

A
P I C T U R E
O F
E N G L A N D :

C O N T A I N I N G

A DESCRIPTION OF THE LAWS, CUSTOMS, AND
MANNERS OF ENGLAND.

Interpersed with curious and interesting Anecdotes of

Present King of Denmark	General Smith	Mrs. Abington
Prince of Wales	Lord Camden	Mr. Wedgewood
Late Empress Maria Theresa	Lord Thurlow	Chevalier D'Eon
Louis XV.	Lord Kenyon	Lord Stormont
Duke de Choiseul	Duke of Bridgewater	Mr. Villette
Late Duke of Bedford	Lord Chatham	General Gansell
Duchess Dowager of Bedford	Lord Sackville	Late Mr. Garrick
Duke of Northumberland	General Burgoyne	Mr. Foote
Duchess of Devonshire	Mr. Luttrell	Mrs. Cornelys
Lord Bute	Mr. Wilkes, and se-	Mrs. Siddons
Lord North	veral other Alder-	Barry
Lord Mansfield	men	Woodward.
Mr. Fox	Mr. Burke	Weston
Mr. Pitt	Mr. Horne Tooke	Henderfon
Lord Sandwich	Late Lord Clive	Palmer
Admiral Keppel	Mr. Gibbon	Mr. Kelly, &c. &c. &c.

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TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

V O L. II.

L O N D O N :

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MDCCLXXXIX.

CHAPTER VI.

The Theatres—Italian Opera—Jubilee in honour of Shakespeare—Kelly the Poet—The Contrast betwixt the English and French Theatres—Foote—Garrick—George Alexander Stevens—Mrs. Cornelys—Pantheon—Masquerades—Debating Societies.

THE two principal theatres in London, open during the winter, are those of Drury-Lane and Covent-Garden; in the Haymarket play-house, which is under the direction of Mr. Colman, they act only during the summer months.

The Italian Opera generally commences in the month of December, and shuts in June: the representations are twice, and sometimes three times a week. As the English in general have no great attachment to this exotic entertainment, and are, for the most part, entirely ignorant of the language,

guage, this theatre is treated with the utmost contempt by the more sensible part of the people. The nobility alone support it; and they merely because—*it is the fashion.*

There is not any place of entertainment in Europe where the audience *yawn* so much as there; its decorations, machinery, and wardrobe, are altogether unworthy of the nation. There is nothing tolerable but its music. The great sums given by the managers to the *castratos*, who are better paid in England than any where, prevent them from laying out any money on the necessary decorations. The latter consequently enrich themselves, and the former have been constantly involved in difficulties.

It is very singular, that the manners, customs, and pleasures of other countries, can never become popular in England. This singularity extends to masquerades, and is visible in regard to operas; for although the opera-house is a noble building, and has cost immense sums, it has never yet been able to produce one work whose merit rose above mediocrity.

Every thing that can characterise the English
nation,

nation, is to be met with in their national theatres alone : there all the efforts of art, the elegance of composition, and the flights of genius, are united. Drury-Lane and Covent-Garden are rivals to each other, and it is difficult to decide, which of them possesses that superiority for which they both contend. .

These two play-houses, for forty days before Easter, perform oratorios on certain days, and sometimes double the price of admission. These are generally HANDEL's compositions. The singers are all English ; and it has been observed by some judicious connoisseurs, that they only want Italian names, and a few journays to the Continent, to procure uncommon reputation.

The greatest part of the foreign musicians who visit London remain there ; for as that great city is actually a PERU to them, they do not choose to deprive themselves of the lucrative monopoly which they there enjoy, in regard to their own profession.

The English theatre is said to have attained its greatest degree of perfection, during the last years of GARRICK's life ; and, without doubt, this was its most brilliant period. The principal works of
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the immortal Shakespeare, and other celebrated dramatic poets, were then represented with a justice, a dignity, and a magnificence, before unknown.

It is true, that even then there was but one GARRICK, but he was seconded by the efforts of other actors, who, without equalling him, were yet worthy of being his associates, in immortalising that celebrated epoch. Among these were Barry, Woodward, Weston, &c. The retreat of the English Roscius, in 1776, was followed by the decline of the stage; the other three died in the same year: Mrs. Abington, the Athalia of England, wished also to retire, and could not be prevailed upon to remain without the most earnest entreaties.

Mrs. Siddons and Mr. Henderson supplied, but in an indifferent manner, the public loss; they were the only two who distinguished themselves among the crowd of actors, who were at that time candidates for the favour of the public. They made their first appearance at Drury-Lane, and were loaded with applause. The audience, however, began in a short time to see them with a greater degree of coolness, and became consequently more sparing of their praises.

Among

Among the number of *peculiarities* belonging to the English play-houses, may be reckoned the after-pieces, called ENTERTAINMENTS. These, for the most part, consist of a happy mixture of dialogue, song, and dance; the decorations are amazing, and the machinery is carried to the most astonishing perfection.

The people are uncommonly attached to this kind of diversion. All the great events that occur to the nation are dramatised and represented on the stage: for example, the coronation of the present King; the Prince of Wales receiving the order of the garter; the grand review at Portsmouth, in 1774; the camp at Coxheath; and the siege of Gibraltar. These representations often last for an hour and a half, and are usually given after one of Shakespeare's plays.

The English do not dislike entertainments, however long, provided they have variety to recommend them.

I have seen the Peak of Derbyshire, its grottoes, caverns, and adjoining mountains, and, in fine, every thing that is marvellous in that spot, represented with an art that seemed to equal magic.

But

But the most remarkable of all these, is SHAKESPEARE'S JUBILEE: that in honour of Voltaire, at the French theatre in Paris, in the year 1777, was a paltry imitation of the Jubilee of the English Poet.

When this is acted, the scenes are painted to represent the market-place at Stratford. At a certain signal, the stage is filled with a mob of country people, whom they actually take out of the street on purpose; and then begins a procession, the like of which has never been seen on any theatre.

A troop of dancers march first with a solemn step; after them come nymphs, who strew flowers around. The principal characters in each comedy then make their appearance, preceded by a flag, on which the name of the play is inscribed; a triumphal car, in which THALIA is drawn by *grotesque* figures, closes the first part.

This is succeeded by the Muses, Venus, and the Graces; Cupids, Nymphs, Fawns, and Dryads, who carry the statue of Shakespeare, and keep time to the sound of instruments of music.

Tragedy closes the procession, attended by
heralds

heralds and standard-bearers, who walk before her : then not only the principal characters in each piece, but also the most striking incidents make their appearance.

In Macbeth the forcerers and their cauldron ; in Coriolanus the tent of that general adorned with the fasces ; and in Romeo and Juliet the tomb of the Capulets forcibly impress the mind with the recollection of the principal incidents in every play.

When the persons of the drama arrive on the stage, they represent, in *dumb-show*, the principal passages of the tragedy.

King Lear exhibits the madness with which he is supposed to be afflicted ; and Richard III. that fury with which he is transported in the midst of the battle.

Macbeth appears with a bloody poniard in his hand, and his lady, as described by the poet, pursued by the avenging furies, and wandering about the palace with a lighted torch. Juliet starts from her lethargy, and lifts her head from the bier. The lictors* and the eagles precede Julius Cæsar ; a number of Roman ladies prostrate themselves

themselves before Coriolanus, and implore his protection. The procession closes with Melpomene, who is drawn in a chariot, and holds an uplifted dagger in her hand.

The last scene represents a superb temple, the altar of which is adorned with the principal subjects mentioned by the poet, depicted in transparent paintings.

This was a real *apotheosis*, for it was not a literary fanaticism, but a just admiration of every thing that is truly great and sublime, which placed the statue of this immortal genius in the temple of immortality.

The actors constantly pay the same, if not a greater, attention to the galleries than the boxes. Before the curtain is drawn, there is a great deal of noise; and afterwards the players are sometimes pelted with orange peel: it is very rare, however, that any disturbance is attended with dangerous consequences. In 1772, Hugh Kelly, who, from writing in favour of his country, at length defended the minister, having presented a comedy called, *A Word to the Wise*; the audience were so exasperated, that they would not allow it to be acted. Garrick made his appearance, but for once even he
begged

begged in vain : the play therefore was withdrawn, and they instantly became quiet.

The *action* of the English stage is entirely different from that of the French. When one makes a comparison between the good actors in London and Paris, the dissimilarity of their tones, their gestures, and their expressions, appear to be wonderful. The marriage of FIGARO, which was represented in the month of December 1784, almost at the same time in Paris and London, afforded a wonderful instance of this observation. However, an intimate knowledge of both theatres, and even of Nature herself, will easily discover to us, that there is more than *one way* to arrive at perfection.

The English make use of a great deal of action and vivacity on the stage, and are not very strict in adapting these to the propriety of their characters. Very few of them, indeed, ever acquire a dignified manner.

In original plays, taken from their own history, and which consequently exhibit the manners and the customs of the nation, this fault is not so perceptible as in translations, such as *Zara*, *Iphigenia*, the *Horatii*, &c. in which, it must be
confessed,

confessed, that they do not excel. The women's parts are, however, better sustained. The actresses support the honour of the theatres, by means of a nobleness and a dignity which charm the beholder.

Mrs. Abington is the greatest ornament of their stage, and unites all parties in her praise. She attempts comedy alone, but with such a happy combination of nature and art, that I may affirm, without fear, that so many talents were never united in any other female performer in Europe. She is now more than fifty years of age, and yet is able to represent, with the same ease and propriety, either a country girl or a woman of fashion.

The Hay-Market theatre was established by the celebrated Foote, the late duke of Cumberland having procured a patent from George II. for that purpose. This actor was styled the *English Aristophanes*. Besides a satirical humour which was natural to him, and discovered itself the moment that he opened his lips, he had the advantage of successfully imitating the Greek poets, by bringing his contemporaries on the stage, and making them the *butt* of his sarcasms, and the public ridicule.

He may be said to have invented a middle kind of dramatic entertainment betwixt comedy and farce. It must be confessed, that his productions have the merit of being so many interesting pictures of the manners of the age. He usually chose some temporary subject, spun it into three acts, and made but little alteration even in the names of those who had the misfortune to fall under his lash. He knew how to imitate with great exactness the gait and conversation of any one, and never forgot to place his hero in the most foolish and ridiculous point of view. When he played, the house, during the whole representation, was affected with a continual and a convulsive laughter.

His satirical vein made him feared by all who approached him, as he spared no one, and his witty sarcastic expressions were never forgotten. But no person dreaded him so much as Garrick, who was more affected by any pleasantry against himself, than by the highest eulogiums in his favour. He made use of every stratagem to procure Foote's friendship, but in vain, for his natural temper could not be confined by any restraint.

Lord Sandwich, who had been greatly offended at some of his jokes, happening to meet him one day, asked, "whether he was most likely to be

“ first * * * * * or hanged ?” “ That entirely
 “ depends, my lord,” replied the wit, “ whe-
 “ ther I embrace your lordship’s mistress, or your
 “ principles.”

The profession of an actor is not thought dishonourable in England ; on the contrary, he is regarded and esteemed on account of his talents. Both Garrick and Foote not only lived in the most familiar manner with the first nobility in the kingdom, but actually went to court, and were well received at St. James’s. The funeral of the former afforded the most convincing proof, how much they respect persons who among us are treated with so much contempt. A great number of peers not only accompanied the corpse of this great man, but actually supported the pall. Perhaps it may be here thought, that I allude to some inconsiderate young men of fashion, who, forgetting the respect due to their rank, were actuated merely by their enthusiasm for Garrick.—It was far otherwise. Men illustrious on account of their merit, and among others lord Camden, who some years before had been chancellor of England, paid this mark of respect to their immortal countryman.

The friends of Garrick, after his retreat from the stage, wished him to become a member of parliament.

liament. It depended wholly on himself, to aspire to and receive this honourable mark of distinction ; but his advanced age made him rather anxious to enjoy the great fortune which he had acquired, amidst the calm and tranquillity of a country life.

When shall we see our German actors honoured in this manner ? If great talents could procure such a distinction with us, they would long since have met with their reward. It is not necessary to be inspired with the zeal of patriotism, to rank SCHRODER among the first actors now in Europe. To compare him to Le Kain, would be doing the greatest injustice : it is only necessary to see these two perform, to be of my way of thinking. The plays of Shakespeare, on which Garrick founded his reputation, lose nothing of their force or beauty in the mouth of Schroder ; but his own countrymen, so liberal in their praise of every thing foreign, have not yet been so just, either sufficiently to appreciate his merits, or those master pieces of the English theatres.

A person of the name of Stevens, who died in 1783, was the inventor of an entertainment equally singular and original, which he called *Lectures on Heads*. This consisted in comical and satirical observations,

servations upon all ranks and classes in the nation.

The author displayed a thorough knowledge of the world, much wit, and a great deal of gaiety in his representations. To animate his narration, and to give force to his ideas, he procured a prodigious number of portraits, the physiognomy and dress of which were expressive of those characters, and occupations, which he ridiculed.

He knew how to imitate their voice, their looks, and their manner, with the most happy adroitness. Women of the town, barristers, physicians, clergymen, merchants, officers, men of learning, artists, ladies of fashion, and billingsgates; in one word, all the professions, copied by Stevens, were caricatured before the public with the utmost humour and gaiety.

It was very seldom that this performer was trivial; every thing that he said was full of that *practical philosophy*, which is as instructive as necessary. He usually ended his lecture with a satire against himself, in which he never spared his own foibles.

It has been often attempted, but always without success, to establish a French theatre in London. The last effort was in 1752. A great number of French actors were then engaged at a prodigious expence; and a play-house was fitted up in the most costly manner for their reception. When the first representation was announced, an uncommon number of people of all ranks and descriptions assembled on the occasion.

The comedians expected a disagreeable reception; but the noise and the catcalls of a tumultuous populace soon made them lose all their courage. It was in vain that they attempted to begin: the clamours and the uninterrupted hisses of the pit and galleries, joined to showers of orange-peel, always prevented them. Not one of the actors had the boldness to appear a second time on the stage; and no other resource was left them, but to escape through a private door.

Some days afterwards, they risked another attempt. A great number of young men of fashion, armed with swords, placed themselves in the boxes, while their servants, and several people hired for the purpose, occupied the centre of the pit, to second them in case of need. When the curtain drew up, this served as a signal for the attack.

The stage was instantly covered with oranges ; the actors took to their heels, and the champions from the boxes and pit joined each other sword in hand. In a short time the affray became general ; the girandoles and the crystal branches were broken in a thousand pieces. The ladies fainted away, and the gentlemen who had the rashness to draw upon the people, had their swords broken in pieces, and were obliged to retire, beaten and covered with blood. This tumult was concluded with the entire destruction of the play-house, after several persons had been killed, and many wounded, who might truly be said to have suffered martyrdom on account of their attachment to the French theatre.

After this unfortunate attempt, who would have thought that such an absurd project would have been again revived ? However, in 1778, a society of persons of quality, headed by the duchess dowager of Bedford, projected the renewal of the same scheme, and, having formed the plan, persisted in its execution.

French comedians were already sent for from Paris, an agreement was entered into with them, the most advantageous promises held out, and money advanced for the journey : in one word, all

all the arrangements were completed. In a few days, however, the news-papers were full of satires, both in verse and prose, against this undertaking : songs were sung in every street, ridiculing the French stage ; and, what was undoubtedly more disadvantageous than any thing else, Palmer, an actor belonging to Drury-Lane, addressed the public in a prologue, in which he besought them not to patronise a foreign, at the expence of the national theatres. His petition was received with uncommon applause, and the dispositions of the people made evident by the general enthusiasm of the audience.

This Anglo-gallic society accordingly concluded, that it would be very dangerous to persist in their scheme ; and, in all human probability, it will never be revived.

The concerts in London are allowed to be very grand, and the English in general prefer them to the music of the opera-house ; but as the price of a ticket is half-a-guinea, none but the higher ranks can receive any gratification from them.

Ranelagh is incomparably superior to any thing of the same kind in Europe. Its immense

saloon and magnificent illuminations, the continual motion of the people of fashion who assemble there in crowds, and the delicious music, make this a most fascinating and enchanting spectacle. It must however be confessed, that there is a certain sameness and melancholy in this place of entertainment, which, with all its grandeur, gives disgust:—people of rank accordingly never spend more than two hours there.

Vauxhall Gardens are situated in a pleasant village of the same name, on the banks of the Thames, about two miles distant from Westminster-bridge; and part of the company go there by water. One shilling only is paid for entrance, and it is not at all uncommon to see six thousand persons there at once. The walks are but badly lighted; in some places, however, the lamps, which consist of a great variety of colours, are distributed with great taste. The orchestra, which is in the open air, is placed under an amphitheatre, erected in form of a temple, surrounded with elegant porticoes, and brilliantly illuminated. In the most agreeable part of the garden, there is a statue erected in honour of Handel, and this is the only one in the whole place.

About forty years since, a new association, under
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the name of the *Attic Society*, was formed in the capital. This was held in a noble hall, where sometimes vocal and sometimes instrumental music, but always of an exquisite kind, was introduced between compositions in poetry and prose, which were recited in the most elegant and engaging manner.

A foreigner occasioned the annihilation of this rational entertainment, soon after its institution. One may with great justice affirm, that this person has in an eminent degree contributed to the progress of luxury in England ; and it is not a little remarkable, that a woman who has occasioned such an extraordinary revolution in the manners and the pleasures of a nation, should be at this moment languishing amidst all the horrors of wretchedness.

This lady is a native of Germany ; an honour, however, which none of her countrymen have ever claimed, either in her affluence or adversity. She arrived in London about twenty-five years since, at an age when a person of her sex has no right to flatter herself with making conquests. Indeed she possessed neither youth nor beauty, and was so ignorant that she could only speak bad German, and a few words of French.

Who could have imagined, that a person of this kind would have *set the fashions* to the most capricious and phlegmatic nation in Europe ?

At first so far was she from forming sanguine expectations, that her utmost efforts were exerted in supplying her daily wants. Her means of existence depended entirely on her voice, which had nothing extraordinary in it ; with it, however, she resolved to captivate the public. In consequence of this determination, she procured three musicians, and gave concerts at one shilling a ticket. Being successful in her undertaking, she augmented her orchestra, and raised the price of entrance.

Soon afterwards, her happy stars made her acquainted with a lady of quality, who became captivated with her talents ; for although Mrs. Cornelys could neither sing nor speak with elegance, she nevertheless possessed a sound judgment, an uncommon taste, and an imagination inexhaustible in inventions.

From this moment, she conceived the idea of gratifying the English nobility by entertainments, such indeed as had never before her time been seen
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in Europe. In consequence of this plan, she hired Carlisle-House, furnished it in a most magnificent stile, and procured two thousand seven hundred subscribers. On the anniversary of the institution, she was allowed to give a masked-ball, to which any one could be admitted by a ticket, the price of which was two guineas. She herself has often assured me, that on these occasions she has had upwards of eight thousand visitors.

The magical genius of this woman knew how to vary her entertainments in a thousand different shapes. Sometimes she exhibited colonades, and triumphal arches, grandly illuminated; at other times she metamorphosed her apartments into gardens, planted with walks of orange-trees, and adorned with fountains, inscriptions, and transparent paintings, surrounded by garlands of flowers, and variegated lamps of a thousand beautiful tints. A whole *suite* of rooms were richly furnished, so as to imitate the manners and luxury of foreign nations, in the Indian, Persian, and Chinese stiles, while nine thousand wax-candles, placed with great art, produced a fine effect to the spectators.

The fairy queen of this enchanted palace knew no other avarice than *glory*; money had few or no

charms for her, and she thought herself amply recompensed by the praises that were lavished on her taste.

Far from amassing riches, she contracted immense debts. She owed to her wax-chandler alone, three thousand pounds.

This carelessness and prodigality at last occasioned her to be arrested, and afterwards sent to the king's-bench prison. Her situation was then truly singular; she obtained permission, during *term time*, now and then to spread pleasure and joy throughout the capital, and was obliged next day to return to gaol.

In a short time, her creditors seized on her effects; and after having for twelve years, by her luxurious and voluptuous entertainments, merited the appellation of the *Queen of taste*, she is now actually obliged to subsist on the casual assistance of her former benefactors.

The construction of the Pantheon, which in grandeur and extent exceeds that of Rome, proves that Mrs. Cornelys's lessons were not thrown away upon the English. The subscription, which amount-

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ed to seventy thousand pounds sterling, was not sufficient to complete such a noble edifice. Every thing that is great, majestic, and magnificent, has been displayed in this temple of Comus.

At a masked-ball, at which I was present, the looking-glasses with which the dome and the other apartments were furnished, cost thirty-six thousand pounds sterling; they were not, however, bought, but only hired for the occasion. The most brilliant concerts are generally given here; and this is one of the few public places, except the theatres, that the royal family honour with their presence. The managers recompense in a noble manner the musicians who perform at this place. The celebrated Ajugari sung here during the winter of 1777, and had one hundred pounds sterling a night, although he gave only two ariettes each time.

Masquerades are sometimes given at the Pantheon, and sometimes at the Opera-House. This kind of diversion, however grand it may appear, in other respects does not seem in the least congenial to the national character, which is grave, and but little allied to the follies of dancing and grimace. The crowds of masks, and the ingenious and magnificent dresses displayed on these occasions, are the
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only circumstances that can give any pleasure to a native, or even a foreigner.

The King is a great enemy to this diversion, and it is said that his majesty was acquainted with general Luttrell's project, in the year 1771, to disturb an entertainment of this kind by going there in the *character* of a corpse.

The English still continue to take a great delight in the public gardens, near the metropolis, where they assemble and drink tea together, in the open air. The number of these in the neighbourhood of the capital is amazing, and the order, regularity, neatness, and even elegance of them, are truly admirable. They, however, are very rarely frequented by people of fashion; but the middle and lower ranks go there often, and seem much delighted with the music of an organ, which is usually played in an adjoining building.

Of all the nations in Europe, the English are most susceptible of the pleasures of *walking*. It is on account of this, that London possesses so many charming places for indulging that propensity. St. James's-Park, the Green-Park, and Kensington Gardens, are frequented by a prodigious concourse of
 people,