

# R E M A R K S

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M R S. S I D D O N S,

I N S O M E O F H E R

P R I N C I P A L C H A R A C T E R S.

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MRS. SIDDONS IS THE LAWFUL SUCCESSOR OF OUR MOST PERFECT ACTRESSES.—MUCH IS SAID OF OLD SCHOOLS, AND NEW SCHOOLS, IN ACTING;—THIS LADY IS THE GREAT ORNAMENT OF NATURE'S SCHOOL, WHICH WILL ETERNALLY BE THE SAME.

DAVIS'S MISCELLANIES.

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# R E M A R K S

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M R S. S I D D O N S

O N Saturday, the celebrated actrefs, Mrs. *Siddons*, made her first appearance on the stage of this place, in the character of *Belvidera*. Her merit underwent a very sufficient trial on this occasion: For the expectations of the public from her were such, as it was hardly to be imagined, that any performance should come up to; and yet it is believed, we may venture to assert, that she answered, if she did not surpass, the hopes even of the most sanguine; and that the unbelievers present (for such there were) who had supposed fashion and affectation to have a large share in the extraordinary applause which has every where attended her, left the house completely converted, and repentant of their incredulity. The figure of this actrefs is an excellent one for the stage. Her countenance,

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which



which some may be inclined to account more beautiful than others will allow, interests and attaches, from the very moment of her entrance, by something peculiarly serious and pensive (perhaps it might even be called *sad*) in the turn of her features; and it exhibits, as she goes on, a power of expressing every passion, above all grief, such as proves how deeply she enters into the feelings of her part, and such indeed as almost renders words unnecessary for conveying them to the audience. In the great article of *voice*, she is uncommonly happy: It's tones are really wonderful, and produce effects which will not easily be credited by those who have not felt them; inasmuch, that a simple exclamation from her, or the pronouncing of a single word, often goes to the heart at once, with a force that is irresistible. Her stile of playing is entirely her own. It differs widely from that of Mrs. Yates or Mrs. Crawford, or any other actresses indeed that is remembered here; and if it be true, (which seems to be the general opinion) that her manner is more free from all appearance of art, from all stage tricks, from every strained and affected device to catch a plaudit, and presents expressions of passion that approach more nearly to the simple, native, genuine expressions of nature; while, on the other hand, it is as far, and as truly distant from the mean or familiar as theirs, it is unquestionably entitled to the preference. This excellence, indeed, of taking nature for her guide, and having the just degree of confidence in the power of that amiable mistress to engage and move by her own proper charms, without the aid of meretricious ornament to heighten her attractions, or pomp to disguise her form, is the distinguishing characteristic of her playing; and it is maintained throughout,



throughout, in the most trifling and subordinate articles, equally as in the great scenes of action and agitation. Her assiduity in her part is unwearied, and most exemplary. The audience is lost to her from the time of her entrance: She attends as closely to what is said by others, as to what she has to say herself, and thus, literally, acts the whole time she is on the stage.—She was received by a crowded audience with the most flattering of all applause to a tragic actress—a profound silence—interrupted only, at times, in a way, which, if it reached her ears, could not fail to give her pleasure. Had the custom of a London audience been known here, who often continue to reiterate their applause at the end of the play, for a length of time after the curtain is dropped, she would have received equal satisfaction in that way. The only censure ventured was against the whitening of her face in the last scene: Mrs. Siddons's power to represent madness stands in need of no such vulgar assistance.—It were injustice not to mention, that Mr. Woods, in the character of *Jaffier*, evidently exerted himself to support Mrs. Siddons; and that his success was such as the Public hold themselves indebted to him for.

On Monday, Mrs. Siddons performed the part of Mrs. *Beverley*, in the *Gamester*; and the public were gratified, in that domestic tragedy, with an opportunity of knowing still better, and admiring more highly, what caught them so much at first in her manner, its originality and simplicity. So remote, indeed, was her appearance and demeanour, in the first scene, from that pompous, buskined deportment which is usually assumed by tragic actors, and which even excellent performers have thought indis-



pensible ; so near was it to the chastity of nature, and to the carriage of a well-educated woman in real life, that many, it is believed, who had never before seen any thing like it upon the stage, could scarce believe themselves that this was the celebrated Mrs. Siddons, and sat for a while in silent doubt, whether to impute it to their own want of taste that they did not admire her, or to prejudice in the public that she had been admired so much. As Partridge, in Tom Jones, laughed at the idea of admiring Garrick's scene with the Ghost in Hamlet, because Garrick looked and behaved on the occasion just as any man would do that saw a ghost, so they saw no cause to be smitten with her performance of this character in private life, because Mrs. Beverley, in her hands, was just what Mrs. Beverley should be, and in nothing either short of it, or beyond it. But this delusion did not last long ; she gained upon them gradually as the story went on ; and all were soon convinced, that her distresses did not find the less ready belief, nor the less easy access to their hearts, for the plainness and modesty with which she had introduced herself to their acquaintance. To notice half the beauties that were remarked in her performance, would much exceed the bounds that can be assigned to this article : But there are some which we should be unwilling to pass over. Her recovery from the warmth, with which she receives from Stukely the first hints of her husband's supposed infidelity, and her endeavours to conceal from that artful villain the uneasiness which his insinuations have occasioned her, is executed with all the nicety and delicacy that they require : an encomium, which, however cool it may appear, is in reality very high ; for few passages are more difficult to execute



ecute with effect. The same praise is most justly due to her mode of taking leave of him at the end of the scene ; the expression which her countenance then wears being natural, and proper, and fine, if ever there was any such in the world. The idea of this too, it must be remarked, is entirely her own, without direction or hint of any kind from the author ; which also is the case with the looks and signs, equally significant and happy, that she addresses to Charlotte, before going out with Lewson. But in that scene of the third act, where Stukely unwarily betrays his secret purpose to her, and uncovers the vileness of his heart, she displays a force, and grandeur, and energy of manner, which those who had seen her only in Belvidera, and thence, probably, had concluded the language of affection and distress to be her *forte*, could not reasonably look for. In speaking these words, “ No, on my life he did not !—“ I’ll “ not believe it.—He has no mistress—or if he “ had, why is it told to me ?” She breaks forth at once with such powers, and is so full of vigour and of meaning, that it may be doubted, whether the author himself, when he wrote the passage, fully conceived all that she throws into it. The searching looks that she afterwards fixes upon Stukely, while he unfolds himself, in which contempt, disdain, indignation, aversion, are all mingled with the most forcible expression, is such, that one almost expects to see the seducer sink into the earth before her. And after she has heard him out, with such animated exultation, and conscious dignity, does she deliver the feelings of her soul for him and for his purpose, that honour and fidelity gain fresh charms from the colours which she lends them, and that every spectator feels inclined to say  
within



within himself, " Surely the part of virtue is  
 " NATURAL to this woman, and it is an impropri-  
 " ety to say she ACTS it." Her performance of  
 Mrs. Beverley rises till the very last scene; in  
 which, when she speaks the words, " 'Tis false  
 " old man!—They had no quarrel—there was no  
 " cause for quarrel!" her expression of alarm,  
 anger, apprehension, agitation, more in short  
 than can be said, is so sudden, and so vivid,  
 that nothing can be beyond it. The scene con-  
 cludes with a representation of mute affliction  
 and despair by her, as she is borne out from the  
 dead body of her husband, which those who  
 wish to conceive, must go and behold. Mr.  
*Woods* did great justice to the character of *Be-*  
*verley*; and the audience regretted that he was  
 so seldom on the stage along with Mrs. Siddons.

A correspondent who says he speaks the wish  
 of many others, as well as his own, begs leave  
 to suggest to the spectators of Mrs. Siddons, the  
 impropriety, and bad policy, of interrupting  
 that inimitable actress by applause in the course  
 of a scene.

On Tuesday, Mrs. Siddons gratified the pub-  
 lic with the part of Lady *Randolph*, in the tra-  
 gedy of *Douglas*; a piece in which the audience  
 of this place have always taken peculiar delight.  
 And justly so. Since, if partiality to the work  
 of a countryman does not bias us (and the rank  
 now attained by his production, where that  
 cause of favour could not advance it, forbids us  
 to believe so) it is distinguished by various per-  
 fections, in which we heartily wish that the lan-  
 guage afforded a larger number of tragedies to  
 rival it. We were, besides, particularly desir-  
 ous to hear *Matilda's* moan poured forth by Mrs.  
 Siddons on another account—We remembered  
 that



that of all the parts which Mrs. Crawford performed here, it was this which raised her highest in our estimation; and we understood that this actress herself, in performing it repeatedly against Mrs. Siddons, this winter, in London, had pitched upon it as a field, on which to encounter, and take revenge upon, the formidable destroyer of her fame. We had heard too, that there were some, who hesitated, as to this character (for the point was given up as to every other) where to give the preference. In the first and second scenes accordingly, from which it is evident that the rival performers differ in their general conceptions of the character, we can imagine that there is room for an opposition of sentiment. Under Mrs. Crawford's hands, Lady Randolph was, throughout these scenes, a plaintive, and highly impassioned character; like one whose griefs were still fresh, and prompted unceasing lamentations. She aimed, in short, at the highest pathetic, from the very outset. In Mrs. Siddon's performance, Matilda's sorrows wear a more composed, and more venerable form; she is less frequently passionate in her complaints: Tender, indeed, and interesting she every where is, and, at times, while she relates her sad story, as for instance in delivering the words, "*My Lord, my life, my husband! Mighty God! what had I done to merit such affliction?*" and in some other, most truly affecting: But still she does not indulge, and give reins to, that power of opening the springs of woe, and deluging the heart with compassion, which, whenever she pleases, she possesses above all created beings. And, if we will consider in what situation the mother of Douglass is introduced to us—that the scene of action is not laid at a recent



cent period after her losses—that she is no longer a woman in the prime of life—that early and severe misfortunes *have killed the forward blossom of her heart*, (as she herself happily expresses it)—that she had borne about a load of anxiety and sorrow for a length of years—and if, to these circumstances, all tending to exalt her mind, while they soften it, we add the strain of virtuous, devout and elevated sentiment, in which she evidently takes delight, and which marks her serious, contemplative turn of mind; we shall discern the propriety of investing the matron with more sober garments than Mrs. Crawford arrayed her in, and spreading, as Mrs. Siddons does, an air of solemnity over her *time settled sorrows*. This conception is unquestionably nearer to nature and the truth, whatever it may be to the intention of the poet; and, what should, perhaps, by itself decide the question, this chastened mode of going through these scenes is attended with the invaluable advantage, that it gives double force to the impassioned scenes which follow, and enables the performer, with the more strength and certainty, to seize and to hold the affections at the crisis of the story, where it is of most importance to maintain them—an advantage which we are sure, from what we have observed in more parts than one, that Mrs. Siddons well understands. And so her success in the remainder of Lady Randolph showed.—We discovered many symptoms of her approaching greatness in the scenes of the second act. For never was there language more plain than the progressive expressions of her countenance, while young Norval rehearses his story, until at length she is surprised by the tear starting from her eye; or if as plain, never was there  
any



any language half so beautiful. Neither did we ever hear the injunction of Glenalvon, "*The friendless stranger my protection claims; I am his friend, and be not thou his foe,*" delivered with so imposing a tone and countenance. Still less did we ever see any thing approaching to the animated picture of generous confidence which she exhibits in speaking the words, "*I will be sworn thou wilt not,*" to confirm young Norval's promise of his honour.—But no sooner was she engaged in the great scene of the piece, which restores her child, than the heart of every mortal gave involuntary testimony to the magic of her powers, and smote him for being rash enough to believe, though but for a single moment, that this woman could not unlock it when she would. We do not remember to have seen, on any occasion, an audience so deeply, and so universally, affected. And no wonder. The scene itself is an admirable one; and in her performance of it, she soars as high above all other performers, as the scene itself is above the rest of the play. The delicate transitions and revolutions of her countenance, as the old shepherd proceeds in his eventful story—the anxiety, the earnestness, the agitation, with which she puts her questions to him—the wild bursts of grief, the exclamations of misery, with which she interrupts him—the cry of triumph, of wonder, of transport, that breaks from her when the light at last glances in upon the story—the passionate expressions of gratitude and fondness to the old shepherd, such as no actress but Mrs. Siddons ever felt enough to be transported to—the devout overflowings of her heart to heaven—the brilliant joy and satisfaction that play in her eyes, and features, and in all about her, during

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the remainder of the scene—all these we would attempt to describe, if we had a confidence in our own words, in any degree proportioned to our admiration of her talents. Suffice it to say, much as the poet has done for us in this scene, no one who was lucky enough to behold Mrs. Siddons play it, but must peruse it for ever after with double relish. It cannot, however, be dismissed ere we remark a passage for the striking difference between her mode of speaking it and Mrs. Crawford's.—The noted words, "*Was he alive?*" is what we mean; which Mrs. Crawford always threw from her with the utmost keenness and animation, unmingled with other expressions.—Mrs. Siddons, on the contrary, with a much stricter attention to the state of Lady Randolph's breast, overpowered and subdued, as it must be, at that awful moment, by the greatness of the occasion, and the contest of various emotions within her, speaks them in a struggling, suffocated voice, expressive in the highest degree of internal agitation—a mode of delivery, as we conceive, far more natural to the situation, and to the character; and preferable, too, for another reason: Since it is to this stile of execution that we owe, in a great measure, the astonishing force which attends the exclamation immediately following: "*Inhuman that thou art—How couldst thou kill what winds and waves have spared!*" The very same difference of manner obtains in their speaking of the words, "*Eternal Providence, what is thy name?*" and Mrs. Siddons's manner is attended in this instance too, as it seems to us, with the same advantages as in the other. For here too there follows an exclamation: "*'Tis he! 'tis he himself! it was my son!*" the effect of which no one can



can have forgotten. As for the remaining acts of the play, which we have not room to examine particularly, we need only say (and it is saying all) that she preserved the impression which she had made, warm and undiminished, throughout them, and (what was never seen before) that almost as many tears were shed at the death of Douglas as at the discovery of Norval's birth.

On Wednesday, Mrs. Siddons again played the part of *Belvidera*, in *Venice Preserv'd*; a piece, which, though far from faultless, in more respects than one, especially the contrivance of its story, yet by its charms of expression, its forcible representations of character and passion, and the deep distress in which its principal personages are involved, by listening to the suggestions of a virtuous feeling, stands deservedly among the foremost productions of the British Theatre. Great, however, as its excellencies are, it will be allowed by all, and by those most readily who have the highest relish of them, that Mrs. Siddons's action renders them more conspicuous. Never was there seen upon the stage, so fair, so lovely, so winning a picture of truth, and tenderness, and strong affection, as that which she sets before us in the first scene with Jaffier. Her looks, her tones, her gestures, her whole manners, as those of a high-souled woman, who knows to love with elegance, and with passion. She approaches Jaffier, she addresses him, she courts him, with all the endearments that nature and kindness can prompt to soothe his distresses. To use the expression of our poet Thomson, "*She pours her soul in love*" to him. Her troubled heart seems to assuage itself in his presence; and when, towards the end of this



scene, she comes to deliver the passage that begins, "*O I will love thee, even in madness love thee,*" what between the attractions of her gesture, the melting of her voice, the fondness that speaks in her eyes and countenance, the sighs that seem to escape from a breast, subdued as it were by its own feelings, we believe there are few men, who, at the moment, would not think with Jaffier, that Belvidera was a treasure, more enviable than a monarch's throne, and who are not prepared, thenceforward, to pardon, and to pity, any weakness which the love of such dangerous perfection may betray him into. In the scene where she is delivered to the conspirators, which is her next appearance, Mrs. Siddons will forgive us for singling out but two beauties, from among the profusion that she scatters over it—They are indeed of such a kind, as no one need think highly of his taste for discovering: For what heart is there so inaccessible to the voice of sorrow, as not to be moved by the helpless, plaintive, doleful tone, with which she pleads for mercy to her unkind husband, in the words, "*Dont—prithee don't in poverty forsake me,*" which are so strangely affecting even in the author? and who is there but must be overcome by the wild, lamentable, miserable note of exclamation, in which, while her eyes stream with tears, and her hands are spread out on high for succour, she calls upon him by his name, "*Oh Jaffier, Jaffier!*" as she is torn from his presence? We must again repeat it, though so often remarked before, there is a power in the tone of this woman's voice, that finds the way to the heart, altogether independently of what she says, and which would move even a person that did not understand her language. The same is most  
strictly



strictly true of her countenance : For *this* speaks a language that cannot be misunderstood. Could any one, for instance, misinterpret the expression of her face and attitude, when first she lifts her eyes on Bedamar and Renault, after being delivered to them ; which is such, that she seems shrinking into herself with terror and amazement, and bereft even of power to look on them ? Still, in these passages, she has the poet to point the path which she must tread, and to give her a general direction for her way : He has put down the ideas for her, and it only remains to the actresses (though that is indeed a great deal) to catch a spark of the fire with which he wrote, and present them to the eye and ear with the suitable accompaniments. But, at the beginning of the third act, there occurs a passage of action, where she supplies the defects of the poet, at least adds to his idea, from the richness of her private store, and presents the audience with a creation of her own. Those who saw her will be at no loss to know what is meant—her mode of receiving Jaffier at their first meeting, after he has abandoned to her the care of Renault. For here, (where Otway has omitted to mark his resentment) while Jaffier is addressing her in his wonted terms of affection, does she contrive, by her mode of demeanour, and management of features, without speaking a single word, to fill up the blank, and to convey, better than a volume of speeches would do, all that a delicate and virtuous woman, who knows her own value, must be supposed to feel, on being exposed to dishonour by the loved man that should protect her—and this expression too, not pure and unmingled, (which it had been easier to execute) but tempered and corrected (which it



it evidently is) by latent affection and regard for the dear deceiver ; and, on the other hand, unadulterated with the least taint of *low* displeasure, or of coquetry or affectation, which, perhaps, it was more difficult than all to avoid. Nothing indeed was ever more delicately performed than this, or more remote from vulgarity, where there was such danger of falling into it. Her performance, throughout this scene, no where falls short of what the introduction promises ; which is saying all of it that can be said. It especially gives proof of the variety of her voice.—But it is in vain to attempt noticing all the beauties of this kind, which an attentive spectator must have discovered here. We hasten, with delight, to what crowns this scene, her delivery of the last words in it, “ *Farewell—remember twelve !*” Not that we are rash enough to attempt describing it : For a volume would scarce suffice to explain all the meaning that she throws into these words. They breathe indeed unutterable things. But this we will with confidence assert, that after hearing Mrs. Siddons speak them, the manner in which all other actresses have spoken them becomes intolerable, and appears just about as proper, as if they were to utter them with the funeral groan of Hamlet’s Ghost, when sinking into the earth, “ *Farewell—remember me !*” In the great scenes which follow, and which have made a good figure under the hands of performers far inferior to Mrs. Siddons, we will only stop to remark a stroke or two of merit peculiar to herself. In her speaking of the single word *why* ? in answer to Jaffier, who, feeling the temptation to destroy her, presses her to leave him ; and in that likewise of the single word



word *No!* a little after, when he asks her if she be not terrified at him; there is something so natural, so innocent and artless, so unsuspecting of the lurking danger, that the spectator, who knows it, and compares her real situation with her appearance, and the state of mind which her tones indicate, is moved instantaneously to compassion, and to tears. Nor is the expression of terror less happily imagined, which is exhibited in the few hasty trembling steps that she takes, when first he alarms her, by recalling to her remembrance "*what she had done, and whither she had brought him.*" In the scene with her father, when he asks forgiveness of her for his hard usage, the sudden throwing of her head down on his hand, and the stifled voice which is then heard to come from her, is a stroke of the same kind, invented by herself, and highly affecting. Of the two scenes that follow we say little; since we despair of doing them any thing like justice. Only this—If there be any one who heard her answer to Jaffier's question—" *How long is it since the miserable day we wedded first?*" and stood it with a dry eye, who was not chilled by her exclamation, "*How! parting! parting!*" who saw the agony of her last embraces without being overpowered, he may congratulate himself, if he pleases, on an utter want of taste, and of sensibility. Of the madness, which concludes poor Belvidera's sufferings, we need only say, it is such, that the spectator feels inclined to shut his eyes against it, and wonders by what power he is fascinated to gaze on.

On Thursday Mrs. Siddons repeated the part of Mrs. *Beverley*. The house was not so thronged on this evening as the former; a circumstance which



which Mrs. Siddons may be assured, arose entirely from the difficulty of getting admittance that had been felt the night before, and a preconceived opinion, that it would continue at least equally considerable.

On Thursday, Mrs. *Siddons* played the part of *Isabella* in the *Fatal Marriage*; which, we had always heard, was esteemed by the audience of London, as well as by Mrs. Siddon's herself, the greatest trial and display of her powers. The audience of Edinburgh have found no reason to dissent from their decision. So far from it, indeed, that we choose, for this night, to decline the task of remarking on her performance. Those who beheld her, stand in no need of a remembrancer to renew the impressions which she made on them: We believe, indeed, there are some, and these not few in number, who would willingly, if they could, chase the picture of the spectacle from their imagination: And as to those who were, fortunate (shall we say) or unfortunate enough to miss this evening's entertainment, it were an over-confidence in our own words, if not in the power of language itself, to suppose that any description we might give could convey an idea of it, either answerable to our feelings, or, in any degree, worthy of the performer's excellence. It must not, however, be concluded, from what has been said, that this excellence was all in one file. In that division of the piece, which precedes Villery's return, the forlorn *Isabella* pleaded for our esteem, our love, and our compassion, with all the power that grace, and dignity, and delicacy of manners, can bestow upon the distresses of a beautiful woman, who utters them in the voice, and with the action of  
nature



nature itself. Affliction, and affection, wore, here, their most elegant and most interesting form.—The sense of obligation borrowed a noble manner which it is little accustomed to—Her looks told the story for the poet—and the language of inquietude and fatigue (in her soliloquy after Villeroy's departure, for instance) was spoken with a simplicity, a nicety, a continence, which we should in vain attempt to render palpable to those (if there were any so void of taste) who did not feel it at the time. The remainder of the piece was really terrible—in so much, that in the last scene, while one of those lengthened tones of anguish was drawing out, which we never could at any time resist, there arose, at once, from all sides of the House, a wailing and crying, in the same note, that almost drowned Mrs. Siddon's voice. It was, in short, (to use a phrase not unjustly suspected of affectation in the common case) *too much*—and, as we never before saw any thing approaching to it, so we are not sure, that we desire ever to see the like again. One thing is clear, that Mrs. Siddons is entitled to every mark of gratitude from Edinburgh: For it is agreed by all, who have seen her both here and in London, that the exertions which we have witnessed, especially in the parts of Isabella and Lady Randolph, are even beyond what the large audience of the metropolis drew from her. By these excessive exertions, however, she puts an end to our encomiums: For since she contrives to rise above praise, she must be content to be admired in silence.

On Saturday, Mrs. *Siddons* appeared in a new part, and one by no means of the same stamp with the two which she had before presented to



the public—that of *Zara*, in the *Mourning Bride*. Of so different a mould indeed is this violent, imperious Princess, from Mrs. Beverley, or Belvidera; and so unamiable, upon the whole, in spite of some great qualities, is the aspect of her character, as drawn by the poet, that we were, we must confess, rather inclined to regret Mrs. Siddons's making choice of a part, in which we were not to love and revere her, as we used to do; and went to the house, expecting indeed to be entertained, (for that we could not doubt) but not in hopes of so high and delicious a banquet as on the former evenings. We found ourselves, however, mistaken; and learnt to acknowledge, that Mrs. Siddons knew far better than we the extent and variety of her powers to charm. Not that she turned aside the current of interest in the piece from its usual channel, or wrung our hearts for the misfortunes of the captive Queen (for that would not be to play the part of *Zara*); but that, in presenting the wild, stormy, passions of *Zara's* breast, such as they are, driving one another off in rapid succession, she filled us with an admiration, or rather wonder, at her skill and power, which we the more confidently believe to be just, that we beheld her calmly, and unmoved by any strong sympathy, or tumultuous emotion, to disturb our judgment. The angry and unlovely feelings, which are the predominant feelings in the character, and every now and then break in upon her love, ardent as it is, she executed, in every instance, with a fire and force truly masterly; but more eminently so, in that scene where she detects the object of her passion in secret conference with her rival. The amazement, and indignation, painted in her attitude and gestures,  
on



on her first coming in and finding them together—the impatience evident in her motions as she advances—the expressions of envy, and mortification, and surprise, with which, while they are parting, she remarks to herself, “*Trembling and weeping as he leads her forth, confusion in his face, and grief in her’s*”—the spiteful pleasantry, the malicious pleasure, the affected scorn, that speak on her countenance, and in her delivery, and in her whole manners, while she derides his sufferings, and insults him with her irony—the momentary bursts of vexation, so happily cut short, which mark the rage and jealousy fermenting in her bosom—the fell voice and look of hatred and revenge, in which she tells him, “*Villain, thou shalt die!*”—the aggravated tone of insolence and contempt, in which she presses home to him her command, that no one, “*no not even the Princess,*” shall be admitted to him—the fury with which at last she bursts away, when she finds him brave her displeasure—all these render this scene, we will venture to assert, from beginning to end, the most complete, the most admirable, dramatic spectacle, that we have ever beheld. The difficulties of executing such a mixture and succession of emotions, must be evident to all; and especially the difficulty (which we had occasion to remark before in another instance) of maintaining grandeur and dignity of manner in those passages of dissimulation, where there is such infinite risk of falling into womanish and vulgar affectation. In the scene of the fourth act, where Zara takes her last resolution, we were taught that Mrs. Siddons understands the language of a great soul, at those moments when it stands retired and collected into itself, equally as



in its fallies and extravagancies. Her manner here is truly delicate and noble. A gloomy composure sits upon her countenance. A kind of awful melancholy appears in her motions and deportment. She commands her attendant to prepare the bowls of poison, in a deep, level, impressivè tone of voice, that forbids reply ;— and she declares her determination, as she is about to quit the scene, in a manner so happily composed of the sad and serious, as makes the *attentive* spectator look up to her, at once, with pity and with wonder.—The dying scene still rises above this. The lamentation which she pours forth, “ *But oh ! he died unknowing in my heart ; he knew I loved, but knew not to what height !* ” makes us feel for the misfortunes of Zara, which we never did before. The look turned up to heaven, which fills the pause before she drinks the poison, and that turned inward as it were upon herself, which follows it, cause us to gaze upon her eye with such attention, as if we thought the drawing of our breath would interrupt her. And when, after the draught has taken effect, she says, “ *Oh, friendly draught ! already in my heart ! Cold, cold* ”—the words are accompanied with so just and natural an action, that *we* also begin to shudder, and to feel as if our veins were chilled. With all these terrible graces, we must not omit to mention, that the natural tendency of Mrs. Siddons’s disposition, which, if we mistake not, is towards the gentle and tender, has given a tinge to her performance of Zara. That Queen is not so very turbulent and fierce a character, under Mrs. Siddons’s hands, as Congreve designed her. Nor do we mention this to disapprove of it, but the contrary. For Congreve has made her, upon the whole,



whole, a disagreeable character to behold.—

Now, as this is by no means necessary, either to the conduct of the story, or the interest of the piece; so we hold ourselves indebted to that amiable performer, for mitigating her faults, and improving her with certain graces, natural to Mrs. Siddons, which the public never desire to see her divested of, and of which, perhaps, she could not divest herself, if she would. It remains to notice some beauties of a gayer stile than those about which we have hitherto been employed. And, in this way, a passage in her first scene with Osmyn may fairly challenge the foremost place: For nothing ever filled us with more agreeable sensations than her delivery of these lines, “*For what are riches, empire, power, but larger means to gratify the will?*” &c.—

She speaks them with the voice of triumph, and as if she were inspired with the happy sentiment that they contain: Her countenance sparkles with life and exultation; her whole frame seems to be animated with pleasure, and to be exalted into more than its accustomed dignity. We surveyed, in like manner, with much delight, the delicate artifice of her action in that scene with the King, where she endeavours, by her insinuations, to raise suspicion in him of an intercourse between his daughter and Osmyn. The vehement tone with which she forbids the admission of any one to Osmyn but her mutes, “*They, and no other, not the Princess’ self;* and the significant, yet apparently accidental manner, in which she mentions the report, that the Princess had visited him in prison, are excellently fitted for that purpose; and are only surpassed by the affected surprise, and disengaged careless behaviour, which, when she finds  
that



that she has gone too far, she employs to do away her own success. Many other passages might be descanted on with equal justice: But the public may tire of hearing her praise; though they never will of seeing her deserve it. We shall remark, therefore, but one merit more, which is equally manifest in every part that Mrs. Siddons has performed—the peculiar simplicity with which she narrates, and gives orders, and delivers any passage whatever, that cannot be supposed to occasion emotion in her at the time—a simplicity, which, far from flattering the story that she tells, only gives her the greater power to mark, and bring forward, any particular circumstance that may deserve to be so distinguished. Whoever recollects the force, which, by this means, she gives to the epithet of “*that old son of mischief*,” bestowed on Renault, as she relates to Jaffier his attempt upon her, or feels the strong meaning, which she thus conveys into her interdiction against the Princess, in her orders to the guards, will be ready to join in this encomium on her. The merit indeed of varying her voice and manner on the occasion, and delivering in an unimpassioned manner what naturally should not affect her, or affect her but slightly, she possesses, in our opinion, above all performers; and it is not the less precious, for often passing quite unnoticed.

We are given to understand, that the practice of applauding Mrs. Siddons at the close of such passages as are admired, is rather agreeable to her than the contrary, as it gives her time to take breath, and gather strength; and that the practice of the London audience is just the reverse of what has been represented.



