A

VIEW

OF

ENGLAND

TOWARDS THE

CLOSE of the EIGHTEENth CENTURY.

BY

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Tranſlated from the Original GERMAN, by the AUTHOR himſelf.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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SPEAK OF ME AS I AM. Shakeſ. Othello.

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ON THE STATE OF ARTS IN ENGLAND.

THE arts, of which I am ſpeaking here, are not thoſe which are called mechanical or uſeful, but thoſe which are known under the name of fine, polite, or liberal arts. In treating on this ſubject, I do not lay the moſt diſtant claim to the title of a connoiſſeur in theſe things. My ſenſes, my feelings, common underſtanding, and hints from a few who are converſant in theſe arts, ſhall be my only guides.

Monteſquieu, du Bos, Winckelman, and others, have denied that the Engliſh had any natural genius for the fine arts. Phyſical cauſes, which are attributed to the climate of the iſland, are ſaid to be in the fault. The Engliſh paſs with them for good mechanics, with a compaſs and plumb-rule in their hand; but they deny that they are poſſeſſed of genius and taſte for theſe arts. The Engliſh, they ſay, can calculate well, but their imagination is without life, and their feelings are blunt with reſpect to what

is beautiful in the arts. I ſhall by no means enter into a diſquiſition, how far theſe accuſations have any foundation, much leſs ſhall I preſume to decide whether they are juſt or unjuſt. Thus far I will boldly aſſert, that the Engliſh, at preſent, in mechanical arts, ſurpaſs all other nations. Real uſe, and what is beſt adapted to obtain the end in view, is that which chiefly engages their attention in works of induſtry. A Frenchman wiſhes to ſhew his taſte; he makes good deſigns, and draws excellent patterns; but an Engliſhman, when he is to execute them, does it in a manner far ſuperior to the Frenchman, though the inventor. Beſides, the climate has, in my opinion, by no means that great influence which ſome have pretended, on the character, on the manner of thinking and acting of inhabitants of different countries. The climate of Great Britain is never ſo bad, or ſo obnoxious to genius and talents for arts, as many on the continent have gravely aſſerted, even in their writings. There are at preſent among the Engliſh eminent painters, ſome very good engravers, and other ingenious artiſts; perhaps, future times may produce greater numbers.

The reaſons why the arts have not made a conſiderable progreſs in England, and why the Bri-

tons remained behind ſome other nations, are various. The character of the nation was already formed, when they began to ſacrifice to the finer arts. This, even among the Engliſh themſelves, is aſſigned as one of the principal cauſes, why they have not met with a warmer reception, and have not riſen to a greater perfection. The Reformation, in the ſixteenth century, is alſo blamed for obſtructing in the nation, the exertions of genius for painting and muſic. In Italy, and in other Roman catholic countries, the decoration of churches with paintings, and the muſic as well as the ſinging in them, have greatly contributed towards promoting the arts. In Great Britain, the walls of the temples are bare, the churches and meeting-houſes are without decorations, and moſt of the pſalms, which are ſung in honour of the Deity, have, perhaps, no more melody in them, than the ſongs of the bards of old. I have already mentioned, in another place, that eminent painters, ſuch as a Reynolds, a Weſt, and others, have offered to ornament the cathedral of St. Paul with paintings, but that the Gothic religious prejudices of a biſhop rejected their propoſal. The large halls of corporations, and trading companies, are, in general, as void of decorations by the arts,

as the members which aſſemble in them are often void of taſte, eating and drinking excepted. Theſe ſocieties, particularly in London, and other commercial towns in England, are generally rich, and have therefore the beſt opportunities and means to encourage the art of painting, ſculpture, and ſtatuary; but when they aſſemble, a table profuſely ſet out with coſtly diſhes, and a ſide-board well ſtored with various ſorts of wine, has infinitely more charms for them, than all the maſterpieces of painting and ſculpture that might decorate their halls, attract the eye of the beholder, and enrapture the admirer of the arts. They would look upon the ſum paid to an artiſt, for ornamenting their hall with an excellent picture, as a moſt idle and unpardonable expence; they would enquire how many fine haunches of veniſon, how many well-fed turkies, how many delicious turtles, how many dozens of excellent old wine might have been bought for ſuch a ſum? It is the more extraordinary, that theſe corporations and ſocieties have not, even from Epicurean principles, and œconomical motives, entertained the thought of decorating their halls with good paintings, and thereby accidentally called forth and encouraged a genius for arts, ſince the trifle which is

paid for ſeeing the painted hall at Greenwich, has already produced not leſs than 20,000l. How many more good dinners might the members of ſuch corporations and companies enjoy, if they erected a ſimilar fund at the expence of the curioſity of ſtrangers! But to ſpeak ſeriouſly; might it not be aſked, why theſe rich ſocieties give no encouragement to the artiſt, or opportunities to genius to exert itſelf, when either want of riches in churches cannot, or bigotry and prejudice will not do it. Foreigners are told much of the public ſpirit of the Engliſh, which, as it is ſaid, operates ſo powerfully for the honour of the nation, and is directed to the nobleſt purpoſes; but if it really exiſted, in the manner which is pretended, why does it not ſhew itſelf more in ſuch things, which might be deemed not only uſeful and ornamental, but alſo ſuch as are intimately connected with the reputation of the nation, as far as it lays claim to arts and ſciences? If the churches be ſhut againſt the arts, why ſhould palaces and public buildings not give them a liberal entrance?

It is an obſervation, which hiſtory confirms, that liberty has not always promoted arts and ſciences. They began to flouriſh moſt among the Greeks when the republics fell into decay, and

and when tyranny lifted up its head. The times when Rome began to loſe its freedom, were the moſt favourable to the arts, and the reign of Auguſtus is juſtly celebrated for them. Arts and ſciences never ſhone with greater luſtre in modern times than during the reign of Louis XIV. Liberty is moſt favourable to trade and commerce. Of this the Engliſh nation affords the ſtrongeſt evidence. The ſpirit of gambling and commerce are nearly related; to gain riches by means of genius and enthuſiaſm for the arts, is exceedingly precarious. It is far more eaſy to obtain a fortune as a tradeſman or merchant, aſſiſted with the good luck of a gambler, and his not always very honeſt maxims. No wonder, therefore, if the greateſt part of the Engliſh, whoſe *ſummum bonum* is money, are taſteleſs in the arts, and treat them with neglect, or even look upon them with a kind of diſdain; no wonder if a tradeſman or merchant, favoured by liberty, regards the accumulation of money above all, and conſiders a man of talents and learning, or an artiſt endowed with excellent genius, as beings far below him. Moſt of thoſe who exhibit themſelves between two or three o'clock, with greedy and envious eyes, on the Royal Exchange, think the images of the Britiſh kings

on the guineas, and the white figures in the black ſpot upon bank notes, to be the moſt excellent and moſt pleaſing productions of the arts. As for the reſt it is, in the eyes of the generality of them, little better than traſh.

Modern Engliſh writers, who are well acquainted with the ſubject of which I am ſpeaking, have given, without heſitation, with reſpect to the imitative arts, the preference to the French before the Engliſh. In a letter to ſir Joſhua Reynolds, by Mr. Valentine Green [8], it is aſſerted, that the arts are much more patronized in France than in England. He praiſes Louis XIV. and Colbert, as the firſt who raiſed them to any conſiderable height in that kingdom. He aſſerts, that the protection and encouragement which the arts have received in France, are not only very great, but even ſo durable, that they can be ſhaken only by the greateſt convulſions in the ſtate. According to this, it might be ſuppoſed, that Mr. Green had no great opinion of the Royal Academy in England, inſtituted about twenty years ago; and that he does not look upon it as ſo great, durable, and uſeful an inſtitution, as ſome, per-

[8] A Review of the polite Arts in France, compared with their preſent State in England; in a Letter to Sir Joſhua Reynolds, by Valentine Green, London, 1782, 4to.

haps,

haps, may be apt to think. In my opinion, however, this royal eſtabliſhment has produced already many good effects, towards reforming the taſte of the Engliſh with regard to the polite arts. It is true, that the artiſts of genius, who have ſtarted up ſince its inſtitution, are not very numerous; but, certainly, ſome have been called forth, who otherwiſe, perhaps, might have been buried in obſcurity. That the firſt has not happened is not the fault of the academy; for it is not in its power to create genius, or to diſtribute talents.

The yearly exhibition of the Royal Academy, in Somerſet-place, is conſidered by ſome as a kind of barometer of the progreſs of painting, ſculpture, and architecture in England; though it is ſaid not to be very favourable, becauſe, according to thoſe who pretend to be connoiſſeurs, it has ſunk for ſeveral years paſt, and the exertions of genius are ſuppoſed to decreaſe.

It is rather ſingular, that moſt of thoſe who have excelled in the polite arts in England, have been foreigners. This is by no means owing to the great encouragement given them by the Engliſh, who are not very much inclined to encourage ſtrangers, except they be fidlers, dancers, or ſingers. A foreign artiſt, though a man

man of talents, has many difficulties to ſtruggle with, ariſing from his not being born on the iſland. The Engliſh painters travel frequently, either at their own expence or otherwiſe ſupported, into France and Italy; but they return, too often, without having much cultivated or refined their taſte; and it is therefore not to be wondered at, that few of them ſhine afterwards. From whatever cauſe this may ariſe, whether from the uſual extravagant way of life which they generally lead, particularly in foreign countries, or from that want of genius with which they are charged, I ſhall not preſume to decide.

Italy draws yearly conſiderable ſums from England, not only by means of her ſingers, caſtratos, dancers, and muſicians, but likewiſe by her productions of the arts. Rich lords and others, whoſe underſtanding and taſte are, perhaps, exceeded by their money, give commiſſions for buying up paintings, ſtatues, and antiquities, for conſiderable ſums, and have them brought over to England, to ornament their London reſidences and their country-ſeats. In my opinion, thoſe who ſend theſe ſums to Italy, would do better to apply at leaſt a part of them, as an encouragement for their own countrymen, who diſcover a genius for the fine arts, inſtead

inſtead of giving ſo much money to Italian painters, who, beſides, impoſe too frequently upon the ignorant, by ſelling copies only inſtead of originals. No man can juſtly be conſidered as an enlightened patriot, or a patron of the polite arts, who merely purchaſes the celebrated works of foreign artiſts, without giving himſelf any trouble to encourage the production of ſimilar works in his own country.

I have had frequently occaſion to obſerve, that ſome of the owners of ſuch works of art, appear to enjoy the poſſeſſion of them without much liberality of mind, and with little inclination to communicate the pleaſure which they may afford to others. Many town-reſidences and country-ſeats of noblemen, and perſons of opulence, are by no means inferior to thoſe of of the Romans; where, according to Juvenal's deſcription,

> . . . Cum Parrhaſii tabulis ſigniſque Myronis
> Phidiacum vivebat ebur, nec non Polycleti
> Multus ubique labor. SAT. VIII. v. 102.

But it ſeems as if the owners of ſuch coſtly things, which belong to luxury and ſplendor, thought themſelves perfectly happy, merely becauſe

becauſe they can ſay that they are the poſſeſſors of them. In France and Italy, the rich, to whom ſome ſcarce and valuable monuments of the arts belong, ſeem rather obliged to him who thinks it worth his while to come to ſee, and to admire them; but, in England, he is ſometimes given to underſtand, that he lies under a kind of obligation to the maſter of the houſe, if he permits him to ſee it, and to reward the ſervant, who ſhewed him about, with a crown, or half a guinea. It ſeems to be a characteriſtical part of this claſs of Engliſhmen, to gratify their pride and vain ſelf-love in this point, and to value themſelves merely, becauſe they have things which others have not, and which are coſtly; though it is frequently no concern of theirs, whether they have an intrinſic value or not. Hence it ariſes, that England, in ſome reſpects, may be conſidered as a kind of lumber-room, where the refuſe of the fine arts among the Italians, French, and Flemings, is collected and ſold for high prices. Many of thoſe in London, who, as auctioneers, with the hammer in their hand, offer pictures at public ſales, aſſume the character of perfect judges of their value, of their beauty, and of the maſters, as if they were poſſeſſed of the greateſt knowledge, and the moſt exquiſite taſte

taſte in things relating to the arts. Their judgments, however, and their deciſions, which would often make a true connoiſſeur ſmile, are received like oracles, by thoſe who have their money ready for the purchaſe. Thus many old pictures covered with ſmoke, and many that are executed by obſcure artiſts, are ſold for pieces of Rubens; and many opulent dilettanti are enabled to enrich their collections with the works of a Raphael, a Caracle, a Titian, a Pouſſin, and others, merely becauſe it has pleaſed the auctioneer to father inferior productions upon theſe great artiſts, and thereby to diſgrace their celebrated names. I have ſeen pictures among the collections of noble lords and others, which, as I was told, had coſt four or five hundred guineas, though men who are well acquainted with the true value of ſuch things, have aſſured me, that they were not worth half the money. Some Engliſh painters, it is ſaid, turn this ſingular and frequently very ill-founded predilection of their countrymen for foreign paintings, to their own advantage. They ſend, unknown, ſome of their works to the continent, and have them as foreign productions re-imported; they enter them at the cuſtom-houſe as ſuch, and pay the duties, which

which are rather high. Notwithſtanding all theſe expences, they ſell them afterwards at a much higher price than what they would have fetched, if it had been known that they were the works of Engliſh artiſts.

I ſhall now ſpeak more particularly and diſtinctly on thoſe arts, which are generally called polite, after having firſt ſaid a few words on a ſociety erected to promote them, under the name of *a Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce*, which was inſtituted in the year 1754. Some patriots, and promoters of what is good and uſeful, united together, to raiſe voluntary contributions among themſelves, to give rewards to thoſe that exerted themſelves in uſeful inventions and improvements, relating to the fine arts, to manufactures, and commerce. It might have been expected, that a ſociety, whoſe views were ſo noble, and whoſe generoſity in rewarding was ſo beneficial to the ſtate, would have been taken under the foſtering protection of government, and been ſupported to the utmoſt; but no ſuch thing happened. It was from the liberality of private perſons; it was the good genius of Great Britain, by whom all this was done for the benefit of the public and the honour of the nation;

nation; nay, of all mankind. It could never be too much regretted, if this ſociety ſhould ever ceaſe for want of ſupport. With an income, of perhaps, 4000 l. it has done an infinite deal of good. Many young riſing geniuſſes in the art of painting, ſtatuary, and architecture, have met with encouragement from this ſociety; and it has alſo rendered great ſervices to agriculture, manufactures, and commerce. And if ſo much good could be done with ſo ſmall a ſum, raiſed by a few patriots, how much more might have been expected, if government had ſupported them? If aſſiſtance had been afforded by the parliament, which, within a century, has voted more than five hundred millions of money out of the people's pockets, perhaps, not always for the benefit and happineſs of the nation?

The number of the members of this ſociety is uncertain, ſince ſome die, others are ſtruck off from the liſt, when they do not pay their ſubſcription, and others are new choſen. Hence it is, that the yearly revenues of the ſociety are unequal. A few years ago it was apprehended, that theſe times of luxury and diſſipation, when patriotiſm is rather ſickly, had thrown it into a decline; but I am happy to

ſay,

ſay, that it has recovered itſelf, and is at preſent in a flouriſhing ſituation [9].

If this ſociety, the uſefulneſs of which is undeniable, ſhould have the proper influence upon the nation, it would be neceſſary, in order to render it more extenſively beneficial, to inſtitute another ſociety, which ſhould offer premiums to thoſe who would adopt the uſeful inventions and improvements made known by the former ſociety, and put them into practice in common life. There are not wanting hardly in any country, wiſe and patriotic men, who wiſh to improve the arts, and to leſſen labour, and the burdens of life; but it really requires oftentimes more ſkill to perſuade people, and the bulk of mankind, who are ignorant and ſelf-conceited, to adopt uſeful inventions and improvements, than to invent them. I have ſeen in the houſe of the Society a large chamber, containing models for machines and tools to make labour eaſy, and to ſave time and trouble; but how much is it to be lamented, that moſt of them are confined to this room, when they ſhould be met with in the fields, in the habitations of the induſtrious poor, and in the

[9] Here follows, in the German original, a more circumſtantial account of this ſociety, which, being well known in this country, is here omitted.

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workshops of artisans. Nay, even many of those who should be wiser, and whose duty it is to promote, by their authority, useful inventions and rational improvements, because they are paid for it by the state, decline rendering this service to the public, either from ignorance, or from indolence. The Society has a house in the Adelphi-Buildings, where the members meet every Wednesday, at five o'clock in the evening, from the fourth Wednesday in October to the first Wednesday in June. The erection of this house cost the Society four thousand pounds, and it was expected that government would have defrayed the expences; but no such thing has happened. In the house are, besides other apartments, an elegant room where the meetings of the Society are held, and the large chamber mentioned before, where numbers of models of various kinds are kept. The great room is ornamented with a series of historical and allegorical paintings, executed, in a most masterly style, by Mr. James Barry. In one of the lesser rooms I have seen a collection of books, which, however, on account of its smallness, can hardly be called a library. The Society has published seven volumes of its Transactions.

I ſhall only mention, that in other parts of the kingdom attempts have been made to promote the arts. Thus, for inſtance, there was inſtituted at Liverpool, in the year 1773, *a Society for the Encouragement of Deſigning, Drawing, and Painting*, &c. but I have not heard that it has met with great ſucceſs.

PAINTING.

IT is but of late, that England has poſſeſſed painters of eminence who were natives of the country. Formerly the painters in England of any celebrity, were moſtly foreigners. *Vertue's Anecdotes of Painting*, publiſhed by Mr. Horace Walpole, will ſufficiently evince this aſſertion. The abbé Winckelman, however, if he had written his *Hiſtory of the Arts among the Ancients*, at the preſent time, would not have dared to aſſert, that England had not produced one ſingle painter of celebrity [10], ſince a Reynolds, a Weſt, a Gainſborough, and many others, have done great credit and honour to their profeſſion. There are, perhaps, ſome who will agree with him, when he ſays, that all the deſcriptions in Milton's Paradiſe Loſt, the love ſcenes of the firſt pair in paradiſe only excepted, are like well painted Gorgons, which bear a reſemblance to each other, and are always equally frightful. But this certainly is not owing, as Winckelman ſuppoſes, to the

[10] Vol. i. p. 29. German edit.

climate of England. Thomſon, who was born much more northerly than Milton, has, in his celebrated poem, *The Seaſons*, ſuch pictureſque deſcriptions, as would furniſh ſubjects for the moſt pleaſing pictures. And how many other Engliſh poets might be mentioned, whoſe powers of imagination have drawn the moſt beautiful ſcenes, in which the ſkill of able painters might be ſucceſsfully employed. Among the inhabitants of England, numbers of handſome men and women are to be met with, the country is full of fine proſpects, and romantic views; why then ſhould it be impoſſible for the Britons to arrive at a high degree of eminence in painting? Who knows, but that future ages may give to England painters, perhaps, not inferior to thoſe of which Greece or Italy can boaſt? If the climate did inſpire, why have not the modern Greeks a Zeuxis, an Apelles, a Protogenes, an Apollodorus? Why is there nobody among them, who can uſe the chiſſel like a Phidias, a Praxiteles, a Polycletes? The climate is ſtill the ſame, and yet no ſuch artiſts now appear.

During the preſent reign, the arts of painting, ſculpture, engraving, and architecture, have certainly riſen to a conſiderable height. This, in no ſmall degree, is owing to the Royal

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Academy, which was inſtituted in the year 1769. Some artiſts, painters, and ſtatuaries, who had inſtituted a ſociety before, may be conſidered as the origin and foundation of this royal academy.

It exhibits the new productions of its members and aſſociates every year, in the month of May. The exhibition rooms in Somerſet-place, are at that time often ſo crowded with gentlemen and ladies, with pretended connoiſſeurs and ſupercilious critics, who all come to ſtare at the pictures that, in the middle of the day ſome ladies are ready to faint, on account of the heat of the rooms, and the powerful perfumes of the odoriferous company with which they are filled.

Whoever pays a ſhilling at the entrance, may go in, and is, beſides, furniſhed with a catalogue of the exhibition. This catalogue not only informs him of the artiſts who have executed every production he ſees before him, but alſo that a portrait, which attracts his attention, and of which he wants to know a little more, is that of a gentleman and not of a lady; or he is told, that the animals which he ſees painted before him, are horſes or dogs; or that ſuch a picture is intended for a landſcape, and not for a ſea-piece. I own, I have often wondered,

why the compoſers of ſuch catalogues do not gratify the curioſity of the ſpectators, in regard to portraits, by adding the name of thoſe for whom they are intended, particularly ſince they may eaſily be learnt from the newſpaper criticiſms. Beſides, though many a portrait is exhibited by the deſire of the painter, which was granted by its owner, with a view to do him ſervice; yet it may well be ſuppoſed, that a great number of thoſe who have their portraits drawn, and ſuffer them to be expoſed to public view, do it from a motive of vanity, and that it therefore would gratify their little pride, if the public were informed, that it was their effigy.

Thoſe who want to ſee the exhibition of the principal paintings muſt not grudge the trouble of aſcending two very high pair of ſtairs, before they reach the principal rooms. It excites, indeed, a little wonder, why it has not been contrived, to have this exhibition in a room not ſo high, with a dome or a ſky-light, that the curious and the friends of the art, might ſatisfy their wiſhes for a pleaſing ſight, without being in the ſame predicament with thoſe, who want to ſee a fine proſpect, and are obliged firſt to mount, at the expence of their lungs, a lofty tower, or a high mountain. Thoſe who want

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to obſerve the heavens and the ſtars, in the Royal Obſervatory at Greenwich, remain on the ground; but, whoever wiſhes to contemplate the works of art among mortal men, is to aſcend till he becomes breathleſs, as if they were only to be ſeen in a higher atmoſphere. During the time of ſuch annual exhibition, the London newſpapers teem with criticiſms upon the works of the painters. Some are juſt, and to the purpoſe, others are the production of ignorance, and not unfrequently of malice and of envy.

Before the academy had any apartments of their own, and were obliged to hire rooms for their exhibitions, nobody found fault that a ſhilling was demanded on entering them; but when thoſe in Somerſet-place were opened for the firſt time, and money was demanded, a great clamour was raiſed againſt it, and the public papers were very free and very ſevere in their cenſure. It was ſaid to be a diſgrace to the nation, and a diſhonour to an academy which was called royal; the noiſe, however, ſoon ſubſided. And, indeed, there is no other, nor any better method, to keep the crowd of the populace out of the rooms, which, notwithſtanding money is to be paid, are generally, in the middle of the day, very full. It is ſaid, that in ſome years,

during the month of the exhibition, three thouſand pounds have been collected by ſingle ſhillings. By means of this money, a fund is eſtabliſhed for the benefit of the ſociety, to pay the profeſſors, officers, and menial ſervants belonging to the academy, and to procure the neceſſary models, books, and prints, for the benefit of the pupils. In fact, therefore, the pockets of the people, as in a hundred other inſtances, are the ſupport of the Royal Academy, of which foreigners, on account of its denomination, generally think that it is merely royal munificence which gave it exiſtence, and which keeps it in being. Out of this ſame fund, ſome young Engliſh painters, as it is ſaid, are ſupported in Italy, to render themſelves there more perfect in their profeſſion. I will not omit to mention, that paintings, which are preſented to the public view in the exhibitions of the Royal Academy, are generally, if they are thought to be intereſting, or if they acquire ſome applauſe, engraved, and thus multiplied.

The academy conſiſts of forty members, who are called Royal Academicians. Painters, ſculptors, and architects, are all comprehended under this denomination. Among theſe members are four royal profeſſors, one for

for painting, one for anatomy, one for architecture, and one for perſpective. A profeſſor has no more than thirty pounds ſalary; but it ought to be remembered, that he is to read only ſix lectures for the benefit of the pupils, during the winter. Beſides the royal academicians, there are aſſociates and honorary members. Theſe latter, now and then, expoſe their works before the public in the annual exhibitions. Their number is undetermined.

As the Engliſh are very fond of having their pictures drawn, it is no wonder that portraits conſtitute the greater part in the exhibitions of the Royal Academy, and that thoſe painters are the moſt ſucceſsful, and gain moſt money, who have acquired the fame of drawing good and pleaſing likeneſſes. Sir Godfrey Kneller ſoon grew rich, and when he died, he left five hundred portraits unfiniſhed behind, for which he had received, before-hand, half the price. When Vanloo came into England, and acquired ſome fame, as many coaches uſed to wait at his door, as perhaps were ſeen on court-days at St. James's. He likewiſe ſoon acquired a fortune. Formerly the price of a full-length portrait was twenty or thirty guineas; at preſent, eminent painters are paid an hundred and more. The fate of ſuch portraits is oftentimes dole-

doleful. They are as tranſitory, and as mortal as the perſons whom they are to repreſent, and to whom they were expected to procure a kind of immortality. The pictures of a couple, which were drawn moſt charmingly, juſt before the wedding-day, and were paid for with fifty or ſixty guineas, wander frequently, a few years after the gentleman and lady are dead, into the lumber-room, up into the garret; if the nephews, or heirs, do not even diſpoſe of them very cheap to a broker, in whoſe ſhop they remain a good while before he ſells them for a few ſhillings profit. I am apprehenſive, that many of thoſe portraits, which have been very dearly paid for, and which I have ſeen in the exhibitions of the Royal Academy, will have met with the ſame fate, before half the next century is elapſed, though they have been admired, and came from the hands of artiſts, who now are called eminent. Pope, when he flattered his friend Jarvis with long duration of his portraits, and propheſied him,

Bloom in his colours for a thouſand years,

did not expect that the painter and his portraits would be ſo ſoon forgotten, and their value ſo much lowered, within forty years after his death.

Sir

Sir James Thornhill was a painter whom the Engliſh juſtly eſteem, though the abbé le Blanc ſays [1], "that nature had refuſed him genius, and that a connoiſſeur would be puzzled to decide, not in what part the painter excelled, but what it was in which he was leaſt faulty." The abbé pays in the ſame breath but a very indifferent compliment to the Engliſh, when he ſays of ſir Godfrey Kneller, that this German ſhewed his judgment in chooſing England for his place to exerciſe his talents in, it being the only country where he could poſſibly gain ſo much credit and honour; for no where elſe would the name of a painter have been beſtowed upon him. However, though the abbé ſpeaks much truth in many parts of his letters, yet his deciſions are not greatly to be depended upon, when the livelineſs of his temper gets the better of him, and when his partiality for his own country biaſſes his judgment in favour of the French. Sir James Thornhill has undoubtedly merit, though it ſeems to be acknowledged, that before the American Mr. Weſt, England had nobody who could be ſtyled an eminent hiſtorical painter. Comparing the price of the labour of portrait-painters, ſuch as Kneller and Vanloo, with that

[1] Letters on the Engliſh and French Nations, vol. i. let. xxiii.

which

which was paid to Thornhill, it did, indeed, reflect no great honour upon the Engliſh at that time, that they rewarded ſo indifferently the merits of their own countryman. He received only two pounds ſterling for a ſquare foot, when he painted the dome of St. Paul. Hogarth, who married his only daughter, againſt the conſent of her father, was certainly an original, and a maſter in his art of drawing caricatures, which he himſelf uſed likewiſe to engrave. Le Blanc acknowledges, that he was a man of genius in his way, but he will not pronounce him to be a painter. Since Hogarth's time, of whom the Engliſh have reaſon to be proud, the taſte for caricatures in England has increaſed amazingly; probably becauſe it gratifies to a high degree that turn for ſatire, which is prevalent among the generality of the nation, and which delights more in that which is overdone, than in that which ſhews refinement, pointed delicacy, and real wit.

Sir Joſhua Reynolds, who is at the head of the Royal Academy, and their preſident, muſt be pronounced to be the firſt painter in England at preſent, and at the ſame time the greateſt in his art, which this iſland ever produced. Mr. Horace Walpole is of opinion, that Italy has not at preſent any painter, who can pretend to

rival an imagination ſo fertile, and that the attitudes of his portraits are as various as thoſe of hiſtory. Indeed, freedom and boldneſs ſeem to be the two principal characteriſtics of ſir Joſhua's pictures. Horace, when he compares poetry and painting, ſays of the latter, that ſome pleaſe more on ſtanding near, and others on keeping a longer diſtance,

. . . Erit, quæ, ſi proprius ſtes,
Te capiet magis; et quædam, ſi longius abſtes.

The latter ought to be ſaid of ſir Joſhua. As to his colouring, much has been advanced againſt it, and as it is ſo little durable, a perſon might be inclined to think, that the painter did not care whether his paintings came down to poſterity or not. However, the engraving of his works, will, in prints, preſerve the merit of them.

Mr. Weſt's colouring is very ſuperior to that of the preſident, and he is, undoubtedly, the ableſt hiſtorical painter at preſent in England, though by birth an American. It is this branch of painting to which his genius ſeems wholly to lead him; and it is much to his credit that he has laid aſide portrait-painting, to follow the bent of his talents, and that he ſacrifices to hiſtory only, when the for-

former, perhaps, would be more conducive to his intereſt.

Mr. Gainſborough [a] is juſtly eſteemed an excellent landſcape painter, and as one whoſe portraits bear the ſtrongeſt likeneſſes. I am inclined to think, that ſome of his paintings will be much ſought after, and, perhaps, in time, fetch, in proportion, a higher price, when they paſs down to poſterity, than any of his contemporaries.

Mr. Barry, the profeſſor of painting to the Royal Academy, is a painter of decided merit. It was he who executed in ſo maſterly a ſtyle, that ſeries of pictures in the great room of the ſociety of arts which I before mentioned. His reſidence in Italy has been of great advantage to him, in regard to his profeſſion, and he has made himſelf known as an ingenious writer, relative to the ſtate of the arts in England [b].

I could add to theſe few, many more reſpectable names of painters, now living on this iſland, who are well and deſervedly known in their profeſſion; but it is not my intention to give a liſt of them. Beſides, as formerly Tillemans,

[a] Since dead.

[b] An Enquiry into the real and imaginary Obſtructions to the Acquiſition of the Arts in England. London 1775, 8vo.

Mo-

Monami, Watteau, Arland, Dahl, Zincke, and many others, who excelled in the art of painting in England, were foreigners, ſo it is the ſame at preſent. Zoffani, Loutherbourg, Rigaud, Cipriani, Angelica Kauffman[4], and many more, are foreigners, who, therefore, cannot come under the deſcription of Engliſh artiſts. Neither do I intend to inſert here a catalogue of the principal works of the preſent Engliſh painters. Their number is not great; and Mr. Green, in his Letter to Sir Joſhua Reynolds, which I have before quoted, ſays, "[5] It is with no pleaſure that I enter into a recapitulation of the labours of the Engliſh ſchool, as they are known to be ſo few; it is the leſs pleaſant, when I am not impowered to hold them all forth as inſtances of national patronage." He likewiſe complains bitterly, that the Houghton collection of pictures was left to be bought by the empreſs of Ruſſia for forty-two thouſand pounds; and he aſſerts, "that the omiſſion of ſeizing the opportunity of buying the whole of that capital collection, and depoſiting them in the principal apartments of the new buildings in Somerſet-place, was loſing the only oppor-

[4] She has left England ſince.

[5] Page 46.

tunity

tunity which England ever had of forming a ſchool of the art that could yield the conſequence, and the uſes ſuch an eſtabliſhment ought to poſſeſs, whereby its ſtudents might be benefited, and the inſtitution become truly reſpectable." Indeed, if this was the only opportunity which could ever occur, it is much to be lamented, that it was loſt either by neglect or by overſight.

The limits which I have preſcribed to myſelf in compoſing this work, prevent me from being circumſtantial in relating the ſtate of the various branches of painting. Miniature is ſtill in good repute, and many pretty pictures of this kind, are to be ſeen in the annual exhibition of the Royal Academy. Zincke from Dreſden, who diſtinguiſhed himſelf ſo much in enamel painting in England, and who died in 1767, is ſaid not hitherto to have been excelled. Mr. Hurter, who is certainly very great in this branch of painting, and outdoes Zincke by far in the ſize of his enamel pictures, came over to England not many years ago; but, I am ſorry to ſay, he did not meet with that encouragement he expected, and to which he thought himſelf intitled.

As the Engliſh are very fond of painted windows

dows, ſo they have of late years beſtowed much pains on this kind of painting. I have before mentioned, in ſpeaking of the Engliſh univerſities, that ſome colleges have been lately ornamented with this ſort of painting, executed in a new ſtile, which is by ſome highly admired; while others have thought the taſte for this kind of painting rather whimſical, and neither ſo beautiful, nor ſo ſtriking, as it is thought to be by its admirers.

Drawing and painting in water-colours are very common in England. Many perſons do it for their amuſement, others procure themſelves a ſubſiſtence by it. There are numbers of drawing maſters in London, who either give leſſons, or keep ſchools for inſtruction, where young people may be taught, at a very moderate expence.

Whether a late invention, by which pictures are ſaid to be copied in oil colours, by a chemical and mechanical proceſs, be really ſuch, and of that importance which is given out, it is impoſſible for me to decide, ſince the method by which the copying is performed, is kept a great myſtery. It ſeems not hitherto to have met with that ſucceſs, and that encouragement, which it would deſerve, if the invention were

really ſuch, as it is ſaid to be by thoſe who are in the ſecret.

There have been many inſtances in England, wherein painters, either on account of their real, or pretended merit, have been raiſed to the honour of knighthood.

ENGRAVING.

THE STAGE.

SO much has been written on the Britiſh theatre, in England as well as abroad, that it can by no means be difficult to ſatisfy the curioſity of thoſe who wiſh to be more fully informed. I, therefore, ſhall confine myſelf to a ſhort account of its preſent ſtate, into which I intend to inſert here and there a remark, as occaſion ſhall offer. The beſt and lateſt accounts of the London theatres are to be met with in Colley Cibber's *Apology*; in Davies's *Life of Garrick*, and his *Dramatic Miſcellanies*; in Victor's *Hiſtory of the Theatres of London and Dublin*, which goes as far as the year 1770; in Baker's *Biographia Dramatica*; in Egerton's *Theatrical Remembrancer*, containing a complete liſt of all the dramatic performances in the Engliſh language, which reaches as far as 1788. Dodſley's *Theatrical Records*, or an account of Engliſh dramatic authors and their works, were publiſhed in 1756.

As

As the propenſity of the Engliſh for dramatic performances is ſo great, it is rather to be wondered at, that there are ſo few theatres in London. Properly ſpeaking, there are but two, that in Drury-lane and that in Covent-garden; for the Little Theatre in the Hay-market is only open during the ſummer ſeaſon, when the other two are ſhut. In the year 1786, a new theatre was built near Wellcloſe-ſquare; but ſo many impediments have been laid in its way, that hitherto the proprietors have not been able to obtain permiſſion to act regular plays. The reaſons which have prevented it are very well known in London. In Shakeſpeare's time, no leſs than ſix theatres exiſted in the city, and in each of them plays were performed. Dryden ſays, that the Engliſh dramatical productions of that time are the beſt, particularly in regard to language. There are theatres at Bath, Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Margate, Wakefield, Edinburgh, and in ſome other places in Great Britain, but they do not come up to thoſe in London; and many of them are only open during the ſummer ſeaſon, when they can get ſome London actors and actreſſes. The theatrical ſeaſon of Covent-garden and Drury-lane, is from the middle of September to the beginning of June; and

thoſe months that are between belong to the Little Theatre in the Hay-market, which the late Mr. Foote brought into repute.

The London theatres have nothing attractive on their outſide; but within they are very neat; nay, I may ſay ſplendid and convenient. Beſides the pit and the boxes, there are only two galleries; in Paris I have found five or ſix. The entrance-price into the theatres, conſidering the dearneſs of every thing in London, ſeems to be pretty moderate; and there is even, in Drury-lane, and Covent-Garden, after the three firſt acts of the play are over, admittance for half price, except when a new pantomime is repreſented, on which occaſion nothing leſs than the full price is taken. The playhouſes are generally much crowded, when any thing of note is acted; and it will ſometimes happen, that they fill ſo faſt on their being opened, that numbers cannot be admitted, which ſeems to be a plain proof that more playhouſes are wanted, particularly as theſe two which now exiſt, are ſituated in one part of London only, and cloſe to one another. Before the doors are opened, there is generally for an hour and longer ſuch a crowd, and ſuch a mobbing, that many a one, who, perhaps is inclined to ſee a play performed, ſtays away, becauſe he does not like to be joſtled about for ſuch

ſuch a length of time, among a multitude, where the leaſt politeneſs is entirely out of the queſtion, and where pick-pockets of all ſorts are extremely buſy. The houſe in Covent-garden is ſaid to hold, when it is full, about fifteen hundred people; and that in Drury-lane about thirteen hundred, becauſe it is ſomewhat ſmaller. The income of an evening, when there is a full audience, is reckoned to amount to about three hundred and twenty pounds. Suppoſing, therefore, that, during eight months in a year, ſix and twenty plays are performed every month, and the income of every evening amounts, on an average, in each theatre, to three hundred pounds, it will make the revenue of both houſes, during eight months, 124,800 pounds. If I reckon the income of the Little Theatre in the Haymarket at 20,000 pounds, it makes the whole 144,800 pounds ſterling. This is, according to our money in Germany, nearly a million of dollars, which the London public contributes annually with pleaſure and eagerneſs, for the ſupport of only three theatres!

The Engliſh, particularly the inhabitants of London, taking ſo much pleaſure in theatrical repreſentations, it is no wonder, that the principal actors and actreſſes find their ſituations

very comfortable; that they are eſteemed, and live in a very decent ſtyle. I know that ſome of the latter have been paid, during the ſeaſon, between twenty and thirty pounds per week; out of which, however, they are to defray the expences of dreſs. Some of the actors have from ten to twenty pounds per week. Beſides, they have generally, in every theatrical ſeaſon, a benefit night, which to ſome, who are eminent in their profeſſion, is worth between two and three hundred pounds. I need not mention that the character of a player has nothing degrading in England, and that thoſe who are at the head of the profeſſion, are rather courted, even by people of rank, and introduced into the beſt companies. In France, they have hitherto denied an actor, or an actreſs, what is called a Chriſtian burial; in England, players are interred with magnificence in Weſtminſter-abbey, on the ſide of kings, when it is paid for.

Since good actors are ſo well paid in England, it is no wonder, that, at preſent, dramatic writers, whoſe works meet with applauſe, ſhould likewiſe earn, in a very ample manner, the fruits of their labour. It is true, that Otway, for his much admired tragedy, *Venice Preſerved*, could hardly find a purchaſer, till at laſt the book-

bookſeller Tonſon gave him fifteen pounds for it; but the times are greatly altered. The author of a play, which meets with tolerable ſucceſs, may promiſe himſelf between four and five hundred pounds, if it is acted a dozen times running. The profits of the third, the ſixth, and the ninth night belong to him [2]. When during the winter of 1786, the comedy *Such Things Are*, was produced on the ſtage, the authoreſs, Mrs. Inchbald, who wrote it, received for the firſt benefit night, if the account then ſtated in the newſpapers be true, an hundred and ſixty pounds; on the ſecond an hundred and ninety; and on the third, an hundred and fifty-five. The copy of the play, as it was likewiſe mentioned in the public prints, ſhe ſold for two hundred pounds. Thus a work of only a few ſheets produced to the writer no leſs than ſeven hundred and five pounds. If ſuch be the reward, it is ſurely well worth while to write a play.

Though the theatre in Drury-lane bears the name of a *Royal Theatre*; yet, it does not differ, in regard to its conſtitution and its ſupport, from the reſt. It is not the king who ſupports

[2] Formerly a dramatic writer had but one benefit. The firſt that had two nights was *Southern*, and the firſt that had three was *Rowe*. JOHNSON's Lives, &c. vol. ii. p. 74.

it, but the whole public, whoſe contributions are far more conſiderable than the expences, which kings and princes are accuſtomed to beſtow on the ſupport of their theatres.

Many traits of the national character of a people may be obſerved in their public entertainments; and it appears to me, as if the Engliſh intended to ſhew that liberty, which they are uſed to glory in, no where more than in their playhouſes. Perſons of high rank, and others of the very loweſt, are preſent; and it ſeems as if the latter were determined to intimate that they were as good as the former. The upper-gallery, which is occupied by the low part of the audience, will oftentimes govern the whole houſe, and the players are under a neceſſity to accommodate themſelves to their whim, and to humour them. It has afforded me now and then pleaſure, when I have obſerved, that the gods, as the company in the upper gallery are called, have been among the firſt whoſe ſenſations have diſcovered ſome of the good things of a new play, and welcomed them with noiſy applauſe. A good thought, or a ſatirical expreſſion, aimed at modiſh follies and vices, has, perhaps, hardly eſcaped the lips of an actor, before the gods have in a moment ſignified their pleaſure by a roar of ap-

probation,

probation, and the noiſe of their hands and feet. Nay, the compoſers of new dramas, and the players themſelves, will lay ſnares to catch the applauſe of the upper gallery, in order to balance the judgment of the critics below, in the pit. They call this, in the technical language of the theatre, clap-traps; but it is oftentimes mere chaff that the populace ſuffer themſelves to be caught with.

It is ſaid on the continent, that the Engliſh are more fond of tragedies than comedies. This, perhaps, may have been true formerly, but not at preſent. They ſeem to be given in theſe modern times more to chearfulneſs than melancholy and ſadneſs; and it is certain, that more comedies are performed on the ſtage than tragedies, and that a far leſs number of the latter ſort are written at preſent than formerly. Whether the reaſon of this is, becauſe it is more difficult to court with ſucceſs the tragic muſe than the comic, I will not minutely inveſtigate; but the latter appearing far oftener on the ſtage than the former, ſhews plainly, that the public are more fond of the comic than the tragic, and that, therefore, the managers, for the ſake of profit, entertain the audience oftenеſt with that of which they are ſure that it will fill the houſe moſt. Beſides, I believe

lieve that there is no nation under the ſun, which produces more original characters than the Engliſh, and that, therefore, a comic writer has an ample field before him to gather fruit, with which he may entertain a public that has a great propenſity to ſatire.

Moſt of thoſe who frequent the theatre, go there for the ſake of pleaſure and entertainment. The managers are, for this reaſon, obliged to call in for their aid ſplendid ſcenes, theatrical proceſſions, pantomimes and harlequin, to draw a full houſe, and to increaſe their revenues. This was not only the taſte in Shakeſpeare's time, but it has been always ſo with the greateſt part of a playhouſe audience, ever ſince theatrical repreſentations took place among men. Shakeſpeare found himſelf, on account of the taſte of his countrymen, under a neceſſity to interlard his tragedies with ſome ſcenes of drollery, and to enliven them with witches, with apparitions of ghoſts, and ſpectres. A pedantic critic, who is leſs acquainted with the human heart than Shakeſpeare was, will, perhaps, look upon all theſe things as ſuch of which the poet's tragedies ſtood not in need; but this was nevertheleſs the caſe. Many of the gentlemen and ladies in the boxes, elegantly dreſſed and outwardly adorned as they are, reſemble,

ble, notwithſtanding, their very homely friends in the upper-gallery, who are more taken and pleaſed with the outward ſhew of the repreſentation than with the intrinſic value of a good play. For this very reaſon, among the tragedies of Shakeſpeare, Hamlet, Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, are thoſe which produce the fulleſt houſes. From motives on the ſame principle, to pleaſe the eye and to fill the theatre, very expenſive pantomimes are exhibited, the firſt repreſentation of which, will coſt, perhaps, ſeveral thouſand pounds. The pleaſure and the aſtoniſhment of the greateſt part of the audience on ſuch occaſions is very great, when apparitions and transformations are exhibited on the ſtage, by the tricks of harlequin, or the wand of a pretended conqueror. The herbs of Pontus, which Virgil's Alpheſiboeus[3] praiſes for their power of changing men into wolves, and raiſing the ghoſts of the deceaſed from their graves, could never produce ſuch effects and raiſe ſuch aſtoniſhment.

It has been frequently, and perhaps, not unjuſtly objected to Engliſh theatrical entertainments, that they laſt too long; and that the

[3] Hic ego ſæpe lupum fieri, et ſe condere ſilvis
Mœrin, ſæpe animas imis exire ſepulchris
——vidi. VIRG. Eclog. viii. v. 97.

ſpec-

ſpectators, at leaſt thoſe in the pit and in the galleries, are obliged to remain in their places above four hours together. It is, therefore, the more neceſſary to keep the ſtage, during that time, always buſy, and that the dramatic writers ſhould introduce as much variety in their plays, and multiply the ſituations in them, as much as poſſible. It is, indeed, very viſible in the theatres in London, that the eyes and the thoughts of the generality of the ſpectators wander much about; that they begin to yawn, and forget the play. For this reaſon, good humour is to be kept up between the acts, by means of ſongs, dances, proceſſions, and things of that kind. I have obſerved, that this was neceſſary even in many of Shakeſpeare's plays, to prevent drowſineſs among the audience; though perhaps a Garrick, a Woodward, or other principal actors, endeavoured to render them pleaſing.

Engliſh plays, and the writers of them, have been frequently blamed for a great neglect of the three unities ſo ſtrongly enjoined by Ariſtotle; and Shakeſpeare has been particularly cenſured on this account. But defenders have not been wanting, who have pleaded Engliſh liberty, and that their dramatic writers were not ſubject to the laws of the Stagirite. Indeed,

deed, it ſeems as if the unity of action was the firſt and the principal dramatic law, which a dramatic writer, in regard to the three unities, ought never to tranſgreſs; though he may, without much blame, deviate in ſome degree from the two others, in a manner not much to be perceived. I do not know, whether the violation of truth, upon which the law of the three unities is ſaid to be founded, can be greater, or the confidence in the deception of the ſpectators of the play be more ſtretched beyond the proper bounds, than when the ſcenes are ſhifted ſo often; when ſometimes a private room, ſometimes a priſon, ſometimes a public place, and a variety of other ſights, are brought before an audience, which does not change its place. It ſuppoſes a total want of critical obſervation among all the ſpectators, to think that not one of them, when he ſees a play performed, in which the three unities are ſtrictly obſerved, ſuch, for inſtance, as Addiſon's Cato, ſhould not find it pleaſant to hear the old Romans, repreſented there, ſpeaking in elegant Engliſh blank verſe; or ſmile when he ſees, as I have done more than once, the grave Cato before him, in a modern wig, and white ſilk ſtockings, or Porcia in an elegant cap, made

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up after the neweſt faſhion. If we, without any complaint, can put up with theſe deviations from truth, if we do not deſire a unity of language, of dreſs, and an hundred other unities, which hiſtorical truth might require, why ſhould we, on ſeeing an excellent play of Shakeſpeare's, or of any other good dramatic writer, perſormed, be angry, becauſe the three unities, preſcribed by Ariſtotle, are not ſtrictly adhered to. The Engliſh, who like to be unſhackled, may certainly ſay many things againſt this cenſure of their plays, which have ſome reſemblance to their modern taſte of gardening.

Whether the Engliſh or the French theatre has the preference, is a queſtion, which I am very far from deciding. I have ſeen ſome plays performed on the French ſtage at Paris and at Lyons; but as I ſhould not attempt to judge even of the Engliſh ſtage, which I have often frequented, ſo ſhould I much leſs venture to give my opinion of the French, of which I have ſeen but little. Lord Cheſterfield, who is looked upon as a connoiſſeur in theſe things, may do that which I dare not. He gives the French theatre the preference before all the reſt in the world, and conſequently, before the Engliſh alſo. He expreſſes himſelf thus very

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emphatically, "There is not, nor ever was, "any theatre comparable to the French [4]". In another place he ſays, "I could wiſh there "were a treaty made between the French and "Engliſh theatres, in which both parties ſhould "make conſiderable conceſſions. The Engliſh "ought to give up their notorious violations "of all unities; and all their maſſacres, racks, "dead bodies, and mangled carcaſſes, which "they ſo frequently exhibit upon their ſtage. "The French ſhould engage to have more ac-"tion, and leſs declamation; and not to cram "and crowd things together, to almoſt a degree "of impoſſibility, from a too ſcrupulous ad-"herence to the unities [5]."

The Engliſh ſtage has been blamed, particularly during the reign of Charles II. for being exceedingly licentious; but it has been, in this reſpect, much reformed; though there occur frequently ſuch expreſſions and double entendres as may put modeſty to the bluſh, which, however, ſeem not to be diſliked by the majority even of female ſpectators, who either beſtow a ſmile upon them, or hide their titter behind their fans. Lord Cheſterfield aſcribes the merit of this reform to the good example of the

[4] CHESTERFIELD's Letters, vol. iii. p. 71.

[5] Ibid. p. 254.

French

French theatre; and Mr. Hume ſays, "The "Engliſh are become ſenſible of the ſcandalous "licentiouſneſs of their ſtage from the exam-"ple of French decency and morals [6]."

There are plenty of new plays, and ſometimes very excellent ones, which appear from time to time; but, as I have before obſerved, comedies are more numerous than tragedies. French plays are frequently tranſlated, and many who write for the ſtage take very liberally from French dramatic authors. In France, they ſometimes take the ſame liberties with Engliſh plays; but, I believe, not near ſo frequently as is done in England. It appears to me rather remarkable, that the Scotch have none among their authors, who have ſhewn great talents for theatrical productions. Whether this be owing, as I have heard it aſſerted, to their more rigid education as Preſbyterians, or to any other cauſe, I am unable to determine.

Riccoboni [7], who beſtows ſo much praiſe upon the Engliſh ſtage, ſays of the actors, that they are far ſuperior to thoſe of France and Italy. This may be true in national plays, or ſuch as relate to Engliſh tranſactions and man-

[6] HUME's Eſſays, vol. i. p. 120.

[7] Account of the Theatres in Europe, p. 176.

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ners; but I doubt very much the truth of this aſſertion, when it is applied to the performing of plays where the ſcene is not in England, or when the play is tranſlated from another language, particularly if it be a tragedy. It is very true, that the Engliſh have had many excellent actors and actreſſes; but the generality of them are but indifferent. Dr. Burney, when he ſaw a play performed at St. Omer's, even by a ſtrolling company, does not heſitate to praiſe French actors at the expence of thoſe of his own country. He ſays of them which he ſaw, "They ſeemed much more at their eaſe, "and appeared more like the characters they "were to repreſent, than thoſe on the Engliſh "ſtage, who, except a few of the principal ac-"tors, are generally ſo aukward and unnatural, "as to deſtroy all illuſion." I have ſeen inſtances in London, where players were raiſed in the opinion and eſtimation of the public, without much merit, merely becauſe ſome, who pretended to be judges in theſe matters, though in fact they were not, cried them up as the moſt excellent in their profeſſion. The multitude, as is generally the caſe, good naturedly, did not trouble themſelves with inquiring into the truth of what they were told by theſe ſuppoſed judges, and players thus acquired a name,

who, without ſuch kind of puffing, would have remained in that obſcurity to which they were originally deſigned. It ought, however, to be ſaid, in praiſe of Engliſh players of both ſexes, that they commonly have learnt their part extremely well, and give very little trouble to the prompter. The declamation of ſome is excellent, of others middling, and of many very indifferent. Though the action of the generality is, as Dr. Burney deſcribes it, in the paſſage which I have juſt quoted; yet there are likewiſe ſome who do perfect juſtice to the characters which they repreſent, and whoſe action is natural, eaſy, and well adapted. I never ſaw a greater maſter in this reſpect than Garrick was. No man, I believe, had the features of his countenance more at his command than he had, to adapt them to almoſt every ſituation of character; and nobody underſtood the language of the eyes and the mien better than him; he was completely maſter of the mimic art. I, therefore, have often wondered, why the Engliſh thought it an honour to call him the Engliſh Roſcius. The Roman Roſcius ſpoke, according to the cuſtom of the ancient actors, under a maſk[8];

[8] Cicero ſays, therefore, "In ore ſunt omnia. In eo autem "ipſo dominatus eſt omnis oculorum: quo melius noſtri illi "ſenes, qui *perſonatum, nec Roſcium quidem*, magnopere lau"dabant." Cic. de Oratore, lib iii. c. 59.

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he conſequently could never appear to that advantage upon the ſtage, which Garrick did, even if he had poſſeſſed all the talents of the Engliſh actor.

The decorations of the theatres are ſplendid, and the dreſs of the actors very becoming. As many ladies appear in the boxes, to ſee and to be ſeen, the illuminations of the playhouſes are fine, which I found quite the reverſe at Paris, as if the Pariſians were aſhamed to ſhew their theatres, which, at preſent, are worth ſeeing. The Engliſh orcheſtra is well attended, and the muſic by no means bad. The new prologues and epilogues are generally full of wit and humour. To condemn a new play for the firſt time in a tumultuous manner, is, at preſent, not very common, though I have ſeen inſtances wherein it was done. I have mentioned in another place, that a cenſor-office in regard to the preſs, where a ſingle perſon, or a whole committee, armed with authority from government, decides whether a manuſcript may be printed or not, is unknown in England; but, in regard to the repreſentation of dramatic works, there exiſts an office of this kind; for the lord chamberlain is to examine every new play, before it be repreſented the firſt time; and if he thinks it inadmiſſible, he may forbid its being brought upon the ſtage, though

he cannot prevent the printing of it. I have heard, likewiſe, complaints againſt ſome managers of the theatres, who will ſometimes act the part of theatrical tyrants, and uſe dramatic writers rather deſpotically, when they offer their new works to them for repreſentation. It is ſaid, that they will, now and then, reject them in a pretty arbitrary manner; though it may be ſuſpected that ſome authors, from a natural predilection for their own productions, will think themſelves ill uſed, when the manager had good reaſon to decline their offers.

Viſiting the theatre is, at preſent, in England, no diſgrace to any body. Playhouſes are more frequented now than they were ever before. This renders them ſo very profitable to managers and players. They are, at preſent, more productive than they were in Garrick's time. It is even not looked upon as an offence againſt decorum, to ſee clergymen there, ſome Methodiſts and rigid Calviniſts perhaps excepted. Nay, ſome clergymen, belonging to the eſtabliſhed church, will write plays to be acted for the entertainment of the public. Formerly it was not ſo. "In Dryden's time," Dr. Johnſon ſays,[9] "the "drama was very far from that univerſal ap- "probation which it has now obtained. The "playhouſe was abhorred by the Puritans,

9 Johnſon's Lives of the Engliſh Poets. vol. ii. p. 47.

" and avoided by thoſe who deſired the charac-
" ter of ſerioufneſs or decency. A grave law-
" yer would have debaſed his dignity, and a
" young trader would have impaired his credit,
" by appearing in thoſe manſions of diſſolute
" licentiouſneſs." The great propenſity of the preſent Engliſh, to ſee plays of all kinds performed; the crowded playhouſes in London; the private theatres, and the ſpouting-clubs, make a fine contraſt with the times in which Dryden lived. It might, perhaps, be wiſhed, for the ſake of morality, that the reſervedneſs and ſerioufneſs of that age were not, as it ſeems, totally given up. Numbers of women of eaſy virtue are to be ſeen within the theatre, and in the avenues leading to them, which contributes not a little to increaſe that immorality which playhouſes are ſaid to promote. Formerly this claſs of females, when they frequented the theatre, were obliged to wear either maſks, or hats with a black crape, and they were not admitted into every part of the houſe. At preſent, they are ſeen in numbers in the boxes, or any diviſion of the houſe, among the reſt of the company, without the leaſt diſtinctive mark, impudence perhaps excepted. Nay, they often give the ton in dreſs, and in an eaſy and free deportment, to thoſe of their ſex who are reputed modeſt; ſo that it is attended with ſome

difficulty to diſtinguiſh innocence loſt, from that which is ſuppoſed ſtill to exiſt.

Beſides the theatres, where regular plays are performed, many are to be found in the outſkirts of London; ſuch as Sadler's Wells, the Circus, Aſtley's amphitheatre, and others, where the audience is entertained with pantomimes, ſinging, dancing, tumbling, horſemanſhip, and things of a ſimilar nature. Theſe theatres afford high entertainment to the lower claſſes of people; but even people of faſhion, and foreigners, go there ſometimes to gratify their ſight, and amuſe themſelves with obſerving what human ingenuity can invent, and what art, joined with aſſiduity, will do to earn a little money, by affording a few hours pleaſure to an idle ſet of ſpectators.

Attempts have been ſeveral times made to have French plays performed in London; but always without ſucceſs. The jealouſy of the national theatres, and the diſlike the people have hitherto borne to the French, are the chief cauſes why theſe attempts have been fruſtrated. I expected, that the late commercial treaty with France would have facilitated the introduction of French players, and their theatrical commodities; but things have hitherto remained as they were before.

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