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A

Autobiography

AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

A Collection

OF THE

MOST INSTRUCTIVE AND AMUSING

LIVES

EVER PUBLISHED,

WRITTEN BY THE PARTIES THEMSELVES.

WITH BRIEF INTRODUCTIONS, AND COMPENDIOUS SEQUELS
CARRYING ON THE COURSE OF EVENTS TO THE
DEATH OF EACH WRITER.

VOLUME I.—COLLEY CIBBER.

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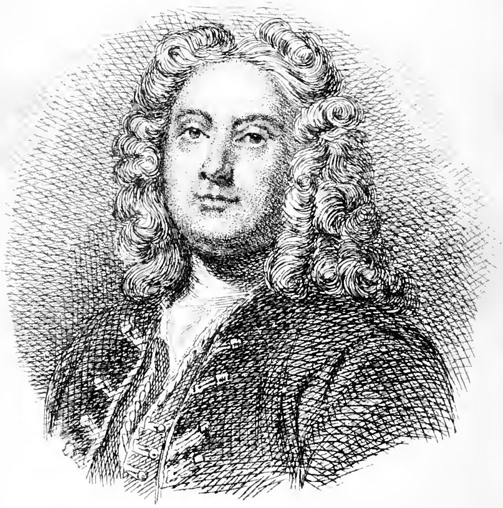

COLLEY CIBBER

AN APOLOGY

FOR

THE LIFE

OF

MR COLLEY CIBBER,

Comedian.

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

> ———————— Hoc est
> Vivere bis, vitâ posse priore frui. — MART. lib. 2.
>
> When years no more of active life retain,
> 'Tis youth renew'd to laugh 'em o'er again. — ANONYM.

LONDON:—1826.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

There is such an essential distinction between self-composed and other Biography, that the principal literary object of our undertaking is at once apparent. It is, in fact, to collect into one consecutive publication, genuine materials for a diversified study of the human character, by selecting the most curious and interesting Autobiographical Memoirs now extant. It is evident that, when disposed to be sincere, no man can do so much justice to the springs and motives of his own character and actions as himself; and when even otherwise, by showing what he wishes to appear, he generally discovers what he really is. Statesmen, from Sully down to Bubb Doddington; men of genius and literature, as Gibbon, Hume, Rousseau, Goethe, Marmontel, Alfieri, Franklin, and many more; the more curious and distinctively featured religious enthusiasts, not forgetting the extraordinary journals of John Wesley and George Whitfield; artists, from Benvenuto Cellini downwards; dramatists, players, and similar autobiographers of a lighter order, as

Colley Cibber, Goldoni, Cumberland, C. Dibdin, &c.; mystics and impostors, as Cardan, William Lilly, Psalmanazar, and others; tradesmen, especially booksellers, as Dunton and Lackington—all are strongly exhibitive of character. Even the coarser lines of adventuring life supply several self-written memoirs of considerable interest; nor has the enterprising felon himself always refused to record his own exploits and progressive criminality, in a manner that may advance an instructive knowledge of human nature. Thus, if variety be a charm, the work, with unity of plan, embraces a very great diversity of subject matter; and, as a whole, forms a series of self-drawn portraits which could not be otherwise collected without considerable trouble and expense.

EDITOR'S PREFACE.

That the vivacious Colley Cibber was a coxcomb, seems to have been admitted on all sides in his own day; but notwithstanding the too rancorous satire of Pope, that he was a coxcomb of talent is now as generally agreed. In fact, the vanity of this man of the stage and of the world was of that constitutionally mercurial kind which, as the result of temperament and organization, forms its own apology, and is compatible with abilities of no common order. So at least it proved in the instance of Cibber, whose spontaneous egotism and buoyant self-complacency are qualified by a portion of wit, spirit, and knowledge of life, which not only renders them inoffensive, but in a very high degree attractive. Regarded in any light, the charge of dulness, so splenetically advanced by Pope, was particularly unmerited; and the deposition of Theobald, to make Cibber—a totally different character—the hero of the Dunciad, is by the best critics deemed no trifling blemish in that celebrated production. Nor did the poet gain much in other respects by his warfare with the player; the pamphleteering railleryof the one being quite as much relished as the piquant lines of the other, while the controversy lasted; however the superior setting of the revenge of the too waspish bard may operate in reference to posterity. In short, Cibber not being a dunce, Pope could not make him one. The power of genius itself is bounded in this direction; and it is well; as even the despotism of genius, like all other despotism, is too often disposed to prove tyrannical.

But setting aside the claims of the man, Cibber's "Apology" will always retain a respectable share of the reputation which it very largely enjoyed in its own day, as forming a history of the stage during a very interesting period. Although the gross license of the previous age was by no means completely retrenched, the effect of the strictures of Jeremy Collier, and of the moral and critical tact of Steele and Addison, had produced an approach to much greater order; and probably in the department of domestic comedy, in which Cibber chiefly shone both as a dramatist and performer, it may be deemed in respect to England the era of the greatest excellence. The author of the "Careless Husband," to say nothing of his other comedies and adaptations, has a right to attention on this point, and may be attended to with great advantage. In addition also to abundance of anecdote, and to the sprightliness and good-humoured frankness with which he communicates his information, Cibber has admirably characterised the excellencies and defects of contemporary performers; and a number of distinguished names among that evanescent order of personages are *fixed* in a species of existence sufficient to afford curious and instructive points of comparison with the histrionic talent of later or of present times. The Bettertons, the Booths, the Wilkses, the Barrys, the Bracegirdles, the Oldfields, &c. &c. pass before our eyes like the ghosts conjured up for the amusement of Gulliver by the governor of Glubbdubbrib. Being called up, as in that celebrated instance, by an adequate magician, they are not summoned in vain. Cibber knew his art well, life and manners still better; his criticism is therefore of that sound description which unpremeditatedly illustrates the one in discussing the points of the other. This art is said to be gradually becoming defunct: if so, less need be said by way of preface to a republication of one of the best examples in existence of stage criticism.

To conclude: as curiously self-exhibitive on the part of the author, and pleasantly informing in a particular line of inquiry, few books have been found more generally and socially amusing, or have been perused more diffusively and with greater pleasure, than the "Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber."

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TO

A CERTAIN GENTLEMAN.

SIR,

Because I know it would give you less concern to find your name in an impertinent satire, than before the daintiest dedication of a modern author, I conceal it.

Let me talk never so idly to you this way, you are at least under no necessity of taking it to yourself; nor when I boast of your favours, need you blush to have bestowed them. Or I may now give you all the attributes that raise a wise and good-natured man to esteem and happiness, and not be censured as a flatterer by my own or your enemies. I place my own first, because, as they are the greater number, I am afraid of not paying the greater respect to them. Yours, if such there are, I imagine are too well-bre to declare themselves: but as there is no hazard o visible terror in an attack upon my defenceless station, my censurers have generally been persons of an intrepid sincerity. Having therefore shut the door against them, while I am thus privately addressing you, I have little to apprehend from either of them.

Under this shelter then I may safely tell you, that the greatest encouragement I have had to publish this work, has risen from the several hours of patience you have lent me at the reading it. It is true, I took the advantage of your leisure in the country, where moderate matters serve for amusement; and there indeed how far your good nature for an old acquaintance, or your reluctance to put the vanity of an author out of countenance, may have carried you, I cannot be sure; and yet appearances give me stronger hopes: for was not the complaisance of a whole evening's attention as much as an author of more importance ought to have expected? Why then was I desired the next day to give you a second lecture? Or why was I kept a third day with you, to tell you more of the same story? If these circumstances have made me vain, shall I say, sir, you are accountable for them? No, sir, I will rather so far flatter myself as to suppose it possible that your having been a lover of the stage (and one of those few good judges who know the use and value of it under a right regulation) might incline you to think so copious an account of it a less tedious amusement than it may naturally be to others of different good sense, who may have less concern or taste for it. But be all this as it may, the brat is now born; and rather than see it starve upon the bare parish provision, I choose thus clandestinely to drop it at your door, that it may exercise one of your many virtues, your charity, in supporting it.

If the world were to know into whose hands I have thrown it, their regard to its patron might incline them to treat it as one of his family; but in the consciousness of what I *am*, I choose not, sir, to say who you *are*. If your equal in rank were to do public justice to your character, then indeed the concealment of your name might be an unnecessary diffidence: but am I, sir, of consequence enough, in any guise, to do honour to Mr ——? Were I to set him in the most laudable lights that truth and good sense could give him, or his own likeness would require, my officious mite would be lost in that general esteem and regard which people of the first consequence, even of different parties, have a pleasure in paying him. Encomiums to superiors from authors of lower life, as they are naturally liable to suspicion, can add very little lustre to what before was visible to the public eye: such offerings, (to use the style they are generally dressed in,) like *Pagan* incense, evaporate on the altar, and rather gratify the priest than the deity.

But you, sir, are to be approached in terms within the reach of common sense: the honest oblation of a cheerful heart is as much as you desire, or I am able to bring you: a heart that has just sense enough to mix respect with intimacy, and is never more delighted than when your rural hours of leisure admit me, with all my laughing spirits, to be my idle self, and in the whole day's possession of you! Then indeed I have reason to be vain; I am then distinguished by a pleasure too great to be concealed, and could almost pity the man of graver merit, that dares not receive it with the same unguarded transport! This nakedness of temper the world may place in what rank of folly or weakness they please; but till wisdom can give me something that will make me more heartily happy, I am content to be gazed at as I am, without lessening my respect for those whose passions may be more soberly covered.

Yet, sir, will I not deceive you; 'tis not the lustre of your public merit, the affluence of your fortune, your high figure in life, nor those honourable distinctions which you had rather deserve than be told of, that have so many years made my plain heart hang after you: these are but incidental ornaments that, 'tis true, may be of service to you in the world's opinion; and though as one among the crowd I may rejoice that Providence has so deservedly bestowed them, yet my particular attachment has arisen from a more natural and more engaging charm, the agreeable companion! Nor is my vanity half so much gratified in the honour, as my sense is in the delight, of your society! When I see you lay aside the advantages of superiority, and by your own cheerfulness of spirits call out all that nature has given me to meet them; then 'tis I taste you—then life runs high—I desire, I possess you!

Yet, sir, in this distinguished happiness I give not up my farther share of that pleasure or of that right I have to look upon you with the public eye, and to join in the general regard so unanimously paid to that uncommon virtue, your integrity! This, sir, the world allows so conspicuous a part of your character, that however invidious the merit, neither the rude license of detraction, nor the prejudice of party, has ever once thrown on it the least impeachment or reproach. This is that commanding power that in public speaking makes you heard with such attention! This it is that discourages and keeps silent the insinuations of prejudice and suspicion, and almost renders your eloquence an unnecessary aid to your assertions: even your opponents, conscious of your integrity, hear you rather as a witness than an orator.—But this, sir, is drawing you too near the light; integrity is too particular a virtue to be covered with a general application. Let me therefore only talk to you as at Tusculum (for so I will call that sweet retreat which your own hands have raised) where, like the famed orator of old, when public cares permit, you pass so many rational, unbending hours: there, and at such times, to have been admitted, still plays in my memory more like a fictitious than a real enjoyment! How many golden evenings, in that theatrical paradise of watered lawns and hanging groves, have I walked and prated down the sun in social happiness! Whether the retreat of Cicero, in cost, magnificence, or curious luxury of antiquities, might not out-blaze the *simplex munditiis*, the modest ornaments of your villa, is not within my reading to determine: but that the united power of nature, art, or elegance of taste, could have thrown so many varied objects into a more delightful harmony, is beyond my conception.

When I consider you in this view, and as the gentleman of eminence, surrounded with the general benevolence of mankind, I rejoice, sir, for you and for myself, to see you in this particular light of merit, and myself sometimes admitted to my more than equal share of you.

If this *apology* for my past life discourages you not from holding me in your usual favour, let me quit this greater stage, the world, whenever I may, I shall think this the best acted part of any I have undertaken since you first condescended to laugh with,

SIR,

Your most obedient, most obliged,

And most humble Servant,

COLLEY CIBBER.

Nov. 6, 1739.

AN APOLOGY

FOR THE

LIFE OF MR COLLEY CIBBER, *&c.*

CHAPTER I.

The introduction.—The author's birth.—Various fortune at school.—Not liked by those he loved there.—Why.—A digression upon raillery.—The use and abuse of it.—The comforts of folly.—Vanity of greatness.—Laughing no bad philosophy.

YOU know, sir, I have often told you, that one time or other I should give the public some memoirs of my own life; at which you have never failed to laugh like a friend, without saying a word to dissuade me from it: concluding, I suppose, that such a wild thought could not possibly require a serious answer. But you see I was in earnest. And now you will say, the world will find me, under my own hand, a weaker man than perhaps I may have passed for even among my enemies. —With all my heart! My enemies will then read me with pleasure, and you perhaps with envy, when you find that follies without the reproach of guilt upon them are not inconsistent with happiness.—But why make my follies public? Why not? I have passed my time very pleasantly with them, and I do not recollect that they have ever been hurtful to any other man living. Even admitting they were injudiciously chosen, would it not be vanity in me to take shame to myself for not being found a wise man? Really, sir, my appetites were in too much haste to be happy, to throw away my time in pursuit of a name I was sure I could never arrive at.

Now the follies I frankly confess, I look upon as in some measure discharged; while those I conceal are still keeping the account open between me and my conscience. To me the fatigue of being upon a continual guard to hide them is more than the reputation of being without them can repay. If this be weakness, *defendit numerus*, I have such comfortable numbers on my side, that were all men to blush that are not wise, I am afraid nine parts in ten of the world ought to be out of countenance: but since that sort of modesty is what they do not care to come into, why should I be afraid of being stared at for not being particular? Or if the particularity lies in owning my weakness, will my wisest reader be so inhuman as not to pardon it? But if there should be such a one, let me at least beg him to show me that strange man who is perfect? Is any one more unhappy, more ridiculous, than he who is always labouring to be thought so, or that is impatient when he is not thought so? Having brought myself to be easy under whatever the world may say of my undertaking, you may still ask me, why I give myself all this trouble? Is it for fame, or profit to myself, or use or delight to others? For all these considerations I have neither fondness nor indifference: if I obtain none of them, the amusement, at worst, will be a reward that must constantly go along with the labour. But behind all this there is something inwardly inciting, which I cannot express in few words; I must therefore a little make bold with your patience.

A man who has passed above forty years of his life upon a theatre, where he has never appeared to be himself, may have naturally excited the curiosity of his spectators to know what he really was when in nobody's shape but his own; and whether he, who by his profession had so long been ridiculing his benefactors, might not, when the coat of his profession was off, deserve to be laughed at himself; or from his being often seen in the most flagrant and immoral characters, whether he might not see as great a rogue when he looked into the glass himself, as when he held it to others.

It was doubtless from a supposition that this sort of curiosity would compensate their labours, that so many hasty writers have been encouraged to publish the lives of the late Mrs Oldfield, Mr Wilks, and Mr Booth, in less time after their deaths than one could suppose it cost to transcribe them.

Now, sir, when my time comes, lest they should think it worth while to handle my memory with the same freedom, I am willing to prevent its being so oddly besmeared (or at best but flatly white-washed) by taking upon me to give the public this as true a picture of myself as natural vanity will permit me to draw; for to promise you that I shall never be vain, were a promise that, like a looking-glass too large, might break itself in the making: nor am I sure I ought wholly to avoid that imputation, because, if vanity be one of my natural features, the portrait would not be like me without it. In a word, I may palliate and soften as much as I please; but upon an honest examination of my heart, I am afraid the same vanity which makes even homely people employ painters to preserve a flattering record of their persons, has seduced me to print off this *chiaro oscuro* o. my mind.

And when I have done it, you may reasonably ask me, of what importance can the history of my private life be to the public? To this indeed I can only make you a ludicrous answer; which is, that the public very well knows my life has not been a private one; that I have been employed in their service ever since many of their grandfathers were young men; and though I have voluntarily laid down my post, they have a sort of right to inquire into my conduct (for which they have so well paid me) and to call for the account of it during my share of administration in the state of the theatre. This work therefore, which I hope they will not expect a man of hasty head should confine to any regular method—(for I shall make no scruple of leaving my history, when I think a digression may make it lighter for my reader's digestion)—this work, I say, shall not only contain the various impressions of my mind (as in Louis XIV's cabinet you have seen the growing medals of his person from infancy to old age) but shall likewise include with them the theatrical history of my own time, from my first appearance on the stage to my last exit.

If then what I shall advance on that head may any ways contribute to the prosperity or improvement of the stage in being, the public must of consequence have a share in its utility.

This, sir, is the best apology I can make for being my own biographer. Give me leave therefore to open the first scene of my life from the very day I came into it; and though (considering my profession) I have n reason to be ashamed of my original, yet I am afraid a plain dry account of it will scarcely admit of a better excuse than what my brother Bayes makes for prince Prettyman in the "Rehearsal," viz. I only do it for fear I should be thought to be nobody's son at all; for if I have led a worthless life, the weight of my pedigree will not add an ounce to my intrinsic value. But be the inference what it will, the simple truth is this.

I was born in London, on the 6th of November 1671, in Southampton-street, facing Southampton-house. My father, Caius Gabriel Cibber, was a native of Holstein, who came into England some time before the restoration of king Charles II, to follow his profession, which was that of a statuary, &c. The basso relievo on the pedestal of the great column in the city, and the two figures of the lunatics, the raving and the melancholy, over the gates of Bethlehem hospital, are no ill monuments of his fame as an artist. My mother was the daughter of William Colley, esq. of a very ancient family of Glaiston in Rutlandshire, where she was born. My mother's brother, Edward Colley, esq. (who gave me my christian name) being the last heir male of it, the family is now extinct. I shall only add, that in "Wright's History of Rutlandshire," published in 1684, the Colleys are recorded as sheriffs and members of parliament from the reign of Henry VII to the latter end of Charles I, in whose cause chiefly sir Anthony Colley, my mother's grandfather, sunk his estate from three thousand to about three hundred per annum.

In the year 1682, at little more than ten years of age, I was sent to the free school of Grantham in Lincolnshire, where I staid till I got through it, from the lowest form to the uppermost. And such learning as that school could give me, is the most I pretend to; (which, though I have not utterly forgot, I cannot say I have much improved by study;) but even there I remember I was the same inconsistent creature I have been ever since; always in full spirits, in some small capacity to do right, but in a more frequent alacrity to do wrong; and consequently often under a worse character than I wholly deserved. A giddy negligence always possessed me, and so much, that I remember I was once whipped for my theme, though my master told me, at the same time, what was good of it was better than any boy's in the form. And (whatever shame it may be to own it) I have observed the same odd fate has frequently attended the course of my later conduct in life. The unskilful openness, or in plain terms the indiscretion, I have always acted with from my youth, has drawn more ill-will towards me, than men of worse morals and more wit might have met with. My ignorance, and want of jealousy of mankind, has been so strong, that it is with reluctance I even yet believe any person I am acquainted with can be capable of envy, malice, or ingratitude; and to show you what a mortification it was to me, in my very boyish days, to find myself mistaken, give me leave to tell you a school story.

A great boy, near the head taller than myself, in some wrangle at play had insulted me; upon which I was fool-hardy enough to give him a box on the ear; the blow was soon returned, with another that brought me under him and at his mercy. Another lad, whom

I really loved, and thought a good-natured one, cried out with some warmth to my antagonist (while I was down) "Beat him, beat him soundly!" This so amazed me, that I lost all my spirits to resist, and burst into tears. When the fray was over, I took my friend aside, and asked him, how he came to be so earnestly against me? To which, with some glouting confusion, he replied, "Because you are always jeering and making a jest of me to every boy in the school." Many a mischief have I brought upon myself by the same folly in riper life. Whatever reason I had to reproach my companion's declaring against me, I had none to wonder at it, while I was so often hurting him: thus I deserved his enmity by my not having sense enough to know I had hurt him; and he hated me, because he had not sense enough to know that I never intended to hurt him.

As this is the first remarkable error of my life I can recollect, I cannot pass it by without throwing out some further reflections upon it; whether flat or spirited, new or common, false or true, right or wrong, they will be still my own, and consequently like me; I will therefore boldly go on; for I am only obliged to give you my own, and not a good picture, to show as well the weakness as the strength of my understanding. It is not on what I write, but on my reader's curiosity, I rely to be read through: at worst, though the impartial may be tired, the ill-natured (no small number) I know will see the bottom of me.

What I observed then, upon my having undesignedly provoked my schoolfriend into an enemy, is a common case in society; errors of this kind often sour the blood of acquaintance into an inconceivable aversion, where it is little suspected. It is not enough to say of your raillery, that you intended no offence; if the person you offer it to has either a wrong head, or wants a capacity to make that distinction, it may have the same effect as the intention of the grossest injury: and in reality, if you know his parts are too slow to return it in kind, it is a vain and idle inhumanity, and sometimes draws the aggressor into difficulties not easily got out of: or, to give the case more scope, suppose your friend may have a passive indulgence for your mirth, if you find him silent at it, though you were as intrepid as Cæsar, there can be no excuse for your not leaving it off. When you are conscious that your antagonist can give as well as take, then indeed the smarter the hit, the more agreeable the party: a man of cheerful sense, among friends, will never be grave upon an attack of this kind, but rather thank you that you have given him a right to be even with you. There are few men, though they may be masters of both, that on such occasions had not rather show their parts than their courage: and the preference is just; a bull-dog may have one, and only a man can have the other. Thus it happens, that in the coarse merriment of common people, when the jest begins to swell into earnest, for want of this election, you may observe, he that has least wit generally gives the first blow. Now as among the better sort a readiness of wit is not always a sign of intrinsic merit, so the want of that readiness is no reproach to a man of plain sense and civility, who therefore, methinks, should never have these lengths of liberty taken with him. Wit there becomes absurd, if not insolent; ill-natured I am sure it is; which imputation a generous spirit will always avoid, for the same reason that a man of real honour will never send a challenge to a cripple. The inward wounds that are given by the inconsiderate insults of wit to those that want it, are as dangerous as those given by oppression to inferiors; as long in healing, and perhaps never forgiven. There is besides (and little worse than this) a mutual grossness in raillery, that sometimes is more painful to the hearers that are not concerned in it, than to the persons engaged. I have seen a couple of these clumsy combatants drub one another with as little manners or mercy as if they had two flails in their hands; children at play with case-knives could not give you more apprehension of their doing one another a mischief; and yet, when the contest has been over, the boobies have looked round them for approbation, and upon being told they were admirably well matched, have sat down (bedaubed as they were) contented at making it a drawn battle. After all that I have said, there is no clearer way of giving rules for raillery than by example.

There are two persons now living who, though very different in their manner, are, as far as my judgment reaches, complete masters of it; one of a more polite and extensive imagination, the other of a knowledge more closely useful to the business of life. The one gives you perpetual pleasure, and seems always to be taking it; the other seems to take none, till his business is over, and then gives you as much as if pleasure were his only business. The one enjoys his fortune, the other thinks it first necessary to make it; though that he will enjoy it then, I cannot be positive, because when a man has once picked up more than he wants, he is apt to think it a weakness to suppose he has enough. But as I do not remember ever to have seen these gentlemen in the same company, you must give me leave to take them separately.

The first of them then has a title, and——no matter what; I am not to speak of the great, but the happy, part of his character, and in this one single light—not of his being an illustrious, but a delightful companion.

In conversation he is seldom silent but when he is attentive, nor ever speaks without exciting the attention of others; and though no man might with less displeasure to his hearers engross the talk of the company, he has a patience in his vivacity that chooses to divide it, and rather gives more freedom than he takes, his sharpest replies having a mixture of politeness that few have the command of; his expression is easy, short, and clear; a stiff or studied word never comes from him; it is in a simplicity of style that he gives the highest surprise, and his ideas are always adapted to the capacity and taste of the person he speaks to: perhaps you will understand me better if I give you a particular instance of it. A person at the university, who, from being a man of wit, easily became his acquaintance there, from that acquaintance found no difficulty in being made one of his chaplains. This person afterwards leading a life that did no great honour to his cloth, obliged his patron to take some gentle notice of it; but as his patron knew the patient was squeamish, he was induced to sweeten the medicine to his taste, and therefore with a smile of good-humour told him, that if to the many vices he had already, he would give himself the trouble to add one more, he did not doubt but his reputation might still be set up again. Sir Crape, who could have no aversion to so pleasant a dose, desiring to know what it might be, was answered, "Hypocrisy, doctor, only a little hypocrisy!" This plain reply can need no comment; but *ex pede Herculem,* he is everywhere proportionable. I think I have heard him since say, the doctor thought hypocrisy so detestable a sin, that he died without committing it. In a word, this gentleman gives spirit to society the moment he comes into it; and whenever he leaves it, they who have business have then leisure to go about it.

Having often had the honour to be myself the butt of his raillery, I must own I have received more pleasure from his lively manner of raising the laugh against me, than I could have felt from the smoothest flattery of a serious civility. Though wit flows from him with as much ease as common sense from another, he is so little elated with the advantage he may have over you, that whenever your good fortune gives it against him, he seems more pleased with it on your side than his own. The only advantage he makes of his superiority of rank is, that by always waving it himself, his inferior finds he is under the greater obligation not to forget it.

When the conduct of social wit is under such regulations, how delightful must those *convivia,* those meals of conversation be, where such a member presides, who can with so much ease (as Shakspeare phrases it) set the table in a roar! I am in no pain that these imperfect outlines will be applied to the person I mean, because every one who has the happiness to know him, must know how much more in this particular attitude is wanting to be like him.

The other gentleman, whose bare interjections of laughter have humour in them, is so far from having a title, that he has lost his real name, which some years ago he suffered his friends to rally him out of; in lieu of which they have equipped him with one they thought had a better sound in good company. He is the first man of so sociable a spirit that I ever knew capable of quitting the allurements of wit and pleasure for a strong application to business; in his youth (for there was a time when he was young) he set out in all the hey-day expenses of a modish man of fortune; but finding himself over-weighted with appetites, he grew restive, kicked up in the middle of the course, and turned his back upon his frolics abroad, to think of improving his estate at home. In order to which, he clapped collars upon his coach horses; and that their mettle might not run over other people, he tied a plough to their tails, which, though it might give them a more slovenly air, would enable him to keep them fatter in a foot pace with a whistling peasant beside them, than in a full trot with a hot-headed coachman behind them. In these unpolite amusements he has laughed like a rake, and looked about him like a farmer, for many years. As his rank and station often find him in the best company, his easy humour, whenever he is called to it, can still make himself the fiddle of it.

And though some say he looks upon the follies of the world like too severe a philosopher, yet he rather chooses to laugh than to grieve at them; to pass his time therefore more easily in it, he often endeavours to conceal himself, by assuming the air and taste of a man in fashion; so that his only uneasiness seems to be, that he cannot quite prevail with his friends to think him a worse manager than he really is; for they carry their raillery to such a height, that it sometimes rises to a charge of downright avarice against him. Upon which head it is no easy matter to be more merry upon him than he will be upon himself. Thus, while he sets that infirmity in a pleasant light, he so disarms your prejudice, that if he has it not, you cannot find in your heart to wish he were without it. Whenever he is attacked where he seems to lie so open, if his wit happens not to be ready for you, he receives you with an assenting laugh, till he has gained time enough to whet it sharp enough for a reply, which seldom turns out to his disadvantage. If you are too strong for him, (which may possibly happen from his being obliged to defend the weak side of the question,) his last resource is to join in the laugh, till he has got himself off by an ironical applause of your superiority.

If I were capable of envy, what I have observed of this gentleman would certainly incline me to it; for sure to get through the necessary cares of life, with a train of pleasures at our heels in vain calling after us—to give a constant preference to the business of the day, and yet be able to laugh while we are about it—to make even society the subservient reward of it—is a state of happiness which the gravest precepts of moral wisdom will not easily teach us to exceed. When I speak of happiness, I go no higher than that which is contained in the world we now tread upon; and when I speak of laughter, I do not simply mean that which every oaf is capable of, but that which has its sensible motive and proper season, which is not more limited than recommended by that indulgent philosophy,

Cum ratione insanire.

When I look into my present self, and afterwards cast my eye round all my hopes, I do not see any one pursuit of them that should so reasonably rouse me out of a nod in my great chair, as a call to those agreeable parties I have sometimes the happiness to mix with, where I always assert the equal liberty of leaving them when my spirits have done their best with them.

Now, sir, as I have been making my way for above forty years through a crowd of cares, (all which by the favour of Providence I have honestly got rid of,) is it a time of day for me to leave off these fooleries and to set up a new character? Can it be worth my while to waste my spirits, to bake my blood with serious contemplations, and perhaps impair my health, in the fruitless study of advancing myself into the better opinion of those very, very few wise men that are as old as I am? No, the part I have acted in real life shall be all of a piece:

> ——Servetur ad imum
> Qualis ab incepto processerit. *Horace.*

I will not go out of my character, by straining to be wiser than I can be, or by being more affectedly pensive than I need be; whatever I am, men of sense will know me to be, put on what disguise I will; I can no more put off my follies than my skin; I have often tried, but they stick too close to me; nor am I sure my friends are displeased with them; for besides that in this light I afford them frequent matter of mirth, they may possibly be less uneasy at their own foibles, when they have so old a precedent to keep them in countenance; nay, there are some frank enough to confess they envy what they laugh at; and when I have seen others, whose rank and fortune have laid a sort of restraint upon their liberty of pleasing their company by pleasing themselves, I have said softly to myself,—Well, there is some advantage in having neither rank nor fortune; not but there are among them a third sort, who have the particular happiness of unbending into the very wantonness of good humour, without depreciating their dignity: he that is not master of that freedom, let his condition be never so exalted, must still want something to come up to the happiness of his inferiors who enjoy it. If Socrates could take pleasure in playing at even or odd with his children, or Agesilaus divert himself in riding the hobby horse with them, am I obliged to be as eminent as either of them, before I am as frolicsome? If the emperor Adrian, near his death, could play with his very soul, his animula, &c. and regret that it could be no longer companionable; if greatness at the same time was not the delight he was so loth to part with, sure then these cheerful amusements I am contending for must have no inconsiderable share in our happiness; he that does not choose to live his own way, suffers others to choose for him. Give me the joy I always took in the end of an old song—

> My mind, my mind is a kingdom to me!

If I can please myself with my own follies, have not I a plentiful provision for life? If the world thinks me a trifler, I do not desire to break in upon their wisdom; let them call me any fool but an uncheerful one; I live as I write; while my way amuses me, it is as well as I wish it; when another writes better, I can like him too, though he should not like me. Not our great imitator of Horace himself can have more pleasure in writing his verses, than I have in reading them, though I sometimes find myself there (as Shakspeare terms it) dispraisingly spoken of: if he is a little free with me, I am generally in good company—he is as blunt with my betters; so that even here I might laugh in my turn. My superiors perhaps may be mended by him; but for my part, I own myself incorrigible. I look upon my follies as the best part of my fortune, and am more concerned to be a good husband of them than of that; nor do I believe I shall ever be rhymed out of them. And, if I do not mistake, I am supported in my way of thinking by Horace himself, who, in excuse of a loose writer, says—

> Prætulerim scriptor delirus inersque videri,
> Dum mea delectent, mala me, aut denique fallant,
> Quam sapere, et ringi———

which, to speak of myself as a loose philosopher, I have thus ventured to imitate:

> Me while my laughing follies can deceive,
> Blest in the dear delirium let me live,
> Rather than wisely know my wants and grieve.

We had once a merry monarch of our own, who thought cheerfulness so valuable a blessing, that he would have quitted one of his kingdoms where he could not enjoy it—where, among many other conditions they had tied him to, his sober subjects would not suffer him to laugh on a Sunday; and though this might not be the avowed cause of his elopement, I am not sure, had he had no other, that this alone might not have served his turn: at least, he has my hearty approbation either way; for had I been under the same restriction, though my staying were to have made me his successor, I should rather have chosen to follow him.

How far his subjects might be in the right, is not my affair to determine; perhaps they were wiser than the frogs in the fable, and rather chose to have a log than a stork for their king; yet I hope it will be no offence to say, that king Log himself must have made but a very simple figure in history.

The man who chooses never to laugh, or whose becalmed passions know no motion, seems to me only in the quiet state of a green tree; he vegetates, it is true, but shall we say he lives? Now, sir, for amusement. Reader, take heed! for I find a strong impulse to talk impertinently; if therefore you are not as fond of seeing as I am of showing myself in all my lights, you may turn over two leaves together, and leave what follows to those who have more curiosity, and less to do with their time, than you have.—As I was saying then, let us for amusement advance this or any other prince to the most glorious throne; mark out his empire in what clime you please; fix him on the highest pinnacle of unbounded power; and in that state let us inquire into his degree of happiness; make him at once the terror and the envy of his neighbours, send his ambition out to war, and gratify it with extended fame and victories; bring him in triumph home, with great unhappy captives behind him, through the acclamations of his people, to repossess his realms in peace. Well, when the dust has been brushed from his purple, what will he do next? Why, this envied monarch (who we will allow to have a more exalted mind than to be delighted with the trifling flatteries of a congratulating circle) will choose to retire, I presume, to enjoy in private the contemplation of his glory; an amusement, you will say, that well becomes his station! But there, in that pleasing rumination, when he has made up his new account of happiness, how much, pray, will be added to the balance more than as it stood before his last expedition? From what one article will the improvement of it appear? Will it arise from the conscious pride of having done his weaker enemy an injury? Are his eyes so dazzled with false glory, that he thinks it a less crime in him to break into the palace of his princely neighbour, because he gave him time to defend it, than for a subject feloniously to plunder the house of a private man? Or is the outrage of hunger and necessity more enormous than the ravage of ambition? Let us even suppose the wicked usage of the world as to that point may keep his conscience quiet; still, what is he to do with the infinite spoil that his imperial rapine has brought home? Is he to sit down, and vainly deck himself with the jewels which he has plundered from the crown of another, whom self-defence had compelled to oppose him? No; let us not debase his glory into so low a weakness. What appetite then are these shining treasures food for? Is their vast value in seeing his vulgar subjects stare at them, wise men smile at them, or his children play with them? Or can the new extent of his dominions add a cubit to his happiness? Was not his empire wide enough before to do good in? And can it add to his delight, that now no monarch has such room to do mischief in? But farther; if even the great Augustus, to whose reign such praises are given, could not enjoy his days of peace, free from the terrors of repeated conspiracies, which lost him more quiet to suppress, than his ambition cost him to provoke them, what human eminence is secure? In what private cabinet then must this wondrous monarch lock up his happiness, that common eyes are never to behold it? Is it, like his person, a prisoner to its own superiority? Or does he at last poorly place it in the triumph of his injurious devastations? One moment's search into himself will plainly show him, that real and reasonable happiness can have no existence without innocence and liberty. What a mockery is greatnèss without them! How lonesome must be the life of that monarch who, while he governs only by being feared, is restrained from letting down his grandeur sometimes, to forget himself, and to humanize him into the benevolence and joy of society; to throw off his cumbersome robe of majesty, to be a man without disguise, to have a sensible taste of life in its simplicity, till he confess, from the sweet experience, that *dulce est desipere in loco* was no fool's philosophy. Or if the gaudy charms of preeminence are so strong that they leave him no sense of a less pompous though a more rational enjoyment, none sure can envy him, but those who are the dupes of an equally fantastic ambition.

My imagination is quite heated and fatigued in dressing up this phantom of felicity; but I hope it has not made me so far misunderstood as not to have allowed, that in all the dispensations of Providence the exercise of a great and virtuous mind is the most elevated state of happiness. No, sir; I am not for setting up gaiety against wisdom, nor for preferring the man of pleasure to the philosopher; but for showing that the wisest or greatest man is very near an unhappy man, if the unbending amusements I am contending for are not sometimes admitted to relieve him.

How far I may have overrated these amusements, let graver casuists decide; whether they affirm or reject what I have asserted, hurts not my purpose; which is not to give laws to others, but to show by what laws I govern myself. If I am misguided, it is nature's fault; and I follow her from this persuasion—that as nature has distinguished our species from the mute creation by our risibility, her design must have been by that faculty as evidently to raise our happiness, as by our *os sublime* (our erected faces) to lift the dignity of our form above them.

Notwithstanding all I have said, I am afraid there is an absolute power in what is simply called our constitution, that will never admit of other rules for happiness than her own; from which (be we never so wise or weak) without divine assistance, we only can receive it; so that all this my parade and grimace of philosophy has been only making a mighty merit of following my own inclination. A very natural vanity! though it is some sort of satisfaction to know it does not impose upon me. Vanity again! However, think it what you will that has drawn me into this copious digression, it is now high time to drop it. I shall therefore in my next chapter return to my school, from whence I fear I have too long been truant.

CHAPTER II.

He that writes of himself, not easily tired.—Boys may give men lessons.—The author's preferment at school attended with misfortunes.—The danger of merit among equals.—Of satirists and backbiters.—What effect they have had upon the author. —Stanzas published by himself against himself.

It often makes me smile to think how contentedly I have set myself down to write my own life; nay, and with less concern for what may be said of it than I should feel, were I to do the same for a deceased acquaintance. This you will easily account for, when you consider that nothing gives a coxcomb more delight than when you suffer him to talk of himself; which sweet liberty I here enjoy for a whole volume together:—a privilege which neither could be allowed me, nor would become me to take in the company I am generally admitted to; but here, when I have all the talk to myself, and have nobody to interrupt or contradict me, sure, to say whatever I have a mind other people should know of me, is a pleasure which none but authors as vain as myself can conceive.—But to my history.

However little worth notice the life of a schoolboy may be supposed to contain, yet as the passions of men and children have much the same motives, and differ very little in their effects, unless where the elder experience may be able to conceal them,—as therefore what arises from the boy may possibly be a lesson to the man,—I shall venture to relate a fact or two that happened while I was still at school.

In February, 1684-5, died king Charles II, who being the only king I had ever seen, I remember (young as I was) his death made a strong impression upon me, as it drew tears from the eyes of multitudes who looked no further into him than I did: but it was then a sort of school-doctrine to regard our monarch as a deity, as in the former reign it was to insist he was accountable to this world, as well as to that above him. But what perhaps gave king Charles II this peculiar possession of so many hearts, was his affable and easy manner in conversing; which is a quality that goes farther with the greater part of mankind than many higher virtues which in a prince might more immediately regard the public prosperity. Even his indolent amusement of playing with his dogs, and feeding his ducks, in St James's park, (which I have seen him do,) made the common people adore him, and consequently overlook in him what, in a prince of a different temper, they might have been out of humour at.

I cannot help remembering one more particular in those times, though it be quite foreign to what will follow. I was carried by my father to the chapel in Whitehall, where I saw the king, and his royal brother, the then duke of York, with him in the closet, and present during the whole divine service. Such dispensation, it seems, for his interest, had that unhappy prince from his real religion, to assist at another, to which his heart was so utterly averse. I now proceed to the facts I promised to speak of.

King Charles's death was judged by our schoolmaster a proper subject to lead the form I was in into a higher kind of exercise; he therefore enjoined us, severally to make his funeral oration: this sort of task, so entirely new to us all, the boys received with astonishment, as a work above their capacity; and though the master persisted in his command, they one and all, except myself, resolved to decline it. But I, sir, who was ever giddily forward, and thoughtless of consequences, set myself roundly to work, and got through it as well as I could. I remember to this hour, that single topic of his affability (which made me mention it before) was the chiefmotive that warmed me into the undertaking; and to show how very childish a notion I had of his character at that time, I raised his humanity, and love of those who served him, to such height, that I imputed his death to the shock he received from the lord Arlington's being at the point of death about a week before him. This oration, such as it was, I produced the next morning: all the other boys pleaded their inability, which the master, taking rather as a mark of their modesty than their idleness, only seemed to punish by setting me at the head of the form: a preferment dearly bought! Much happier had I been to have sunk my performance in the general modesty of declining it. A most uncomfortable life I led among them for many a day after! I was so jeered, laughed at, and hated, as a pragmatical bastard (schoolboys' language) who had betrayed the whole form, that scarce any of them would keep me company; and though it so far advanced me into the master's favour, that he would often take me from the school to give me an airing with him on horseback, while they were left to their lessons, you may be sure such envied happiness did not increase their goodwill to me. Notwithstanding which, my stupidity could take no warning from their treatment. An accident of the same nature happened soon after, that might have frightened a boy of a meek spirit from attempting any thing above the lowest capacity. On the 23d of April following, being the coronation day of the new king, the school petitioned the master for leave to play; to which he agreed, provided any of the boys would produce an English ode upon that occasion. The very word ode, I know, makes you smile already; and so it does me; not only because it still makes so many poor devils turn wits upon it, but from a more agreeable motive—from a reflection of how little I then thought that half a century afterwards I should be called upon twice a year, by my post, to make the same kind of oblations to an unexceptionable prince, the serene happiness of whose reign my halting rhymes are still so unequal to. This, I own, is vanity without disguise; but *hæc olim meminisse juvat:* the remembrance of the miserable prospect we had then before us, and have since escaped by a revolution, is now a pleasure which, without that remembrance, I could not so heartily have enjoyed. The ode I was speaking of fell to my lot, which in about half an hour I produced. I cannot say it was much above the merry style of "Sing! sing the day, and sing the song," in the farce; yet, bad as it was, it served to get the school a play-day, and to make me not a little vain upon it; which last effect so disgusted my playfellows, that they left me out of the party I had most a mind to be of in that day's recreation. But their ingratitude served only to increase my vanity; for I considered them as so many beaten tits that had just had the mortification of seeing my hack of a Pegasus come in before them. This low passion is so rooted in our nature, that sometimes riper heads cannot govern it. I have met with much the same silly sort of coldness even from my contemporaries of the theatre, from having the superfluous capacity of writing myself the characters I have acted.

Here perhaps I may again seem to be vain; but if all these facts are true (as true they are) how can I help it? Why am I obliged to conceal them? The merit of the best of them is not so extraordinary as to have warned me to be nice upon it; and the praise due to them is so small a fish, it was scarce worth while to throw my line into the water for it. If I confess my vanity while a boy, can it be vanity when a man to remember it? And if I have a tolerable feature, will not that as much belong to my picture as an imperfection? In a word, from what I have mentioned, I would observe only this; that when we are conscious of the least comparative merit in ourselves, we should take as much care to conceal the value we set upon it, as if it were a real defect. To be elated or vain upon it, is showing your money before people in want; ten to one but some who may think you have too much, may borrow, or pick your pocket, before you get home. He who assumes praise to himself, the world will think overpays himself. Even the suspicion of being vain ought as much to be dreaded as the guilt itself. Cæsar was of the same opinion in regard to his wife's chastity. Praise, though it may be our due, is not like a bank-bill, to be paid upon demand; to be valuable it must be voluntary. When we are dunned for it, we have a right and privilege to refuse it. If compulsion insists upon it, it can only be paid, as persecution in points of faith is, in a counterfeit coin; and who ever believed occasional conformity to be sincere? Nero, the most vain coxcomb of a tyrant that ever breathed, could not raise an unfeigned applause of his harp by military execution; even where praise is deserved, ill-nature and self-conceit (passions that poll a majority of mankind) will with less reluctance part with their money than their approbation. Men of the greatest merit are forced to stay till they die, before the world will fairly make up their account; then indeed you have a chance for your full due, because it is less grudged when you are incapable of enjoying it: then perhaps even malice shall heap praises upon your memory, though not for your sake, but that your surviving competitors may suffer by a comparison. It is from the same principle that satire shall have a thousand readers where panegyric has one. When I therefore find my name at length in the satirical works of our most celebrated living author, I never look upon those lines as malice meant to me (for he knows I never provoked it) but profit to himself: one of his points must be to have many readers. He considers that my face and name are more known than those of many thousands of more consequence in the kingdom; that therefore, right or wrong, a lick at the laureat will always be a sure bait, *ad captandum vulgus,* to catch him little readers; and that to gratify the unlearned, by now and then interspersing those merry sacrifices of an old acquaintance to their taste, is a piece of quite right poetical craft.

But as a little bad poetry is the greatest crime he lays to my charge, I am willing to subscribe to his opinion of it. That this sort of wit is one of the easiest ways too of pleasing the generality of readers, is evident from the comfortable subsistence which our weekly retailers of politics have been known to pick up, merely by making bold with a government that had unfortunately neglected to find their genius a better employment.

Hence too arises all that flat poverty of censure and invective that so often has a run in our public papers, upon the success of a new author; when, God knows, there is seldom above one writer, among hundreds in being at the same time, whose satire a man of common sense ought to be moved at. When a master in the art is angry, then indeed, we ought to be alarmed! How terrible a weapon is satire in the hand of a great genius! Yet even there how liable is prejudice to misuse it! How far, when general, it may reform our morals, or what cruelties it may inflict by being angrily particular, is perhaps above my reach to determine. I shall therefore only beg leave to interpose what I feel for others, whom it may personally have fallen upon. When I read those mortifying lines of our most eminent author in his character of Atticus—(Atticus, whose genius in verse, and whose morality in prose, has been so justly admired)—though I am charmed with the poetry, my imagination is hurt at the severity of it; and though I allow the satirist to have had personal provocation, yet methinks, for that very reason, he ought not to have troubled the public with it. For, as it is observed in the 242d Tatler, "in all terms of reproof, where the sentence appears to arise from personal hatred or passion, it is not then made the cause of mankind, but a misunderstanding between two persons." But if such kind of satire has its incontestable greatness, if its exemplary brightness may not mislead inferior wits into a barbarous imitation of its severity, then I have only admired the verses, and exposed myself by bringing them under so scrupulous a reflection. But the pain which the acrimony of those verses gave me is in some measure allayed, in finding that this inimitable writer, as he advances in years, has since had candour enough to celebrate the same person for his visible merit. Happy genius! whose verse, like the eye of beauty, can heal the deepest wounds with the least glance of favour.

Since I am got so far into this subject, you must give me leave to go through all I have a mind to say upon it; because I am not sure that in a more proper place my memory may be so full of it. I cannot find therefore from what reason satire is allowed more license than comedy, or why either of them (to be admired) ought not to be limited by decency and justice. Let Juvenal and Aristophanes have taken what liberties they please, if the learned have nothing more than their antiquity to justify their laying about them at that enormous rate, I shall wish they had a better excuse for them. The personal ridicule and scurrility thrown upon Socrates, which Plutarch too condemns, and the boldness of Juvenal in writing real names over guilty characters, I cannot think are to be pleaded in right of our modern liberties of the same kind. *Facit indignatio versum* may be a very spirited expression, and seems to give a reader hopes of a lively entertainment; but I am afraid reproof is in unequal hands, when anger is its executioner; and though an outrageous invective may carry some truth in it, yet it will never have that natural easy credit with us, which we give to the laughing ironies of a cool head. The satire that can smile *circum præcordia ludit,* and seldom fails to bring the reader quite over to his side, whenever ridicule and folly are at variance. But when a person satirized is used with the extremest rigour, he may sometimes meet with compassion instead of contempt, and throw back the odium that was designed for him, upon the author. When I would therefore disarm the satirist of this indignation, I mean little more than that I would take from him all private or personal prejudice, and would still leave him as much general vice to scourge as he pleases, and that with as much fire and spirit as art and nature demand to enliven his work and keep his reader awake.

Against all this it may be objected, that these are laws which none but phlegmatic writers will observe, and only men of eminence should give. I grant it, and therefore only submit them to writers of better judgment. I pretend not to restrain others from choosing what I do not like; they are welcome too (if they please) to think I offer these rules more from an incapacity to break them, than from a moral humanity. Let it be so! Still, that will not weaken the strength of what I have asserted, if my assertion be true. And though I allow that provocation is not apt to weigh out its resentments by drachms and scruples, I shall still think that no public revenge can be honourable, where it is not limited by justice; and if honour is insatiable in its revenge, it loses what it contends for, and sinks itself, if not into cruelty, at least into vain glory.

This so singular concern which I have shown for others, may naturally lead you to ask me, what I feel for myself, when I am unfavourably treated by the elaborate authors of our daily papers. Shall I be sincere, and own my frailty? Its usual effect is to make me vain: for I consider, if I were quite good for nothing, these piddlers in wit would not be concerned to take me to pieces, or (not to be quite so vain) when they moderately charge me with only ignorance or dulness, I see nothing in that which an honest man need be ashamed of. There is many a good sou. who from those sweet slumbers of the brain are never awakened by the least harmful thought: and I am sometimes tempted to think those retailers of wit may be of the same class; that what they write proceeds not from malice, but industry; and that I ought no more to reproach them, than I would a lawyer that pleads against me for his fee; that their detraction, like dung thrown upon a meadow, though it may seem at first to deform the prospect, in a little time it will disappear of itself, and leave an involuntary crop of praise behind it.

When they confine themselves to a sober criticism upon what I write, if their censure is just, what answer can I make to it? If it is unjust, why should I suppose that a sensible reader will not see it, as well as myself? Or, admit I were able to expose them by a laughing reply, will not that reply beget a rejoinder? And though they might be gainers, by having the worst on't, in a paper war, that is no temptation for me to come into it. Or (to make both sides less considerable) would not my bearing ill-language from a chimney-sweeper do me less harm, than it would be to box with him, though I were sure to beat him? Nor indeed is the little reputation I have as an author worth the trouble of a defence. Then, as no criticism can possibly make me worse than I really am, so nothing I can say of myself can possibly make me better. When therefore a determined critic comes armed with wit and outrage, to take from me that small pittance I have, I would no more dispute with him, than I would resist a gentleman of the road, to save a little pocket-money. Men that are in want themselves, seldom make a conscience of taking it from others. Whoever thinks I have too much, is welcome to what share of it he pleases: nay, to make him more merciful (as I partly guess the worst he can say of what I now write) I will prevent even the imputation of his doing me injustice, and honestly say it myself, viz. that of all the assurances I was ever guilty of, this of writing my own life is the most hardy—I beg his pardon — impudent is what I should have said ;—that through every page there runs a vein of vanity and impertinence which no French ensign's *mémoires* ever came up to; but as this is a common error, I presume the terms of doating trifler, old fool, or conceited coxcomb, will carry contempt enough for an impartial censor to bestow on me ;—that my style is unequal, pert, and frothy; patched and party-coloured like the coat of an harlequin, low and pompous, crammed with epithets, strewed with scraps of second-hand Latin from common quotations; frequently aiming at wit, without ever hitting the mark; a mere ragout tossed up from the offals of other authors ; my subject below all pens but my own, which, whenever I keep to, is flatly daubed by one eternal egotism; that I want nothing but wit, to be an as accomplished a coxcomb here, as ever I attempted to expose on the theatre; nay, that this very confession is no more a sign of my modesty, than it is a proof of my judgment, that, in short, you may roundly tell me, that —— *Cinna* (or Cibber) *vult videri pauper, et est pauper.*

> When humble Cinna cries, I'm poor and low,
> You may believe him —— he is really so.

Well, sir Critic! and what of all this? Now I have laid myself at your feet, what will you do with me? Expose me? Why, dear sir, does not every man that writes expose himself? Can you make me more ridiculous than nature has made me? You could not sure suppose, that I would lose the pleasure of writing, because you might possibly judge me a blockhead, or perhaps might pleasantly tell other people they ought to think me so too. Will not they judge as well from what I say, as what you say? If then you attack me merely to divert yourself, your excuse for writing will be no better than mine. But perhaps you may want bread: if that be the case, even go to dinner, in God's name!

If our best authors, when teased by these triflers, have not been masters of this indifference, I should not wonder if it were disbelieved in me; but when it is considered that I have allowed my never having been disturbed into a reply has proceeded as much from vanity as from philosophy, the matter then may not seem so incredible: and though I confess the complete revenge of making them immortal dunces in immortal verse, might be glorious; yet if you will call it insensibility in me never to have winced at them, even that insensibility has its happiness; and what could glory give me more? For my part, I have always had the comfort to think, whenever they designed me a disfavour, it generally flew back into their own faces, as it happens to children when they squirt at their playfellows against the wind. If a scribbler cannot be easy, because he fancies I have too good an opinion of my own productions, let him write on, and mortify; I owe him not the charity to be out of temper myself, merely to keep him quiet, or give him joy: nor in reality can I see why any thing misrepresented, though believed of me by persons to whom I am unknown, ought to give me any more concern than what may be thought of me in Lapland. It is with those with whom I am to live only, where my character can affect me; and I will venture to say, he must find out a new way of writing, that will make me pass my time there less agreeably.

You see, sir, how hard it is for a man that is talking of himself to know when to give over; but if you are tired, lay me aside till you have a fresh appetite; if not, I'll tell you a story.

In the year 1730 there were many authors whose merit wanted nothing but interest to recommend them to the vacant laurel, and who took it ill to see it at last conferred upon a comedian; insomuch that they were resolved at least to show specimens of their superior pretensions, and accordingly enlivened the public papers with ingenious epigrams, and satirical flirts at the unworthy successor. These papers my friends, with a wicked smile, would often put into my hands, and desire me to read them fairly in company. This was a challenge which I never declined; and, to do my doughty antagonists justice, I always read them with as much impartial spirit as if I had writ them myself. While I was thus beset on all sides, there happened to step forth a poetical knight-errant to my assistance, who was hardy enough to publish some compassionate stanzas in my favour. These, you may be sure, the raillery of my friends could do no less than say I had written to myself. To deny it, I knew would but have confirmed their pretended suspicion: I therefore told them, since it gave them such joy to believe them my own, I would do my best to make the whole town think so too. As the oddness of this reply was, I knew, what would not be easily comprehended, I desired them to have a day's patience, and I would print an explanation to it. To conclude, in two days after I sent this letter, with some doggerel rhymes at the bottom,

To the Author of the Whitehall Evening Post.

SIR,

The verses to the laureat, in yours of Saturday last, have occasioned the following reply, which I hope you will give a place in your next, to show that we can be quick, as well as smart, upon a proper occasion. And as I think it the lowest mark of a scoundrel to make bold with any man's character in print, without subscribing the true name of the author, I therefore desire, if the laureat is concerned enough to ask the question, that you will tell him my name, and where I live; till then, I beg leave to be known by no other than that of

Your servant,

FRANCIS FAIRPLAY.

Monday, Jan. 11, 1730.

These were the verses.

Ah, ha! sir Coll, is that thy way,
Thy own dull praise to write?
And would'st thou stand so sure a lay?
No, that's too stale a bite.

Nature and art in thee combine;
Thy talents here excel;
All shining brass thou dost outshine,
To play the cheat so well.

Who sees thee in Iago's part,
But thinks thee such a rogue,
And is not glad, with all his heart,
To hang so sad a dog?

When Bayes thou play'st, thyself thou art;
For that by nature fit,
No blockhead better suits the part,
Than such a coxcomb wit.

In Wronghead too thy brains we see,
Who might do well at plough;
As fit for parliament was he,
As for the laurel thou.

Bring thy protected verse from court,
And try it on the stage;
There it will make much better sport,
And set the town in rage.

There beaux, and wits, and cits, and smarts,
Where hissing's not uncivil,
Will show their parts to thy deserts,
And send it to the devil.

But ah! in vain 'gainst thee we write,
In vain thy verse we maul!
Our sharpest satire's thy delight,
For—blood! thou'lt stand it all. *

Thunder, 'tis said, the laurel spares;
Naught but thy brows could blast it:
And yet—O curst, provoking stars!
Thy comfort is, thou hast it.

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* A line in the epilogue to the "Nonjuror."

This, sir, I offer as a proof, that I was seven years ago the same cold candidate for fame which I would still be thought; you will not easily suppose I could have much concern about it while, to gratify the merry pique of my friends, I was capable of seeming to head the poetical cry then against me, and at the same time of never letting the public know, till this hour, that these verses were written by myself. Nor do I give them you as an entertainment, but merely to show you this particular cast of my temper.

When I have said this, I would not have it thought affectation in me, when I grant, that no man worthy the name of an author is a more faulty writer than myself; that I am not master of my own language, I too often feel when I am at a loss for expression. I know too that I have too bold a disregard for that correctness which others set so just a value upon. This I ought to be ashamed of, when I find that persons, perhaps of colder imaginations, are allowed to write better than myself. Whenever I speak of any thing that highly delights me, I find it very difficult to keep my words within the bounds of common sense. Even when I write too, the same failing will sometimes get the better of me; of which I cannot give you a stronger instance than in that wild expression I made use of in the first edition of my preface to the "Provoked Husband;" where, speaking of Mrs Oldfield's excellent performance in the part of Lady Townly, my words ran thus, viz. "It is not enough to say, that here she outdid her usual outdoing." A most vile jingle, I grant it! You may well ask me, how could I possibly commit such a wantonness to paper? And I owe myself the shame of confessing, I have no excuse for it, but that, like a lover in the fulness of his content, by endeavouring to be floridly grateful, I talked nonsense. Not but it makes me smile to remember how many flat writers have made themselves brisk upon this single expression; wherever the verb *outdo* could come in, the pleasant accusative *outdoing* was sure to follow it. The provident wags knew, that *decies* *repetita placebit:* so delicious a morsel could not be served up too often! After it had held them nine times told for a jest, the public has been pestered with a tenth skull, thick enough to repeat it. Nay, the very learned in the law have at last facetiously laid hold of it. Ten years after it first came from me, it served to enliven the eloquence of an eloquent pleader before a house of parliament! What author would not envy me so frolicsome a fault, that had such public honours paid to it?

After this consciousness of my real defects, you will easily judge, sir, how little I presume that my poetical labours may outlive those of my mortal contemporaries.

At the same time that I am so humble in my pretensions to fame, I would not be thought to undervalue it; nature will not suffer us to despise it, but she may sometimes make us too fond of it. I have known more than one good writer very nearly ridiculous, from being in too much heat about it. Whoever intrinsically deserves it, will always have a proportionable right to it. It can neither be resigned, nor taken from you by violence. Truth, which is unalterable, must (however his fame may be contested) give every man his due. What a poem weighs, it will be worth; nor is it in the power of human eloquence, with favour or prejudice, to increase or diminish its value. Prejudice, it is true, may awhile discolour it; but it will always have its appeal to the equity of good sense, which will never fail in the end to reverse all false judgment against it. Therefore when I see an eminent author hurt, and impatient at an impotent attack upon his labours, he disturbs my inclination to admire him; I grow doubtful of the favourable judgment I have made of him, and am quite uneasy to see him so tender in a point he cannot but know he ought not himself to be judge of; his concern indeed at another's prejudice or disapprobation may be natural; but to own it, seems to me a natural weakness. When a work is apparently great, it will go without crutches; all your art and anxiety to heighten the fame of it then becomes low and little. He that will bear no censure, must be often robbed of his due praise. Fools have as good a right to be readers, as men of sense have; and why not to give their judgments too? Methinks it would be a sort of tyranny in wit, for an author to be publicly putting every argument to death that appeared against him; so absolute a demand for approbation puts us upon our right to dispute it; praise is as much the reader's property, as wit is the author's; applause is not a tax paid to him as a prince, but rather a benevolence given to him as a beggar; and we have naturally more charity for the dumb beggar than the sturdy one. The merit of a writer, and a fine woman's face, are never mended by their talking of them. How amiable is she that seems not to know she is handsome!

To conclude; all I have said upon this subject is much better contained in six lines of a reverend author, which will be an answer to all critical censure for ever:

Time is the judge; time has nor friend nor foe;
False fame will wither, and the true will grow.
Arm'd with this truth, all critics I defy;
For if I fall, by my own pen I die;
While snarlers strive, with proud but fruitless pain,
To wound immortals, or to slay the slain.

CHAPTER III.

The author's several chances for the church, the court, and the army.—Going to the university, met the revolution at Nottingham.—Took arms on that side.—What he saw of it.—A few political thoughts.—Fortune willing to do for him.—His neglect of her.—The stage preferred to all her favours.—The profession of an actor considered.—The misfortunes and advantages of it.

I AM now come to that crisis of my life when fortune seemed to be at a loss what she should do with me. Had she favoured my father's first designation of me, he might then perhaps have had as sanguine hopes of my being a bishop, as I afterwards conceived of my being a general, when I first took arms at the revolution. Nay, after that I had a third chance too, equally as good, of becoming an under-propper of the state. How at last I came to be none of all these, the sequel will inform you.

About the year 1687 I was taken from school to stand at the election of children into Winchester college; and being by my mother's side a descendant of William of Wickham, the founder, my father (who knew little how the world was to be dealt with) imagined my having that advantage, would be security enough for my success, and so sent me simply down thither, without the least favourable recommendation or interest, but that of my naked merit, and a pompous pedigree in my pocket. Had he tacked a direction to my back, and sent me by the carrier to the mayor of the town, to be chosen member of parliament there, I might have had just as much chance to have succeeded in the one as the other. But I must not omit in this place to let you know, that the experience which my father then bought, at my cost, taught him some years after to take a more judicious care of my younger brother, Lewis Cibber, whom, with the present of a statue of the founder, of his own making, he recommended to the same college. This statue now stands (I think) over the school door there, and was so well executed, that it seemed to speak—for its kinsman. It was no sooner set up, than the door of preferment was open to him.

Here one would think my brother had the advantage of me, in the favour of fortune, by this his first laudable step into the world. I own I was so proud of his success, that I even valued myself upon it; and yet it is but a melancholy reflection, to observe how unequally his profession and mine were provided for; when I, who had been the outcast of fortune, could find means, from my income of the theatre, before I was my own master there, to supply in his highest preferment his common necessities. I cannot part with his memory without telling you I had as sincere a concern for this brother's well being as my own. He had lively parts, and more than ordinary learning, with a good deal of natural wit and humour; but from too great a disregard to his health, he died a fellow of New college in Oxford, soon after he had been ordained by Dr Compton, then bishop of London. I now return to the state of my own affair at Winchester.

After the election, the moment I was informed that I was one of the unsuccessful candidates, I blest myself to think what a happy reprieve I had got from the confined life of a schoolboy, and the same day took post back to London, that I might arrive time enough to see a play (then my darling delight) before my mother might demand an account of my travelling charges. When I look back to that time, it almost makes me tremble to think what miseries, in fifty years farther in life, such an unthinking head was liable to! To ask why Providence afterwards took more care of me than I did of myself, might be making too bold an inquiry into its secret will and pleasure: all I can say to that point is, that I am thankful and amazed at it.

It was about this time I first imbibed an inclination, which I durst not reveal, for the stage; for, besides that I knew it would disoblige my father, I had no conception of any means, practicable, to make my way to it. I therefore suppressed the bewitching ideas of so sublime a station, and compounded with my ambition by laying a lower scheme, of only getting the nearest way into the immediate life of a gentleman-collegiate. My father being at this time employed at Chatsworth in Derbyshire by the (then) earl of Devonshire, who was raising that seat from a Gothic, to a Grecian magnificence, I made use of the leisure I then had in London, to open to him by letter my disinclination to wait another year for an uncertain preferment at Winchester, and to entreat him that he would send me *per saltum*, by a shorter cut, to the university. My father, who was naturally indulgent to me, seemed to comply with my request, and wrote word that as soon as his affairs would permit, he would carry me with him, and settle me in some college, but rather at Cambridge, where during his late residence at that place, in making some statues that now stand upon Trinity college new library, he had contracted some acquaintance with the heads of houses, who might assist his intentions for me. This I liked better than to go discountenanced to Oxford, to which it would have been a sort of reproach to me not to have come elected. After some months were elapsed, my father, not being willing to let me lie too long idling in London, sent for me down to Chatsworth, to be under his eye, till he could be at leisure to carry me to Cambridge. Before I could set out on my journey thither, the nation fell in labour of the revolution, the news being then just brought to London, that the prince of Orange at the head of an army was landed in the west. When I came to Nottingham, I found my father in arms there, among those forces which the earl of Devonshire had raised for the redress of our violated laws and liberties. My father judged this a proper season for a young stripling to turn himself loose into the bustle of the world; and being himself too advanced in years to endure the winter fatigue which might possibly follow, entreated that noble lord that he would be pleased to accept of his son in his room, and that he would give him (my father) leave to return and finish his works at Chatsworth. This was so well received by his lordship, that he not only admitted of my service, but promised my father in return, that when affairs were settled, he would provide for me. Upon this, my father returned to Derbyshire; while I, not a little transported, jumped into his saddle. Thus in one day all my thoughts of the university were smothered in ambition! A slight commission for a horse-officer was the least view I had before me. At this crisis you cannot but observe, that the fate of king James and of the prince of Orange, and that of so minute a being as myself, were all at once upon the anvil. In what shape they would severally come out, though a good guess might be made, was not then demonstrable to the deepest foresight; but as my fortune seemed to be of small importance to the public, Providence thought fit to postpone it, until that of those great rulers of nations was justly perfected. Yet, had my father's business permitted him to have carried me one month sooner (as he intended) to the university, who knows but by this time that purer fountain might have washed my imperfections into a capacity of writing (instead of plays and annual odes) sermons and pastoral letters? But whatever care of the church might so have fallen to my share, as I dare say it may be now in better hands, I ought not to repine at my being otherwise disposed of.

You must now consider me as one among those desperate thousands who, after a patience sorely tried, took arms under the banner of necessity, the natural parent of all human laws and government. I question if in all the histories of empire there is one instance of so bloodless a revolution as that in England in 1688, wherein whigs, tories, princes, prelates, nobles, clergy, common people, and a standing army, were unanimous. To have seen all England of one mind, is to have lived at a very particular juncture. Happy nation! who are never divided among themselves, but when they have least to complain of. Our greatest grievance since that time seems to have been, that we cannot all govern; and until the number of good places are equal to those who think themselves qualified for them, there must ever be a cause of contention among us. While great men want great posts, the nation will never want real or seeming patriots; and while great posts are filled with persons whose capacities are but human, such persons will never be allowed to be without errors. Not even the revolution with all its advantages, it seems, has been able to furnish us with unexceptionable statesmen; for from that time I do not remember any one set of ministers that have not been heartily railed at; a period long enough, one would think (if all of them have been as bad as they have been called) to make a people despair of ever seeing a good one. But as it is possible that envy, prejudice, or party, may sometimes have a share in what is generally thrown upon them, it is not easy for a private man to know who is absolutely in the right, from what is said against them, or from what their friends or dependants may say in their favour: though I can hardly forbear thinking, that they who have been longest railed at must, from that circumstance, show in some sort a proof of capacity.—But to my history.

It were almost incredible to tell you, at the latter end of king James's time (though the rod of arbitrary power was always shaking over us) with what freedom and contempt the common people, in the open streets, talked of his wild measures to make a whole Protestant nation Papists; and yet, in the height of our secure and wanton defiance of him we of the vulgar had no farther notion of any remedy for this evil, than a satisfied presumption that our numbers were too great to be mastered by his mere will and pleasure; that though he might be too hard for our laws, he would never be able to get the better of our nature; and, that to drive all England into popery and slavery, he would find, would be teaching an old lion to dance.

But happy was it for the nation that it had then wiser heads in it, who knew how to lead a people so disposed into measures for the public preservation.

Here I cannot help reflecting on the very different deliverances England met with at this time, and in the very same year of the century before. Then (in 1588) under a glorious princess, who had at heart the good and happiness of her people, we scattered and destroyed the most formidable navy of invaders that ever covered the seas: and now (in 1688) under a prince who had alienated the hearts of his people by his absolute measures to oppress them, a foreign power is received with open arms, in defence of our laws, liberties, and religion, which our native prince had invaded! How widely different were these two monarchs in their sentiments of glory! But *tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.*

When we consider in what height of the nation's prosperity the successor of queen Elizabeth came to this throne, it seems amazing that such a pile of English fame and glory, which her skilful administration had erected, should in every following reign, down to the revolution, so unhappily moulder away in one continual gradation of political errors; all which must have been avoided, if the plain rule which that wise princess left behind her had been observed, viz. "that the love of her people was the surest support of her throne." This was the principle by which she so happily governed herself and those she had the care of. In this she found strength to combat and struggle through more difficulties and dangerous conspiracies than ever English monarch had to cope with. At the same time that she professed to desire the people's love, she took care that her actions should deserve it, without the least abatement of her prerogative; the terror of which she so artfully covered, that she sometimes seemed to flatter those she was determined should obey. If the four following princes had exercised their regal authority with so visible a regard to the public welfare, it were hard to know whether the people of England might have ever complained of them, or even felt the want of that liberty they now so happily enjoy. It is true, that before her time our ancestors had many successful contests with their sovereigns for their ancient right and claim to it; yet what did those successes amount to? Little more than a declaration that there was such a right in being; but who ever saw it enjoyed? Did not the actions of almost every succeeding reign show there were still so many doors of oppression left open to the prerogative, that whatever value our most eloquent legislators may have set upon those ancient liberties, I doubt it will be difficult to fix the period of their having a real being before the revolution: or if there ever was an elder period of our unmolested enjoying them, I own my poor judgment is at a loss where to place it. I will boldly say then, it is to the revolution only we owe the full possession of what till then we never had more than a perpetually contested right to. And, from thence, from the revolution it is that the Protestant successors of king William have found their paternal care and maintenance of that right has been the surest basis of their glory.

These, sir, are a few of my political notions, which I have ventured to expose, that you may see what sort of an English subject I am; how wise or weak they may have shown me, is not my concern; let the weight of these matters have drawn me never so far out of my depth, I still flatter myself that I have kept a simple honest head above water. And it is a solid comfort to me, to consider that, how insignificant soever my life was at the revolution, it had still the good fortune to make one among the many who brought it about; and that I now, with my coevals, as well as with the millions since born, enjoy the happy effects of it.

But I must now let you see how my particular fortune went forward with this change in the government; of which I shall not pretend to give you any farther account than what my simple eyes saw of it.

We had not been many days at Nottingham, before we heard that the prince of Denmark, with some other great persons, were gone off from the king to the prince of Orange; and that the princess Anne, fearing the king her father's resentment might fall upon her for her consort's revolt, had withdrawn herself in the night from London, and was then within half a day's journey of Nottingham; on which very morning we were suddenly alarmed with the news, that two thousand of the king's dragoons were in close pursuit to bring her back prisoner to London. But this alarm it seems was all stratagem, and was but a part of that general terror which was thrown into many other places about the kingdom at the same time, with design to animate and unite the people in their common defence; it being then given out, that the Irish were every where at our heels, to cut off all the Protestants within the reach of their fury. In this alarm our troops scrambled to arms in as much order as their consternation would admit of; when, having advanced some few miles on the London road, they met the princess in a coach, attended only by the lady Churchill, (now duchess dowager of Marlborough,) and the lady Fitzharding, whom they conducted into Nottingham through the acclamations of the people. The same night all the noblemen, and the other persons of distinction then in arms, had the honour to sup at her royal highness's table, which was then furnished (as all her necessary accommodations were) by the care and at the charge of the lord Devonshire. At this entertainment, of which I was a spectator, something very particular surprised me: the noble guests at the table happening to be more in number than attendants out of liveries could be found for, I, being well known in the lord Devonshire's family, was desired by his lordship's *maître d'hôtel* to assist at it. The post assigned me was to observe what the lady Churchill might call for. Being so near the table, you may naturally ask me what I might have heard to have passed in conversation at it; which I should certainly tell you, had I attended to above two words that were uttered there; and those were, "Some wine and water." These I remember came distinguished and observed to my ear, because they came from the fair guest whom I took such pleasure to wait on. Except at that single sound, all my senses were collected into my eyes, which during the whole entertainment wanted no better amusement than stealing now and then the delight of gazing on the fair object so near me. If so clear an emanation of beauty, such a commanding grace of aspect, struck me into a regard that had something softer than the most profound respect in it, I cannot see why I may not without offence remember it; since beauty, like the sun, must sometimes lose its power to choose, and shine into equal warmth the peasant and the courtier. Now to give you, sir, a farther proof of how good a taste my first hopeful entrance into manhood set out with, I remember above twenty years after, when the same lady had given the world four of the loveliest daughters that ever were gazed on, even after they were all nobly married, and were become the reigning toasts of every party of pleasure, their still lovely mother had at the same time her votaries, and her health very often took the lead in those involuntary triumphs of beauty. However presumptuous or impertinent these thoughts might have appeared at my first entertaining them, why may I not hope that my having kept them decently secret for full fifty years, may be now a good round plea for their pardon? Were I now qualified to say more of this celebrated lady, I should conclude it thus: that she has lived (to all appearance) a peculiar favourite of Providence; that few examples can parallel the profusion of blessings which have attended so long a life of felicity. A person so attractive! a husband so memorably great! an offspring so beautiful! a fortune so immense! and a title which (when royal favour had no higher to bestow) she only could receive from the Author of Nature—a great grandmother without grey hairs! These are such consummate indulgencies, that we might think heaven has centered them all in one person, to let us see how far, with a lively understanding, the full possession of them could contribute to human happiness. I now return to our military affairs.

From Nottingham our troops marched to Oxford; through every town we passed, the people came out, in some sort of order, with such rural and rusty weapons as they had, to meet us in acclamations of welcome and good wishes. This I thought promised a favourable end of our civil war, when the nation seemed so willing to be all of a side. At Oxford the prince and princess of Denmark met, for the first time after their late separation, and had all possible honours paid them by the university. Here we rested in quiet quarters for several weeks, till the flight of king James into France; when, the nation being left to take care of itself, the only security that could be found for it, was to advance the prince and princess of Orange to the vacant throne. The public tranquillity being now settled, our forces were remanded back to Nottingham. Here all our officers, who had commanded them from their first rising, received commissions to confirm them in their several posts; and at the same time such private men as chose to return to their proper business or habitations, were offered their discharges. Among the small number of those who received them, I was one; for not hearing that my name was in any of these new commissions, I thought it time for me to take my leave of ambition, as ambition had before seduced me from the imaginary honours of the gown, and therefore resolved to hunt my fortune in some other field.

From Nottingham I again returned to my father at Chatsworth, where I staid till my lord came down with the new honours of lord steward of his majesty's household and knight of the garter. A noble turn of fortune! And a deep stake he had played for! Which calls to my memory a story we had then in the family, which, though too light for our grave historian's notice, may be of weight enough for my humble memoirs. This noble lord being in the presence-chamber, in king James's time, and known to be no friend to the measures of his administration, a certain person in favour there, and desirous to be more so, took occasion to tread rudely upon his lordship's foot, which was returned with a sudden blow upon the spot. For this misdemeanour his lordship was fined thirty thousand pounds, but I think had some time allowed him for the payment. In the summer preceding the revolution, when his lordship was retired to Chatsworth, and had been there deeply engaged with other noblemen in the measures which soon after brought it to bear, king James sent a person down to him with offers to mitigate his fine upon conditions of ready payment; to which his lordship replied, that if his majesty pleased to allow him a little longer time, he would rather choose to play " double or quit" with him. The time of the intended rising being then so near at hand, the demand, it seems, came too late for a more serious answer.

However low my pretensions to preferment were at this time, my father thought that a little court favour added to them might give him a chance for saving the expense of maintaining me, as he had intended, at the university. He therefore ordered me to draw up a petition to the duke, and—to give it some air of merit—to put it into Latin; the prayer of which was, that his grace would be pleased to do something (I really forget what) for me. However, the duke upon receiving it was so good as to desire my father would send me to London in the winter, where he would consider of some provision for me. It might indeed well require time to consider it: for I believe it was then harder to know what I was really fit for, than to have got me any thing I was not fit for. However, to London I came, where I entered into my first state of attendance and dependance for about five months, till the February following. But, alas! in my intervals of leisure, by frequently seeing plays, my wise head was turned to higher views; I saw no joy in any other life than that of an actor; so that (as before, when a candidate at Winchester) I was even afraid of succeeding to the preferment I sought for. It was on the stage alone I had formed a happiness preferable to all that camps or courts could offer me; and there was I determined, let father and mother take it as they pleased, to fix my *non ultra*. Here I think myself obliged, in respect to the honour of that noble lord, to acknowledge that I believe his real intentions to do well for me were prevented by my own inconsiderate folly; so that if my life did not then take a more laudable turn, I have no one but myself to reproach for it; for I was credibly informed by the gentlemen of his household, that his grace had in their hearing talked of recommending me to the lord Shrewsbury, then secretary of state, for the first proper vacancy in that office. But the distant hope of a reversion was too cold a temptation for a spirit impatient as mine, that wanted immediate possession of what my heart was so differently set upon. The allurements of a theatre are still so strong in my memory, that perhaps few except those who have felt them can conceive: and I am yet so far willing to excuse my folly, that I am convinced, were it possible to take off that disgrace and prejudice which custom has thrown upon the profession of an actor, many a well-born younger brother, and beauty of low fortune, would gladly have adorned the theatre, who, by their not being able to brook such dishonour to their birth, have passed away their lives decently unheeded and forgotten.

Many years ago, when I was first in the management of the theatre, I remember a strong instance which will show you what degree of ignominy the profession of an actor was then held at. A lady with a real title, whose female indiscretions had occasioned her family to abandon her, being willing in her distress to make an honest penny of what beauty she had left, desired to be admitted as an actress; when, before she could receive our answer, a gentleman (probably by her relations' permission) advised us not to entertain her, for reasons easy to be guessed. You may imagine we could not be so blind to our interest as to make an honourable family our unnecessary enemies, by not taking his advice; which the lady too being sensible of, saw the affair had its difficulties, and therefore pursued it no farther. Now is it not hard that it should be a doubt whether this lady's condition or ours were the more melancholy? For here you find her honest endeavour to get bread from the stage was looked upon as an addition of new scandal to her former dishonour; so that I am afraid, according to this way of thinking, had the same lady stooped to have sold patches and pomatum in a bandbox from door to door, she might in that occupation have starved with less infamy, than had she relieved her necessities by being famous on the theatre. Whether this prejudice may have arisen from the abuses that so often have crept in upon the stage, I am not clear in; though, when that is grossly the case, I will allow there ought to be no limits set to the contempt of it. Yet in its lowest condition, in my time, methinks there could have been no pretence of preferring the bandbox to the buskin. But this severe opinion, whether merited or not, is not the greatest distress that this profession is liable to.

I shall now give you another anecdote, quite the reverse of what I have instanced, wherein you will see an actress as hardly used for an act of modesty : (which, without being a prude, a woman even upon the stage may sometimes think it necessary not to throw off.) This too I am forced to premise, that the truth of what I am going to tell you may not be sneered at before it be known. About the year 1717, a young actress of a desirable person sitting in an upper box at the opera, a military gentleman thought this a proper opportunity to secure a little conversation with her; the particulars of which were probably no more worth repeating than it seems the demoiselle then thought them worth listening to; for, notwithstanding the fine things he said to her, she rather chose to give the music the preference of her attention. This indifference was so offensive to his high heart, that he began to change the tender into the terrible, and in short proceeded at last to treat her in a style too grossly insulting for the meanest female ear to endure unresented ; upon which, being beaten too far out of her discretion, she turned hastily upon him with an angry look, and a reply which seemed to set his merit in so low a regard, that he thought himself obliged in honour to take his time to resent it. This was the full extent of her crime, which his glory delayed no longer to punish than until the next time she was to appear upon the stage : there, in one of her best parts, wherein she drew a favourable regard and approbation from the audience, he, dispensing with the respect which some people think due to a polite assembly, began to interrupt her performance with such loud and various notes of mockery as other young men of honour in the same place have sometimes made themselves undauntedly merry with. Thus, deaf to all murmurs or entreaties of those about him, he pursued his point even to throwing near her such trash as no person can be supposed to carry about him, unless to use on so particular an occasion.

A gentleman then behind the scenes, being shocked at his unmanly behaviour, was warm enough to say, that no man but a fool or a bully could be capable of insulting an audience, or a woman, in so monstrous a manner. The former valiant gentleman, to whose ear the words were soon brought by his spies, whom he had placed behind the scenes to observe how the action was taken there, came immediately from the pit in a heat, and demanded to know of the author of those words, if he was the person that spoke them: to which he calmly replied, that though he had never seen him before, yet since he seemed so earnest to be satisfied, he would do him the favour to own, that indeed the words were his, and that they would be the last words he should choose to deny, whoever they might fall upon. To conclude, their dispute was ended the next morning in Hyde Park, where the determined combatant who first asked for satisfaction, was obliged afterwards to ask his life too; whether he mended it or not, I have not yet heard; but his antagonist, in a few years after, died in one of the principal posts of the government.

Now, though I have sometimes known these gallant insulters of audiences draw themselves into scrapes which they have less honourably got out of, yet alas! what has that availed? This generous public-spirited method of silencing a few, was but repelling the disease in one part, to make it break out in another. All endeavours at protection are new provocations to those who pride themselves in pushing their courage to a defiance of humanity. Even when a royal resentment has shown itself in the behalf of an injured actor, it has been unable to defend him from farther insults; an instance of which happened in the late king James's time. Mr Smith (whose character as a gentleman could have been no way impeached, had he not degraded it by being a celebrated actor) had the misfortune, in a dispute with a gentleman behind the scenes, to receive a blow from him. The same night an account of this action was carried to the king, to whom the gentleman was represented so grossly in the wrong, that the next day his majesty sent to forbid him the court upon it. This indignity cast upon a gentleman only for having maltreated a player, was looked upon as the concern of every gentleman; and a party was soon formed to assert and vindicate their honour by humbling this favoured actor, whose slight injury had been judged equal to so severe a notice. Accordingly, the next time Smith acted, he was received with a chorus of cat-calls, that soon convinced him he should not be suffered to proceed in his part; upon which, without the least discomposure, he ordered the curtain to be dropped; and, having a competent fortune of his own, thought the conditions of adding to it by his remaining upon the stage were too dear; and from that day entirely quitted it. I shall make no observation upon the king's resentment, or on that of his good subjects; how far either was or was not right, is not the point I dispute for; be that as it may, the unhappy condition of the actor was so far from being relieved by this royal interposition in his favour, that it was the worse for it.

While these sort of real distresses on the stage are so unavoidable, it is no wonder that young people of sense (though of low fortune) should be so rarely found to supply a succession of good actors. Why then may we not in some measure impute the scarcity of them to the wanton inhumanity of those spectators who have made it so terribly mean to appear there? Were there no ground for this question, where could be the disgrace of entering into a society whose institution, when not abused, is a delightful school of morality; and where to excel requires as ample endowments of nature as any one profession (that of holy institution excepted) whatsoever? But, alas! as Shakspeare says,

> Where's that palace whereinto sometimes
> Foul things intrude not?

Look into St Peter's at Rome, and see what a profitable farce is made of religion there! Why then is an actor more blemished than a cardinal, while the excellence of the one arises from his innocently seeming what he is not, and the eminence of the other from the most impious fallacies that can be imposed upon human understanding? If the best things therefore are most liable to corruption, the corruption of the theatre is no disproof of its innate and primitive utility.

In this light therefore all the abuses of the stage, all the low, loose, or immoral supplements, to wit, whether in making virtue ridiculous or vice agreeable, or in the decorated nonsense and absurdities of pantomimical trumpery, I give up to the contempt of every sensible spectator, as so much rank theatrical popery; but cannot still allow these enormities to impeach the profession, while they are so palpably owing to the depraved taste of the multitude. While vice and farcical folly are the most profitable commodities, why should we wonder that, time out of mind, the poor comedian, when real wit would bear no price, should deal in what would bring him most ready money? But this, you will say, is making the stage a nursery of vice and folly, or at least keeping an open shop for it. I grant it: but who do you expect should reform it? The actors? Why so? If people are permitted to buy it without blushing, the theatrical merchant seems to have an equal right to the liberty of selling it without reproach. That this evil wants a remedy, is not to be contested; nor can it be denied, that the theatre is as capable of being preserved by a reformation, as matters of more importance; which for the honour of our national taste I could wish were attempted; and then, if it could not subsist under decent regulations, by not being permitted to present any thing there but what were worthy to be there, it would be time enough to consider, whether it were necessary to let it totally fall, or effectually support it.

Notwithstanding all my best endeavours to recommend the profession of an actor to a more general favour, I doubt, while it is liable to such corruptions, and the actor himself to such unlimited insults as I have already mentioned,—I doubt, I say, we must still leave him adrift, with his intrinsic merit, to ride out the storm as well as he is able.

However, let us now turn to the other side of this account, and see what advantages stand there, to balance the misfortunes I have laid before you. There we shall still find some valuable articles of credit, that sometimes overpay his incidental disgraces.

First, if he has sense, he will consider that as these indignities are seldom or never offered him by people that are remarkable for any one good quality, he ought not to lay them too close to his heart: he will know too, that when malice, envy, or a brutal nature, can securely hide or fence themselves in a multitude, virtue, merit, innocence, and even sovereign superiority, have been and must be equally liable to their insults; that therefore, when they fall upon him in the same manner, his intrinsic value cannot be diminished by them: on the contrary, if with a decent and unruffled temper he lets them pass, the disgrace will return upon his aggressor, and perhaps warm the generous spectator into a partiality in his favour.

That while he is conscious, that as an actor he must be always in the hands of injustice, it does him at least this involuntary good, that it keeps him in a settled resolution to avoid all occasions of provoking it, or of even offending the lowest enemy who at the expense of a shilling may publicly revenge it.

That if he excels on the stage, and is irreproachable in his personal morals and behaviour, his profession is so far from being an impediment, that it will be oftener a just reason for his being received among people of condition with favour, and sometimes with a more social distinction than the best, though more profitable trade he might have followed, could have recommended him to.

That this is a happiness to which several actors within my memory, as Betterton, Smith, Montfort, captain Griffin, and Mrs Bracegirdle (yet living) have arrived at; to which I may add the late celebrated Mrs Oldfield. Now let us suppose these persons—the men, for example—to have been all eminent mercers, and the women as famous milliners; can we imagine that merely as such, though endowed with the same natural understanding, they could have been called into the same honourable parties of conversation? People of sense and condition could not but know it was impossible they could have had such various excellencies on the stage, without having something naturally valuable in them: and I will take upon me to affirm, who knew them all living, that there was not one of the number who were not capable of supporting a variety of spirited conversation, though the stage were never to have been the subject of it.

That to have trod the stage has not always been thought a disqualification from more honourable employments; several have had military commissions; Carlisle and Wiltshire were both killed captains, one in king William's reduction of Ireland, and the other in his first war in Flanders; and the famous Ben Jonson, though an unsuccessful actor, was afterwards made poet-laureat.

To these laudable distinctions let me add one more, that of public applause, which when truly merited is perhaps one of the most agreeable gratifications that venial vanity can feel:—a happiness almost peculiar to the actor, insomuch that the best tragic writer, however numerous his separate admirers may be, yet to unite them into one general act of praise, to receive at once those thundering peals of approbation which a crowded theatre throws out, he must still call in the assistance of the skilful actor to raise and partake of them.

In a word, it was in this flattering light only, though not perhaps so thoroughly considered, I looked upon the life of an actor, when but eighteen years of age; nor can you wonder if the temptations were too strong for so warm a vanity as mine to resist; but whether excusable or not, to the stage at length I came; and it is from thence chiefly your curiosity, if you have any left, is to expect a farther account of me.

CHAPTER IV.

A short view of the stage, from the year 1660 to the revolution. —The king's and duke's company united, composed the best set of English actors yet known.—Their several theatrical characters.

Though I have only promised you an account of all the material occurrences of the theatre during my own time, yet there was one which happened not above seven years before my admission to it, which may be as well worth notice as the first great revolution of it, in which among numbers I was involved. And as the one will lead you into a clearer view of the other, it may therefore be previously necessary to let you know that king Charles II, at his restoration, granted two patents, one to sir William Davenant, and the other to Henry Killigrew, esq., and their several heirs and assigns for ever, for the forming of two distinct companies of comedians. The first were called the king's servants, and acted at the theatre-royal in Drury-lane; and the other the duke's company, who acted at the duke's theatre in Dorset-garden. About ten of the king's company were on the royal household establishment, having each ten yards of scarlet cloth, with a proper quantity of lace, allowed them for liveries; and in their warrants from the lord chamberlain were styled gentlemen of the great chamber. Whether the like appointments were extended to the duke's company, I am not certain; but they were both in high estimation with the public, and so much the delight and concern of the court, that they were not only supported by its being frequently present at their public presentations, but by its taking cognizance even of their private government, insomuch that their particular differences, pretensions, or complaints, were generally ended by the king or duke's personal command or decision. Besides their being thorough masters of their art, these actors set forwards with two critical advantages, which perhaps may never happen again in many ages. The one was their immediate opening after the so long interdiction of plays during the civil war, and the anarchy that followed it. What eager appetites from so long a fast must the guests of those times have had to that high and fresh variety of entertainments which Shakspeare had left prepared for them? Never was a stage so provided! A hundred years are wasted, and another silent century well advanced; and yet what unborn age shall say Shakspeare has his equal? How many shining actors have the warm scenes of his genius given to posterity, without being himself in his action equal to his writing! A strong proof that actors, like poets, must be born such. Eloquence and elocution are quite different talents. Shakspeare could write Hamlet; but tradition tells us, that the ghost in the same play was one of his best performances as an actor: nor is it within the reach of rule or precept to complete either of them. Instruction, it is true, may guard them equally against faults or absurdities; but there it stops; nature must do the rest. To excel in either art is a self-born happiness, which something more than good sense must be the mother of.

The other advantage I was speaking of is, that before the restoration no actresses had ever been seen upon the English stage. The characters of women on former theatres were performed by boys, or young men of the most effeminate aspect. And what grace or master-strokes of action can we conceive such ungain hoydens to have been capable of? This defect was so well considered by Shakspeare, that in few of his plays he has any greater dependence upon the ladies than in the innocence and simplicity of a Desdemona, an Ophelia, or in the short specimen of a fond and virtuous Portia. The additional objects then of real, beautiful women, could not but draw a proportion of new admirers to the theatre. We may imagine too that these actresses were not ill chosen, when it is well known that more than one of them had charms sufficient at their leisure hours to calm and mollify the cares of empire. Besides these peculiar advantages, they had a private rule or agreement which both houses were happily tied down to, which was, that no play acted at one house should ever be attempted at the other. All the capital plays therefore of Shakspeare, Fletcher, and Ben Jonson, were divided between them, by the approbation of the court, and their own alternate choice. So that when Hart was famous for Othello, Betterton had no less a reputation for Hamlet. By this order, the stage was supplied with a greater variety of plays than could possibly have been shown, had both companies been employed at the same time upon the same play; which liberty too must have occasioned such frequent repetitions of them, by their opposite endeavours to forestall and anticipate one another, that the best actors in the world must have grown tedious and tasteless to the spectator. For what pleasure is not languid to satiety? It was therefore one of our greatest happinesses (during my time of being in the management of the stage) that we had a certain number of select plays which no other company had the good fortune to make a tolerable figure in, and consequently could find little or no account by acting them against us. These plays therefore for many years, by not being too often seen, never failed to bring us crowded audiences; and it was to this conduct we owed no little share of our prosperity. But when four houses are at once (as very lately they were) all permitted to act the same pieces, let three of them perform never so ill, when plays come to be so harassed and hackneyed out to the common people (half of which too perhaps would as lieve see them at one house as another) the best actors will soon feel that the town has enough of them.

I know it is the common opinion, that the more playhouses, the more emulation; I grant it; but what has this emulation ended in? Why, a daily contention which shall soonest surfeit you with the best plays; so that when what ought to please can no longer please, your appetite is again to be raised by such monstrous presentations as dishonour the taste of a civilized people. If indeed to our several theatres we could raise a proportionable number of good authors, to give them all different employment, then perhaps the public might profit from their emulation. But while good writers are so scarce, and undaunted critics so plenty, I am afraid a good play and a blazing star will be equal rarities. This voluptuous expedient therefore of indulging the taste with several theatres, will amount to much the same variety as that of a certain economist, who to enlarge his hospitality would have two puddings and two legs of mutton for the same dinner. But to resume the thread of my history.

These two excellent companies were both prosperous for some few years, till their variety of plays began to be exhausted; then of course the better actors (which the king's seem to have been allowed) could not fail of drawing the greater audiences. Sir William Davenant therefore, master of the duke's company, to make head against their success, was forced to add spectacle and music to action, and to introduce a new species of plays, since called dramatic operas, of which kind were the Tempest, Psyche, Circe, and others, all set off with the most expensive decorations of scenes and habits, with the best voices and dancers.

This sensual supply of sight and sound, coming in to the assistance of the weaker party, it was no wonder they should grow too hard for sense and simple nature, when it is considered how many more people there are that can see and hear than think and judge. So wanton a change of the public taste therefore began to fall as heavy upon the king's company, as their greater excellence in action had before fallen upon their competitors. Of which encroachment upon wit, several good prologues in those days frequently complained.

But alas! what can truth avail, when its dependence is much more upon the ignorant than the sensible auditor? A poor satisfaction, that the due praise given to it must at last sink into the cold comfort of—*laudatur et alget.* Unprofitable praise can hardly give it a *soup maigre.* Taste and fashion with us have always had wings, and fly from one public spectacle to another so wantonly, that I have been informed by those who remember it, that a famous puppet-show in Salisbury 'change (then standing where Cecil-street now is) so far distressed these two celebrated companies, that they were reduced to petition the king for relief against it. Nor ought we perhaps to think this strange, when, if I mistake not, Terence himself reproaches the Roman auditors of his time with the like fondness for the *funambuli,* the rope-dancers. Not to dwell too long therefore upon that part of my history which I have only collected from oral tradition, I shall content myself with telling you, that Mohun and Hart now growing old, (for, above thirty years before this time, they had severally borne the king's commission of major and captain in the civil wars,) and the younger actors, as Goodman, Clark, and others, being impatient to get into their parts, and growing intractable, the audiences too of both houses then falling off, the patentees of each, by the king's advice, which perhaps amounted to a command, united their interests, and both companies into one exclusive of all others, in the year 1684. This union was however so much in favour of the duke's company, that Hart left the stage upon it, and Mohun survived not long after.

One only theatre being now in possession of the whole town, the united patentees imposed their own terms upon the actors; for the profits of acting were then divided into twenty shares, ten of which went to the proprietors, and the other moiety to the principal actors, in such subdivisions as their different merit might pretend to. These shares of the patentees were promiscuously sold out to money-making persons, called adventurers, who though utterly ignorant of theatrical affairs were still admitted to a proportionate vote in the management of them; all particular encouragements to actors were by them, of consequence, looked upon as so many sums deducted from their private dividends. While therefore the theatrical hive had so many drones in it, the labouring actors, sure, were under the highest discouragement, if not a direct state of oppression. Their hardship will at least appear in a much stronger light, when compared to our later situation, who with scarce half their merit succeeded to be sharers under a patent upon five times easier conditions: for as they had but half the profits divided among ten or more of them, we had three-fourths of the whole profits divided only among three of us; and as they might be said to have ten taskmasters over them, we never had but one assistant manager (not an actor) joined with us; who, by the crown's indulgence, was sometimes too of our own choosing. Under this heavy establishment then groaned this united company, when I was first admitted into the lowest rank of it. How they came to be relieved by king William's licence in 1695, how they were again dispersed early in queen Anne's reign, and from what accidents fortune took better care of us, their unequal successors, will be told in its place. But to prepare you for the opening so large a scene of their history, methinks I ought (in justice to their memory too) to give you such particular characters of their theatrical merit as in my plain judgment they seemed to deserve. Presuming then that this attempt may not be disagreeable to the curious, or the true lovers of the theatre, take it without farther preface.

In the year 1690, when I first came into this company, the principal actors then at the head of it were:—

Mr Betterton,
Mr Montfort,
Mr Kynaston,
Mr Sandford,
Mr Nokes,
Mr Underhil, and
Mr Leigh.

Mrs Betterton,
Mrs Barry,
Mrs Leigh,
Mrs Butler,
Mrs Montfort, and
Mrs Bracegirdle.

These actors, whom I have selected from their contemporaries, were all original masters in their different style; not mere auricular imitators of one another, which commonly is the highest merit of the middle rank; but self-judges of nature, from whose various lights they only took their true instruction. If in the following account of them I may be obliged to hint at the faults of others, I never mean such observations should extend to those who are now in possession of the stage; for as I design not my memoirs shall come down to their time, I would not lie under the imputation of speaking in their disfavour to the public, whose approbation they must depend upon for support. But to my purpose.

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 an 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, Macbeths, 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 may 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 sat by him to see this scene acted, made the same observation, asking me with some surprise if I thought Hamlet should be in so violent a passion with the ghost, which, though it might have astonished, 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 supplied 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 words 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:—it is 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 vain-glory:—

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

And therefore they shall know it again—

> When glory, like the dazzling eagle, stood
> Perch'd 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 appear'd the leading God?

When these flowing numbers came 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 an 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 canvass—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 misled 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 from 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 Mountfort, 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 extravagances of that character, to be a more surprising 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.

Notwithstanding the extraordinary power he showed in blowing Alexander once more into a blaze of admiration, Betterton had so just a sense of what was true or false applause, that I have heard him say he never thought any kind of it equal to an attentive silence; that there were many ways of deceiving an audience into a loud one; but to keep them hushed and quiet, was an applause which only truth and merit could arrive at: of which art there never was an equal master to himself. From these various excellencies, he had so full a possession of the esteem and regard of his auditors, that upon his entrance into every scene, he seemed to seize upon the eyes and ears of the giddy and inadvertent! To have talked or looked another way, would then have been thought insensibility or ignorance. In all his soliloquies of moment, the strong intelligence of his attitude and aspect drew you into such an impatient gaze and eager expectation, that you almost imbibed the sentiment with your eye, before the ear could reach it.

As Betterton is the centre to which all my observations upon action tend, you will give me leave, under his character, to enlarge upon that head. In the just delivery of poetical numbers, particularly where the sentiments are pathetic, it is scarce credible upon how minute an article of sound depends their greatest beauty or inaffection. The voice of a singer is not more strictly tied to time and tune, than that of an actor in theatrical elocution: the least syllable too long or too slightly dwelt upon in a period, depreciates it to nothing; while every syllable if rightly touched shall, like the heightening stroke of light from a master's pencil, give life and spirit to the whole. I never heard a line in tragedy come from Betterton, wherein my judgment, my ear, and my imagination, were not fully satisfied; which since his time I cannot equally say of any one actor whatsoever; not but it is possible to be much his inferior, with great excellencies; which I shall observe in another place. Had it been practicable to have tied down the clattering hands of all the ill judges who were commonly the majority of an audience, to what amazing perfection might the English theatre have arrived, with so just an actor as Betterton at the head of it! If what was truth only could have been applauded, how many noisy actors had shook their plumes with shame, who, from the injudicious approbation of the multitude, have bawled and strutted in the place of merit? If therefore the bare speaking voice has such allurements in it, how much less ought we to wonder, however we may lament, that the sweeter notes of vocal music should so have captivated even the politer world into an apostasy from sense to an idolatry of sound? Let us inquire from whence this enchantment rises. I am afraid it may be too naturally accounted for: for when we complain that the finest music, purchased at such vast expense, is so often thrown away upon the most miserable poetry, we seem not to consider that when the movement of the air and tone of the voice are exquisitely harmonious, though we regard not one word of what we hear, yet the power of the melody is so busy in the heart, that we naturally annex ideas to it of our own creation, and in some sort become ourselves the poet to the composer; and what poet is so dull as not to be charmed with the child of his own fancy? So that there is even a kind of language in agreeable sounds, which, like the aspect of beauty, without words speaks and plays with the imagination. While this taste therefore is so naturally prevalent, I doubt to propose remedies for it were but giving laws to the winds, or advice to inamoratos; and however gravely we may assert that profit ought always to be inseparable from the delight of the theatre —nay admitting that the pleasure would be heightened by the uniting them—yet while instruction is so little the concern of the auditor, how can we hope that so choice a commodity will come to a market where there is so seldom a demand for it?

It is not to the actor therefore, but to the vitiated and low taste of the spectator, that the corruptions of the stage (of what kind soever) have been owing. If the public, by whom they must live, had spirit enough to discountenance and declare against all the trash and fopperies they have been so frequently fond of, both the actors and the authors to the best of their power must naturally have served their daily table with sound and wholesome diet. But I have not yet done with my article of elocution.

As we have sometimes great composers of music who cannot sing, we have as frequently great writers that cannot read; and though without the nicest ear no man can be master of poetical numbers, yet the best ear in the world will not always enable him to pronounce them. Of this truth Dryden, our first great master of verse and harmony, was a strong instance · when he brought his play of "Amphytrion" to the stage, I heard him give it his first reading to the actors, in which, though it is true he delivered the plain sense of every period, yet the whole was in so cold, so flat, and unaffecting a manner, that I am afraid of not being believed when I affirm it.

On the contrary Lee, far his inferior in poetry, was so pathetic a reader of his own scenes, that I have been informed by an actor who was present, that while Lee was reading to major Mohun at a rehearsal, Mohun in the warmth of his admiration threw down his part and said—"Unless I were able to play it as well as you read it, to what purpose should I undertake it?" And yet this very author, whose elocution raised such admiration in so capital an actor, when he attempted to be an actor himself, soon quitted the stage in an honest despair of ever making any profitable figure there From all this I would infer, that let our conception of what we are to speak be ever so just, and the ear ever so true, yet when we are to deliver it to an audience (I will leave fear out of the question) there must go along with the whole a natural freedom and becoming grace which is easier to conceive than to describe: for without this inexpressible somewhat the performance will come out oddly disguised, or somewhere defectively unsurprising to the hearer. Of this defect too I will give you yet a stranger instance, which you will allow fear could not be the occasion of. If you remember Estcourt, you must have known that he was long enough upon the stage not to be under the least restraint from fear in his performance. This man was so amazing and extraordinary a mimic, that no man or woman, from the coquette to the privy-counsellor, ever moved or spoke before him, but he could carry their voice, look, mien, and motion, instantly into another company. I have heard him make long harangues, and form various arguments, even in the manner of thinking of an eminent pleader at the bar, with every the least article and singularity of his utterance so perfectly imitated, that he was the very *alter ipse*, scarce to be distinguished from his original. Yet more; I have seen upon the margin of the written part of Falstaff, which he acted, his own notes and observations upon almost every speech of it, describing the true spirit of the humour, and with what tone of voice, look, and gesture, each of them ought to be delivered. Yet in his execution upon the stage he seemed to have lost all those just ideas he had formed of it, and almost through the character laboured under a heavy load of flatness: in a word, with all his skill in mimicry, and knowledge of what ought to be done, he never upon the stage could bring it truly into practice but was upon the whole a languid unaffecting actor. After I have shown you so many necessary qualifications, not one of which can be spared in true theatrical elocution, and have at the same time proved that with the assistance of them all united, the whole may still come forth defective; what talents shall we say will infallibly form an actor? This I confess is one of nature's secrets too deep for me to dive into; let us content ourselves therefore with affirming, that genius, which nature only gives, only can complete him. This genius then was so strong in Betterton, that it shone out in every speech and motion of him. Yet voice and person are such necessary supports to it, that by the multitude they have been preferred to genius itself, or at least often mistaken for it. Betterton had a voice of that kind which gave more spirit to terror than to the softer passions; of more strength than melody. The rage and jealousy of Othello became him better than the sighs and tenderness of Castalio: for though in Castalio he only excelled others, in Othello he excelled himself; which you will easily believe when you consider that, in spite of his complexion, Othello has more natural beauties than the best actor can find in all the magazine of poetry, to animate his power and delight his judgment with.

The person of this excellent actor was suitable to his voice, more manly than sweet, not exceeding the middle stature, inclining to the corpulent; of a serious and penetrating aspect; his limbs nearer the athletic than the delicate proportion; yet however formed, there arose from the harmony of the whole a commanding mien of majesty, which the fairer-faced or (as Shakspeare calls them) the "curled" darlings of his time ever wanted something to be equal masters of. There was some years ago to be had, almost in every print-shop, a mezzotinto from Kneller, extremely like him.

In all I have said of Betterton, I confine myself to the time of his strength and highest power in action, that you may make allowances from what he was able to execute at fifty, to what you might have seen of him at past seventy; for though to the last he was without his equal, he might not then be equal to his former self; yet so far was he from being ever overtaken, that for many years after his decease I seldom saw any of his parts in Shakspeare supplied by others, but it drew from me the lamentation of Ophelia upon Hamlet's being unlike what she had seen him :—

> ————Ah ! woe is me !
> To have seen what I have seen, see what I see !

The last part this great master of his profession acted was Melantius in the "Maid's Tragedy," for his own benefit; when, being suddenly seized by the gout, he submitted, by extraordinary applications, to have his foot so far relieved, that he might be able to walk on the stage in a slipper, rather than wholly disappoint his auditors. He was observed that day to have exerted a more than ordinary spirit, and met with suitable applause; but the unhappy consequence of tampering with his distemper was, that it flew into his head, and killed him in three days (I think) in the seventy-fourth year of his age.

I once thought to have filled up my work with a select dissertation upon theatrical action ; but I find by the digressions I have been tempted to make in this account of Betterton, that all I can say upon that head will naturally fall in, and possibly be less tedious if dispersed among the various characters of the particular actors I have promised to treat of. I shall therefore make use of those several vehicles which you will find waiting in the next chapter to carry you through the rest of the journey at your leisure.

CHAPTER V.

The theatrical characters of the principal actors in the year 1690 continued.—A few words to critical auditors

Though, as I have before observed, women were not admitted to the stage until the return of king Charles, yet it could not be so suddenly supplied with them, but that there was still a necessity for some time to put the handsomest young men into petticoats, which Kynaston was then said to have worn with success, particularly in the part of Evadne in the "Maid's Tragedy," which I have heard him speak of, and which calls to my mind a ridiculous distress that arose from these sort of shifts which the stage was then put to.—The king, coming a little before his usual time to a tragedy, found the actors not ready to begin; when his majesty, not choosing to have as much patience as his good subjects, sent to them to know the meaning of it; upon which the master of the company came to the box, and rightly judging that the best excuse for their default would be the true one, fairly told his majesty that the queen was not shaved yet. The king, whose good humour loved to laugh at a jest as well as to make one, accepted the excuse, which served to divert him until the male queen could be effeminated. In a word, Kynaston at that time was so beautiful a youth, that the ladies of quality prided themselves in taking him with them in their coaches to Hyde-park, in his theatrical habit, after the play; which in those days they might have sufficient time to do, because plays then were used to begin at four o'clock—the hour that people of the same rank are now going to dinner. Of this truth I had the curiosity to inquire, and had it confirmed from his own mouth in his advanced age: and indeed to the last of him his handsomeness was very little abated; even at past sixty his teeth were all sound, white and even as one would wish to see in a reigning toast of twenty. He had something of a formal gravity in his mien, which was attributed to the stately step he had been so early confined to in a female decency. But even that in characters of superiority had its proper graces; it misbecame him not in the part of Leon, in Fletcher's "Rule a Wife,"&c. which he executed with a determined manliness and honest authority, well worth the best actor's imitation. He had a piercing eye, and in characters of heroic life a quick imperious vivacity in his tone of voice, that painted the tyrant truly terrible. There were two plays of Dryden in which he shone with uncommon lustre; in "Aurengzebe" he played Morat, and in "Don Sebastian," Muley Moloch; in both these parts he had a fierce lion-like majesty in his port and utterance, that gave the spectator a kind of trembling admiration.

Here I cannot help observing upon a modest mistake which I thought the late Mr Booth committed in his acting the part of Morat. There are in this fierce character so many sentiments of avowed barbarity, insolence, and vain-glory, that they blaze even to a ludicrous lustre; and doubtless the poet intended those to make his spectators laugh while they admired them: but Booth thought it depreciated the dignity of tragedy to raise a smile in any part of it, and therefore covered these kind of sentiments with a scrupulous coldness and unmoved delivery, as if he had feared the audience might take too familiar a notice of them. In Mr Addison's "Cato," Syphax has some sentiments of near the same nature, which I ventured to speak as I imagined Kynaston would have done, had he been then living to have stood in the same character. Mr Addison, who had something of Mr Booth's diffidence, at the rehearsal of his play, after it was acted, came into my opinion, and owned that even tragedy on such particular occasions might admit of a laugh of approbation. In Shakspeare instances of them are frequent, as in Macbeth, Hotspur, Richard III and Henry VIII; all which characters, though of a tragical cast, have sometimes familiar strokes in them so highly natural to each particular disposition, that it is impossible not to be transported into an honest laughter at them: and these are those happy liberties which, though few authors are qualified to take, yet when justly taken may challenge a place among their greatest beauties. Now whether Dryden in his Morat *feliciter audet*, or may be allowed the happiness of having hit this mark, seems not necessary to be determined by the actor, whose business, sure, is to make the best of his author's intention, as in this part Kynaston did, doubtless not without Dryden's approbation. For these reasons then I thought my good friend Mr Booth (who certainly had many excellencies) carried his reverence for the buskin too far, in not following the bold flights of the author with that wantonness of spirit which the nature of those sentiments demanded. For example:—Morat, having a criminal passion for Indamora, promises at her request for one day to spare the life of her lover Aurengzebe: but not choosing to make known the real motive of his mercy, when Nourmahal says to him,

> 'Twill not be safe to let him live an hour!

Morat silences her with this heroical rodomontade—

> I'll do it to show my arbitrary power.

Risum teneatis? It was impossible not to laugh, and reasonably too, when this line came out of the mouth of Kynaston, with the stern and haughty look that attended it. But above this tyrannical tumid superiority of character, there is a grave and rational majesty in Shakspeare's Henry IV, which, though not so glaring to the vulgar eye, requires thrice the skill and grace to become and support. Of this real majesty Kynaston was entirely master: here every sentiment came from him as if it had been his own, as if he had himself that instant conceived it, as if he had lost the player, and were the real king he personated!—a perfection so rarely found, that very often in actors of good repute a certain vacancy of look, inanity of voice, or superfluous gesture, shall unmask the man to the judicious spectator; who from the least of those errors plainly sees the whole but a lesson given him, to be got by heart, from some great author whose sense is deeper than the repeater's understanding. This true majesty Kynaston had so entire a command of, that when he whispered the following plain line to Hotspur—

> Send us your prisoners, or you'll hear of it!

he conveyed a more terrible menace in it than the loudest intemperance of voice could swell to. But let the bold imitator beware: for without the look and just elocution that waited on it, an attempt of the same nature may fall to nothing.

But the dignity of this character appeared in Kynaston still more shining in the private scene between the king and the prince his son. There you saw majesty in that sort of grief which only majesty could feel; there the paternal concern for the errors of the son made the monarch more revered and dreaded—his reproaches so just, yet so unmixed with anger, (and therefore the more piercing,) opening as it were the arms of nature, with a secret wish that filial duty and penitence awakened might fall into them with grace and honour. In this affecting scene I thought Kynaston showed his most masterly strokes of nature; expressing all the various motions of the heart with the same force, dignity, and feeling, they are written; adding to the whole that peculiar and becoming grace which the best writer cannot inspire into any actor that is not born with it. What made the merit of this actor and that of Betterton more surprising was, that though they both observed the rules of truth and nature, they were each as different in their manner of acting as in their personal form and features. But Kynaston staid too long upon the stage, till his memory and spirit began to fail him: I shall not therefore say any thing of his imperfections, which at that time were visibly not his own, but the effects of decaying nature,

Mountfort, a younger man by twenty years, and at this time in his highest reputation, was an actor of a very different style. Of person he was tall, well made, fair, and of an agreeable aspect; his voice clear, full, and melodious; in tragedy he was the most affecting lover within my memory. His addresses had a resistless recommendation from the very tone of his voice, which gave his words such softness that, as Dryden says,

> ——— Like flakes of feathered snow,
> They melted as they fell!

All this he particularly verified in that scene of Alexander, where the hero throws himself at the feet of

Statira, for pardon of his past infidelities. There we saw the great, the tender, the penitent, the despairing, the transported, and the amiable, in the highest perfection. In comedy he gave the truest life to what we call the fine gentleman; his spirit shone the brighter for being polished with decency. In scenes of gaiety he never broke into the regard that was due to the presence of equal or superior characters, though inferior actors played them; he filled the stage, not by elbowing and crossing it before others, or disconcerting their action, but by surpassing them in true and masterly touches of nature. He never laughed at his own jest, unless the point of his raillery upon another required it. He had a particular talent in giving life to *bons mots* and repartees. The wit of the poet seemed always to come from him extempore, and sharpened into more wit from his brilliant manner of delivering it; he had himself a good share of it, or what is equal to it, so lively a pleasantness of humour, that when either of these fell into his hands upon the stage, he wantoned with them to the highest delight of his auditors. The agreeable was so natural to him, that even in that dissolute character of the Rover, he seemed to wash off the guilt from vice, and gave it charms and merit. For though it may be a reproach to the poet to draw such characters not only unpunished but rewarded, the actor may still be allowed his due praise in his excellent performance. And this is a distinction which, when this comedy was acted at Whitehall, king William's queen, Mary, was pleased to make in favour of Mountfort, notwithstanding her disapprobation of the play.

He had, besides all this, a variety in his genius which few capital actors have shown, or perhaps have thought it any addition to their merit to arrive at. He could entirely change himself; could at once throw off the man of sense for the brisk, vain, rude, and lively coxcomb, the false, flashy pretender to wit, and the dupe of his own sufficiency. Of this he gave a delightful instance in the character of Sparkish in

Wycherly's "Country Wife." In that of sir Courtly Nice his excellence was still greater. There his whole man, voice, mien, and gesture, was no longer Mountfort, but another person. There the insipid, soft civility; the elegant and formal mien; the drawling delicacy of voice, the stately flatness of his address, and the empty eminence of his attitudes,—were so nicely observed and guarded by him, that had he not been an entire master of nature, had he not kept his judgment as it were a sentinel upon himself, not to admit the least likeness of what he used to be, to enter into any part of his performance, he could not possibly have so completely finished it. If, some years after the death of Mountfort, I myself had any success in either of these characters, I must pay the debt I owe to his memory, in confessing the advantages I received from the just idea and strong impression he had given me from his acting them. Had he been remembered when I first attempted them, my defects would have been more easily discovered, and consequently my favourable reception in them must have been very much and justly abated. If it could be remembered how much he had the advantage of me in voice and person, I could not here be suspected of an affected modesty, or of over-valuing his excellence. For he sung a clear counter-tenor, and had a melodious warbling throat, which could not but set off the last scene of sir Courtly with an uncommon happiness; which I, alas! could only struggle through, with the faint excuses and real confidence of a fine singer, under the imperfection of a feigned and screaming treble, which at best could only show you what I would have done, had nature been more favourable to me.

This excellent actor was cut off by a tragical death in the 33d year of his age, generally lamented by his friends and all lovers of the theatre. The particular accidents that attended his fall are to be found at large in the trial of the lord Mohun, printed among those of the state, in folio.

Sandford might properly be termed the Spagnolet of the theatre, an excellent actor in disagreeable characters. For, as the chief pieces of that famous painter were of human nature in pain and agony, so Sandford upon the stage was generally as flagitious as a Creon, a Maligni, an Iago, or a Machiavel, could make him. The painter, it is true, from the fire of his genius, might think the quiet objects of nature too tame for his pencil, and therefore chose to indulge it in its full power upon those of violence and horror. But poor Sandford was not the stage-villain by choice, but from necessity; for, having a low and crooked person, such bodily defects were too strong to be admitted into great or amiable characters; so that whenever in any new or revived play there was a hateful or mischievous person, Sandford was sure to have no competitor for it. Nor indeed (as we are not to suppose a villain or traitor can be shown for our imitation, or not for our abhorrence) can it be doubted but the less comely the actor's person, the fitter he may be to perform them. The spectator too, by not being misled by a tempting form, may be less inclined to excuse the wicked or immoral views or sentiments of them. And though the hard fate of an Œdipus might naturally give the humanity of an audience thrice the pleasure that could arise from the wilful wickedness of the best acted Creon, yet who could say that Sandford in such a part was not master of as true and just action as the best tragedian could be, whose happier person had recommended him to the virtuous hero or any other more pleasing favourite of the imagination? In this disadvantageous light then stood Sandford as an actor; admired by the judicious, while the crowd only praised him by their prejudice. And so unusual had it been to see Sandford an innocent man in a play, that whenever he was so, the spectators would hardly give him credit in so gross an improbability. Let me give you an odd instance of it, which I heard Mountfort say was a real fact. A new play (the name of it I have forgot) was brought upon the stage, wherein Sandford happened to perform the part of an honest statesman. The pit, after they had sat three or four acts in a quiet expectation that the well-dissembled honesty of Sandford (for such of course they concluded it) would soon be discovered, or at least from its security involve the actors in the play in some surprising distress or confusion, which might raise and animate the scenes to come; when at last, finding no such matter, but that the catastrophe had taken quite another turn, and that Sandford was really an honest man to the end of the play,—they fairly damned it, as if the author had imposed upon them the most frontless or incredible absurdity.

It is not improbable but that from Sandford's so masterly personating characters of guilt, the inferior actors might think his success chiefly owing to the defects of his person; and from thence might take occasion, whenever they appeared as bravoes or murderers, to make themselves as frightful and as inhuman figures as possible. In king Charles's time this low skill was carried to such an extravagance, that the king himself, who was black-browed and of a swarthy complexion, passed a pleasant remark upon his observing the grim looks of the murderers in Macbeth; when, turning to his people in the box about him, " Pray what is the meaning," said he, " that we never see a rogue in a play, but, Godsfish! they always clap him on a black periwig, when it is well known one of the greatest rogues in England always wears a fair one!" Now whether or no Dr Oates at that time wore his own hair, I cannot be positive: or if his majesty pointed at some greater man then out of power, I leave those to guess at him, who may yet remember the changing complexion of his ministers. This story I had from Betterton, who was a man of veracity; and I confess I should have thought the king's observation a very just one, though he himself had been fair as Adonis. Nor can I in this question help voting with the court: for were it not too gross a weakness to employ in wicked purposes men whose very suspected looks might be enough to betray them? Or are we to suppose it unnatural that a murder should be thoroughly committed out of an old red coat and a black periwig?

For my own part, I profess myself to have been an admirer of Sandford, and have often lamented that his masterly performance could not be rewarded with that applause which I saw much inferior actors met with, merely because they stood in more laudable characters. For though it may be a merit in an audience to applaud sentiments of virtue and honour, yet there seems to be an equal justice that no distinction should be made as to the excellence of an actor, whether in a good or evil character; since neither the vice nor the virtue of it is his own, but given him by the poet: therefore, why is not the actor who shines in either equally commendable? No, sir; this may be reason, but that is not always a rule with us; the spectator will tell you that when virtue is applauded, he gives part of it to himself; because his applause at the same time lets others about him see that he himself admires it. But when a wicked action is going forward; when an Iago is meditating revenge and mischief; though art and nature may be equally strong in the actor, the spectator is shy of his applause, lest he should in some sort be looked upon as an aider or an abettor of the wickedness in view; and therefore rather chooses to rob the actor of the praise he may merit, than give it him in a character which he would have you see his silence modestly discourages. From the same fond principle, many actors have made it a point to be seen in parts sometimes even flatly written, only because they stood in the favourable light of honour and virtue.

I have formerly known an actress carry this theatrical prudery to such a height, that she was very near keeping herself chaste by it. Her fondness for virtue on the stage she began to think might persuade the world that it had made an impression on her private life; and the appearance of it actually went so far, that in an epilogue to an obscure play, the profits of which were given to her, and wherein she acted a part of impregnable chastity, she bespoke the favour of the ladies by a protestation, that in honour of their goodness and virtue she would dedicate her unblemished life to their example. Part of this vestal vow I remember was contained in the following verse—

Study to live the character I play.

But alas! how weak are the strongest works of art when nature besieges it! for though this good creature so far held out her distaste to mankind that they could never reduce her to marry any one of them; yet we must own she grew, like Cæsar, greater by her fall. Her first heroic motive to a surrender was to save the life of a lover, who in his despair had vowed to destroy himself; with which act of mercy (in a jealous dispute once in my hearing) she was provoked to reproach him in these very words—"Villain! did not I save your life?" The generous lover, in return to that first tender obligation, gave life to her first-born; and that pious offspring has since raised to her memory several innocent grandchildren.

So that, as we see, it is not the hood that makes the monk, nor the veil the vestal. I am apt to think that if the personal morals of an actor were to be weighed by his appearance on the stage, the advantage and favour (if any were due to either side) might rather incline to the traitor than the hero, to the Sempronius than the Cato, or to the Syphax than the Juba: because no man can naturally desire to cover his honesty with a wicked appearance; but an ill man might possibly incline to cover his guilt with the appearance of virtue, which was the case of the frail fair one now mentioned. But be this question decided as it may, Sandford always appeared to me the honester man in proportion to the spirit wherewith he exposed the wicked and immoral characters he acted. For had his heart been unsound, or tainted with the least guilt of them, his conscience must in spite of him, in any too near a resemblance of himself, have been a check upon the vivacity of his action. Sandford therefore might be said to have contributed his equal share with the foremost actors to the true and laudable use of the stage. And in this light too, of being so frequently the object of common distaste, we may honestly style him a theatrical martyr to poetical justice: for in making vice odious, or virtue amiable, where does the merit differ? To hate the one, or love the other, are but leading steps to the same temple of fame, though at different portals.

This actor in his manner of speaking varied very much from those I have already mentioned. His voice had an acute and piercing tone, which struck every syllable of his words distinctly upon the ear. He had likewise a peculiar skill in his look of marking out to an audience whatever he judged worth their more than ordinary notice. When he delivered a command, he would sometimes give it more force by seeming to slight the ornament of harmony. In Dryden's plays of rhyme, he as little as possible glutted the ear with the jingle of it, rather choosing, when the sense would permit him, to lose it than to value it.

Had Sandford lived in Shakspeare's time, I am confident his judgment must have chosen him above all other actors to have played his Richard III. I leave his person out of the question, which though naturally made for it, yet that would have been the least part of his recommendation. Sandford had stronger claims to it; he had sometimes an uncouth stateliness in his motion, a harsh and sullen pride of speech, a meditating brow, a stern aspect, occasionally changing into an almost ludicrous triumph over all goodness and virtue: from thence falling into the most assuasive gentleness and soothing candour of a designing heart. These, I say, must have preferred him to it; these would have been colours so essentially shining in that character, that it will be no dispraise to that great author to say, Sandford must have shown as many masterly strokes in it (had he ever acted it) as are visible in the writing it.

When I first brought "Richard III" (with such alterations as I thought not improper) to the stage, Sandford was engaged in the company then acting under king William's license in Lincoln's-inn-fields; otherwise you cannot but suppose my interest must have offered him that part. What encouraged me therefore to attempt it myself at the theatre-royal, was that I imagined I knew how Sandford would have spoken every line of it. If therefore in any part of it I succeeded, let the merit be given to him; and how far I succeeded in that light, those only can be judges who remember him. In order therefore to give you a nearer idea of Sandford, you must give me leave (compelled as I am to be vain) to tell you that the late sir John Vanbrugh, who was an admirer of Sandford, after he had seen me act it, assured me, that he never knew any one actor so particularly profit by another, as I had done by Sandford in "Richard III." You have, said he, his very look, gesture, gait, speech, and every motion of him, and have borrowed them all only to serve you in that character. If therefore sir John Vanbrugh's observation was just, they who remember me in "Richard III," may have a nearer conception of Sandford than from all the critical account I can give of him.

I come now to those other men actors, who at this time were equally famous in the lower life of comedy. But I find myself more at a loss to give you them in their true and proper light, than those I have already set before you. Why the tragedian warms us into joy or admiration, or sets our eyes on flow with pity, we can easily explain to another's apprehension: but it may sometimes puzzle the gravest spectator to account for that familiar violence of laughter that shall seize him at some particular strokes of a true comedian. How then shall I describe what a better judge might not be able to express? The rules to please the fancy cannot so easily be laid down, as those that ought to govern the judgment. The decency too that must be observed in tragedy reduces, by the manner of speaking it, one actor to be much more like another than they can or need be supposed to be in comedy: there the laws of action give them such free and almost unlimited liberties to play and wanton with nature, that the voice, look, and gesture of a comedian, may be as various as the manners and faces of the whole of mankind are different from one another. These are the difficulties I lie under. Where I want words therefore to describe what I may commend, I can only hope you will give credit to my opinion: and this credit I shall most stand in need of when I tell you that—

Nokes was an actor of a quite different genius from any I have ever read, heard of, or seen, since or before his time; and yet his general excellence may be comprehended in one article, viz. a plain and palpable simplicity of nature, which was so utterly his own, that he was often as unaccountably diverting in his common speech as on the stage. I saw him once giving an account of some table talk to another actor behind the scenes, which a man of quality accidentally listening to, was so deceived by his manner, that he asked him if that was a new play he was rehearsing. It seems almost amazing, that this simplicity, so easy to Nokes, should never be caught by any one of his successors. Leigh and Underhill have been well copied, though not equalled by others. But not all the mimical skill of Estcourt (famed as he was for it) though he had often seen Nokes, could scarcely give us an idea of him. After this perhaps it will be saying less of him, when I own, that though I have still the sound of every line he spoke in my ear, (which used not to be thought a bad one,) yet I have often tried by myself, but in vain, to reach the least distant likeness of the *vis comica* of Nokes. Though this may seem little to his praise, it may be negatively saying a good deal to it, because I have never seen any one actor except himself, whom I could not at least so far imitate, as to give you a more than tolerable notion of his manner. But Nokes was so singular a species, and was so formed by nature for the stage, that I question if (beyond the trouble of getting words by heart) it ever cost him an hour's labour to arrive at that high reputation he had and deserved.

The characters he particularly shone in, were sir Martin Marr-al, Gomez in the "Spanish Friar," sir Nicholas Cully in "Love in a Tub," Barnaby Brittle in the "Wanton Wife," sir Davy Dunce in the "Soldier's Fortune," Sosia in "Amphytrion," &c. &c. &c. To tell you how he acted them, is beyond the reach of criticism: but to tell you what effect his action had upon the spectator, is not impossible. This then is all you will expect from me, and from hence I must leave you to guess at him.

He scarce ever made his first entrance in a play, but he was received with an involuntary applause, not of hands only,—for those may be and have often been partially prostituted and bespoken,—but by a general laughter, which the very sight of him provoked, and nature could not resist; yet the louder the laugh, the graver was his look upon it; and sure the ridiculous solemnity of his features was enough to have set a whole bench of bishops into a titter, could he have been honoured (may it be no offence to suppose it!) with such grave and right reverend auditors. In the ludicrous distresses which by the laws of comedy folly is often involved in, he sunk into such a mixture of piteous pusillanimity, and a consternation so ruefully ridiculous and inconsolable, that when he had shook you to a fatigue of laughter, it became a moot point whether you ought not to have pitied him. When he debated any matter by himself, he would shut up his mouth with a dumb studious pout, and roll his full eye into such a vacant amazement, such a palpable ignorance of what to think of it, that his silent perplexity (which would sometimes hold him several minutes) gave your imagination as full content, as the most absurd thing he could say upon it. In the character of sir Martin Marr-all, who is always committing blunders to the prejudice of his own interest, when he had brought himself to a dilemma in his affairs by vainly proceeding upon his own head, and was afterwards afraid to look his governing servant and counsellor in the face, what a copious and distressful harangue have I seen him make with his looks (while the house has been in one continued roar for several minutes) before he could prevail with his courage to speak a word to him! Then might you have at once read in his face vexation—that his own measures which he had piqued himself upon had failed; envy—of his servant's superior wit; distress—to retrieve the occasion he had lost; shame—to confess his folly; and yet a sullen desire to be reconciled and better advised for the future! What tragedy ever showed us such a tumult of passions rising at once in one bosom; or what buskined hero, standing under the load of them, could have more effectually moved his spectators by the most pathetic speech, than poor miserable Nokes did by this silent eloquence and piteous plight of his features?

His person was of the middle size; his voice clear and audible; his natural countenance grave and sober; but the moment he spoke, the settled seriousness of his features was utterly discharged, and a dry, drolling, or laughing levity took such full possession of him, that I can only refer the idea of him to your imagination. In some of his low characters, that became it, he had a shuffling shamble in his gait, with so contented an ignorance in his aspect and an awkward absurdity in his gesture, that had you not known him, you could not have believed that naturally he could have had a grain of common sense. In a word, I am tempted to sum up the character of Nokes as a comedian, in a parody of what Shakspeare's Mark Antony says of Brutus as a hero:—

His life was laughter, and the ludicrous
So mixt, in him, that Nature might stand up,
And say to all the world—This was an actor.

Leigh was of the mercurial kind, and though not so strict an observer of nature, yet never so wanton in his performance as to be wholly out of her sight. In humour he loved to take a full career, but was careful enough to stop short when just upon the precipice. He had great variety in his manner, and was famous in very different characters. In the canting, grave hypocrisy of the Spanish friar, he stretched the veil of piety so thinly over him, that in every look, word, and motion, you saw a palpable wicked slyness shine through it.

Here he kept his vivacity demurely confined, till the pretended duty of his function demanded it; and then he exerted it with a choleric sacerdotal insolence. But the friar is a character of such glaring vice, and so strongly drawn, that a very indifferent actor cannot but hit upon the broad jests that are remarkable in every scene of it; though I have never yet seen any one that has filled them with half the truth and spirit of Leigh. Leigh raised the character as much above the poet's imagination, as the character has sometimes raised other actors above themselves; and I do not doubt but the poet's knowledge of Leigh's genius helped him to many a pleasant stroke of nature, which without that knowledge never might have entered into his conception. Leigh was so eminent in this character, that the late earl of Dorset (who was equally an admirer and a judge of theatrical merit) had a whole length of him in the friar's habit drawn by Kneller The whole portrait is highly painted, and extremely like him. But no wonder Leigh arrived to such fame in what was so completely written for him, when characters that would make the reader yawn in the closet, have by the strength of his action been lifted into the loudest laughter on the stage. Of this kind was the scrivener's great booby son in the "Villain;" and Ralph, a stupid, staring under-servant in "Sir Solomon Single." Quite opposite to those were sir Jolly Jumble in the "Soldier's Fortune," and his old Belfond in the "Squire of Alsatia." In sir Jolly he was all life and laughing humour; and when Nokes acted with him in the same play, they returned the ball so dexterously upon one another, that every scene between them seemed but one continued rest of excellence. But alas! when those actors were gone, that comedy, and many others for the same reason, were rarely known to stand upon their own legs; by seeing no more of Leigh or Nokes in them, the characters were quite sunk and altered. In his sir William Belfond, Leigh showed a more spirited variety than ever I saw any actor in any one character come up to. The poet it is true had here exactly chalked for him the outlines of nature; but the high colouring, the strong lights and shades of humour, that enlivened the whole, and struck our admiration with surprise and delight, were wholly owing to the actor. The easy reader might perhaps have been pleased with the author without discomposing a feature; but the spectator must have heartily held his sides, or the actor would have heartily made them ache for it.

Now though I observed before, that Nokes never was tolerably touched by any of his successors, yet in his character, I must own, I have seen Leigh extremely well imitated by my late facetious friend Pinkethman, who, though far short of what was inimitable in the original, yet as to the general resemblance was a very valuable copy of him; and as I know Pinkethman cannot be out of your memory, I have chosen to mention him here, to give you the nearest idea I can of the excellence of Leigh in that particular light: for Leigh had many masterly variations which the other could not nor ever pretended to reach; particularly in the dotage and follies of extreme old age, in the characters of Fumble in the "Fond Husband," and the toothless lawyer in the "City Politics," both which plays lived only by the extraordinary performance of Nokes and Leigh.

There were two other characters of the farcical kind, Geta in "the Prophetess," and Crack in "Sir Courtly Nice," which, as they are less confined to nature, the imitation of them was less difficult to Pinkethman; who, to say the truth, delighted more in the whimsical than the natural. Therefore, when I say he sometimes resembled Leigh, I reserve this distinction on his master's side; that the pleasant extravagancies of Leigh were all the flowers of his own fancy, while the less fertile brain of my friend was contented to make use of the stock his predecessor had left him. What I have said therefore is not to detract from honest Pinky's merit, but to do justice to his predecessor. And though it is true we as seldom see a good actor as a great poet arise from the bare imitation of another's genius, yet if this be a general rule, Pinkethman was the nearest to an exception from it; for with those who never knew Leigh, he might very well have passed for a more than common original. Yet again, as my partiality for Pinkethman ought not to lead me from truth, I must beg leave (though out of its place) to tell you fairly what was the best of him, that the superiority of Leigh may stand in its due light. Pinkethman had certainly from nature a great deal of comic power about him; but his judgment was by no means equal to it; for he would make frequent deviations into the whimsies of an harlequin. By the way (let me digress a little farther) whatever allowances are made for the license of that character, I mean of an harlequin, whatever pretences may be urged from the practice of the ancient comedy for its being played in a mask resembling no part of the human species, I am apt to think, the best excuse a modern actor can plead for his continuing it is, that the low, senseless, and monstrous things he says and does in it no theatrical assurance could get through with a bare face: let me give you an instance of even Pinkethman's being out of countenance for want of it. When he first played harlequin in the "Emperor of the Moon," several gentlemen (who inadvertently judged by the rules of nature) fancied that a great deal of the drollery and spirit of his grimace was lost by his wearing that useless, unmeaning mask of a black cat, and therefore insisted that the next time of his acting that part he should play without it: their desire was accordingly complied with,—but, alas! in vain: Pinkethman could not take to himself the shame of the character without being concealed—he was no more harlequin—his humour was quite disconcerted—his conscience could not with the same effrontery declare against nature, without the cover of that unchanging face which he was sure would never blush for it! No! it was quite another case; without that armour, his courage could not come up to the bold strokes that were necessary to get the better of common sense. Now if this circumstance will justify the modesty of

Pinkethman, it cannot but throw a wholesome contempt on the low merit of an harlequin. But how farther necessary the mask is to that fool's coat, we have lately had a stronger proof in the favour that the harlequin Sauvage met with at Paris, and the ill fate that followed the same Sauvage when he pulled off his mask in London. So that it seems what was wit from a harlequin, was something too extravagant from a human creature. If therefore Pinkethman, in characters drawn from nature, might sometimes launch out into a few gamesome liberties which would not have been excused from a more correct comedian, yet in his manner of taking them he always seemed to me in a kind of consciousness of the hazard he was running, as if he fairly confessed, that what he did was only as well as he could do; that he was willing to take his chance for success, but if he did not meet with it, a rebuke should break no squares; he would mend it another time, and would take whatever pleased his judges to think of him in good part:—and I have often thought that a good deal of the favour he met with was owing to this seeming humble way of waving all pretences to merit, but what the town would please to allow him. What confirms me in this opinion is, that when it has been his ill fortune to meet with a *disgraccia*, I have known him say apart to himself, yet loud enough to be heard,—"Odso! I believe I am a little wrong here;" which once was so well received by the audience, that they turned their reproof into applause.

Now the judgment of Leigh always guarded the happier sallies of his fancy from the least hazard of disapprobation; he seemed not to court but to attack your applause, and always came off victorious; nor did his highest assurance amount to any more than that just confidence, without which the commendable spirit of every good actor must be abated; and of this spirit Leigh was a most perfect master. He was much admired by king Charles, who used to distinguish him, when spoke of, by the title of his actor: which however makes me imagine, that in his exile that prince might have received his first impression of good actors from the French stage; for Leigh had more of that farcical vivacity than Nokes, but Nokes was never languid by his more strict adherence to nature; and as far as my judgment is worth taking, if their intrinsic merit could be justly weighed, Nokes must have had the better in the balance. Upon the unfortunate death of Mountfort, Leigh fell ill of a fever, and died in a week after him, in December 1692.

Underhill was a correct and natural comedian; his particular excellence was in characters that may be called still-life—I mean the stiff, the heavy, and the stupid; to these he gave the exactest and most expressive colours, and in some of them looked as if it were not in the power of human passions to alter a feature of him. In the solemn formality of Obadiah in the "Committee," and in the boobily heaviness of Lolpoop in the "Squire of Alsatia," he seemed the immovable log he stood for: a countenance of wood could not be more fixed than his when the blockhead of a character required it. His face was full and long; from his crown to the end of his nose was the shorter half of it; so that the disproportion of his lower features, when soberly composed, with an unwandering eye hanging over them, threw him into the most lumpish, moping mortal that ever made beholders merry; not but, at other times, he could be wakened into spirit equally ridiculous. In the coarse rustic humour of justice Clodpate, in "Epsom Wells," he was a delightful brute; and in the blunt vivacity of sir Sampson, in "Love for Love," he showed all that true perverse spirit that is commonly seen in much wit and ill-nature. This character is one of those few so well written, with so much wit and humour, that an actor must be the grossest dunce that does not appear with an unusual life in it; but it will still show as great a proportion of skill to come near Underhill in the acting it; which (not to undervalue those who soon came after him) I have not yet seen. He was particularly admired too for the grave-digger in "Hamlet." The author of the "Tatler" recommends him to the favour of the town, upon that play being acted for his benefit, wherein, after his age had some years obliged him to leave the stage, he came on again for that day to perform his old part; but, alas! so worn and disabled, as if himself was to have lain in the grave he was digging. When he could no more excite laughter, his infirmities were dismissed with pity. He died soon after, a superannuated pensioner in the list of those who were supported by the joint sharers under the first patent granted to sir Richard Steele.

The deep impressions of these excellent actors which I received in my youth, I am afraid may have drawn me into the common foible of us old fellows; which is a fondness, and perhaps a tedious partiality, for the pleasures we have formerly tasted, and think are now fallen off, because we can no longer enjoy them. If therefore I lie under that suspicion, though I have related nothing incredible or out of the reach of a good judge's conception, I must appeal to those few who are about my own age, for the truth and likeness of these theatrical portraits.

There were at this time several others in some degree of favour with the public, Powel, Verbruggen, Williams, &c. But as I cannot think their best improvements made them in any wise equal to those I have spoken of, I ought not to range them in the same class. Neither were Wilks or Dogget yet come to the stage; nor was Booth initiated till about six years after them; or Mrs Oldfield known till the year 1700. I must therefore reserve the four last for their proper period, and proceed to the actresses that were famous with Betterton at the latter end of the last century.

Mrs Barry was then in possession of almost all the chief parts in tragedy. With what skill she gave life to them, you will judge from the words of Dryden in his preface to "Cleomenes," where he says,—

"Mrs Barry, always excellent, has in this tragedy excelled herself, and gained a reputation beyond any woman I have ever seen on the theatre."

I very perfectly remember her acting that part; and however unnecessary it may seem to give my judgment after Dryden's, I cannot help saying, I do not only close with his opinion, but will venture to add, that (though Dryden has been dead these thirty-eight years) the same compliment to this hour may be due to her excellence. And though she was then not a little past her youth, she was not till that time fully arrived to her maturity of power and judgment. From whence I would observe, that the short life of beauty is not long enough to form a complete actress. In men the delicacy of person is not so absolutely necessary, nor the decline of it so soon taken notice of. The fame Mrs Barry arrived to, is a particular proof of the difficulty there is in judging with certainty from their first trials, whether young people will ever make any great figure on a theatre. There was, it seems, so little hope of Mrs Barry at her first setting out, that she was at the end of the first year discharged the company, among others that were thought to be a useless expense to it. I take it for granted that the objection to Mrs Barry, at that time, must have been a defective ear, or some unskilful dissonance in her manner of pronouncing. But where there is a proper voice and person, with the addition of a good understanding, experience tells us that such defect is not always invincible; of which not only Mrs Barry, but the late Mrs Oldfield, are eminent instances. Mrs Oldfield had been a year in the theatre-royal, before she was observed to give any tolerable hope of her being an actress; so unlike to all manner of propriety was her speaking! How unaccountably then does a genius for the stage make its way towards perfection! For notwithstanding these equal disadvantages, both these actresses, though of different excellence, made themselves complete mistresses of their art, by the prevalence of their understanding. If this observation may be of any use to the masters of future theatres, I shall not then have made it to no purpose.

Mrs Barry, in characters of greatness, had a presence of elevated dignity; her mien and motion superb, and gracefully majestic; her voice full, clear, and strong, so that no violence of passion could be too much for her; and when distress or tenderness possessed her, she subsided into the most affecting melody and softness. In the art of exciting pity, she had a power beyond all the actresses I have yet seen, or what your imagination can conceive. Of the former of these two great excellencies, she gave the most delightful proofs in almost all the heroic plays of Dryden and Lee; and of the latter, in the softer passions of Otway's Monimia and Belvidera. In scenes of anger, defiance, or resentment, while she was impetuous and terrible, she poured out the sentiment with an enchanting harmony; and it was this particular excellence for which Dryden made her the above-recited compliment, upon her acting Cassandra in his "Cleomenes." But here I am apt to think his partiality for that character may have tempted his judgment to let it pass for her masterpiece; when he could not but know there were several other characters in which her action might have given her a fairer pretence to the praise he has bestowed on her for Cassandra; for in no part of that is there the least ground for compassion, as in Monimia; nor equal cause for admiration, as in the nobler love of Cleopatra, or the tempestuous jealousy of Roxana. It was in these lights I thought Mrs Barry shone with a much brighter excellence than in Cassandra. She was the first person whose merit was distinguished by the indulgence of having an annual benefit-play, which was granted to her alone, if I mistake not, first in king James's time, and which became not common to others, till the division of this company after the death of king William's queen Mary. This great actress died of a fever, towards the latter end of queen Anne; the year I have forgot, but perhaps you will recollect it, by an expression that fell from her in blank verse, in her last hours, when she was delirious, viz.

Ha, ha! and so they make us lords by dozens!

Mrs Betterton, though far advanced in years, was so great a mistress of nature, that even Mrs Barry, who acted the lady Macbeth after her, could not in that part, with all her superior strength and melody of voice, throw out those quick and careless strokes of terror, from the disorder of a guilty mind, which the other gave us with a facility in her manner that rendered them at once tremendous and delightful. Time could not impair her skill, though he had brought her person to decay. She was to the last the admiration of all true judges of nature and lovers of Shakspeare, in whose plays she chiefly excelled, and without a rival. When she quitted the stage, several good actresses were the better for her instruction. She was a woman of an unblemished and sober life; and had the honour to teach queen Anne, when princess, the part of Semandra in "Mithridates," which she acted at court in king Charles's time. After the death of Mr Betterton, her husband, that princess, when queen, ordered her a pension for life; but she lived not to receive more than the first half-year of it.

Mrs Leigh, the wife of Leigh already mentioned, had a very droll way of dressing the pretty foibles of superannuated beauties. She had in herself a good deal of humour, and knew how to infuse it into the affected mothers, aunts, and modest stale maids that had missed their market; of this sort were the modish mother in the "Chances," affecting to be politely *commode* for her own daughter; the coquette prude of an aunt, in "Sir Courtly Nice," who prides herself in being chaste and cruel at fifty; and the languishing lady Wishfort in "The Way of the World." In all these, with many others, she was extremely entertaining, and painted in a lively manner the blind side of nature.

Mrs Butler, who had her christian name of Charlotte given her by king Charles, was the daughter of a decayed knight, and had the honour of that prince's recommendation to the theatre; a provident restitution, giving to the stage in kind what he had sometimes taken from it. The public, at least, was obliged by it; for she proved not only a good actress, but was allowed in those days to sing and dance to great perfection. In the dramatic operas of "Dioclesian," and "King Arthur," she was a capital and admired performer. In speaking, too, she had a sweet-toned voice, which, with her naturally genteel air and sensible pronunciation, rendered her wholly mistress of the amiable in many serious characters. In parts of humour too she had a manner of blending her assuasive softness even with the gay, the lively, and the alluring. Of this she gave an agreeable instance in her action of the (Villiers) duke of Buckingham's second Constantia in the "Chances." In which if I should say I have never seen her exceeded, I might still do no wrong to the late Mrs Oldfield's lively performance of the same character. Mrs Oldfield's fame may spare Mrs Butler's action this compliment, without the least diminution or dispute of her superiority in characters of more moment.

Here I cannot help observing, when there was but one theatre in London, at what unequal salaries, compared to those of later days, the hired actors were then held by the absolute authority of their frugal masters, the patentees; for Mrs Butler had then but forty shillings a week, and could she have obtained an addition of ten shillings more, (which was refused her,) would never have left their service; but being offered her own conditions to go with Mr Ashbury to Dublin, (who was then raising a company of actors for that theatre, where there had been none since the revolution,) her discontent here prevailed with her to accept of his offer, and he found his account in her value. Were not those patentees most sagacious economists, that could lay hold on so notable an expedient to lessen their charge? How gladly, in my time of being a sharer, would we have given four times her income to an actress of equal merit?

Mrs Mountfort, whose second marriage gave her the name of Verbruggen, was mistress of more variety of humour than I ever knew in any one woman actress. This variety too was attended with an equal vivacity, which made her excellent in characters extremely different. As she was naturally a pleasant mimic, she had the skill to make that talent useful on the stage; a talent which may be surprising in a conversation, and yet be lost when brought to the theatre—which was the case of Estcourt already mentioned. But where the elocution is round, distinct, voluble, and various, as Mrs Mountfort's was, the mimic there is a great assistant to the actor. Nothing, though ever so barren, if within the bounds of nature, could be flat in her hands. She gave many heightening touches to characters but coldly written, and often made an author vain of his work, that in itself had but little merit. She was so fond of humour, in what low part soever to be found, that she would make no scruple of defacing her fair form to come heartily into it: for when she was eminent in several desirable characters of wit and humour in higher life, she would be in as much fancy, when descending into the antiquated Abigail of Fletcher, as when triumphing in all the airs and vain graces of a fine lady; a merit that few actresses care for. In a play of D'Urfey's, now forgotten, called "The Western Lass," which part she acted, she transformed her whole being, body, shape, voice, language, look, and features, into almost another animal; with a strong Devonshire dialect, a broad laughing voice, a poking head, round shoulders, an unconceiving eye, and the most bedizening, dowdy dress, that ever covered the untrained limbs of a Joan Trot. To have seen her here you would have thought it impossible the same creature could ever have been recovered to what was as easy to her—the gay, the lively, and the desirable. Nor was her humour limited to her sex; for while her shape permitted, she was a more adroit pretty fellow than is usually seen upon the stage; her easy air, action, mien, and gesture, quite changed from the quoif to the cocked hat and cavalier in fashion. People were so fond of seeing her a man, that when the part of Bays in the "Rehearsal" had for some time lain dormant, she was desired to take it up, which I have seen her act with all the true coxcombly spirit and humour that the sufficiency of the character required.

But what found most employment for her whole various excellence at once, was the part of Melantha in "Marriage-Alamode." Melantha is as finished an impertinent as ever fluttered in a drawing-room, and seems to contain the most complete system of female foppery that could possibly be crowded into the tortured form of a fine lady. Her language, dress, motion, manners, soul, and body, are in a continual hurry to be something more than is necessary or commendable. And though I doubt it will be a vain labour to offer you a just likeness of Mrs Mountfort's action, yet the fantastic impression is still so strong in my memory, that I cannot help saying something, though fantastically, about it. The first ridiculous airs that break from her are upon a gallant never seen before, who delivers her a letter from her father, recommending him to her good graces as an honourable lover. Here now one would think she might naturally show a little of the sex's decent reserve, though never so slightly covered. No, sir; not a tittle of it; modesty is the virtue of a poor-souled country gentlewoman; she is too much a court lady to be under so vulgar a confusion; she reads the letter therefore with a careless, dropping lip, and erected brow, humming it hastily over as if she were impatient to outgo her father's commands by making a complete conquest of him at once; and that the letter might not embarrass her attack, crack! she crumbles it at once into her palm, and pours upon him her whole artillery of airs, eyes, and motion; down goes her dainty diving body to the ground, as if she were sinking under the conscious load of her own attractions; then launches into a flood of fine language and compliment, still playing her chest forward in fifty falls and risings, like a swan upon waving water; and to complete her impertinence, she is so rapidly fond of her own wit that she will not give her lover leave to praise it; silent assenting bows, and vain endeavours to speak, are all the share of the conversation he is admitted to, which at last he is relieved from by her engagement to half a score visits, which she swims from him to make, with a promise to return in a twinkling.

If this sketch has colour enough to give you any near conception of her, I then need only tell you that throughout the whole character her variety of humour was every way proportionable; as indeed in most parts that she thought worth her care, or that had the least matter for her fancy to work upon, I may justly say that no actress, from her own conception, could have heightened them with more lively strokes of nature.

I come now to the last and only living person of all those whose theatrical characters I have promised you, Mrs Bracegirdle; who I know would rather pass her remaining days forgotten as an actress, than to have her youth recollected in the most favourable light I am able to place it; yet as she is essentially necessary to my theatrical history, and as I only bring her back to the company of those with whom she passed the spring and summer of her life, I hope it will excuse the liberty I take in commemorating the delight which the public received from her appearance while she was an ornament to the theatre.

Mrs Bracegirdle was now but just blooming to her maturity; her reputation as an actress gradually rising with that of her person; never any woman was in such general favour of her spectators, which to the last scene of her dramatic life she maintained by not being unguarded in her private character. This discretion contributed not a little to make her the *cara*, the darling of the theatre: for it will be no extravagant thing to say, scarce an audience saw her that were less than half of them lovers, without a suspected favourite among them: and though she might be said to have been the universal passion, and under the highest temptations, her constancy in resisting them served but to increase the number of her admirers. And this perhaps you will more easily believe, when I extend not my encomiums on her person beyond a sincerity that can be suspected; for she had no greater claim to beauty than what the most desirable brunette might pretend to. But her youth and lively aspect threw out such a glow of health and cheerfulness, that on the stage few spectators that were not past it could behold her without desire. It was even a fashion among the gay and young to have a taste or *tendre* for Mrs Bracegirdle. She inspired the best authors to write for her; and two of them, when they gave her a lover in a play, seemed palpably to plead their own passion, and make their private court to her in fictitious characters. In all the chief parts she acted, the desirable was so predominant that no judge could be cold enough to consider from what other particular excellence she became delightful. To speak critically of an actress that was extremely good, were as hazardous as to be positive in one's opinion of the best opera singer. People often judge by comparison where there is no similitude in the performance. So that in this case we have only taste to appeal to, and of taste there can be no disputing. I shall therefore only say of Mrs Bracegirdle, that the most eminent authors always chose her for their favourite character, and shall leave that uncontestable proof of her merit to its own value. Yet let me say there were two very different characters in which she acquitted herself with uncommon applause; if any thing could excuse that desperate extravagance of love, that almost frantic passion, of Lee's "Alexander the Great," it must have been when Mrs Bracegirdle was his Statira: as when she acted Millamant, all the faults, follies, and affectation, of that agreeable tyrant, were venially melted down into so many charms and attractions of a conscious beauty. In other characters, where singing was a necessary part of them, her voice and action gave a pleasure which good sense in those days was not ashamed to give praise to.

She retired from the stage in the height of her favour from the public, when most of her contemporaries whom she had been bred up with were declining, in the year 1710; nor could she be persuaded to return to it under new masters, upon the most advantageous terms that were offered her; excepting one day about a year after, to assist her good friend Mr Betterton, when she played Angelica, in "Love for Love," for his benefit. She has still the happiness to retain her usual cheerfulness, and to be, without the transitory charm of youth, agreeable.

If in my account of these memorable actors I have not deviated from truth, which in the least article I am not conscious of, may we not venture to say they had not their equals at any one time upon any theatre in Europe? Or if we confine the comparison to that of France alone, I believe no other stage can be much disparaged by being left out of the question, which cannot properly be decided by the single merit of any one actor; whether their Baron or our Betterton might be the superior (take which side you please) that point reaches either way but to a thirteenth part of what I contend for, viz. that no stage at any one period could show thirteen actors standing all in equal lights of excellence in their profession; and I am the bolder in this challenge to any other nation, because no theatre, having so extended a variety of natural characters as the English, can have a demand for actors of such various capacities; why then, where they could not be equally wanted, should we suppose them at any one time to have existed?

How imperfect soever this copious account of them may be, I am not without hope at least it may in some degree show what talents are requisite to make actors valuable; and if that may any ways inform, or assist the judgment of future spectators, it may as often be of service to their public entertainments; for as their hearers are, so will actors be, worse or better as the false or true taste applauds or discommends them. Hence only can our theatres improve or must degenerate.

There is another point relating to the hard condition of those who write for the stage, which I would recommend to the consideration of their hearers; which is, that the extreme severity with which they damn a bad play, seems too terrible a warning to those whose untried genius might hereafter give them a good one; whereas it might be a temptation to a latent author to make the experiment, could he be sure that though not approved, his muse might at least be dismissed with decency; but the vivacity of our modern critics is of late grown so riotous, that an unsuccessful author has no more mercy shown him than a notorious cheat in a pillory; every fool, the lowest member of the mob, becomes a wit, and will have a fling at him. They come now to a new play like hounds to a carcass, and are all in a full cry, sometimes for an hour together, before the curtain rises, to throw it amongst them. Sure those gentlemen cannot but allow, that a play condemned after a fair hearing falls with thrice the ignominy as when it is refused that common justice.

But when their critical interruptions grow so loud, and of so long a continuance, that the attention of quiet people (though not so complete critics) is terrified, and the skill of the actors quite disconcerted by the tumult, the play then seems rather to fall by assassins than by a lawful sentence. Is it possible that such auditors can receive delight or think it any praise to them, to prosecute so injurious, so unmanly a treatment? And though perhaps the compassionate on the other side (who know they have as good a right to clap and support, as others have to catcall, damn, and destroy) may oppose this oppression, their good-nature, alas! contributes little to the redress; for in this sort of civil war the unhappy author, like a good prince while his subjects are at mortal variance, is sure to be a loser by a victory on either side; for still the commonwealth, his play, is during the conflict torn to pieces. While this is the case, while the theatre is so turbulent a sea, and so infested with pirates, what poetical merchant of any substance will venture to trade in it? If these valiant gentlemen pretend to be lovers of plays, why will they deter gentlemen from giving them such as are fit for gentlemen to see? In a word, this new race of critics seem to me like the lion whelps in the Tower, who are so boisterously gamesome at their meals, that they dash down the bowls of milk brought for their own breakfast.

As a good play is certainly the most rational and the highest entertainment that human invention can produce, let that be my apology (if I need any) for having thus freely delivered my mind in behalf of those gentlemen who under such calamitous hazards may hereafter be reduced to write for the stage, whose case I shall compassionate from the same motive that prevailed on Dido to assist the Trojans in distress.

> Non ignara mali miseris succurrere disco.
> Virg.

Or, as Dryden has it,

> I learn to pity woes so like my own.

If those particular gentlemen have sometimes made me the humbled object of their wit and humour, their triumph at least has done me this involuntary service, that it has driven me a year or two sooner into a quiet life, than otherwise my own want of judgment might have led me to. I left the stage before my strength left me; and though I came to it again for some few days a year or two after, my reception there not only turned to my account, but seemed a fair invitation that I would make my visits more frequent; but to give over a winner, can be no very imprudent resolution.

CHAPTER VI.

The author's first step upon the stage.—His discouragements. The best actors in Europe ill used.—A revolution in their favour.—King William grants them a license to act in Lincoln's-inn-fields.—The author's distress, in being thought a worse actor than a poet.—Reduced to write a part for himself.—His success.—More remarks upon theatrical action.—Some upon himself.

Having given you the state of the theatre at my first admission to it, I am now drawing towards the several revolutions it suffered in my own time. But as you find, by the setting out of my history, that I always intended myself the hero of it, it may be necessary to let you know me in my obscurity, as well as in my higher light, when I became one of the theatrical triumvirate.

The patentees, who were now masters of this united and only company of comedians, seemed to make it a rule that no young persons desirous to be actors should be admitted into pay under at least half a year's probation; wisely knowing, that how early soever they might be approved of, there could be no great fear of losing them, while they had then no other market to go to. But alas! pay was the least of my concern; the joy and privilege of every day seeing plays for nothing, I thought was a sufficient consideration for the best of my services. So that it was no pain to my patience, that I waited full three quarters of a year before I was taken into a salary of ten shillings per week; which, with the assistance of food and raiment at my father's house, I then thought a most plentiful accession, and myself the happiest of mortals.

The first thing that enters into the head of a young actor is that of being a hero: in this ambition I was soon snubbed, by the insufficiency of my voice; to which might be added, an uninformed meagre person (though then not ill made) with a dismal pale complexion. Under these disadvantages, I had but a melancholy prospect of ever playing a lover with Mrs Bracegirdle, which I had flattered my hopes that my youth might one day have recommended me to. What was most promising in me then, was the aptness of my ear; for I was soon allowed to speak justly, though what was grave and serious did not equally become me. The first part therefore in which I appeared with any glimpse of success, was the chaplain in the "Orphan" of Otway. There is in this character (of one scene only) a decent pleasantry, and sense enough to show an audience whether the actor has any himself. Here was the first applause I ever received, which you may be sure made my heart leap with a higher joy than may be necessary to describe; and yet my transport was not then half so high as at what Goodman (who had now left the stage) said of me the next day in my hearing. Goodman often came to a rehearsal for amusement; and having sat out the "Orphan" the day before, in a conversation with some of the principal actors, inquired what new young fellow that was whom he had seen in the chaplain? Upon which Mountfort replied, that is he behind you. Goodman then, turning about, looked earnestly at me, and after some pause, clapping me on the shoulder, rejoined—If he does not make a good actor I will be d—ed! The surprise of being commended by one who had been himself so eminent on the stage, and in so positive a manner, was more than I could support; in a word, it almost took away my breath, and (laugh, if you please) fairly drew tears from my eyes! And though it may be as ridiculous as incredible, to tell you what a full vanity and content at that time possessed me, I will still make it a question, whether Alexander himself, or Charles XII of Sweden, when at the head of their first victorious armies, could feel a greater transport in their bosoms than I did then in mine, when but in the rear of this troop of comedians. You see to what low particulars I am forced to descend, to give you a true resemblance of the early and lively follies of my mind. Let me give you another instance of my discretion, more desperate than that of preferring the stage to any other views of life. One might think that the madness of breaking from the advice and care of parents, to turn player, could not easily be exceeded: but what think you, sir, of—matrimony? which, before I was two-and-twenty, I actually committed, when I had but twenty pounds a year, which my father had assured to me, and twenty shillings a week from my theatrical labours, to maintain as I then thought the happiest young couple that ever took a leap in the dark! If after this, to complete my fortune, I turned poet too, this last folly indeed had something a better excuse,—necessity. Had it never been my lot to have come on the stage, it is probable I might never have been inclined or reduced to have wrote for it: but having once exposed my person there, I thought it could be no additional dishonour to let my parts, whatever they were, take their fortune along with it. But to return to the progress I made as an actor.

Queen Mary having commanded the "Double Dealer" to be acted, Kynaston happened to be so ill that he could not hope to be able next day to perform his part of the lord Touchwood. In this exigence the author, Mr Congreve, advised that it might be given to me, if at so short a warning I would undertake it. The flattery of being thus distinguished by so celebrated an author, and the honour to act before a queen, you may be sure made me blind to whatever difficulties might attend it. I accepted the part, and was ready in it before I slept. Next day the queen was present at the play, and was received with a new prologue from the author, spoken by Mrs Barry, humbly acknowledging the great honour done to the stage, and to his play in particular: two lines of it, which though I have not since read, I still remember.

But never were in Rome nor Athens seen
So fair a circle or so bright a queen.

After the play, Mr Congreve made me the compliment of saying, that I had not only answered but had exceeded his expectations, and that he would show me he was sincere by his saying more of me to the masters. He was as good as his word; and the next pay day I found my salary of fifteen was then advanced to twenty shillings a week. But, alas! this favourable opinion of Mr Congreve made no farther impression upon the judgment of my good masters; it only served to heighten my own vanity; but could not recommend me to any new trials of my capacity; not a step farther could I get until the company was again divided; when the desertion of the best actors left a clear stage for younger champions to mount, and show their best pretensions to favour. But it is now time to enter upon those facts that immediately preceded this remarkable revolution of the theatre.

You have seen how complete a set of actors were under the government of the united patents in 1690; if their gains were not extraordinary, what shall we impute it to but some extraordinary ill management? I was then too young to be in their secrets, and therefore can only observe upon what I saw, and have since thought visibly wrong.

Though the success of the "Prophetess" and "King Arthur" (two dramatic operas, in which the patentees had embarked all their hopes) was in appearance very great, yet their whole receipts did not so far balance their expense as to keep them out of a large debt, which it was publicly known was about this time contracted, and which found work for the court of Chancery for about twenty years following, till one side of the cause grew weary. But this was not all that was wrong; every branch of the theatrical trade had been sacrificed to the necessary fitting out those tall ships of burden, that were to bring home the Indies. Plays of course were neglected, actors held cheap and slightly dressed, while singers and dancers were better paid and embroidered. These measures of course created murmurings on one side, and ill-humour and contempt on the other. When it became necessary therefore to lessen the charge, a resolution was taken to begin with the salaries of the actors; and what seemed to make this resolution more necessary at this time, was the loss of Nokes, Mountfort, and Leigh, who all died about the same year: no wonder then, if when these great pillars were at once removed the building grew weaker, and the audiences very much abated. Now in this distress, what more natural remedy could be found, than to incite and encourage (though with some hazard) the industry of the surviving actors; but the patentees, it seems, thought the surer way was to bring down their pay in proportion to the fall of their audiences. To make this project more feasible, they proposed to begin at the head of them, rightly judging that if the principals acquiesced, their inferiors would murmur in vain. To bring this about with a better grace, they, under pretence of bringing younger actors forward, ordered several of Betterton's and Mrs Barry's chief parts to be given to young Powel and Mrs Bracegirdle. In this they committed two palpable errors; for while the best actors are in health and still on the stage, the public is always apt to be out of humour when those of a lower class pretend to stand in their places; or admitting at this time they might have been accepted, this project might very probably have lessened, but could not possibly mend, an audience; and was a sure loss of that time in studying, which might have been better employed in giving the auditor variety, the only temptation to a palled appetite; and variety is only to be given by industry: but industry will always be lame, when the actor has reason to be discontented. This the patentees did not consider, or pretended not to value, while they thought their power secure and uncontrollable: but farther, their first project did not succeed; for though the giddy head of Powel accepted the parts of Betterton, Mrs Bracegirdle had a different way of thinking, and desired to be excused from those of Mrs Barry; her good sense was not to be misled by the insidious favour of the patentees; she knew the stage was wide enough for her success, without entering into any such rash and invidious competition with Mrs Barry, and therefore wholly refused acting any part that properly belonged to her. But this proceeding however was warning enough to make Betterton be upon his guard, and to alarm others with apprehensions of their own safety from the design that was laid against him. Betterton upon this drew into his party most of the valuable actors, who, to secure their unity, entered with him into a sort of association to stand or fall together. All this the patentees for some time slighted, but when matters drew towards a crisis they found it advisable to take the same measures, and accordingly opened an association on their part, both which were severally signed as the interest or inclination of either side led them.

During these contentions, which the impolitic patentees had raised against themselves, (not only by this I have mentioned, but by many other grievances which my memory retains not,) the actors offered a treaty of peace; but their masters, imagining no consequence could shake the right of their authority, refused all terms of accommodation. In the mean time this dissension was so prejudicial to their daily affairs, that I remember it was allowed by both parties, that before Christmas the patent had lost the getting of at least a thousand pounds by it.

My having been a witness of this unnecessary rupture was of great use to me, when many years after I came to be a manager myself. I laid it down as a settled maxim, that no company could flourish while the chief actors and the undertakers were at variance. I therefore made it a point, while it was possible upon tolerable terms, to keep the valuable actors in humour with their station; and though I was as jealous of their encroachments as any of my copartners could be, I always guarded against the least warmth in my expostulations with them; not but at the same time they might see I was perhaps more determined in the question than those that gave a loose to their resentment, and when they were cool were as apt to recede. I do not remember that ever I made a promise to any that I did not keep, and therefore was cautious how I made them. This coldness, though it might not please, at least left them nothing to reproach me with; and if temper and fair words could prevent a disobligation, I was sure never to give offence or receive it. But as I was but one of three, I could not oblige others to observe the same conduct. However, by this means I kept many an unreasonable discontent from breaking out; and both sides found their account in it.

How a contemptuous and overbearing manner of treating actors had like to have ruined us in our early prosperity, shall be shown in its place. If future managers should chance to think my way right, I suppose they will follow it; if not, when they find what happened to the patentees, (who choose to disagree with their people,) perhaps they may think better of it.

The patentees then, who by their united powers had made a monopoly of the stage, and consequently presumed they might impose what conditions they pleased upon their people, did not consider that they were all this while endeavouring to enslave a set of actors whom the public (more arbitrary than themselves) were inclined to support; nor did they reflect that the spectator naturally wished that the actor who gave him delight might enjoy the profits arising from his labour, without regard of what pretended damage or injustice might fall upon his owners, whose personal merit the public was not so well acquainted with. From this consideration then, several persons of the highest distinction espoused their cause, and sometimes in the circle entertained the king with the state of the theatre. At length their grievances were laid before the earl of Dorset, then lord chamberlain, who took the most effectual method for their relief. The learned of the law were advised with, and they gave their opinion that no patent for acting plays, &c. could tie up the hands of a succeeding prince from granting the like authority where it might be thought proper to trust it. But while this affair was in agitation, queen Mary died, which of course occasioned a cessation of all public diversions. In this melancholy interim, Betterton and his adherents had more leisure to solicit their redress; and the patentees, now finding that the party against them was gathering strength, were reduced to make sure of as good a company as the leavings of Betterton's interest could form; and these you may be sure would not lose this occasion of setting a price upon their merit, equal to their own opinion of it, which was but just double to what they had before. Powell and Verbruggen, who had then but forty shillings a week, were now raised each of them to four pounds, and others in proportion. As for myself, I was then too insignificant to be taken into their councils, and consequently stood among those of little importance, like cattle in a market, to be sold to the first bidder. But the patentees, seeming in the greater distress for actors, condescended to purchase me. Thus, without any farther merit than that of being a scarce commodity, I was advanced to thirty shillings a week: yet our company was so far from being full, that our commanders were forced to beat up for volunteers in several distant counties; it was this occasion that first brought Johnson and Bullock to the service of the theatre-royal.

Forces being thus raised and the war declared on both sides, Betterton and his chiefs had the honour of an audience of the king, who considered them as the only subjects whom he had not yet delivered from arbitrary power, and graciously dismissed them with an assurance of relief and support. Accordingly, a select number of them were empowered by his royal license to act in a separate theatre for themselves. This great point being obtained, many people of quality came into a voluntary subscription of twenty, and some of forty guineas a piece, for erecting a theatre within the walls of the Tennis-court in Lincoln's-inn-Fields. But as it required time to fit it up, it gave the patentees more leisure to muster their forces, who notwithstanding were not able to take the field till the Easter Monday in April following. Their first attempt was a revived play, called "Abdelazar or the Moor's Revenge," poorly written by Mrs Behn. The house was very full; but whether it was the play or the actors that were not approved, the next day's audience sunk to nothing. However, we were assured that, let the audiences be never so low, our masters would make good all deficiencies; and so indeed they did, until towards the end of the season, when dues to balance came too thick upon them. But that I may go gradually on with my own fortune, I must take this occasion to let you know by the following circumstance, how very low my capacity as an actor was then rated. It was thought necessary at our opening that the town should be addressed in a new prologue; but to our great distress, among several that were offered, not one was judged fit to be spoken. This I thought a favourable occasion to do myself some remarkable service, if I should have the good fortune to produce one that might be accepted. The next (memorable) day my muse brought forth her first fruit that was ever made public; how good or bad, imports not; my prologue was accepted, and resolved on to be spoken. This point being gained, I began to stand upon terms, you will say not unreasonable; which were, that if I might speak it myself, I would expect no farther reward for my labour. This was judged as bad as having no prologue at all! You may imagine how hard I thought it, that they durst not trust my poor poetical brat to my own care. But since I found it was to be given into other hands, I insisted that two guineas should be the price of my parting with it; which with a sigh I received, and Powel spoke the prologue; but every line that was applauded went sorely to my heart, when I reflected that the same praise might have been given to my own speaking; nor could the success of the author compensate the distress of the actor. However, in the end it served in some sort to mend our people's opinion of me; and whatever the critics might think of it, one of the patentees (who, it is true, knew no difference between Dryden and D'Urfey) said, upon the success of it, that in sooth, I was an ingenious young man. This sober compliment (though I could have no reason to be vain upon it) I thought was a fair promise to my being in favour. But to matters of more moment: now let us reconnoitre the enemy.

After we had stolen some few days' march upon them, the forces of Betterton came up with us in terrible order. In about three weeks following, the new theatre was opened against us with a veteran company, and a new train of artillery: or, in plainer English, the old actors in Lincoln's-inn-fields began with a new comedy of Mr Congreve's, called "Love for Love," which ran on with such extraordinary success, that they had seldom occasion to act any other play until the end of the season. This valuable play had a narrow escape from falling into the hands of the patentees; for before the division of the company it had been read and accepted of at the theatre-royal: but while the articles of agreement for it were preparing, the rupture in the theatrical state was so far advanced, that the author took time to pause before he signed them; when, finding that all hopes of accommodation were impracticable, he thought it advisable to let it take its fortune with those actors for whom he had first intended the parts.

Mr Congreve was then in such high reputation as an author, that besides his profits from this play, they offered him a whole share with them, which he accepted; in consideration of which he obliged himself, if his health permitted, to give them one new play every year. Dryden in king Charles's time had the same share with the king's company; but he bound himself to give them two plays every season. This you may imagine he could not hold long; and I am apt to think he might have served them better with one in a year, not so hastily written. Mr Congreve, whatever impediment he met with, was three years before, in pursuance to his agreement, he produced the "Mourning Bride;" and if I mistake not, the interval had been much the same, when he gave them the "Way of the World." But it came out the stronger for the time it cost him, and to their better support when they sorely wanted it: for though they went on with success for a year or two, and even when their affairs were declining stood in much higher estimation of the public than their opponents, yet in the end both sides were great sufferers by their separation; the natural consequence of two houses, which I have already mentioned in a former chapter.

The first error this new colony of actors fell into, was their inconsiderately parting with Williams and Mrs Mountfort, upon a too nice (not to say severe) punctilio, in not allowing them to be equal sharers with the rest; which before they had acted one play occasioned their return to the service of the patentees. As I have called this an error, I ought to give my reasons for it. Though the industry of Williams was not equal to his capacity, for he loved his bottle better than his business; and though Mrs Mountfort was only excellent in comedy—yet their merit was too great almost on any scruples to be added to the enemy; and at worst they were certainly much more above those they would have ranked them with, than they could possibly be under those they were not admitted to be equal to. Of this fact there is a poetical record in the prologue to "Love for Love," where the author, speaking of the then happy state of the stage, observes, that if in paradise, when two only were there, they both fell, the surprise was less if from so numerous a body as theirs there had been any deserters.

> Abate the wonder, and the fault forgive,
> If, in our larger family, we grieve
> One falling Adam and one tempted Eve.

These lines alluded to the revolt of the persons above mentioned.

Notwithstanding the acquisition of these two actors, who were of more importance than any of those to whose assistance they came, the affairs of the patentees were still in a very creeping condition; they were now too late convinced of their error in having provoked their people to this civil war of the theatre: quite changed and dismal now was the prospect before them—their houses thin, and the town crowding into a new one—actors at double salaries, and not half the usual audiences to pay them! And all this brought upon them by those whom their full security had contemned, and who were now in a fair way of making their fortunes upon the ruined interest of their oppressors.

Here, though at this time my fortune depended on the success of the patentees, I cannot help, in regard to truth, remembering the rude and riotous havoc we made of all the late dramatic honours of the theatre. All became at once the spoil of ignorance and self-conceit. Shakspeare was defaced and tortured in every signal character; Hamlet and Othello lost in one hour all their good sense, their dignity and fame; Brutus and Cassius became noisy blusterers, with bold unmeaning eyes, mistaken sentiments, and turgid elocution. Nothing sure could more painfully regret a judicious spectator, than to see at our first setting out with what rude confidence those habits which actors of real merit had left behind them, were worn by giddy pretenders that so vulgarly disgraced them! Not young lawyers in hired robes and plumes at a masquerade could be less what they would seem, or more awkwardly personate the characters they belonged to. If in all these acts of wanton waste, these insults upon injured nature, you observe I have not yet charged one of them upon myself, it is not from an imaginary vanity that I could have avoided them, but that I was rather safe by being too low at that time to be admitted even to my chance of falling into the same eminent errors; so that as none of those great parts ever fell to my share, I could not be accountable for the execution of them: nor indeed could I get one good part of any kind until many months after, unless it were of that sort which nobody else cared for, or would venture to expose themselves in. The first unintended favour, therefore, of a part of any value, necessity threw upon me on the following occasion.

As it has been always judged their natural interest, where there are two theatres, to do one another as much mischief as they can, you may imagine it could not be long before this hostile policy showed itself in action. It happened, upon our having information on a Saturday morning, that the Tuesday after Hamlet was intended to be acted at the other house, where it had not yet been seen,—our merry managing actors (for they were now in a manner left to govern themselves) resolved at any rate to steal a march upon the enemy, and take possession of the same play the day before them: accordingly Hamlet was given out that night to be acted with us on Monday. The notice of this sudden enterprise soon reached the other house, who in my opinion too much regarded it; for they shortened their first orders, and resolved that Hamlet should to Hamlet be opposed on the same day; whereas, had they given notice in their bills, that the same play would have been acted by them the day after, the town would have been in no doubt which house they should have reserved themselves for; ours must certainly have been empty, and theirs with more honour have been crowded. Experience many years after in like cases has convinced me, that this would have been the more laudable conduct. But be that as it may, when in their Monday's bills it was seen that Hamlet was up against us, our consternation was terrible to find that so hopeful a project was frustrated. In this distress Powel, who was our commanding officer, and whose enterprising head wanted nothing but skill to carry him through the most desperate attempts; (for like others of his cast he had murdered many a hero, only to get into his clothes;) this Powel, I say, immediately called a council of war; where the question was, whether he should fairly face the enemy, or make a retreat to some other play of more probable safety? It was soon resolved that to act Hamlet against Hamlet would be certainly throwing away the play, and disgracing themselves to little or no audience. To conclude; Powel, who was vain enough to envy Betterton as his rival, proposed to change plays with them, and that, as they had given out the "Old Bachelor," and had changed it for Hamlet against us, we should give up our Hamlet, and turn the Old Bachelor upon them. This motion was agreed to, *nemine contradicente;* but upon inquiry it was found that there were not two persons among them who had ever acted in that play. But that objection, it seems (though all the parts were to be studied in six hours) was soon got over; Powel had an equivalent *in petto*, that would balance any deficiency on that score; which was, that he would play the Old Bachelor himself, and mimic Betterton throughout the whole part. This happy thought was approved with delight and applause, as whatever can be supposed to ridicule merit generally gives joy to those that want it. Accordingly the bills were changed, and at the bottom inserted "The part of the Old Bachelor to be performed in imitation of the original." Printed books of the play were sent for in haste, and every actor had one, to pick out of it the part he had chosen. Thus, while they were each of them chewing the morsel they had most mind to, some one, happening to cast his eye over the *dramatis personæ*, found that the main matter was still forgot, that no body had yet been thought of for the part of alderman Fondlewife. Here we were all aground again; nor was it to be conceived who could make the least tolerable shift with it. This character had been so admirably acted by Dogget, that though it is only seen in the fourth act, it may be no dispraise to the play to say it probably owed the greatest part of its success to his performance. But as the case was now desperate, any resource was better than none. Somebody must swallow the bitter pill, or the play must die. At last it was recollected that I had been heard to say, in my wild way of talking, what a vast mind I had to play Nykin, by which name the character was more frequently called. Notwithstanding they were thus distressed about the disposal of this part, most of them shook their heads at my being mentioned for it; yet Powel, who was resolved at all hazards to fall upon Betterton, and having no concern for what might become of any one that served his ends or purpose, ordered me to be sent for; and, as he naturally loved to set other people wrong, honestly said before I came, " If the fool has a mind to blow himself up at once, let us even give him a clear stage for it."

Accordingly the part was put into my hands between eleven and twelve that morning, which I durst not refuse, because others were as much straitened in time for study as myself. But I had this casual advantage of most of them; that having so constantly observed Dogget's performance, I wanted but little trouble to make me perfect in the words; so that when it came to my turn to rehearse, while others read their parts from their books, I had put mine in my pocket, and went through the first scene without it; and though I was more abashed to rehearse so remarkable a part before the actors (which is natural to most young people) than to act before an audience, yet some of the better-natured encouraged me so far as to say they did not think I should make an ill figure in it. To conclude, the curiosity to see Betterton mimicked drew us a pretty good audience, and Powel (as far as applause is a proof of it) was allowed to have burlesqued him very well. As I have questioned the certain value of applause, I hope I may venture with less vanity to say how particular a share I had of it in the same play. At my first appearance, one might have imagined, by the various murmurs of the audience, that they were in doubt whether Dogget himself were not returned, or that they could not conceive what strange face it could be that so nearly resembled him; for I had laid the tint of forty years more than my real age upon my features, and to the most minute placing of a hair was dressed exactly like him When I spoke, the surprise was still greater, as if I had not only borrowed his clothes but his voice too. But though that was the least difficult part of him to be imitated, they seemed to allow I had so much of him in every other requisite, that my applause was perhaps more than proportionable. For whether I had done so much where so little was expected, or that the generality of my hearers were more than usually zealous upon so unexpected an occasion, or from what other motive such favour might be poured upon me, I cannot say; but in plain and honest truth, upon my going off from the first scene, a much better actor might have been proud of the applause that followed me; after one loud plaudit was ended, and sunk into a general whisper that seemed still to continue their private approbation, it revived to a second, and again to a third still louder than the former. If to all this I add, that Dogget himself was in the pit at the same time, it would be too rank affectation if I should not confess, that to see him there a witness of my reception, was to me as consummate a triumph as the heart of vanity could be indulged with. But whatever vanity I might set upon myself from this unexpected success, I found that was no rule to other people's judgment of me. There were few or no parts of the same kind to be had; nor could they conceive, from what I had done in this, what other sort of characters I could be fit for. If I solicited for any thing of a different nature, I was answered, "That was not in my way." And what was in my way, it seems, was not as yet resolved upon. And though I replied, that I thought any thing naturally written ought to be in every one's way that pretended to be an actor; this was looked upon as a vain impracticable conceit of my own. Yet it is a conceit that, in forty years farther experience, I have not yet given up; I still think, that a painter who can draw but one sort of object, or an actor that shines but in one light, can neither of them boast of that ample genius which is necessary to form a thorough master of his art. For though genius may have a particular inclination, yet a good history painter, or a good actor, will without being at a loss give you upon demand a proper likeness of whatever nature produces. If he cannot do this he is only an actor as the shoemaker was allowed a limited judge of Apelles's painting, but not beyond his last. Now, though to do any one thing well, may have more merit than we often meet with, and may be enough to procure a man the name of a good actor from the public; yet in my opinion it is but still the name without the substance. If his talent is in such narrow bounds, that he dares not step out of them, to look upon the singularities of mankind, and cannot catch them in whatever form they present themselves; if he is not master of the *quicquid agunt homines*, &c. in any shape human nature is fit to be seen in; if he cannot change himself into several distinct persons, so as to vary his whole tone of voice, his motion, his look, and gesture, whether in high or low life, and at the same time keep close to those variations without leaving the character they singly belong to; if his best skill falls short of this capacity, what pretence have we to call him a complete master of his art? And though I do not insist, that he ought always to show himself in these various lights, yet, before we compliment him with that title, he ought at least by some few proofs to let us see that he has all them in his power. If I am asked, who ever arrived at this imaginary excellence, I confess the instances are very few; but I will venture to name Mountfort as one of them, whose theatrical character I have given in my last chapter. For in his youth he had acted low humour with great success, even down to Tallboy in the "Jovial Crew;" and when he was in great esteem as a tragedian, he was in comedy the most complete gentleman that I ever saw upon the stage. Let me add too, that Betterton in his declining age was as eminent in sir John Falstaff, as in the vigour of it in his Othello.

While I thus measure the value of an actor by the variety of shapes he is able to throw himself into, you may naturally suspect that I am all this while leading my own theatrical character into your favour. Why, really, to speak as an honest man, I cannot wholly deny it. But in this I shall endeavour to be no farther partial to myself than known facts will make me; from the good or bad evidence of which, your better judgment will condemn or acquit me. And to show you that I willconceal no truth that is against me, I frankly own, that had I been always left to my own choice of characters, I am doubtful whether I might ever have deserved an equal share of that estimation which the public seemed to have held me in. Nor am I sure that it was not vanity in me, often to have suspected that I was kept out of the parts I had most mind to, by the jealousy or prejudice of my contemporaries; some instances of which I could give you, were they not too slight to be remembered. In the mean time, be pleased to observe how slowly in my younger days my good fortune came forward.

My early success in the "Old Bachelor," of which I have given so full an account, having opened no farther way to my advancement, was enough perhaps to have made a young fellow of more modesty despair; but being of a temper not easily disheartened, I resolved to leave nothing unattempted that might show me in some new rank of distinction. Having then no other resource, I was at last reduced to write a character for myself; but as that was not finished till about a year after, I could not in the interim procure any one part that gave me the least inclination to act it; and consequently such as I got I performed with a proportionable negligence. But this misfortune, if it were one, you are not to wonder at; for the same fate attended me more or less to the last days of my remaining on the stage. What defect in me this may have been owing to, I have not yet had sense enough to find out;—but I soon found out as good a thing, which was, never to be mortified at it; though I am afraid this seeming philosophy was rather owing to my inclination to pleasure than to business. But to my point. The next year I produced the comedy of "Love's last Shift;" yet the difficulty of getting it to the stage was not easily surmounted; for at that time as little was expected from me as an author, as had been from my pretensions to be an actor. However, Mr Southern, the author of "Oroonoko," having had the patience to hear me read it to him, happened to like it so well, that he immediately recommended it to the patentees, and it was accordingly acted in January 1695. In this play I gave myself the part of sir Novelty, which was thought a good portrait of the foppery then in fashion. Here too Mr Southern, though he had approved my play, came into the common diffidence of me as an actor. For when, on the first day of it, I was standing myself to prompt the prologue, he took me by the hand and said, "Young man, I pronounce thy play a good one; I will answer for its success, if thou dost not spoil it by thy own action." Though this might be a fair *salvo* for his favourable judgment of the play, yet if it were his real opinion of me as an actor, I had the good fortune to deceive him. I succeeded so well in both, that people seemed at a loss which they should give the preference to. But—(now let me show a little more vanity, and my apology for it shall come after)—the compliment which my lord Dorset (then lord chamberlain) made me upon it is, I own, what I had rather not suppress, viz. that it was the best first play that any author in his memory had produced; and that for a young fellow to show himself such an actor and such a writer in one day, was something extraordinary. But as this noble lord has been celebrated for his good-nature, I am contented that as much of this compliment should be supposed to exceed my deserts, as may be imagined to have been heightened by his generous inclination to encourage a young beginner. If this excuse cannot soften the vanity of telling a truth so much in my own favour, I must lie at the mercy of the reader. But there was a still higher compliment passed upon me, which I may publish without vanity, because it was not a designed one, and apparently came from my enemies; viz. that, to their certain knowledge, it was not my own. This report is taken notice of in my dedication to the play. If they spoke truth, if they knew what other person it really belonged to, I will at least allow them true to their trust; for above forty years have since past, and they have not yet revealed the secret.

The new light in which the character of sir Novelty had shown me, one might have thought were enough to have dissipated the doubts of what I might now be possibly good for. But to whatever chance my ill-fortune was due; whether I had still but little merit, or that the managers, if I had any, were not competent judges of it; or whether I was not generally elbowed by other actors (which I am most inclined to think the true cause) when any fresh parts were to be disposed of, not one part of any consequence was I preferred to till the year following. Then indeed, from sir John Vanbrugh's favourable opinion of me, I began with others to have a better of myself. For he not only did me honour as an author, by writing his "Relapse" as a sequel or second part to "Love's last Shift;" but as an actor too, by preferring me to the chief character in his own play; which, from sir Novelty, he had ennobled by the style of baron of Foppington. This play (the "Relapse") from its new and easy turn of wit had great success, and gave me as a comedian a second flight of reputation along with it.

As the matter I write must be very flat or impertinent to those who have no taste or concern for the stage, and may, to those who delight in it too, be equally tedious when I talk of nobody but myself, I shall endeavour to relieve your patience by a word or two more of this gentleman, so far as he lent his pen to the support of the theatre.

Though the "Relapse" was the first play this agreeable author produced, yet it was not, it seems, the first he had written; for he had at that time by him (more than) all the scenes that were acted of the "Provoked Wife;" but being then doubtful whether he should ever trust them to the stage, he thought no more of it. But after the success of the "Relapse," he was more strongly importuned than able to refuse it to the public. Why the last written play was first acted, and for what reason they were given to different stages, what follows will explain.

In his first step into public life, when he was but an ensign, and had a heart above his income, he happened somewhere at his winter quarters, upon a very slender acquaintance with sir Thomas Skipwith, to receive a particular obligation from him, which he had not forgot at the time I was speaking of. When sir Thomas's interest in the theatrical patent (for he had a large share in it, though he little concerned himself in the conduct of it) was rising but very slowly, he thought that to give it a lift by a new comedy, if it succeeded, might be the handsomest return he could make to those his former favours; and having observed that in "Love's last Shift" most of the actors had acquitted themselves beyond what was expected of them, he took a sudden hint from what he liked in that play, and in less than three months, in the beginning of April following, brought us the "Relapse" finished; but the season being then too far advanced, it was not acted till the succeeding winter. Upon the success of the "Relapse," the late lord Halifax, who was a great favourer of Betterton's company, having formerly by way of family amusement heard the "Provoked Wife" read to him in its looser sheets, engaged sir John Vanbrugh to revise it, and give it to the theatre in Lincoln's-inn-fields. This was a request not to be refused to so eminent a patron of the muses as the lord Halifax, who was equally a friend and admirer of sir John himself. Nor was sir Thomas Skipwith in the least disobliged by so reasonable a compliance. After which, sir John was again at liberty to repeat his civilities to his friend sir Thomas; and about the same time, or not long after, gave us the comedy of "Æsop;" for his inclination always led him to serve sir Thomas. Besides, our company about this time began to be looked upon in another light; the late contempt we had lain under was now wearing off; and from the success of two or three new plays our actors, by being originals in a few good parts where they had not the disadvantage of comparison against them, sometimes found new favour in those old plays where others had exceeded them.

Of this good fortune perhaps I had more than my share, from the two very different chief characters I had succeeded in; for I was equally approved in Æsop as in lord Foppington, allowing the difference to be no less than as wisdom in a person deformed may be less entertaining to the general taste than folly and foppery finely drest: for the character that delivers precepts of wisdom, is in some sort severe upon the auditor, by showing him one wiser than himself. But when folly is his object, he applauds himself for being wiser than the coxcomb he laughs at: and who is not more pleased with an occasion to commend, than accuse himself?

Though to write much in a little time is no excuse for writing ill, yet sir John Vanbrugh's pen is not to be a little admired for its spirit, ease, and readiness, in producing plays so fast upon the neck of one another; for notwithstanding this quick despatch, there is a clear and lively simplicity in his wit, that neither wants the ornament of learning, nor has the least smell of the lamp in it. As the face of a fine woman, with only her locks loose about her, may be then in its greatest beauty, such were his productions only adorned by nature. There is something so catching to the ear, so easy to the memory in all he wrote, that it has been observed by all the actors of my time, that the style of no author whatsoever gave their memory less trouble than that of sir John Vanbrugh; which I myself, who have been charged with several of his strongest characters, can confirm by a pleasing experience. And indeed his wit and humour were so little laboured, that his most entertaining scenes seemed to be no more than his common conversation committed to paper. Here I confess my judgment at a loss, whether in this I give him more or less than his due praise. For may it not be more laudable to raise an estate (whether in wealth or fame) by pains and honest industry, than to be born to it? Yet if his scenes really were, as to me they always seemed, delightful, are they not, thus expeditiously written, the more surprising? Let the wit and merit of them then be weighed by wiser critics than I pretend to be: but no wonder, while his conceptions were so full of life and humour, his muse should be sometimes too warm to wait the slow pace of judgment, or to endure the drudgery of forming a regular fable to them: yet we see the "Relapse," however imperfect in the conduct, by the mere force of its agreeable wit, ran away with the hearts of its hearers; while "Love's last Shift," which (as Mr Congreve justly said of it) had only in it a great many things that were like wit, that in reality were not wit, and—what is still less pardonable (as I say of it myself)—has a great deal of puerility and frothy stage-language in it, yet, by the mere moral delight received from its fable, has been with the other in a continued and equal possession of the stage for more than forty years.

As I have already promised you to refer your judgment of me as an actor rather to known facts that my own opinion (which I could not be sure would keep clear of self-partiality) I must a little farther risk my being tedious, to be as good as my word. I have elsewhere allowed, that my want of a strong and full voice soon cut short my hopes of making any valuable figure in tragedy; and I have been many years since convinced, that whatever opinion I might have of my own judgment or capacity to amend the palpable errors that I saw our tragedians most in favour commit, yet the auditors who would have been sensible of any such amendments (could I have made them) were so very few, that my best endeavour would have been but an unavailing labour, or—what is yet worse—might have appeared both to our actors and to many auditors the vain mistake of my own self-conceit: for so strong, so very near indispensable, is that one article of voice in the forming a good tragedian, that an actor may want any other qualification whatsoever, and yet have a better chance for applause than he will ever have with all the skill in the world, if his voice is not equal to it. Mistake me not; I say for applause only: but applause does not always stay for nor always follow intrinsic merit; applause will frequently open like a young hound upon a wrong scent; and the majority of auditors you know are generally composed of babblers that are profuse of their voices before there is any thing on foot that calls for them: not but, I grant, to lead or mislead the many, will always stand in some rank of a necessary merit; yet when I say a good tragedian, I mean one in opinion of whose real merit the best judges would agree. Having so far given up my pretensions to the buskin, I ought now to account for my having been, notwithstanding, so often seen in some particular characters in tragedy, as Iago, Wolsey, Syphax, Richard III, &c. If in any of this kind I have succeeded, perhaps it has been a merit dearly purchased; for, from the delight I seemed to take in my performing them, half my auditors have been persuaded that a great share of the wickedness of them must have been in my own nature; if this is true, as true I fear (I had almost said hope) it is, I look upon it rather as a praise than censure of my performance. Aversion there is an involuntary commendation, where we are only hated for being like the thing we ought to be like; a sort of praise however which few actors besides myself could endure: had it been equal to the usual praise given to virtue, my contemporaries would have thought themselves injured if I had pretended to any share of it: so that you see it has been as much the dislike others had to them, as choice, that has thrown me sometimes into these characters. But it may be farther observed, that in the characters I have named, where there is so much close meditated mischief, deceit, pride, insolence, or cruelty, they cannot have the least cast or proffer of the amiable in them; consequently there can be no great demand for that harmonious sound, or pleasing round melody of voice, which in the softer sentiments of love, the wailings of distressful virtue, or in the throes and swellings of honour and ambition, may be needful to recommend them to our pity or admiration: so that, again, my want of that requisite voice might less disqualify me for the vicious than the virtuous character. This too may have been a more favourable reason for my having been chosen for them. A yet farther consideration that inclined me to them, was that they are generally better written, thicker sown with sensible reflections, and come by so much nearer to common life and nature, than characters of admiration—as vice is more the practice of mankind than virtue: nor could I sometimes help smiling at those dainty actors, that were too squeamish to swallow them—as if they were one jot the better men for acting a good man well, or another man the worse for doing equal justice to a bad one! It is not, sure, what we act, but how we act what is allotted us, that speaks our intrinsic value; as in real life the wise man or the fool, be he prince or peasant, will in either state be equally the fool or the wise man. But alas! in personated life this is no rule to the vulgar: they are apt to think all before them real, and rate the actor according to his borrowed vice or virtue.

If then I had always too careless a concern for false or vulgar applause, I ought not to complain if I have had less of it than others of my time, or not less of it than I desired: yet I will venture to say that, from the common weak appetite of false applause, many actors have run into more errors and absurdities than their greatest ignorance could otherwise have committed. If this charge is true, it will lie chiefly upon the better judgment of the spectator to reform it.

But not to make too great a merit of my avoiding this common road to applause, perhaps I was vain enough to think I had more ways than one to come at it; that, in the variety of characters I acted, the chances to win it were the stronger on my side; that if the multitude were not in a roar to see me in cardinal Wolsey, I could be sure of them in alderman Fondlewife; if they hated me in Iago, in sir Fopling they took me for a fine gentleman; if they were silent at Syphax, no Italian eunuch was more applauded than when I sung in sir Courtly; if the morals of Æsop were too grave for them, justice Shallow was as simple and as merry an old rake as the wisest of our young ones could wish me; and though the terror and detestation raised by king Richard might be too severe a delight for them, yet the more gentle and modern vanities of a poet Bays, or the well-bred vices of a lord Foppington, were not at all more than their merry hearts or nicer morals could bear.

These few instances, out of fifty more I could give you, may serve to explain what sort of merit I at most pretended to; which was, that I supplied with variety whatever I might want of that particular skill wherein others went before me. How this variety was executed (for by that only is its value to be rated) you, who have so often been my spectator, are the proper judge: if you pronounce my performance to have been defective, I am condemned by my own evidence; if you acquit me, these outlines may serve for a sketch of my theatrical character.

CHAPTER VII.

The state of the stage continued.—The occasion of Wilks commencing actor.—His success.—Facts relating to his theatrical talent.—Actors more or less esteemed from their private characters.

The Lincoln's-inn-fields company were now, in 1693, a commonwealth like that of Holland divided from the tyranny of Spain: but the similitude goes very little farther. Short was the duration of their theatrical power: for though success poured in so fast upon them at their first opening, that every thing seemed to support itself; yet experience in a year or two showed them, that they had never been worse governed than when they governed themselves. Many of them began to make their particular interest more their point, than that of the general: and though some deference might be had to the measures and advice of Betterton, several of them wanted to govern in their turn, and were often out of humour that their opinion was not equally regarded. But have we not seen the same infirmity in senates? The tragedians seemed to think their rank as much above the comedians, as in the characters they severally acted; when the first were in their finery, the latter were impatient at the expense, and looked upon it as rather laid out upon the real than the fictitious person of the actor; nay, I have known in our own company this ridiculous sort of regret carried so far, that the tragedian has thought himself injured when the comedian pretended to wear a fine coat! I remember Powel, upon surveying my first dress in the "Relapse," was out of all temper, and reproached our master, in very rude terms, that he had not so good a suit to play Cæsar Borgia in; though he knew, at the same time, my lord Foppington filled the house when his bouncing Borgia would do little more than pay fiddles and candles to it, and though a character of vanity might be supposed more expensive in dress than possibly one of ambition; yet the high heart of this heroical actor could not bear that a comedian should ever pretend to be as well dressed as himself. Thus again, on the contrary, when Betterton proposed to set off a tragedy, the comedians were sure to murmur at the charge of it: and the late reputation which Dogget had acquired, from acting his Ben in "Love for Love," made him a more declared malecontent on such occasions; he overvalued comedy for its being nearer to nature than tragedy, which is allowed to say many fine things that nature never spoke in the same words; and supposing his opinion were just, yet he should have considered that the public had a taste as well as himself, which in policy he ought to have complied with. Dogget however could not with patience look upon the costly trains and plumes of tragedy, in which knowing himself to be useless, he thought they were all a vain extravagance: and when he found his singularity could no longer oppose that expense, he so obstinately adhered to his own opinion, that he left the society of his old friends, and came over to us at the theatre-royal: and yet this actor always set up for a theatrical patriot. This happened in the winter following the first division of the (only) com pany. He came time enough to the theatre-royal to act the part of Lory in the "Relapse," an arch valet quite after the French cast, pert and familiar. But it suited so ill with Dogget's dry and closely-natural manner of acting, that upon the second day he desired it might be disposed of to another; which the author complying with, gave it to Pinkethman, who, though in other lights much his inferior, yet this part seemed better to become. Dogget was so immovable in his opinion of whatever he thought was right or wrong, that he could never be easy under any kind of theatrical government, and was generally so warm in pursuit of his interest, that he often outran it. I remember him three times, for some years, unemployed in any theatre, from his not being able to bear in common with others the disagreeable accidents that in such societies are unavoidable. But whatever pretences he had formed for this first deserting from Lincoln's-inn-fields, I always thought his best reason for it was, that he looked upon it as a sinking ship; not only from the melancholy abatement of their profits, but likewise from the neglect and disorder in their government. He plainly saw, that their extraordinary success at first had made them too confident of its duration, and from thence had slackened their industry; by which, he observed at the same time, the old house, where there was scarce any other merit than industry, began to flourish. And indeed they seemed not enough to consider, that the appetite of the public, like that of a fine gentleman, could only be kept warm by variety; that let their merit be never so high, yet the taste of a town was not always constant nor infallible; that it was dangerous to hold their rivals in too much contempt; for they found that a young industrious company were soon a match for the best actors, when too securely negligent: and negligent they certainly were, and fondly fancied, that had each of their different schemes been followed, their audiences would not so suddenly have fallen off.

But alas! the vanity of applauded actors, when they are not crowded too as they may have been, makes them naturally impute the change to any cause rather than the true one, satiety: they are mighty loath to think a town once so fond of them could ever be tired; and yet at one time or other, more or less, thin houses have been the certain fate of the most prosperous actors ever since I remember the stage. But against this evil the provident patentees had found out a relief, which the new house were not yet masters of, viz. never to pay their people when the money did not come in; nor then neither, but in such proportions as suited their conveniency. I myself was one of the many who for six acting weeks together never received one day's pay, and for some years after seldom had above half our nominal salaries; but to the best of my memory, the finances of the other house held it not above one season more, before they were reduced to the same expedient of making the like scanty payments.

Such was the distress and fortune of both these companies since their division from the theatre-royal; either working at half wages, or by alternate successes intercepting the bread from one another's mouths; irreconcilable enemies, yet without hope of relief from a victory on either side; sometimes both parties reduced, and yet each supporting their spirits by seeing the other under the same calamity.

During this state of the stage it was, that the lowest expedient was made use of to ingratiate our company in the public favour. Our master, who had some time practised the law, and therefore loved a storm better than fair weather, (for it was his own conduct chiefly that had brought the patent into these dangers,) took nothing so much to heart as that partiality wherewith he imagined the people of quality had preferred the actors of the other house to those of his own. To balance this misfortune, he was resolved at least to be well with their domestics, and therefore cunningly opened the upper gallery to them gratis; for before this time no footman was ever admitted, or had presumed to come into it, till after the fourth act was ended. This additional privilege (the greatest plague that ever playhouse had to complain of) he conceived would not only incline them to give us a good word in the respective families they belonged to, but would naturally incite them to come all hands aloft in the crack of our applauses; and indeed it so far succeeded, that it often thundered from the full gallery above, while our thin pit and boxes below were in the utmost serenity. This riotous privilege, so craftily given, and which from custom was at last ripened into right, became the most disgraceful nuisance that ever depreciated the theatre. How often have the most polite audiences, in the most affecting scenes of the best plays, been disturbed and insulted by the noise and clamour of these savage spectators! From the same narrow way of thinking too, were so many ordinary people and unlicked cubs of condition admitted behind our scenes for money, and sometimes without it; the plagues and inconveniencies of which custom we found so intolerable, when we afterwards had the stage in our hands, that at the hazard of our lives we were forced to get rid of them; and our only expedient was by refusing money from all persons without distinction at the stage-door. By this means we preserved to ourselves the right and liberty of choosing our own company there; and by a strict observance of this order, we brought what had been before debased into all the licenses of a lobby, into the decencies of a drawing-room.

About the distressful time I was speaking of, in the year 1696, Wilks, who now had been five years in great esteem on the Dublin theatre, returned to that of Drury-lane; in which last he had first set out, and had continued to act some small parts for one winter only. The considerable figure which he so lately made upon the stage in London, makes me imagine that a particular account of his first commencing actor may not be unacceptable to the curious. I shall therefore give it them as I had it from his own mouth.

In king James's reign he had been some time employed in the secretary's office in Ireland (his native country) and remained in it till after the battle of the Boyne, which completed the revolution. Upon that happy and unexpected deliverance, the people of Dublin, among the various expressions of their joy, had a mind to have a play; but the actors being dispersed during the war, some private persons agreed in the best manner they were able to give one to the public gratis at the theatre. The play was "Othello," in which Wilks acted the Moor; and the applause he received in it warmed him to so strong an inclination for the stage, that he immediately preferred it to all his other views in life; for he quitted his post, and with the first fair occasion came over to try his fortune in the (then only) company of actors in London. The person who supplied his post in Dublin, he told me, raised to himself from thence a fortune of fifty thousand pounds. Here you have a much stronger instance of an extravagant passion for the stage, than that which I have elsewhere shown in myself. I only quitted my hopes of being preferred to the like post, for it; but Wilks quitted his actual possession for the imaginary happiness which the life of an actor presented to him. And though possibly we might both have bettered our fortunes in a more honourable station, yet whether better fortunes might have equally gratified our vanity (the universal passion of mankind) may admit of a question.

Upon his being formerly received into the theatre-royal (which was in the winter after I had been initiated) his station there was much upon the same class with my own; our parts were generally of an equal insignificancy, not of consequence enough to give either a preference; but, Wilks being more impatient of his low condition than I was—(and indeed the company was then so well stocked with good actors, that there was very little hope of getting forward)—laid hold of a more expeditious way for his advancement, and returned again to Dublin with Mr Ashbury, the patentee of that theatre, to act in his new company there. There went with him at the same time Mrs Butler, whose character I have already given, and Estcourt, who had not appeared on any stage, and was yet only known as an excellent mimic. Wilks, having no competitor in Dublin, was immediately preferred to whatever parts his inclination led him; and his early reputation on that stage as soon raised in him an ambition to show himself on a better. And I have heard him say (in raillery of the vanity which young actors are liable to) that when the news of Mountfort's death came to Ireland, he from that time thought his fortune was made, and took a resolution to return a second time to England with the first opportunity; but as his engagements to the stage where he was were too strong to be suddenly broke from, he returned not to the theatre-royal until the year 1696.

Upon his first arrival, Powel, who was now in possession of all the chief parts of Mountfort, and the only actor that stood in Wilks's way, in seeming civility offered him his choice of whatever he thought fit to make his first appearance in; though in reality the favour was intended to hurt him. But Wilks rightly judged it more modest to accept only a part of Powel's, and which Mountfort had never acted, that of Palamede in Dryden's "Marriage Alamode." Here too he had the advantage of having the ball played into his hand by the inimitable Mrs Mountfort, who was then his Melantha in the same play. Whatever fame Wilks had brought with him from Ireland, he as yet appeared but a very raw actor, to what he was afterwards allowed to be. His faults however I shall rather leave to the judgments of those who then may remember him, than to take upon me the disagreeable office of being particular upon them, farther than by saying, that in this part of Palamede he was short of Powel, and missed a good deal of the loose humour of the character, which the other more happily hit. But however he was young, erect, of a pleasing aspect, and, in the whole, gave the town and the stage sufficient hopes of him. I ought to make some allowances too for the restraint he must naturally have been under from his first appearance upon a new stage. But from that he soon recovered, and grew daily more in favour not only of the town but likewise of the patentee, whom Powel before Wilks's arrival had treated in almost whatever manner he pleased.

Upon this visible success of Wilks, the pretended contempt which Powel had held him in began to sour into an open jealousy; he now plainly saw he was a formidable rival, and (which more hurt him) saw too that other people saw it; and therefore found it high time to oppose and be troublesome to him. But Wilks happening to be as jealous of his fame as the other, you may imagine such clashing candidates could not be long without a rupture. In short a challenge, I very well remember, came from Powel when he was hot-headed; but the next morning he was cool enough to let it end in favour of Wilks. Yet, however the magnanimity on either part might subside, the animosity was as deep in the heart as ever, though it was not afterwards so openly avowed. For when Powel found that intimidating would not carry his point, but that Wilks, when provoked, would really give battle, he (Powel) grew so out of humour, that he cocked his hat, and in his passion walked off to the service of the company in Lincoln's-inn-fields. But there, finding more competitors, and that he made a worse figure among them than in the company he came from, he stayed but one winter with them before he returned to his old quarters in Drury-lane; where, after these unsuccessful pushes of his ambition, he at last became a martyr to negligence, and quietly submitted to the advantages and superiority which (during his late desertion) Wilks had more easily got over him.

However trifling these theatrical anecdotes may seem to a sensible reader, yet as the different conduct of these rival actors may be of use to others of the same profession, and from thence may contribute to the pleasure of the public; let that be my excuse for pursuing them. I must therefore let it be known, that though in voice and ear nature had been more kind to Powel, yet he so often lost the value of them by an unheedful confidence, that the constant wakeful care and decency of Wilks left the other far behind in the public esteem and approbation. Nor was his memory less tenacious than that of Wilks; but Powel put too much trust in it, and idly deferred the studying of his parts, as schoolboys do their exercise, to the last day, which commonly brings them out proportionably defective. But Wilks never lost an hour of precious time, and was in all his parts perfect to such an exactitude, that I question if in forty years he ever five times changed or misplaced an article in any one of them. To be master of this uncommon diligence, is adding to the gift of nature all that is in an actor's power; and this duty of studying perfect, whatever actor is remiss in, he will proportionably find that nature may have been kind to him in vain; for though Powel had an assurance that covered this neglect much better than a man of more modesty might have done, yet with all his intrepidity very often the diffidence and concern for what he was to say, made him lose the look of what he was to be. While therefore Powel presided, his idle example made his fault so common to others, that I cannot but confess in the general infection I had my share of it; nor was my too critical excuse for it a good one, viz. that scarce one part in five that fell to my lot was worth the labour. But to show respect to an audience, is worth the best actor's labour; and his business considered, he must be a very impudent one, that comes before them with a conscious negligence of what he is about. But Wilks was never known to make any of these venial distinctions, nor, however barren his part might be, could bear even the self-reproach of favouring his memory. And I have been astonished to see him swallow a volume of froth and insipidity in a new play, that we were sure could not live above three days, though favoured and recommended to the stage by some good person of quality. Upon such occasions, in compassion to his fruitless toil and labour. I have sometimes cried out with Cato-- "painful preeminence"—so insupportable in my sense was the task, when the bare praise of not having been negligent was sure to be the only reward of it. But so indefatigable was the diligence of Wilks, that he seemed to love it, as a good man does virtue, for its own sake; of which the following instance will give you an extraordinary proof.

In some new comedy he happened to complain of a crabbed speech in his part, which he said gave him more trouble to study than all the rest of it had done; upon which he applied to the author, either to soften or shorten it. The author, that he might make the matter quite easy to him, fairly cut it all out. But when he got home from the rehearsal, Wilks thought it such an indignity to his memory, that any thing should be thought too hard for it, that he actually made himself perfect in that speech, though he knew it was never to be made use of. From this singular act of supererogation, you may judge how indefatigable the labour of his memory must have been, when his profit and honour were more concerned to make use of it.

But besides this indispensable quality of diligence, Wilks had the advantage of a sober character in private life, which Powel, not having the least regard to, laboured under the unhappy disfavour, not to say contempt, of the public, to whom his licentious courses were no secret. Even when he did well, that natural prejudice pursued him; neither the hero nor the gentleman, the young Ammon nor the Dorimant, could conceal from the conscious spectator the true George Powel. And this sort of disesteem or favour every actor will feel, and more or less have his share of, as he has or has not a due regard to his private life and reputation. Nay, even false reports shall affect him, and become the cause or pretence at least of undervaluing or treating him injuriously. Let me give a known instance of it, and at the same time a justification of myself from an imputation that was laid upon me many years before I quitted the theatre, of which you will see the consequence.

After the vast success of that new species of dramatic poetry, the "Beggar's Opera," the year following I was so stupid as to attempt something of the same kind upon a quite different foundation, that of recommending virtue and innocence; which I ignorantly thought might not have a less pretence to favour than setting greatness and authority in a contemptible, and the most vulgar vice and wickedness in an amiable, light. But behold how fondly I was mistaken! "Love in a Riddle" (for so my new-fangled performance was called) was as vilely damned and hooted at as so vain a presumption in the idle cause of virtue could deserve. Yet this is not what I complain of; I will allow my poetry to be as much below the other as taste or criticism can sink it: I will grant likewise that the applauded author of the Beggar's Opera (whom I knew to be an honest good-natured man, and who, when he had descended to write more like one in the cause of virtue, had been as unfortunate as others of that class); I will grant, I say, that in his Beggar's Opera he had more skilfully gratified the public taste than all the brightest authors that ever wrote before him; and I have sometimes thought, from the modesty of his motto, "*Nos hæc novimus esse nihil*," that he gave them that performance as a satire upon the depravity of their judgment (as Ben Jonson of old was said to give his "Bartholomew-Fair" in ridicule of the vulgar taste which had disliked his "Sejanus,") and that by artfully seducing them to be the champions of the immoralities he himself detested, he should be amply revenged on their former severity and ignorance. This were indeed a triumph which even the author of Cato might have envied; Cato, it is true, succeeded, but reached not by full forty days the progress and applause of the Beggar's Opera. Will it however admit of a question which of the two compositions a good writer would rather wish to have been the author of? Yet, on the other side, must we not allow, that to have taken a whole nation, high and low, into a general applause, has shown a power in poetry which, though often attempted in the same kind, none but this one author could ever yet arrive at. By what rule then are we to judge of our true national taste?—But to keep a little closer to my point.

The same author the next year had, according to the laws of the land, transported his hero to the West Indies, in a second part to the Beggar's Opera; but so it happened, to the surprise of the public, this second part was forbid to come upon the stage! Various were the speculations upon this act of power: some thought that the author, others that the town, was hardly dealt with; a third sort, who perhaps had envied him the success of his first part, affirmed, when it was printed, that whatever the intention might be, the fact was in his favour, that he had been a greater gainer by subscriptions to his copy, than he could have been by a bare theatrical presentation. Whether any part of these opinions were true, I am not concerned to determine or consider. But how they affected me I am going to tell you. Soon after this prohibition, my performance was to come upon the stage at a time when many people were out of humour at the late disappointment, and seemed willing to lay hold of any pretence of making a reprisal. Great umbrage was taken that I was permitted to have the whole town to myself, by this absolute forbiddance of what they had more mind to have been entertained with; and for some few days before my bauble was acted, I was informed that a strong party would be made against it. This report I slighted, as not conceiving why it should be true; and when I was afterwards told what was the pretended provocation of this party, I slighted it still more, as having less reason to suppose any persons could believe me capable (had I had the power) of giving such a provocation. The report it seems that had run against me was this: that, to make way for the success of my own play, I had privately found means, or made interest, that the second part of the Beggar's Opera might be suppressed. What an involuntary compliment did the reporters of this falsehood make me, to suppose me of consideration enough to influence a great officer of state to gratify the spleen or envy of a comedian, so far as to rob the public of an innocent diversion (if it were such) that none but that cunning comedian might be suffered to give it them! This is so very gross a supposition, that it needs only its own senseless face to confound it; let that alone then be my defence against it. But against blind malice and staring inhumanity, whatever is upon the stage has no defence. There they knew I stood helpless and exposed to whatever they might please to load or asperse me with. I had not considered, poor devil! that, from the security of a full pit, dunces might be critics, cowards valiant, and apprentices gentlemen! Whether any such were concerned in the murder of my play, I am not certain; for I never endeavoured to discover any one of its assassins; I cannot afford them a milder name, from their unmanly manner of destroying it. Had it been heard, they might have left me nothing to say to them. It is true it faintly held up its wounded head a second day, and would have spoke for mercy, but was not suffered. Not even the presence of a royal heir apparent could protect it. But then I was reduced to be serious with them; their clamour then became an insolence which I thought it my duty, by the sacrifice of any interest of my own, to put an end to. I therefore quitted the actor for the author, and stepping forward to the pit, told them, "That since I found they were not inclined that this play should go forward, I gave them my word that after this night it should never be acted again; but that in the mean time I hoped they would consider in whose presence they were, and for that reason at least would suspend what farther marks of their displeasure they might imagine I had deserved." At this there was a dead silence; and after some little pause a few civilized hands signified their approbation. When the play went on, I observed about a dozen persons of no extraordinary appearance sullenly walked out of the pit; after which every scene of it, while uninterrupted, met with more applause than my best hopes had expected. But it came too late: peace to its manes! I had given my word it should fall; and I kept it by giving out another play for the next day, though I knew the boxes were all let for the same again. Such then was the treatment I met with. How much of it the errors of the play might deserve, I refer to the judgment of those who may have curiosity and idle time enough to read it. But if I had no occasion to complain of the reception it met with from its quieted audience, sure it can be no great vanity to impute its disgraces chiefly to that severe resentment which a groundless report of me had inflamed. Yet those disgraces have left me something to boast of, an honour preferable even to the applause of my enemies. A noble lord came behind the scenes, and told me from the box where he was in waiting, "That what I said to quiet the audience was extremely well taken there; and that I had been commended for it in a very obliging manner." Now, though this was the only tumult that I have known to have been so effectually appeased these fifty years, by any thing that could be said to an audience in the same humour, I will not take any great merit to myself upon it; because when like me you will but humbly solicit to their doing you all the mischief they can, they will at any time be satisfied.

I have mentioned this particular fact, to enforce what I before observed, "that the private character of an actor will always more or less affect his public performance." And if I suffered so much from the bare suspicion of my having been guilty of a base action, what should not an actor expect that is hardy enough to think his whole private character of no consequence? I could offer many more, though less severe, instances of the same nature. I have seen the most tender sentiment of love in tragedy create laughter instead of compassion, when it has been applicable to the real engagements of the person that uttered it. I have known good parts thrown up from an humble consciousness that something in them might put an audience in mind of —— what it was rather wished might be forgotten. Those remarkable words of Evadne in the Maid's Tragedy—"a maiden-head, Amintor, at my years?"—have sometimes been a much stronger jest for being a true one. But these are reproaches which in all nations the theatres must have been used to, unless we could suppose actors something more than human creatures, void of faults or frailties. It is a misfortune at least not limited to the

English stage. I have seen the better bred audience in Paris made merry even with a modest expression, when it has come from the mouth of an actress whose private character it seemed not to belong to. The apprehension of these kind of fleers from the witlings of a pit has been carried so far in our own country, that a late valuable actress (who was conscious her beauty was not her greatest merit) desired the warmth of some lines might be abated, when they have made her too remarkably handsome. But in this discretion she was alone: few others were afraid of undeserving the finest things that could be said to them. But to consider this matter seriously; I cannot but think at a play a sensible auditor would contribute all he could to his being well deceived, and not suffer his imagination so far to wander from the well-acted character before him, as to gratify a frivolous spleen by mocks or personal sneers on the performer, at the expense of his better entertainment. But I must now take up Wilks and Powel again where I left them.

Though the contention for superiority between them seemed about this time to end in favour of the former, yet the distress of the patentee (in having his servant his master, as Powel had lately been) was not much relieved by the victory; he had only changed the man, but not the malady. For Wilks, by being in possession of so many good parts, fell into the common error of most actors, that of overrating their merit, or never thinking it is so thoroughly considered as it ought to be; which generally makes them proportionably troublesome to the master, who, they might consider, only pays them to profit by them. The patentee therefore found it as difficult to satisfy the continual demands of Wilks, as it was dangerous to refuse them; very few were made that were not granted, and as few were granted as were not grudged him. Not but our good master was as sly a tyrant as ever was at the head of a theatre; for he gave the actors more liberty and fewer days' pay than any of his predecessors. He would laugh with them over a bottle, and bite them in their bargains. He kept them poor, that they might not be able to rebel; and sometimes merry, that they might not think of it. All their articles of agreement had a clause in them that he was sure to creep out at, viz. their respective salaries were to be paid in such manner and proportion as others of the same company were paid; which in effect made them all when he pleased but limited sharers of loss, and himself sole proprietor of profits; and this loss or profit they only had such verbal accounts of as he thought proper to give them. It is true, he would sometimes advance them money (but not more than he knew at most could be due to them) upon their bonds; upon which, whenever they were mutinous, he would threaten to sue them. This was the net we danced in for several years. But no wonder we were dupes, while our master was a lawyer. This grievance however Wilks was resolved for himself at least to remedy at any rate, and grew daily more intractable, for every day his redress was delayed. Here our master found himself under a difficulty he knew not well how to get out of. For as he was a close subtle man, he seldom made use of a confidant in his schemes of government. But here the old expedient of delay would stand him in no longer stead; Wilks must instantly be complied with, or Powel come again into power. In a word, he was pushed so home that he was reduced even to take my opinion into his assistance: for he knew I was a rival to neither of them; perhaps too he had fancied that, from the success of my first play, I might know as much of the stage, and what made an actor valuable, as either of them. He saw too that, though they had each of them five good parts to my one, yet the applause which in my few I had met with, was given me by better judges than as yet had approved of the best they had done. They generally measured the goodness of a part by the quantity or length of it: I thought none bad for being short, that were closely natural; nor any the better for being long, without that valuable quality. But in this, I doubt, as to their interest, they judged better than myself; for I have generally observed, that those who do a great deal not ill, have been preferred to those who do but little, though ever so masterly. And therefore I allow, that while there were so few good parts, and as few good judges of them, it ought to have been no wonder to me, that as an actor I was less valued by the master or the common people, than either of them. All the advantage I had of them was, that by not being troublesome I had more of our master's personal inclination than any actor of the male sex; and so much of it, that I was almost the only one whom at that time he used to take into his parties of pleasure; very often *tête à tête*, and sometimes in a *partie quarrée*. These then were the qualifications, however good or bad, to which may be imputed our master's having made choice of me to assist him in the difficulty under which he now laboured. He was himself sometimes inclined to set up Powel again as a check upon the overbearing temper of Wilks. Though, to say truth, he liked neither of them, but was still under a necessity that one of them should preside; though he scarce knew which of the two evils to choose. This question, when I happened to be alone with him, was often debated in our evening conversation; nor indeed did I find it an easy matter to know which party I ought to recommend to his election. I knew they were neither of them well-wishers to me, as in common they were enemies to most actors in proportion to the merit that seemed to be rising in them. But as I had the prosperity of the stage more at heart than any other consideration, I could not be long undetermined in my opinion, and therefore gave it to our master at once in favour of Wilks. I, with all the force I could muster, insisted, "That if Powel were preferred, the ill example of his negligence and abandoned character (whatever his merit on the stage might be) would reduce our company to contempt and beggary; observing, at the same time, in how much better order our affairs went forward since Wilks came among us, of which I recounted several instances that are not so necessary to tire my reader with. All this though he allowed to be true, yet Powel, he said, was a better actor than Wilks, when he minded his business, (that is to say, when he was—what he seldom was—sober.) But Powel, it seems, had a still greater merit to him, which was (as he observed) that when affairs were in his hands, he had kept the actors quiet without one day's pay for six weeks together, and it was not every body could do that; "for you see," said he, "Wilks will never be easy unless I give him the whole pay when others have it not; and what an injustice would that be to the rest, if I were to comply with him? How do I know but then they may be all in a mutiny, and mayhap (that was his expression) with Powel at the head of them!" By this specimen of our debate, it may be judged under how particular and merry a government the theatre then laboured. To conclude, this matter ended in a resolution to sign a new agreement with Wilks, which entitled him to his full pay of four pounds a week without any conditional deductions. How far soever my advice might have contributed to our master's settling his affairs upon this foot, I never durst make the least merit of it to Wilks, well knowing that his great heart would have taken it as a mortal affront, had I (though never so distantly) hinted, that his demands had needed any assistance but the justice of them. From this time then Wilks became first minister or bustle-master-general of the company. He now seemed to take new delight in keeping the actors close to their business, and got every play revived with care, in which he had acted the chief part in Dublin. It is true, this might be done with a particular view of setting off himself to advantage; but if at the same time it served the company, he ought not to want our commendation. Now, though my own conduct neither had the appearance of his merit, nor the reward that followed his industry, I cannot help observing, that it showed me to the best of my power a more cordial commonwealth's man. His first views, in serving himself, made his service to the whole but an incidental merit; whereas, by my prosecuting the means to make him easy in his pay, unknown to him, or without asking any favour for myself at the same time, I gave a more unquestionable proof of my preferring the public to my private interest. From the same principle, I never murmured at whatever little parts fell to my share; and though I knew it would not recommend me to the favour of the common people, I often submitted to play wicked characters, rather than they should be worse done by weaker actors than myself. But perhaps in all this patience under my situation, I supported my spirits by a conscious vanity; for I fancied I had more reason to value myself upon being sometimes the confidant and companion of our master, than Wilks had in all the more public favours he had extorted from him. I imagined too there was sometimes as much skill to be shown in a short part as in the most voluminous, which he generally made choice of; that even the coxcombly follies of a sir John Daw might as well distinguish the capacity of an actor, as all the dry enterprises and busy conduct of a Truewit. Nor could I have any reason to repine at the superiority he enjoyed, when I considered at how dear a rate it was purchased, at the continual expense of a restless jealousy and fretful impatience. These were the passions that in the height of his successes kept him lean to his last hour, while what I wanted in rank or glory was amply made up to me in ease and cheerfulness. But let not this observation either lessen his merit or lift up my own; since our different tempers were not in our choice, but equally natural to both of us. To be employed on the stage was the delight of his life; to be justly excused from it was the joy of mine: I loved ease, and he preeminence: in that he might be more commendable. Though he often disturbed me, he seldom could do it without more disordering himself. In our disputes, his warmth could less bear truth, than I could support manifest injuries. He would hazard our undoing, to gratify his passions, though otherwise an honest man; and I rather chose to give up my reason or not see my wrong, than ruin our community by an equal rashness. By this opposite conduct, our accounts at the end of our labours stood thus: while he lived he was the elder man: when he died, he was not so old as I am. He never left the stage till he left the world; I never so well enjoyed the world as when I left the stage. He died in possession of his wishes; and I, by having had a less choleric ambition, am still tasting mine in health and liberty. But as he in a great measure wore out the organs of life in his incessant labours to gratify the public, the many he gave pleasure to will always owe his memory a favourable report. Some facts that will vouch for the truth of this account will be found in the sequel of these memoirs. If I have spoke with more freedom of his quondam competitor Powel, let my good intentions to future actors, in showing what will so much concern them to avoid, be my excuse for it: for though Powel had from nature much more than Wilks—in voice and ear, in elocution in tragedy, and humour in comedy, greatly the advantage of him; yet, as I have observed, from the neglect and abuse of those valuable gifts, he suffered Wilks to be of thrice the service to our society. Let me give another instance of the reward and favour which in a theatre diligence and sobriety seldom fail of. Mills the elder grew into the friendship of Wilks, with not a great deal more than those useful qualities to recommend him. He was an honest, quiet, careful man, of as few faults as excellencies; and Wilks rather chose him for his second in many plays, than an actor of perhaps greater skill that was not so laboriously diligent. And from this constant assiduity, Mills, with making to himself a friend in Wilks, was advanced to a larger salary than any man-actor had enjoyed during my time on the stage. I have yet to offer a more happy recommendation of temperance, which a late celebrated actor was warned into by the misconduct of Powel. About the year that Wilks returned from Dublin, Booth, who had commenced actor upon that theatre, came over to the company in Lincoln's-inn-fields. He was then but an under-graduate of the buskin, and, as he told me himself, had been for some time too frank a lover of the bottle; but having had the happiness to observe into what contempt and distresses Powel had plunged himself by the same vice, he was so struck with terror of his example, that he fixed a resolution (which from that time to the end of his days he strictly observed) of utterly reforming it; an uncommon act of philosophy in a young man, of which in his fame and fortune he afterwards enjoyed the reward and benefit. These observations I have not merely thrown together as a moralist, but to prove that the briskest loose liver or intemperate man (though morality were out of the question) can never arrive at the necessary excellencies of a good or useful actor.

CHAPTER VIII.

The patentee of Drury-lane wiser than his actors.—His particular management.—The author continues to write plays.—Why.—The best dramatic poets censured by Jeremy Collier in his "Short View of the Stage."—It has a good effect.—The master of the revels from that time cautious in his licensing new plays.—A complaint against him.—His authority founded upon custom only.—The late law for fixing that authority in a proper person considered.

Though the master of our theatre had no conception himself of theatrical merit, either in authors or actors, yet his judgment was governed by a saving rule in both: he looked into his receipts for the value of a play, and from common fame he judged of his actors. But by whatever rule he was governed, while he had prudently reserved to himself a power of not paying them more than their merit could get, he could not be much deceived by their being over or undervalued. In a word, he had with great skill inverted the constitution of the stage, and quite changed the channel of profits arising from it. Formerly (when there was but one company) the proprietors punctually paid the actors their appointed salaries, and took to themselves only the clear profits: but our wiser proprietor took first out of every day's receipts two shillings in the pound to himself; and left their salaries to be paid only as the less or greater deficiencies of acting (according to his own accounts) would permit. What seemed most extraordinary in these measures was, that at the same time he persuaded us to be contented with our condition, upon his assuring us that as fast as money would come in we should all be paid our arrears: and that we might not have it always in our power to say he had never intended to keep his word, I remember, in a few years after this time, he once paid us nine days in one week: this happened when the "Funeral" or "Grief à la Mode" was first acted with more than expected success. Whether this well timed bounty was only allowed us to save appearances, I will not say; but if that was his real motive for it, it was too costly a frolic to be repeated, and was at least the only grimace of its kind he vouchsafed us; we never having received one day more of those arrears in above fifteen years' service.

While the actors were in this condition, I think I may very well be excused in my presuming to write plays; which I was forced to do for the support of my increasing family, my precarious income as an actor being then too scanty to supply it with even the necessaries of life.

It may be observable too, that my muse and my spouse were equally prolific; that the one was seldom the mother of a child, but in the same year the other made me the father of a play. I think we had a dozen of each sort between us; of both which kinds some died in their infancy, and near an equal number of each were alive when I quitted the theatre. But it is no wonder, when a muse is only called upon by family duty, she should not always rejoice in the fruit of her labour. To this necessity of writing then I attribute the defects of my second play, which, coming out too hastily, the year after my first, turned to very little account. But having got as much by my first as I ought to have expected from the success of them both, I had no great reason to complain: not but I confess so bad was my second, that I do not choose to tell you the name of it; and that it might be peaceably forgotten, I have not given it a place in the two volumes of those I published in quarto in the year 1721. And whenever I took upon me to make some dormant play of an old author, to the best of my judgment, fitter for the stage, it was, honestly, not to be idle, that set me to work; as a good housewife will mend old linen when she has not better employment. But when I was more warmly engaged by a subject, entirely new, I only thought it a good subject when it seemed worthy of an abler pen than my own, and might prove as useful to the hearer as profitable to myself: therefore, whatever any of my productions might want of skill, learning, wit, or humour, or however unqualified I might be to instruct others, who so ill governed myself, yet such plays (entirely my own) were not wanting at least in what our most admired writers seemed to neglect, and without which I cannot allow the most taking play to be intrinsically good, or to be a work upon which a man of sense and probity should value himself: I mean when they do not as well *prodesse* as *delectare*, give profit with delight. The *utile dulci* was of old equally the point, and has always been my aim, however wide of the mark I may have shot my arrow. It has often given me amazement, that our best authors of that time could think the wit and spirit of their scenes could be an excuse for making the looseness of them public. The many instances of their talents so abused are too glaring to need a closer comment, and are sometimes too gross to be recited. If then to have avoided this imputation, or rather to have had the interest and honour of virtue always in view, can give merit to a play, I am contented that my readers should think such merit the all that mine have to boast of. Libertines of mere wit and pleasure, may laugh at these grave laws that would limit a lively genius: but every sensible, honest man, conscious of their truth and use, will give these ralliers smile for smile, and show a due contempt for their merriment.

But while our authors took these extraordinary liberties with their wit, I remember the ladies were then observed to be decently afraid of venturing bare-faced to a new comedy, until they had been assured they might do it without the risk of an insult to their modesty; or if their curiosity were too strong for their patience, they took care at least to save appearances, and rarely came upon the first days of acting but in masks (then daily worn and admitted in the pit, the side boxes, and gallery;) which custom however had so many ill consequences attending it, that it has been abolished these many years.

These immoralities of the stage had by an avowed indulgence been creeping into it ever since king Charles's time; nothing that was loose could then be too low for it: the "London Cuckolds," the most rank play that ever succeeded, was then in the highest court-favour. In this almost general corruption Dryden, whose plays were more famed for their wit than their chastity, led the way, which he fairly confesses and endeavours to excuse in his epilogue to the "Pilgrim," revived in 1700 for his benefit in his declining age and fortune. The following lines of it will make good my observation.

> Perhaps the parson stretch'd a point too far,
> When with our theatres he waged a war.
> He tells you that this very moral age
> Receiv'd the first infection from the stage;
> But sure a banish'd court, with lewdness fraught,
> The seeds of open vice returning brought.
> Thus lodg'd (as vice by great example thrives)
> It first debauch'd the daughters and the wives
> London, a fruitful soil, yet never bore
> So plentiful a crop of horns before.

The poets, who must live by courts or starve,
Were proud so good a government to serve;
And mixing with buffoons and pimps profane,
Tainted the stage for some small snip of gain.
For they, like harlots under bawds profess'd,
Took all th'ungodly pains, and got the least.
Thus did the thriving malady prevail,
The court its head, the poets but the tail.
The sin was of our native growth, 'tis true;
The scandal of the sin was wholly new.
Misses there were, but modestly conceal'd;
Whitehall the naked Venus first reveal'd,
Where, standing as at Cyprus in her shrine,
The strumpet was ador'd with rites divine, &c.

This epilogue, and the prologue to the same play, written by Dryden, I spoke myself; which not being usually done by the same person, I have a mind, while I think of it, to let you know on what occasion they both fell to my share, and how other actors were affected by it.

Sir John Vanbrugh, who had given some light touches of his pen to the "Pilgrim," to assist the benefit day of Dryden, had the disposal of the parts; and I being then as an actor in some favour with him, he read the play first with me alone, and was pleased to offer me my choice of what I might like best for myself in it. But as the chief characters were not (according to my taste) the most shining, it was no great self-denial in me, that I desired he would first take care of those who were more difficult to be pleased; I therefore only chose for myself two short incidental parts, that of the stuttering cook and the mad Englishman; in which homely characters I saw more matter for delight than in those that might have a better pretence to the amiable: and when the play came to be acted, I was not deceived in my choice. Sir John, upon my being contented with so little a share in the entertainment, gave me the epilogue to make up my mess; which being written so much above the strain of common authors, I confess I was not a little pleased with. And Dryden, upon his hearing me repeat it to him, made me a farther compliment of trusting me with the prologue.

This so particular distinction was looked upon by the actors as something too extraordinary. But no one was so impatiently ruffled at it as Wilks, who seldom chose soft words when he spoke of any thing he did not like. The most gentle thing he said of it was, that he did not understand such treatment; that for his part he looked upon it as an affront to all the rest of the company, that there should be but one out of the whole judged fit to speak either a prologue or an epilogue. To quiet him, I offered to decline either in his favour, or both, if it were equally easy to the author: but he was too much concerned to accept of an offer that had been made to another in preference to himself, and which he seemed to think his best way of resenting was to contemn. But from that time, however, he was resolved to the best of his power never to let the first offer of a prologue escape him: which little ambition sometimes made him pay too dear for his success: the flatness of the many miserable prologues that by this means fell to his lot, seemed wofully unequal to the few good ones he might have reason to triumph in.

I have given you this fact only as a sample of those frequent rubs and impediments I met with, when any step was made to my being distinguished as an actor; and from this incident too you may partly see what occasioned so many prologues, after the death of Betterton, to fall into the hands of one speaker. But it is not every successor to a vacant post, that brings into it the talents equal to those of a predecessor. To speak a good prologue well, is in my opinion one of the hardest parts and strongest proofs of sound elocution, of which, I confess I never thought that any of the several who attempted it showed themselves, by far, equal masters to Betterton. Betterton in the delivery of a good prologue had a natural gravity that gave strength to good sense; a tempered spirit, that gave life to wit; and a dry reserve in his smile, that threw ridicule into its brightest colours. Of these qualities in the speaking of a prologue, Booth only had the first, but attained not to the other two; Wilks had spirit, but gave too loose a rein to it, and it was seldom he could speak a grave and weighty verse harmoniously: his accents were frequently too sharp and violent, which sometimes occasioned his eagerly cutting off half the sound of syllables that ought to have been gently melted into the melody of metre: in verses of humour too he would sometimes carry the mimickry farther than the hint would bear, even to a trifling light, as if himself were pleased to see it so glittering. In the truth of this criticism I have been confirmed by those whose judgment I dare more confidently rely on than my own. Wilks had many excellencies; but if we leave prologue-speaking out of the number, he will still have enough to have made him a valuable actor. And I only make this exception from them, to caution others from imitating what in his time they might have too implicitly admired.—But I have a word or two more to say concerning the immoralities of the stage. Our theatrical writers were not only accused of immorality, but profaneness; many flagrant instances of which were collected and published by a non-juring clergyman, Jeremy Collier, in his "View of the Stage," &c. about the year 1697. However just his charge against the authors that then wrote for it might be, I cannot but think his sentence against the stage itself is unequal; reformation he thinks too mild a treatment for it, and is therefore for laying his axe to the root of it. If this were to be a rule of judgment for offences of the same nature, what might become of the pulpit, where many a seditious and corrupted teacher has been known to cover the most pernicious doctrine with the mask of religion? This puts me in mind of what the noted Jo. Hayns the comedian, a fellow of a wicked wit, said upon this occasion; who being asked what could transport Mr Collier into so blind a zeal for a general suppression of the stage, when only some particular authors had abused it; whereas the stage, he could not but know, was generally allowed, when rightly conducted, to be a delightful method of mending our morals? "For that reason," replied Hayns: "Collier is by profession a moral-mender himself; and two of a trade you know can never agree."

The authors of the "Old Bachelor," and of the "Relapse," were those whom Collier most laboured to convict of immorality; to which they severally published their reply: the first seemed too much hurt to be able to defend himself, and the other felt him so little, that his wit only laughed at his lashes.

My first play of the "Fool in Fashion," too, being then in a course of success perhaps for that reason only this severe author thought himself obliged to attack it; in which I hope he has shown more zeal than justice. His greatest charge against it is, that it sometimes uses the word "faith!" as an oath in the dialogue: but if "faith" may as well signify our given word or credit as our religious belief, why might not his charity have taken it in the less criminal sense? Nevertheless, Mr Collier's book was upon the whole thought so laudable a work, that king William, soon after it was published, granted him a *nolo prosequi*, when he stood answerable to the law for his having absolved two criminals just before they were executed for high treason. And it must be farther granted, that his calling our dramatic writers to this strict account had a very wholesome effect upon those who wrote after this time. They were now a great deal more upon their guard; indecencies were no longer wit; and by degrees the fair sex came again to fill the boxes on the first day of a new comedy without fear or censure. But the master of the revels, who then licensed all plays for the stage, assisted this reformation with a more zealous severity than ever: he would strike out whole scenes of a vicious or immoral character, though it were visibly shown to be reformed or punished. A severe instance of this kind falling upon myself, may be an excuse for my relating it: when Richard III (as I altered it from Shakspeare) came from his hands to the stage, he expunged the whole first act without sparing a line of it. This extraordinary stroke of a *sic volo* occasioned my applying to him for the small indulgence of a speech or two, that the other four acts might limp on with a little less absurdity. No! he had not leisure to consider what might be separately inoffensive. He had an objection to the whole act; and the reason he gave for it was, that the distresses of king Henry VI, who is killed by Richard in the first act, would put weak people too much in mind of king James then living in France; a notable proof of his zeal for the government! Those who have read either the play or the history, I dare say will think he strained hard for the parallel. In a word, we were forced for some few years to let the play take its fate, with only four acts divided into five; by the loss of so considerable a limb, may one not modestly suppose it was robbed of at least a fifth part of that favour it afterwards met with? For though this first act was at last recovered, and made the play whole again, yet the relief came too late to repay me for the pains I had taken in it. Nor did I ever hear that this zealous severity of the master of the revels was afterwards thought justifiable. But my good fortune in process of time gave me an opportunity to talk with my oppressor in my turn.

The patent granted by his majesty king George I to sir Richard Steele and his assigns, of which I was one, made us sole judges of what plays might be proper for the stage, without submitting them to the approbation or license of any other particular person. Notwithstanding which, the master of the revels demanded his fee of forty shillings upon our acting a new one, though we had spared him the trouble of perusing it. This occasioned my being deputed to him to inquire into the right of his demand, and to make an amicable end of our dispute. I confess I did not dislike the office, and told him, according to my instructions, that I came not to defend even our own right in prejudice to his; that if our patent had inadvertently superseded the grant of any former power or warrant whereon he might ground his pretensions, we would not insist upon our broad seal, but would readily answer his demands, upon sight of such his warrant, any thing in our patent to the contrary notwithstanding. This I had reason to think he could not do; and when I found he made no direct reply to my question, I repeated it with greater civilities and offers of compliance, until I was forced in the end to conclude with telling him, that as his pretensions were not backed with any visible instrument of right, and as his strongest plea was custom, we could not so far extend our complaisance as to continue his fees upon so slender a claim to them. And from that time neither our plays nor his fees gave either of us any farther trouble. In this negotiation I am the bolder to think justice was on our side, because the law lately passed, by which the power of licensing plays, &c. is given to a proper person, is a strong presumption that no law had ever given that power to any such person before.

My having mentioned this law, which so immediately affected the stage, inclines me to throw out a few observations upon it. But I must first lead you gradually through the facts and natural causes that made such a law necessary.

Although it had been taken for granted from time immemorial, that no company of comedians could act plays, &c. without the royal license, or protection of some legal authority; a theatre was, notwithstanding, erected in Goodman's-fields about seven years ago, where plays without any such license were acted for some time unmolested and with impunity. After a year or two, this playhouse was thought a nuisance too near the city; upon which the lord-mayor and aldermen petitioned the crown to suppress it. What steps were taken in favour of that petition, I know not; but common fame seemed to allow, from what had or had not been done in it, that acting plays in the said theatre was not evidently unlawful. However, this question of acting without a license, a little time after, came to a nearer decision in Westminster-hall. The occasion of bringing it thither was this. It happened that the purchasers of the patent to whom Mr Booth and myself had sold our shares, were at variance with the comedians that were then left to their government; and the variance ended in the chief of those comedians deserting, and setting up for themselves in the little house in the Haymarket in 1733; by which desertion the patentees were very much distressed and considerable losers. Their affairs being in this desperate condition, they were advised to put the act of the twelfth of queen Anne against vagabonds in force against these deserters, then acting in the Haymarket without license. Accordingly one of their chief performers was taken from the stage by a justice of peace's warrant, and committed to bridewell as one within the penalty of the said act. When the legality of this commitment was disputed in Westminster-hall, by all I could observe from the learned pleadings on both sides, (for I had the curiosity to hear them,) it did not appear to me that the comedian so committed was within the description of the said act, he being a housekeeper and having a vote for the Westminster members of parliament. He was discharged accordingly, and conducted through the hall with the congratulations of the crowds that attended and wished well to his cause.

The issue of this trial threw me at that time into a very odd reflection, viz. that if acting plays without license did not make the performers vagabonds, unless they wandered from their habitations so to do, how particular was the case of us three late managing actors at the theatre-royal, who in twenty years before had paid upon an average at least twenty thousand pounds, to be protected (as actors) from a law that has not since appeared to be against us. Now whether we might certainly have acted without any license at all, I shall not pretend to determine; but this I have of my own knowledge to say, "that in queen Anne's reign the stage was in such confusion, and its affairs in such distress, that sir John Vanbrugh and Mr Congreve, after they had held it about one year, threw up the management of it as an unprofitable post; after which a license for acting was not thought worth any gentleman's asking for, and almost seemed to go a begging, until some time after, by the care, application, and industry of three actors, it became so prosperous, and the profits so considerable, that it created a new place, and a sinecure of a thousand pounds a year, which the labour of those actors constantly paid to such persons as had from time to time merit or interest enough to get their names inserted as fourth managers in a license with them for acting plays, &c.—a preferment that many a sir Francis Wronghead would have jumped at. But to go on with my story. This endeavour of the patentees to suppress the comedians acting in the Haymarket proving ineffectual, and no hopes of a reunion then appearing, the remains of the company left in Drury-lane were reduced to a very low condition. At this time a third purchaser, Charles Fleetwood, esq. stept in; who, judging the best time to buy was when the stock was at the lowest price, struck up a bargain at once for five parts in six of the patent; and at the same time gave the revolted comedians their own terms to return and come under his government in Drury-lane, where they now continue to act at very ample salaries, as I am informed, in 1738. But, as I have observed, the late cause of the prosecuted comedian having gone so strongly in his favour, and the house in Goodman's-fields too continuing to act with as little authority unmolested,—these so tolerated companies gave encouragement to a broken wit to collect a fourth company, who for some time acted plays in the Haymarket, which house the united Drury-lane comedians had lately quitted. This enterprising person I say, (whom I do not choose to name, unless it could be to his advantage, or that it were of importance,) had sense enough to know that the best plays with bad actors would turn but to a very poor account; and therefore found it necessary to give the public some pieces of an extraordinary kind, the poetry of which he conceived ought to be so strong that the greatest dunce of an actor could not spoil it. He knew too, that as he was in haste to get money, it would take up less time to be intrepidly abusive than decently entertaining; that to draw the mob after him, he must rake the channel and pelt their superiors; that to show himself somebody, he must come up to Juvenal's advice, and stand the consequence:—

> Aude aliquid brevibus Gyaris, et carcere dignum
> Si vis esse aliquis ——— Juv. *Sat.* i.

Such then was the mettlesome modesty he set out with; upon this principle he produced several frank and free farces, that seemed to knock all distinctions of mankind on the head. Religion, laws, government, priests, judges, and ministers, were all laid flat at the feet of this Herculean satirist, this drawcansir in wit, that spared neither friend nor foe; who, to make his poetical fame immortal, like another Erostratus, set fire to his stage, by writing up to an act of parliament to demolish it. I shall not give the particular strokes of his ingenuity a chance to be remembered by reciting them; it may be enough to say in general terms, they were so openly flagrant, that the wisdom of the legislature thought it high time to take a proper notice of them.

Having now shown by what means there came to be four theatres, besides a fifth for operas, in London, all open at the same time; and that while they were so numerous, it was evident that some of them must have starved, unless they fed upon the trash and filth of buffoonery and licentiousness; I now come, as I promised, to speak of that necessary law which has reduced their number, and prevents the repetition of such abuses in those that remain open for the public recreation.

While this law was in debate, a lively spirit and uncommon eloquence was employed against it. It was urged, that one of the greatest goods we can enjoy, is liberty. (This we may grant to be an incontestable truth, without its being the least objection to this law.) It was said too, that to bring the stage under the restraint of a licenser, was leading the way to an attack upon the liberty of the press. This amounts but to a jealousy at best, which I hope and believe all honest Englishmen have as much reason to think a groundless, as to fear it is a just jealousy: for the stage and the press, I shall endeavour to show, are very different weapons to wound with. If a great man could be no more injured by being personally ridiculed, or made contemptible in a play, than by the same matter only printed, and read against him in a pamphlet or the strongest verse, then indeed the stage and the press might pretend to be upon an equal foot of liberty: but when the wide difference between these two liberties comes to be explained and considered, I dare say we shall find the injuries from one capable of being ten times more severe and formidable than from the other. Let us see, at least, if the case will not be vastly altered. Read what Mr Collier, in his defence of his Short "View of the Stage," &c. page 25, says to this point. He sets this difference in a clear light: these are his words:

"The satire of a comedian and another poet have a different effect upon reputation: a character of disadvantage upon the stage makes a stronger impression than elsewhere: reading is but hearing at second-hand; now hearing at best is a more languid conveyance than sight. For, as Horace observes,

> Segnius irritant animum demissa per aurem,
> Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus.

The eye is much more affecting and strikes deeper into the memory than the ear. Besides, upon the stage both the senses are in conjunction. The life of the actor fortifies the object, and awakens the mind to take hold of it. Thus a dramatic abuse is rivetted in the audience, a jest is improved into argument, and rallying grows up into reason. Thus a character of scandal becomes almost indelible; a man goes for a blockhead upon content; and he that is made a fool in a play, is often made one for his life. 'Tis true, he passes for such only among the prejudiced and unthinking; but these are no inconsiderable division of mankind. For these reasons, I humbly conceive the stage stands in need of a great deal of discipline and restraint. To give them an unlimited range is in effect to make them masters of all moral distinctions, and to lay honour and religion at their mercy. To show greatness ridiculous is the way to lose the use and abate the value of the quality. Things made little in jest, will soon be so in earnest; for laughing and esteem are seldom bestowed on the same object."

If this was truth and reason (as sure it was) forty years ago, will it not carry the same conviction with it to these days, when there came to be a much stronger call for a reformation of the stage, than when this author wrote against it, or perhaps than was ever known since the English stage had a being? And now let us ask another question: does not the general opinion of mankind suppose that the honour and reputation of a minister is, or ought to be, as dear to him as his life? Yet when the law in queen Anne's time had made even an unsuccessful attempt upon the life of a minister capital, could any reason be found that the fame and honour of his character should not be under equal protection? Was the wound that Guiscard gave to the late lord Oxford, when a minister, a greater injury than the theatrical insult which was offered to a later minister in a more valuable part, his character? Was it not as high time then to take this dangerous weapon of mimical insolence and defamation out of the hands of a mad poet, as to wrest the knife from the lifted hand of a murderer? And is not that law of a milder nature which prevents a crime, than that which punishes it after it is committed? May not one think it amazing, that the liberty of defaming lawful power and dignity should have been so eloquently contended for; or especially, that this liberty ought to triumph in a theatre, where the most able, the most innocent, and most upright person must himself be, while the wound is given, defenceless? How long must a man so injured lie bleeding before the pain and anguish of his fame (if he suffers wrongfully) can be dispelled? Or say he had deserved reproof and public accusation, yet the weight and greatness of his office never can deserve it from a public stage, where the lowest malice by saucy parallels and abusive inuendoes may do every thing but name him. But, alas! liberty is so tender, so chaste a virgin that, it seems, not to suffer her to do irreparable injuries with impunity, is a violation of her! It cannot sure be a principle of liberty that would turn the stage into a court of inquiry; that would let the partial applauses of a vulgar audience give sentence upon the conduct of authority, and put impeachments into the mouth of a harlequin? Will not every impartial man think that malice, envy, faction, and misrule, might have too much advantage over lawful power, if the range of such a stage liberty were unlimited, and insisted on to be enrolled among the glorious rights of an English subject?

I remember much such another ancient liberty which many of the good people of England were once extremely fond of; I mean that of throwing squibs and crackers at all spectators without distinction upon a lord-mayor's day; but about forty years ago a certain nobleman happening to have one of his eyes burnt out by this mischievous merriment, it occasioned a penal law to prevent those sorts of jests from being laughed at for the future. Yet I have never heard that the most zealous patriot ever thought such a law was the least restraint upon our liberty.

If I am asked, why I am so voluntary a champion for the honour of this law that has limited the number of playhouses, and which now can no longer concern me as a professor of the stage; I reply, that it being a law so nearly relating to the theatre, it seems not at all foreign to my history to have taken notice of it; and as I have farther promised to give the public a true portrait of my mind, I ought fairly to let them see how far I am or am not a blockhead, when I pretend to talk of serious matters that may be judged so far above my capacity: nor will it in the least discompose me whether my observations are contemned or applauded. A blockhead is not always an unhappy fellow; and if the world will not flatter us, we can flatter ourselves; perhaps too it will be as difficult to convince us we are in the wrong, as that you wiser gentlemen are one tittle the better for your knowledge. It is yet a question with me, whether we weak heads have not as much pleasure too, in giving our shallow reason a little exercise, as those clearer brains have that are allowed to dive into the deepest doubts and mysteries. To reflect or form a judgment upon remarkable things past, is as delightful to me as it is to the gravest politician to penetrate into what is present, or to enter into speculations upon what is or is not likely to come. Why are histories written, if all men are not to judge of them? Therefore, if my reader has no more to do than I have, I have a chance for his being as willing to have a little more upon the same subject as I am to give it him.

When direct arguments against this bill were found too weak, recourse was had to dissuasive ones. It was said, that this restraint upon the stage would not remedy the evil complained of. That a play refused to be licensed, would still be printed with double advantage, when it should be insinuated that it was refused for some strokes of wit, &c. and would be more likely then to have its effect among the people. However natural this consequence may seem, I doubt it will be very difficult to give a printed satire or libel half the force or credit of an acted one. The most artful or notorious lie, or strained allusion, that ever slandered a great man, may be read by some people with a smile of contempt, or at worst it can impose but on one person at once: but when the words of the same plausible stuff shall be repeated on a theatre, the wit of it among a crowd of hearers is liable to be over-valued, and may unite and warm a whole body of the malicious or ignorant into a plaudit; nay, the partial claps of only twenty ill-minded persons among several hundreds of silent hearers, shall and often have been mistaken for a general approbation, and frequently draw into their party the indifferent or inapprehensive, who, rather than be thought not to understand the conceit, will laugh with the laughers, and join in the triumph! But alas! the quiet reader of the same ingenious matter can only like for himself; and the poison has a much slower operation upon the body of a people, when it is so retailed out, than when sold to a full audience by wholesale. The single reader too may happen to be a sensible or unprejudiced person; and then the merry dose, meeting with the antidote of a sound judgment, perhaps may have no operation at all. With such a one, the wit of the most ingenious satire will only by its intrinsic truth or value gain upon his approbation; or if it be worth an answer, a printed falsehood may possibly be confounded by printed proofs against it. But against contempt and scandal, heightened and coloured by the skill of an actor ludicrously infusing it into a multitude, there is no immediate defence to be made, or equal reparation to be had for it; for it would be but a poor satisfaction at last, after lying long patient under the injury, that time only is to show (which would probably be the case) that the author of it was a desperate indigent that did it for bread. How much less dangerous or offensive then is the written than the acted scandal? The impression the comedian gives to it is a kind of double stamp upon the poet's paper, that raises it to ten times the intrinsic value. Might we not strengthen this argument too, even by the eloquence that seemed to have opposed this law? I will say for myself, at least, that when I came to read the printed arguments against it, I could scarce believe they were the same that had amazed and raised such admiration in me, when they had the advantage of a lively elocution, and of that grace and spirit which gave strength and lustre to them in the delivery.

Upon the whole, if the stage ought ever to have been reformed—if to place a power somewhere of restraining its immoralities, was not inconsistent with the liberties of a civilized people (neither of which, sure, any moral man of sense can dispute) might it not have shown a spirit too poorly prejudiced, to have rejected so rational a law, only because the honour and office of a minister might happen in some small measure to be protected by it?

But however little weight there may be in the observations I have made upon it, I shall for my own part always think them just; unless I should live to see (which I do not expect) some future set of upright ministers use their utmost endeavours to repeal it.

And now we have seen the consequence of what many people are apt to contend for, variety of playhouses! How was it possible so many could honestly subsist on what was fit to be seen? Their extraordinary number of course reduced them to live upon the gratification of such hearers as they knew would be best pleased with public offence; and public offence of what kind soever will always be a good reason for making laws to restrain it.

To conclude; let us now consider this law in a quite different light; let us leave the political part of it quite out of the question; what advantage could either the spectators of plays, or the masters of playhouses, have gained by its having never been made? How could the same stock of plays supply four theatres, which (without such additional entertainments as a nation of common sense ought to be ashamed of) could not well support two? Satiety must have been the natural consequence of the same plays being twice as often repeated as now they need be; and satiety puts an end to all tastes that the mind of man can delight in. Had therefore this law been made seven years ago, I should not have parted with my share in the patent under a thousand pounds more than I received for it. So that, as far as I am able to judge, both the public, as spectators, and the patentees, as undertakers, are or might be in a way of being better entertained and more considerable gainers by it.

I now return to the state of the stage where I left it, about the year 1697, from whence this pursuit of its immoralities has led me farther than I first designed to have followed it.

CHAPTER IX.

A small apology for writing on.—The different state of the two companies.—Wilks invited over from Dublin.—Estcourt, from the same stage, the winter following.—Mrs Oldfield's first admission to the theatre royal.—Her character.—The great theatre in the Haymarket built for Betterton's company.—It answers not their expectation.—Some observations upon it.—A theatrical state secret.

I now begin to doubt that the *gaieté du cœur* in which I first undertook this work, may have drawn me into a more laborious amusement than I shall know how to away with; for though I cannot say I have yet jaded my vanity, it is not impossible but by this time the most candid of my readers may want a little breath; especially when they consider that all this load I have heaped upon their patience, contains but seven years of the forty-three I passed upon the stage, the history of which period I have enjoined myself to transmit to the judgment (or oblivion) of posterity. However, even my dulness will find somebody to do it right. If my reader is an ill-natured one, he will be as much pleased to find me a dunce in my old age, as possibly he may have been to prove me a brisk blockhead in my youth; but if he has no gall to gratify, and would (for his simple amusement) as well know how the playhouses went on forty years ago, as how they do now, I will honestly tell him the rest of my story as well as I can. Lest therefore the frequent digressions that have broke in upon it may have entangled his memory, I must beg leave just to throw together the heads of what I have already given him, that he may again recover the clue of my discourse.

Let him then remember, from the year 1660 to 1684, the various fortune of the (then) king's and duke's two famous companies; their being reduced to one united; the distinct characters I have given of thirteen actors, which in the year 1690 were the most famous then remaining of them; the cause of their being again divided in 1695, and the consequences of that division until 1697; from whence I shall lead them to our second union in——Hold! let me see: ay, it was in that memorable year when the two kingdoms of England and Scotland were made one. And I remember a particular that confirms me I am right in my chronology; for the play of Hamlet being acted soon after, Estcourt, who then took upon him to say any thing, added a fourth line to Shakspeare's prologue to the play, in that play which originally consisted but of three; but Estcourt made it run thus:—

> For us, and for our tragedy,
> Thus stooping to your clemency,
> [This being a year of unity,]
> We beg your hearing patiently.

This new chronological line, coming unexpectedly upon the audience, was received with applause, though several grave faces looked a little out of humour at it. However, by this fact, it is plain our theatrical union happened in 1707. But to speak of it in its place I must go a little back again.

From 1697 to this union both companies went on without any memorable change in their affairs, unless it were that Betterton's people (however good in their kind) were most of them too far advanced in years to mend; and though we in Drury-lane were too young to be excellent, we were not too old to be better. But what will not satiety depreciate? For though I must own and avow, that in our highest prosperity I always thought we were greatly their inferiors, yet by our good fortune of being seen in quite new lights, which several new written plays had shown us in, we now began to make a considerable stand against them. One good new play to a rising company is of inconceivable value. In "Oroonoko," (and why may I not name another, though it be my own?) in "Love's last Shift," and in the sequel of it, the "Relapse," several of our people showed themselves in a new style of acting, in which nature had not as yet been seen. I cannot here forget a misfortune that befell our society about this time by the loss of a young actor, Hildebrand Horden, who was killed at the bar of the Rose tavern in a frivolous rash accidental quarrel; for which a late resident at Venice, colonel Burgess, and several other persons of distinction, took their trials and were acquitted. This young man had almost every natural gift that could promise an excellent actor; he had besides a good deal of table wit and humour, with a handsome person, and was every day rising into public favour. Before he was buried, it was observable that two or three days together several of the fair sex, well dressed, came in masks (then frequently worn) and some in their own coaches, to visit this theatrical hero in his shroud. He was the elder son of Dr Horden, minister of Twickenham in Middlesex. But this misfortune was soon repaired by the return of Wilks from Dublin, who upon this young man's death was sent for over, and lived long enough among us to enjoy that approbation from which the other was so unhappily cut off. The winter following, Estcourt, the famous mimic, of whom I have already spoken, had the same invitation from Ireland, where he had commenced actor. His first part here, at the theatre royal, was the Spanish Friar, in which, though he had remembered every look and motion of the late Tony Leigh, so far as to put the spectator very much in mind of him, yet it was visible through the whole, notwithstanding his exactness in the outlines, the true spirit that was to fill up the figure was not the same, but unskilfully daubed on, like a child's painting upon the face of a mezzotinto. It was too plain to the judicious, that the conception was not his own, but imprinted in his memory by another of whom he only presented a dead likeness. But these were defects not so obvious to common spectators; no wonder, therefore, if by his being much sought after in private companies, he met with a sort of indulgence, not to say partiality, for what he sometimes did upon the stage.

In the year 1699, Mrs Oldfield was first taken into the house, where she remained about a twelvemonth almost a mute and unheeded, until sir John Vanbrugh, who first recommended her, gave her the part of Alinda, in the "Pilgrim" revised. This gentle character happily became that want of confidence which is inseparable from young beginners, who without it seldom arrive to any excellence: notwithstanding, I own I was then so far deceived in my opinion of her, that I thought she had little more than her person, that appeared necessary to the forming a good actress; for she set out with so extraordinary a diffidence, that it kept her too despondingly down to a formal, plain, (not to say) flat manner of speaking. Nor could the silver tone of her voice, until after some time, incline my ear to any hope in her favour. But public approbation is the warm weather of a theatrical plant, which will soon bring it forward to whatever perfection nature has designed it. However Mrs Oldfield (perhaps for want of fresh parts) seemed to come but slowly forward until the year 1703. Our company that summer acted at the Bath, during the residence of queen Anne at that place. At that time it happened that Mrs Verbruggen, by reason of her last sickness (of which she some few months after died) was left in London; and though most of her parts were of course to be disposed of, yet so earnest was the female scramble for them, that only one of them fell to the share of Mrs Oldfield, that of Leonora in "sir Courtly Nice;" a character of good plain sense, but not over elegantly written. It was in this part Mrs Oldfield surprised me into an opinion of her having all the innate powers of a good actress, though they were yet but in the bloom of what they promised. Before she had acted this part, I had so cold an expectation from her abilities, that she could scarce prevail with me to rehearse with her the scenes she was chiefly concerned in with "sir Courtly," which I then acted. However, we ran them over with a mutual inadvertency of one another. I seemed careless, as concluding that any assistance I could give her would be to little or no purpose; and she muttered out her words in a sort of misty manner, at my low opinion of her. But when the play came to be acted, she had a just occasion to triumph over the error of my judgment, by the (almost) amazement that her unexpected performance awaked me to; so forward and sudden a step into nature I had never seen; and what made her performance more valuable was, that I knew it all proceeded from her own understanding, untaught and unassisted by any one more experienced actor. Perhaps it may not be unacceptable, if I enlarge a little more upon the theatrical character of so memorable an actress.

Though this part of Leonora in itself was of so little value, that when she got more into esteem, it was one of the several she gave away to inferior actresses; yet it was the first (as I have observed) that corrected my judgment of her, and confirmed me in a strong belief, that she could not fail in a very little time of being, what she was afterwards allowed to be, the foremost ornament of our theatre. Upon this unexpected sally then of the power and disposition of so unforeseen an actress, it was that I again took up the two first acts of the "Careless Husband," which I had written the summer before, and had thrown aside in despair of having justice done to the character of lady Betty Modish by any one woman then among us; Mrs Verbruggen being now in a very declining state of health, and Mrs Bracegirdle out of my reach, and engaged in another company; but, as I have said, Mrs Oldfield having thrown out such new proffers of a genius, I was no longer at a loss for support, my doubts were dispelled, and I had now a new call to finish it: accordingly the "Careless Husband" took its fate upon the stage the winter following, in 1704. Whatever favourable reception this comedy has met with from the public, it would be unjust in me not to place a large share of it to the account of Mrs Oldfield, not only from the uncommon excellence of her action, but even from her personal manner of conversing. There are many sentiments in the character of lady Betty Modish, that I may almost say were originally her own, or only dressed with a little more care than when they negligently fell from her lively humour; had her birth placed her in a higher rank of life, she had certainly appeared in reality, what in this play she only excellently acted, an agreeable gay woman of quality, a little too conscious of her natural attractions. I have often seen her in private societies, where women of the best rank might have borrowed some part of her behaviour without the least diminution of their sense or dignity: and this very morning, where I am now writing at Bath, November 14, 1738, the same words were said of her by a lady of condition, whose better judgment of her personal merit in that light has emboldened me to repeat them. After her success in this character of higher life, all that nature had given her of the actress seemed to have risen to its full perfection; but the variety of her power could not be known until she was seen in variety of characters, which, as fast as they fell to her, she equally excelled in. Authors had much more from her performance than they had reason to hope for from what they had written for her; and none had less than another, but as their genius in the parts they allotted her was more or less elevated.

In the wearing of her person she was particularly fortunate: her figure was always improving to her thirty-sixth year; but her excellence in acting was never at a stand; and the last new character she shone in, lady Townly, was a proof that she was still able to do more, if more could have been done for her. She had one mark of good sense rarely known in any actor of either sex but herself. I have observed several, with promising dispositions, very desirous of instruction at their first setting out; but no sooner had they found their least account in it, than they were as desirous of being left to their own capacity, which they then thought would be disgraced by their seeming to want any farther assistance: but this was not Mrs Oldfield's way of thinking, for to the last year of her life she never undertook any part she liked, without being importunately desirous of having all the helps in it that another could possibly give her. By knowing so much of herself, she found how much more there was of nature yet needful to be known: yet it was a hard matter to give her any hint that she was not able to take or improve. With all this merit, she was tractable, and less presuming in her station than several that had not half her pretensions to be troublesome; but she lost nothing by her easy conduct; she had every thing she asked, which she took care should be always reasonable, because she hated as much to be grudged as denied a civility. Upon her extraordinary action in the "Provoked Husband," the managers made her a present of fifty guineas more than her agreement, which never was more than a verbal one; for they knew she was above deserting them to engage upon any other stage, and she was conscious they would never think it their interest to give her cause of complaint. In the last two months of her illness, when she was no longer able to assist them, she declined receiving her salary, though by her agreement she was entitled to it. Upon the whole she was, to the last scene she acted, the delight of her spectators; why then may we not close her character with the same indulgence with which Horace speaks of a commendable poem:

> Ubi plura nitent, non ego paucis
> Offendor maculis ————

> Where in the whole such various beauties shine,
> 'Twere idle upon errors to refine.

What more might be said of her as an actress, may be found in the preface to the "Provoked Husband," to which I refer the reader.

With the acquisition then of so advanced a comedian as Mrs Oldfield, and the addition of one so much in favour as Wilks, and by the visible improvement of our other actors, as Penkethman, Johnson, Bullock, and I think I may venture to name myself in the number, (but in what rank, I leave to the judgment of those who have been my spectators,) the reputation of our company began to get ground; Mrs Oldfield and Mr Wilks, by their frequently playing against one another in our best comedies, very happily supported that humour and vivacity which is so peculiar to our English stage. The French, our only modern competitors, seldom give us their lovers in such various lights: in their comedies (however lively a people they are by nature) their lovers are generally constant simple sighers, both of a mind, and equally distressed about the difficulties of their coming together; which naturally makes their conversation so serious, that they are seldom good company to their auditors: and though I allow them many other beauties of which we are too negligent, yet our variety of humour has excellencies that all their valuable observance of rules has never yet attained to. By these advantages then we began to have an equal share of the politer sort of spectators, who, for several years could not allow our company to stand in any comparison with the other. But theatrical favour, like public commerce, will sometimes deceive the best judgments by an unaccountable change of its channel; the best commodities are not always known to meet with the best markets. To this decline of the old company many accidents might contribute; as the too distant situation of their theatre, or their want of a better, for it was not then in the condition it now is, but small and poorly fitted up, within the walls of a tennis *quarrée* court, which is of the lesser sort. Booth, who was then a young actor among them, has often told me of the difficulties Betterton then laboured under and complained of: how impracticable he found it to keep their body to that common order which was necessary for their support; of their relying too much upon their intrinsic merit; and though but few of them were young, even when they first became their own masters, yet they were all now ten years older, and consequently more liable to fall into an inactive negligence, or were only separately diligent for themselves in the sole regard of their benefit-plays; which several of their principals knew at worst would raise them contributions that would more than tolerably subsist them for the current year. But as these were too precarious expedients to be always depended upon, and brought in nothing to the general support of the numbers who were at salaries under them, they were reduced to have recourse to foreign novelties; L'Abbée, Balon, and Mademoiselle Subligny, three of the then most famous dancers of the French opera, were at several times brought over at extraordinary rates, to revive that sickly appetite which plain sense and nature had satiated. But alas! there was no recovering to a sound constitution by those merely costly cordials; the novelty of a dance was but of a short duration, and perhaps hurtful in its consequence; for it made a play without a dance less endured than it had been before, when such dancing was not to be had. But perhaps their exhibiting these novelties might be owing to the success we had met with in our more barbarous introducing of French mimics and tumblers the year before, of which Mr Rowe thus complains in his prologue to one of his first plays:

> Must Shakspeare, Fletcher, and laborious Ben,
> Be left for Scaramouch and Harlequin?

While the crowd therefore so fluctuated from one house to another, as their eyes were more or less regaled than their ears, it could not be a question much in debate which had the better actors; the merit of either seemed to be of little moment; and the complaint in the foregoing lines, though it might be just for a time, could not be a just one for ever; because the best play that ever was writ may tire by being too often repeated, a misfortune naturally attending the obligation to play every day; not that whenever such satiety commences, it will be any proof of the play's being a bad one, or of its being ill acted. In a word, satiety is seldom enough considered by either critics, spectators, or actors, as the true, not to say just, cause of declining audiences to the most rational entertainments. And though I cannot say I ever saw a good new play not attended with due encouragement, yet to keep a theatre daily open without sometimes giving the public a bad old one, is more than I doubt the wit of human writers or excellence of actors will ever be able to accomplish. And as both authors and comedians may have often succeeded where a sound judgment would have condemned them, it might puzzle the nicest critic living, to prove in what sort of excellence the true value of either consisted. For, if their merit were to be measured by the full houses they may have brought, if the judgment of the crowd were infallible, I am afraid we shall be reduced to allow, that the "Beggar's Opera" was the best written play, and sir Harry Wildair (as Wilks played it) was the best acted part, that ever our English theatre had to boast of. That critic indeed must be rigid to a folly, that would deny either of them their due praise, when they severally drew such numbers after them; all their hearers could not be mistaken; and yet, if they were all in the right, what sort of fame will remain to those celebrated authors and actors that had so long and deservedly been admired before these were in being? The only distinction I shall make between them is, that to write or act like the authors or actors of the latter end of the last century, I am of opinion will be found a far better pretence to success, than to imitate these who have been so crowded to in the beginning of this. All I would infer from this explanation is, that though we had then the better audiences, and might have more of the young world on our side, yet this was no sure proof that the other company were not, in the truth of action, greatly our superiors. These elder actors then, besides the disadvantages I have mentioned, having only the fewer true judges to admire them, naturally wanted the support of the crowd, whose taste was to be pleased at a cheaper rate and with coarser fare. To recover them therefore to their due estimation, a new project was formed of building them a stately theatre in the Haymarket, by sir John Vanbrugh, for which he raised a subscription of thirty persons of quality, at one hundred pounds each, in consideration whereof every subscriber for his own life was to be admitted to whatever entertainments should be publicly performed there, without farther payment for his entrance. Of this theatre I saw the first stone laid, on which was inscribed "The Little Whig," in honour to a lady of extraordinary beauty, then the celebrated toast and pride of that party.

In the year 1706, when this house was finished, Betterton and his copartners dissolved their own agreement, and threw themselves under the direction of sir John Vanbrugh and Mr Congreve; imagining perhaps, that the conduct of two such eminent authors might give a more prosperous turn to their condition; that the plays it would now be their interest to write for them, would soon recover the town to a true taste, and be an advantage that no other company could hope for; that in the interim, till such plays could be written, the grandeur of their house, as it was a new spectacle, might allure the crowd to support them; but if these were their views, we shall see that their dependence upon them was too sanguine. As to their prospect of new plays, I doubt it was not enough considered that good ones were plants of a slow growth; and though sir John Vanbrugh had a very quick pen, yet Mr Congreve was too judicious a writer to let any thing come hastily out of his hands. As to their other dependence, the house, they had not yet discovered, that almost every proper quality and convenience of a good theatre had been sacrificed or neglected, to show the spectator a vast triumphal piece of architecture; and that the best play, for the reasons I am going to offer, could not but be under great disadvantages, and be less capable of delighting the auditor here, than it could have been in the plain theatre they came from. For what could their vast columns, their gilded cornices, their immoderate high roofs, avail, when scarce one word in ten could be distinctly heard in it? Nor had it then the form it now stands in, which necessity, two or three years after, reduced it to. At the first opening it, the flat ceiling that is now over the orchestra was then a semioval arch, that sprung fifteen feet higher from above the cornice: the ceiling over the pit too was still more raised, being one level line from the highest back part of the upper gallery to the front of the stage: the front boxes were a continued semicircle to the bare walls of the house on each side. This extraordinary and superfluous space occasioned such an undulation from the voice of every actor, that generally what they said sounded like the gabbling of so many people in the lofty isles in the cathedral. The tone of a trumpet, or the swell of an eunuch's holding note, it is true, might be sweetened by it; but the articulate sounds of a speaking voice were drowned by the hollow reverberations of one word upon another. To this inconvenience, why may we not add that of its situation? for at that time it had not the advantage of almost a large city which has since been built in its neighbourhood. Those costly spaces of Hanover, Grosvenor, and Cavendish squares, with the many and great adjacent streets about them, were then all but so many green fields of pasture, from whence they could draw little or no sustenance, unless it were that of a milk diet. The city, the inns of court, and the middle part of the town, which were the most constant support of a theatre, and chiefly to be relied on, were now too far out of the reach of an easy walk; and coach hire is often too hard a tax upon the pit and gallery. But from the vast increase of the buildings I have mentioned, the situation of that theatre has since that time received considerable advantages; a new world of people of condition are nearer to it than formerly; and I am of opinion, that if the auditory part were a little more reduced to the model of that in Drury-lane, an excellent company of actors would now find a better account in it than in any other house in this populous city. Let me not be mistaken: I say, an excellent company, and such as might be able to do justice to the best of plays, and throw out those latent beauties in them which only excellent actors can discover and give life to. If such a company were now there, they would meet with a quite different set of auditors than other theatres have lately been used to. Polite hearers would be content with polite entertainments; and I remember the time when plays without the aid of farce or pantomime were as decently attended as operas or private assemblies; where a noisy sloven would have passed his time as uneasily in a front box as in a drawing room; when a hat upon a man's head there would have been looked upon as a sure mark of a brute or a booby: but of all this I have seen too the reverse—where in the presence of ladies at a play common civility has been set at defiance, and the privilege of being a rude clown, even to a nuisance, has in a manner been demanded as one of the rights of English liberty. Now, though I grant that liberty is so precious a jewel, that we ought not to suffer the least ray of its lustre to be diminished, yet methinks the liberty of seeing a play in quiet, has as laudable a claim to protection, as the privilege of not suffering you to do it has to impunity. But since we are so happy as not to have a certain power among us, which in another country is called the police, let us rather bear this insult than buy its remedy at too dear a rate; and let it be the punishment of such wrong-headed savages, that they never will or can know the true value of that liberty which they so stupidly abuse. Such vulgar minds possess their liberty, as profligate husbands do fine wives, only to disgrace them. In a word, when liberty boils over, such is the scum of it. But to our new-erected theatre.

Not long before this time, the Italian opera began first to steal into England; but in as a rude a disguise, and unlike itself, as possible; in a lame, hobbling translation into our own language, with false quantities, or metre out of measure to its original notes, sung by our own unskilful voices, with graces misapplied to almost every sentiment, and with action lifeless and unmeaning through every character. The first Italian performer that made any distinguished figure in it was Valentini, a true sensible singer at that time, but of a throat too weak to sustain those melodious warblings, for which the fairer sex have since idolized his successors. However, this defect was so well supplied by his action, that his hearers bore with the absurdity of his singing his first part of Turnus, in Camilla, all in Italian, while every other character was sung and recited to him in English. This I have mentioned, to show not only our tramontane taste, but that the crowded audiences which followed it to Drury-lane, might be another occasion of their growing thinner in Lincoln's-inn-fields.

To strike in therefore with this prevailing novelty, sir John Vanbrugh and Mr Congreve opened their new Haymarket theatre with a translated opera, to Italian music, called the "Triumph of Love;" but this, not having in it the charms of Camilla, either from the inequality of the music or voices, had but a cold reception, being performed but three days, and those not crowded. Immediately upon the failure of this opera, sir John Vanbrugh produced his comedy called the "Confederacy," taken (but greatly improved) from the "Bourgeois à la Mode" of Dancour. Though the fate of this play was something better, yet I thought it was not equal to its merit. For it is written with an uncommon vein of wit and humour, which confirms me in my former observation, that the difficulty of hearing distinctly in that (then) wide theatre, was no small impediment to the applause that might have followed the same actors in it upon every other stage; and indeed every play acted there, before the house was altered, seemed to suffer from the same inconvenience. In a word, the prospect of profits from this theatre was so very barren, that Mr Congreve in a few months gave up his share and interest in the government of it wholly to sir John Vanbrugh. But sir John, being sole proprietor of the house, was at all events obliged to do his utmost to support it. As he had a happier talent of throwing the English spirit into his translation of French plays, than any former author who had borrowed from them, he in the same season gave the public three more of that kind, called the "Cuckold in Conceit," from the "Cocu Imaginaire" of Moliere; "Squire Treloohy," from his "Monsieur de Pourceaugnac;" and the "Mistake," from the "Dépit Amoureux" of the same author. Yet all these, however well executed, came to the ear in the same undistinguished utterance by which almost all their plays had equally suffered: for what few could plainly hear, it was not likely a great many could applaud.

It must farther be considered too, that this company were not now what they had been when they first revolted from the patentees in Drury-lane, and became their own masters in Lincoln's-inn-fields. Several of them, excellent in their different talents, were now dead; as Smith, Kynaston, Sandford, and Leigh; Mrs Betterton and Underhill being at this time also superannuated pensioners, whose places were generally but ill supplied. Nor could it be expected that Betterton himself, at past seventy, could retain his former force and spirit, though he was yet far distant from any competitor. Thus then were these remains of the best set of actors that I believe were ever known at once in England, by time, death, and the satiety of their hearers, mouldering to decay.

It was now the town talk that nothing but a union of the two companies could recover the stage to its former reputation; which opinion was certainly true. One would have thought too, that the patentee of Drury-lane could not have failed to close with it, he being then on the prosperous side of the question, having no relief to ask for himself, and little more to do in the matter, than to consider what he might safely grant. But it seems this was not his way of counting; he had other persons who had great claims to shares in the profits of this stage; which profits, by a union, he foresaw would be too visible to be doubted of, and might raise up a new spirit in those adventurers, to revive their suits at law with him; for he had led them a chase in chancery several years; and when they had driven him into a contempt of that court, he conjured up a spirit, in the shape of six and eight-pence a day, that constantly struck the tipstaff blind whenever he came near him. He knew the intrinsic value of delay, and was resolved to stick to it, as the surest way to give the plaintiffs enough of it. And by this expedient our good master had long walked about at his leisure, cool and contented as a fox when the hounds were drawn off and gone home from him. But whether I am right or not in my conjectures, certain it is, that this close master of Drury-lane had no inclination to a union, as will appear by the sequel.

Sir John Vanbrugh knew too, that to make a union worth his while, he must not seem too hasty for it; he therefore found himself under a necessity, in the mean time, of letting his theatrical farm to some industrious tenant that might put it into better condition. This is that crisis, as I observed in the eighth chapter, when the royal license for acting plays, &c. was judged of so little value as not to have one suitor for it. At this time then the master of Drury-lane happened to have a sort of premier agent in his stage affairs, that seemed in appearance as much to govern the master, as the master himself did to govern his actors. But this person was under no stipulation or salary for the service he rendered; but had gradually wrought himself into the master's extraordinary confidence and trust, from habitual intimacy, a cheerful humour, and an indefatigable zeal for his interest. If I should further say, that this person has been well known in almost every metropolis in Europe; that few private men have with so little reproach run through more various turns of fortune; that, on the wrong side of three-score, he has yet the open spirit of a hale young fellow of five-and-twenty; that, though he still chooses to speak what he thinks to his best friends with an undisguised freedom, he is notwithstanding acceptable to many persons of the first rank and condition; that any one of them (provided he likes them) may now send him for their service to Constantinople at half a day's warning; that time has not yet been able to make a visible change in any part of him, but the colour of his hair, from a fierce coal-black to that of a milder milk-white;—when I have taken this liberty with him, methinks it cannot be taking a much greater, if I at once should tell you that this person was Mr Owen Swiney; and that it was to him sir John Vanbrugh in this exigence of his theatrical affairs made an offer of his actors, under such agreements of salary as might be made with them; and of his house, clothes, and scenes, with the queen's license to employ them, upon payment of only the casual rent of five pounds upon every acting day, and not to exceed 700*l.* in the year. Of this proposal Mr Swiney desired a day or two to consider; for, however he might like it, he would not meddle in any sort without the consent and approbation of his friend and patron, the master of Drury-lane. Having given the reasons why this patentee was averse to a union, it may now seem less a wonder why he immediately consented that Swiney should take the Haymarket house, &c. and continue that company to act against him; but the real truth was, that he had a mind both companies should be clandestinely under one and the same interest; and yet in so loose a manner, that he might declare his verbal agreement with Swiney good, or null and void, as he might best find his account in either. What flattered him that he had this wholesome project, and Swiney to execute it, both in his power, was, that at this time Swiney happened to stand in his books debtor to cash upwards of 200*l.* But here we shall find he overrated his security. However, Swiney as yet followed his orders; he took the Haymarket theatre, and had further the private consent of the patentee to take such of his actors from Drury-lane, as either from inclination or discontent might be willing to come over to him in the Haymarket. The only one he made an exception of was myself. For though he chiefly depended upon his singers and dancers, he said, it would be necessary to keep some one tolerable actor with him, that might enable him to set those machines agoing. Under this limitation of not entertaining me Swiney seemed to acquiesce, until after he had opened with the so recruited company in the Haymarket. The actors that came to him from Drury-lane were Wilks, Estcourt, Mills, Keen, Johnson, Bullock, Mrs Oldfield, Mrs Rogers, and some few others of less note. But I must here let you know that this project was formed, and put in execution, all in very few days in the summer season, when no theatre was open. To all which I was entirely a stranger, being at this time at a gentleman's house in Gloucestershire, scribbling, if I mistake not, the "Wife's Resentment."

The first word I heard of this transaction was by a letter from Swiney, inviting me to make one in the Haymarket company, whom he hoped I could not but now think the stronger party. But I confess I was not a little alarmed at this revolution. For I considered that I knew of no visible fund to support these actors, but their own industry; that all his recruits from Drury-lane would want new clothing; and that the warmest industry would be always labouring up hill under so necessary an expense, so bad a situation, and so inconvenient a theatre. I was always of opinion too, that in changing sides, in most conditions, there generally were discovered more unforeseen inconveniences than visible advantages; and that, at worst, there would always some sort of merit remain with fidelity, though unsuccessful. Upon these considerations, I was only thankful for the offers made me from the Haymarket, without accepting them; and soon after came to town, towards the usual time of their beginning to act, to offer my service to our old master. But I found our company so thinned, that it was almost impracticable to bring any one tolerable play upon the stage. When I asked him where were his actors, and in what manner he intended to proceed, he replied, Do not you trouble yourself; come along, and I will show you. He then led me about all the by-places in the house, and showed me fifty little back doors, dark closets, and narrow passages; in alterations and contrivances of which kind he had busied his head most part of the vacation; for he was scarce ever without some notable joiner, or a bricklayer extraordinary, in pay for twenty years. And there are so many odd obscure places about a theatre, that his genius in nook-building was never out of employment; nor could the most vain-headed author be more deaf to an interruption in reciting his works, than our wise master was, while entertaining me with the improvements he had made in his invisible architecture; all which, without thinking any one part of it necessary, though I seemed to approve, I could not help now and then breaking in upon his delight with the impertinent question of—But, master, where are your actors? But it seems I had taken a wrong time for this sort of inquiry; his head was full of matters of more moment, and (as you find) I was to come another time for an answer. A very hopeful condition I found myself in, under the conduct of so profound a virtuoso, and so considerate a master! But to speak of him seriously, and to account for this disregard to his actors, his notion was, that singing and dancing, or any sort of exotic entertainments, would make an ordinary company of actors too hard for the best set, who had only plain plays to subsist on. Now, though I am afraid too much might be said in favour of this opinion, yet I thought he laid more stress upon that sort of merit than it would bear. As I therefore found myself of so little value with him, I could not help setting a little more upon myself, and was resolved to come to a short explanation with him. I told him I came to serve him at a time when many of his best actors had deserted him; that he might now have the refusal of me; but I could not afford to carry the compliment so far as to lessen my income by it; that I therefore expected either my casual pay to be advanced, or the payment of my former salary made certain for as many days as we had acted the year before. No; he was not willing to alter his former method; but I might choose whatever parts I had a mind to act of theirs who had left him. When I found him, as I thought, so insensible or impregnable, I looked gravely in his face and told him—he knew upon what terms I was willing to serve him; and took my leave. By this time the Haymaket company had begun acting to audiences something better than usual, and were all paid their full salaries; a blessing they had not felt in some years in either house before. Upon this success, Swiney pressed the patentee to execute the articles they had as yet only verbally agreed on, which were in substance, that Swiney should take the Haymarket house in his own name, and have what actors he thought necessary from Drury-lane; and after all payments punctually made, the profits should be equally divided between these two undertakers. But soft and fair! Rashness was a fault that had never yet been imputed to the patentee; certain payments were methods he had not of a long, long, time been used to; that point still wanted time for consideration. But Swiney was as hasty as the other was slow, and was resolved to know what he had to trust to before they parted; and to keep him the closer to his bargain, he stood upon his right of having *me* added to that company, if I was willing to come into it. But this was a point as absolutely refused on one side, as insisted on on the other. In this contest high words were exchanged on both sides, until in the end this their last private meeting came to an open rupture. But before it was publicly known, Swiney, by fairly letting me into the whole transaction, took effectual means to secure me in his interest. When the mystery of the patentee's indifference to me was unfolded, and that his slighting me was owing to the security he relied on of Swiney's not daring to engage me, I could have no further debate with myself which side of the question I should adhere to. To conclude; I agreed in two words to act with Swiney; and from this time, every change that happened in the theatrical government was a nearer step to that twenty years of prosperity which actors under the management of actors not long afterwards enjoyed. What was the immediate consequence of this last desertion from Drury-lane, shall be the subject of another chapter.

CHAPTER X.

The recruited actors in the Haymarket encouraged by a subscription.—Drury-lane under a particular management.—The power of a lord chamberlain over the theatres considered.—How it had been formerly exercised.—A digression to tragic authors.

Having shown the particular conduct of the patentee in refusing so fair an opportunity of securing to himself both companies under his sole power and interest, I shall now lead the reader, after a short view of what passed in this new establishment of the Haymarket theatre, to the accidents that the year following compelled the same patentee to receive both companies united into the Drury-lane theatre, notwithstanding his disinclination to it.

It may now be imagined, that such a detachment of actors from Drury-lane could not but give a new spirit to those in the Haymarket; not only by enabling them to act each other's plays to better advantage, but by an emulous industry, which had lain too long inactive among them, and without which they plainly saw they could not be sure of subsistence. Plays by this means began to recover a good share of their former esteem and favour; and the profits of them in about a month enabled our new manager to discharge his debt (of something more than two hundred pounds) to his old friend the patentee, who had now left him and his troop in trust to fight their own battles. The greatest inconvenience they still laboured under was the immoderate wideness of their house; in which, as I have observed, the difficulty of hearing may be said to have buried half the auditors' entertainment. This defect seemed evident from the much better reception several new plays (first acted there) met with, when they afterwards came to be played by the same actors in Drury-lane. Of this number were the "Beaux Stratagem," and the "Wife's Resentment;" to which I may add the "Double Gallant."

This last was a play made up of what little was tolerable in two or three others that had no success, and were laid aside as so much poetical lumber; but by collecting and adapting the best parts of them all into one play, the Double Gallant has had a place every winter amongst the public entertainments these thirty years. As I was only the compiler of this piece, I did not publish it in my own name; but as my having but a hand in it could not be long a secret, I have been often treated as a plagiary on that account. Not that I think I have any right to complain of whatever would detract from the merit of that sort of labour; yet a cobbler may be allowed to be useful, though he is not famous; and I hope a man is not blamable for doing a little good, though he cannot do as much as another. But so it is: two penny critics must live, as well as eighteen-penny authors!

While the stage was thus recovering its former strength, a more honourable mark of favour was shown to it than it was ever known before or since to have received. The then lord Halifax was not only the patron of the men of genius of his time, but had likewise a generous concern for the reputation and prosperity of the theatre, from whence the most elegant dramatic labours of the learned he knew had often shone in their brightest lustre. A proposal therefore was drawn up, and addressed to that noble lord, for his approbation and assistance to raise a public subscription for reviving three plays of the best authors, with the full strength of the company; every subscriber to have three tickets for the first day of each play, for his single payment of three guineas. This subscription his lordship so zealously encouraged that, from his recommendation chiefly, in a very little time it was completed. The plays were "Julius Cæsar" of Shakspeare; the "King and No King" of Fletcher; and the comic scenes of Dryden's "Marriage à la Mode," and of his "Maiden Queen," put together; for it was judged that, as these comic episodes were utterly independent of the serious scenes they were originally written to, they might on this occasion be as well episodes either to the other, and so make up five livelier acts between them. At least the project so well succeeded, that those comic parts have never since been replaced, but were continued to be jointly acted as one play several years after.

By the aid of this subscription, which happened in 1707, and by the additional strength and industry of this company, not only the actors (several of which were handsomely advanced in their salaries) were duly paid, but the manager himself too, at the foot of his account, stood a considerable gainer.

At the same time the patentee of Drury-lane went on in his usual method of paying extraordinary prices to singers, dancers, and other exotic performers, which were as constantly deducted out of the sinking salaries of his actors. It is true his actors perhaps might not deserve much more than he gave them; yet, by what I have related, it is plain he chose not to be troubled with such as visibly had deserved more. For it seems he had not purchased his share of the patent to mend the stage, but to make money of it. And to say truth, his sense of every thing to be shown there was much upon a level with the taste of the multitude, whose opinion and whose money weighed with him full as much as that of the best judges. His point was to please the majority, who could more easily comprehend any thing they *saw*, than the daintiest things that could be said to them. But in this notion he kept no medium; for in my memory he carried it so far that he was (some few years before this time) actually dealing for an extraordinary large elephant, at a certain sum for every day he might think fit to show the tractable genius of that vast quiet creature in any play or farce in the theatre (then standing) in Dorset-garden. But from the jealousy which so formidable a rival had raised in his dancers, and by his bricklayers assuring him that, if the walls were to be opened wide enough for his entrance, it might endanger the fall of the house, he gave up his project, and with it so hopeful a prospect of making the receipts of the stage run higher than all the wit and force of the best writers had ever yet raised them to.

About the same time of his being under this disappointment, he put in practice another project of as new though not of so bold a nature; which was his introducing a set of rope-dancers into the same theatre, for the first day of whose performance he had given out some play in which I had a material part. But I was hardy enough to go into the pit, and acquaint the spectators near me, that I hoped they would not think it a mark of my disrespect to them, if I declined acting upon any stage that was brought to so low a disgrace as ours was like to be by that day's entertainment. My excuse was so well taken, that I never after found any ill consequences, or heard of the least disapprobation of it. And the whole body of actors too protesting against such an abuse of their profession, our cautious master was too much alarmed and intimidated to repeat it.

After what I have said, it will be no wonder that all due regards to the original use and institution of the stage should be utterly lost or neglected. Nor was the conduct of this manager easily to be altered, while he had found the secret of making money out of disorder and confusion. For, however strange it may seem, I have often observed him inclined to be cheerful in the distresses of his theatrical affairs, and equally reserved and pensive when they went smoothly forward with a visible profit. Upon a run of good audiences he was more frighted to be thought a gainer, which might make him accountable to others, than he was dejected with bad houses, which at worst he knew would make others accountable to him. And as, upon a moderate computation, it cannot be supposed that the contested accounts of a twenty years' wear and tear in a playhouse could be fairly adjusted by a master in chancery under four-score years more, it will be no surprise that by the neglect, or rather the discretion, of other proprietors, in not throwing away good money after bad, this hero of a manager, who alone supported the war, should in time so fortify himself by delay, and so tire his enemies, that he became sole monarch of his theatrical empire, and left the quiet possession of it to his successors.

If these facts seem too trivial for the attention of a sensible reader, let it be considered that they are not chosen fictions to entertain, but truths necessary to inform him under what low shifts and disgraces, what disorders and revolutions, the stage laboured, before it could recover that strength and reputation wherewith it began to flourish towards the latter end of queen Anne's reign, and which it continued to enjoy for a course of twenty years following. But let us resume our account of the new settlement in the Haymarket.

It may be a natural question, why the actors whom Swiney brought over to his undertaking in the Haymarket, would tie themselves down to limited salaries? For though he, as their manager, was obliged to make them certain payments, it was not certain that the receipts would enable him to do it; and since their own industry was the only visible fund they had to depend upon, why would they not, for that reason, insist upon their being sharers as well of possible profits as losses? How far in this point they acted right or wrong, will appear from the following state of their case.

It must first be considered, that this scheme of their desertion was all concerted and put in execution in a week's time, which short warning might make them overlook that circumstance; and the sudden prospect of being delivered from having seldom more than half their pay, was a contentment that had bounded all their farther views. Besides, as there could be no room to doubt of their receiving their full pay, previous to any profits that might be reaped by their labour, and as they had no great reason to apprehend those profits could exceed their respective salaries so far as to make them repine at them, they might think it but reasonable to let the chance of any extraordinary gain be on the side of their leader and director. But farther, as this scheme had the approbation of the court, these actors in reality had it not in their power to alter any part of it: and what induced the court to encourage it was, that by having the theatre and its manager more immediately dependent on the power of the lord chamberlain, it was not doubted but the stage would be recovered into such a reputation as might now do honour to that absolute command which the court or its officers seemed always fond of having over it.

Here, to set the constitution of the stage in a clearer light, it may not be amiss to look back a little on the power of a lord chamberlain, which, as may have been observed, in all changes of the theatrical government has been the main spring without which no scheme of what kind soever could be set in motion. My intent is not to inquire how far by law this power has been limited or extended, but merely as an historian to relate facts to gratify the curious and then leave them to their own reflections. This too I am the more inclined to, because there is no one circumstance which has affected the stage, wherein so many spectators, from those of the highest rank to the vulgar, have seemed more positively knowing or less informed in.

Though in all letters patent for acting plays, &c. since king Charles the First's time, there has been no mention of the lord chamberlain, or of any subordination to his command or authority, yet it was still taken for granted, that no letters patent, by the bare omission of such a great officer's name, could have superseded or taken out of his hands that power which time out of mind he always had exercised over the theatre. The common opinions then abroad were, that if the profession of actors was unlawful, it was not in the power of the crown to license it; and if it were not unlawful, it ought to be free and independent, as other professions; and that a patent to exercise it was only an honorary favour from the crown, to give it a better grace of recommendation to the public. But as the truth of this question seemed to be wrapt in a great deal of obscurity, in the old laws made in former reigns relating to players, &c., it may be no wonder that the best companies of actors should be desirous of taking shelter under the visible power of a lord chamberlain, who they knew had at his pleasure favoured and protected, or borne hard, upon them: but be all this as it may, a lord chamberlain (from whencesoever his power might be derived) had, till of later years, had always an implicit obedience paid to it. I shall now give some few instances in what manner it was exercised.

What appeared to be most reasonably under his cognizance, was the licensing or refusing new plays, or striking out what might be thought offensive in them: which province had been for many years assigned to his inferior officer, the master of the revels; yet was not this license irrevocable; for several plays, though acted by that permission, had been silenced afterwards. The first instance of this kind that common fame has delivered down to us, is that of the "Maid's Tragedy" of Beaumont and Fletcher, which was forbid, in king Charles II's time, by an order from the lord chamberlain. For what reason this interdiction was laid upon it, the politics of those days have only left us to guess. Some said that the killing of the king in that play, while the tragical death of king Charles I was then so fresh in people's memory, was an object too horribly impious for a public entertainment. What makes this conjecture seem to have some foundation, is that the celebrated Waller, in compliment to that court, altered the last act of this play (which is printed at the end of his works) and gave it a new catastrophe, wherein the life of the king is loyally saved, and the lady's matter made up with a less terrible reparation. Others have given out, that a repenting mistress, in a romantic revenge of her dishonour, killing the king in the very bed he expected her to come into, was showing a too dangerous example to other Evadnes then shining at court in the same rank of royal distinction; who, if ever their consciences should have run equally mad, might have had frequent opportunities of putting the expiation of their frailty into the like execution. But this I doubt is too deep a speculation, or too ludicrous a reason, to be relied on; it being well known that the ladies then in favour were not so nice in their notions, as to think their preferment their dishonour, or their lover a tyrant: besides, that easy monarch loved his roses without thorns; nor do we hear that he much chose to be himself the first gatherer of them.

The "Lucius Junius Brutus" of Nat. Lee was in the same reign silenced after the third day of acting it; it being objected, that the plan and sentiments of it had too boldly vindicated, and might inflame, republican principles.

A prologue (by Dryden) to the "Prophetess" was forbid by the lord Dorset after the first day of its being spoken. This happened when king William was prosecuting the war in Ireland. It must be confessed that this prologue had some familiar metaphorical sneers at the revolution itself; and as the poetry of it was good, the offence of it was less pardonable.

The tragedy of "Mary Queen of Scotland" had been offered to the stage twenty years before it was acted; but from the profound penetration of the master of the revels, who saw political spectres in it that never appeared in the presentation, it had lain so long upon the hands of the author; who had at last the good fortune to prevail with a nobleman to favour his petition to queen Anne for permission to have it acted. The queen had the goodness to refer the merit of his play to the opinion of that noble person, although he was not her majesty's lord chamberlain; upon whose report of its being every way an innocent piece, it was soon after acted with success.

Reader, by your leave, I will but just speak a word or two to any author that has not yet writ one line of his next play, and then I will come to my point again. What I would say to him is this,—Sir, before you set pen to paper, think well, and principally of your design, or chief action, towards which every line you write ought to be drawn as to its centre; if we can say of your finest sentiments, this or that might be left out without maiming the story you would tell us, depend upon it that fine thing is said in a wrong place; and though you may urge that a bright thought is not to be resisted, you will not be able to deny that those very fine lines would be much finer, if you could find a proper occasion for them; otherwise you will be thought to take less advice from Aristotle or Horace, than from poet Bays in the "Rehearsal," who very smartly says, "What the devil is the plot good for, but to bring in fine things?" Compliment the taste of your hearers as much as you please with them, provided they belong to your subject; but do not, like a dainty preacher who has his eye more upon this world than the next, leave your text for them. When your fable is good, every part of it will cost you much less labour to keep your narration alive, than you will be forced to bestow upon those elegant discourses that are not absolutely conducive to your catastrophe or main purpose; scenes of that kind show but at best the unprofitable or injudicious spirit of a genius. It is but a melancholy commendation of a fine thought to say, when we have heard it, "Well! but what is all this to the purpose?" Take therefore in some part example by the author last mentioned. There are three plays of his, the "Earl of Essex," "Anna Bullen," and "Mary Queen of Scots;" which, though they are all written in the most barren barbarous style that was ever able to keep possession of the stage, have all interested the hearts of his auditors. To what then could this success be owing, but to the intrinsic and naked value of the well-conducted tales he has simply told us? There is something so happy in the disposition of all his fables; all his chief characters are thrown into such natural circumstances of distress, that their misery or affliction wants very little assistance from the ornaments of style or words to speak them. When a skilful actor is so situated, his bare plaintive tone of voice, the cast of sorrow from his eye, his slowly graceful gesture, his humble sighs of resignation under his calamities; all these, I say, are sometimes without a tongue equal to the strongest eloquence. At such a time the attentive auditor supplies from his own heart whatever the poet's language may fall short of in expression, and melts himself into every pang of humanity which the like misfortunes in real life could have inspired.

After what I have observed, whenever I see a tragedy defective in its fable, let there be never so many fine lines in it, I hope I shall be forgiven if I impute that defect to the idleness, the weak judgment, or barren invention, of the author.

If I should be asked why I have not always myself followed the rules I would impose upon others, I can only answer, that whenever I have not, I lie equally open to the same critical censure. But having often observed a better than ordinary style thrown away upon the loose and wandering scenes of an ill-chosen story, I imagined these observations might convince some future author of how great advantage a fable well planned must be to a man of any tolerable genius.

All this, I own, is leading my reader out of the way; but if he has as much time upon his hands as I have (provided we are neither of us tired) it may be equally to the purpose what he reads, or what I write of. But as I have no objection to method, when it is not troublesome, I return to my subject.

Hitherto we have seen no very unreasonable instance of this absolute power of a lord chamberlain, though we were to admit that no one knew of any real law, or construction of law, by which this power was given him. I shall now offer some facts relating to it of a more extraordinary nature, which I leave my reader to give a name to.

About the middle of king William's reign, an order of the lord chamberlain was then subsisting, that no actor of either company should presume to go from one to the other without a discharge from their respective managers, and the permission of the lord chamberlain. Notwithstanding such order, Powel, being uneasy at the favour Wilks was then rising into, had without such discharge left the Drury-lane theatre, and engaged himself to that of Lincoln's-inn-fields; but by what follows it will appear that this order was not so much intended to do both of them good, as to do that which the court chiefly favoured (Lincoln's-inn-fields) no harm: for when Powel grew dissatisfied at his station there too, he returned to Drury-lane, as he had before gone from it, without a discharge:—but halt a little! here, on this side of the question: the order was to stand in force, and the same offence against it now was not to be equally passed over. He was the next day taken up by a messenger, and confined to the porter's lodge, where to the best of my remembrance he remained about two days; when the managers of Lincoln's-inn-fields, not thinking an actor of his loose character worth their farther trouble, gave him up; though perhaps he was released for some better reason. Upon this occasion, the next day, behind the scenes at Drury-lane, a person of great quality, in my hearing inquiring of Powel into the nature of his offence, after he had heard it, told him, that if he had had patience or spirit enough to have staid in his confinement till he had given him notice of it, he would have found him a handsomer way of coming out of it.

Another time the same actor, Powel, was provoked at Will's coffee-house, in a dispute about the playhouse affairs, to strike a gentleman whose family had been sometimes masters of it; a complaint of this insolence was, in the absence of the lord chamberlain, immediately made to the vice chamberlain, who so highly resented it, that he thought himself bound in honour to carry his power of redressing it as far as it could possibly go. For Powel having a part in the play that was acted the day after, the vice chamberlain sent an order to silence the whole company for having suffered Powel to appear upon the stage before he had made that gentleman satisfaction, although the masters of the theatre had had no notice of Powel's misbehaviour. However this order was obeyed, and remained in force for two or three days, until the same authority was pleased or advised to revoke it. From the measures this injured gentleman took for his redress, it may be judged how far it was taken for granted, that a lord chamberlain had an absolute power over the theatre.

I shall now give an instance of an actor who had the resolution to stand upon the defence of his liberty against the same authority, and was relieved by it.

In the same king's reign, Dogget, who, though from a severe exactness in his nature he could be seldom long easy in any theatre where irregularity, not to say injustice, too often prevailed, yet in the private conduct of his affairs was a prudent, honest man,—therefore took an unusual care, when he returned to act under the patent in Drury-lane, to have his articles drawn firm and binding. But having some reason to think the patentee had not dealt fairly with him, he quitted the stage and would act no more, rather choosing to lose his, whatever unsatisfied, demands, than go through the chargeable and tedious course of the law to recover it. But the patentee, who (from other people's judgment) knew the value of him, and who wanted too to have him sooner back than the law could possibly bring him, thought the surer way would be to desire a shorter redress from the authority of the lord chamberlain. Accordingly, upon his complaint, a messenger was immediately despatched to Norwich, where Dogget then was, to bring him up in custody. But doughty Dogget, who had money in his pocket, and the cause of liberty at his heart, was not in the least intimidated by this formidable summons. He was observed to obey it with a particular cheerfulness, entertaining his fellow traveller, the messenger, all the way in the coach (for he had protested against riding) with as much humour as a man of his business might be capable of tasting. And as he found his charges were to be defrayed, he at every inn called for the best dainties the country could afford, or a pretended weak appetite could digest. At this rate they jollily rolled on, more with the air of a jaunt than a journey, or a party of pleasure than of a poor devil in durance. Upon his arrival in town, he immediately applied to the lord chief justice Holt for his Habeas Corpus. As his case was something particular, that eminent and learned minister of the law took a particular notice of it: for Dogget was not only discharged, but the process of his confinement (according to common fame) had a censure passed upon it in court, which I doubt I am not lawyer enough to repeat. To conclude; the officious agents in this affair, finding that in Dogget they had mistaken their man, were mollified into milder proceedings, and (as he afterwards told me) whispered something in his ear that took away Dogget's farther uneasiness about it.

By these instances, we see how naturally power only founded on custom is apt, where the law is silent, to run into excesses; and while it laudably pretends to govern others, how hard it is to govern itself. But since the law has lately opened its mouth, and has said plainly that some part of this power to govern the theatre shall be, and is, placed in a proper person; and as it is evident that the power of that white staff, ever since it has been in the noble hand that now holds it, has been used with the utmost lenity, I would beg leave of the murmuring multitude who frequent the theatre, to offer them a simple question or two, viz. "Pray, gentlemen, how came you, or rather your forefathers, never to be mutinous upon any of the occasional facts I have related? And why have you been so often tumultuous upon a law's being made, that only confirms a less power than was formerly exercised without any law to support it? You cannot, sure, say such discontent is either just or natural, unless you allow it a maxim in your politics, that power exercised without law is a less grievance than the same power exercised according to law!"

Having thus given the clearest view I was able of the usual regard paid to the power of a lord chamberlain, the reader will more easily conceive what influence and operation that power must naturally have in all theatrical revolutions, and particularly in the complete reunion of both companies which happened in the year following.

CHAPTER XI.

Some chimerical thoughts of making the stage useful.—Some to its reputation.—The patent unprofitable to all the proprietors but one.—A fourth part of it given away to colonel Brett.—A digression to his memory.—The two companies of actors reunited by his interest and management.—The first direction of operas only given to Mr Swiney.

From the time that the company of actors in the Haymarket was recruited with those from Drury-lane, and came into the hands of their new director, Swiney, the theatre for three or four years following suffered so many convulsions, and was thrown every other winter under such different interests and management, before it came to a firm and lasting settlement, that I am doubtful if the most candid reader will have patience to go through a full and fair account of it. And yet I would fain flatter myself, that those who are not too wise to frequent the theatre (or have wit enough to distinguish what sort of sights there either do honour or disgrace to it) may think their national diversion no contemptible subject for a more able historian than I pretend to be. If I have any particular qualification for the task more than another, it is that I have been an ocular witness of the several facts that are to fill up the rest of my volume, and am perhaps the only person living (however unworthy) from whom the same materials can be collected; but let them come from whom they may, whether at best they will be worth reading, perhaps a judgment may be better formed after a patient perusal of the following digression.

In whatever cold esteem the stage may be among the wise and powerful, it is not so much a reproach to those who contentedly enjoy it in its lowest condition, as that condition of it is to those who (though they cannot but know to how valuable a public use a theatre well established might be raised) yet in so many civilized nations have neglected it. This perhaps will be called thinking my own wiser than all the wise heads in Europe. But I hope a more humble sense will be given to it; at least I only mean, that if so many governments have their reasons for their disregard of their theatres, those reasons may be deeper than my capacity has yet been able to dive into. If therefore my simple opinion is a wrong one, let the singularity of it expose me; and though I am only building a theatre in the air, it is there however at so little expense, and in so much better a taste than any I have yet seen, that I cannot help saying of it, as a wiser man did (it may be) upon a wiser occasion:—

> — Si quid novisti rectius istis,
> Candidus imperti; si non—— Hor.

give me leave to play with my project in fancy.

I say then that, as I allow nothing is more liable to debase and corrupt the minds of a people than a licentious theatre, so under a just and proper establishment it were possible to make it as apparently the school of manners and of virtue. Were I to collect all the arguments that might be given for my opinion, or to enforce it by exemplary proofs, it might swell this short digression to a volume; I shall therefore trust the validity of what I have laid down to a single fact, that may be still fresh in the memory of many living spectators. When the tragedy of "Cato" was first acted, let us call to mind the noble spirit of patriotism which that play then infused into the breasts of a free people that crowded to it; with what affecting force was that most elevated of human virtues recommended! Even the false pretenders to it felt an unwilling conviction, and made it a point of honour to be foremost in their approbation; and this too at a time when the fermented nation had their different views of government. Yet the sublime sentiments of liberty in that venerable character raised in every sensible hearer such conscious admiration, such compelled assent to the conduct of a suffering virtue, as even demanded two almost irreconcilable parties to embrace and join in their equal applauses of it. Now, not to take from the merit of the writer, had that play never come to the stage, how much of this valuable effect of it must have been lost? It then could have had no more immediate weight with the public, than our poring upon the many ancient authors, through whose works the same sentiments have been perhaps less profitably dispersed, though amongst millions of readers; but by bringing such sentiments to the theatre and into action, what a superior lustre did they shine with! There Cato breathed again in life; and though he perished in the cause of liberty, his virtue was victorious, and left the triumph of it in the heart of every melting spectator. If effects like these are laudable; if the representation of such plays can carry conviction with so much pleasure to the understanding; have they not vastly the advantage of any other human helps to eloquence? What equal method can be found to lead or stimulate the mind to a quicker sense of truth and virtue, or warm a people into the love and practice of such principles as might be at once a defence and honour to their country? In what shape could we listen to virtue with equal delight or appetite of instruction? The mind of man is naturally free; and when he is compelled or menaced into any opinion that he does not readily conceive, he is more apt to doubt the truth of it, than when his capacity is led by delight into evidence and reason. To preserve a theatre in this strength and purity of morals is, I grant, what the wisest nations have not been able to perpetuate, or to transmit long to their posterity: but this difficulty will rather heighten than take from the honour of the theatre. The greatest empires have decayed for want of proper heads to guide them, and the ruins of them sometimes have been the subject of theatres that could not be themselves exempt from as various revolutions. Yet may not the most natural inference from all this be, that the talents requisite to form good actors, great writers, and true judges, were like those of wise and memorable ministers, as well as the gifts of fortune as of nature, and not always to be found in all climes or ages? Or can there be a stronger modern evidence of the value of dramatic performances, than that in many countries, where the papal religion prevails, the holy policy, though it allows not to an actor Christian burial, is so conscious of the usefulness of his art, that it will frequently take in the assistance of the theatre to give even sacred history, in a tragedy, a recommendation to the more pathetic regard of their people? How can such principles, in the face of the world, refuse the bones of a wretch the lowest benefit of Christian charity, after having admitted his profession (for which they deprive him of that charity) to serve the solemn purposes of religion? How far then is this religious inhumanity short of that famous painter's, who, to make his crucifix a master-piece of nature, stabbed the innocent hireling from whose body he drew it; and having heightened the holy portrait with his last agonies of life, then sent it to be the consecrated ornament of an altar? Though we have only the authority of common fame for this story, yet, be it true or false, the comparison will still be just. Or let me ask another question more humanly political:—

How came the Athenians to lay out an hundred thousand pounds upon the decorations of one single tragedy of Sophocles? Not, sure, as it was merely a spectacle for idleness or vacancy of thought to gape at, but because it was the most rational, most instructive and delightful composition that human wit had yet arrived at; and consequently the most worthy to be the entertainment of a wise and warlike nation. And it may be still a question, whether the Sophocles inspired this public spirit, or this public spirit inspired the Sophocles?

But alas! as the power of giving or receiving such inspirations from either of these causes, seems pretty well at an end, now I have shot my bolt, I shall descend to talk more like a man of the age I live in. For indeed what is all this to a common English reader? Why truly, as Shakspeare terms it, caviare to the multitude! Honest John Trott will tell you, that if he were to believe what I have said of the Athenians, he is at most but astonished at it; but that if the twentieth part of the sum I have mentioned were to be applied out of the public money to the setting off the best tragedy the nicest noddle in the nation could produce, it would probably raise the passions higher in those that did not like it, than in those that did; it might as likely meet with an insurrection, as the applause of the people, and so mayhap be fitter for the subject of a tragedy, than for a public fund to support it.—Truly, Mr Trott, I cannot but own that I am very much of your opinion. I am only concerned, that the theatre has not a better pretence to the care and further consideration of those governments where it is tolerated; but as what I have said will not probably do it any great harm, I hope I have not put you out of patience, by throwing a few good wishes after an old acquaintance.

To conclude this digression. If, for the support of the stage, what is generally shown there must be lowered to the taste of the common spectators; or if it is inconsistent with liberty to mend that vulgar taste, by making the multitude less merry there, or by abolishing every low and senseless jollity in which the understanding can have no share; whenever, I say, such is the state of the stage, it will be as often liable to unanswerable censure and manifest disgraces. Yet there was a time, not yet out of many people's memory, when it subsisted upon its own rational labours; when even success attended an attempt to reduce it to decency; and when actors themselves were hardy enough to hazard their interest in pursuit of so dangerous a reformation. And this crisis I am myself as impatient as any tired reader can be to arrive at. I shall therefore endeavour to lead him the shortest way to it; but, as I am a little jealous of the badness of the road, I must reserve to myself the liberty of calling upon any matter in my way, for a little refreshment to whatever company may have the curiosity or goodness to go along with me.

When the sole managing patentee at Drury-lane, for several years, could never be persuaded or driven to any account with the adventurers, sir Thomas Skipwith (who, if I am rightly informed, had an equal share with him) grew so weary of the affair, that he actually made a present of his entire interest in it, upon the following occasion.

Sir Thomas happened, in the summer preceding the reunion of the companies, to make a visit to an intimate friend of his, colonel Brett, of Sandywell in Gloucestershire; where the pleasantness of the place, and the agreeable manner of passing his time there, had raised him to such a gallantry of heart that, in return to the civilities of his friend the colonel, he made him an offer of his whole right in the patent; but not to overrate the value of his present, told him he himself had made nothing of it these ten years: but the colonel (he said) being a greater favourite of the people in power, and (as he believed) among the actors too, than himself was, might think of some scheme to turn it to advantage; and in that light, if he liked it, it was at his service. After a great deal of raillery on both sides, of what sir Thomas had not made of it, and the particular advantages the colonel was likely to make of it, they came to a laughing resolution, that an instrument should be drawn the next morning of an absolute conveyance of the premises. A gentleman of the law, well known to them both, happening to be a guest there at the same time, the next day produced the deed according to his instructions, in the presence of whom and of others it was signed, sealed, and delivered, to the purposes therein contained.

This transaction may be another instance (as I have elsewhere observed) at how low a value the interests in a theatrical license were then held; though it was visible, from the success of Swiney in that very year, that with tolerable management they could at no time have failed of being a profitable purchase.

The next thing to be considered was what the colonel should do with his new theatrical commission, which in another's possession had been of so little importance. Here it may be necessary to premise, that this gentleman was the first of any consideration, since my coming to the stage, with whom I had contracted a personal intimacy; which might be the reason why in this debate my opinion had some weight with him. Of this intimacy too I am the more tempted to talk, from the natural pleasure of calling back, in age, the pursuits and happy ardours of youth long past, which, like the ideas of a delightful spring in a winter's rumination, are sometimes equal to the former enjoyment of them. I shall therefore rather choose in this place to gratify myself than my reader, by setting the fairest side of this gentleman in view, and by indulging a little conscious vanity in showing how early in life I fell into the possession of so agreeable a companion. Whatever failings he might have to others, he had none to me, nor was he where he had them, without his valuable qualities to balance or soften them. Let then what was not to be commended in him rest with his ashes, never to be raked into; but for the friendly favours I received from him while living, give me still a pleasure in paying this only mite of my acknowledgment in my power to his memory. And if my taking this liberty may find pardon from several of his fair relations still living, for whom I profess the utmost respect, it will give me but little concern, though my critical readers should think it all impertinence.

This gentleman then, Henry, was the eldest son of Henry Brett, esq. of Cowley in Gloucestershire, who, coming early to his estate of about two thousand a year, by the usual negligences of young heirs had, before this his eldest son came of age, sunk it to about half that value, and that not wholly free from encumbrances. Mr Brett, whom I am speaking of, had his education, and I might say ended it, at the university of Oxford; for though he was settled some time after at the Temple, he so little followed the law there, that his neglect of it made the law (like some of his fair and frail admirers) very often follow him. As he had an uncommon share of social wit, and a handsome person, with a sanguine bloom in his complexion, no wonder they persuaded him that he might have a better chance of fortune by throwing such accomplishments into the gayer world, than by shutting them up in a study. The first view that fires the head of a young gentleman of this modish ambition, just broke loose from business, is to cut a figure (as they call it) in a side-box at the play; from whence their next step is to the green room behind the scenes, sometimes their *non ultra.* Hither at last then, in this hopeful quest of his fortune, came this gentleman-errant, not doubting but the fickle dame, while he was thus qualified to receive her, might be tempted to fall into his lap; and though possibly the charms of our theatrical nymphs might have their share in drawing him thither, yet in my observation the most visible cause of his first coming was a more sincere passion he had conceived for a fair full-bottomed periwig which I then wore in my first play of the "Fool in Fashion," in the year 1695. For it is to be noted, that the beaux of those days were of a quite different cast from the modern stamp, and had more of the stateliness of the peacock in their mien than (which now seems to be their highest emulation) the pert air of a lapwing. Now, whatever contempt philosophers may have for a fine periwig, my friend, who was not to despise the world, but to live in it, knew very well that so material an article of dress upon the head of a man of sense, if it became him, could never fail of drawing to him a more partial regard and benevolence than could possibly be hoped for in an ill-made one. This perhaps may soften the grave censure which so youthful a purchase might otherwise have laid upon him. In a word, he made his attack upon this periwig, as your young fellows generally do upon a lady of pleasure; first by a few familiar praises of her person, and then a civil inquiry into the price of it. But upon his observing me a little surprised at the levity of his question about a fop's periwig, he began to rally himself with so much wit and humour upon the folly of his fondness for it, that he struck me with an equal desire of granting any thing in my power to oblige so facetious a customer. This singular beginning of our conversation, and the mutual laughs that ensued upon it, ended in an agreement to finish our bargain that night over a bottle.

If it were possible the relation of the happy indiscretions which passed between us that night could give the tenth part of the pleasure I then received from them, I could still repeat them with delight: but as it may be doubtful whether the patience of a reader may be quite so strong as the vanity of an author, I shall cut it short by only saying, that single bottle was the sire of many a jolly dozen that for some years following, like orderly children, whenever they were called for, came into the same company. Nor indeed did I think from that time, whenever he was to be had, any evening could be agreeably enjoyed without him. But the long continuance of our intimacy perhaps may be thus accounted for.

He who can taste wit in another may in some sort be said to have it himself. Now, as I always had, and (I bless myself for the folly) still have, a quick relish of whatever did or can give me delight, this gentleman could not but see the youthful joy I was generally raised to, whenever I had the happiness of a *tête à tête* with him; and it may be a moot point whether wit is not as often inspired by a proper attention as by the brightest reply to it. Therefore, as he had wit enough for any two people, and I had attention enough for any four, there could not well be wanting a sociable delight on either side. And though it may be true that a man of a handsome person is apt to draw a partial ear to every thing he says, yet this gentleman seldom said any thing that might not have made a man of the plainest person agreeable. Such a continual desire to please, it may be imagined, could not but sometimes lead him into a little venial flattery, rather than not succeed in it; and I perhaps might be one of those flies that were caught in this honey. As I was then a young successful author, and an actor in some unexpected favour, whether deservedly or not, imports not; yet such appearances at least were plausible pretences enough for an amicable adulation to enlarge upon; and the sallies of it a less vanity than mine might not have been able to resist. Whatever this weakness on my side might be, I was not alone in it; for I have heard a gentleman of condition say, who knew the world as well as most men that live in it, that let his discretion be ever so much upon its guard, he never fell into Mr Brett's company without being loth to leave it, or carrying away a better opinion of himself from it. If his conversation had this effect among the men, what must we suppose to have been the consequence when he gave it a yet softer turn among the fair sex? Here now a French novelist would tell you fifty pretty lies of him; but as I choose to be tender of secrets of that sort, I shall only borrow the good breeding of that language, and tell you, in a word, that I knew several instances of his being *un homme à bonne fortune.* But though his frequent successes might generally keep him from the usual disquiets of a lover, he knew this was a life too liquorish to last; and therefore had reflection enough to be governed by the advice of his friends, to turn these advantages of nature to a better use.

Among the many men of condition with whom his conversation had recommended him to an intimacy, sir Thomas Skipwith had taken a particular inclination to him; and as he had the advancement of his fortune at heart, introduced him where was a lady who had enough in her power to disencumber him of the world, and make him every way easy for life.

While he was in pursuit of this affair, which no time was to be lost in, (for the lady was to be in town but for three weeks,) I one day found him idling behind the scenes before the play was begun. Upon sight of him, I took the usual freedom he allowed me, to rate him roundly for the madness of not improving every moment in his power, in what was of such consequence to him. "Why are you not," said I, "where you know you only should be? If your design should once get wind in the town, the ill-will of your enemies, or the sincerity of the lady's friends, may soon blow up your hopes, which in your circumstances of life cannot be long supported by the bare appearance of a gentleman."—But it is impossible to proceed without some apology for the very familar circumstance that is to follow; yet, as it might not be so trivial in its effect, as I fear it may be in the narration, and is a mark of that intimacy which it is necessary should be known had been between us, I will honestly make bold with my scruples, and let the plain truth of my story take its chance for contempt or approbation.

After twenty excuses to clear himself of the neglect I had so warmly charged him with, he concluded them with telling me he had been out all the morning upon business, and that his linen was too much soiled to be seen in company. "Oh, ho!" said I, "is that all? Come along with me, we will soon get over that dainty difficulty." Upon which I hauled him by the sleeve into my shifting-room, he either staring, laughing, or hanging back, all the way. There, when I had locked him in, I began to strip off my upper clothes, and bade him do the same; still he either did not or would not seem to understand me, and continuing his laugh, cried, "What! is the puppy mad?" "No, no, only positive," said I; "for look you, in short, the play is ready to begin, and the parts that you and I are to act to day are not of equal consequence; mine of Young Reveller (in 'Greenwich-Park') is but a rake; but whatever you may be, you are not to appear so; therefore take my shirt and give me yours; for, depend upon it, stay here you shall not; and so go about your business." To conclude, we fairly changed linen; nor could his mother's have wrapped him up more fortunately, for in about ten days he married the lady. In a year or two after his marriage he was chosen a member of that parliament which was sitting when king William died, and upon raising of some new regiments was made lieutenant-colonel to that of sir Charles Hotham; but as his ambition extended not beyond the bounds of a park wall, and a pleasant retreat in the corner of it, which with too much expense he had just finished, he within another year had leave to resign his company to a younger brother.

This was the figure in life he made, when sir Thomas Skipwith thought him the most proper person to oblige (if it could be an obligation) with the present of his interest in the patent. And from these anecdotes of my intimacy with him, it may be less a surprise, when he came to town invested with this new theatrical power, that I should be the first person to whom he took any notice of it. And notwithstanding he knew I was then engaged in another interest at the Haymarket, he desired we might consider together of the best use he could make of it, assuring me at the same time, he should think it of none to himself, unless it could in some shape be turned to my advantage. This friendly declaration, though it might be generous in him to make, was not needful to incline me, in whatever might be honestly in my power, whether by interest or negotiation, to serve him. My first advice therefore was, that he should produce his deed to the other managing patentee of Drury-lane, and demand immediate entrance to a joint possession of all effects and powers to which that deed had given him an equal title; after which, if he met with no opposition to this demand (as upon sight of it he did not) that he should be watchful against any contradiction from his colleague in whatever he might propose in carrying on the affair, but to let him see that he was determined in all his measures; yet to heighten that resolution with an ease and temper in his manner, as if he took it for granted there could be no opposition made to whatever he had a mind to—for that this method, added to his natural talent of persuading, would imperceptibly lead his colleague into a reliance on his superior understanding; that however little he cared for business, he should give himself the air at least of inquiry into what *had* been done, that what he intended to do might be thought more considerable, and be the readier complied with: for if he once suffered his colleague to seem wiser than himself, there would be no end of his perplexing him with absurd and dilatory measures; direct and plain dealing being a quality his natural diffidence would never suffer him to be master of; of which his not complying with his verbal agreement with Swiney, when the Haymarket house was taken for both their uses, was an evidence. And though some people thought it depth and policy in him to keep things often in confusion, it was ever my opinion they overrated his skill, and that in reality his parts were too weak for his post, in which he had always acted to the best of his knowledge. That his late colleague, sir Thomas Skipwith, had trusted too much to his capacity for this sort of business, and was treated by him accordingly, without ever receiving any profits from it for several years; insomuch that when he found his interest in such desperate hands, he thought the best thing he could do with it was (as he saw) to give it away. Therefore if he (Mr Brett) could once fix himself, as I had advised, upon a different foot with this hitherto untractable manager, the business would soon run through whatever channel he might have a mind to lead it. And though I allowed the greatest difficulty he would meet with would be in getting his consent to a union of the two companies, which was the only scheme that could raise the patent to its former value, and which I knew this close manager would secretly lay all possible rubs in the way to, yet it was visible there was a way of reducing him to compliance. For though it was true his caution would never part with a straw by way of concession, yet to a high hand he would give up any thing, provided he were suffered to keep his title to it. If his hat were taken from his head in the street, he would make no farther resistance than to say, "I am not willing to part with it:" much less would he have the resolution openly to oppose any just measures, when he should find one who, with an equal right to his, and with a known interest to bring them about, was resolved to go through with them.

Now, though I knew my friend was as thoroughly acquainted with this patentee's temper as myself, yet I thought it not amiss to quicken and support his resolution, by confirming to him the little trouble he would meet with in pursuit of the union I had advised him to; for it must be known, that on our side trouble was a sort of physic we did not much care to take. But as the fatigue of this affair was likely to be lowered by a good deal of entertainment and humour, which would naturally engage him in his dealings with so exotic a partner, I knew that this softening the business into a diversion would lessen every difficulty that lay in our way to it.

However copiously I may have indulged myself in this commemoration of a gentleman with whom I had passed so many of my younger days with pleasure, yet the reader may by this insight into his character, and by that of the other patentee, be better able to judge of the secret springs that gave motion to or obstructed so considerable an event as that of the reunion of the two companies of actors in 1708. In histories of more weight, for want of such particulars, we are often deceived in the true causes of facts that most concern us to be let into; which sometimes makes us ascribe to policy, or false appearances of wisdom, what perhaps in reality was the mere effect of chance or humour.

Immediately after Mr Brett was admitted as a joint patentee, he made use of the intimacy he had with the vice-chamberlain to assist his scheme of this intended union; in which he so far prevailed, that it was soon after left to the particular care of the same vice-chamberlain to give him all the aid and power necessary to the bringing what he desired to perfection. The scheme was to have but one theatre for plays, and another for operas, under separate interests; and this the generality of spectators, as well as the most approved actors, had been some time calling for, as the only expedient to recover the credit of the stage and the valuable interests of its managers.

As the condition of the comedians at this time is taken notice of in my dedication of the "Wife's Resentment" to the marquis (now duke) of Kent, and then lord-chamberlain, which was published above thirty years ago, when I had no thought of ever troubling the world with this theatrical history, I see no reason why it may not pass as a voucher of the facts I am now speaking of. I shall therefore give them in the very light I then saw them. After some acknowledgment for his lordship's protection of our (Haymarket) theatre, it is further said:—

"The stage has for many years, until of late, groaned under the greatest discouragements, which have been very much if not wholly owing to the mismanagement of those that have awkwardly governed it. Great sums have been ventured upon empty projects and hopes of immoderate gains; and when those hopes have failed, the loss has been tyrannically deducted out of the actors' salary. And if your lordship had not redeemed them —(this is meant of our being suffered to come over to Swiney)—they were very near being wholly laid aside, or at least the use of their labour was to be swallowed up in the pretended merit of singing and dancing."

What follows relates to the difficulties in dealing with the then impracticable manager; viz.—

"And though your lordship's tenderness of oppressing is so very just, that you have rather staid to convince a man of your good intentions to him, than to do him even a service against his will; yet since your lordship has so happily begun the establishment of the separate diversions, we live in hope that the same justice and resolution will still persuade you to go as successfully through with it. But while any man is suffered to confound the industry and use of them, by acting publicly in opposition to your lordship's equal intentions, under a false and intricate pretence of not being able to comply with them, the town is likely to be more entertained with the private dissensions than the public performance of either, and the actors in a perpetual fear and necessity of petitioning your lordship every season for new relief."

Such was the state of the stage immediately preceding the time of Mr Brett's being admitted a joint patentee, who, as he saw with clearer eyes what was its evident interest, left no proper measures unattempted to make this so long despaired-of union practicable. The most apparent difficulty to be got over in this affair was, what could be done for Swiney, in consideration of his being obliged to give up those actors whom the power and choice of the lord chamberlain had the year before set him at the head of, and by whose management those actors had found themselves in a prosperous condition. But an accident at this time happily contributed to make that matter easy. The inclination of our people of quality for foreign operas had now reached the ears of Italy; and the credit of their taste had drawn over from thence, without any more particular invitation, one of their capital singers, the famous signor Cavaliero Nicolini; from whose arrival, and the impatience of the town to hear him, it was concluded that operas, being now so completely provided, could not fail of success; and that by making Swiney sole director of them, the profits must be an ample compensation for his resignation of the actors. This matter being thus adjusted by Swiney's acceptance of the opera, only to be performed at the Haymarket house, the actors were all ordered to return to Drury-lane, there to remain (under the patentees) her majesty's only company of comedians.

CHAPTER XII.

A short view of the opera, when first divided from the comedy. —Plays recover their credit.—The old patentee uneasy at their success.—Why.—The occasion of colonel Brett's throwing up his share in the patent. The consequences of it.—Anecdotes of Goodman the actor.—The rate of favourite actors in his time.—The patentees, by endeavouring to reduce their price, lose them all a second time.—The principal comedians return to the Haymarket in shares with Swiney.—They alter that theatre.—The original and present form of the theatre in Drury-lane compared.—Operas fall off.—The occasion of it.—Farther observations upon them.—The patentee dispossessed of Drury-lane theatre.—Mr Collier, with a new license, heads the remains of that company.

Plays and operas being thus established upon separate interests, they were now left to make the best of their way into favour by their different merit. Although the opera is not a plant of our native growth, nor what our plainer appetites are fond of, and is of so delicate a nature that without excessive charge it cannot live long among us, especially while the nicest connoisseurs in music fall into such various heresies in taste, every sect pretending to be the true one; yet, as it is called a theatrical entertainment, and by its alliance or neutrality has more or less affected our domestic theatre, a short view of its progress may be allowed a place in our history.

After this new regulation, the first opera that appeared was "Pyrrhus." Subscriptions at that time were not extended, as of late, to the whole season, but were limited to the first six days only of a new opera. The chief performers in this were Nicolini, Valentini, and Mrs Tofts; and for the inferior parts, the best that were then to be found. Whatever praises may have been given to the most famous voices that have been heard since Nicolini, upon the whole I cannot but come into the opinion that still prevails among several persons of condition, who are able to give a reason for their liking, that no singer since his time has so justly and gracefully acquitted himself, in whatever character he appeared, as Nicolini. At most the difference between him and the greatest favourite of the ladies, Farinelli, amounted but to this, that he might sometimes more exquisitely surprise us; but Nicolini (by pleasing the eye as well as the ear) filled us with a more various and *rational* delight. Whether in this excellence he has since had any competitor, perhaps will be better judged by what the critical censor of Great Britain says of him in his 115th Tatler; viz.

" Nicolini sets off the character he bears in an opera by his action, as much as he does the words of it by his voice; every limb and finger contributes to the part he acts, insomuch that a deaf man might go along with him in the sense of it. There is scarce a beautiful posture in an old statue which he does not plant himself in, as the different circumstances of the story give occasion for it. He performs the most ordinary action in a manner suitable to the greatness of his character, and shows the prince even in the giving of a letter or despatching of a message," &c.

His voice at this first time of being among us (for he made us a second visit when it was impaired) had all that strong, clear, sweetness of tone so lately admired in Senesino. A blind man could scarce have distinguished them; but in volubility of throat the former had much the superiority. This so excellent performer's agreement was eight hundred guineas for the year, which is but an eighth part more than half the sum that has since been given to several that could never totally surpass him. The consequence of which is, that the losses by operas for several seasons, to the end of the year 1738, have been so great, that those gentlemen of quality who last undertook the direction of them, found it ridiculous any longer to entertain the public at so extravagant an expense, while no one particular person thought himself obliged by it.

Mrs Tofts, who took her first grounds of music here in her own country, before the Italian taste had so highly prevailed, was then not an adept in it: yet whatever defect the fashionably skilful might find in her manner, she had, in the general sense of her spectators, charms that few of the most learned singers ever arrive at. The beauty of her fine-proportioned figure, and exquisitely sweet silver tone of her voice, with that peculiar rapid sweetness of her throat, were perfections not to be imitated by art or labour. Valentini I have already mentioned; therefore need only say farther of him, that though he was every way inferior to Nicolini, yet as he had the advantage of giving us our first impression of a good opera singer, he had still his admirers, and was of great service in being so skilful a second to his superior.

Three such excellent performers, in the same kind of entertainment at once, England till this time had never seen: without any farther comparison then with the much dearer-bought who have succeeded them, their novelty at least was a charm that drew vast audiences of the fine world after them. Swiney their sole director was prosperous, and in one winter a gainer by them of a moderate younger brother's fortune. But as music, by so profuse a dispensation of her beauties, could not always supply our dainty appetites with equal variety, nor for ever please us with the same objects, the opera after one luxurious season, like the fine wife of a roving husband, began to lose its charms, and every day discovered to our satiety imperfections which our former fondness had been blind to. But of this I shall observe more in its place: in the mean time let us inquire into the productions of our native theatre.

It may easily be conceived that, by this entire reunion of the two companies, plays must generally have been performed to a more than usual advantage and exactness: for now every chief actor, according to his particular capacity, piqued himself upon rectifying those errors which during their divided state were almost unavoidable. Such a choice of actors added a richness to every good play, as it was then served up to the public entertainment: the common people crowded to them with a more joyous expectation, and those of the higher taste returned to them as to old acquaintances, with new desires, after a long absence. In a word, all parties seemed better pleased, but he who one might imagine had most reason to be so, the (lately) sole managing patentee. He indeed saw his power daily mouldering from his own hands into those of Mr Brett; whose gentlemanly manner of making every one's business easy to him, threw their old master under a disregard which he had not been used to, nor could with all his happy change of affairs support. Although this grave theatrical minister, of whom I have been obliged to make such frequent mention, had acquired the reputation of a most profound politician by being often incomprehensible, yet I am not sure that his conduct at this juncture gave us not an evident proof that he was, like other frail mortals, more a slave to his passions than his interest; for no creature ever seemed more fond of power, that so little knew how to use it to his profit and reputation; otherwise he could not possibly have been so discontented, in his secure and prosperous state of the theatre, as to resolve at all hazards to destroy it. We shall now see what infallible measures he took to bring this laudable scheme to perfection.

He plainly saw that, as this disagreeable prosperity was chiefly owing to the conduct of Mr Brett, there could be no hope of recovering the stage to its former confusion, but by finding some effectual means to make Mr Brett weary of his charge. The most probable he could for the present think of in this distress was, to call in the adventurers (whom for many years, by his defence in law, he had kept out) now to take care of their visibly improving interests. This fair appearance of equity, being known to be his own proposal, he rightly guessed would incline these adventurers to form a majority of votes on his side in all theatrical questions, and consequently become a check upon the power of Mr Brett, who had so visibly alienated the hearts of his theatrical subjects, and now began to govern without him. When the adventurers therefore were readmitted to their old government, after having recommended himself to them, by proposing to make some small dividend of the profits (though he did not design that jest should be repeated) he took care that the creditors of the patent, who were then no inconsiderable body, should carry off the every week's clear profits, in proportion to their several dues and demands. This conduct, so speciously just, he had hopes would let Mr Brett see that his share in the patent was not so valuable an acquisition as perhaps he might think it, and probably make a man of his turn to pleasure soon weary of the little profit and great plague it gave him. Now, though these might be all notable expedients, yet I cannot say they would have wholly contributed to Mr Brett's quitting his post, had not a matter of much stronger moment, an unexpected dispute between him and sir Thomas Skipwith, prevailed with him to lay it down: for, in the midst of this flourishing state of the patent, Mr Brett was surprised with a subpœna into chancery, from sir Thomas Skipwith, who alleged in his bill, that the conveyance he had made of his interest in the patent to Mr Brett was only intended in trust. (Whatever the intent might be, the deed itself, which I then read, made no mention of any trust whatever.) But whether Mr Brett, as sir Thomas farther asserted, had previously, or after the deed was signed, given his word of honour, that if he should ever make the stage turn to any account or profit, he would certainly restore it,—that indeed I can say nothing to; but be the deed valid or void, the facts that apparently followed were, that though Mr Brett, in his answer to this bill, absolutely denied his receiving this assignment either in trust or upon any limited condition of what kind soever, yet he made no farther defence in the cause. But since he found sir Thomas had thought fit on any account to sue for the restitution of it; and Mr Brett being himself conscious that, as the world knew he had paid no consideration for it, his keeping it might be misconstrued or not favourably spoken of; or perhaps finding, though the profits were great, they were constantly swallowed up (as has been observed) by the previous satisfaction of old debts,—he grew so tired of the plague and trouble the whole affair had given him, and was likely still to engage him in, that, in a few weeks after, he withdrew himself from all concern with the theatre, and quietly left sir Thomas to find his better account in it. And thus stood this undecided right till, upon the demise of sir Thomas, Mr Brett, being allowed the charges he had been at in this attendance and prosecution of the union, reconveyed this share of the patent to sir George Skipwith, the son and heir of sir Thomas.

Our politician, the old patentee, having thus fortunately got rid of Mr Brett, who had so rashly brought the patent once more to be a profitable tenure, was now again at liberty to choose rather to lose all, than not to have it all to himself.

I have elsewhere observed, that nothing can so effectually secure the strength or contribute to the prosperity of a good company, as the directors of it having always, as near as possible, an amicable understanding with three or four of their best actors, whose good or ill will must naturally make a wide difference in their profitable or useless manner of serving them. While the principal are kept reasonably easy, the lower class can never be troublesome without hurting themselves: but when a valuable actor is hardly treated, the master must be a very cunning man that finds his account in it. We shall now see how far experience will verify this observation.

The patentees, thinking themselves secure in being restored to their former absolute power over this now only company, chose rather to govern it by the reverse of the method I have recommended: for though the daily charge of their united company amounted not by a good deal to what either of the two companies now in Drury-lane or Covent-garden singly arises, they notwithstanding fell into their former politics of thinking every shilling taken from a hired actor, so much clear gain to the proprietor: many of their people therefore were actually, if not injudiciously, reduced in their pay, and others given to understand the same fate was designed them; of which last number I myself was one: which occurs to my memory by the answer I made to one of the adventurers who, in justification of their intended proceeding, told me that my salary, though it should be less than it was by ten shillings a week, would still be more than ever Goodman had, who was a better actor than I could pretend to be: to which I replied, "This may be true, but then you know, sir, it is as true, that Goodman was forced to go upon the highway for a livelihood." As this was a known fact of Goodman, my mentioning it on that occasion I believe was of service to me; at least my salary was not reduced after it. To say a word or two more of Goodman, so celebrated an actor in his time, perhaps may set the conduct of the patentees in a clearer light. Though Goodman had left the stage before I came to it, I had some slight acquaintance with him. About the time of his being expected to be an evidence against sir John Fenwick, in the assassination-plot in 1696, I happened to meet him at dinner at sir Thomas Skipwith's, who, as he was an agreeable companion himself, liked Goodman for the same quality. Here it was that Goodman, without disguise or sparing himself, fell into a laughing account of several loose passages of his younger life; as his being expelled the university of Cambridge for being one of the hot-headed sparks who were concerned in the cutting and defacing the duke of Monmouth's picture, then chancellor of that place. But this disgrace, it seems, had not disqualified him for the stage; which, like the sea-service, refuses no man for his morals that is able-bodied. There as an actor he soon grew into a different reputation; but whatever his merit might be, the pay of a hired hero in those days was so very low, that he was forced it seems to take the air (as he called it) and borrow what money the first man he met had about him. But this being his first exploit of that kind, which the scantiness of his theatrical fortune had reduced him to, king James was prevailed upon to pardon him; which, Goodman said, was doing him so particular an honour, that no man could wonder if his acknowledgment had carried him a little farther than ordinary into the interest of that prince. But as he had lately been out of luck in backing his old master, he had now no way to get home the life he was out upon his account, but by being under the same obligations to king William.

Another anecdote of him, though not quite so dishonourably enterprising, which I had from his own mouth at a different time, will equally show to what low shifts in life the poor provision for good actors under the early government of the patent reduced them. In the younger days of their heroism, captain Griffin and Goodman were confined by their moderate salaries to the economy of lying together in the same bed, and having but one whole shirt between them. One of them, being under the obligation of a rendezvous with a fair lady, insisted upon his wearing it out of his turn; which occasioned so high a dispute that the combat was immediately demanded; and accordingly their pretensions to it were decided by a fair tilt upon the spot, in the room where they lay: but whether Clytus or Alexander was obliged to see no company until a worse could be washed for him, seems not to be a material point in their history, or to my purpose.

By this rate of Goodman, who until the time of his quitting the stage never had more than what is called forty shillings a week, it may be judged how cheap the labour of actors had been formerly; and the patentees thought it a folly to continue the higher price, (which their divisions had since raised them to,) now there was but one market for them. But alas! they had forgot their former fatal mistake of squabbling with their actors in 1695; nor did they make any allowance for the changes and operations of time, or enough consider the interest the actors had in the lord chamberlain, on whose protection they might always rely, and whose decrees had been less restrained by precedent, than those of a lord chancellor.

In this mistaken view of their interest, the patentees, by treating their actors as enemies, really made them so. And when once the masters of a hired company think not their actors' hearts as necessary as their hands, they cannot be said to have agreed for above half the work they are able to do in a day. Or, if an unexpected success should notwithstanding make the profits in any gross disproportion greater than the wages, the wages will always have something worse than a murmur at the head of them, that will not only measure the merit of the actor by the gains of the proprietor, but will never naturally be quiet, till every scheme of getting into property has been tried to make the servant his own master. And this, as far as experience can make me judge, will always be in either of these cases the state of our English theatre. What truth there may be in this observation, we are now coming to a proof of.

To enumerate all the particular acts of power, in which the patentees daily bore hard upon this now only company of actors, might be as tedious as unnecessary. I shall therefore come at once to their most material grievance, upon which they grounded their complaint to the lord chamberlain, who in the year following, 1709, took effectual measures for their relief.

The patentees, observing that the benefit-plays of the actors, towards the latter end of the season, brought the most crowded audiences in the year, began to think their own interests too much neglected by these partial favours of the town to their actors, and therefore judged, it would not be impolitic in such wholesome annual profits to have a fellow feeling with them. Accordingly, an indulto was laid of one-third out of the profits of every benefit, for the proper use and behoof of the patent. But that a clear judgment may be formed of the equity or hardship of this imposition, it will be necessary to show from whence, and from what causes, the actors' claim to benefits originally proceeded.

During the reign of king Charles an actor's benefit had never been heard of. The first indulgence of this kind was given to Mrs Barry (as has been formerly observed) in king James's time, in consideration of the extraordinary applause that had followed her performance. But there this favour rested, to her alone, until after the division of the only company in 1695, at which time the patentees were soon reduced to pay their actors half in good words, and half in ready money. In this precarious condition, some particular actors (however binding their agreements might be) were too poor or too wise to go to law with a lawyer, and therefore rather chose to compound their arrears for their being admitted to the chance of having them made up by the profits of a benefit-play. This expedient had this consequence; that the patentees, though their daily audiences might and did sometimes mend, still kept the short subsistence of their actors at a stand, and grew more steady in their resolution so to keep them, as they found them less apt to mutiny while their hopes of being cleared off by a benefit were depending. In a year or two these benefits grew so advantageous, that they became at last the chief article in every actor's agreement.

Now, though the agreements of these united actors I am speaking of, in 1708, were as yet only verbal, yet that made no difference in the honest obligation to keep them: but as honour at that time happened to have but a loose hold of their consciences, the patentees rather chose to give it the slip, and went on with their work without it. No actor therefore could have his benefit fixed until he had first signed a paper, signifying his voluntary acceptance of it upon the above conditions, any claims from custom to the contrary notwithstanding. Several at first refused to sign this paper; upon which the next in rank were offered on the same conditions to come before the refusers. This smart expedient got some few of the fearful the preference to their seniors; who at last, seeing the time was too short for a present remedy, and that they must either come into the boat or lose their tide, were forced to comply with what they as yet silently resented as the severest injury. In this situation therefore they chose to let the principal benefits be over, that their grievances might swell into some bulk, before they made any application for redress to the lord chamberlain; who, upon hearing their general complaint, ordered the patentees to show cause why their benefits had been diminished one-third, contrary to the common usage. The patentees pleaded the signed agreement, and the actors' receipts of the other two thirds, in full satisfaction. But these were proved to have been exacted from them by the methods already mentioned. They notwithstanding insisted upon them as lawful. But as law and equity do not always agree, they were looked upon as unjust and arbitrary: whereupon the patentees were warned, at their peril, to refuse the actors full satisfaction. But here it was thought necessary that judgment should be for some time respited, until the actors, who had leave so to do, could form a body strong enough to make the inclination of the lord chamberlain to relieve them practicable.

Accordingly Swiney (who was then sole director of the opera only) had permission to enter into a private treaty with such of the united actors in Drury-lane as might be thought fit to head a company under their own management, and to be sharers with him in the Haymarket. The actors chosen for this charge were Wilks, Dogget, Mrs Oldfield, and myself. But before I proceed, lest it should seem surprising that neither Betterton, Mrs Barry, Mrs Bracegirdle, or Booth, were parties in this treaty, it must be observed, that Betterton was now seventy-three, and rather chose, with the infirmities of age upon him, to rely on such salary as might be appointed him, than to involve himself in the cares and hurry that must unavoidably attend the regulation of a new company. As to the two celebrated actresses I have named, this has been my first proper occasion of making it known, that they had both quitted the stage the year before this transaction was thought of. And Booth as yet was scarce out of his minority as an actor, or only in the promise of that reputation which in about four or five years after he happily arrived at. However, at this juncture he was not so far overlooked as not to be offered a valuable addition to his salary: but this he declined, being, while the patentees were under this distress, as much if not more in favour with their chief manager as a schematist than as an actor: and indeed he appeared to my judgment more inclined to risk his fortune in Drury-lane, where he should have no rival in parts or power, than on any terms to embark in the Haymarket, where he was sure to meet with opponents in both. However, this his separation from our interest, when our all was at stake, afterwards kept his advancement to a share with us, in our more successful days, longer postponed than otherwise it probably might have been.

When Mrs Oldfield was nominated as a joint sharer in our new agreement to be made with Swiney, Dogget, who had no objection to her merit, insisted that our affairs could never be upon a secure foundation, if there was more than one sex admitted to the management of them. He therefore hoped that if we offered Mrs Oldfield a *carte blanche* instead of a share, she would not think herself slighted. This was instantly agreed to, and Mrs Oldfield received it rather as a favour than a disobligation. Her demands therefore were two hundred pounds a year certain, and a benefit clear of all charges; which were readily signed to. Her easiness on this occasion, some years after, when our establishment was in prosperity, made us with less reluctancy advance her two hundred pounds to three hundred guineas per annum, with her usual benefit, which upon an average for several years at least doubled that sum.

When a sufficient number of actors were engaged under our confederacy with Swiney, it was then judged a proper time for the lord chamberlain's power to operate; which by lying above a month dormant had so far recovered the patentees from any apprehensions of what might fall upon them from their late usurpations on the benefits of the actors, that they began to set their marks upon those who had distinguished themselves in the application for redress. Several little disgraces were put upon them, particularly in the disposal of parts in plays to be revived; and as visible a partiality was shown in the promotion of those in their interest, though their endeavours to serve them could be of no extraordinary use. How often does history show us, in the same state of courts the same politics have been practised! All this while the other party were passively silent, until one day the actor who particularly solicited their cause at the lord chamberlain's office, being shown there the order signed for absolutely silencing the patentees, and ready to be served, flew back with the news to his companions, then at a rehearsal in which he had been wanted; when, being called to his part, and something hastily questioned by the patentee for his neglect of business; this actor, I say, with an erected look and a theatrical spirit, at once threw off the mask, and roundly told him—"Sir, I have now no more business here than you have; in half an hour you will neither have actors to command, nor authority to employ them."—The patentee, though he could not readily comprehend his mysterious manner of speaking, had just a glimpse of terror enough from the words to soften his reproof into a cold formal declaration, that if he would not do his work, he should not be paid. But now, to complete the catastrophe of these theatrical commotions, enters the messenger with the order of silence in his hand, whom the same actor officiously introduced, telling the patentee that the gentleman wanted to speak with him from the lord chamberlain. When the messenger had delivered the order, the actor, throwing his head over his shoulder towards the patentee, in the manner of Shakspeare's Harry the Eighth to cardinal Wolsey, cried—"Read over that; and now—to breakfast, with what appetite you may." Though these words might be spoken in too vindictive and insulting a manner to be commended, yet from the fulness of a heart injuriously treated, and now relieved by that instant occasion, why might they not be pardoned?

The authority of the patent now no longer subsisting, all the confederated actors immediately walked out of the house, to which they never returned, till they became themselves the tenants and masters of it.

Here again we see an higher instance of the authority of a lord chamberlain, than any of those I have elsewhere mentioned. From whence that power might be derived, as I have already said, I am not lawyer enough to know; however, it is evident that a lawyer obeyed it, though to his cost; which might incline one to think that the law was not clearly against it. Be that as it may, since the law has lately made it no longer a question, let us drop the inquiry, and proceed to the facts which followed this order that silenced the patent.

From this last injudicious disagreement of the patentees with their principal actors, and from what they had suffered on the same occasion, in the division of their only company in 1695, might we not imagine there was something of infatuation in their management? For though I allow actors in general, when they are too much indulged or governed by an unsteady head, to be as unruly a multitude as power can be plagued with; yet there is a medium which, if cautiously observed by a candid use of power; making them always know without feeling their superior; neither suffering their encroachments nor invading their rights, with an immovable adherence to the accepted laws they are to walk by; such a regulation, I say, has never failed in my observation to have made them a tractable and profitable society. If the government of a well established theatre were to be compared to that of a nation, there is no one act of policy or misconduct in the one or the other, in which the manager might not in some parallel case (laugh, if you please) be equally applauded or condemned with the statesman. Perhaps this will not be found so wild a conceit, if you look into the 193d Tatler, vol. iv. where the affairs of the state, and those of the very stage which I am now treating of, are, in a letter from Downs the prompter, compared, and with a great deal of wit and humour set upon an equal foot of policy. The letter is supposed to have been written in the last change of the ministry in queen Anne's time. I will therefore venture, upon the authority of that author's imagination, to carry the comparison as high as it can possibly go, and say, that as I remember one of our princes in the last century to have lost his crown by too arbitrary a use of his power, though he knew how fatal the same measures had been to his unhappy father before him; why should we wonder that the same passions, taking possession of men in lower life, by an equally unpolitic usage of their theatrical subjects, should have involved the patentees in proportionable calamities?

During the vacation which immediately followed the silence of the patent, both parties were at leisure to form their schemes for the winter; for the patentee would still hold out, notwithstanding his being so miserably maimed or over matched; he had no more regard to blows than a blind cock of the game; he might be beaten, but would never yield; the patent was still in his possession, and the broad seal to it visibly as fresh as ever; besides, he had yet some actors in his service at a much cheaper rate than those who had left him; the salaries of which last, now they would not work for him, he was not obliged to pay. In this way of thinking, he still kept together such as had not been invited over to the Haymarket, or had been influenced by Booth to follow his fortune in Drury-lane.

By the patentee's keeping these remains of his broken forces together, it is plain that he imagined this order of silence, like others of the same kind, would be recalled of course, after a reasonable time of obedience had been paid to it: but it seems he had relied too much upon former precedents; nor had his politics yet dived into the secret, that the court power, with which the patent had been so long and often at variance, had now a mind to take the public diversions more absolutely into their own hands; not that I have any stronger reasons for this conjecture, than that the patent never after this order of silence got leave to play during the queen's reign. But upon the accession of his late majesty, power having then a different aspect, the patent found no difficulty in being permitted to exercise its former authority for acting plays, &c. which however, from this time of their lying still in 1709, did not happen till 1714; which the old patentee never lived to see, for he died about six weeks before the new-built theatre in Lincoln's-inn-fields was opened, where the first play acted was the "Recruiting Officer," under the management of his heirs and successors. But of that theatre it is not yet time to give any further account.

The first point resolved on by the comedians now reestablished in the Haymarket, was to alter the auditory part of their theatre, the inconveniences of which have been fully enlarged upon in a former chapter. What embarrassed them most in this design was their want of time to do it in a more complete manner than it now remains in: otherwise they had brought it to the original model of that in Drury-lane, only in a larger proportion, as the wider walls of it would require. As there are not many spectators who may remember what form the Drury-lane theatre stood in about forty years ago, before the old patentee, to make it hold more money, took it in his head to alter it, it were but justice to lay the original figure which sir Christopher Wren first gave it, and the alterations of it now standing, in a fair light; that equal spectators may see, if they were at their choice, which of the structures would incline them to a preference. But in this appeal, I only speak to such spectators as allow a good play, well acted, to be the most valuable entertainment of the stage. Whether such plays (leaving the skill of the dead or living actors equally out of the question) have been more or less recommended in their presentation by either of these different forms of that theatre, is our present matter of inquiry.

It must be observed then, that the area or platform of the old stage projected about four feet forwarder, in a semioval figure, parallel to the benches of the pit; and that the former lower doors of entrance for the actors were brought down between the two foremost (and then only) pilasters, in the place of which doors now the two stage boxes are fixed. That where the doors of entrance now are, there formerly stood two additional side wings, in front to a full set of scenes, which had then almost a double effect in their loftiness and magnificence.

By this original form the usual station of the actors in almost every scene was advanced at least ten feet nearer to the audience than they now can be, because, not only from the stage being shortened in front, but likewise from the additional interposition of those stage boxes, the actors (in respect to the spectators that fill them) are kept so much more backward from the main audience than they used to be; but when the actors were in possession of that forwarder space to advance upon, the voice was then more in the centre of the house, so that the most distant ear had scarce the least doubt or difficulty in hearing what fell from the weakest utterance; all objects were thus drawn nearer to the sense; every painted scene was stronger, every grand scene and dance more extended; every rich or fine-coloured habit had a more lively lustre: nor was the minutest motion of a feature (properly changing with the passion or humour it suited) ever lost, as they frequently must be in the obscurity of too great a distance: and how valuable an advantage the facility of hearing distinctly is to every well-acted scene, every common spectator is a judge. A voice scarce raised above the tone of a whisper, either in tenderness, resignation, innocent distress, or jealousy suppressed, often have as much concern with the heart as the most clamorous passions; and when on any of these occasions such affecting speeches are plainly heard or lost, how wide is the difference from the great or little satisfaction received from them! To all this a master of a company may say, I now receive ten pounds more than could have been taken formerly in every full house. Not unlikely. But might not his house be oftener full, if the auditors were oftener pleased? Might not every bad house too, by a possibility of being made every day better, add as much to one side of his account as it could take from the other? If what I have said carries any truth in it, why might not the original form of this theatre be restored? But let this digression avail what it may, the actors now returned to the Haymarket, as I have observed, wanting nothing but length of time to have governed their alteration of that theatre by this original model of Drury-lane, which I have recommended. As their time therefore was short, they made their best use of it; they did something to it: they contracted its wideness by three ranges of boxes on each side, and brought down its enormous high ceiling within so proportionable a compass, that it effectually cured those hollow undulations of the voice formerly complained of. The remedy had its effect: their audiences exceeded their expectation. There was now no other theatre open against them; they had the town to themselves; they were their own masters; and the profits of their industry came into their own pockets.

Yet with all this fair weather the season of their uninterrupted prosperity was not yet arrived; for the great expense and thinner audiences of the opera (of which they then were equally directors) was a constant drawback upon their gains, yet not so far but that their income this year was better than in their late station at Drury-lane. But by the short experience we had then had of operas; by the high reputation they seemed to have been arrived at the year before; by their power of drawing the whole body of nobility as by enchantment to their solemnities; by that prodigality of expense, at which they were so willing to support them; and from the late extraordinary profits Swiney had made of them; what mountains did we not hope from this mole-hill? But alas! the fairy vision was vanished, this bridal beauty was grown familiar to the general taste, and satiety began to make excuses for its want of appetite; or what is still stranger, its late admirers now as much valued their judgment in being able to find out the faults of the performers, as they had before in discovering their excellences. The truth is, that this kind of entertainment being so entirely sensual, it had no possibility of getting the better of our reason but by its novelty; and that novelty could never be supported but by an annual change of the best voices, which like the finest flowers bloom but for a season, and when that is over, are only dead nosegays. From this natural cause, we have seen within these two years even Farinelli singing to an audience of five and thirty pounds; and yet, if common fame may be credited, the same voice so neglected in one country has in another had charms sufficient to make that crown sit easy on the head of a monarch, which the jealousy of politicians (who had their views in his keeping it) feared, without some such extraordinary amusement, his satiety of empire might tempt him a second time to resign.

There is too in the very species of an Italian singer such an innate fantastical pride and caprice, that the government of them (here at least) is almost impracticable. This distemper, as we were not sufficiently warned or apprized of, threw our musical affairs into perplexities we knew not easily how to get out of. There is scarce a sensible auditor in the kingdom that has not since that time had occasion to laugh at the several instances of it; but what is still more ridiculous, these costly canary-birds have sometimes infested the whole body of our dignified lovers of music with the same childish animosities. Ladies have been known to decline their visits upon account of their being of a different musical party. Cæsar and Pompey made not a warmer division in the Roman republic, than those heroines, their countrywomen, the Faustina and Cuzzoni, blew up in our commonwealth of academical music, by their implacable pretensions to superiority. And while this greatness of soul is their unalterable virtue, it will never be practicable to make two capital singers of the same sex do as they should do in one opera at the same time! No, not though England were to double the sums it has already thrown after them; for even in their own country, where an extraordinary occasion has called a greater number of their best to sing together, the mischief they have made has been proportionable; an instance of which, if I am rightly informed, happened at Parma, where upon the celebration of the marriage of that duke a collection was made of the most eminent voices that expense or interest could purchase, to give as complete an opera as the whole vocal power of Italy could form. But when it came to the proof of this musical project, behold what woful work they made of it! Every performer would be a Cæsar or nothing; their several pretensions to preference were not to be limited within the laws of harmony; they would all choose their own songs, but not more to set off themselves than to oppose or deprive another of an occasion to shine; yet any one would sing a bad song, provided nobody else had a good one, till at last they were thrown together like so many feathered warriors for a battle-royal in a cock-pit, where every one was obliged to kill another to save himself! What pity it was these froward misses and masters of music had not been engaged to entertain the court of some king of Morocco that could have known a good opera from a bad one; with how much ease would such a director have brought them to better order! But alas, as it has been said of greater things,

> Suis et ipsa Roma viribus ruit. HOR.

Imperial Rome fell by the too great strength of its own citizens; so fell this mighty opera, ruined by the too great excellency of its singers; for, upon the whole, it proved to be as barbarously bad, as if malice itself had composed it.

Now though something of this kind, equally provoking, has generally embarrassed the state of operas these thirty years, yet it was the misfortune of the managing actors at the Haymarket to have felt the first effects of it; the honour of the singer and the interest of the undertaker were so often at variance, that the latter began to have but a bad bargain of it. But not to impute more to the caprice of those performers than was really true, there were two different accidents that drew numbers from our audiences before the season was ended; which were—another company permitted to act in Drury-lane, and the long trial of Doctor Sacheverel in Westminster-hall. By the way, it must be observed that this company was not under the direction of the patent (which continued still silenced) but was set up by a third interest, with a license from court. The person to whom this new license was granted was William Collier, esq. a lawyer of an enterprising head and a jovial heart. What sort cf favour he was in with the people then in power, may be judged from his being often admitted to partake with them those detached hours of life when business was to give way to pleasure; but this was not all his merit: he was at the same time a member of parliament for Truro in Cornwall; and we cannot suppose a person so qualified could be refused such a trifle as a license to head a broken company of actors. This sagacious lawyer then, who had a lawyer to deal with, observing that his antagonist kept possession of a theatre without making use of it, and for which he was not obliged to pay rent, unless he actually *did* use it, wisely conceived it might be the interest of the joint landlords, since their tenement was in so precarious a condition, to grant a lease to one who had an undisputed authority to be liable by acting plays in it to pay the rent of it; especially when he tempted them with an offer of raising it from three to four pounds per diem. His project succeeded; the lease was signed; but the means of getting into possession were to be left to his own cost and discretion. This took him up but little time: he immediately laid siege to it with a sufficient number of forces; whether lawless or lawful, I forget; but they were such as obliged the old governor to give it up; who notwithstanding had got intelligence of his approaches and design, time enough to carry off every thing that was worth moving, except a great number of old scenes and new actors that could not easily follow him.

A ludicrous account of this transaction, under fictitious names, may be found in the 99th Tatler, vol. ii. which this explanation may now render more intelligible to the readers of that agreeable author.

This other new license being now in possession of the Drury-lane theatre, those actors whom the patentee, ever since the order of silence, had retained in a state of inaction, all to a man came over to the service of Collier. Of these Booth was then the chief. The merit of the rest had as yet made no considerable appearance; and as the patentee had not left a rag of their clothing behind him, they were but poorly equipped for a public review; consequently at their first opening they were very little able to annoy us. But during the trial of Sacheverel our audiences were extremely weakened by the better rank of people daily attending it; while, at the same time, the lower sort, who were not equally admitted to that grand spectacle, as eagerly crowded into Drury-lane to a new comedy called "The fair Quaker of Deal." This play, having some low strokes of natural humour in it, was rightly calculated for the capacity of the actors who played it, and to the taste of the multitude who were now more disposed and at leisure to see it; but the most happy incident in its fortune was the charm of the fair Quaker, which was acted by Miss Santlow, (afterwards Mrs Booth,) whose person was then in the full bloom of what beauty she might pretend to; before this she had only been admired as the most excellent dancer; which perhaps might not a little contribute to the favourable reception she now met with as an actress in this character, which so happily suited her figure and capacity. The gentle softness of her voice, the composed innocence of her aspect, the modesty of her dress, the reserved decency of her gesture, and the simplicity of the sentiments that naturally fell from her, made her seem the amiable maid she represented. In a word, not the enthusiastic Maid of Orleans was more serviceable of old to the French army, when the English had distressed them, than this fair Quaker was at the head of that dramatic attempt, upon which the support of their weak society depended.

But when the trial I have mentioned, and the run of this play was over, the tide of the town beginning to turn again in our favour, Collier was reduced to give his theatrical affairs a different scheme; which advanced the stage another step towards that settlement which in my time was of the longest duration.

CHAPTER XIII.

The patentee, having now no actors, rebuilds the new theatre in Lincoln's-inn-fields.—A guess at his reasons for it.—More changes in the state of the stage.—The beginning of its better days under the triumvirate of actors.—A sketch of their governing characters.

As coarse mothers may have comely children, so anarchy has been the parent of many a good government; and by a parity of possible consequences we shall find, that from the frequent convulsions of the stage arose at last its longest settlement and prosperity; which many of my readers (or, if I should happen to have but few of them, many of my spectators at least) who, I hope, have not yet lived half their time, will be able to remember.

Though the patent had been often under distresses, it had never felt any blow equal to this unrevoked order of silence; which it is not easy to conceive could have fallen upon any other person's conduct than that of the old patentee. For if he was conscious of his being under the subjection of that power which had silenced him, why would he incur the danger of a suspension by his so obstinate and impolitic treatment of his actors? If he thought such power over him illegal, how came he to obey it now more than before, when he slighted a former order that enjoined him to give his actors their benefits on their usual conditions? But to do him justice, the same obstinacy that involved him in these difficulties, at last preserved to his heirs the property of the patent in its full force and value; yet, to suppose that he foresaw a milder use of power in some future prince's reign might be more favourable to him, is begging at best but a cold question. But whether he knew that this broken condition of the patent would not make his troublesome friends, the adventurers, fly from it as from a falling house, seems not so difficult a question. However, let the reader form his own judgment of them from the facts that followed. It must therefore be observed, that the adventurers seldom came near the house but when there was some visible appearance of a dividend; but I could never hear that upon an ill run of audiences they had ever returned, or brought in a single shilling to make good the deficiencies of their daily receipts. Therefore, as the patentee in possession had alone for several years supported and stood against this uncertainty of fortune, it may be imagined that his accounts were under so voluminous a perplexity, that few of those adventurers would have leisure or capacity enough to unravel them; and as they had formerly thrown away their time and money at law in a fruitless inquiry into them, they now seemed to have entirely given up their right and interest. And according to my best information, notwithstanding the subsequent gains of the patent have been sometimes extraordinary, the further demands or claims of right of the adventurers have lain dormant above these five and twenty years.

Having shown by what means Collier had dispossessed this patentee, not only of the Drury-lane house, but likewise of those few actors which he had kept for some time unemployed in it, we are now led to consider another project of the same patentee, which, if we are to judge of it by the event, has shown him more a wise than a weak man; which I confess, at the time he put it in execution, seemed not so clear a point. For notwithstanding he now saw the authority and power of his patent was superseded, or was at best but precarious, and that he had not one actor left in his service; yet under all these dilemmas and distresses he resolved upon rebuilding the new theatre in Lincoln's-inn-fields, of which he had taken a lease at a low rent ever since Betterton's company had first left it. This conduct seemed too deep for my comprehension. What are we to think of his taking this lease in the height of his prosperity, when he could have no occasion for it? Was he a prophet? Could he then foresee he should one time or other be turned out of Drury-lane? Or did his mere appetite of architecture urge him to build a house, while he could not be sure he should ever have leave to make use of it? But of all this we may think as we please; whatever was his motive, he at his own expense, in this interval of his having nothing else to do, rebuilt that theatre from the ground, as it is now standing. As for the order of silence, he seemed little concerned at it, while it gave him so much uninterrupted leisure to supervise a work which he naturally took delight in.

After this defeat of the patentee, the theatrical forces of Collier in Drury-lane, notwithstanding their having drawn the multitude after them for about three weeks, during the trial of Sacheverel, had made but an indifferent campaign at the end of the season. Collier at least found so little account in it, that it obliged him to push his court interest (which, wherever the stage was concerned, was not inconsiderable) to support him in another scheme; which was, that in consideration of his giving up the Drury-lane clothes, scenes, and actors, to Swiney, and his joint sharers in the Haymarket, he (Collier) might be put into an equal possession of the Haymarket theatre with all the singers, &c. and be made sole director of the opera. Accordingly, by permission of the lord chamberlain, a treaty was entered into, and in a few days ratified by all parties, conformable to the said preliminaries. This was that happy crisis of theatrical liberty which the labouring comedians had long sighed for; and which for above twenty years following was so memorably fortunate to them.

However, there were two hard articles in this treaty, which though it might be policy in the actors to comply with, yet the imposition of them seemed little less despotic than a tax upon the poor when a government did not want it.

The first of these articles was that, whereas the sole license for acting plays was presumed to be a more profitable authority than that for acting operas only, therefore two hundred pounds a-year should be paid to Collier, while master of the opera, by the comedians; to whom a verbal assurance was given by the plenipos on the court side, that while such payment subsisted no other company should be permitted to act plays against them within the liberties, &c. The other article was, that on every Wednesday whereon an opera could be performed, the plays should, *toties quoties*, be silent at Drury-lane, to give the opera a fairer chance for a full house.

This last article, however partial in the intention, was in its effect of great advantage to the sharing actors. For in all public entertainments a day's abstinence naturally increases the appetite to them. Our every Thursday's audience therefore was visibly the better by thus making the day before it a fast. But as this was not a favour designed us, this prohibition of a day, methinks, deserves a little farther notice, because it evidently took a sixth part of their income from all the hired actors, who were only paid in proportion to the number of acting days. This extraordinary regard to operas was in effect making the day-labouring actors the principal subscribers to them; and the shutting out people from the play every Wednesday, many murmured at as an abridgement of their usual liberty. And though I was one of those who profited by that order, it ought not to bribe me into a concealment of what was then said and thought of it. I remember a nobleman of the first rank, then in a high post, and not out of court favour, said openly behind the scenes—"It was shameful to take part of the actors' bread from them, to support the silly diversion of people of quality." But alas! what was all this grievance, when weighed against the qualifications of so grave and stanch a senator as Collier? Such visible merit it seems was to be made easy, though at the expense of the—I had almost said—honour of the court, whose gracious intention for the theatrical commonwealth might have shone with thrice the lustre, if such a paltry price had not been paid for it. But as the government of the stage is but that of the world in miniature, we ought not to have wondered that Collier had interest enough to quarter the weakness of the opera upon the strength of the comedy. General good intentions are not always practicable to a perfection. The most necessary law can hardly pass, but a tenderness to some private interest shall often hang such exceptions upon particular clauses, until at last it comes out lame and lifeless, with the loss of half its force, purpose, and dignity. As for instance, how many fruitless motions have been made in parliaments to moderate the enormous exactions in the practice of the law? And what sort of justice must that be called, which, when a man has not a mind to pay you a debt of ten pounds, it shall cost you fifty pounds before you can get it? How long too has the public been labouring for a bridge at Westminster? But the wonder, that it was not built a hundred years ago, ceases when we are told, that the fear of making one end of London as rich as the other, has been so long an obstruction to it; and though it might seem a still greater wonder, when a new law for building one had at last got over that apprehension, that it should meet with any further delay, yet experience has shown us that the structure of this useful ornament to our metropolis has been so clogged by private jobs that were to be picked out of the undertaking, and the progress of the work so disconcerted by a tedious contention of private interests, and endeavours to impose upon the public abominable bargains, that a whole year was lost before a single stone could be laid to its foundation. But posterity will owe its praises to the zeal and resolution of a truly noble commissioner, whose distinguished impatience has broken through those narrow artifices, those false and frivolous objections, that delayed it, and has already began to raise above the tide that future monument of his public spirit.

How far all this may be allowed applicable to the state of the stage, is not of so great importance, nor so much my concern, as that what is observed upon it should always remain a memorable truth to the honour of that nobleman. But now I go on: Collier, being thus possessed of his musical government, thought his best way would be to farm it out to a gentleman, Aaron Hill, esq. (who, he had reason to suppose, knew something more of theatrical matters than himself) at a rent, if I mistake not, of six hundred pounds per annum; but before the season was ended (upon what occasion, if I could remember, it might not be material to say) took it into his hands again. But all his skill and interest could not raise the direction of the opera to so good a post as he thought due to a person of his consideration: he therefore, the year following, entered upon another high-handed scheme, which, until the demise of the queen, turned to his better account.

After the comedians were in possession of Drury-lane, from whence, during my time upon the stage, they never departed, their swarm of audiences exceeded all that had been seen in thirty years before; which however I do not impute so much to the excellence of their acting, as to their indefatigable industry and good management; for, as I have often said, I never thought, in the general, that we stood in any place of comparison with the eminent actors before us; perhaps too, by there being now an end of the frequent divisions and disorders that had from time to time broken in upon and frustrated their labours, not a little might be contributed to their success.

Collier then, like a true liquorish courtier, observing the prosperity of a theatre which he the year before had parted with for a worse, began to meditate an exchange of theatrical posts with Swiney, who had visibly very fair pretensions to that he was in, by his being first chosen by the court to regulate and rescue the stage from the disorders it had suffered under its former managers. Yet Collier knew that sort of merit could stand in no competition with his being a member of parliament. He therefore had recourse to his court interest (where mere will and pleasure, at that time, was the only law that disposed of all theatrical rights) to oblige Swiney to let him be off from his bad bargain for a better. To this it may be imagined Swiney demurred, and, as he had reason, strongly remonstrated against it. But as Collier had listed his conscience under the command of interest, he kept it to strict duty, and was immovable; insomuch that sir John Vanbrugh, who was a friend to Swiney, and who by his intimacy with the people in power better knew the motive of their actions, advised Swiney rather to accept of the change, than by a non-compliance to hazard his being excluded from any post or concern in either of the theatres. To conclude; it was not long before Collier had procured a new license for acting plays, &c. for himself, Wilks, Dogget, and Cibber, exclusive of Swiney, who by this new regulation was reduced to his Hobson's choice of the opera.

Swiney, being thus transferred to the opera in the sinking condition Collier had left it, found the receipts of it, in the winter following 1711, so far short of the expenses, that he was driven to attend his fortune in some more favourable climate, where he remained twenty years an exile from his friends and country; though there has been scarce an English gentleman who, in his tour of France or Italy, has not renewed or created an acquaintance with him. As this is a circumstance that many people may have forgot, I cannot remember it without that regard and concern it deserves from all that know him. Yet it is some mitigation of his misfortune, that since his return to England, his grey hairs and cheerful disposition have still found a general welcome among his foreign and former domestic acquaintance.

Collier, being now first-commissioned manager with the comedians, drove them, too, to the last inch of a hard bargain (the natural consequence of all treaties between power and necessity.) He not only demanded six hundred a year neat money, the price at which he had farmed out his opera, and to make the business a sinecure to him; but likewise insisted upon a moiety of the two hundred that had been levied upon us the year before in aid of the operas; in all seven hundred pounds. These large and ample conditions, considering in what hands we were, we resolved to swallow without wry faces; rather choosing to run any hazard than contend with a formidable power, against which we had no remedy. But so it happened, that fortune took better care of our interest than we ourselves had like to have done: for had Collier accepted of our first offer of an equal share with us, he had got three hundred pounds a year more by complying with it, than by the sum he imposed upon us; our shares being never less than a thousand annually to each of us, until the end of the queen's reign in 1714; after which, Collier's commission was superseded, his theatrical post, upon the accession of his late majesty, being given to sir Richard Steele.

From these various revolutions in the government of the theatre, all owing to the patentees' mistaken principle of increasing their profits by too far enslaving their people, and keeping down the price of good actors—(and I could almost insist, that giving large salaries to bad ones could not have had a worse consequence)—I say, when it is considered that the authority for acting plays, &c. was thought of so little worth, that (as has been observed) sir Thomas Skipwith gave away his share of it, and the adventurers had fled from it; that Mr Congreve at another time had voluntarily resigned it, and sir John Vanbrugh (merely to get the rent of his new house paid) had by leave of the court farmed out his license to Swiney, who not without some hesitation had ventured upon it; let me say again, out of this low condition of the theatre, was it not owing to the industry of three or four comedians, that a new place was now created for the crown to give away, without any expense attending it, well worth the acceptance of any gentleman whose merit or services had no higher claim to preferment, and which Collier and sir Richard Steele, in the two last reigns, successively enjoyed? Though I believe I may have said something like this in a former chapter, I am not unwilling it should be twice taken notice of.

We are now come to that firm establishment of the theatre, which, except the admittance of Booth into a share, and Dogget's retiring from it, met with no change or alteration for above twenty years after.

Collier, as has been said, having accepted of a certain appointment of seven hundred per annum, Wilks, Dogget, and myself were now the only acting managers under the queen's license; which being a grant but during pleasure, obliged us to a conduct that might not undeserve that favour. At this time we were all in the vigour of our capacities as actors; and our prosperity enabled us to pay at least double the salaries to what the same actors had usually received, or could have hoped for under the government of the patentees. Dogget, who was naturally an economist, kept our expenses and accounts, to the best of his power, within regulated bounds and moderation. Wilks, who had a stronger passion for glory than lucre, was a little apt to be lavish in what was not always as necessary for the profit as the honour of the theatre: for example, at the beginning of almost every season he would order two or three suits to be made or refreshed, for actors of moderate consequence, that his having constantly a new one for himself might seem less particular, though he had as yet no new part for it. This expeditious care of doing us good, without waiting for our consent to it, Dogget always looked upon with the eye of a man in pain: but I, who hated pain (though I as little liked the favour as Dogget himself) rather chose to laugh at the circumstance than complain of what I knew was not to be cured but by a remedy worse than the evil. Upon these occasions therefore, whenever I saw him and his followers so prettily dressed out for an old play, I only commended his fancy, or at most but whispered him not to give himself so much trouble about others, upon whose performance it would but be thrown away: to which, with a smiling air of triumph over my want of penetration, he has replied, "Why now, that was what I really did it for; to show others, that I love to take care of them as well as of myself." Thus, whenever he made himself easy, he had not the least conception, let the expense be what it would, that we could possibly dislike it; and from the same principle, provided a thinner audience were liberal of their applause, he gave himself little concern about the receipt of it. As in these different tempers of my brother managers there might be equally something right and wrong, it was equally my business to keep well with them both: and though of the two, I was rather inclined to Dogget's way of thinking, yet I was always under the disagreeable restraint of not letting Wilks see it: therefore, when in any material point of management they were ready to come to a rupture, I found it advisable to think neither of them absolutely in the wrong; but by giving to one as much of the right in his opinion this way, as I took from the other in that, their differences were sometimes softened into concessions that I have reason to think prevented many ill consequences in our affairs that otherwise might have attended them. But this was always to be done with a very gentle hand; for, as Wilks was apt to be easily hurt by opposition, so when he felt it, he was apt to be insupportable. However, there were some points in which we were always unanimous. In the twenty years while we were our own directors, we never had a creditor that had occasion to come twice for his bill; every Monday morning discharged us of all demands, before we took a shilling for our own use. And from this time we neither asked any actor, nor were desired by them, to sign any written agreement (to the best of my memory) whatsoever: the rates of their respective salaries were only entered in our daily pay-roll, which plain record every one looked upon as good as city-security; for where an honest meaning is mutual, the mutual confidence will be bond enough in conscience on both sides. But that I may not ascribe more to our conduct than was really its due, I ought to give fortune her share of the commendation; for had not our success exceeded our expectation, it might not have been in our power so thoroughly to have observed those laudable rules of economy, justice, and lenity, which so happily supported us: but the severities and oppression we had suffered under our former masters, made us incapable of imposing them upon others; which gave our whole society the cheerful looks of a rescued people. But notwithstanding this general cause of content, it was not above a year or two before the imperfection of human nature began to show itself in contrary symptoms. The merit of the hazards which the managers had run, and the difficulties they had combated in bringing to perfection that revolution by which they had all so amply profited in the amendment of their general income, began now to be forgotten; their acknowledgments and thankful promises of fidelity were no more repeated, or scarce thought obligatory: ease and plenty by an habitual enjoyment had lost their novelty; and the largeness of their salaries seemed rather lessened than advanced by the extraordinary gains of the undertakers; for that is the scale in which the hired actor will always weigh his performance; but whatever reason there may seem to be in his case, yet as he is frequently apt to throw a little self-partiality into the balance, that consideration may a good deal alter the justness of it. While the actors therefore had this way of thinking, happy was it for the managers that their united interest was so inseparably the same, and that their skill and power in acting stood in a rank so far above the rest, that if the whole body of private men had deserted them, it would yet have been an easier matter for the managers to have picked up recruits, than for the deserters to have found proper officers to head them. Here then, in this distinction, lay our security: our being actors ourselves was an advantage to our government, which all former managers, who were only idle gentlemen, wanted: nor was our establishment easily to be broken, while our health and limbs enabled us to be joint-labourers in the work we were masters of.

The only actor who, in the opinion of the public, seemed to have had a pretence of being advanced to a share with us, was certainly Booth: but when it is considered how strongly he had opposed the measures that had made us managers, by setting himself (as has been observed) at the head of an opposite interest, he could not as yet have much to complain of; besides, if the court had thought him now an equal object of favour, it could not have been in our power to have opposed his preferment. This I mention, not to take from his merit, but to show from what cause it was not as yet better provided for. Therefore it may be no vanity to say, our having at that time no visible competitors on the stage was the only interest that raised us to be the managers of it.

But here let me rest awhile; and since at my time of day our best possessions are but ease and quiet, I must be content, if I will have sallies of pleasure, to take up with those only that are to be found in imagination. When I look back therefore on the storms of the stage we had been tossed in; when I consider that various vicissitude of hopes and fears we had for twenty years struggled with, and found ourselves at last thus safely set on shore, to enjoy the produce of our own labours; and to have raised those labours, by our skill and industry, to a much fairer profit than our task-masters, by all their severe and griping government, had ever reaped from them; a good-natured reader that is not offended at the comparison of great things with small, will allow was a triumph in proportion equal to those that have attended the most heroic enterprises for liberty. What transport could the first Brutus feel upon his expulsion of the Tarquins, greater than that which now danced in the heart of a poor actor who, from an injured labourer unpaid his hire, had made himself, without guilt, a legal manager of his own fortune? Let the grave and great contemn or yawn at these low conceits; but let me be happy in the enjoyment of them! To this hour my memory runs over that pleasing prospect of life past, with little less delight than when I was first in the real possession of it. This is the natural temper of my mind, which my acquaintance are frequently witnesses of: and as this was all the ambition Providence had made my obscure condition capable of, I am thankful that means were given me to enjoy the fruits of it.

——— Hoc est
Vivere bis, vitâ posse priore frui.

Something like the meaning of this the less learned reader may find in my title page.

CHAPTER XIV.

The stage in its highest prosperity.—The managers not without errors.—Of what kind.—Cato first acted.—What brought it to the stage.—The company go to Oxford.—Their success, and different auditors there.—Booth made a sharer.—Dogget objects to him.—Quits the stage upon his admittance.—That not his true reason.—What was.—Dogget's theatrical character.

Notwithstanding the managing actors were now in a happier situation than their utmost pretensions could have expected, yet it is not to be supposed but wiser men might have mended it. As we could not all govern ourselves, there were seasons when we were not all fit to govern others. Our passions and our interest drew not always the same way. *Self* had a great sway in our debates; we had our partialities, our prejudices, our favourites of less merit, and our jealousies of those who came too near us; frailties which societies of higher consideration, while they are composed of men, will not always be free from. To have been constantly capable of unanimity had been a blessing too great for our station: one mind among three people, were to have had three masters to one servant; but when that one servant is called three different ways at the same time, whose business is to be done first? For my own part, I was forced almost all my life to give up my share of him; and if I could, by art or persuasion, hinder others from making what I thought a wrong use of their power, it was the all and utmost I desired. Yet whatever might be our personal errors, I shall think I have no right to speak of them farther than where the public entertainment was affected by them. If therefore, among so many, some particular actors were remarkable in any part of their private lives, that might sometimes make the world merry without doors, I hope my laughing friends will excuse me, if I do not so far comply with their desires or curiosity, as to give them a place in my history. I can only recommend such anecdotes to the amusement of a noble person, who (in case I conceal them) does me the flattering honour to threaten my work with a supplement. It is enough for me, that such actors had their merits to the public: let those recite their imperfections; who are themselves without them: it is my misfortune not to have that qualification. Let us see then (whatever was amiss in it) how our administration went forward.

When we were first invested with this power, the joy of our so unexpectedly coming into it, kept us for some time in amity and good humour with one another: and the pleasure of reforming the many false measures, absurdities, and abuses, that like weeds had sucked up the due nourishment from the fruits of the theatre, gave us as yet no leisure for private dissentions. Our daily receipts exceeded our imagination; and we seldom met as a board to settle our weekly accounts, without the satisfaction of joint-heirs just in possession of an unexpected estate that had been distantly entailed upon them. Such a sudden change of our condition, it may be imagined, could not but throw out of us a new spirit in almost every play we appeared in: nor did we ever sink into that common negligence which is apt to follow good fortune. Industry we knew was the life of our business; that it not only concealed faults, but was of equal value to greater talents without it; which the decadence once of Betterton's company in Lincoln's-inn-fields had lately shown us a proof of.

This then was that happy period when both actors and managers were in their highest enjoyment of general content and prosperity. Now it was that the politer world too, by their decent attention, their sensible taste, and their generous encouragements to authors and actors, once more saw that the stage under a due regulation was capable of being what the wisest ages thought it *might* be—the most rational scheme that human wit could form to dissipate with innocence the cares of life, to allure even the turbulent or ill disposed from worse meditations, and to give the leisure hours of business and virtue an instructive recreation.

If this grave assertion is less recommended by falling from the pen of a comedian, I must appeal for the truth of it to the tragedy of "Cato," which was first acted in 1712. I submit to the judgment of those who were then the sensible spectators of it, if the success and merit of that play was not an evidence of every article of that value which I have given to a decent theatre? But (as I was observing) it could not be expected the summer days I am speaking of could be the constant weather of the year; we had our clouded hours as well as our sunshine, and were not always in the same good humour with one another: fire, air, and water, could not be more vexatiously opposite, than the different tempers of the three managers, though they might equally have their useful as well as their destructive qualities. How variously these elements in our several dispositions operated, may be judged from the following single instance, as well as a thousand others which, if they were all to be told, might possibly make my reader wish I had forgot them.

Much about this time then there came over from Dublin theatre two uncelebrated actors, to pick up a few pence among us in the winter, as Wilks had a year or two before done on their side the water in the summer. But it was not so clear to Dogget and myself, that it was in their power to do us the same service in Drury-lane, as Wilks might have done them in Dublin. However, Wilks was so much a man of honour, that he scorned to be outdone in the least point of it, let the cost be what it would to his fellow-managers, who had no particular accounts of honour open with them. To acquit himself therefore with a better grace, Wilks so ordered it, that his Hibernian friends were got upon our stage before any other manager had well heard of their arrival. This so generous despatch of their affair gave Wilks a very good chance of convincing his friends, that himself was sole master of the masters of the company. Here now the different elements in our tempers began to work with us. While Wilks was only animated by a grateful hospitality to his friends, Dogget was ruffled into a storm, and looked upon this generosity as so much insult and injustice upon himself and the fraternity. During this disorder I stood by, a seeming quiet passenger; and since talking to the winds, I knew, could be to no great purpose, (whatever weakness it might be called,) could not help smiling, to observe with what officious ease and delight Wilks was treating his friends at our expense, who were scarce acquainted with them: for it seems all this was to end in their having a benefit-play in the height of the season, for the unprofitable service they had done us, without our consent or desire to employ them. Upon this Dogget bounced, and grew almost as untractable as Wilks himself. Here again I was forced to clap my patience to the helm, to weather this difficult point between them. Applying myself therefore to the person I imagined was most likely to hear me, I desired Dogget "to consider, that I must naturally be as much hurt by this vain and overbearing behaviour in Wilks, as he could be; and that though it was true these actors had no pretence to the favour designed them, yet we could not say they had done us any farther harm than letting the town see the parts they had been shown in had been better done by those to whom they properly belonged: yet as we had greatly profited by the extraordinary labour of Wilks, who acted long parts almost every day, and at least twice to Dogget's once; and that I granted it might not be so much his consideration of our common interest, as his fondness for applause, that set him to work; yet even that vanity, if he supposed it such, had its merit to us; and as we had found our account in it, it would be folly upon a punctilio to tempt the rashness of a man who was capable to undo all he had done, by any act of extravagance that might fly into his head: that, admitting this benefit might be some little loss to us, yet to break with him upon it, could not but be ten times of worse consequence than our overlooking his disagreeable manner of making the demand upon us."

Though I found this had made Dogget drop the severity of his features, yet he endeavoured still to seem uneasy by his starting a new objection, which was, that we could not be sure even of the charge they were to pay for it: for Wilks, said he, you know will go any lengths to make it a good day to them, and may whisper the door-keepers to give them the ready money taken, and return the account in such tickets only as these actors have not themselves disposed of. To make this easy too, I gave him my word to be answerable for the charge myself. Upon this he acceded, and accordingly they had the benefit-play. But so it happened (whether as Dogget had suspected or not, I cannot say) the ready money received fell ten pounds short of the sum they had agreed to pay for it. Upon the Saturday following (the day on which we constantly made up our accounts) I went early to the office and inquired if the ten pounds had yet been paid in; but not hearing that one shilling of it had found its way thither, I immediately supplied the sum out of my own pocket, and directed the treasurer to charge it received from me in the deficient receipt of the benefit-day. Here now, it might be imagined, all this silly matter was accommodated, and that no one could so properly say he was aggrieved as myself; but let us observe what the consequence says. Why, the effect of my insolent interposing honesty proved to be this: that the party most obliged was the most offended; and the offence was imputed to me, who had been ten pounds out of pocket, to be able to commit it: for when Wilks found in the account how spitefully the ten pounds had been paid in, he took me aside into the adjacent stone passage, and with some warmth asked me, what I meant by pretending to pay in this ten pounds; and that for his part he did not understand such treatment. To which I replied, that though I was amazed at his thinking himself ill treated, I would give him a plain justifiable answer; that I had given my word to Dogget the charge of the benefit should be fully paid, and since his friends had neglected it, I found myself bound to make it good. Upon which he told me I was mistaken if I thought he did not see into the bottom of all this; that Dogget and I were always endeavouring to thwart and make him uneasy; but he was able to stand upon his own legs, and we should find he would not be used so: that he took this payment of the ten pounds as an insult upon him, and a slight to his friends; but rather than suffer it, he would tear the whole business to pieces: that I knew it was in his power to do it; and if he could not do a civil thing to a friend without all this senseless rout about it, he could be received in Ireland upon his own terms, and could as easily mend a company there as he had done here: that if he were gone, Dogget and I would not be able to keep the doors open a week; and, by G—, he would not be a drudge for nothing. As I knew all this was but the foam of the high value he had set upon himself, I thought it not amiss to seem a little silently concerned for the helpless condition to which his resentment of the injury I have related was going to reduce us: for I knew I had a friend in his heart, that, if I gave him a little time to cool, would soon bring him to reason: the sweet morsel of a thousand pounds a year was not to be met with at every table, and might tempt a nicer palate than his own to swallow it when he was not out of humour. This I knew would always be of weight with him, when the best arguments I could use would be of none. I therefore gave him no farther provocation than by gravely telling him we all had it in our power to do one another a mischief, but I believed none of us much cared to hurt ourselves; that if he was not of my opinion, it would not be in my power to hinder whatever new scheme he might resolve upon; that London would always have a playhouse, and I should have some chance in it, though it might not be so good as it had been; that he might be sure, if I had thought my paying in the ten pounds could have been so ill received, I should have been glad to have saved it. Upon this he seemed to mutter something to himself, and walked off as if he had a mind to be alone. I took the occasion, and returned to Dogget to finish our accounts. In about six minutes Wilks came in to us—not in the best humour, it may be imagined, yet not in so ill a one but that he took his share of the ten pounds, without showing the least contempt of it; which had he been proud enough to have refused, or to have paid in himself, I might have thought he intended to make good his menaces, and that the injury I had done him would never have been forgiven; but it seems we had different ways of thinking.

Of this kind, more or less delightful, was the life I led with this impatient man for full twenty years. Dogget, as we shall find, could not hold it so long; but as he had more money than I, he had not occasion for so much philosophy. And thus were our theatrical affairs frequently disconcerted by this irascible commander, this Achilles of our confederacy; who, I may be bold to say, came very little short of the spirit Horace gives to that hero in his

> Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer.

This then is one of those personal anecdotes of our variances, which, as our public performances were affected by it, could not with regard to truth and justice be omitted.

From this time to the year 1712, my memory (from which repository alone every article of what I write is collected) has nothing worth mentioning until the first acting of the tragedy of "Cato." As to the play itself, it might be enough to say, that the author and the actors had their different hopes of fame and profit amply answered by the performance; but as its success was attended with remarkable consequences, it may not be amiss to trace it from its several years' concealment in the closet to the stage.

In 1703, nine years before it was acted, I had the pleasure of reading the first four acts (which was all of it then written) privately with sir Richard Steele: it may be needless to say it was impossible to lay them out of my hand until I had gone through them; or to dwell upon the delight his friendship to the author received, upon my being so warmly pleased with them; but my satisfaction was as highly disappointed when he told me, whatever spirit Mr Addison had shown in his writing it, he doubted he would never have courage enough to let his "Cato" stand the censure of an English audience; that it had only been the amusement of his leisure hours in Italy, and was never intended for the stage. This poetical diffidence sir Richard himself spoke of with some concern, and in the transport of his imagination could not help saying, "Good God! what a part would Betterton make of Cato!" But this was seven years before Betterton died, and when Booth (who afterwards made his fortune by acting it) was in his theatrical minority. In the latter end of queen Anne's reign, when our national politics had changed hands, the friends of Mr Addison then thought it a proper time to animate the public with the sentiments of Cato. In a word, their importunities were too warm to be resisted; and it was no sooner finished than hurried to the stage, in April 1712, at a time when three days a week were usually appointed for the benefit-plays of particular actors: but a work of that critical importance was to make its way through all private considerations; nor could it possibly give place to a custom, which the breach of could very little prejudice the benefits, that on so unavoidable an occasion were (in part, though not wholly) postponed. It was therefore (Mondays excepted) acted every day for a month to constantly crowded houses. As the author had made us a present of whatever profits he might have claimed from it, we thought ourselves obliged to spare no cost in the proper decorations of it. Its coming so late in the season to the stage proved of particular advantage to the sharing actors; because the harvest of our annual gains was generally over before the middle of March, many select audiences being then usually reserved in favour to the benefits of private actors; which fixed engagements naturally abated the receipts of the days before and after them. But this unexpected aftercrop of "Cato," largely supplied to us those deficiencies, and was almost equal to two fruitful seasons in the same year; at the close of which the three managing actors found themselves each a gainer of thirteen hundred and fifty pounds. But to return to the first reception of this play from the public.

Although "Cato" seems plainly written upon what are called Whig principles, yet the Tories of that time had sense enough not to take it as the least reflection upon their administration; but, on the contrary, they seemed to brandish and vaunt their approbation of every sentiment in favour of liberty, which by a public act of their generosity was carried so high, that one day, while the play was acting, they collected fifty guineas in the boxes, and made a present of them to Booth, with this compliment—"For his honest opposition to a perpetual dictator, and his dying so bravely in the cause of liberty." What was insinuated by any part of these words, is not my affair; but so public a reward had the appearance of a laudable spirit which only such a play as "Cato" could have inspired; nor could Booth be blamed if, upon so particular a distinction of his merit, he began himself to set more value upon it. How far he might carry it, in making use of the favour he stood in with a certain nobleman then in power at court, was not difficult to penetrate, and indeed ought always to have been expected by the managing actors. For which of them (making the case every way his own) could with such advantages have contented himself in the humble station of an hired actor? But let us see how the managers stood severally affected upon this occasion.

Dogget, who expected, though he feared not, the attempt of what after happened, imagined he had thought of an expedient to prevent it; and to cover his design with all the art of a statesman, he insinuated to us (for he was a staunch Whig) that this present of fifty guineas was a sort of a Tory triumph, which they had no pretence to; and that for his part he could not bear, that so redoubted a champion for liberty as Cato should be bought off to the cause of a contrary party. He therefore in the seeming zeal of his heart proposed, that the managers themselves should make the same present to Booth, which had been made him from the boxes the day before. This, he said, would recommend the equality and liberal spirit of our management to the town, and might be a means to secure Booth more firmly in our interest; it never having been known that the skill of the best actor had received so round a reward or gratuity in one day before. Wilks, who wanted nothing but abilities to be as cunning as Dogget, was so charmed with the proposal, that he longed that moment to make Booth the present with his own hands; and though he knew he had no right to do it without my consent, had no patience to ask it; upon which I turned to Dogget with a cold smile, and told him, that if Booth could be purchased at so cheap a rate, it would be one of the best proofs of his economy we had ever been beholden to. I therefore desired we might have a little patience; that our doing it too hastily might be only making sure of an occasion to throw the fifty guineas away; for if we should be obliged to do better for him, we could never expect that Booth would think himself bound in honour to refund them. This seemed so absurd an argument to Wilks, that he began with his usual freedom of speech to treat it as a pitiful evasion of their intended generosity. But Dogget, who was not so wide of my meaning, clapping his hand upon mine, said with an air of security, "Oh! do not trouble yourself: there must be two words to that bargain; let me alone to manage that matter." Wilks, upon this dark discourse, grew uneasy, as if there were some secret between us that he was to be left out of. Therefore, to avoid the shock of his intemperance, I was reduced to tell him that it was my opinion, that Booth would never be made easy by any thing we could do for him, until he had a share in the profits and management; and that, as he did not want friends to assist him, whatever his merit might be before, every one would think, since his acting of Cato, he had now enough to back his pretensions to it. To which Dogget replied, that nobody could think his merit was slighted by so handsome a present as fifty guineas; and that for his further pretensions, whatever the license might avail, our property of house, scenes, and clothes, were our own, and not in the power of the crown to dispose of. To conclude, my objections that the money would be only thrown away, &c. were overruled; and the same night Booth had the fifty guineas, which he received with a thankfulness that made Wilks and Dogget perfectly easy; insomuch that they seemed for some time to triumph in their conduct, and often endeavoured to laugh my jealousy out of countenance. But in the following winter the game happened to take a different turn; and then, if it had been a laughing matter, I had as strong an occasion to smile at their former security. But before I make an end of this matter, I cannot pass over the good fortune of the company that followed us to the act at Oxford, which was held in the intervening summer. Perhaps too a short view of the stage in that different situation may not be unacceptable to the curious.

After the restoration of king Charles, before the cavalier and round-head parties, under their new denomination of Whig and Tory, began again to be politically troublesome, public acts at Oxford (as I find by the date of several prologues written by Dryden for Hart on those occasions) had been more frequently held than in later reigns. Whether the same party dissentions may have occasioned the discontinuance of them, is a speculation not necessary to be entered into. But these academical jubilees have usually been looked upon as a kind of congratulatory compliment to the accession of every new prince to the throne, and generally as such have attended them. King James, notwithstanding his religion, had the honour of it; at which the players as usual assisted. This I have only mentioned, to give the reader a theatrical anecdote of a liberty which Tony Leigh the comedian took with the character of the well known Obadiah Walker, then head of University college, who in that prince's reign had turned Roman Catholic. The circumstance is this.

In the latter end of the comedy called the "Committee," Leigh, who acted the part of Teague, hauling in Obadiah with a halter about his neck, whom, according to his written part, he was to threaten to hang for no better reason than his refusing to drink the king's health,—here Leigh, to justify his purpose with a stronger provocation, put himself into a more than ordinary heat with his captive Obadiah; which having heightened his master's curiosity to know what Obadiah had done to deserve such usage, Leigh, folding his arms with a ridiculous stare of astonishment, replied —"Upon my shoul, he has shange his religion." As the merit of this jest lay chiefly in the auditors' sudden application of it to the Obadiah of Oxford, it was received with all the triumph of applause which the zeal of a different religion could inspire. But Leigh was given to understand that the king was highly displeased at it, inasmuch as it had shown him that the university was in a temper to make a jest of his proselyte. But to return to the conduct of our own affairs there in 1712.

It had been a custom for the comedians, while at Oxford, to act twice a day; the first play ending every morning before the college hours of dining, and the other never to break into the time of shutting their gates in the evening. This extraordinary labour gave all the hired actors a title to double pay, which at the act in king William's time I had myself accordingly received there. But the present managers considering, that by acting only once a day, their spirits might be fresher for every single performance, and that by this means they might be able to fill up the term of their residence without the repetition of their best and strongest plays; and as their theatre was contrived to hold a full third more than the usual form of it had done, one house well filled might answer the profits of two but moderately taken up; being enabled too, by their late success at London, to make the journey pleasant and profitable to the rest of their society,—they resolved to continue to them their double pay, notwithstanding this new abatement of half their labour. This conduct of the managers more than answered their intention, which was rather to get nothing themselves, than not let their fraternity be the better for the expedition. Thus they laid an obligation upon their company, and were themselves considerable, though unexpected, gainers by it. But my chief reason for bringing the reader to Oxford, was to show the different taste of plays there, from that which prevailed at London. A great deal of that false flashy wit, and forced humour, which had been the delight of our metropolitan multitude, was only rated there at its bare intrinsic value; applause was not to be purchased there, but by the true sterling, the *sal atticum* of a genius; unless where the skill of the actor passed it upon them with some extraordinary strokes of nature. Shakspeare and Jonson had there a sort of classical authority; for whose masterly scenes they seemed to have as implicit a reverence as formerly for the ethics of Aristotle; and were as incapable of allowing moderns to be their competitors as of changing their academical habits for gaudy colours or embroidery. Whatever merit therefore some few of our more politely written comedies might pretend to, they had not the same effect upon the imagination there, nor were received with that extraordinary applause they had met with from the people of mode and pleasure in London; whose vain accomplishments did not dislike themselves in the glass that was held to them. The elegant follies of higher life were not at Oxford among their acquaintance, and consequently might not be so good company to a learned audience, as nature in her plain dress, and unornamented in her pursuits and inclinations, seemed to be.

The only distinguished merit allowed to any modern writer, was to the author of Cato; which play being the flower of a plant raised in that learned garden, (for there Mr Addison had his education,) what favour may we not suppose was due to him from an audience of brethren, who from that local relation to him might naturally have a warmer pleasure in their benevolence to his fame? But not to give more weight to this imaginary circumstance than it may bear, the fact was, that on our first day of acting it, our house was in a manner invested, and entrance demanded by twelve o'clock at noon; and before one it was not wide enough for many who came too late for places. The same crowds continued for three days together, (an uncommon curiosity in that place,) and the death of Cato triumphed over the injuries of Cæsar everywhere. To conclude, our reception at Oxford, whatever our merit might be, exceeded our expectation. At our taking leave we had the thanks of the vice-chancellor for the decency and order observed by our whole society; an honour which had not always been paid upon the same occasions; for at the act in king William's time I remember some pranks of a different nature had been complained of. Our receipts had not only enabled us (as I have observed) to double the pay of every actor, but to afford out of them, towards the repair of St Mary's church, the contribution of fifty pounds. Besides which, each of the three managers had to his respective share, clear of all charges, one hundred and fifty more, for his one and twenty days' labour; which, being added to his thirteen hundred and fifty shared in the winter preceding, amounted in the whole to fifteen hundred; the greatest sum ever known to have been shared in one year to that time. And to the honour of our auditors here and elsewhere be it spoken, all this was raised without the aid of those barbarous entertainments with which some few years after (upon the reestablishment of two contending companies) we were forced to disgrace the stage to support it.

This therefore is that remarkable period when the stage, during my time upon it, was the least reproachable. And it may be worth the public observation (if any thing I have said of it can be so) that *one* stage may, as I have proved it has done, very laudably support itself by such spectacles only as are fit to delight a sensible people; but the equal prosperity of *two* stages has always been of a very short duration. If therefore the public should ever recover into the true taste of that time, and stick to it, the stage must come into it or *starve;* as whenever the general taste is vulgar, the stage must come down to it to *live.* But I ask pardon of the multitude, who in all regulations of the stage may expect to be a little indulged in what they like. If therefore they *will* have a May-pole, why, the players must *give* them a May-pole; but I only speak in case they should keep an old custom of changing their minds, and by their privilege of being in the *wrong*, should take a fancy by way of variety of being in the *right.* Then in such a case what I have said may appear to have been no intended design against their liberty of judging for themselves.

After our return from Oxford, Booth was at full leisure to solicit his admission to a share in the management; in which he succeeded about the beginning of the following winter. Accordingly a new license (recalling all former licenses) was issued, wherein Booth's name was added to those of the other managers. But still there was a difficulty in his qualification to be adjusted—what consideration he should allow for an equal title to our stock of clothes, scenes, &c., without which the license was of no more use than the stock was without the license; or at least, if there were any difference, the former managers seemed to have the advantage in it; the stock being entirely theirs, and three parts in four of the license; for Collier, though now but a fifth manager, still insisted on his former appointment of seven hundred pounds a year, which in equity ought certainly to have been proportionably abated. But court-favour was not always measured by *that* yard; Collier's matter was soon out of the question; his pretensions were too visible to be contested; but the affair of Booth was not so clear a point. The lord chamberlain therefore only recommended it to be adjusted among ourselves; which, to say the truth, at that time was a greater indulgence than I expected. Let us see then how this critical case was handled.

Wilks was of opinion, that to set a good round value upon our stock, was the only way to come near an equivalent for the diminution of our shares which the admission of Booth must occasion. But Dogget insisted that he had no mind to dispose of any part of his property, and therefore would set no price upon it at all. Though I allowed that both these opinions might be grounded on a good deal of equity, yet I was not sure that either of them was practicable; and therefore told them, that when they could both agree, which of them could be made so, they might rely on my consent in any shape. In the mean time I desired they would consider, that as our license subsisted only during pleasure, we could not pretend that the queen might not recall or alter it; but that to speak out without mincing the matter on either side, the truth was plainly this:—that Booth had a manifest merit as an actor; and as he was not supposed to be a Whig, it was as evident that, a good deal for that reason, a secretary of state had taken him into his protection, which I was afraid the weak pretence of our invaded property would not be able to contend with. That his having signalized himself in the character of Cato (whose principles the Tories had affected to have taken into their own possession) was a very popular pretence of making him free of the stage, by advancing him to the profits of it; and as we had seen that the stage was frequently treated as if it was not supposed to have any property at all, this favour intended to Booth was thought a right occasion to avow that opinion, by disposing of its property at pleasure. But be that as it might, I owned it was not so much my apprehensions of what the *court* might do, that swayed me into an accommodation with Booth, as what the *town* (in whose favour he now apparently stood) might think *ought* to be done. That there might be more danger in contesting their arbitrary will and pleasure, than in disputing this less terrible strain of the prerogative. That if Booth were only imposed upon us from his merit to the court, we were then in the condition of other subjects. Then indeed law, right, and possession, might have a tolerable tug for our property; but as the town would always look upon his merit to *them* in a stronger light, and be judges of it themselves, it would be a weak and idle endeavour in us not to sail with the stream, when we might possibly make a merit of our cheerfully admitting him. That though his former opposition to our interest might, between man and man, a good deal justify our not making an earlier friend of him; yet that was a disobligation out of the town's regard, and consequently would be of no weight against so approved an actor's being preferred. But, all this notwithstanding, if they could both agree in a different opinion, I would at the hazard of any consequence be guided by it.

Here now will be shown another instance of our different tempers. Dogget (who in all matters that concerned our common weal and interest little regarded our opinion, and even to an obstinacy walked by his own) looked only out of humour at what I had said, and without thinking himself obliged to give any reason for it, declared he would maintain his property. Wilks (who upon the same occasions was as remarkably ductile as, when his superiority on the stage was in question, he was assuming and intractable) said, for his part, provided our business of acting was not interrupted, he did not care what we did; but, in short, he was for playing on, come what would of it. This last part of his declaration I did not dislike, and therefore I desired we might all enter into an immediate treaty with Booth upon the terms of his admission. Dogget still sullenly replied, that he had no occasion to enter into any treaty. Wilks then, to soften him, proposed that, if I liked it, Dogget might undertake it himself. I agreed. No! he would not be concerned in it. I then offered the same trust to Wilks, if Dogget approved of it. Wilks said he was not good at making of bargains; but if I was willing, he would rather leave it to me. Dogget at this rose up, and said we might both do as we pleased, but that nothing but the law should make him part with his property—and so went out of the room. After which he never came among us more, either as an actor or manager.

By his having in this abrupt manner abdicated his post in our government, what he left of it naturally devolved upon Wilks and myself. However, this did not so much distress our affairs as I have reason to believe Dogget thought it would. For though, by our indentures tripartite, we could not dispose of his property without his consent; yet those indentures could not oblige us to fast, because he had no appetite; and if the mill did not grind, we could have no bread. We therefore determined at any hazard to keep our business still going, and that our safest way would be to make the best bargain we could with Booth; one article of which was to be, that Booth should stand equally answerable with us to Dogget for the consequence. To which Booth made no objection; and the rest of his agreement was, to allow us six hundred pounds for his share in our property, which was to be paid by such sums as should arise from half his profits of acting, until the whole was discharged. Yet so cautious were we in this affair, that this agreement was only verbal on our part, though written and signed by Booth as what entirely contented him. However, bond and judgment could not have made it more secure to him; for he had his share, and was able to discharge the encumbrance upon it by his income of that year only. Let us see what Dogget did in this affair, after he had left us.

Might it not be imagined that Wilks and myself, by having made this matter easy to Booth, should have deserved the approbation at least, if not the favour, of the court, that had exerted so much power to prefer him? But shall I be believed, when I affirm that Dogget, who had so strongly opposed the court in his admission to a share, was very near getting the better of us both upon that account, and for some time appeared to have more favour there than either of us? Let me tell out my story, and then think what you please of it, Dogget, who was equally obliged with us to act upon the stage, as to assist in the management of it, though he had refused to do either, still demanded of us his whole share of the profits, without considering what part of them Booth might pretend to from our late concessions. After many fruitless endeavours to bring him back to us, Booth joined with us in making him an offer of half a share, if he had a mind totally to quit the stage, and make it a sinecure. No! he wanted the whole, and to sit still himself while we (if we pleased) might work for him, or let it alone, and none of us all, neither he nor we, be the better for it. What we imagined encouraged him to hold us at this short defiance was, that he had laid up enough to live upon without the stage, (for he was one of those close economists whom prodigals call a miser,) and therefore, partly from an inclination, as an invincible Whig, to signalize himself in defence of his property, and as much presuming that our necessities would oblige us to come to his own terms, he was determined (even against the opinion of his friends) to make no other peace with us. But not being able by this inflexible perseverance to have his wicked will of us, he was resolved to go to the fountain head of his own distress, and try if from thence he could turn the current against us. He appealed to the vice-chamberlain, to whose direction the adjusting of all these theatrical difficulties was then committed. But there, I dare say, the reader does not expect he should meet with much favour. However, be that as it may; for whether any regard was had to his having some thousands in his pocket; or that he was considered as a man who would or could make more noise in the matter than courtiers might care for: or what charms, spells, or conjurations, he might make use of, is all darkness to me; yet so it was, he one way or other played his part so well, that in a few days after we received an order from the vice-chamberlain, positively commanding us to pay Dogget his whole share, notwithstanding we had complained before of his having withdrawn himself from acting on the stage and from the management of it. This I thought was a dainty distinction indeed—that Dogget's defiance of the commands in favour of Booth should be rewarded with so ample a sinecure; and that we, for our obedience, should be condemned to dig in the mine to pay it him! This bitter pill, I confess, was more than I could down with, and therefore soon determined at all events never to take it. But as I had a man in power to deal with, it was not my business to speak *out* to him, or to set forth our treatment in its proper colours. My only doubt was, whether I could bring Wilks into the same sentiments (for he never cared to litigate any thing that did not affect his figure upon the stage.) But I had the good fortune to lay our condition in so precarious and disagreeable a light to him, if we submitted to this order, that he fired before I could get through half the consequences of it; and I began now to find it more difficult to keep him within bounds, than I had before to alarm him. I then proposed to him this expedient: that we should draw up a remonstrance, neither seeming to refuse nor comply with this order; but to start such objections and perplexing difficulties that should make the whole impracticable: that under such distractions as this would raise in our affairs, we could not be answerable to keep open our doors, which consequently would destroy the fruit of the favour lately granted to Booth, as well as of this intended to Dogget himself. To this remonstrance we received an answer in writing, which varied something in the measures to accommodate matters with Dogget. This was all I desired. When I found the style of *sic jubeo* was altered, when this formidable power began to parley with us, we knew there could not be much to be feared from it: for I would have remonstrated until I had died, rather than have yielded to the roughest or smoothest persuasion that could intimidate or deceive us. By this conduct we made the affair at last too troublesome for the ease of a courtier to go through with: for when it was considered that the principal point, the admission of Booth, was got over, Dogget was fairly left to the law for relief.

Upon this disappointment, Dogget accordingly preferred a bill in chancery against us. Wilks, who hated all business but that of entertaining the public, left the conduct of our cause to me; in which we had at our first setting out this advantage of Dogget, that we had three pockets to support our expense, where he had but one. My first direction to our solicitor was to use all possible delay that the law would admit of; a direction that lawyers seldom neglect. By this means we hung up our plaintiff about two years in chancery, until we were at full leisure to come to a hearing before the lord chancellor Cowper, which did not happen until after the accession of his late majesty. The issue of it was this: Dogget had about fourteen days allowed him to make his election, whether he would return to act as usual: but he declaring by his counsel, that he rather chose to quit the stage, he was decreed six hundred pounds for his share in our property, with fifteen per cent. interest, from the date of the last license. Upon the receipt of which, both parties were to sign general releases, and severally to pay their own costs. By this decree Dogget, when his lawyer's bill was paid, scarce got one year's purchase of what we had offered him without law; which, as he survived but seven years after it, would have been an annuity of five hundred pounds, and a sinecure for life.

Though there are many persons living, who know every article of these facts to be true, yet it will be found, that the strongest of them was not the strongest occasion of Dogget's quitting the stage. If therefore the reader should not have curiosity enough to know how the public came to be deprived of so valuable an actor, let him consider that he is not obliged to go through the rest of this chapter, which, I fairly tell him before hand, will only be filled up with a few idle anecdotes, leading to that discovery.

After our lawsuit was ended, Dogget for some few years could scarce bear the sight of Wilks or myself, though (as shall be shown) for different reasons: yet it was his misfortune to meet with us almost every day. Button's coffee-house, so celebrated in the "Tatler" for the good company that came there, was at this time in its highest request. Addison, Steele, Pope, and several other gentlemen of different merit, then made it their constant rendezvous; nor could Dogget decline the agreeable conversation there, though he was daily sure to find Wilks or myself in the same place, to sour his share of it. For as Wilks and he were differently proud; the one rejoicing in a captious, overbearing, valiant pride; and the other, in a stiff, sullen, purse-pride,—it may be easily conceived, when two such tempers met, how agreeable the sight of one was to the other. And as Dogget knew I had been the conductor of our defence against his lawsuit, which had hurt him more for the loss he had sustained in his reputation of understanding business, which he valued himself upon, than his disappointment had of getting so little by it; it was no wonder if I was entirely out of his good graces; which, I confess, I was inclined upon any reasonable terms to have recovered; he being, of all my theatrical brethren, the man I most delighted in. For when he was not in a fit of wisdom, or not over concerned about his interest, he had a great deal of entertaining humour. I therefore, notwithstanding his reserve, always left the door open to our former intimacy, if he were inclined to come into it. I never failed to give him my hat, and "your servant," wherever I met him; neither of which he would ever return for above a year after; but I still persisted in my usual salutation, without observing whether it was civilly received or not. This ridiculous silence between two comedians that had so lately lived in a constant course of raillery with one another, was often smiled at by our acquaintance, who frequented the same coffee-house; and one of them carried his jest upon it so far, that when I was at some distance from town, he wrote me a formal account, that Dogget was actually dead. After the first surprise his letter gave me was over, I began to consider that this, coming from a droll friend to both of us, might possibly be written to extract some merriment out of my real belief of it. In this I was not unwilling to gratify him, and returned an answer as if I had taken the truth of his news for granted; and was not a little pleased that I had so fair an opportunity of speaking my mind freely of Dogget, which I did in some favour of his character. I excused his faults, and was just to his merit. His lawsuit with us I only imputed to his having naturally deceived himself in the justice of his cause. What I most complained of was, his irreconcilable disaffection to me upon it, whom he could not reasonably blame for standing in my own defence; that not to endure me after it, was a reflection upon his sense, when all our acquaintance had been witnesses of our former intimacy; which my behaviour in his lifetime had plainly shown him I had a mind to renew. But since he was now gone (however great a churl he was to me) I was sorry my correspondent had lost him.

This part of my letter, I was sure, if Dogget's eyes were still open, would be shown to him; if not, I had only writ it to no purpose. But about a month after, when I came to town, I had some little reason to imagine it had the effect I wished from it. For one day, sitting over against him at the same coffee-house, where we often mixed at the same table, though we never exchanged a single syllable, he graciously extended his hand for a pinch of my snuff. As this seemed, from him, a sort of breaking the ice of his temper, I took courage upon it to break silence on my side, and asked him how he liked it? To which, with a slow hesitation, naturally assisted by the action of his taking the snuff, he replied—"Umph! the best—umph!—I have tasted a great while!"—If the reader, who may possibly think all this extremely trifling, will consider that trifles sometimes show characters in as strong a light, as facts of more serious importance, I am in hopes he may allow that my matter less needs an excuse, than the excuse itself does; if not, I must stand condemned at the end of my story.——But let me go on.

After a few days of these coy, lady-like, compliances on his side, we grew into a more conversable temper. At last, I took a proper occasion, and desired he would be so frank with me, as to let me know what was his real dislike or motive, that made him throw up so good an income as his share with us annually brought him in; for though, by our admission of Booth, it might not probably amount to so much, by a hundred or two a year, as formerly, yet the remainder was too considerable to be quarrelled with, and was likely to continue more than the best actors before us had ever got by the stage. And farther, to encourage him to be open, I told him if I had done any thing that had particularly disobliged him, I was ready, if he could put me in the way, to make him any amends in my power; if not, I desired he would be so just to himself as to let me know the real truth without reserve. But reserve he could not from his natural temper easily shake off. All he said came from him by half sentences and *inuendos*, as—No, he had not taken any thing particularly ill; for his part, he was very easy as he was; but where others were to dispose of his property as they pleased—if you had stood it out as I did, Booth might have paid a better price for it.—You were too much afraid of the court—but that is all over. There were other things in the playhouse. No man of spirit.—In short, to be always pestered and provoked by a trifling wasp — a — vain — shallow — a man would sooner beg his bread than bear it.—(Here it was easy to understand him. I therefore asked him what he had to bear, that I had not my share of?) "No! it was not the same thing," he said.—" You can play with a bear, or let him alone, and do what he would; but I could not let him lay his paws upon me without being hurt; you did not feel him as I did.—And for a man to be cutting of throats, upon every trifle, at my time of day!—If I had been as covetous as he thought me, may be I might have borne it, as well as you; but I would not be a lord of the treasury, if such a temper as Wilks's were to be at the head of it."

Here then the whole secret was out. The rest of our conversation was but explaining upon it. In a word, the painful behaviour of Wilks had hurt him so sorely, that the affair of Booth was looked upon as much a relief as a grievance, in giving him so plausible a pretence to get rid of us all with a better grace.

Booth too in a little time had his share of the same uneasiness, and often complained of it to me; yet as we neither of us could then afford to pay Dogget's price for our remedy, all we could do was to avoid every occasion in our power of inflaming the distemper; so that we both agreed, though Wilks's nature was not to be changed, it was a less evil to live with him than without him.

Though I had often suspected from what I had felt myself, that the temper of Wilks was Dogget's real quarrel to the stage, yet I could never thoroughly believe it, until I had it from his own mouth. And I then thought the concern he had shown at it was a good deal inconsistent with that understanding which was generally allowed him. When I give my reasons for it, perhaps the reader will not have a better opinion of my own. Be that as it may, I cannot help wondering that he, who was so much more capable of reflection than Wilks, could sacrifice so valuable an income to his impatience of another's natural frailty; and though my stoical way of thinking may be no rule for a wiser man's opinion, yet if it should happen to be right, the reader may make his use of it. Why then should we not always consider, that the rashness of abuse is but the false reason of a weak man; and that offensive terms are only used to supply the want of strength in argument? Which, as to the common practice of the sober world, we do not find every man in business is obliged to resent with a military sense of honour; or if he should, would not the conclusion amount to this—because another wants sense and manners, I am obliged to be a madman? For such every man is, more or less, while the passion of anger is in possession of him. And what less can we call that proud man who would put another out of the world, only for putting him out of humour? If accounts of the tongue were always to be made up with the sword, all the wise men in the world might be brought in debtors to blockheads. And when honour pretends to be witness, judge, and executioner, in its own cause, if honour were a man, would it be an untruth to say honour is a very impudent fellow? But in Dogget's case it may be asked, how was he to behave himself? Were passionate insults to be borne for years together? To these questions I can only answer with two or three more:—was he to punish himself because another was in the wrong? How many sensible husbands endure the teasing tongue of a froward wife, only because she is the weaker vessel? And why should not a weak man have the same indulgence? Daily experience will tell us that the fretful temper of a friend, like the personal beauty of a fine lady, by use and cohabitation may be brought down to give us neither pain nor pleasure. Such at least, and no more, was the distress I found myself in upon the same provocations, which I generally returned with humming an air to myself; or if the storm grew very high, it might perhaps sometimes ruffle me enough to sing a little out of tune. Thus too (if I had any ill nature to gratify) I often saw the unruly passion of the aggressor's mind punish itself by a restless disorder of the body.

What inclines me therefore to think the conduct of Dogget was as rash as the provocations he complained of, is that in some time after he had left us he plainly discovered he had repented it. His acquaintance observed to us that he sent many a long look after his share, in the still prosperous state of the stage; but as his heart was too high to declare (what we saw too) his shy inclination to return, he made us no direct overtures. Nor indeed did we care (though he was a golden actor) to pay too dear for him; for as most of his parts had been pretty well supplied, he could not now be of his former value to us. However, to show the town at least, that he had not forsworn the stage, he one day condescended to play, for the benefit of Mrs Porter, in the "Wanton Wife," at which he knew his late majesty was to be present. Now (though I speak it not of my own knowledge) yet it was not likely Mrs Porter would have asked that favour of him without some previous hint that it would be granted. His coming among us for that day only had a strong appearance of his laying it in our way to make him proposals, or that he hoped the court or town might intimate to us their desire of seeing him oftener; but as he acted only to do a particular favour, the managers owed him no compliment for it, beyond common civilities. And as that might not be all he proposed by it, his farther views (if he had any) came to nothing: for after this attempt he never returned to the stage.

To speak of him as an actor, he was the most original and the strictest observer of nature, of all his contemporaries. He borrowed from none of them; his manner was his own; he was a pattern to others, whose greatest merit was that they had sometimes tolerably imitated him. In dressing a character to the greatest exactness, he was remarkably skilful; the least article of whatever habit he wore, seemed in some degree to speak and mark the different humour he presented; a necessary care in a comedian, in which many have been too remiss or ignorant. He could be extremely ridiculous, without stepping into the least impropriety to make him so. His greatest success was in characters of lower life, which he improved from the delight he took in his observations of that kind in the real world. In songs and particular dances too of humour he had no competitor. Congreve was a great admirer of him, and found his account in the characters he expressly wrote for him. In those of Fondlewife in his "Old Bachelor," and Ben in "Love for Love," no author and actor could be more obliged to their mutual masterly performances. He was very acceptable to several persons of high rank and taste;

though he seldom cared to be the comedian but among his more intimate acquaintance.

And now let me ask the world a question. When men have any valuable qualities, why are the generality of our modern wits so fond of exposing their failings only, which the wisest of mankind will never wholly be free from? Is it of more use to the public to know their errors than their perfections? Why is the account of life to be so unequally stated? Though a man may be sometimes debtor to sense or morality, is it not doing him wrong, not to let the world see at the same time how far he may be creditor to both? Are defects and disproportions to be the only laboured features in a portrait? But perhaps such authors may know how to please the world better than I do, and may naturally suppose that what is delightful to themselves may not be disagreeable to others. For my own part, I confess myself a little touched in conscience at what I have just now observed to the disadvantage of my other brother-manager.

If therefore, in discovering the true cause of the public's losing so valuable an actor as Dogget, I have been obliged to show the temper of Wilks in its natural complexion, ought I not, in amends and balance of his imperfections, to say at the same time of him, that if he was not the most correct or judicious, yet (as Hamlet says of the king his father) take him for all in all, &c. he was certainly the most diligent, most laborious, and most useful actor, that I have seen upon the stage in fifty years.

CHAPTER XV.

Sir Richard Steele succeeds Collier in the theatre-royal.—Lincoln's-inn-fields house rebuilt.—The patent restored.—Eight actors at once desert from the king's company.—Why.—A new patent obtained by sir Richard Steele, and assigned in shares to the managing actors of Drury-lane.—Of modern pantomimes.—The rise of them.—Vanity invincible and ashamed.—The "Nonjuror" acted.—The author not forgiven, and rewarded for it.

Upon the death of the queen, plays (as they always had been on the like occasions) were silenced for six weeks. But this happening on the first of August, in the long vacation of the theatre, the observance of that ceremony, which at another juncture would have fallen like wet weather upon their harvest, did them now no particular damage. Their license however being of course to be renewed that vacation, gave the managers time to cast about for the better alteration of it; and since they knew the pension of seven hundred a year, which had been levied upon them for Collier, must still be paid to somebody, they imagined the merit of a Whig might now have as good a chance for getting into it, as that of a Tory had for being continued in it. Having no obligations therefore to Collier, who had made the last penny of them, they applied themselves to sir Richard Steele, who had distinguished himself by his zeal for the house of Hanover, and had been expelled the house of Commons for carrying it (as was judged at a certain crisis) into a reproach of the government. This we knew was his pretension to that favour in which he now stood at court; we knew too the obligations the stage had to his writings, there being scarce a comedian of merit in our whole company, whom his "Tatlers" had not made better by his public recommendation of them; and many days had our house been particularly filled by the influence and credit of his pen. Obligations of this kind from a gentleman with whom they all had the pleasure of a personal intimacy, the managers thought could not be more justly returned than by showing him some warm instance of their desire to have him at the head of them. We therefore begged him to use his interest for the renewal of our license, and that he would do us the honour of getting our names to stand with his in the same commission. This, we told him, would put it still farther into his power of supporting the stage in that reputation to which his lucubrations had already so much contributed, and that therefore we thought no man had better pretences to partake of its success.

Though it may be no addition to the favourable part of this gentleman's character, to say with what pleasure he received this mark of our inclination to him, yet my vanity longs to tell you, that it surprised him into an acknowledgment that people who are shy of obligations are cautious of confessing. His spirits took such a lively turn upon it, that had we been all his own sons, no unexpected act of filial duty could have more endeared us to him.

It must be observed then, that as Collier had no share in any part of our property, no difficulties from that quarter could obstruct this proposal. And the usual time of our beginning to act for the winter-season now drawing near, we pressed him not to lose any time in his solicitation of this new license. Accordingly, sir Richard applied himself to the duke of Marlborough, the hero of his heart, who, upon the first mention of it, obtained it of his majesty for sir Richard, and the former managers who were actors. Collier we heard no more of.

The court and town being crowded very early in the winter-season, upon the critical turn of affairs so much expected from the Hanover succession, the theatre had its particular share of that general blessing, by a more than ordinary concourse of spectators.

About this time the patentee having very near finished his house in Lincoln's-inn-fields, began to think of forming a new company; and in the mean time found it necessary to apply for leave to employ them. By the weak defence he had always made against the several attacks upon his interest and former government of the theatre, it might be a question, if his house had been ready in the queen's time, whether he would then have had the spirit to ask, or interest enough to obtain, leave to use it: but in the following reign, as it did not appear he had done any thing to forfeit the right of his patent, he prevailed with Mr Craggs the younger, (afterwards secretary of state,) to lay his case before the king, which he did in so effectual a manner, that (as Mr Craggs himself told me) his majesty was pleased to say upon it, "That he remembered, when he had been in England before, in king Charles's time, there had been two theatres in London; and as the patent seemed to be a lawful grant, he saw no reason why two playhouses might not be continued."

The suspension of the patent being thus taken off, the younger multitude seemed to call aloud for two playhouses. Many desired another, from the common notion that *two* would always create emulation in the actors: (an opinion which I have considered in a former chapter.) Others too were as eager for them, from the natural ill-will that follows the fortunate or prosperous in any undertaking. Of this low malevolence we had now and then had remarkable instances; we had been forced to dismiss an audience of a hundred and fifty pounds, from a disturbance spirited up by obscure people, who never gave any better reason for it, than that it was their fancy to support the idle complaint of one rival actress against another, in their several pretensions to the chief part in a new tragedy. But as this tumult seemed only to be the wantonness of English liberty, I shall not presume to lay any farther censure upon it.

Now, notwithstanding this public desire of re-establishing wo houses, and though I have allowed the former actors greatly our superiors, and the managers I am speaking of not to have been without their private errors, yet under all these disadvantages, it is certain, the stage for twenty years before this time had never been in so flourishing a condition; and it was as evident to all sensible spectators, that this prosperity could be only owing to that better order and closer industry now daily observed, and which had formerly been neglected by our predecessors. But that I may not impose upon the reader a merit which was not generally allowed us, I ought honestly to let him know, that about this time the public papers, particularly "Mist's Journal," took upon them very often to censure our management with the same freedom and severity as if we had been so many ministers of state: but so it happened, that these unfortunate reformers of the world, these self-appointed censors, hardly ever hit upon what was really wrong in us; but taking up facts upon trust or hearsay, piled up many a pompous paragraph, that they had ingeniously conceived was sufficient to demolish our administration, or at least to make us very uneasy in it; which indeed had so far its effect, that my equally-injured brethren, Wilks and Booth, often complained to me of these disagreeable aspersions, and proposed that some public answer might be made to them, which I always opposed, by perhaps too secure a contempt of what such writers could do to hurt us; and my reason for it was, that I knew but of one way to silence authors of that stamp; which was to grow insignificant and good for nothing, and then we should hear no more of them. But while we continued in the prosperity of pleasing others, and were not conscious of having deserved what they said of us, why should we gratify the little spleen of our enemies by wincing at it, or give them fresh opportunities to dine upon any reply they might make to our publicly taking notice of them? And though silence might in some cases be a sign of guilt or error confessed, our accusers were so low in their credit and sense, that the content we gave the public almost every day from the stage, ought to be our only answer to them.

However (as I have observed) we made many blots which these unskilful gamesters never hit: but the fidelity of an historian cannot be excused the omission of any truth which might make for the other side of the question. I shall therefore confess a fact which, if a happy accident had not intervened, had brought our affairs into a very tottering condition. This too is that fact which in a former chapter I promised to set forth, as a seamark of danger to future managers in their theatrical course of government.

When the new-built theatre in Lincoln's-inn-fields was ready to be opened, seven or eight actors in one day deserted from us to the service of the enemy; which obliged us to postpone many of our best plays, for want of some inferior part in them, which these deserters had been used to fill. But the indulgence of the royal family, who then frequently honoured us by their presence, was pleased to accept of whatever could be hastily got ready for their entertainment. And though this critical good fortune prevented, in some measure, our audiences falling so low as otherwise they might have done, yet it was not sufficient to keep us in our former prosperity: for that year our profits amounted not to above a third part of our usual dividends; though in the following year we entirely recovered them. The chief of these deserters were Keen, Bullock, Pack, Leigh, son of the famous Tony Leigh, and others of less note. It is true, they none of them had more than a negative merit, in being only able to do us more harm by their leaving us without notice, than they could do us good by remaining with us: for though the best of them could not support a play, the worst of them by their absence could maim it; as the loss of the least pin in a watch may obstruct its motion. But to come to the true cause of their desertion: after my having discovered the (long unknown) occasion that drove Dogget from the stage, before his settled inclination to leave it; it will be less incredible that these actors, upon the first opportunity to relieve themselves, should all in one day have left us from the same cause of uneasiness. For in a little time after, upon not finding their expectations answered in Lincoln's-inn-fields, some of them, who seemed to answer for the rest, told me the greatest grievance they had in our company was the shocking temper of Wilks, who upon every, almost no, occasion, let loose the unlimited language of passion upon them in such a manner as their patience was not longer able to support. This indeed was what we could not justify; this was a secret, that might have made a wholesome paragraph in a critical newspaper! But as it was our good fortune that it came not to the ears of our enemies, the town was not entertained with their public remarks upon it.

After this new theatre had enjoyed that short run of favour which is apt to follow novelty, their audiences began to flag; but whatever good opinion we had of our own merit, we had not so good a one of the multitude, as to depend too much upon the delicacy of their taste: we knew too, that this company, being so much nearer to the city than we were, would intercept many an honest customer, that might not know a good market from a bad one; and that the thinnest of their audiences must be always taking something from the measure of our profits. All these disadvantages, with many others, we were forced to lay before sir Richard Steele, and farther to remonstrate to him that, as he now stood in Collier's place, his pension of seven hundred pounds was liable to the same conditions that Collier had received it upon; which were, that it should be only payable during our being the only company permitted to act; but in case another should be set up against us, that then this pension was to be liquidated into an equal share with us; and which we now hoped he would be contented with. While we were offering to proceed, sir Richard stopt us short by assuring us, that as he came among us by our own invitation, he should always think himself obliged to come into any measures for our ease and service; that to be a burden to our industry, would be more disagreeable to him than it could be to us; and as he had always taken a delight in his endeavours for our prosperity, he should be still ready on our own terms to continue them.

Every one who knew sir Richard Steele in his prosperity (before the effects of his good nature had brought him to distresses) knew that this was his manner of dealing with his friends in business: another instance of the same nature will immediately fall in my way.

When we proposed to put this agreement into writing, he desired us not to hurry ourselves; for that he was advised, upon the late desertion of our actors, to get our license (which only subsisted during pleasure) enlarged into a more ample and durable authority, and which he said he had reason to think would be more easily obtained, if we were willing that a patent for the same purpose might be granted to him only, for his life and three years after, which he would then assign over to us. This was a prospect beyond our hopes, and what we had long wished for; for though I cannot say we had ever reason to grieve at the personal severities or behaviour of any one lord chamberlain in my time, yet the several officers under them, who had not the hearts of noblemen, often treated us (to use Shakspeare's expression) with all the insolence of office that narrow minds are apt to be elated with; but a patent, we knew, would free us from so abject a state of dependency. Accordingly, we desired sir Richard to lose no time; he was immediately promised it; in the interim we sounded the inclination of the actors remaining with us, who had all sense enough to know, that the credit and reputation we stood in with the town, could not but be a better security for their salaries, than the promise of any other stage, put into bonds, could make good to them. In a few days after, sir Richard told us that his majesty, being apprized that others had a joint power with him in the license, it was expected we should under our hands signify that his petition for a patent was preferred by the consent of us all. Such an acknowledgment was immediately signed, and the patent thereupon passed the great seal; for which I remember the lord chancellor Cowper, in compliment to sir Richard, would receive no fee

We received the patent January 19, 1718; and sir Richard being obliged the next morning to set out for Boroughbridge in Yorkshire, where he was soon after elected member of parliament, we were forced that very night to draw up in a hurry (until our counsel might more advisably perfect it) his assignment to us of equal shares in the patent, with further conditions of partnership. But here I ought to take shame to myself, and at the same time to give this second instance of the equity and honour of sir Richard: for this assignment (which I had myself the hasty penning of) was so worded, that it gave sir Richard as equal a title to our property, as it had given us to his authority in the patent: but sir Richard, notwithstanding, when he returned to town, took no advantage of the mistake, and consented in our second agreement to pay us twelve hundred pounds, to be equally entitled to our property, which at his death we were obliged to repay (as we afterwards did) to his executors; and which, in case any of us had died before him, the survivors were equally obliged to have paid to the executors of such deceased person, upon the same account. But sir Richard's moderation with us was rewarded with the reverse of Collier's stiffness: Collier, by insisting on his pension, lost three hundred pounds a year; and sir Richard, by his accepting a share in lieu of it, was one year with another as much a gainer.

The grant of this patent having assured us of a competent term to be relied on, we were now emboldened to lay out larger sums in the decorations of our plays. Upon the revival of Dryden's "All for Love," the habits of that tragedy amounted to an expense of near six hundred pounds; a sum unheard of for many years before on the like occasions. But we thought such extraordinary marks of our acknowledgment were due to the favours which the public were now again pouring in upon us. About this time we were so much in fashion and followed, that our enemies (who they were, it would not be fair to guess, for we never knew them) made their push of a good round lie upon us, to terrify those auditors from our support, whom they could not mislead by their private arts or public invectives. A current report, that the walls and roof of our house were liable to fall, had got such ground in the town, that on a sudden we found our audiences unusually decreased by it. Wilks was immediately for denouncing war and vengeance on the author of this falsehood, and for offering a reward to whoever could discover him. But it was thought more necessary first to disprove the falsehood, and then to pay what compliments might be thought advisable to the author. Accordingly an order from the king was obtained to have our tenement surveyed by sir Thomas Hewett, then the proper officer; whose report of its being in a safe and sound condition, and signed by him, was published in every newspaper. This had so immediate an effect, that our spectators, whose apprehensions had lately kept them absent, now made up our losses by returning to us with a fresh inclination, and in greater numbers.

When it was first publicly known that the new theatre would be opened against us, I cannot help going a little back to remember the concern that my brother-managers expressed at what might be the consequences of it. They imagined that now all those who wished ill to us, and particularly a great party who had been disobliged by our shutting them out from behind our scenes, even to the refusal of their money, would now exert themselves in any partial or extravagant measures that might either hurt us or support our competitors. These too were some of those further reasons which had discouraged them from running the hazard of continuing to sir Richard Steele the same pension which had been paid to Collier. Upon all which I observed to them, that for my own part I had not the same apprehensions, but that I foresaw as many good as bad consequences from two houses; that though the novelty might possibly at first abate a little of our profits, yet if we slackened not our industry, that loss would be amply balanced by an equal increase of our ease and quiet; that those turbulent spirits which were always molesting us would now have other employment; that the questioned merit of our acting would now stand in a clearer light, when others were faintly compared to us; that though faults might be found with the best actors that ever were, yet the egregious defects that would appear in others would now be the effectual means to make our superiority shine, if we had any pretence to it; and that what some people hoped might ruin us, would in the end reduce them to give up the dispute, and reconcile them to those who could best entertain them.

In every article of this opinion they afterwards found I had not been deceived; and the truth of it may be so well remembered by many living spectators, that it would be too frivolous and needless a boast to give it any farther observation.

But in what I have said I would not be understood to be an advocate for two playhouses. For we shall soon find that two sets of actors tolerated in the same place have constantly ended in the corruption of the theatre; of which the auxiliary entertainments that have so barbarously supplied the defects of weak action, have for some years past been a flagrant instance. It may not therefore be here improper to show how our childish pantomimes first came to take so gross a possession of the stage.

I have upon several occasions already observed, that when one company is too hard for another, the lower in reputation has always been forced to exhibit some new-fangled foppery to draw the multitude after them. Of these expedients, singing and dancing had formerly been the most effectual; but, at the time I am speaking of, our English music had been so discountenanced since the taste of Italian operas prevailed, that it was to no purpose to pretend to it. Dancing therefore was now the only weight in the opposite scale; and as the new theatre sometimes found their account in it, it could not be safe for us wholly to neglect it. To give even dancing therefore some improvement, and to make it something more than motion without meaning, the fable of "Mars and Venus" was formed into a connected presentation of dances in character, wherein the passions were so happily expressed, and the whole story so intelligibly told by a mute narration of gesture only, that even thinking spectators allowed it both a pleasing and a rational entertainment; though at the same time, from our distrust of its reception, we durst not venture to decorate it with any extraordinary expense of scenes or habits; but upon the success of this attempt, it was rightly concluded, that if a visible expense in both were added to something of the same nature, it could not fail of drawing the town proportionably after it. From this original hint then (but every way unequal to it) sprung forth that succession of monstrous medleys that have so long infested the stage, and which arose upon one another alternately at both houses, outvying in expense, like contending bribes on both sides at an election, to secure a majority of the multitude. But so it is; truth may complain, and merit murmur, with what justice it may; the few will never be a match for the many, unless authority should think fit to interpose and put down these poetical drams, these ginshops of the stage, that intoxicate its auditors, and dishonour their understanding with a levity for which I want a name.

If I am asked (after my condemning these fooleries myself) how I came to assent, or continue my share of expense to them, I have no better excuse for my error than confessing it. I did it against my conscience, and had not virtue enough to starve by opposing a multitude that would have been too hard for me. Now let me ask an odd question: had Harry the Fourth of France a better excuse for changing his religion? I was still in my heart, as much as he could be, on the side of truth and sense, but with this difference, that I had their leave to quit them when they could not support me. For what equivalent could I have found for my falling a a martyr to them? How far the hero or the comedian was in the wrong, let the clergy and the critics decide. Necessity will be as good a plea for the one as the other. But let the question go which way it will, Harry IV has always been allowed a great man; and what I want of his grandeur, you see by the inference nature has amply supplied to me in vanity; a pleasure which neither the pertness of wit nor the gravity of wisdom will ever persuade me to part with. And why is there not as much honesty in owning as in concealing it? For though to hide it may be wisdom, to be without it is impossible; and where is the merit of keeping a secret which every body is let into? To say we have no vanity then, is showing a great deal of it; as to say we *have* a great deal, cannot be showing so much; and though there may be art in a man's accusing himself, even then it will be more pardonable than self-commendation. Do not we find that even good actions have their share of it—that it is as inseparable from our being as our nakedness? And though it may be equally decent to cover it, yet the wisest man can no more be without it, than the weakest can believe he was born in his clothes. If then what we say of ourselves be true, and not prejudicial to others, to be called vain upon it, is no more a reproach than to be called a brown or a fair man. Vanity is of all complexions; it is the growth of every clime and capacity; authors of all ages have had a tincture of it; and yet you read Horace, Montaigne, and sir William Temple, with pleasure. Nor am I sure, if it were curable by precept, that mankind would be mended by it. Could vanity be eradicated from our nature, I am afraid that the reward of most human virtues would not be found in this world. And happy is he who has no greater sin to answer for in the next!

But what is all this to the theatrical follies I was talking of. Perhaps not a great deal, but it is to my purpose; for though I am an historian, I do not write to the wise and learned only; I hope to have readers of no more judgment than some of my quondam auditors; and I am afraid they will be as hardly contented with dry matters of fact, as with a plain play without entertainments. This rhapsody therefore has been thrown in as a dance between the acts, to make up for the dulness of what would have been by itself only proper. But I now come to my story again.

Notwithstanding then this our compliance with the vulgar taste, we generally made use of these pantomimes but as crutches to our weakest plays; nor were we so lost to all sense of what was valuable, as to dishonour our best authors in such bad company; we had still a due respect to several select plays, that were able to be their own support; and in which we found our constant account without painting and patching them out, like prostitutes, with these follies in fashion. If therefore we were not so strictly chaste in the other part of our conduct, let the error of it stand among the silly consequences of two stages. Could the interest of both companies have been united in one only theatre, I had been one of the few that would have used my utmost endeavour of never admitting to the stage any spectacle that ought not to have been seen there; the errors of my own plays, which I could not see, excepted. And though probably the majority of spectators would not have been so well pleased with a theatre so regulated, yet sense and reason cannot lose their intrinsic value, because the giddy and the ignorant are blind and deaf, or numerous; and I cannot help saying it is a reproach to a sensible people, to let folly so publicly govern their pleasures.

While I am making this grave declaration of what I *would* have done, had one only stage been continued; to obtain an easier belief of my sincerity, I ought to put my reader in mind of what I *did* do, even after two companies were again established.

About this time Jacobitism had lately exerted itself by the most unprovoked rebellion that our histories have handed down to us, since the Norman conquest. I therefore thought, that to set the authors and principles of that desperate folly in a fair light, by allowing the mistaken consciences of some their best excuse, and by making the artful pretenders to conscience as ridiculous as they were ungratefully wicked, was a subject fit for the honest satire of comedy, and what might, if it succeeded, do honour to the stage, by showing the valuable use of it. And considering what numbers at that time might come to it as prejudiced spectators, it may be allowed that the undertaking was not less hazardous than laudable.

To give life therefore to this design, I borrowed the "Tartuffe" of Moliere, and turned him into a modern "Nonjuror:" upon the hypocrisy of the French character I ingrafted a stronger wickedness, that of an English popish priest, lurking under the doctrine of our own church to raise his fortune upon the ruin of a worthy gentleman, whom his dissembled sanctity had seduced into the treasonable cause of a Roman Catholic outlaw. How this design in the play was executed, I refer to the readers of it; it cannot be mended by any critical remarks I can make in its favour; let it speak for itself. All the reason I had to think it no bad performance was, that it was acted eighteen days running, and that the party that were hurt by it (as I have been told) have not been the smallest number of my back friends ever since. But happy was it for this play, that the very subject was its protection; a few smiles of silent contempt were the utmost disgrace that on the first day of its appearance it was thought safe to throw upon it; as the satire was chiefly employed on the enemies of the government, they were not so hardy as to own themselves such by any higher disapprobation or resentment. But as it was then probable I might write again, they knew it would not be long before they might with more security give a loose to their spleen, and make up accounts with me. And, to do them justice, in every play I afterwards produced, they paid me the balance to a tittle. But to none was I more beholden than that celebrated author Mr Mist, whose "Weekly Journal," for about fifteen years following scarce ever failed of passing some of his party compliments upon me. The state and the stage were his frequent parallels, and the minister and mynheer Keiber the manager, were as constantly drolled upon. Now for my own part, though I could never persuade my wit to have an open account with him (for, as he had no effects of his own, I did not think myself obliged to answer his bills;) notwithstanding I will be so charitable to his real manes, and to the ashes of his paper, as to mention one particular civility he paid to my memory, after he thought he had ingeniously killed me. Soon after the "Nonjuror" had received the favour of the town, I read in one of his journals the following short paragraph, viz. "Yesterday died Mr Colley Cibber, late comedian of the theatre-royal, notorious for writing the 'Nonjuror.'" The compliment in the latter part I confess I did not dislike, because it came from so impartial a judge; and it really so happened that the former part of it was very near being true; for I had that very day just crawled out, after having been some weeks laid up by a fever. However I saw no use in being thought to be thoroughly dead before my time, and therefore had a mind to see whether the town cared to have me alive again; so the play of the "Orphan" being to be acted that day, I quietly stole myself into the part of the Chaplain, which I had not been seen in for many years before. The surprise of the audience at my unexpected appearance on the very day I had been dead in the news, and the paleness of my looks, seemed to make it a doubt whether I was not the ghost of my real self departed; but when I spoke, their wonder eased itself by an applause which convinced me they were then satisfied that my friend Mist had told a fib of me. Now, if simply to have shown myself in broad life and about my business, after he had *notoriously* reported me dead, can be called a reply, it was the only one which his paper while alive ever drew from me. How far I may be vain then in supposing that this play brought me into the disfavour of so many wits and valiant auditors as afterwards appeared against me, let those who may think it worth their notice judge. In the mean time, until I can find a better excuse for their sometimes particular treatment of me, I cannot easily give up my suspicion: and if I add a more remarkable fact, that afterwards confirmed me in it, perhaps it may incline others to join in my opinion.

On the first day of the "Provoked Husband," ten years after the "Nonjuror" had appeared, a powerful party, not having the fear of public offence or private injury before their eyes, appeared most impetuously concerned for the demolition of it; in which they so far succeeded, that for some time I gave it up for lost; and, to follow their blows, in the public papers of the next day it was attacked and triumphed over as a dead and damned piece; a swinging criticism was made upon it in general invective terms, for they disdained to trouble the world with particulars; their sentence, it seems, was proof enough of its deserving the fate it had met with. But this damned play was, notwithstanding, acted twenty-eight nights together, and left off at a receipt of upwards of a hundred and forty pounds; which happened to be more than in fifty years before could be then said of any one play whatsoever.

Now, if such notable behaviour could break out upon so successful a play (which too, upon the share sir John Vanbrugh had in it, I will venture to call a good one) what shall we impute it to? Why may not I plainly say, it was not the play, but me who had a hand in it, they did not like? And for what reason? If they were not ashamed of it, why did not they publish it? No; the reason had published itself—I was the author of the "Nonjuror." But perhaps, of all authors, I ought not to make this sort of complaint, because I have reason to think, that that particular offence has made me more honourable friends than enemies; the latter of which I am not unwilling should know (however unequal the merit may be to the reward) that part of the bread I now eat was given me for having writ the "Nonjuror."

And yet I cannot but lament, with many quiet spectators, the helpless misfortune that has so many years attended the stage; that no law has had force enough to give it absolute protection: for until we can civilize its auditors, the authors that write for it will seldom have a greater call to it than necessity; and how unlikely is the imagination of the needy to inform or delight the many in affluence; or how often does necessity make many unhappy gentlemen turn authors in spite of nature?

What a blessing therefore is it, what an enjoyed deliverance, after a wretch has been driven by fortune to stand so many wanton buffets of unmanly fierceness, to find himself at last quietly lifted above the reach of them!

But let not this reflection fall upon my auditors without distinction; for though candour and benevolence are silent virtues, they are as visible as the most vociferous ill-nature; and I confess the public has given me more frequent reason to be thankful than to complain.

CHAPTER XVI.

The author steps out of his way.—Pleads his theatrical cause in chancery.—Carries it.—Plays acted at Hampton-court.—Theatrical anecdotes in former reigns.—Ministers and managers always censured.—The difficulty of supplying the stage with good actors, considered.—Courtiers and comedians governed by the same passions.—Examples of both.—The author quits the stage.—Why.

Having brought the government of the stage through such various changes and revolutions to this settled state, in which it continued to almost the time of my leaving it; it cannot be supposed, that a period of so much quiet, and so long a train of success, (though happy for those who enjoyed it,) can afford such matter of surprise or amusement, as might arise from times of more distress and disorder. A quiet time in history, like a calm in a voyage, leaves us but in an indolent station. To talk of our affairs when they were no longer ruffled by misfortunes would be a picture without shade, a flat performance at best. As I might therefore throw all that tedious time of our tranquillity into one chasm in my history, and cut my way short at once to my last exit from the stage I shall at least fill it up with such matter only as I have a mind should be known, how few soever may have patience to read it. Yet, as I despair not of some readers who may be most awake, when they think others have most occasion to sleep; who may be more pleased to find me languid than lively, or in the wrong than in the right; why should I scruple (when it is so easy a matter too) to gratify their particular taste by venturing upon any error that I like, or the weakness of my judgment misleads me to commit? I think, too, I have a very good chance for my success in this passive ambition, by showing myself in a light I have not been seen in.

By your leave then, gentlemen, let the scene open, and at once discover your comedian at the bar! There you will find him a defendant, and pleading his own theatrical cause in a court of chancery. But, as I choose to have a chance of pleasing others, as well as of indulging you, gentlemen, I must first beg leave to open my case to them; after which, my whole speech upon that occasion shall be at your mercy.

In all the transactions of life, there cannot be a more painful circumstance than a dispute at law with a man with whom we have long lived in an agreeable amity. But when sir Richard Steele, to get himself out of difficulties, was obliged to throw his affairs into the hands of lawyers and trustees, that consideration then could be of no weight. The friend or the gentleman had no more to do in the matter. Thus, while sir Richard no longer acted from himself, it may be no wonder if a flaw was found in our conduct, for the law to make work with. It must be observed then, that about two or three years before this suit was commenced, upon sir Richard's totally absenting himself from all care and management of the stage (which by our articles of partnership he was equally, and jointly obliged with us to attend) we were reduced to let him know, that we could not go on at that rate; but that if he expected to make the business a sinecure, we had as much reason to expect a consideration for our extraordinary care of it; and that during his absence, we therefore intended to charge ourselves at a salary of 1*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.* every acting day (unless he could show us cause to the contrary) for our management. To which, in his composed manner, he only answered, that to be sure we knew what was fitter to be done than he did; that he had always taken a delight in making us easy, and had no reason to doubt of our doing him justice. Now whether under this easy style of approbation he concealed any dislike of our resolution, I cannot say; but if I may speak my private opinion, I really believe, from his natural negligence of his affairs, he was glad at any rate to be excused an attendance which he was now grown weary of. But whether I am deceived or right in my opinion, the fact was truly this, that he never once directly or indirectly complained or objected to our being paid the above-mentioned daily sum in near three years together; and yet still continued to absent himself from us and our affairs. But notwithstanding he had seen and done all this with his eyes open, his lawyer thought here was still a fair field for a battle in chancery, in which, though his client might be beaten, he was sure his bill must be paid for it. Accordingly to work with us he went. But not to be so long as the lawyers were in bringing this cause to an issue, I shall at once let you know, that it came to a hearing before the late sir Joseph Jekyll, then master of the rolls, in the year 1726. Now, as the chief point in dispute was, of what kind or importance the business of a manager was, or in what it principally consisted, it could not be supposed, that the most learned counsel could be so well apprized of the nature of it, as one who had himself gone through the care and fatigue of it. I was therefore encouraged by our counsel to speak to that particular head myself; which I confess I was glad he suffered me to undertake; but when I tell you, that two of the learned counsel against us came afterwards to be successively lord chancellors, it sets my presumption in a light, that I still tremble to show it in. But however, to assume more merit from its success than was really its due, I ought fairly to let you know that I was not so hardy as to deliver my pleading without notes in my hand of the heads I intended to enlarge upon; for though I thought I could conquer my fear, I could not be so sure of my memory. But when it came to the critical moment, the dread and apprehension of what I had undertaken so disconcerted my courage, that though I had been used to talk to above fifty thousand different people every winter, for upwards of thirty years together, an involuntary and unaffected proof of my confusion fell from my eyes; and as I found myself quite out of my element, I seemed rather gasping for life, than in a condition to cope with the eminent orators against me. But however I soon found, from the favourable attention of my hearers, that my diffidence had done me no disservice; and as the truth I was to speak to, needed no ornament of words, I delivered it in the plain manner following, viz.

"In this cause, sir, I humbly conceive there are but two points that admit of any material dispute. The first is, whether sir Richard Steele is as much obliged to do the duty and business of a manager, as either Wilks, Booth, or Cibber. And the second is, whether by sir Richard's totally withdrawing himself from the business of a manager, the defendants are justifiable in charging to each of themselves the 1*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.* per diem, for their particular pains and care in carrying on the whole affairs of the stage, without any assistance from sir Richard Steele.

"As to the first, if I do not mistake the words of the assignment, there is a clause in it that says, all matters relating to the government or management of the theatre shall be concluded by a majority of voices. Now I presume, sir, there is no room left to allege that sir Richard was ever refused his voice, though in above three years he never desired to give it. And I believe there will be as little room to say, that he could have a voice if he were not a manager. But, sir, his being a manager is so self-evident, that it is amazing how he could conceive that he was to take the profits and advantages of a manager without doing the duty of it. And I will be bold to say, sir, that his assignment of the patent to Wilks, Booth, and Cibber, in no one part of it, by the severest construction in the world, can be wrested to throw the heavy burden of the management only upon their shoulders. Nor does it appear, sir, that either in his bill or in his answer to our cross-bill, he has offered any hint or glimpse of a reason for his withdrawing from the management at all; or so much as pretend, from the time complained of, that he ever took the least part of his share of it. Now, sir, however unaccountable this conduct of sir Richard may seem, we will still allow that he had some cause for it; but whether or no that cause was a reasonable one, your honour will the better judge, if I may be indulged in the liberty of explaining it.

“Sir, the case, in plain truth and reality, stands thus: sir Richard, though no man alive can write better of economy than himself, yet perhaps he is above the drudgery of practising it. Sir Richard then was often in want of money; and while we were in friendship with him, we often assisted his occasions. But those compliances had so unfortunate an effect, that they only heightened his importunity to borrow more; and the more we lent, the less he minded us, or showed any concern for our welfare. Upon this, sir, we stopt our hands at once, and peremptorily refused to advance another shilling, until by the balance of our accounts it became due to him. And this treatment (though we hope not in the least unjustifiable) we have reason to believe so ruffled his temper, that he at once was as short with us as we had been with him; for from that day he never more came near us. Nay, sir, he not only continued to neglect what he *should* have done, but actually did what he ought *not* to have done: he made an assignment of his share without our consent, in a manifest breach of our agreement. For, sir, we did not lay that restriction upon ourselves for no reason: we knew beforehand what trouble and inconvenience it would be to unravel and expose our accounts to strangers, who, if they were to do us no hurt by divulging our secrets, we were sure could do us no good by keeping them. If sir Richard had had our common interest at heart, he would have been as warm in it as we were, and as tender of hurting it. But supposing his assigning his share to others may have done us no great injury, it is at least a shrewd proof that he did not care whether it did us any or no; and if the clause was not strong enough to restrain him from it in law, there was enough in it to have restrained him in honour from breaking it. But take it in its best light, it shows him as remiss a manager in our affairs, as he naturally was in his own. Suppose, sir, we had all been as careless as himself, which I cannot find he has any more right to be than we have, must not our whole affair have fallen to ruin? And may we not, by a parity of reason, suppose that by his neglect a fourth part of it *does* fall to ruin? But, sir, there is a particular reason to believe, that from our want of sir Richard more than a fourth part *does* suffer by it: his rank and figure in the world, while he gave us the assistance of them, were of extraordinary service to us; he had an easier access, and a more regarded audience at court than our low station of life could pretend to, when our interest wanted (as it often did) a particular solicitation there. But since we have been deprived of him, the very end, the very consideration, of his share in our profits is not performed on his part; and will sir Richard then make us no compensation for so valuable a loss in our interests, and so palpable an addition to our labour? I am afraid, sir, if we were all to be as indolent in the managing part, as sir Richard presumes he has a right to be, our patent would soon run us as many hundreds in debt, as he had (and still seems willing to have) his share of for doing of nothing.

"Sir, our next point in question is, whether Wilks, Booth, and Cibber, are justifiable in charging the 1*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.* per diem, for their extraordinary management in the absence of sir Richard Steele. I doubt, sir, it will be hard to come to the solution of this point, unless we may be a little indulged in setting forth what is the daily and necessary business and duty of a manager. But, sir, we will endeavour to be as short as the circumstances will admit of.

"Sir, by our books it is apparent, that the managers have under their care no less than one hundred and forty persons in constant daily pay; and among such numbers, it will be no wonder if a great many of them are unskilful, idle, and sometimes untractable; all which tempers are to be led, or driven, watched, and restrained, by the continual skill, care, and patience of the managers. Every manager is obliged, in his turn, to attend two or three hours every morning at the rehearsal of plays and other entertainments for the stage, or else every rehearsal would be but a rude meeting of mirth and jollity. The same attendance is as necessary at every play during the time of its public action, in which one or more of us have constantly been punctual, whether we have had any part in the play then acted or not. A manager ought to be at the reading of every new play when it is first offered to the stage, though there are seldom one of those plays in twenty, which upon hearing proves to be fit for it; and upon such occasions the attendance must be allowed to be as painfully tedious as the getting rid of the authors of such plays must be disagreeable and difficult. Besides this, sir, a manager is to order all new clothes, to assist in the fancy and propriety of them, to limit the expense, and to withstand the unreasonable importunities of some that are apt to think themselves injured, if they are not finer than their fellows. A manager is to direct and oversee the painters, machinists, musicians, singers, and dancers; to have an eye upon the door-keepers, under servants, and officers, that without such care are too often apt to defraud us or neglect their duty.

"And all this, sir, and more, much more, which we hope will be needless to trouble you with, have we done every day without the least assistance from sir Richard, even at times when the concern and labour of our parts upon the stage have made it very difficult and irksome to go through with it.

"In this place, sir, it may be worth observing that sir Richard, in his answer to our cross-bill, seems to value himself upon Cibber's confessing, in the dedication of a play which he made to sir Richard, that he (sir Richard) had done the stage very considerable service, by leading the town to our plays, and filling our houses, by the force and influence of his "Tatlers." But sir Richard forgets, that those "Tatlers" were written in the late queen's reign, long before he was admitted to a share in the playhouse. And in truth, sir, it was our real sense of those obligations, and sir Richard's assuring us they should be continued, that first and chiefly inclined us to invite him to share the profits of our labours, upon such further conditions as in his assignment of the patent to us are specified. And sir, as Cibber's public acknowledgment of those favours is at the same time an equal proof of sir Richard's power to continue them; so, sir, we hope it carries an equal probability that without his promise to *use* that power, he would never have been thought on, much less have been invited by us into a joint-management of the stage, and into a share of the profits. And indeed what pretence could he have formed for asking a patent from the crown, had he been possessed of no eminent qualities, but in common with other men? But, sir, all these advantages, all these hopes, nay, certainties, of greater profits from those great qualities, have we been utterly deprived of by the wilful and unexpected neglect of sir Richard. But we find, sir, it is a common thing in the practice of mankind to justify one error by committing another. For sir Richard has not only refused us the extraordinary assistance which he is able and bound to give us; but on the contrary, to our great expense and loss of time, now calls us to account in this honourable court for the wrong we have done him in not doing his business of a manager for nothing. But sir, sir Richard has not met with such treatment from us: he has not writ plays for us for nothing; we paid him very well, and in an extraordinary manner, for his late comedy of the "Conscious Lovers." And though, in writing that play, he had more assistance from one of the managers than becomes me to enlarge upon, of which evidence has been given upon oath by several of our actors; yet, sir, he was allowed the full and particular profits of that play as an author, which amounted to three hundred pounds, besides about three hundred more which he received as a joint-sharer of the general profits that arose from it. Now, sir, though the managers are not all of them able to write plays, yet they have all of them been able to do (I would not say as good, but at least) as profitable a thing. They have invented and adorned a spectacle that for forty days together has brought more money to the house than the best play that ever was writ. The spectacle I mean, sir, is that of the coronation ceremony of Anna Bullen. And though we allow a good play to be the more laudable performance, yet, sir, in the profitable part of it there is no comparison. If therefore our spectacle brought in as much or more money than sir Richard's comedy, what is there on his side but usage that entitles him to be paid for one more than we are for the other? But then, sir, if he is so profitably distinguished for his play, if we yield him up the preference, and pay him for his extraordinary composition, and take nothing for our own, though it turned out more to our common profit. Sure, sir, while we do such extraordinary duty as managers, and while he neglects his share of that duty, he cannot grudge us the moderate demand we make for our separate labour.

"To conclude, sir, if by our constant attendance, our care, our anxiety (not to mention the disagreeable contests we sometimes meet with, both within and without doors, in the management of our theatre) we have not only saved the whole from ruin, which, if we had all followed sir Richard's example, could not have been avoided; I say, sir, if we have still made it so valuable an income to him, without his giving us the least assistance for several years past; we hope, sir, that the poor labourers that have done all this for sir Richard, will not be thought unworthy of their hire."

How far our affairs being set in this particular light, might assist our cause, may be of no great importance to guess; but the issue of it was this: that sir Richard not having made any objection to what we had charged for management for three years together; and as our proceedings had been all transacted in open day, without any clandestine intention of fraud; we were allowed the sums in dispute above mentioned; and sir Richard not being advised to appeal to the lord chancellor, both parties paid their own costs, and thought it their mutual interest to let this be the last of their lawsuits.

And now, gentle reader, I ask pardon for so long an imposition on your patience: for though I may have no ill opinion of this matter myself; yet to you I can very easy conceive it may have been tedious. You are therefore at your own liberty of charging the whole impertinence of it either to the weakness of my judgment or the strength of my vanity; and I will so far join in your censure, that I further confess I have been so impatient to give it to you, that you have had it out of its turn. For some years before this suit was commenced there were other facts that ought to have had a precedence in my history; but that, I dare say, is an oversight you will easily excuse, provided you afterwards find them worth reading. However, as to that point, I must take my chance; and shall therefore proceed to speak of the theatre which was ordered by his late majesty to be erected in the great old hall at Hampton-court; where plays were intended to have been acted twice a week during the summer season. But, before the theatre could be finished, above half the month of September being elapsed, there were but seven plays acted before the court returned to London. This throwing open a theatre in a royal palace seemed to be reviving the old English hospitable grandeur, where the lowest rank of neighbouring subjects might make themselves merry at court without being laughed at themselves. In former reigns theatrical entertainments at the royal palaces had been performed at vast expense, as appears by the description of the decorations in several of Ben Jonson's masks in king James and Charles the First's time; many curious and original draughts of which by sir Inigo Jones I have seen in the museum of our greatest master and patron of arts and architecture, whom it would be a needless liberty to name. But when our civil wars ended in the decadence of monarchy, it was then an honour to the stage to have fallen with it. Yet after the restoration of Charles II some faint attempts were made to revive these theatrical spectacles at court; but I have met with no account of above one mask acted there by the nobility; which was that of "Calisto," written by Crowne, the author of "Sir Courtly Nice." For what reason Crowne was chosen to that honour, rather than Dryden, who was then poet-laureate, and out of all comparison his superior in poetry, may seem surprising. But if we consider the offence which the then duke of Buckingham took at the character of Zimri in Dryden's "Absalom," &c. (which might probably be a return to his grace's "Drawcansir" in the "Rehearsal") we may suppose the prejudice and recommendation of so illustrious a pretender to poetry might prevail at court to give Crowne this preference. In the same reign the king had his comedians at Windsor, but upon a particular establishment; for though they acted in St George's hall within the royal palace, yet (as I have been informed by an eye-witness) they were permitted to take money at the door of every spectator. Whether this was an indulgence in conscience, I cannot say; but it was a common report among the principal actors, when I first came into the theatre-royal in 1690, that there was then due to the company from that court about one thousand five hundred pounds for plays commanded, &c.; and yet it was the general complaint in that prince's reign, that he paid too much ready money for his pleasures. But these assertions I only give as I received them, without being answerable for their reality. This theatrical anecdote however puts me in mind of one of a more private nature which I had from old solemn Boman, the late actor of venerable memory. Boman, then a youth, and famed for his voice, was appointed to sing some part in a concert of music at the private lodgings of Mrs Gwynn; at which were only present the king, the duke of York, and one or two more who were usually admitted upon those detached parties of pleasure. When the performance was ended, the king expressed himself highly pleased, and gave it extraordinary commendations. "Then, sir," said the lady, "to show you do not speak like a courtier, I hope you will make the performers a handsome present." The king said he had no money about him, and asked the duke if he had any? To which the duke replied, "I believe, sir, not above a guinea or two." Upon which the laughing lady, turning to the people about her, and making bold with the king's common expression, cried, "Odd's fish! what company am I got into!"

Whether the reverend historian of his "Own Time," among the many other reasons of the same kind he might have for styling this fair one the indiscreetest and wildest creature that ever was in a court, might know this to be one of them, I cannot say; but if we consider her in all the disadvantages of her rank and education, she does not appear to have had any criminal errors more remarkable than her sex's frailty to answer for: and if the same author, in his latter end of that prince's life, seems to reproach his memory with too kind a concern for her support, we may allow that it becomes a bishop to have had no eyes or taste for the frivolous charms or playful badinage of a king's mistress: yet if the common fame of her may be believed, which in my memory was not doubted, she had less to be laid to her charge, than any other of those ladies who were in the same state of preferment. She never meddled in matters of serious moment, or was the tool of working politicians: never broke into those amorous infidelities which others in that grave author are accused of; but was as visibly distinguished by her particular personal inclination to the king, as her rivals were by their titles and grandeur. Give me leave to carry (perhaps the partiality of) my observation a little farther. The same author in the same page, 263, tells us of "another of the king's mistresses, the daughter of a clergyman, Mrs Roberts, in whom her first education had so deep a root, that though she fell into many scandalous disorders, with very dismal adventures in them all, yet a principle of religion was so deep laid in her, that though it did not restrain her, yet it kept alive in her such a constant horror of sin, that she was never easy in an ill course, and died with a great sense of her former ill life."

To all this let us give an implicit credit: here is the account of a frail sinner made up with a reverend witness; yet I cannot but lament, that this mitred historian, who seems to know more personal secrets than any that ever writ before him, should not have been as inquisitive after the last hours of our other fair offender, whose repentance, I have been unquestionably informed, appeared in all the contrite symptoms of a Christian sincerity. If therefore you find I am so much concerned to make this favourable mention of the one, because she was a sister of the theatre, why may not—— But I dare not be so presumptuous, so uncharitably bold, as to suppose the other was spoken better of, merely because she was the daughter of a clergyman. Well, and what then? What is all this idle prate, you may say, to the matter in hand? Why, I say your question is a little too critical; and if you will not give an author leave now and then to embellish his work by a natural reflection, you are an ungentle reader. But I have done with my digression, and return to our theatre at Hampton-court, where I am not sure the reader, be he ever so wise, will meet with any thing more worth his notice: however, if he happens to read as I write, for want of something better to do, he will go on; and perhaps wonder when I tell him that——

A play presented at court, or acted on a public stage, seems to its different auditors a different entertainment. Now hear my reason for it. In the common theatre the guests are at home, where the politer forms of good breeding are not so nicely regarded: every one there falls to, and likes or finds fault according to his natural taste or appetite. At court, where the prince gives the treat, and honours the table with his own presence, the audience is under the restraint of a circle where laughter or applause, raised higher than a whisper, would be stared at. At a public play they are both let loose, even until the actor is sometimes pleased with his not being able to be heard, for the clamour of them. But this coldness or decency of attention at court, I observed, had but a melancholy effect upon the impatient vanity of some of our actors, who seemed inconsolable when their flashy endeavours to please had passed unheeded: their notconsidering where they were, quite disconcerted them; nor could they recover their spirits, till from the lowest rank of the audience some gaping John or Joan in the fulness of their hearts roared out their approbation: and indeed such a natural instance of honest simplicity, a prince himself, whose indulgence knows where to make allowances, might reasonably smile at, and perhaps not think it the worst part of his entertainment. Yet it must be owned, that an audience may be as well too much reserved, as too profuse of their applause: for though it is possible a Betterton would not have been discouraged from throwing out an excellence, or elated into an error by his auditors being too little or too much pleased, yet as actors of his judgment are rarities, those of less judgment may sink into a flatness in their performance, for want of that applause which from the generality of judges they might perhaps have some pretence to: and the auditor when not seeming to feel what ought to affect him, may rob himself of something more, that he might have had by giving the actor his due, who measures out his power to please according to the value he sets upon his hearer's taste or capacity. But however, as we were not here itinerant adventurers, and had properly but one royal auditor to please, after that honour was attained to, the rest of our ambition had little to look after: and that the king was often pleased, we were not only assured by those who had the honour to be near him, but could see it from the frequent satisfaction in his looks at particular scenes and passages: one instance of which I am tempted to relate, because it was at a speech that might more naturally affect a sovereign prince, than any private spectator. In Shakspeare's "Henry VIII," that king commands the cardinal to write circular letters of indemnity into every county where the payment of certain heavy taxes had been disputed: upon which the cardinal whispers the following directions to his secretary Cromwell:—

> ——— A word with you .
> Let there be letters writ to every shire,
> Of the king's grace and pardon. The griev'd commons
> Hardly conceive of me. Let it be nois'd,
> That through our intercession this revokement
> And pardon comes.—I shall anon advise you
> Farther, in the proceeding.———

The solicitude of this spiritual minister, in filching from his master the grace and merit of a good action, and dressing up himself in it, while himself had been author of the evil complained of, was so easy a stroke of his temporal conscience, that it seemed to raise the king into something more than a smile, whenever that play came before him: and I had a more distinct occasion to observe this effect, because my proper stand on the stage, when I spoke the lines, required me to be near the box were the king usually sat. In a word, this play is so true a dramatic chronicle of an old English court, and where the character of Harry the Eighth is so exactly drawn, even to a humorous likeness, that it may be no wonder why his majesty's particular taste for it should have commanded it three several times in one winter.

This too calls to my memory an extravagant pleasantry of sir Richard Steele, who, being asked by a grave nobleman, after the same play had been presented at Hampton-court, how the king liked it, replied, "So terribly well, my lord, that I was afraid I should have lost all my actors: for I was not sure the king would not keep them to fill the posts at court, that he saw them so fit for in the play."

It may be imagined, that giving plays to the people at such a distance from London could not but be attended with an extraordinary expense; and it was some difficulty, when they were first talked of, to bring them under a moderate sum. I shall therefore, in as few words as possible, give a particular of what establishment they were then brought to, that in case the same entertainments should at any time hereafter be called to the same place, future courts may judge how far the precedent may stand good, or need an alteration.

Though the stated fee for a play acted at Whitehall had been formerly but twenty pounds; yet, as that hindered not the company's acting on the same day at the public theatre, that sum was almost all clear profits to them. But this circumstance not being practicable when they were commanded to Hampton-court, a new and extraordinary charge was unavoidable. The managers therefore, not to inflame it, desired no consideration for their own labour, farther than the honour of being employed in his majesty's commands; and if the other actors might be allowed each their day's pay and travelling charges, they should hold themselves ready to act any play there, at a day's warning: and that the trouble might be less by being divided, the lord chamberlain was pleased to let us know that the household music, the wax lights, and a chaise-marine to carry our moving wardrobe to every different play, should be under the charge of the proper officers. Notwithstanding these assistances, the expense of every play amounted to fifty pounds; which account, when all was over, was not only allowed us, but his majesty was graciously pleased to give the managers two hundred pounds more, for their particular performance and trouble, in only seven times acting. Which last sum, though it might not be too much for a sovereign prince to give, it was certainly more than our utmost merit ought to have hoped for: and I confess, when I received the order for the money from his grace the duke of Newcastle, then lord chamberlain, I was so surprised, that I imagined his grace's favour, or recommendation of our readiness or diligence, must have contributed to so high a consideration of it; and was offering my acknowledgments, as I thought them due; but was soon stopt short by his grace's declaration, that we had no obligations for it, but to the king himself, who had given it from no other motive than his own bounty. Now, whether we may suppose that cardinal Wolsey (as you see Shakspeare has drawn him) would silently have taken such low acknowledgments to himself, perhaps may be as little worth consideration, as my mentioning this circumstance has been necessary: but if it is due to the honour and integrity of the (then) lord chamberlain, I cannot think it wholly impertinent.

Since that time there has been but one play given at Hampton-court, which was for the entertainment of the duke of Lorraine; and for which his present majesty was pleased to order us a hundred pounds.

The reader may now plainly see, that I am ransacking my memory for such remaining scraps of theatrical history as may not perhaps be worth his notice. But if they are such as tempt me to write them, why may I not hope, that in this wide world there may be many an idle soul, no wiser than myself, who may be equally tempted to read them?

I have so often had occasion to compare the state of the stage to the state of a nation, that I yet feel a reluctancy to drop the comparison, or speak of the one without some application to the other. How many reigns then do I remember, from that of Charles the

Second, through all which there has been, from one half of the people, or the other, a succession of clamour against every different ministry for the time being! And yet, let the cause of this clamour have been never so well grounded, it is impossible but that some of those ministers must have been wiser and honester men than others. If this be true, as true I believe it is, why may I not then say, as some fool in a French play does upon a like occasion—*justement, comme chez nous!* It was exactly the same with our management: let us have done ever so well, we could not please every body. All I can say in our defence is, that though many good judges might possibly conceive how the state of the stage might have been mended, yet the best of them never pretended to remember the time when it was better, or could show us the way to make their imaginary amendments practicable.

For though I have often allowed, that our best merit as actors was never equal to that of our predecessors, yet I will venture to say, that in all its branches the stage had never been under so just, so prosperous, and so settled, a regulation, for forty years before, as it was at the time I am speaking of. The most plausible objection to our administration seemed to be, that we took no care to breed up young actors to succeed us; and this was imputed as the greater fault, because it was taken for granted, that it was a matter as easy as planting so many cabbages. Now might not a court as well be reproached for not breeding up a succession of complete ministers? And yet it is evident, that if providence or nature do not supply us with both, the state and the stage will be but poorly supported. If a man of an ample fortune should take it into his head to give a younger son an extraordinary allowance, in order to breed him a great poet, what might we suppose would be the odds, that his trouble and money would be all thrown away? Not more than it would be against the master of a theatre, who should say—This or that young man I will take care shall be an excellent actor! Let it be our excuse then, for that mistaken charge against us, that since there was no garden or market where accomplished actors grew, or were to be sold, we could only pick them up, as we do pebbles of value, by chance: we may polish a thousand, before we can find one fit to make a figure in the lid of a snuff-box. And how few soever we were able to produce, it is no proof that we were not always in search of them. Yet at worst it was allowed, that our deficiency of men actors was not so visible as our scarcity of tolerable women. But when it is considered that the life of youth and beauty is too short for the bringing an actress to her perfection; were I to mention too the many frail fair ones I remember, who, before they could arrive to their theatrical maturity, were feloniously stolen from the tree,—it would rather be thought our misfortune than our fault, that we were not better provided.

Even the laws of a nunnery, we find, are thought no sufficient security against temptations, without iron grates and high walls to enforce them; which the architecture of a theatre will not so properly admit of. And yet methinks beauty that has not those artificial fortresses about it, that has no defence but its natural virtue (which upon the stage has more than once been met with) makes a much more meritorious figure in life, than that immured virtue which could never be tried. But alas! as the poor stage is but the show-glass to a toyshop, we must not wonder if now and then some of the baubles should find a purchaser.

However, as to say more or less than truth are equally unfaithful in an historian, I cannot but own, that in the government of the theatre I have known many instances where the merit of promising actors has not always been brought forward with the regard or favour it had a claim to. And if I put my reader in mind, that in the early part of this work I have shown through what continued difficulties and discouragements I myself made my way up the hill of preferment, he may justly call it too strong a glare of my vanity. I am afraid he is in the right; but I pretend not to be one of those chaste authors that know how to write without it. When truth is to be told, it may be as much chance as choice, if it happens to turn out in my favour. But to show that this was true of others, as well as myself, Booth shall be another instance. In 1707, when Swiney was the only master of the company in the Haymarket, Wilks, though he was then but an hired actor himself, rather chose to govern and give orders, than to receive them; and was so jealous of Booth's rising that with a high hand he gave the part of Pierre, in "Venice Preserved," to Mills the elder, who (not to undervalue him) was out of sight in the pretensions that Booth, then young as he was, had to the same part. And this very discouragement so strongly affected him, that not long after, when several of us became sharers with Swiney, Booth rather chose to risk his fortune with the old patentee in Drury-lane, than come into our interest, where he saw he was like to meet with more of those partialities. And yet again Booth himself, when he came to be a manager, would sometimes suffer his judgment to be blinded by his inclination to actors whom the town seemed to have but an indifferent opinion of. This again inclines me to ask another of my odd questions, viz. have we never seen the same passions govern a court? How many white staffs and great places do we find in our histories, have been laid at the feet of a monarch, because they chose not to give way to a rival in power, or hold a second place in his favour? How many Whigs and Tories have changed their parties, when their good or bad pretensions have met with a check to their higher preferment?

Thus we see, let the degrees and rank of men be ever so unequal, nature throws out their passions from the same motives; it is not the eminence or lowliness of either that makes the one, when provoked, more or less a reasonable creature than the other. The courtier and the comedian, when their ambition is out of humour, take just the same measures to right themselves.

If this familiar style of talking should in the nostrils of gravity and wisdom smell a little too much of the presumptuous or the pragmatical, I will at least descend lower in my apology for it, by calling to my assistance the old humble proverb, viz. "It is an ill bird that, &c." Why then should I debase my profession by setting it in vulgar lights, when I may show it to more favourable advantages? And when I speak of our errors, why may I not extenuate them by illustrious examples; or by not allowing them greater than the greatest men have been subject to? Or why, indeed, may I not suppose that a sensible reader will rather laugh than look grave at the pomp of my parallels?

Now, as I am tied down to the veracity of an historian, whose facts cannot be supposed, like those in a romance, to be in the choice of the author, to make them more marvellous by invention; if I should happen to sink into a little farther insignificancy, let the simple truth of what I have farther to say, be my excuse for it. I am obliged therefore to make the experiment, by showing you the conduct of our theatrical ministry in such lights as on various occasions it appeared in.

Though Wilks had more industry and application than any actor I had ever known, yet we found it possible that those necessary qualities might sometimes be so misconducted, as not only to make them useless but hurtful to our commonwealth; for while he was impatient to be foremost in every thing, he frequently shocked the honest ambition of others whose measures might have been more serviceable, could his jealousy have given way to them. His own regards for himself therefore were, to avoid a disagreeable dispute with him, too often complied with. But this leaving his diligence to his own conduct made us in some instances pay dearly for it. For example; he would take as much or more pains in forwarding to the stage the water-gruel work of some insipid author that happened rightly to make his court to him, than he would for the best play wherein it was not his fortune to be chosen for the best character. So great was his impatience to be employed, that I scarce remember in twenty years above one profitable play we could get to be revived, wherein he found he was to make no considerable figure, independent of him. But the "Tempest" having done wonders formerly, he could not form any pretensions to let it lie longer dormant. However, his coldness to it was so visible, that he took all occasions to postpone and discourage its progress, by frequently taking up the morning-stage with something more to his mind. Having been myself particularly solicitous for the reviving this play, Dogget (for this was before Booth came into the management) consented that the extraordinary decorations and habits should be left to my care and direction, as the fittest person whose temper could jostle through the petulant opposition that he knew Wilks would be always offering to it, because he had but a middling part in it, that of Ferdinand. Notwithstanding which, so it happened, that the success of it showed (not to take from the merit of Wilks) that it was possible to have good audiences without his extraordinary assistance. In the first six days of acting it, we paid all our constant and incidental expense, and shared each of us a hundred pounds: the greatest profit that in so little a time had yet been known within my memory. But, alas! what was paltry pelf to glory? That was the darling passion of Wilks's heart; and not to advance in it was, to so jealous an ambition, a painful retreat, a mere shade to his laurels; and the common benefit was but a poor equivalent to his want of particular applause. To conclude, not prince Lewis of Baden, though a confederate general with the duke of Marlborough, was more inconsolable upon the memorable victory at Blenheim, at which he was not present, than our theatrical hero was to see any action prosperous that he was not himself at the head of. If this then was an infirmity in Wilks, why may not my showing the same weakness in so great a man, mollify the imputation, and keep his memory in countenance?

This laudable appetite for fame in Wilks was not however to be fed without that constant labour which only himself was able to come up to. He therefore bethought him of the means to lessen the fatigue, and at the same time to heighten his reputation; which was by giving up now and then a part to some raw actor who he was sure would disgrace it, and consequently put the audience in mind of his superior performance. Among this sort of indulgences to young actors, he happened once to make a mistake that set his views in a clear light. The best critics, I believe, will allow that in Shakspeare's "Macbeth" there are in the part of Macduff two scenes, the one of terror in the second act, and the other of compassion in the fourth, equal to any that dramatic poetry has produced. These scenes Wilks had acted with success, though far short of that happier skill and grace which Mountfort had formerly shown in them. Such a part, however, one might imagine would be one of the last a good actor would choose to part with. But Wilks was of a different opinion; for Macbeth was thrice as long, had more great scenes of action, and bore the name of the play. Now to be a second in any play, was what he did not much care for, and had been seldom used to. This part of Macduff therefore he had given to one Williams, as yet no extraordinary though a promising actor. Williams, in the simplicity of his heart, immediately told Booth what a favour Wilks had done him. Booth, as he had reason, thought Wilks had here carried his indulgence and his authority a little too far; for as Booth had no better part in the same play than that of Banquo, he found himself too much disregarded in letting so young an actor take place of him. Booth therefore, who knew the value of Macduff, proposed to do it himself, and to give Banquo to Williams; and to make him farther amends, offered him any other of his parts that he thought might be of service to him. Williams was content with the exchange, and thankful for the promise. This scheme indeed (had it taken effect) might have been an ease to Wilks, and possibly no disadvantage to the play; but softly—that was not quite what we had a mind to. No sooner then came this proposal to Wilks, but off went the mask, and out came the secret: for though Wilks wanted to be eased of the part, he did not desire to be *excelled* in it; and as he was not sure but that might be the case, if Booth were to act it, he wisely retracted his own project, took Macduff again to himself, and while he lived never had a thought of running the same hazard by any farther offer to resign it.

Here I confess I am at a loss for a fact in history to which this can be a parallel. To be weary of a post, even to a real desire of resigning it, and yet to choose rather to drudge on in it than suffer it to be well supplied, (though to share in that advantage,) is a delicacy of ambition that Machiavel himself has made no mention of; or if in old Rome the jealousy of any pretended patriot, equally inclined to abdicate his office, may have come up to it, it is more than my reading remembers.

As nothing can be more impertinent than showing too frequent a fear to be thought so, I will without farther apology rather risk that imputation, than not tell you another story much to the same purpose, and of no more consequence than my last. To make you understand it, however, a little preface will be necessary.

If the merit of an actor (as it certainly does) consists more in the quality than the quantity of his labour, the other managers had no visible reason to think this needless ambition of Wilks in being so often, and sometimes so unnecessarily, employed, gave him any title to a superiority; especially when our articles of agreement had allowed us all to be equal. But what are narrow contracts to great souls with growing desires? Wilks therefore, who thought himself lessened in appealing to any judgment but his own, plainly discovered by his restless behaviour (though he did not care to speak out) that he thought he had a right to some higher consideration for his performance. This was often Booth's opinion as well as my own. It must be farther observed, that he actually had a separate allowance of fifty pounds a year, for writing our daily playbills for the printer; which province, to say the truth, was the only one we cared to trust to his particular intendance, or could find out for a pretence to distinguish him. But to speak a plainer truth, this pension, which was no part of our original agreement, was merely paid to keep him quiet, and not that we thought it due to so insignificant a charge as what a prompter had formerly executed. This being really the case, his frequent complaints of being a drudge to the company, grew something more than disagreeable to us: for we could not digest the imposition of a man's setting himself to work, and then bringing in his own bill for it. Booth therefore, who was less easy than I was to see him so often setting a merit upon this quantity of his labour, which neither could be our interest or his own to lay upon him, proposed to me that we might remove this pretended grievance by reviving some play that might be likely to live, and be easily acted without Wilks having any part in it. About this time an unexpected occasion offered itself to put our project in practice. What followed our attempt will be all (if any thing be) worth observation in my story.

In 1725 we were called upon, in a manner that could not be resisted, to revive the "Provoked Wife," a comedy which, while we found our account in keeping the stage clear of those loose liberties it had formerly too justly been charged with, we had laid aside for some years. The author, sir John Vanbrugh, who was conscious of what it had too much of, was prevailed upon to substitute a new written scene in the place of one in the fourth act, where the wantonness of his wit and humour had (originally) made a rake talk like a rake, in the borrowed habit of a clergyman; to avoid which offence, he clapt the same debauchee into the undress of a woman of quality. Now the character and profession of a fine lady not being so indelibly sacred as that of a churchman, whatever follies he exposed in the petticoat, kept him at least clear of his former profaneness, and were now innocently ridiculous to the spectator.

This play, being thus refitted for the stage, was, as I have observed, called for from court, and by many of the nobility. Now then we thought was a proper time to come to an explanation with Wilks. Accordingly, when the actors were summoned to hear the play read, and receive their parts, I addressed myself to Wilks before them all, and told him, that as the part of Constant, which he seemed to choose, was a character of less action than he generally appeared in, we thought this might be a good occasion to ease himself by giving it to another.—Here he looked grave.—That the love scenes of it were rather serious than gay or humorous, and therefore might sit very well upon Booth.—Down dropt his brow, and furled were his features.—That if we were never to revive a tolerable play without him, what would become of us in case of his indisposition? —Here he pretended to stir the fire.—That as he could have no further advantage or advancement in his station to hope for, his acting in this play was but giving himself an unprofitable trouble, which neither Booth nor I desired to impose upon him.—Softly: now the pill began to gripe him. In a word, this provoking civility plunged him into a passion which he was no longer able to contain; out it came with all the equipage of unlimited language, that on such occasions his displeasure usually set out with; but when his reply was stript of those ornaments, it was plainly this:—that he looked upon all I had said as a concerted design, not only to signalize ourselves by laying him aside, but a contrivance to draw him into the disfavour of the nobility, by making it supposed his own choice, that he did not act in a play so particularly asked for; but we should find he could stand upon his own bottom, and it was not all our little caballing should get our ends of him. To which I answered with some warmth, that he was mistaken in our ends; "for those, sir," said I, "you have answered already, by showing the company you cannot bear to be left out of any play. Are not you every day complaining of your being overlaboured? And now, upon our first offering to ease you, you fly into a passion, and pretend to make that a greater grievance than the other. But, sir, if your being in or out of the play is a hardship, you shall impose it upon yourself. The part is in your hand, and to us it is a matter of indifference now, whether you take it or leave it." Upon this he threw down the part upon the table, crossed his arms, and sat knocking his heel upon the floor, as seeming to threaten most when he said least; but when nobody persuaded him to take it up again, Booth, not choosing to push the matter too far, but rather to split the difference of our dispute, said, that for his part he saw no such great matter in acting every day; for he believed it the wholesomest exercise in the world; it kept the spirits in motion, and always gave him a good stomach. Though this was in a manner giving up the part to Wilks, yet it did not allow he did us any favour in receiving it. Here I observed Mrs Oldfield began to titter behind her fan. But Wilks, being more intent upon what Booth had said, replied, every one could best feel for himself, but he did not pretend to the strength of a packhorse; therefore, if Mrs Oldfield would choose any body else to play with her, he should be very glad to be excused. This throwing the negative upon Mrs Oldfield was indeed a sure way to save himself; which I could not help taking notice of by saying, it was making but an ill compliment to the company, to suppose there was but one man in it fit to play an ordinary part with her. Here Mrs Oldfield got up, and turning me half round to come forward, said with her usual frankness, "Pooh! you are all a parcel of fools, to make such a rout about nothing!" rightly judging, that the person most out of humour would not be more displeased at her calling us all by the same name. As she knew too the best way of ending the debate would be to help the weak, she said she hoped Mr Wilks would not so far mind what had past, as to refuse his acting the part with her; for though it might not be so good as he had been used to, yet she believed those who had bespoke the play would expect to have it done to the best advantage; and it would make but an odd story abroad, if it were known there had been any difficulty in that point among ourselves. To conclude, Wilks had the part, and we had all we wanted; which was an occasion to let him see, that the accident or choice of one manager's being more employed than another, would never be allowed a pretence for altering our indentures, or his having an extraordinary consideration for it.

However disagreeable it might be to have this unsociable temper daily to deal with, yet I cannot but say, that from the same impatient spirit that had so often hurt us, we still drew valuable advantages. For as Wilks seemed to have no joy in life beyond his being distinguished on the stage, we were not only sure of his always doing his best there himself, but of making others more careful than without the rod of so irascible a temper over them they would have been; and I much question if a more temperate or better usage of the hired actors could have so effectually kept them to order. Not even Betterton (as we have seen) with all his good sense, his great fame, and experience, could, by being only a quiet example of industry himself, save his company from falling, while neither gentleness could govern, nor the consideration of their common interest, reform them. Diligence, with much the inferior skill or capacity, will beat the best negligent company that ever came upon a stage. But when a certain dreaming idleness, or jolly negligence of rehearsals gets into a body of the ignorant and incapable (which before Wilks came into Drury-lane, when Powel was at the head of them, was the case of that company) then, I say, a sensible spectator might have looked upon the fallen stage, as Portius in the play of "Cato" does upon his ruined country, and have lamented it in (something near) the same exclamation, viz.

—— O ye immortal bards!
What havoc do these blockheads make among your works!
How are the boasted labours of an age
Defaced and tortured by ungracious action!

Of these wicked doings Dryden too complains in one of his prologues at that time, where, speaking of such lewd actors, he closes a couplet with the following line; viz.

And murder plays, which they miscall reviving

The great share therefore that Wilks, by his exemplary diligence and impatience of neglect in others, had in the reformation of this evil, ought in justice to be remembered; and let my own vanity here take shame to itself, when I confess, that had I had half his application, I still think I might have shown myself twice the actor that in my highest state of favour I appeared to be. But if I have any excuse for that neglect (a fault which, if I loved not truth, I need not have mentioned) it is, that so much of my attention was taken up in an incessant labour to guard against our private animosities, and preserve a harmony in our management, that I hope and believe it made ample amends for whatever omission my auditors might sometimes know it cost me some pains to conceal. But nature takes care to bestow her blessings with a more equal hand than fortune does, and is seldom known to heap too many upon one man. One tolerable talent in an individual is enough to preserve him from being good for nothing; and if that was not laid to my charge as an actor, I have, in this light too, less to complain of, than to be thankful for.

Before I conclude my history, it may be expected I should give some further view of these my last contemporaries of the theatre, Wilks and Booth, in their different acting capacities. If I were to paint them in the colours they laid upon one another, their talents would not be shown with half the commendation I am inclined to bestow upon them when they are left to my own opinion. But people of the same profession are apt to see themselves in their own clear glass of partiality, and look upon their equals through a mist of prejudice. It might be imagined too, from the difference of their natural tempers, that Wilks should have been more blind to the excellencies of Booth, than Booth was to those of Wilks; but it was not so. Wilks would sometimes commend Booth to me; but when Wilks excelled, the other was silent. Booth seemed to think nothing valuable that was not tragically great or marvellous. Let that be as true as it may; yet I have often thought, that from his having no taste or humour himself, he might be too much inclined to depreciate the acting of it in others. The very slight opinion which in private conversation with me he had of Wilks's acting sir Harry Wildair, was certainly more than could be justified; not only from the general applause that was against that opinion, (though applause is not always infallible,) but from the visible capacity which must be allowed to an actor that could carry such slight materials to such a height of approbation. For though the character of Wildair scarce in any one scene will stand against a just criticism, yet in the whole there are so many gay and false colours of the fine gentleman, that nothing but a vivacity in the performance, proportionably extravagant, could have made them so happily glare upon a common audience.

Wilks from his first setting out certainly formed his manner of acting upon the model of Mountfort; as Booth did his on that of Betterton. But *haud passibus æquis:* I cannot say either of them came up to their original. Wilks had not that easy regulated behaviour, or the harmonious elocution of the one; nor Booth that conscious aspect of intelligence, or requisite variation of voice, that made every line the other spoke seem his own natural self-delivered sentiment. Yet there is still room for great commendation of both the first mentioned; which will not be so much diminished in my having said they were only excelled by such predecessors, as it will be raised in venturing to affirm, it will be a longer time before any successors will come near them. Thus one of the greatest praises given to Virgil is, that no successor in poetry came so near *him* as *he* himself did to Homer.

Though the majority of public auditors are but bad judges of theatrical action, and are often deceived into their approbation of what has no solid pretence to it; yet as there are no other appointed judges to appeal to, and as every single spectator has a right to be one of them, their sentence will be definitive, and the merit of an actor must in some degree be weighed by it. By this law then Wilks was pronounced an excellent actor; which if the few true judges did not allow him to be, they were at least too candid to slight or discourage him. Booth and he were actors so directly opposite in their manner, that if either of them could have borrowed a little of the other's fault, they would both have been improved by it. If Wilks had sometimes too violent a vivacity, Booth as often contented himself with too grave a dignity. The latter seemed too much to heave up his words, and the other to dart them to the ear with too quick and sharp a vehemence. Thus Wilks would too frequently break into the time and measure of the harmony by too many spirited accents in one line; and Booth by too solemn a regard to harmony would as often lose the necessary spirit of it. So that (as I have observed) could we have sometimes raised the one, and sunk the other, they had both been nearer to the mark. Yet this could not be always objected to them: they had their intervals of unexceptionable excellence, that more than balanced their errors. The masterpiece of Booth was Othello: there he was most in character, and seemed not more to animate or please himself in it than his spectators. It is true, he owed his last and highest advancement to his acting "Cato:" but it was the novelty and critical appearance of that character, that chiefly swelled the torrent of his applause: for let the sentiments of a declaiming patriot have all the sublimity that poetry can raise them to; let them be delivered too with the umost grace and dignity of elocution, that can recommend them to the auditor: yet this is but one light wherein the excellence of an actor can shine. But in "Othello" we may see him in the variety of nature • there the actor is carried through the different accidents of domestic happiness and misery, occasionally torn and tortured by the most distracting passion that can raise terror or compassion in the spectator. Such are the characters that a master actor would delight in; and therefore, in "Othello," I may safely aver that Booth showed himself thrice the actor that he could in "Cato." And yet his merit in acting "Cato" need not be diminished by this comparison.

Wilks often regretted, that in tragedy he had not the full and strong voice of Booth, to command and grace his periods with: but Booth used to say, that if his ear had been equal to it, Wilks had voice enough to have shown himself a much better tragedian. Now, though there might be some truth in this, yet these two actors were of so mixed a merit, that even in tragedy the superiority was not always on the same side. In sorrow, tenderness, or resignation, Wilks plainly had the advantage, and seemed more pathetically to feel, look, and express his calamity; but in the more turbulent transports of the heart, Booth again bore the palm, and left all competitors behind him. A fact perhaps will set this difference in a clearer light. I have formerly seen Wilks act "Othello," and Booth the "Earl of Essex," in which they both miscarried: neither the exclamatory rage nor jealousy of the one, nor the plaintive distresses of the other, were happily executed, or became either of them; though in the contrary characters they were both excellent.

When an actor becomes and naturally looks the character he stands in, I have often observed it to have had as fortunate an effect, and as much recommended him to the approbation of the common auditors, as the most correct or judicious utterance of the sentiments. This was strongly visible in the favourable reception Wilks met with in "Hamlet," where I own the half of what he spoke was as painful to my ear, as every line that came from Betterton was charming; and yet it is not impossible, could they have come to a poll, but Wilks might have had a majority of admirers. However, such a division had been no proof that the preeminence had not still remained in Betterton; and if I should add, that Booth too was behind Betterton in "Othello," it would be saying no more than Booth himself had judgment and candour enough to know and confess. And if both he and Wilks are allowed in the two above mentioned characters a second place to so great a master as Betterton, it will be a rank of praise that the best actors since my time might have been proud of.

I am now come towards the end of that time, through which our affairs had long gone forward in a settled course of prosperity. From the visible errors of former managements we had at last found the necessary means to bring our private laws and orders into the general observance and approbation of our society. Diligence and neglect were under an equal eye; the one never failed of its reward, and the other, by being very rarely excused, was less frequently committed. You are now to consider us in our height of favour, and so much in fashion with the politer part of the town, that our house every Saturday seemed to be the appointed assembly of the first ladies of quality. Of this too the common spectators were so well apprized, that for twenty years successively on that day we scarce ever failed of a crowded audience; for which occasion we particularly reserved our best plays, acted in the best manner we could give them.

Among our many necessary reformations, what not a little preserved to us the regard of our auditors, was the decency of our clear stage, from whence we had now for many years shut out those idle gentlemen who seemed more delighted to be pretty objects themselves, than capable of any pleasure from the play, who took their daily stands where they might best elbow the actor, and come in for their share of the auditor's attention. In many a laboured scene of the warmest humour, and of the most affecting passion, have I seen the best actors disconcerted, while these buzzing mosquittos have been fluttering round their eyes and ears. How was it possible an actor so embarrassed should keep his impatience from entering into that different temper which his personated character might require him to be master of?

Future actors may perhaps wish I would set this grievance in a stronger light; and to say the truth, where auditors are ill-bred, it cannot well be expected that actors should be polite. Let me therefore show how far an artist in any science is apt to be hurt by any sort of inattention to his performance.

While the famous Corelli at Rome was playing some musical composition of his own to a select company in the private apartment of his patron cardinal, he observed, in the height of his harmony, his eminence was engaging in a detached conversation; upon which he suddenly stopped short, and gently laid down his instrument. The cardinal, surprised at the unexpected cessation, asked him if a string was broke? To which Corelli, in an honest conscience of what was due to his music, replied, "No, sir; I was only afraid I interrupted business." His eminence, who knew that a genius could never show itself to advantage, where it had not its proper regards, took this reproof in good part, and broke off his conversation, to hear the whole concerto played over again.

Another story will let us see, what effect a mistaken offence of this kind had upon the French theatre; which was told me by a gentleman of the long robe then at Paris, and who was himself the innocent author of it. At the tragedy of "Zaire," while the celebrated mademoiselle Gaussin was delivering a soliloquy, this gentleman was seized with a sudden fit of coughing, which gave the actress some surprise and interruption; and his fit increasing, she was forced to stand silent so long, that it drew the eyes of the uneasy audience upon him; when a French gentleman, leaning forward to him, asked him if this actress had given him any particular offence, that he took so public an occasion to resent it? The English gentleman in the utmost surprise assured him, so far from it, that he was a particular admirer of her performance; that his malady was his real misfortune; and if he apprehended any return of it, he would rather quit his seat than disoblige either the actress or the audience.

This public decency in their theatre I have myself seen carried so far, that a gentleman in their second loge, or middle gallery, being observed to sit forward himself, while a lady sat behind him, a loud number of voices called out to him from the pit, "*Place à la dame! Place à la dame!*" when the person so offending either not apprehending the meaning of the clamour, or possibly being some John Trott who feared no man alive, the noise was continued for several minutes; nor were the actors, though ready on the stage, suffered to begin the play until this unbred person was laughed out of his seat, and had placed the lady before him.

Whether this politeness observed at plays may be owing to their clime, their complexion, or their government, is of no great consequence; but if it is to be acquired, methinks it is pity our accomplished countrymen, who every year import so much of this nation's gaudy garniture, should not, in this long course of our commerce with them, have brought over a little of their theatrical good-breeding too.

I have been the more copious upon this head, that it might be judged how much it stood us upon, to have got rid of those improper spectators I have been speaking of; for whatever regard we might draw by keeping them at a distance from our stage, I had observed, while they were admitted behind our scenes, we but too often showed them the wrong side of our tapestry, and that many a tolerable actor was the less valued, when it was known what ordinary stuff he was made of.

Among the many more disagreeable distresses that are almost unavoidable in the government of a theatre, those we so often met with from the persecution of bad authors were what we could never entirely get rid of. But let us state both our cases, and then see where the justice of the complaint lies. It is true, when an ingenious indigent had taken perhaps a whole summer's pains, *invitâ Minervâ*, to heap up a pile of poetry into the likeness of a play, and found at last the gay promise of his winter's support was rejected and abortive, a man almost ought to be a poet himself, to be justly sensible of his distress. Then indeed great allowances ought to be made for the severe reflections he might naturally throw upon those pragmatical actors who had no sense or taste of good writing. And yet, if his relief was only to be had by his imposing a bad play upon a good set of actors, methinks the charity that first looks at home has as good an excuse for its coldness, as the unhappy object of it had a plea for his being relieved at their expense. But immediate want was not always confessed their motive for writing; fame, honour, and Parnassian glory, had sometimes taken a romantic turn in their heads; and then they gave themselves the air of talking to us in a higher strain. "Gentlemen were not to be so treated: the stage was like to be finely governed, when actors pretended to be judges of authors," &c. But, dear gentlemen, if they were good actors, why not? How should they have been able to act or rise to any excellence, if you supposed them not to feel or understand what you offered them? Would you have reduced them to the mere mimicry of parrots and monkies, that can only prate and play a great many pretty tricks without reflection! Or how are you sure your friend, the infallible judge to whom you read your fine piece, might be sincere in the praises he gave it! Or, indeed, might not you have thought the best judge a bad one, if he had disliked it? Consider too how possible it might be that a man of sense would not care to tell you a truth he was sure you would not believe; and if neither Dryden, Congreve, Steele, Addison, nor Farquhar, (if you please,) ever made any complaint of their incapacity to judge, why is the world to believe the slights you have met with from them, are either undeserved or particular? Indeed, indeed, I am not conscious that we ever did you or any of your fraternity the least injustice. Yet this was not all we had to struggle with: to supersede our right of rejecting the recommendation, or rather imposition, of some great persons (whom it was not prudence to disoblige) they sometimes came in with a high hand to support their pretensions; and then, *coûte qui coûte*, acted it must be! So when the short life of this wonderful nothing was over, the actors were perhaps abused in a preface for obstructing the success of it, and the town publicly damned us for our private civility.

I cannot part with these fine gentlemen authors without mentioning a ridiculous *disgraccia* that befell one of them many years ago. This solemn bard, who like Bays only writ for fame and reputation, on the second day's public triumph of his muse, marching in a stately full-bottomed periwig into the lobby of the house, with a lady of condition in his hand, when raising his voice to the Fopling sound that became the mouth of a man of quality, and calling out—"Hey! box-keeper, where is my lady such-a-one's servant?"—was unfortunately answered by honest John Trott, (which then happened to be the box-keeper's real name,) "Sir, we have dismissed: there was not company enough to pay candles." In which mortal astonishment it may be sufficient to leave him. And yet had the actors refused this play, what resentment might have been thought too severe for them?

Thus was our administration often censured for accidents which were not in our power to prevent; a possible case in the wisest governments. If therefore some plays have been referred to the stage, that were never fit to have been seen there, let this be our best excuse for it. And yet, if the merit of our rejecting the many bad plays that pressed hard upon us, were weighed against the few that were thus imposed upon us, our conduct in general might have more amendments of the stage to boast of, than errors to answer for. But it is now time to drop the curtain.

During our four last years there happened so very little unlike what has been said before, that I shall conclude with barely mentioning those unavoidable accidents that drew on our dissolution. The first, that for some years had led the way to greater, was the continued ill state of health that rendered Booth incapable of appearing on the stage. The next was the death of Mrs Oldfield, which happened on the 23d of

October 1730. About the same time too, Mrs Porter, then in her highest reputation for tragedy, was lost to us by the misfortune of a dislocated limb from the overturning of a chaise. And our last stroke was the death of Wilks in September, the year following, 1731.

Notwithstanding such irreparable losses, whether, when these favourite actors were no more to be had, their successors might not be better borne with, than they could possibly have hoped while the former were in being; or that the generality of spectators, from their want of taste, were easier to be pleased, than the few that knew better; or that at worst our actors were still preferable to any other company of the several then subsisting; or to whatever cause it might be imputed,—our audiences were far less abated than our apprehensions had suggested. So that, though it began to grow late in life with me, having still health and strength enough to have been as useful on the stage as ever, I was under no visible necessity of quitting it. But so it happened, that our surviving fraternity having got some chimerical and, as I thought, unjust notions into their heads, which though I knew they were without much difficulty to be surmounted, I choose not at my time of day to enter into new contentions; and as I found an inclination in some of them to purchase the whole power of the patent into their own hands, I did my best, while I staid with them, to make it worth their while to come up to my price; and then patiently sold out my share to the first bidder, wishing the crew I had left in the vessel a good voyage.

What commotions the stage fell into the year following, or from what provocations the greatest part of the actors revolted, and set up for themselves in the little house in the Haymarket, lies not within the promise of my title-page to relate; or as it might set some persons living in a light they possibly might not choose to be seen in, I will rather be thankful for the involuntary favour they have done me, than trouble the public with private complaints of fancied or real injuries.

SEQUEL.

The subsequent life of this able and eccentric comedian and dramatist, who lived seventeen years beyond the termination of his "Apology," supplies but little incident for narrative. The chief circumstance which kept up his notoriety, originated in his quarrel with Pope in 1742. That able but too petulant satirist did his best to hold him up to everlasting ridicule in the Dunciad; but the injustice of the attempt to make him a dunce was too self-evident to operate in his own day; nor in respect to posterity will it be much more efficacious, the real state of the case having become a well-known part of literary history. Cibber, conscious of the airy briskness of his own character, as a writer, performer, and social companion, observed with great nonchalance, that the wits might deem him light, flippant, or what they pleased; but it was out of their power to justly call him *dull;* and the world has agreed with him. He occasionally acted after his retirement, to oblige friends and performers, and was particularly fond of playing Fondlewife, in the "Old Bachelor," to the Letitia of Mrs Woffington, to whom he manifested the most gallant attentions much beyond his seventieth year. In 1745, being then seventy-four, he acted the part of Pandulph, the legate, in his own play of "Papal Tyranny;" a very poor production; tragedy being in no respect adapted to the talents of Cibber. He was equally out of his element in an "Essay on the Character and Conduct of Cicero," 4to. which he published in 1747. It was never much attended to, and rapidly reached oblivion. He survived to his eighty-seventh year; during which time his lively manners and companionable qualities caused his society to be courted by a large and opulent circle, including even many families of rank. His death took place suddenly on the 12th of December 1757, on which morning his man servant, who had conversed with him at six o'clock, found him, with his face reclining on the pillow, quite dead at the hour of nine.

Colley Cibber had a large family; but of the children who lived to become adults, two have been unfortunately better known for their vices and eccentricity, than their talents and good conduct. Theophilus Cibber, like his father, was a writer and performer in the same caste of comedy, but with far inferior abilities and reputation. He was born in 1703, and regularly educated; but his indolence and extravagance involved him in difficulties, in which he showed so little principle, that his character was irretrievably ruined. He was the husband of the celebrated tragic actress, Mrs Susanna Maria Cibber, whose talents were discovered and cultivated by her father-in-law, with a confident expectation of great success, in which it is well-known that he was not disappointed. Her mean and dissolute husband entrapped this amiable woman into an illicit intercourse with a gentleman of fortune, with a view to gain damages; but his intentions being detected, he utterly failed, and gained nothing but ten pounds and universal contempt. A separation of course took place; and Mrs Cibber, being regarded as the victim of her profligate husband, obtained both countenance and respect. This wretched man lost his life on his passage to Ireland, where he was engaged as a performer: the packet in which he embarked being cast away, he was drowned, with almost every person on board, in the winter of the year 1757, the same which terminated the life of his father. He was author of "The Lover," a comedy; of "Pattie and Peggy," a ballad opera; and also assisted in and superintended the collection entitled "Cibber's Lives."

Charlotte, the youngest daughter of Colley Cibber, was also a very extraordinary person. At eight years of age she was put to school, but by some curious neglect or caprice was brought up more like a boy than a girl. As she grew up, her masculine propensities took a still more decided direction: she was much more frequently in the stable than the parlour, and handled a currycomb much better than a needle. Shooting, hunting, riding races, and digging in a garden, formed her principal amusements. This wildness did not however prevent her obtaining a husband in the person of Richard Charke, a famous player on the violin. Misconduct on both sides soon produced a separation, and Mrs Charke obtained an engagement at Drury-lane theatre as a second rate actress, with a decent salary; where she might have looked to the gradual acquirement of reputation, had not her ungovernable temper induced her to quarrel with the manager Fleetwood, against whom she wrote a farce entitled "The Art of Management." He notwithstanding forgave and re-engaged her; but she soon left him a second time, and was reduced to the pitiable condition of a strolling actress, in which she more frequently appeared as a male than a female. In 1755 she came to London, and published a narrative of her life, the profits of which, it is supposed, enabled her to pass the remainder of her days in a hut by herself, in a state of squalid misery which baffles description. She lived in this abject condition, which in its most disgusting features appears to have been voluntary, until 1759, when death terminated a course of folly, suffering, and imprudence, which it is charitable to suppose must have been in some degree the result of disturbed or injured intellects. The autobiography of this unhappy woman, although much less meritorious, may possibly, in the way of singularity, be entitled to as much attention as that of her father.

It may be as well to observe in conclusion, that Cibber's dramatic works are published in five volumes 12mo. His other productions, except his "Apology," are obsolete, and likely to remain so.

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