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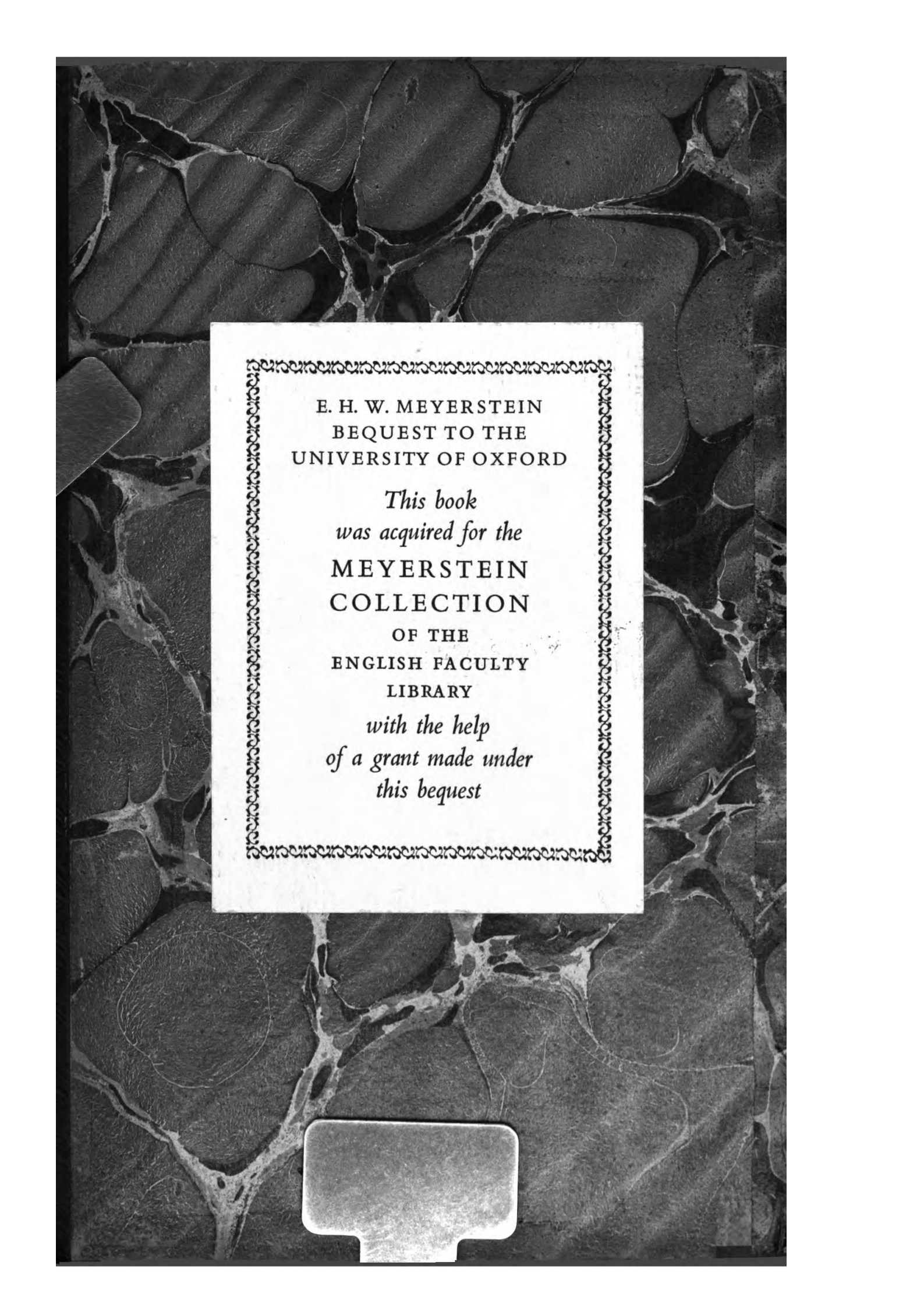
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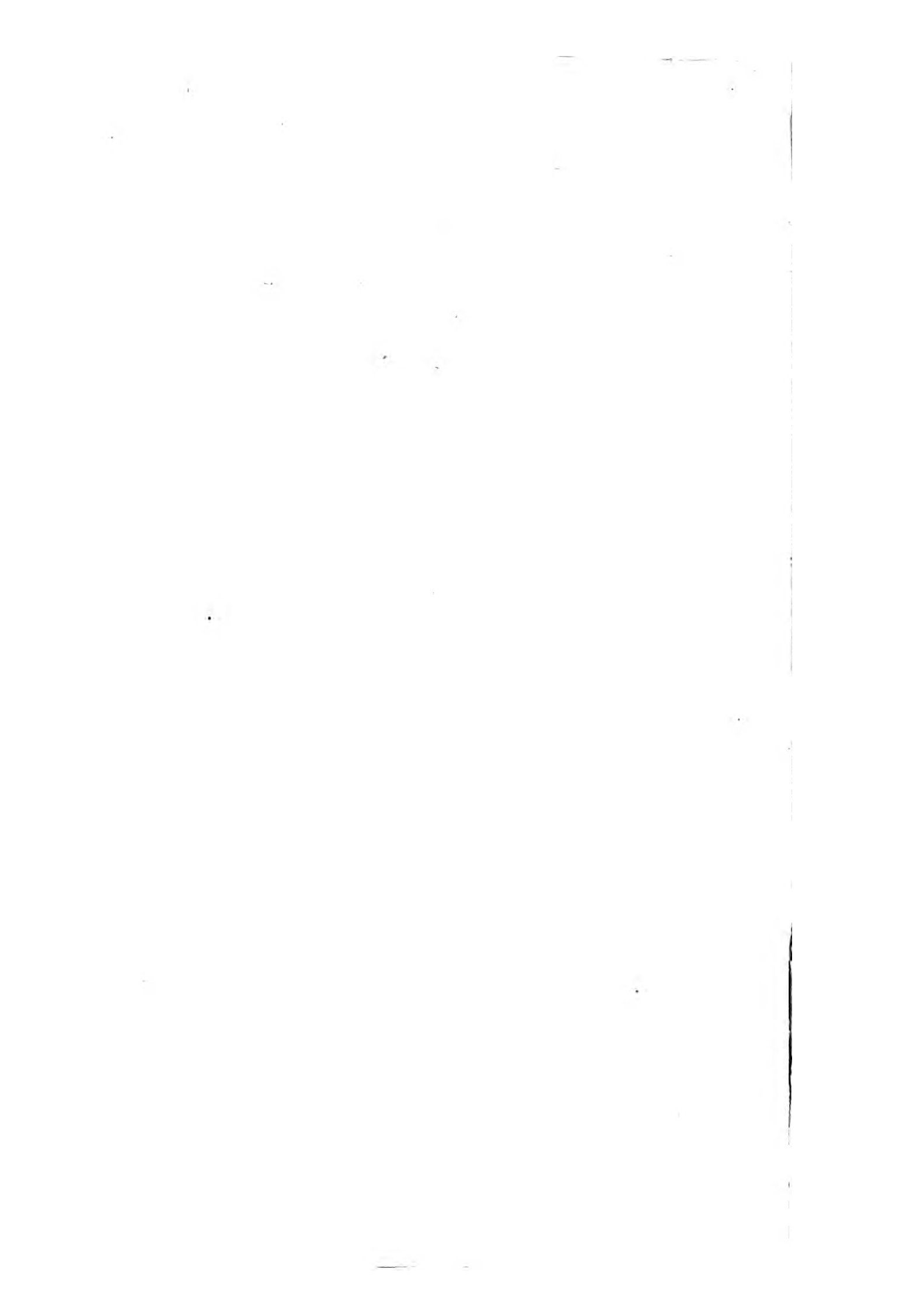


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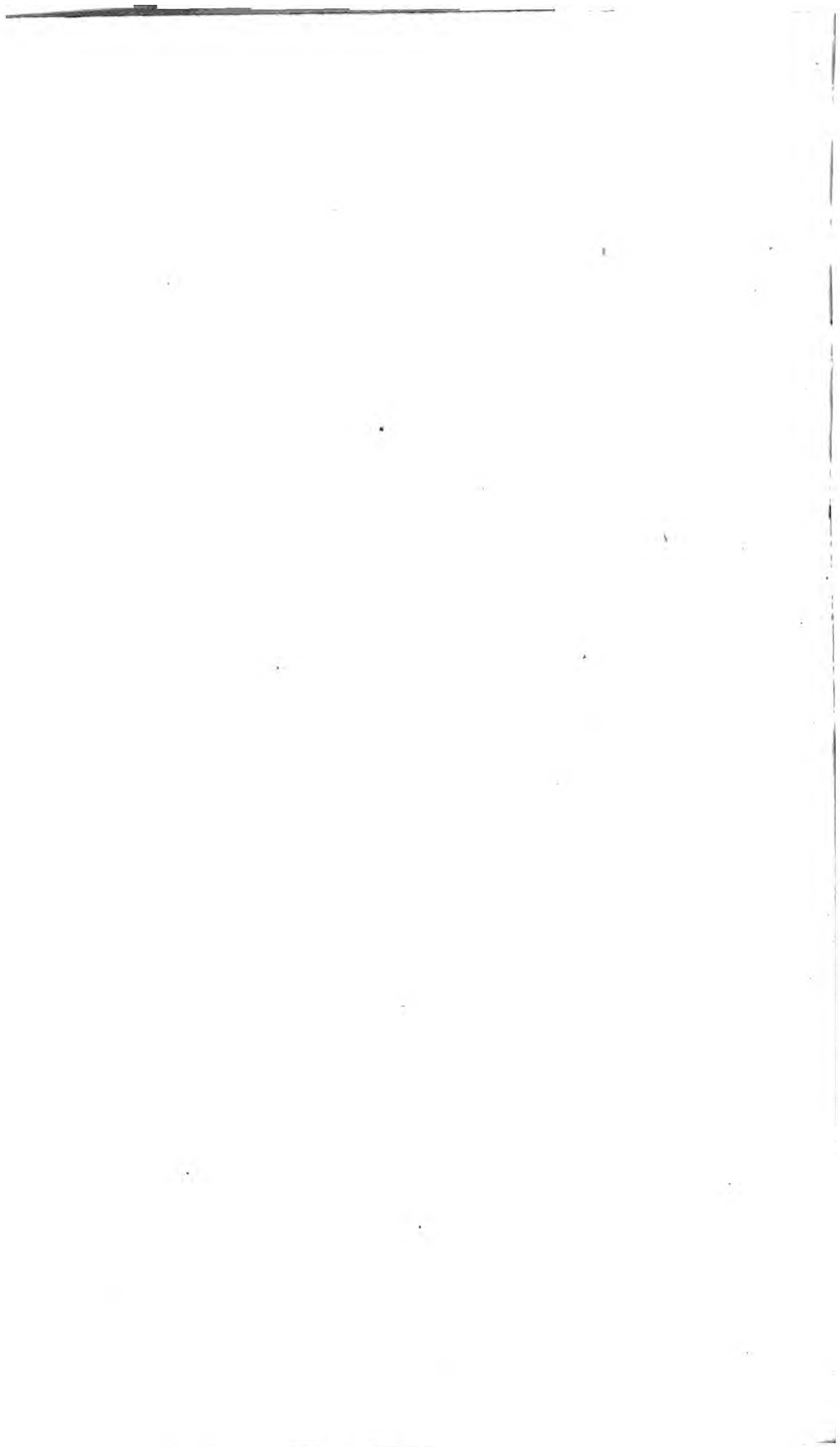
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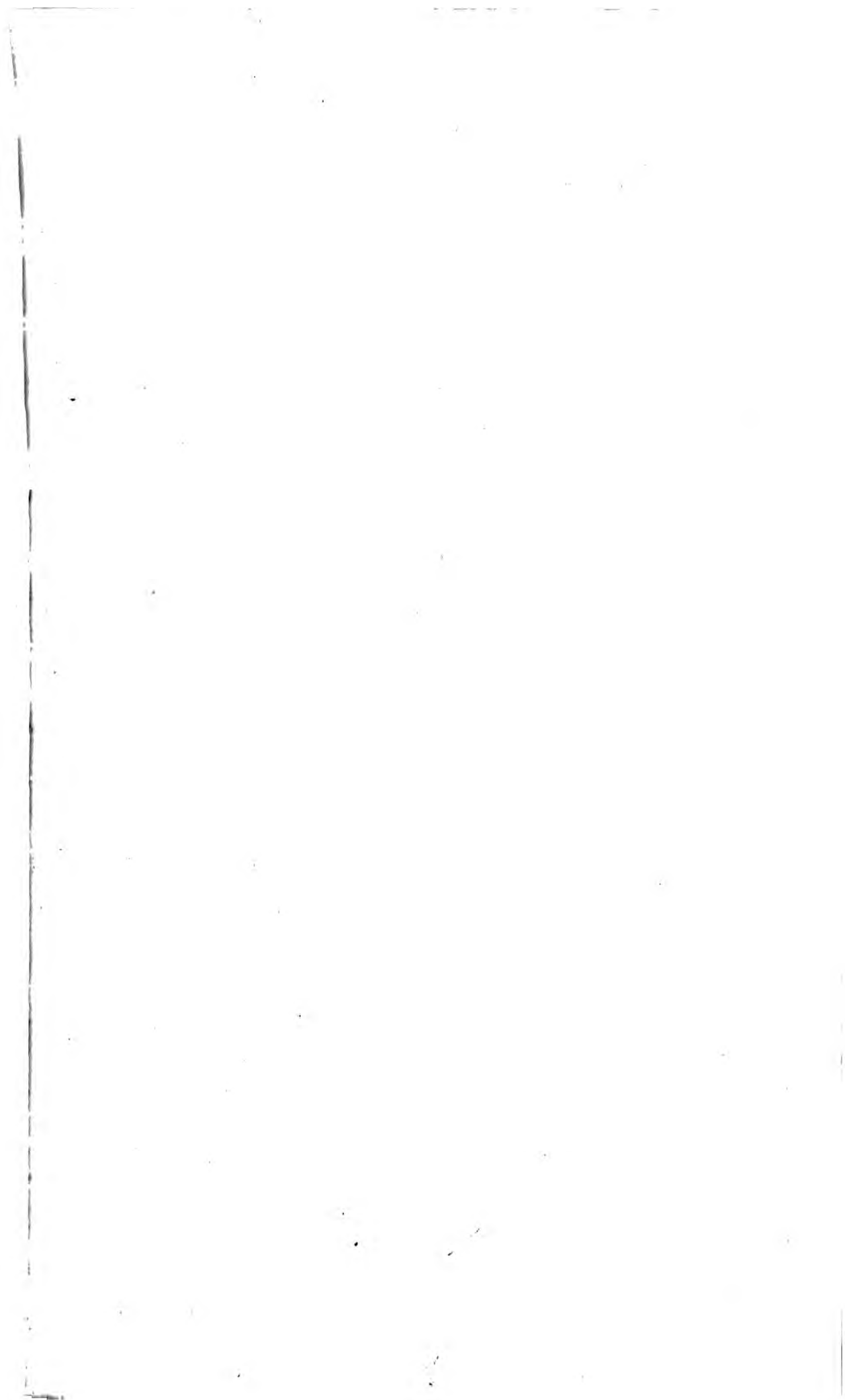
LIFE

OF

MRS. SIDDONS.









PAINTED BY T. LAWRENCE, ESQ. R.A.

ENGRAVED BY THO<sup>S</sup> LUPTON.

MRS. SIDDONS.

FROM A PICTURE IN THE POSSESSION OF WILLIAM FITZHUGH ESQ.

*London, Published May 1, 1834, by Effingham Wilson, Royal Exchange*

L I F E  
OF  
MRS. SIDDONS.

BY THOMAS CAMPBELL.

“Pity it is that the momentary beauties flowing from a harmonious elocution cannot, like those of poetry, be their own record;—that the animated graces of the Player can live no longer than the instant breath and motion that represent them; or at least can but faintly glimmer through the memory and imperfect attestation of a few surviving spectators.”

CIBBER.

VOL. I.

LONDON:  
EFFINGHAM WILSON, ROYAL EXCHANGE.

1834.



...of the ... yet I was glad to ...  
... by one so well ...  
... from the ...  
... which I have left in the congeniality of our  
... respecting the illustrations subject of these  
... I beg leave to inscribe them to you, with

Yours sincerely,

T. CAMPBELL.

TO SAMUEL ROGERS, Esq.

---

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HAVE heard you say, that, rare as it was to meet with so gifted a genius as that of Mrs. Siddons, it was almost equally so to meet in human nature with so much candid and benignant singleness of mind as belonged to her personal character. Though this was always my own conviction, yet I was gratified to hear it strongly expressed by one so well acquainted with her, and possessing so much perspicacity. From the happiness which I have felt in the congeniality of our sentiments respecting the illustrious subject of these Volumes, I beg leave to inscribe them to you, with the regard of

Yours sincerely,

T. CAMPBELL.

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IN THE PRESS,

THE RICHES OF CHAUCER:

In which the impurities have been expunged, the orthography modernised, the rhythm accentuated where necessary, and the obsolete terms explained at the foot of each page. To which have been added, a few Explanatory Notes, with a new Life of the Poet.

By CHARLES COWDEN CLARKE,

Author of "Tales in Prose, from Chaucer;" and "Adam the Gardener."

**CHAPTER I.**

**B**

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L I F E  
OF  
M R S. S I D D O N S.

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CHAPTER I.

MRS. SIDDONS'S maiden name was Kemble. She was the daughter of Roger Kemble, the manager of a theatrical company that performed chiefly in the midland and the western towns of England; and of Sarah Ward, whose father was also a strolling manager. Mr. Ward had been an actor in the days of Betterton, and had been the original *Hazareth*, in Fenton's "Mariamne."

I remember having seen the parents of the great actress in their old age. They were both of them tall and comely personages. The

mother had a somewhat austere stateliness of manner; but it seems to have been from her that the family inherited their genius and force of character. Her voice had much of the emphasis of her daughter's; and her portrait, which long graced Mrs. Siddons's drawing-room, has an intellectual expression of the strongest power: she gave you the idea of a Roman matron. The father had all the suavity of the old school of gentlemen.

Persons who cannot for a moment disjoin their idea of human dignity from that of station, will perhaps be surprised that I should speak of the dignified manners of a pair who lived by the humble vocation which I have mentioned. It is nevertheless true that the presence and demeanour of this couple might have graced a court; and, though their relationship to Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble, of course, enhanced the interest which their venerable appearance commanded, yet I have

been assured by those who knew them long before their children became illustrious, that in their humblest circumstances they always sustained an entire respectability. There are some individuals whom no circumstances can render vulgar, and Mr. and Mrs. Kemble were of this description. Besides, in spite of all our prejudices against the player's vocation, irreproachable personal character will always find its level in the general esteem.

Respecting Roger Kemble, Mrs. Siddons's father, I have not been able to make out any very interesting particulars. His wife alleged that he was an unparalleled *Falstaff*, but I know of no impartial testimony to the same effect. Ward disapproved of his daughter marrying an actor; and, when he found that her union with Kemble was inevitable, he was with difficulty persuaded to speak to her. He then forgave her with all the bitterness of his heart, saying, "*Sarah, you have not disobeyed*



*me: I told you never to marry an actor, and you have married a man who neither is nor ever can be an actor."* This anecdote has been often mistold, and the same words inaccurately ascribed to Roger Kemble, on his daughter's marriage with Mr. Siddons.

Those who remember Roger Kemble describe him as a man of plain sense and of good-humoured and jocose disposition. His mildness made him more popular at home than his spouse, who, having a brood of high-mettled boys and Solomon's precept respecting the rod incessantly before her eyes, was rather a stern disciplinarian towards her masculine progeny. He was born in the city of Hereford, in 1721, and died in 1802, in his 82d year. When in poor circumstances, he used laughingly to console himself by alleging that he was come of a good house, though decayed. It was handed down in the family, that they were sprung from the Kembles of Wydell, in

Wiltshire, a house of undoubted antiquity. I have not been able to prove this descent, even with the aid of my friend, Mr. Young, of the Herald's College. But still I am not inclined to disbelieve the general tradition, that their ancestors had once been wealthy and powerful. Their property, it was said, had been confiscated in Charles's Civil war, and their misfortunes consummated by their adhesion to the Roman Catholic faith.

Though the gifted theatrical Kembles have no need of heraldic blazonry, yet still their family, like every other, has a right to its own traditional recollections; and they still cherish the memory of two ancestral members, whose names are not wholly destitute of historical interest. The one was a soldier, the other a martyr.

In the description of the battle of Worcester it is mentioned, that, "after the rout of the

Royal army, the Earl of Cleveland and some others rallied what force they could, though inconsiderable to the number of the republicans, and charged the enemy very gallantly, in Sudbury street, where Sir James Hamilton and Captain Kemble were both desperately wounded, and others slain. Yet this action," the chronicler adds, "did much secure his Majesty's march out at St. Martin's gate, who had otherwise been in danger of being taken in the town. For this service, Captain Kemble was rewarded by Charles the Second, after the Restoration, with the gift of a war-horse."

Another ancestral relative, who, I imagine, was the great grand-uncle of Roger Kemble, was one of the last individuals in England who was publicly put to death for his religion.\*

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\* It is not true, however, though sometimes asserted, that he was the very last of those who suffered for the Romish faith in England. The Reverend Oliver Plunket,

Some Church of England readers will possibly be shocked, or incredulous, when they are told that this poor man was murdered by Christians of their own persuasion: for it is but recently that the bulk of Englishmen have been forced to believe the historical fact, that their Protestant forefathers were nearly as stanch persecutors as the Catholics. No principle, so worthy of growth in the English mind, has taken root in it so slowly as a charitable and just spirit towards that body of believers. Even the soul of Milton could not raise itself entirely above intolerant sentiments. He deprecates the persecution of Catholics, but proposes that they should never be allowed the public exercise of their reli-

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titular bishop of Armagh, was hanged at Tyburn, 1681, two years after the death of Mr. Kemble: nor was the ceremony of taking out Plunket's heart and bowels omitted on this disgraceful occasion. Still later, a Father Attwood was sentenced, but reprieved and taken off the hurdle. Father Atkinson, a Franciscan friar, died a prisoner in Hurst castle, in 1729.

gion; as if, restraining men from worshipping according to their creed, were not the essence of persecution.

The martyr to whom I have alluded was the Reverend John Kemble, who, according to the Diary of Douay College, was ordained a priest in February, 1625; and in the June following was sent upon the English mission: after which, his usual residence was in the diocese of his native county of Hereford. He officiated as a priest for fifty-four years. In the fifty-fifth year after his ordination, and in the eightieth of his age, he was apprehended, and executed on the 2d of August, 1679.

A Mr. Jaby, who claims relationship with Mr. Charles Kemble, about two years ago, addressed to that gentleman a letter, which is now before me; in which he says, that their ancestral relation, the above priest, was compelled to walk from London to Hereford at

the age of eighty, and that he was there burnt upon the stones. The manner of death here ascribed to him is, however, a mistake; Mr. Jaby indeed contradicts it himself, by immediately adding, that the same Captain Kemble, the martyr's nephew who behaved so gallantly at Worcester, preserved one of his uncle's hands, which is kept to this day in the Worcester Catholic chapel. It would certainly tell more martyrologically that the old gentleman had suffered by fire, and at this moment it would make no difference to him; but, in point of fact, no part of him was burnt, except his heart and bowels, after he was hanged, and when it is to be hoped he was insensible. Mr. Jaby says, in the same letter, that his brother possesses a likeness of the martyr, painted in oil, whilst he was in prison. The old man's fortitude is still a traditional by-word in the place. On his way to execution, he smoked his pipe and conversed with his friends; and in that county it was long usual

to call the last pipe that was smoked in a social company, a Kemble's pipe. I have heard that John Kemble and Mrs. Siddons once paid a visit together to the martyr's tomb; though I know not at what time they made the pilgrimage. One would have gone far for a sight of their countenances on the spot.

The poor old man was apprehended at Pembridge castle, in the parish of Witchcastle, in Herefordshire, by a Captain Scudamore, of Kentchurch. He was apprized of his pursuers, but refused to abscond, saying that, in the course of nature, he must die ere long, and that it would be better for him to die for his religion. He was committed to Hereford gaol, but was cruelly and unnecessarily ordered up to London, on pretence of implication in Titus Oates's plot; and from thence sent back again to take his trial at Hereford. He was put on horseback for the journey, but his infirmities permitting him only to ride side-

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ways, he was compelled to perform the greater part of it on foot. After his return to Hereford gaol he was frequently visited by Captain Scudamore's children, whom he treated to whatever dainties were sent to him by his friends; and when asked why he so petted his captor's children, he said, it was because their father was his best friend. He suffered on the field of Wigmarsh, close by Hereford. His last words from the cart were as follows: "It will be expected I should say something; but, as I am an old man, it cannot be much. I have no concern in the plot, neither indeed do I believe that there is any. Oates and Bedloe, not being able to charge me with anything when I was brought up to London, makes it evident that I die only for professing the old Roman Catholic religion, which was the religion that first made this kingdom Christian; and, whoever intends to be saved, must die in that religion. I beg of all whom I have offended, either by thought, word, or



deed, to forgive me, as I do heartily forgive all that have been instrumental or desirous of my death." He then turned to the executioner, and said, "Honest friend Anthony, do thine office; thou wilt do me a greater kindness than discourtesy." After his death, Captain Kemble begged off his body, and buried it in the churchyard of Welsh Newton.

Mr. Roger Kemble being, like his ancestors, a Catholic, whilst his wife was a Protestant, it was arranged that their sons should be bred in the Catholic faith, and the daughters in that of their mother.\* Some of their children died

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\* LIST OF THE KEMBLE FAMILY.

ROGER KEMBLE, born in the city of Hereford, March 1, 1721. Died 1802.	Clonmell, in Ireland, September 2, 1735. Married R. Kemble, at Cirencester, 1753.
SARAH WARD, born at	Died 1806.

THEIR CHILDREN WERE

1. SARAH KEMBLE, (Mrs. Siddons,) born at Brecon, July 5, 1755. Died in London, June 8, 1831.

in infancy, but three sons and five daughters arrived at adult years. John Philip Kemble, the eldest son, was born more than a year after Mrs. Siddons, and proved ultimately

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2. JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE, born at Prescott, in Lancashire, February 1, 1757. Died at Lausanne, 1823.

3. STEPHEN KEMBLE, born at Rington, in Herefordshire, May 3, 1758. Died 1822.

4. FRANCES KEMBLE, born at Hereford, December 28, 1759. Died at Bath, in 1812.

5. ELIZABETH KEMBLE, born at Warrington, Lancashire, April 2, 1761. Alive in 1834.

6. MARY KEMBLE, born at Stratford on Avon, 1763. Died very young.

7. ANNE KEMBLE, born at Worcester, April 1764. Alive in 1834.

8. CATHERINE KEMBLE, born at Hereford, July 4, 1765. Died very young.

9. LUCY KEMBLE, born at Worcester, July 28, 1767. Died young.

10. HENRY KEMBLE, born at Leominster, December 29, 1773. Died young.

11. CHARLES KEMBLE, born at Brecon, South Wales, November, 1775. Alive in 1834.

12. JANE KEMBLE, born at Warwick, September 30, 1777. Died very young.

the greatest actor of his time on the English stage.

Roger Kemble always declared it to be his wish that his children should not follow his own vocation, and he gave the male part of them, at least, an education that might have made them independent of the stage. The sons were successively sent to the catholic seminary at Douay, a school at that time inferior to none in Europe in discipline and tuition. They proved both of them accomplished men, whose acquirements did credit to their seminary.

I have not a doubt that Mr. and Mrs. Roger Kemble were anxious to prevent their children from becoming actors, and that they sought out other means of providing for them ; but they made this attempt too late, that is, after their offspring had been accustomed to theatrical joyousness. For parents who are players themselves, it is hardly possible to keep their children

from following the same life. The conversations—the readings—the books of the family—the learning of parts—the rehearsals at home—the gaiety diffused by the getting-up of comic characters before they are acted, and the imposing dignity of tragic characters—the company—everything, indeed, which the children of play-acting parents hear and see, has a tendency to make them more prone to the stage than to any other such plodding and drudging occupations as the most of them would be otherwise destined to pursue.

Stephen Kemble accordingly, when put an apprentice to an apothecary, soon grew weary of the pestle and mortar, and attached himself to an itinerant company. He afterwards migrated to Dublin, where his brother John was beginning to establish his fame. Harris, the manager of Covent Garden, anxious to be beforehand with Drury Lane, secretly dispatched an agent thither to bring over the great Kemble.

The messenger, mistaking the large for the great brother, unfortunately engaged the former; and Stephen made his first appearance at Covent Garden, as *Othello*, in 1785. In the bills announcing that *debut*, Stephen was called Mr. Kemble. Whether or not the Covent Garden managers had already discovered their mistake, but wished to save other people from the pain of sharing it, certain it is that they got ample credit for an attempt to mystify the public, though the *debutant's* appearance, if not a triumph, was at least not a complete failure.\* This mistake of the managers produced many comic remarks, that would have

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\* In the *Morning Herald* of September, 1783, I find the following friendly notice:

“The Siddons and the Kemble were seated over the stage-box on Wednesday evening, the 24th, to see their brother Stephen Kemble’s first appearance. Nature, whose effusions have in public secured to the former an universal admiration, operated very powerfully and frequently on this occasion. The tears of sensibility stole down her cheek, and with a sister’s sympathy, spoke all the brother felt.”

been of great detriment to the tragic laurels of my friend Stephen, if his talents in the graver drama had been greater than they were. But though he was not the worst of tragedians, his forte was in comedy. He became afterwards a member of the Haymarket theatre, where he played *Sir Christopher Curry*, in "Incle and Yarico," with great applause; but he relinquished London in consequence of becoming manager at Edinburgh. There he had a long contest with Mrs. Esten, the mistress of the Duke of Hamilton, an actress of considerable celebrity, who laid claims to the management of the same theatre. She dropped them, however, for a stipulated sum. Some years afterwards Mr. Stephen Kemble removed from Edinburgh, to conduct the theatre of Newcastle-upon-Tyne; but he acted occasionally both in London and on the Scottish stage, and his *Falstaff* always drew full houses. I have seen him often act in Edinburgh in my boyish days, and, if it was the prepossession of youth and

strong personal friendship to believe him an unparalleled comedian, I would go a great way to enjoy the same illusion again. Joy comes to my heart at the recollection of his *Falstaff* and *Village Lawyer*; and the memory of the man who was pleasantness personified, touches me with still deeper feelings. His accomplished daughter married the grandson of Sir Richard Arkwright. She is the authoress of many charming musical compositions.

Frances Kemble, the sister of Mrs. Siddons next in age to herself, married Francis Twiss, esq., who is known to the public chiefly by an "Index to Shakespeare," on the plan of the Indices in the *Usum Delphini* editions of the Classics, a very useful work. Their surviving son, Mr. Horace Twiss, was lately member of parliament for Wootton Bassett, and under-secretary of state for the Home Department.

Mrs. Siddons's next sister, Elizabeth, I am


happy to say, is still alive ; and to those who knew the great actress she offers a striking and pleasing resemblance of her. She has a full share of the noble air and elocution of her departed sister, and more varied and amusing powers of conversation. Miss Elizabeth Kemble acted for some time at Drury Lane, till she married Charles Edward Whitelock, who was manager of the Theatre Royal at Newcastle-upon-Tyne. He was a descendant of the great lawyer Whitelock, and was godson to the prince commonly called the Pretender. For this Jacobitical god-name, imposed upon him by others at his baptism, it is difficult to imagine any one less responsible than the bearer himself ; and we should scarcely expect him to have been exposed to reproach for it at the end of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, the celebrated Cooke, at that time an actor in Mr. Whitelock's troop, charged him with it at a public dinner that was given to the ma-



nager at Newcastle, and declared that it was impossible for the bearer of such a god-name to be a loyal subject. The company, however, took a different view of the matter, and shewed his drunken accuser out of the room.

Mrs. Whitelock accompanied her husband in a professional expedition to America, where she acted for many years with eminent success, and realized a fortune; her popularity on the other side of the Atlantic having fairly supported a family resemblance to that of her sister at home. She played principally at Charleston and Philadelphia, and frequently before General Washington. That great man was by no means a stoic at the sight of tragedy; but he hated to be seen weeping, and always wiped the tears with his handkerchief hastily from his face. She had on one occasion other auditors, who were no less disdainful of the melting mood than Washington, and who were themselves no uninteresting a spec-

tacle, whilst they sat as spectators. This was a group of Indians, who had come from their distant wildernesses to conclude a treaty with the United States' government. They were accompanied by an interpreter, as none of them knew a word of English. They came to the theatre of Philadelphia on an appointed night, and were received with vociferous cheering. They were tall, dark, gaunt figures, in their native costume. With steady, slow steps they entered the stage-box, and, without noticing the audience, or seeming to hear their claps of welcome, they seated themselves with their eyes fixed on the stage, as if they had had but one head. All the time of the principal piece they continued thus sitting like statues, with immoveable tranquillity. But in the after-piece, an artificial elephant was introduced; and it so electrified the sons of the forest, that they all started up on a sudden with an earnest cry. Little suspecting that the imagined mammoth was a harmless structure of sticks,



and clouts, and pasteboard, with four stupid men for its legs, they demanded through their interpreter where this quadruped had been found. There had been once, they said, a great beast like this in the land of the Red Men; but it had been slain, and they were fearful that the white men had brought a second mammoth over the Big Lake in order to eat the Indians. After some time, they were appeased by an assurance that the great beast was as harmless as a squirrel, and that they should see him to-morrow by daylight. Accordingly, they were taken behind the scenes next morning, and initiated in the mysteries of its construction. An European would have laughed at the discovery, but the Red Men maintained an imperturbable gravity. They could not leave the house, however, without asking the manager for a mighty favour—namely, that they might be allowed to approach the heavenly women who had appeared on the stage last night,

and to salute them. When this was reported in the green-room, it spread dismay among the actresses; but it was represented to them that there was a general wish among the Americans to conciliate the Indians, that the popularity of the company might be injured by offending the swarthy strangers, and that their request, after all, had been made in no immodest spirit, and might be complied with without the least degradation on the part of the ladies. Some of the heavenly women, therefore, allowed a kiss to their savage admirers, who took no further liberty. Mrs. Whitelock was about to go through the same ceremony, when a fit of shyness came over her, and she shrank from the salute of the chief who came up to her. But the most polished gentleman, she said, could not have behaved with more delicate courtesy than this blanketed Indian. He put his hand to his breast, bowed respectfully, and retired.

All the Indian diplomatists, however, were not endowed with the same polite gallantry. One day, Mrs. Whitelock observed one of them eyeing and following her at a distance in the streets of Philadelphia. Her house was situated out of the town, and she had to cross an unfrequented common before she could reach it. At the suburbs there were several negroes, who were selling fruit, and she offered a dollar to any one of them who would accompany her home, and protect her from the approaching Indian. But the blacks, who are free in that part of the States, only laughed at her distress; so she had to post all alone over the common, like another Daphne, with her copper Apollo in interesting proximity behind her. At last, in a panting panic, she got home just in time to shut the gate in his face; and, before she had well recovered to tell the cause of her fright, the pursuer had disappeared. But the same evening, whilst Mr. Whitelock and she

were at supper, a crash, like the stroke of a battering-ram, was heard at the garden-gate. The Indian had burst it open by throwing a large stone against it, and her picturesque admirer was seen by moonlight deliberately walking up the avenue towards the house. Mr. Whitelock immediately took down a sabre and fire-arms, but he had no occasion to use them; for an athletic young Englishman, who lived in the house, rushed out, and repaid the intruder for his crash at the door by a stroke upon his jaw that was almost equally audible. The savage took his punishment very quietly, and, after one flooring, got up and walked back to Philadelphia.

To return to the immediate subject of these memoirs :—our great actress's birth-place was Brecon, or Brecknon, in South Wales. A friend has obligingly written to me as follows respecting the house in which Mrs. Siddons

*Brecon*

was born : “ It is a public-house in the high street of this town, which still retains its appellation, ‘The Shoulder of Mutton,’ though now entirely altered from its pristine appearance. I send you a drawing of the house, not as it is at present, but as I perfectly well remember seeing it stand, with its gable



*House in which Mrs. Siddons was born.*

front, projecting upper floors, and a rich well-fed shoulder of mutton painted over the door, offering an irresistible temptation to the sharpened appetites of the Welsh farmers, who

frequented the adjoining market-place ; especially as within doors the same, or some similar object in a more substantial shape, was always, at the accustomed hour, seen roasting at the kitchen fire, on a spit turned by a dog in a wheel, the invariable mode in all Breconian kitchens. In addition to which noontide entertainment for country guests, there was abundance of Welsh ale of the rarest quality ; and, as the ‘ Shoulder of Mutton ’ was situated in the centre of Brecon, it was much resorted to by the neighbouring inhabitants of the borough. If I am rightly informed, old Kemble was neither an unwilling nor an unwelcome member of their jolly associations. Those who remember him tell me that he was a man of respectable family, and of some small hereditary property in Herefordshire ; and that having married the daughter of a provincial manager, he received a company of strolling players for her dowry, and set up as a manager himself.”



Brecnoc, as far as I can learn, could never boast in modern times of having produced any other distinguished individuals than Mrs. Siddons and Charles Kemble; yet the place is not without its interesting historical, and even dramatic associations. It was the first ground in Wales on which the Anglo-Norman banner intruded; and the grey moss-grown cairns upon its mountains are still the acknowledged resting-places of British warriors, whose memory is preserved in the songs of the ancient language of Britain. The last prince of Brecnoc, Bleddyn, who died fighting *pro aris et focis* against the Anglo-Normans, was the descendant of Sir Caradoch Bris Bras, one of the heroes of old French romance.

In the fifteenth century, the lordship of Brecon fell into the possession of the Staffords, Dukes of Buckingham, one of whom acts a conspicuous part in Shakespeare's "Richard the Third."

*Buckingham.*

“ And is it thus repays he my deep service  
With such contempt? Made I him king for this?  
Oh! let me think on Hastings, and begone  
To Brecon whilst my fearful head is on.”

*Act IV. Sc. 2.*

It was in the castle of Brecon that Buckingham, in concert with Moreton, Bishop of Ely, plotted the rebellion in favour of Richmond.

*Catesby.*

“ Bad news, my lord: Moreton is fled to Richmond,  
And Buckingham, backed by the hardy Welshmen,  
Is in the field; and still his power increaseth.”

*Act IV. Sc. 3.*

It appears, however, that Buckingham was no great favourite with the Breconians and other Welshmen; for, after having followed him to the banks of the Severn, they left him to be taken by the adherents of Richard, who beheaded him without ceremony. The

fact of so powerful a nobleman having been so wholly abandoned by his followers, would imply that the authority of the feudal lords had not been established in Wales to the same extent as in the rest of the kingdom, and probably never existed at all much beyond the limits of the boroughs and fortified towns. Soon after, when the Earl of Richmond landed at Milford Haven, he being a Tudor and of Welsh extraction, the natives of the Principality flocked to his standard, and contributed to the victory of Bosworth.

Brecon has also furnished a character for the drama of Shakespeare, namely, that of *Sir Hugh Evans*, that "*remnant of Welsh flannel*," in "*The Merry Wives of Windsor*." He was curate of the priory of Brecon in the days of Queen Elizabeth. He died in 1581, and by a will, which is still among the records of Brecon, left a library which must have been at that time thought considerable,

*Evans*

and which bespeaks him to have been a man of reading. In the same will, he bequeaths his swash-buckler to one of his friends, and appoints Richard Price, Esq. to be overseer of his testament. The last-named gentleman was the son of Sir John Price, of the Priory,\* a great patron of Sir Hugh Evans. By the younger Price, Evans was presented, in 1572, to the living of Merthyr Cynog, and was doubtless introduced also to Shakespeare. At least so says my learned Cambrian friend; † who adds, that this Richard Price was a favourite at the court of Elizabeth; and, on the authority of the family records, is stated to have held a correspondence with Shakespeare. It is so delightful to identify anything appertaining to the poet of poets with the birth-

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\* Sir John Price is well known among the Welsh as an antiquary. He took an active part in the union of Wales with England, and is supposed to have dictated the petition of his countrymen to Henry the Eighth.

† The Rev. T. Price, of Crickhowell.

place of our heroine, that I am fain to indulge a pleasing belief in the probability of what my correspondent says further. He states "that, from the intimacy which subsisted betwixt Shakespeare and the Princes of the Priory, an idea prevails that he frequently visited them at their residence in Brecon, and that he not only availed himself of the whimsicalities of old Sir Hugh, but that he was indebted to this part of the kingdom for much of the machinery of 'Midsummer Night's Dream.' This idea is confirmed by the similarity which the frolics of *Puck* and his companions bear to the goblins and fairies of this portion of the Principality; there being in Breconshire a valley which bears his name, Cwm Pwica. Here this merry sprite is said still to practise his gambols with all the energies of the sixteenth century; and certainly, if beautiful scenery have any influence in localizing these beings, they could find few better places than the deep romantic glen of the Clydach."

In the Memoranda which she has left me, Mrs. Siddons says nothing of her juvenile days: but I remember her telling an anecdote of her infancy, which strongly illustrated her confidence in the efficacy of prayer, or rather of the Prayer Book. One day, her mother had promised to take her out the following, to a pleasure party in the neighbourhood, and she was to wear a new pink dress, which became her exceedingly. But whether the party was to hold and the pink apparel to be worn, was to depend on the weather of to-morrow morning. On going to bed, she took with her her Prayer Book, opened, as she supposed, at the prayer for fine weather, and she fell asleep with the book folded in her little arms. At daybreak she found that she had been holding the prayer for rain to her breast, and that the rain, as if Heaven had taken her at her word, was pelting at the windows. But she went to bed again, with the book opened at the right place, and

she found the mistake quite remedied; for the morning was as pink and beautiful as the dress she was to wear.

*Milton*  
*§ c. 02*  
*Milton*

I have heard her say that Milton's poetry was the object of her admiration earlier than Shakespeare's, and that when but ten years old she used to pore over "Paradise Lost" for hours together. Some portion of this Miltonic devotion may have sprung from piety more than taste; for, without disparagement to the bard of Eden be it said, that we are awed into idolatry of him by the sacredness of his subject, before we can appreciate his beauties.

Mrs. Siddons continued devoted to Milton all her life; and she was one of the most judicious critics you could hear discourse of him. No doubt, when she thought, in her latter days, of making "Paradise Lost" more popular by her readings, she miscalculated

even her own powers of recitation. The best reading can do little or nothing for great poetry that is not dramatic; and the Muse of Milton is too proud to borrow a debt from elocution.

I am unable to state the exact date of Mrs. Siddons's first appearance on the stage, but it must have been very early; for the company was offended at her appearance of childhood, and was for some time shaken with uproar. The timid *debutante* was about to retire, when her mother, with characteristic decision, led her to the front of the stage, and made her repeat the fable of the "Boys and the Frogs," which not only appeased the audience, but produced thunders of applause. At thirteen, she was the heroine in several English operas, and sang very tolerably. In the "History of Worcester," there is found the copy of a play-bill, dated Feb. 12, 1767, in which Mr. Roger Kemble

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sang



announces his company of comedians, as playing at the King's Head, in that city; with a concert of music. The play was "Charles the First," by an actor named Havard, indifferently written, and from its subject ill calculated for the universal sympathy of a British audience.\* The characters were thus cast: *James, Duke of Richmond*, by Mr. Siddons, who was now an actor in Kemble's company; *James, Duke of York*, by Master John Kemble, who was then about twelve

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\* Havard undertook the tragedy of "Charles I." at the desire of the manager of the company of Lincoln's Inn Fields, to which he then belonged, in 1737. The manager had probably read of the salutary effects produced on the genius of Euripides by seclusion in his cave, and he was determined to give Havard the same advantage in a garret during the composition of his task. He invited him to his house, took him up to one of its airiest apartments, and there locked him up for so many hours every day, well knowing his desultory habits; nor released him, after he had once turned the *clavis tragica*, till the unfortunate bard had repeated through the key-hole a certain number of new speeches in the progressive tragedy.

years old. *The Young Princess*, by Miss Kemble, then approaching to fourteen; *Lady Fairfax*, by Mrs. Kemble. *Singing between the acts*, by Mr. Fowler and Miss Kemble. In the April following, Master John Kemble is announced as *Philidel*, in "King Arthur," and Miss Kemble as *Ariel*, in "The Tempest."

Her education could not be expected, from her father's circumstances, to be very accomplished; but it included instruction both in vocal and instrumental music. Her father also remarked that she had fine natural powers of elocution, and he wished them to be cultivated by regular tuition. For this purpose, when she was about fifteen, he engaged a stranger to be her reading preceptor, who would have undertaken the office, if Mrs. Kemble had not interposed her veto. This individual was William Combe, recently known as the author of "Doctor Syntax's Adventures." This eccentric being, after mis-spend-

ing a handsome fortune, had come to Wolverhampton as a common soldier, and, after obtaining his discharge, and pecuniary relief from some friendly people in the place, had set up as a teacher of elocution. Roger Kemble had promised him a pupil in his eldest daughter, and went home to boast of the accomplished tutor he had engaged. But Mrs. Kemble more wisely determined that such an adventurer should not give lessons to her child.\*

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\* Mr. Combe's history is not less remarkable for the recklessness of his early days than for the industry of his maturer age, and the late period of life at which he attracted popularity by his talents. He was the nephew of a Mr. Alexander, an alderman of the city of London; and, as he was sent first to Eton College, and afterwards to Oxford, it may be inferred that his parents were in good circumstances. His uncle left him sixteen thousand pounds. On the acquisition of this fortune he entered himself of the Temple, and in due time was called to the bar. On one occasion he even distinguished himself before the Lord Chancellor Nottingham. But his ambition was to shine as a man of fashion, and he paid little attention to the law. Whilst at the Temple, his courtly dress, his handsome liveries, and, it may be added, his tall stature

When she was about seventeen, Mr. Siddons, who was still an actor in her father's company, paid his first attentions to her; and it was soon perceived that they were acceptable. Mr. Siddons had been bred to business

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and fine appearance, procured him the appellation of Duke Combe. Some of the most exclusive ladies of fashion had instituted a society which was called the Coterie, to which gentlemen were admitted as visitors. Among this favoured number was the Duke Combe. One evening, Lady Archer, who was a beautiful woman, but too fond of gaudy colours, and who had her face always lavishly rouged, was sitting in the Coterie, when Lord Lyttleton, the graceless son of an estimable peer, entered the room evidently intoxicated, and stood before Lady Archer for several minutes with his eyes fixed on her. The lady manifested great indignation, and asked why he thus annoyed her. "I have been thinking," said Lord Lyttleton, "what I can compare you to, in your gaudy colouring, and you give me no idea but that of a drunken peacock." The lady returned a sharp answer, on which he threw the contents of a glass of wine in her face. All was confusion in a moment; but, though several noblemen and gentlemen were present, none of them took up the cause of the insulted female till Mr. Combe came forward, and, by his resolute behaviour, obliged

in Birmingham ; but, being handsome and active, and not without versatile talents for the stage, as his range of characters extended from *Hamlet* to *Harlequin*, he acquired pro-

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the offender to withdraw. His spirited conduct on this occasion gained him much credit among the circles of fashion ; but his Grace's diminishing finances ere long put an end to the fashionableness of his acquaintance. He paid all the penalties of a spendthrift, and was steeped in poverty to the very lips. At one time he was driven for a morsel of bread to enlist as a private in the British army ; and, at another time, in a similar exigency, he went into the French service. From a more cogent motive than piety, he afterwards entered into a French monastery, and lived there till the term of his noviciate expired. He returned to Britain, and took service wherever he could get it ; but in all these dips into low life, he was never in the least embarrassed when he met with his old acquaintance. A wealthy divine, who had known him in the best London society, recognised him when a waiter at Swansea, actually tripping about with the napkin under his arm, and, staring at him, exclaimed, " You cannot be Combe ? " " Yes, indeed, but I am," was the waiter's answer. He married the mistress of a noble lord, who promised him an annuity with her, but cheated him ; and in revenge he wrote a spirited satire, entitled " The Diaboliad." Among its subjects were an Irish peer and his eldest son, who had a quarrel that

vincial popularity as an actor. The people of Brecon even took an interest in his attachment to Miss Kemble, especially at one period, when he thought himself threatened with a

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extinguished any little natural affection that might have ever subsisted between them. The father challenged the son to fight; the son refused to go out with him, not, as he expressly stated, because the challenger was his own father, but because he was *not a gentleman*.

After his first wife's death, Mr. Combe made a more creditable marriage with a sister of Mr. Cosway, the artist, and much of the distress which his imprudence entailed upon him was mitigated by the assiduities of this amiable woman. For many years he subsisted by writing for the booksellers, with a reputation that might be known to many individuals, but that certainly was not public. He wrote a work, which was generally ascribed to the good Lord Lyttleton, entitled "Letters from a Nobleman to his Son," and "Letters from an Italian Nun to an English Nobleman," that professed to be translated from Rousseau. He published also several political tracts, that were trashy, time-serving, and scurrilous. Pecuniary difficulties brought him to a permanent residence in the King's Bench, where he continued about twenty years, and for the latter part of them a voluntary inmate. One of his friends offered to effect a compromise with his creditors, but he refused the favour. "If I compounded with my creditors," said

disappointment. At this crisis, Mr. Siddons made a public statement of his case, which, though it flowed in rhyme, might possibly contain more rhyme than reason. He alleged

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Mr. Combe, "I should be obliged to sacrifice the little substance which I possess, and on which I subsist in prison. These chambers, the best in the Bench, are mine at the rent of a few shillings a week, in right of my seniority as a prisoner. My habits are become so sedentary, that if I lived in the airiest square of London, I should not walk round it once in a month. I am contented in my cheap quarters."

When he was near the age of seventy he had some literary dealings with Mr. Ackermann, the bookseller. The late caricaturist, Rowlandson, had offered to Mr. Ackermann a number of drawings, representing an old clergyman and schoolmaster, who felt, or fancied himself, in love with the fine arts, quixottically travelling during his holidays in quest of the picturesque. As the drawings needed the explanation of letter-press, Mr. Ackermann declined to purchase them unless he should find some one who could give them a poetical illustration. He carried one or two of them to Mr. Combe, who undertook the subject. The bookseller, knowing his procrastinating temper, left him but one drawing at a time, which he illustrated in verse, without knowing the subject of the drawing that was next to come. The popularity of the "Adventures of Dr. Syntax" induced

that, though he had been accepted by Miss Kemble with the approbation of her parents, they had suddenly forbidden his pretensions, on the prospect of a wealthy neighbouring squire being about to solicit her hand, and that the young lady herself had acquiesced

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Mr. Ackermann afterwards to employ him in two successive publications, "The Dance of Life," and "The Dance of Death," in England, which were also accompanied by Rowlandson's designs.

It was almost half a century before the appearance of these works that Mr. Combe so narrowly missed the honour of being Mrs. Siddons's reading master. He had exchanged the gaieties of London for quarters at a tap-room in Wolverhampton, where he was billeted as a soldier in the service of his Britannic Majesty. He had a bad foot at the time, and was limping painfully along the high street of the town, when he was met by an acquaintance who had known him in all his fashionable glory. This individual had himself seen better days, having exchanged a sub-lieutenancy of marines for a strollership in Mr. Kemble's company. "Heavens!" said the astonished histrion, "is it possible, Combe, that you can bear this condition?" "Fiddlesticks!" answered the ex-duke, taking a pinch of snuff, "a philosopher can bear anything." The player ere long introduced him to Mr. Roger Kemble; but, by



in their decision. The object of Mr. Siddons's terrors and jealousy was a Mr. Evans, of Pennant, a gentleman who, at that time, had an estate near Brecon, though he lived to consume it, and died an insolvent bachelor. It is still remembered by some survivors at

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this time, Mr. Combe had become known in the place through his conversational talents. A gentleman, passing through the public-house, had observed him reading, and, looking over his shoulder, saw with surprise a copy of Horace. "What," said he, "my friend, can you read that book in the original?" "If I cannot," replied Combe, "a great deal of money has been thrown away on my education." His landlord soon found the literary red-coat an attractive ornament to his tap-room, which was filled every night with the wondering auditors of the learned soldier. They treated him to gratuitous potations, and clubbed their money to procure his discharge. Roger Kemble gave him a benefit night at the theatre, and Combe promised to speak an address on the occasion. In this address, he noticed the various conjectures that had been circulated respecting his real name and character; and, after concluding the enumeration, he said, "Now, ladies and gentlemen, I shall tell you what I am." While expectation was all agog, he added, "*I am—ladies and gentlemen, your most obedient humble servant.*" He then bowed, and left the stage.

Brecon, that this Mr. Evans was rumoured to have fallen in love with Miss Kemble on hearing her sing an opera song, "Sweet Robin," with peculiarly fascinating effect; and people expected that he would ask her in marriage. Of the instability of Miss Kemble's affection, however, there is not the slightest proof beyond the word of a jealous lover; and, though Mr. and Mrs. Kemble might well grudge their lovely daughter to a fellow-stroller, we are not to take Mr. Siddons's song as evidence of their culpability.\* Mr.

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\* The following was the Song, sung by Mr. Siddons on this occasion, entitled "The Discarded Lover."

1.

"Ye ladies of Brecon, whose hearts ever feel  
For wrongs like to this I'm about to reveal:  
Excuse the first product, nor pass unregarded  
The complaints of poor Colin, a lover *discarded*."

2.

"When first on the shore of fair Cambria he trode,  
His devotion was paid to the blind little god,  
Whose aid and assistance each day he'd implore  
To grant him his Phyllis—he wanted no more."

Siddons proposed to his beloved an immediate elopement, who, tempering amatory with

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3.

“ No cloud seemed to threaten, each bar was removed :  
The father, though silent, with silence approved :  
The mother, at last, bestowed her assent,  
When Phyllis seemed pleased, and Colin content.

4.

“ Secure, as he thought, in a treasure so dear,  
Neither duke, lord, nor squire, had he reason to fear ;  
But, oh ! strange the reverse to all things brought about,  
For the last undersigned has poor Colin thrown out.

5.

“ Common fame, who we all are inform'd is a liar,  
Reported of late that a wealthy young squire  
Had received from the fair an invincible dart,  
And “ Robin, sweet robin,” had thrill'd thro' his heart.

6.

“ At length the report reach'd the ears of his flame,  
Whose nature he fear'd from the source whence it came ;  
She acquainted her ma'a, who, her ends to obtain,  
Determin'd poor Colin to drive from the plain.

7.

“ Not easily turn'd, she her project pursued,  
Each part of the shepherd was instantly viewed ;  
And the charms of three hundred a year, some say more,  
Made her find out a thousand she ne'er saw before.

filial duty, declined the proposal. The impatient lover then became so impetuous in his language to her parents, that he received his dismissal, for the time being, from Mr. Kemble's company as an actor. He was allowed, however, to have a benefit, and the people

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8.

“ Poor Colin, whose fame bids all slander defiance,  
Could not help being moved at their talk'd-of alliance ;  
The means so alluring, so tempting the bait,  
Thus Colin consider'd, and dreaded his fate.

9.

“ Yet still on his Phyllis his hopes were all placed,  
That her vows were so firm they could ne'er be effac'd ;  
But soon she convinced him 'twas all a mere joke,  
For duty rose up, and her vows were all broke.

10.

“ Dear ladies, avoid one indelible stain,  
Excuse me, I beg, if my verse is too plain ;  
But a jilt is the devil, as has long been confess'd,  
Which a heart like poor Colin's must ever detest.

11.

“ Now your pardon he begs, as your pity he might,  
But here 'tis confess'd you have shewn it to-night ;  
For his merits, tho' small, you have amply rewarded,  
To accept the poor thanks of a lover discarded.”

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of Brecon gave him a bumper house. At the conclusion of the play he sang the song of his own composition already mentioned, which does no remarkable credit either to his delicacy or poetical genius. But it described the pangs of his own attachment, the coldness of Miss Kemble, and the perfidy of her parents; and, indifferent as the effusion was, it was greeted by the audience with all the Welsh warmth of their hearts. Their applauses were still resounding, after his last bow, when Colin, retiring into the green-room, was met by the stately mother of Miss Kemble, who was fully prepared to avenge the honour of the family, and crowned Mr. Siddons's benefit by boxing his ears very heartily.

How the feud was healed I know not; but the event proved that Mr. Siddons was cured of his jealousy. Miss Kemble promised to marry him as soon as her father and mother's objections could be overcome. Meanwhile,

she agreed to go from home, and lived for some time under the protection of Mrs. Greatheed, of Guy's Cliff, in Warwickshire. From a surviving member of that family, I learn that she came into it in a dependant capacity; and, though she was much liked, that her great latent genius was not even suspected. It was observed, however, that she passionately admired Milton; and I have seen a copy of his works which the Greatheeds presented to her at this period. This circumstance is at variance with a rumour often repeated, I have no doubt with a charitable wish to make her early days appear as vulgar as possible, namely, that she went as a nursery-maid into the house at Guy's Cliff. Families rarely present their nursemaids with copies of Milton's poetry; and, besides, there were at that time no children to be nursed in the Greatheed family. Her station with them was humble, but not servile, and her principal employment was to read to the elder Mr. Greatheed.

The younger Mr. Greatheed at that time was, I believe, about twelve years of age. His recollections of Mrs. Siddons, and her future history, gave him an interest in our great actress that lasted for life. George Greatheed, though unsuccessful as a poet, was a most honourable and estimable man. He wrote the "Regent," an indifferent tragedy, and, having joined the *Della Crusicans*, came under the savage vituperation of Gifford. But his scathed laurels never lowered him in Mrs. Siddons's regard.

Whilst she remained at Guy's Cliff she received several visits from Mr. Siddons; and her parents, seeing that the attachment was serious, ceased to oppose it. In her nineteenth year she was united to the object of her choice, her own father giving her away. They were married at Trinity church, Coventry, November 26, 1773; and on the 4th of the October following, their eldest son, Henry, was born, at Wolverhampton.

## **CHAPTER II.**



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Mrs. Siddons acts at Cheltenham—Meets with the Hon. Miss Boyle, afterwards Lady O'Neil—Is invited by Garrick to Drury Lane—Appears as *Portia*—Has indifferent success—Is dismissed from Drury Lane by a Letter from the Prompter—Retires to the Provincial Theatres, where she is popular—Her future greatness predicted by Henderson—Is admired at Bath, and from thence recalled to Drury Lane.

## CHAPTER II.

IN the course of the year 1774, Mr. and Mrs. Siddons were both engaged to act at Cheltenham. That place, though now an opulent and considerable town, consisted in those days of only one tolerable street, through the middle of which ran a clear stream of water, with stepping-stones that served as a bridge. At that time, the Honourable Miss Boyle, the only daughter of Lord Dungarvon, a most accomplished woman, and authoress of several pleasing poems, one of which, "An Ode to the Poppy," was published by Charlotte Smith, happened to be at Cheltenham. She had come, accompanied by her

*Boyle*

mother, and her mother's second husband, the Earl of Aylesbury. One morning that she and some other fashionables went to the box-keeper's office, they were told that the tragedy to be performed that evening was "Venice Preserved." They all laughed heartily, and promised themselves a treat of the ludicrous, in the misrepresentation of the piece. Some one who overheard their mirth kindly reported it to Mrs. Siddons. She had the part of *Belvidera* allotted to her, and prepared for the performance of it with no very enviable feelings. It may be doubted indeed whether Otway had imagined in *Belvidera* a personage more to be pitied than her representative now thought herself. The rabble, in "Venice Preserved," showed compassion for the heroine, and, when they saw her feather-bed put up to auction, "*governed their roaring throats, and grumbled pity.*" But our actress anticipated refined scorers, more pitiless than the rabble: and the prospect was certainly calculated to pre-

pare her more for the madness than the dignity of her part. In spite of much agitation, however, she got through it. About the middle of the piece she heard some unusual and apparently suppressed noises, and therefore concluded that the fashionables were in the full enjoyment of their anticipated amusement, tittering and laughing, as she thought, with unmerciful derision. She went home, after the play, grievously mortified. Next day, however, Mr. Siddons met in the street with Lord Aylesbury, who inquired after Mrs. Siddons's health, and expressed not only his own admiration of her last night's exquisite acting, but related its effects on the ladies of his party. They had wept, he said, so excessively, that they were unpresentable in the morning, and were confined to their rooms with headaches. Mr. Siddons hastened home to gladden his fair spouse with this intelligence. Miss Boyle soon afterwards visited Mrs. Siddons at her lodgings, took the deepest interest in her for-

} L. M.

tunes, and continued her ardent friend till her death. She married Lord O'Neil, of Shane's Castle, in Ireland. It is no wonder that Mrs. Siddons dwells with tenderness in her Memoranda on the name of this earliest encourager of her genius. Miss Boyle was a beauty of the first order, and gifted with a similar mind, as her poetry, and her patronage of the hitherto unnoticed actress, evince; though patronage is too cold a word for the friendship which she bestowed on so interesting an object. Though the powers of the latter were by her own confession still crude, yet her noble young friend consoled and cheered her; and, with the prophetic eye of taste, foresaw her glory. Miss Boyle took upon her the direction of her wardrobe, enriched it from her own, and made many of her dresses with her own hands.

Mrs. Siddons continues thus in her Autograph Recollections: "Mr. King, by order of Mr. Garrick, who had heard some account of

*Garrick*

me from the Aylesbury family, came to Cheltenham to see me in the "Fair Penitent." I knew neither Mr. King nor his purpose; but I shortly afterwards received an invitation from Garrick himself, upon very low terms. Happy to be placed where I presumptuously augured that I should do all that I have since achieved, if I could but once gain the opportunity, I instantly paid my respects to the great man. I was at that time good-looking; and certainly, all things considered, an actress well worth my poor five pounds a week. His praises were most liberally conferred upon me; but his attentions, great and unremitting as they were, ended in worse than nothing.— How was all this admiration to be accounted for, consistently with his subsequent conduct? Why, thus, I believe: He was retiring from the Management of Drury Lane, and, I suppose, at that time wished to wash his hands of all its concerns and details. I moreover had served what I believe was his chief object in

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the exaltation of poor me,—and that was, the mortification and irritation of Mrs. Yates and Miss Younge, whose consequence and troublesome airs were, it must be confessed, enough to try his patience. As he had now almost withdrawn from it, the interests of the Theatre grew, I suppose, rather indifferent to him. However that may have been, he always objected to my appearance in any very prominent character, telling me that the fore-named ladies would poison me, if I did. I of course thought him not only an oracle, but my friend; and, in consequence of his advice, *Portia*, in the “*Merchant of Venice*,” was fixed upon for my *debut*; a character in which it was not likely that I should excite any great sensation—*I was, therefore, merely tolerated*. The fulsome adulation that courted Garrick in the Theatre cannot be imagined; and whosoever was the luckless wight who should be honoured by his distinguished and envied smiles, of course, became an object of spite

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and malevolence. Little did I imagine that I myself was now that wretched victim. He would sometimes hand me from my own seat in the green-room, to place me next to his own. He also selected me to personate *Venus*, at the revival of the "Jubilee." This gained me the malicious appellation of Garrick's *Venus*; and the ladies who so kindly bestowed it on me rushed before me in the last scene, so that if he (Mr. Garrick) had not brought us forward with him with his own hands, my little Cupid\* and myself, whose appointed situations were in the very front of the stage, might have as well been in the Island of Paphos at that moment. Mr. Garrick would also flatter me, by sending me into one of the boxes, when he acted any of his great characters. In short,

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\* This little Cupid was the subsequent autobiographer, Thomas Dibdin. He told me that, as it was necessary for him to smile in the part of his godship, Mrs. Siddons kept him in humour by asking him what sort of sugar-plums he liked best, and promising him a large supply of them. After the performance she kept her word.



his attentions were enough to turn an older and wiser head. He promised Mr. Siddons to procure me a good engagement with the new Managers, and desired him to give himself no trouble about the matter, but to put my cause entirely into his hands. He let me down, however, after all these protestations, in the most humiliating manner; and, instead of doing me common justice with those gentlemen, rather depreciated my talents. This Mr. Sheridan afterwards told me; and said that, when Mrs. Abingdon heard of my impending dismissal, she told them they were all acting like fools. When the London season was over, I made an engagement at Birmingham, for the ensuing summer, little doubting of my return to Drury Lane for the next winter; but, whilst I was fulfilling my engagement at Birmingham, to my utter dismay and astonishment, I received an official letter from the Prompter of Drury Lane, acquainting me that my services would be no longer required. It was a stunning and cruel blow, overwhelming all my ambitious

hopes, and involving peril, even to the subsistence of my helpless babes.\* It was very near destroying me. My blighted prospects indeed, induced a state of mind that preyed upon my health, and for a year and a half I was supposed to be hastening to a decline. For the sake of my poor children, however, I roused myself to shake off this despondency, and my endeavours were blest with success, in spite of the degradation I had suffered in being banished from Drury Lane, as a worthless candidate for fame and fortune."

These sentences, which were penned by Mrs. Siddons in her advanced age, shew that neither a long lifetime, nor most forgiving habits of mind, had effaced the poignant feelings which this transaction had inflicted on her; and those who knew her best will have the most implicit

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\* Her eldest daughter, Sarah Martha, was born at Gloucester, Nov. 5, 1775, within two months before Mrs Siddons's first appearance in London.

or. S/ belief in her veracity. Her statement, however, I think, shews that Garrick behaved to her rather like a man of the world than with absolute treachery. One traces in his conduct more of that thoughtlessness which the French call "*une heureuse légèreté*," than of any bad meaning. It is utterly improbable that he was ever jealous of her genius, or that he sought to keep it back from popularity, for fear of its eclipsing his own. At that time she had not risen (at least in the common opinion,) to rivalry with players far inferior to Garrick. His culpability, in failing to keep his promise to Mrs. Siddons as to her engagement, cannot be very definitely measured. In leaving so complicated a concern as Drury Lane, he might be obliged to sacrifice his influence. For the fact of his having depreciated her talents to the Managers, we have only the testimony of Sheridan, who probably found her mind irritated on the subject, and was a man much disposed to say to a beautiful woman whatever

was likely to fall in with her prevailing mood. When Garrick ceased to be the Manager of Drury Lane, he ceased to have the power of dictating engagements. Still it were to be wished that he had left the affair explained.

Mr. Boaden, in his Life of our great actress, asserts, that some years previous to her *debut* on the London boards, she made a private application to Garrick, as Manager of Drury Lane, soliciting first his judgment, and secondly his protection. She repeated, according to Mr. Boaden, some of the speeches of "Jane Shore" before the Manager. "He seemed highly pleased with her elocution and deportment, wondered how she could have got rid of the provincial ti-tum-ti, but regretted he could do nothing for her, and wished her a good morning."

I have strong doubts with regard to this anecdote. The scene of it is laid in Lon-

don; and I have heard Mrs. Siddons herself say, that she never was in London before her invitation from Garrick, in 1775. At the time alleged, she was in the family of the Greatheeds, and the surviving members of that family have no recollection either of Mrs. Siddons's having left them, or of their having removed from Guy's Cliff, during her abode with them.

It was on Friday, the 29th of December, 1775, that Mrs. Siddons made her first appearance on the London boards, in the character of *Portia*, in the "Merchant of Venice." She was announced merely as a young lady, whose performances had met with great applause. The part of *Portia* was manifestly too gay for Mrs. Siddons under the appalling ordeal of a first appearance in London. She played it to be sure many years afterwards with very fair success; but that was when her triumphs had given her strength. The nobleness of her form,

and the energy of her acting made her appear constitutionally strong; but she was far from being so, and her nerves were of the most delicate texture. By looking at the note appended to page 63, it will be seen that her health could not *now* be very robust. She had thus to throw the first die for her fame in a sprightly and half-comic part, under disadvantages both physical and moral.

The great obstacle to the early development of her powers, I have heard Mrs. Siddons declare, was timidity. The following critique on her first appearance at Drury Lane will exemplify the truth of this acknowledgment, though it equally convicts the vile newspaper critic of insensibility to the real cause of her failure in the part. The scribbler acknowledges that she delivered the great speech to *Shylock* with the most critical propriety, though he had not the charity to ascribe her tremulous tones to diffidence, the most par-

donable of all faults, because the most indicative of sensibility. In describing her appearance, the newsman says, "On before us tottered rather than walked, a very pretty, delicate, fragile-looking young creature, dressed in a most unbecoming manner, in a faded salmon-coloured sack and coat, and uncertain whereabouts to fix either her eyes or her feet. She spoke in a broken tremulous tone; and at the close of a sentence her words generally lapsed into a horrid whisper, that was absolutely inaudible. After her first exit, the buzzing comment went round the pit generally. She certainly is very pretty, but then how awkward, and what a shocking dresser! Towards the famous Trial-scene, she became more collected, and delivered the great speech to *Shylock with the most critical propriety*, but still with a faintness of utterance which seemed the result rather of internal physical weakness than of a deficiency of spirit or feeling. Altogether, the impression made upon the audi-

ence by this first effort was of the most negative nature."

She repeated the character of *Portia* a few nights afterwards, but with no greater effect. She then waited until the 13th of January, 1776, for one of the ladies collegiate, in Ben Jonson's "Epicœne," which had been restored to the stage by Colman.

Soon after, in the same season, she acted a part, of trifling moment, in an opera, called *Bate* "The Blackamoor Washed White." The author of this opera, Henry Bate, was a clergyman, who had a living near Chelmsford, in Essex. He produced "Henry and Emma," an interlude, which was acted at Covent Garden in 1774; and "The Rival Candidates," a comic opera, which came out at Drury Lane, with approbation; but his third piece, in which Mrs. Siddons performed, was coldly received, lived only three nights, and was never printed.



On the 17th of February, 1776, Mrs. Siddons performed in Mrs. Cowley's comedy of "The Runaway," which was acted for seventeen nights consecutively. The "Runaway" is not the best of Mrs. Cowley's comedies; but it is by no means contemptible. Her "Belle's Stratagem" is her *chef d'œuvre*; and I would recommend to those who despise her as a *Della Cruscan* poetess to read that comedy. A recognition of her merits as a comic writer is the more due to her, that they were forgotten by the world in her latter years, when the author of the "Baviad" and "Mæviad" lashed her under her assumed name of Anna Matilda. I must acknowledge, to be sure, that nothing but sheer infatuation can account for the authoress of the "Belle's Stratagem" having obscured a fair reputation by printing cartloads of *Della Cruscan* rhymes. As a matter of taste, she deserved admonition: but her sex and her services to literature ought to have screened her from gross vituperation. Gifford abused his power.

The public were thankful to him for writing down such nuisances as Williams, the self-styled Anthony Pasquin, an impudent fellow to whom many of the artists and players of London actually paid *black mail*, in order to be saved from his scurrility. This was performing a public duty. But he was too savage on the tinsel school; for the feeble *Della Cruscan* would have died without a public execution. Besides, it would have been but justice on the part of Gifford to have blended his censure of Mrs. Cowley's *Della Cruscanism* with a full acknowledgment of her better works.\* At this

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\* I never saw this authoress but once, and that was some thirty years ago, in a bookseller's shop. An old lady came in, who, I was told, was the Della Cruscan Anna Matilda. She inquired about the sale of her last poem, "The Siege of Acre." I have since learnt that she was at that time in good circumstances, and cherished by many friends; but, either from my fancy picturing the prints of Gifford's satire in her furrowed countenance, or that she was in uncommonly bad spirits, she seemed to me the most forlorn being I had

time, when Mrs. Siddons acted in the "Run-away," Miss Younge was the great magnet in comedy. Yet the part allotted to Mrs. Siddons bespeaks no intention of keeping her back from public attention. On the contrary, whilst Miss Younge in the piece acted *Bella*, whose fortune is rather in the side-plot, Mrs. Siddons appeared as *Emily*, the lovely fugitive, who may be called the heroine of the play. The part is tender and dignified, and was peculiarly suited to the beauty of Mrs. Siddons. But the comedy, though in some respects pleasant, fails to concentrate much interest in the principal charac-

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ever seen. When the bookseller told her that he had sold only fifteen copies of her "Siege of Acre," her chagrin was manifest. After she was gone, the biblioplist informed us that he had actually disposed of only three copies, but could not find in his heart to mortify her with the strict truth. I was told, however, that Mrs. Cowley had written the "Belle's Stratagem." I went home, and read it; and *Letitia Hardy* cured me of my contemptuous compassion for an excellent comic authoress.

ter. In one of the last scenes, the heroine's distress consists in being accused of having been a strolling player, a somewhat mortifying part for our young actress to personate. Mrs. Siddons, according to Mr. Boaden, was to sound the very bass-string of humility, by performing in a farce, by T. Vaughan, called "Love's Metamorphoses;" but Mr. Boaden seems to have condemned the piece without having read it, for he gives it not even its real title, which is "Love's Vagaries," not "Metamorphoses," and it is very passable. The author was Clerk of the Peace for Westminster. He is canonized in the "Rosciad," by the name of Dapper.

Garrick was now about to leave the stage, and was determined to leave the parting impression of his *comic* excellence by playing his favorite character of *Ranger*, in "The Suspicious Husband." To Mrs. Siddons he allotted the part of *Mrs. Strickland*; and, as far as

beauty could give attraction in comedy, no one could better represent the young and lovely wife. On this occasion Mrs. Siddons's type was enlarged on the bills of the play, and she had a whole line to herself—"Mrs. Strickland, Mrs. Siddons." Hitherto she had played no part that was strictly tragic on the London boards, but Garrick now revived "Richard III.," which had been discontinued for several years, and he assigned the part of *Lady Anne* to our actress. She here met Roscius in all his terrors.—Garrick's acting that night must have been startling. From what his cotemporaries have said of it, we may guess that his impressiveness bordered upon excess. He made the galleries often laugh when he intended that they should shudder. By his force, approaching to wildness, and the fire of his eyes, he dismayed the young actress. He had directed her, in speaking to him, always to turn her back to the audience, in order that he might keep his own face towards them; and her forgetfulness

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of this direction was punished by Garrick with a glance of displeasure, that unnerved her powers. Of this performance the following account is given, in the theatrical report of "The London Magazine" for May, 1776. After declaring that Garrick's appearance beggared all description, the writer adds: "As to most of the other characters, particularly the female ones, they were wretchedly performed. Mrs. Hopkins was an ungracious *Queen*, Mrs. Johnston a frightful *Duchess*, and Mrs. Siddons, a lamentable *Lady Anne*."

A week afterwards she had an opportunity to attempt reinstating herself in Garrick's good graces, as "Richard III." was again performed, by command of their Majesties, on the 5th of June. Whether she succeeded or not, I know not; but Garrick closed his own brilliant career five days afterwards, and left Mrs. Siddons to receive from the Managers a dismissal, to which, if he had not prospec-

tively consented, he had at least offered no opposition.

Altogether, though this first failure of the greatest of actresses evinces nothing like positive or acute discernment in the public taste; and though the criticism which I have quoted was most heartlessly uncandid; yet I am not prepared to blame her audiences implicitly for wilful blindness to her merit. By her own confession, she was infirm in her health, and fearfully nervous. It is true she was the identical Mrs. Siddons who, a year afterwards, electrified the provincial theatres, and who, in 1782, eclipsed all rivalship whatsoever: but it does not follow that she was *the identical actress*. Her case adds but one to the many instances in the history of great actors and orators, of timidity obscuring the brightest powers at their outset; like chilling vapours awhile retarding the beauty of a day in spring. But the day of her fame, when it rose, well repaid her for the

lateness of its rising, and its splendour more than atoned for its morning shade: indeed, it renders her history more interesting by the contrast.\*

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\* It is remarkable, that Mrs. Elizabeth Barry, the greatest of Mrs. Siddons's stage predecessors, and Mrs. Oldfield, the most beautiful, were both, like herself, unsuccessful *debutantes*. "The fame," says Colley Cibber, "to which Mrs. Barry arrived is a particular proof of the difficulty there is of judging with certainty, from their first trials, whether young people will ever make any great figure on a theatre. There was, it seems, so little hope of her at her first setting out, that she was, at the end of the first year, discharged the company. I take it for granted, that the objection to Mrs. Barry must have been a defective ear, or some unskilful dissonance in her manner of pronouncing; but where there is a proper voice and person, with the addition of a good understanding, experience tells us that such a defect is not always invincible, of which both Mrs. Barry and the late Mrs. Oldfield are eminent instances. Mrs. Oldfield had been a year in the Theatre Royal before she gave any tolerable hope of her being an actress, so unlike to all manner of propriety was her speaking." *How unaccountably then does a genius for the stage make its way towards perfection.*



In her Autograph Memoranda, she says that, after her dismissal by letter from the Prompter of Drury Lane, she made an engagement at Bath. I imagine she means, that her first important engagement was at Bath, for I find that her first performance, after she quitted London, was at Birmingham; and there, whilst she had an engagement for the whole summer season of 1776, she was allowed the highest characters. It was there that she acted with Henderson, who was so struck by her merits, that he wrote immediately to Palmer, the Manager of the Bath Theatre, urging him in the strongest terms to engage her. The Bath Manager could not for the present engage her, but he kept Henderson's advice in his mind.

Early in the year 1777 Mrs. Siddons played at Manchester, and became there so celebrated that her fame brought her an invitation to York. By this time her range of characters was considerable, though it included none of

the great females of Shakespeare. She excelled in *Euphrasia* ("The Grecian Daughter"), *Alicia* ("Jane Shore"), *Rosalind* ("As You Like It"), and *Matilda* (in "Douglas"). She was even acceptable as *Lady Townley*. At Manchester, one of her most applauded characters was *Hamlet*, which she performed many years afterwards in Dublin, though she could never be prevailed upon to play it in London. *Hamlet*

At York, she was engaged from Easter to Whitsuntide, in 1777; and, on the 15th of April, played the *Grecian Daughter*. Tate Wilkinson, who acted with her, as *Evander*, says, in his *Memoirs*, that though he saw in her every other requisite for great acting, he trembled for fear her wretched health should disable her from sustaining the fatigues of her duty. She had at York at first to encounter some disparagers, among whom, the leading critic of the place, a Mr. Swan, was the most noisy. But she had only performed a few

times when all the Yorkists knelt at her shrine, and the swan himself waddled forward to bow his neck in admiration.

“I never remember,” says Wilkinson, “any actress to have been so great a favorite at York as Mrs. Siddons was during that short time. All lifted up their eyes with astonishment, that such a voice, such a judgment, and such acting, should have been neglected by a London audience, and by the first actor in the world.” In the meantime, Henderson’s advice had not slept in Palmer’s ear, and he invited her to Bath, where she consummated the reputation that brought her in triumph to the London boards. “I now made an engagement at Bath,” she says, in her Memoranda: “there my talents and industry were encouraged by the greatest indulgence, and, I may say, with some admiration. Tragedies, which had been almost banished, again resumed their proper interest; but still I had the mortification of being obliged to

personate many subordinate characters in comedy, the first being, by contract, in the possession of another lady. To this I was obliged to submit, or to forfeit a part of my salary, which was only three pounds a week. Tragedies £3.0.0 were now becoming more and more fashionable. This was favorable to my cast of powers; and, whilst I laboured hard, I began to earn a distinct and flattering reputation. Hard labour indeed it was; for, after the rehearsal at Bath, and on a Monday morning, I had to go and act at Bristol on the evening of the same day; and reaching Bath again, after a drive of twelve miles, I was obliged to represent some fatiguing part there on the Tuesday evening. Meantime, I was gaining private friends, as well as public favour; and my industry and perseverance were indefatigable. When I recollect all this labour of mind and body, I wonder that I had strength and courage to support it, interrupted as I was by the cares of a mother, and by the childish sports of my little ones, who were often most

unwillingly hushed to silence, for interrupting their mother's studies."

During her residence at Bath, July 1, 1779, she gave birth to her second daughter, Maria.

"I remained at Bath," she continues, "about three years, during which time Mr. Henderson came there to act for a few nights. He was most kindly encouraging to me, and, on his return to London, spoke of me most favourably. I acted *Beatrice* with his *Benedick*, and he commended my efforts even in comdey. He was a fine actor, with no great personal advantages indeed; but he was the soul of feeling and intelligence."

Henderson's name has a right to a place in Mrs. Siddons's biography. Within a year after her expulsion from Drury Lane, he pronounced that "*she was an actress who never had had an equal, nor would ever have a superior.*" He

was the only great player of his time who did her early justice; and if we had nothing more than this to inscribe on his tomb, it would be no ignoble epitaph.

John Henderson was the son of an Irish factor, in London, and was born in Cheapside, 1746. His father died whilst he was a child, and left his widowed mother with something less than 1000*l.* to support him and two other children. With these slender means she retired to Newport Pagnell, and in that place Henderson, with no other teacher than his mother, passed the first ten years of his life. She taught him to read, she put the English poets into his hands, and was rewarded by hearing him recite them with the instinctive grace of enthusiasm. Shakespeare enraptured his boyish imagination. In his passion for the drama he could not be said to have been stage-struck; for he longed and pined to see a play of Shakespeare's acted before he had seen an actor

or a stage, there being at that time not even strollers at Newport Pagnell.

At eleven years of age he went to a school at Hemel Hempstead, where, within little more than a year, he acquired some knowledge of French, and learnt the common rules of arithmetic, besides a little Latin. He owns that he never made a regular study of English grammar. If we were all honest, the confession would not seem singular.

From thence he went to London; and, having shown an early propensity to drawing, he was placed as a house-pupil with a drawing-master, of the name of Fournier. But in that artist's employ he was ill-used, and had few opportunities of studying his art. Nevertheless, during his stay with Fournier, he made a pen-and-ink drawing of a Fisherman smoking his pipe, which gained him a premium from the Society for the Encouragement of Art.

Leaving this master, he went to live with a Mr. Cripps, a working silversmith, in St. James's street; but the death of this employer left him at twenty years of age upon the world, with few connexions, and with no determinate pursuit. In these circumstances he betook himself to his powers of elocution, and gained considerable popularity by public readings in London. Garrick recommended him to Palmer, at Bath, who gave him an engagement at the theatre there; and he soon became so distinguished as to be called the Bath Roscius. From thence, and to requite him for many mortifying rebuffs from the London managers, he might be said to have come, in despite of them, into the Haymarket and Drury Lane Theatres; and, for several years after Garrick's retirement, he was regarded as the first actor on the English stage. He died in 1785, with a distinguished public and an amiable private reputation.



Mr. Galt, in his "*Lives of the Players*," has made, in my opinion, a harsh and false estimate of his character as an actor. "The elder Colman," says Mr. Galt, "objected to the style in which Henderson sometimes dressed himself, and condemned his costume, in *Shylock*, as too shabby.—Foote said of him, that '*he would not do*;' and Garrick's contempt of him amounted to personal enmity.—All this," says Mr. Galt, "serves to confirm the idea that he was not so extraordinary a man as his friends represented." With a little explanation, however, all this leads to no such conclusion. Colman's objection to his dress in *Shylock* was never confirmed by public opinion. On the contrary, according to tradition, Henderson was the happiest of all the actors of that part. Boaden observes, with great felicity of expression, that "the power of Henderson, as an actor, was analytic. He was not contented with the mere light of common meaning. He showed it you through a prism,

and reflected all the delicate and mingling hues that enter into the composition of any ray of human character. Besides, he had a voice so flexible, that his tones conveyed all that his meaning would insinuate." This is the testimony of an ear and eye witness, and it surely outweighs the assertion of Mr. Galt, who never saw him, that "*Henderson was a mere mimic.*" That he had great powers of mimicry, is certain; but what great comic actor was ever without them? Garrick himself delighted in imitating the gobbling of a turkey-cock.

Foote said of Henderson, that "*he would not do.*" Yes; but it was before he had seen him on the stage. When he had seen him, he spoke of him as an actor of genius.

Garrick's contempt of Henderson, according to Galt, approached to personal enmity. But, in the first place, contempt and enmity cannot very well exist together; and, in the next place,

Garrick could have no contempt for Henderson, or else he would never have invited him from Bath to London. As to Garrick's enmity, it arose from Henderson's refusing his invitation to Drury Lane, and complying with the little Manager's request to take him off before his face. Garrick had chuckled at Henderson's mimicry of all the other eminent players, and at last entreated to be taken off himself; but he sulked at the imitation, and never forgave it.

Professor Dugald Stewart, who knew Henderson, told me that his power of memory was the most astonishing he had ever met with. In the philosopher's presence he took up a newspaper, and, after reading it once, repeated such a portion of it as to Mr. Stewart seemed utterly marvellous. When he expressed his surprise, Henderson modestly replied, "If you had been obliged, like me, to depend, during many years, for your daily bread, on getting words by heart,

you would not be so much astonished at habit having produced this facility."

"In the summer of 1782," Mrs. Siddons thus continues her Memoranda, "I received an invitation to re-visit Drury Lane. After my former dismissal from thence, it may be imagined that this was to me a triumphant moment. My good reception in London I cannot but partly attribute to the enthusiastic accounts of me which the amiable Duchess of Devonshire had brought thither, and spread before my arrival. I had the honour of her acquaintance during her visit at Bath, and her unqualified approbation at my performances."

1782

Mrs. Siddons says she was truly touched at the thought of parting from her kind friends at Bath. She took leave of them in the following lines of her own composition.

MRS. SIDDONS'S ADDRESS ON QUITTING THE  
BATH THEATRE.

HAVE I not raised some expectation here?—  
Wrote by herself?—What! authoress and player?—  
True, we have heard her,—thus I guess'd you'd say,  
With decency recite another's lay;  
But never heard, nor ever could we dream  
Herself had sipp'd the Heliconian stream.  
Perhaps you farther said—Excuse me, pray,  
For thus supposing all that you might say,  
What will she treat of in this same address?  
Is it to shew her learning?—Can you guess?  
Here let me answer—No: far different views  
Possess'd my soul, and fired my virgin Muse;  
'Twas honest gratitude, at whose request  
Shamed be the heart that will not do its best.  
The time draws nigh when I must bid adieu  
To this delightful spot—nay, ev'n to you—  
To you, whose fost'ring kindness rear'd my name,  
O'erlooked my faults, but magnified my fame.  
How shall I bear the parting? Well I know  
Anticipation here is daily woe.

Oh ! could kind Fortune, where I next am thrown,  
 Bestow but half the candour you have shewn.  
 Envy, o'ercome, will hurl her pointless dart,  
 And critic gall be shed without its smart ;  
 The numerous doubts and fears I entertain,  
 Be idle all—as all possess'd in vain.—  
 But to my promise. If I thus am bless'd,  
 In friendship link'd, beyond my worth caress'd,—  
 Why don't I here, you'll say, content remain,  
 Nor seek uncertainties for certain gain ?  
 What can compensate for the risks you run,  
 And what your reasons?—Surely you have none.  
 To argue here would but your time abuse :  
 I keep my word—my reason I produce—

[*Here three children were discovered: they were  
 HENRY, SALLY, and MARIA SIDDONS.*]

These are the moles that bear me from your side,  
 Where I was rooted—where I could have died.  
 Stand forth, ye elves, and plead your mother's cause :  
 Ye little magnets, whose soft influence draws  
 Me from a point where every gentle breeze  
 Wafted my bark to happiness and ease—  
 Sends me adventurous on a larger main,  
 In hopes that you may profit by my gain.

Have I been hasty?—am I then to blame?  
Answer, all ye who own a parent's name?  
Thus have I tired you with an untaught Muse,  
Who for your favor still most humbly sues,  
That you, for classic learning, will receive  
My soul's best wishes, which I freely give—  
For polished periods round, and touched with art,—  
The fervent offering of my grateful heart.

1782 Mrs. Siddons returned to Drury Lane Theatre in 1782, and may be said to have mounted with but a few steps to unrivalled possession of the tragic throne. The oldest praisers of the by-gone time scarcely pretended to have beheld or heard of her superior in acting, though they had seen the best actresses of the century, and had heard their fathers describe those of the age before.

When I entered on the Life of Mrs. Siddons, I felt curious to ascertain the traditional characters of those women who may be called her predecessors as the Queens of

our Tragic stage; and, when any subject engages our own interest, we naturally imagine that it will not be wholly unattractive to the curiosity of others. I even felt as if there would be something like abruptness in commencing the history of her professional supremacy without some prefatory remarks on the previous state of Female acting in England. This was perhaps taking an exaggerated view of the subject. But, at all events, as my retrospect of our greatest tragic actresses, anterior to Mrs. Siddons, will be brief, I hope the reader will not repudiate it as a wholly uninteresting digression.

It is true, that all the information to be gleaned respecting those elder actresses is very scanty; and it is the misfortune of histrionic genius that the most vivid portraits of it convey but vague conceptions of its excellence. And yet, amidst all this vagueness, the mind can make out some general and trustworthy



conclusions. I find, for instance, no Queen of our stage so unequivocally extolled for majesty and beauty of person as Mrs. Siddons: nor any one whose sway over her audiences can be imagined to have been stronger. My inference is, if I may parody Milton's phrase, that she was the fairest of her predecessors—and that if Time could re-build his ruins, and re-act the lost scenes of existence, he would present no female to match her on the Tragic stage.

## **CHAPTER III.**

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First introduction of Females on the English Stage—  
Names and Characters of Mrs. Siddons's greatest Pre-  
decessors—Mrs. Betterton—Mrs. Anne Marshall—  
Mrs. Boutell—Mrs. Barry—Mrs. Bracegirdle—Mrs.  
Oldfield—Mrs. Porter—Mrs. Cibber—Mrs. Pritchard  
—Mrs. Yates—Mrs. Crawford.

### CHAPTER III.

UNTIL the time of Charles the Second, there were no women actors in our Theatres. Female characters were performed by boys, or young men. Even after the Restoration, *this custom* was not all at once discontinued; and we hear of Kynaston, the last beautiful youth who figured in petticoats on the stage, having been carried about in his theatrical dress by ladies of fashion in their carriages. This was an unseemly spectacle, and we can forgive the Puritans for objecting to see "*men in women's clothing.*" But, against this impropriety, the Puritans ought to have appealed to common sense and decency, instead of quoting a text from the Book of Deuteronomy, which forbids

the appearance of men in female attire: for, though it is true that the Jewish law has interdicted the assumption of women's dress by men, yet it should be remembered that the Levitical law is not binding upon Christians.

The restorers of our theatres, without troubling themselves about the Puritans, followed the custom of the continent, in bringing women upon the stage, putting a stop to the impersonation of queens and heroines by the creatures, who had sometimes to be shaved before they acted. Yet this admission of women among the players, though a great natural improvement, occurred in times and circumstances that made it appear at first rather an unfavourable change for the moral character of the stage. Since the death of Shakespeare, and during the latter part of James's reign, the Drama had grown more and more licentious. The speeches which stage-heroines had to hear and utter were

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so gross, that the Puritans pronounced it impossible for any woman who was not a courtesan to tread the boards; and Charles the Second, who had re-opened the theatres, and was effectively the manager of one of them, seemed as if he strove for a wager to make good the words of the Puritans. Considering the profligacy of the age, it is more wonderful that a few actresses, and these the best, were unexceptionable private characters, than that the stage gave its contingency to Charles's seraglio.\*

Though, even in those times, the lives of Mrs. Betterton and other actresses belied the

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\* Among Charles's mistresses, his "Loves of the Theatre" were the least expensive and unpopular. Nell Gwynne, it is true, had 1500*l.* a year; but the Duchess of Cleveland had 4700*l.*: the Duchess of Portsmouth had still more. The latter were hated by the whole nation; while Nelly, who was called the "Poor Man's Friend," was literally a general favourite, and not undeservedly: for, bred as she had been, as an orange-girl,

puritanic assertion, that no modest woman could tread the boards, still modern civilization has robbed the Puritans of the strongest objection which they could allege against the Theatre, namely, the grossness of its language ; so that the most delicate female need not now shrink from the profession on that account. At

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amidst the haunts of dissipation, vice was more her des-  
tiny than her blame. She was really a good-hearted woman, and, in the days of her prosperity, showed herself grateful to her old friends ; among whom she had the honour of ranking Otway and Dryden. She was faith-  
ful to the King, never pestered him about politics, and was never the creature of Ministers. Once, when Charles had ordered an extravagant service of plate, as a present to the Duchess of Portsmouth, from a jeweller in Cheapside, an immense crowd collected about the shop, cursing the Duchess, and wishing that the plate were melted and poured down her throat. But they added, "What a pity it should not be bestowed on Madam Ellen !"

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Nell was often successful in throwing ridicule on her rival, the Duchess of Portsmouth, originally Mlle. Querouaille. She pretended to be related to the best families of France ; and, whenever one of their members died, she put herself into mourning. It happened that news

present, after so many women, who have been patterns of their sex, have been actresses, it may be safely affirmed, that a young *débutante*, ambitious of first-rate rank as an actress, would find the greatest talents scarcely available without personal respectability of character. Still there are persons, not puritanical, who think it

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of the Cham of Tartary's death had lately reached England. A Prince of France was also recently dead, and the Duchess of Portsmouth was of course in sables. Nell came to Court in the same attire, and, standing close by her Grace, was asked by one of her friends, why she was in mourning? "O!" said Nell, "have you not heard of my loss, in the death of the Cham of Tartary?" "And what the deuse," replied her friend, "was the Cham of Tartary to you?" "Oh," answered Nell, "exactly the same relation that the Prince of — was to Mlle. Querouaille."

The mistaken tradition of Ellen Gwynne having founded Chelsea Hospital probably arose from her character for benevolence, as well as from her frequently visiting Chelsea, where her mother lived many years, and where the old woman died, in consequence of falling one day into the Thames, when looking out of her window. What had made her top-heavy is not recorded.

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Chelsea



derogatory to female delicacy to meet the gaze of spectators in impassioned parts. This objection, I grant, may apply to private theatricals. The unprofessional actress, who makes and returns love-speeches before an audience, is likely to have no better motive than her vanity. But the public actress has a fair apology, and her professional publicity is an additional challenge to her virtuous pride.

We sometimes hear the player's vocation pronounced degrading, because it exposes him to public insults; but this is certainly a most unfair argument, at least when it comes from those who frequent the Theatre. By attending such entertainments, they recognise the player as a dispenser of innocent amusement; and, when they insult him, merely because he fails to please, they are no doubt obliging the actor to ply a degrading vocation; but, if cruelty and injustice be disgraceful, they are also degrading themselves. Either it should be proved

that the Stage is noxious to society, and that it should therefore be abolished, or, if it be tolerated, the player's occupation should be made as respectable as possible by good treatment. Even if it were admitted, for the sake of argument, that there is something in the actor's life (that something I leave to others to ascertain,) which necessarily tends to impress faults on his moral character, still, what profession can be named which, if it finds any weaknesses in the nature of a man, will not tend to increase them, and bring them out? All professions tend, more or less, to stamp us with something peculiar, and not always with amiable peculiarities. Yet society wisely honours several professions for their general usefulness, though they labour under this objection. To give but one instance: The world very properly holds the barrister's calling in high respect; for we know that life and property would be less secure than they now are, if every man were to be his own lawyer. And

yet it is notorious, that the lawyer's life, which makes him daily and hourly a hireling either on the right side or the wrong side of a cause, as his brief may chance to call him, must tend to imbue his mind with a taste for sophistry, as well as with adroitness in the practice of it. In fact, there is a great deal of acting, both in courts of justice and elsewhere, that goes by a different name.

If I should appear all this time to be begging the question, and to be assuming that theatrical amusements are *de facto* indispensable to society, I would only ask of those who object to them, to say if, practically speaking, they could be done away with? Would the public permit you to shut up the theatres? No; no more (I speak it respectfully,) than to shut up the churches. The love of the drama is a public instinct, that requires to be regulated, but is too deep for eradication. I am no such bigot for the stage, as to say that it is necessarily a

school of morals ; for, by bad management, it may be made the reverse : and I think, on the whole, that the drama rather follows than leads public morals. At the same time, it has a general indirect tendency towards the good of society, which, if the theatre be kept amenable to decency and public opinion, may make the Drama directly promotive of good morals. It contributes to cheerfulness, and it draws men from grosser enjoyments. It may be made an innocent, nay, an instructive amusement. As a tasteful recreation, it sweetens the public temper. It has well been compared to a mirror, in which we may see ourselves as others see us. But, granting the similitude to be just, the enemy of the theatre will possibly ask me, Has the mirror at which we dress ourselves the power of giving symmetry to our features, or of adding an inch to our stature ? No ; but still that chamber-mirror will shew a man how ugly he looks with an unwashed face, or an angry physiognomy. In like

manner, the moral mirror of the Drama will shew us what passions most become us and most deform us, and may therefore, certainly, instruct us in the regulation of our moral feelings.

To say that the Stage is liable to abuse, is to say nothing more than is applicable to every other source of human pleasure. You cannot excite men joyously without some contingent dangers. The playhouse, say its enemies, is the resort of great numbers of the vicious, the idle, and the dissipated. Unhappily, so are all popular assemblies, not excepting every Methodist meeting in the kingdom. In fact, if you proscribe theatres, you are bound, in consistency, to persecute Methodism, to uproot vineyards, to destroy breweries, and to abolish music and dancing.

And religion says as little as sound morality against plays and players. The Scriptures nowhere stigmatize them, though, in our Savi-

our's time, there was a theatre in Jerusalem. That theatrical establishment, we know, was forced upon the Jews, at the expense of several lives, by Herod the Great; and, after his death, if Jesus Christ had thought a theatre among the evils to be extirpated by Christianity, he would have found no topic more popular than an innovation so violent to Jewish feelings. But he has left upon it not the slightest denunciation; and, in this circumstance, he is imitated by all the Apostles: St. Paul even quotes a dramatic poet, and shews that he was well acquainted with the Attic Drama.

It is not positively certain, but it is extremely probable, that the earliest regular actress of the English stage was a Mrs. Saunderson, afterwards Mrs. Betterton, the wife of the famous actor. At all events, if not the earliest, she was the greatest actress for many years after the Restoration. Both her husband's theatrical character and her

*Better* own have been painted by Cibber in memorable colours. "Betterton," he says, "was an actor, as Shakespeare was an author, both without competitors, formed for the mutual assistance and illustration of each other's genius. How Shakespeare wrote, all men who have a taste for nature may read and know; but with higher rapture still would Shakespeare be read, could they conceive how Betterton played him. Pity it is, that the momentary beauties flowing from a harmonious elocution cannot, like those of poetry, be their own record; that the animated graces of the player can live no longer than the instant breath and motion that represent them; or, at least, can but faintly glimmer through the memory and imperfect attestation of a few surviving spectators."

Mrs.,\* or, as we should now call her, Miss Saunderson, married Mr. Betterton in 1663.

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\* Unmarried ladies at that time got the title of Mrs.

Cibber speaks of her in 1690, when she was already a veteran on the stage: but he says that, "though far advanced in years, she was still so great an actress, that even the famous Mrs. Barry, who acted *Lady Macbeth* after her, could not in that part, with all her superior strength and melody of voice, throw out those quick and careless strokes of terror which the other gave, with a facility in her manner that rendered her at once tremendous and delightful. Time could not impair her skill, though it gave her person to decay. She was, to the last, the admiration of all true judges of nature and lovers of Shakespeare, in whose plays she chiefly excelled, and without a rival. She was the faithful companion of her husband and his fellow-labourers for five and forty years, and was a woman of unblemished and sober life. She had the honour to teach Queen Anne, when Princess, the part of *Semandra*, in 'Mithridates,' which she acted at Court, in King Charles's time." After her husband's death,



which happened in 1710, the Queen gave her a pension. Betterton's death so much affected her, that she lost her senses for some time, but recovered them, and survived him for two years.\*

Whilst Mr. and Mrs. Betterton were the ornaments of that one of the two great theatres which was called the Duke's, Mrs. Anne *Marshall* Marshall was for many years the principal actress in the King's Company. She is said to have excelled in parts of dignity. Davies tells us, in his *Dramatic Miscellanies*, that the high sentiments of honour, in many of her characters, corresponded with the dictates of her mind, and were justified by her private conduct. But

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\* Among the characters of Shakespeare which she performed, were *Ophelia*, *Juliet*, *Queen Katharine*, and *Lady Macbeth*. For a full list of the parts played by this actress, and by all the other predecessors of Mrs. Siddons, whom I have mentioned, I refer the reader, if he is curious on the subject, to Mr. Genest's "Account of the Stage," published in 1833.

Davies got this information from a book of no authority, written by Gildon, and published by Curl, two names that may well make the hair of our literary faith stand on end. We might accept their testimony, perhaps, on the mere ground of its being favourable to Mrs. Marshall, as we may safely take our oaths that neither Curl\* nor Gildon ever uttered, in the whole course of their lives, a single falsehood in behalf of any human character, except their own. *Epig* And Mrs. Marshall may have been an excellent woman for aught that appears to the contrary; but, in truth, very little is known about her: for, in the long story of her resisting Lord Oxford's dishonourable addresses, but being at last basely beguiled into a mock marriage, in which his Lordship's coachman was dressed up as a clergyman, Curl has related what happened to a different actress.

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\* Curl was so formidable for getting up lives of people, when they were hardly cold in their coffin, that Dr. Arbuthnot denominated him "*one of the new terrors of Death.*"

That Mrs. Marshall was capable, like Mrs. Betterton, of sustaining the high characters of Shakespeare, is not at least evinced by the list of her parts; for in that list I find her performing only one Shakespearian character, namely, *Calphurnia*, in "Julius Cæsar." Something like a lingering taste for the great Dramatist seems to have been kept alive at the Duke's Theatre by the genius of the Bettertons; though, ultimately, they were obliged to appear in plays of Shakespeare basely altered. But, at the King's Theatre, Shakespeare was fairly obsolete. Indeed, in that iron age, Ben Jonson himself was not more popular than Crowne, whilst, for one play of Shakespeare's, probably five of Beaumont and Fletcher's, and seven of Dryden's, were performed.

The sweet-featured Mrs. Boutell was a highly popular actress in that period, from 1663 to 1696. Her forte was simplicity and tenderness, and she was particularly admired in *Aspasia*, in

the "Maid's Tragedy." Though Cibber makes no mention of her, the parts which she played denote her consequence on the stage. She was the original *Statira* of Lee's "Alexander," and acted the Rival Queens successively with Mrs. Marshall and Mrs. Barry. Once, when playing with the latter of these ladies, she was in danger of dying on the stage in earnest. Before the curtain drew up, the two Queens, *Statira*, Boutell, and *Roxana*, Barry, had a real rivalry about a lace veil, which was at last awarded to the former by the property-man. This decision so enraged *Roxana*, that she acted her part rather too naturally, and, in stabbing *Statira*, sent her dagger, though it was a blunted one, through Mrs. Boutell's stays, about a quarter of an inch into the flesh. Mrs. Elizabeth Barry, however, though a virago, was the best actress of her age, for she eclipsed both Mrs. Marshall and Mrs. Boutell; and Cibber tells us that, in 1696, he found her in possession of all the chief tragic parts.

She was the daughter of Edward Barry, a barrister, who got the title of colonel, for having raised a regiment in the cause of Charles I. But, as he ruined himself by providing soldiers for Charles, his family were left at his death to provide for themselves. His orphan daughter was born in 1658. She was educated by the charity of Lady Davenant, a relation of the poet of that name, and by his interest was brought upon the boards, in 1673. Her first effort was a failure. With a good voice, she was thought to be utterly defective in ear; and the Duke's company pronounced her incapable of ever becoming an actress. It must be allowed that they were precipitate in their judgment, for the young *débutante* was then only fifteen years of age. Two years afterwards, she re-appeared in Otway's "Alcibiades," when her merit obtained the thanks of the poet, and drew universal attention. In 1680 the part of *Monimia*, in the first representation of the "Orphan," drew forth her powers to still higher

advantage; and, two years afterwards, her *Belvidera*, in "Venice Preserved," obtained for her the permanent appellation of *the famous Madam Barry*. Her fame was not diminished by her appearing as the original *Isabella*, in Southerne's "Fatal Marriage;" and she enjoyed perhaps a higher character than any actress, anterior to Mrs. Siddons.

I am sorry to add, however, that it was professional, not private character. She was the mistress of Lord Rochester; and we are told that she owed her improvement in acting chiefly to his instructions. The latter circumstance I am inclined to consider apocryphal, for two reasons: in the first place, because the minute account of her tuition by Rochester, which Davies gives, in his *Dramatic Miscellanies*, was derived solely from a book of bad authority published by Curl; and, in the next place, because, putting disgust out of the question, I have some difficulty in imagining the

actress of *Monimia* or *Belvidera* drawing lessons of refined enchantment from a gentleman so habitually drunk, and so grossly profligate, as Lord Rochester. I admit that some letters of the peer to Mrs. Barry, published by Tonson, in 1716, if they be genuine, are, considering the nature of the connexion, not discreditable to him; and farther, that his name has become a by-word of infamy to a greater degree than it really merits. Innumerable verses of a vile nature have been fathered upon Lord Rochester, which he never wrote. I believe him indeed to have been more intelligent and accomplished than the odium attached to his vices generally allows us to suppose. But, after all, he was a gross being, in spite of his best poems and the history of his penitence; and he illustrates the truth, that if men's vices do not degrade them more than crimes, they at least throw a heavier cloud over their genius. I cannot figure to myself Mrs. Barry imbibing graces from his suggestions.

I have quoted Cibber's testimony, that in 1696 he found Mrs. Barry in possession of all the chief parts of tragedy. Cibber adds, "With what skill she gave life to them you will judge from the words of Dryden, in his preface to 'Cleomenes,' where he says, 'Mrs. Barry, always excellent, has, in this tragedy, excelled herself, and gained a reputation beyond any woman I have ever seen on a theatre.' I very well remember," continues Cibber, "her acting that part; and, however unnecessary it may seem to give my judgment after Dryden's, I cannot help saying, I do not only close with his opinion, but will venture to add, that, though Dryden has been dead these thirty-eight years, the same compliment to this hour may be due to her excellence. And though she was then\* not a little past her youth, she was not till that

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\* By the word, *then*, Cibber means the later time at which he himself saw her, and not the time alluded to by Dryden, when Mrs. Barry was still very young.



time fully arrived at the maturity of her power and judgment : from whence I would observe, that the short life of beauty is not long enough to form a complete actress. In men, the delicacy of person is not so absolutely necessary, nor the decline of it so soon taken notice of.

“ Mrs. Barry, in characters of greatness, had a presence of elevated dignity : her mien and motion, superb and gracefully majestic ; her voice, full, clear, and strong, so that no violence of passion could be too much for her ; and, when distress or tenderness possessed her, she subsided into the most affecting melody and softness. In the art of exciting pity, she had a power beyond all the actresses I have yet seen, or what your imagination can conceive. Of the former of these two great excellencies, she gave delightful proofs in almost all the heroic plays of Dryden and Lee ; and, of the latter, in the softer passions of Otway’s *Monimia* and

*Belvidera*. In scenes of anger, defiance, or resentment, while she was impetuous and terrible, she poured out the sentiment with an enchanting harmony; and it was this particular excellence for which Dryden made her the above-recited compliment, upon her acting *Cassandra*, in his 'Cleomenes.' But here I am apt to think his partiality for that character may have tempted his judgment to let it pass for her masterpiece, when he could not but know, that there were several other characters, in which her action might have given her a fairer pretence to the praise he has bestowed on her for *Cassandra*; for in no part of that is there the least ground for compassion as in *Monimia*; nor equal cause for admiration, as in the nobler love of *Cleopatra*, or the tempestuous jealousy of *Roxana*. It was in these lights I thought Mrs. Barry shone with a much brighter excellence than in *Cassandra*."

Yet Anthony Aston\*, in his Supplement to Cibber's Works, tells us that, "with all her enchantment, this fine creature was not handsome; her mouth opening most on the right side, which she strove to draw the other way; and, at times, composing her face as if to have her picture drawn. She was middle-sized," he adds, "had darkish hair, light eyes, and was indifferent plump. She had a manner of drawing out her words, which suited her, but not

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\* Anthony Aston wrote a theatrical pamphlet, entitled "A brief Supplement to Colley Cibber's Lives of the famous Actors and Actresses." He lived early enough to have seen Mrs. Barry, having been a performer in the reign of King William. Chetwood says, he played in all the theatres in London, but never continued long in any. His way of living was peculiar to himself: he used to resort to the principal cities and towns in England with his Medley, as he called it, which consisted of some capital scenes of humour out of the most celebrated plays. Chetwood adds, that he was as well known in every town as the post-horse that carried the mail.

Mrs. Bradshaw and Mrs. Porter, her successors. In tragedy, she was solemn and august; in comedy, alert, easy, and genteel,—pleasant in her face and manner, and filling the stage with a variety of action. Yet she could not sing, nor dance; no, not even in a country-dance.”

Mrs. Barry appeared above a hundred times as the original heroine of some new comic or tragic drama, which is more, I believe, than can be said of any actress that ever trod the British stage. She died of hydrophobia, from the bite of her own lap-dog, at the age of fifty-five, and was buried in the churchyard of Acton, where her monument still remains.

When Mrs. Cibber was at the zenith of her popularity, Cibber tells us, that Mrs. Anne Bracegirdle was just blooming towards maturity. He luxuriates in describing her fascination of her audiences, which was such, that it was the fashion, among the gay and young, to

have a *taste* or *tendre* for Mrs. Bracegirdle. From the important characters that were intrusted to her in tragedy, such as *Almeira*, in the "Mourning Bride," *Isabella*, in "Measure for Measure," *Cordelia*, *Portia*, and *Ophelia*, it is presumed that she was a good tragic actress: but Cibber does not say so; and her chief charm appears to have lain in the lighter drama.

Her name, however, was connected with too deep a tragedy in real life. A Captain Hill, whose offers of marriage she had refused, made an attempt at her abduction; and, having been foiled, he, on the same evening, stabbed her friend and fellow-actor, Mountford, of whom he was jealous, in the neighbourhood of her dwelling. The ruffian Hill escaped the gallows by flight. Lord Mohun, who figures twice in the State Trials, was indicted as his accomplice in the murder, but was acquitted.

Mrs. Bracegirdle lived to a great age, and, it would seem, with a fair reputation, in spite of the surmise that Mountford died the victim of an illicit attachment to her. Both Cibber and A. Aston speak of her in terms of the highest respect. But I am sorry to have seen in our own day, in Mr. Bellchambers's edition of Cibber's *Apology*, an attack upon her memory, in my opinion, as unfair as it is furious; raking up the very scandal which the more respectable part of her cotemporaries appear to have disbelieved. Perhaps I may be asked, of what consequence *now* is Mrs. Bracegirdle's character? Very true: as a matter taken entirely by itself, it is of no consequence whether she was a wanton or a vestal; but *it is* of importance that even deceased human character should not be taken away on forced suspicions or on feeble proofs; for injustice towards the dead leads, by no very circuitous route, to injustice towards the living. Once convict the one on false or defective evidence, and you will soon leave the

other at the mercy of malignity. The serpent vituperation will thus grow into an amphisbæna, to sting at both ends.\*

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\* At the passage where Cibber says of Mrs. Bracegirdle that she was not unguarded in her private conduct, his annotator catches at the words, and says, "She was decidedly not unguarded in her conduct, for, though the object of general suspicion, no proof of positive unchastity was ever brought against her; but her intrigue with Mountfort is hardly to be disputed, and there is pretty ample evidence that Congreve was honoured with the gratification of his love." Here is a fine juxta-position of admission and assertion: no proof of positive unchastity, and yet pretty ample evidence of Congreve's success! But where did Mr. Bellchambers find that she was the object of general suspicion? Not in the testimony of her cotemporaries, Aston and Cibber, but in the lampooner, Tom Brown, and in a collection of poems which, by Mr. Bellchambers's own shewing, is the most infamous that was ever published.

Of her intrigue with Mountfort there is no evidence at all. Hill, whom she had refused in marriage, used to talk jealously over his cups about Mountfort, and threaten to kill him. But are the ravings of a drunken murderer, and a man capable of attempting a rape and abduction, to pass for evidence? Mountford, however,

Mrs. Bracegirdle left the stage in consequence of the ascendant popularity of Mrs. Oldfield.

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was killed near her dwelling, before which Lord Mohun and Hill, on the night of the failure of their noble enterprise, when the crowd rescued Mrs. Bracegirdle, after she had been knocked down by the ruffians, were parading with drawn swords; and Mr. Bellchambers's inference is, that Mountford could by no possibility have come thither but for an improper purpose. Now Mrs. Bracegirdle's house was in Arundel street, in the Strand, and Mountford, who was a married man, had to cross the top of that street on the way to his own home. He came down Arundel street instead of crossing the top of it, and was struck, challenged, and slain by Hill. But is the circumstance of his having come out of his way such damnatory proof of his connexion with Mrs. Bracegirdle? He was ignorant of the late attempt at her abduction; but, when he came to the top of Arundel street, if there was either starlight or moonlight, or the glimmer of a lamp, he must have seen that there was something extraordinary going on before Mrs. Bracegirdle's door, where Hill and Mohun, refreshed with wine from the neighbouring vintner's, were pleading for entrance, and alarming the neighbourhood. And that the night was not dark, is proved by the evidence



I imagine Anne Oldfield, though the descriptions of her give us no idea of such majesty as Mrs. Siddons, to have been otherwise the most beautiful woman that ever trod the British stage. Even indifferent prints of her give us a conception of those large, speaking eyes, which she half shut with so much archness, in comedy, and of the graceful features and spirited mien that could put life in tragedy, even into Thomson's "Sophonisba." "She was tallish in stature," says Cibber, "beautiful in action and aspect, and she always looked like one of those

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on Lord Mohun's trial. Mountford must, therefore, not only have heard, but seen, the disturbance in a short street; and with the most innocent motives he might have gone down that street, instead of crossing the top of it. Mr. Bellchambers, in this business, seems almost to have a kindly feeling for the ruffian Hill; and he praises Lord Mohun *for his chivalrous devotion* to his friend, the murderer and would-be ravisher. In his opinion, "*the player Mountford fell a victim, not unfairly, to one of those casual encounters which mark the general violence of the times.*" Abominable!

principal figures in the finest paintings, that first seize, and longest delight the eye of the spectator. Her countenance was benevolent, like her heart,\* yet it could express contemptuous dignity so well, that once, when a malignant beau rose in the pit to hiss her, she made him instantly hide his head and vanish, by a pausing look, and her utterance of the words '*Poor creature.*'" Her voice, according to Cibber, was sweet, strong, and melodious, and her elocution voluble, distinct, and judicious. But I

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\* For many years, indeed as long as she lived, she gave an annuity of 50*l.* a year to the poet Savage, that he might pursue his poetry and his studies undistressed. After her death, the benevolence of the whole British public was canvassed for the same sum, but without success. Latterly, whilst she was allowing Savage this pension, she was still plying her profession, under the painful illness that preceded her death, and when her cheeks were often bathed with tears from corporeal pain, whilst she was playing her most smiling parts.

Pope attacked her, dead and alive, four times, in his poetry. He hated her, merely for being the friend of Cibber, who had ridiculed the obscene and stupid farce

must take an abrupt leave of this fair being, with a confession, that neither she nor Mrs. Bracegirdle can, in strictness, be ranked among the great tragic predecessors of Mrs. Siddons. Perhaps, if Anne Oldfield had not delighted in her comic supremacy, she had beauty, feeling, and intellect enough to have been a finished tragedian. But, though Chetwood attests her popularity in many characters of tragedy, still she seems to have been forced into its service against her inclination, by her looks, voice, and

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of "Five Hours after Marriage," which Pope was concerned in getting up. In chapter xii. of "The Art of Sinking in Poetry," he accuses her of prurient conversation, but his own indecency disarms his scandal, for, he utters it in sentences unfit to be quoted, and which he was himself ashamed to reprint. The damnation of the "Five Hours" gave Pope an implacable aversion to players. He says, "The players and I are luckily no friends;" but he might have omitted the word "luckily," for his enmity to players, as to other people, kept him in the foul atmosphere of satire, when he should have been breathing the empyreal of poetry.

elocution. When offered a tragic part, she used to say, "Oh, give it to Mrs. Porter; she can make a far better tragedy face than I can."

Mrs. Porter was the genuine tragic successor *Porter* of the famous Barry,\* whose female attendant she had been. She was noticed, when a child, by the great Betterton, who saw her in a Lord Mayor's pageant, in the reign of James II. In those times it was customary for the fruit-women of the theatres to stand fronting the pit, with their backs to the stage; and this actress was so little, when she came under Betterton's tuition, that he used to threaten, if she would not speak and act as he would have her, that he would put her into a fruitwoman's basket, and cover her with a vine-leaf. Bred under Betterton she lived to see Garrick, and was so charmed by his acting, that she lamented

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\* It will hardly be necessary to caution any reader against confusing the elder and famous Madam Barry with the wife of Spranger Barry, afterwards Mrs. Crawford.

her age and want of power to tread the stage with him.

Mrs. Porter was tall, fair, well-shaped, and easy and dignified in action. But she was not handsome, and her voice had a small degree of tremor. Moreover, she imitated, or rather faultily exceeded, Mrs. Barry in the habit of prolonging and toning her pronunciation, sometimes to a degree verging upon a chant. But whether it was that the public ear was at that period accustomed to a demi-chant, or that she threw off the defect in the heat of passion, it is certain that her general judgment and genius, in the highest bursts of tragedy, inspired enthusiasm in all around her; and that she was thought to be alike mistress of the terrible and the tender. Dr. Johnson said, that in the vehemence of tragic acting, he had never seen her equal; and the great actor, Booth, spoke in raptures of her *Belvidera*. By her powers and popularity, she kept several new-born and

weakly tragedies from dying a natural death ; an act of charity, however, that is, like many others, of doubtful benefit to the public.

Her history inspires regret. With a character not only unquestioned, but marked by the noblest traits of generosity, she had to ply her profession for many years on the stage, when she was absolutely a cripple. The cause of her lameness deserves honourable mention. On a summer evening, when she was taking the air in a one-horse chaise, having with her, according to custom, a brace of pistols to defend her against robbery, a highwayman came up and demanded her money : she levelled one of her pistols at him ; the assailant immediately changed his tone to supplication, told her his name and the abode of his starving family, and appealed to her compassion so strongly, that she gave him ten guineas out of her purse. He left her, and she lashed her horse to go on, but the animal started out of his track, upset the

chaise, and caused her by her fall to dislocate her hip-joint. Notwithstanding all the pain and loss which the man had thus occasioned to her, she inquired into his circumstances, and finding that he had told her the truth, she raised sixty pounds among her acquaintance, and sent it to the relief of his family. She was so much injured by this accident, that in acting *Elizabeth*, in the "Albion Queens," she had to support herself on a crutched cane; but she turned even that circumstance to advantage; for, after signing *Mary's* death-warrant, she expressed her agitation by striking the stage with her cane so violently, as to draw bursts of applause.

When she could act no longer, in consequence of her lameness, she had to subsist upon charity. Dr. Johnson paid her a visit some years before her death. She was then so wrinkled, that he said a picture of old age, in the abstract, might have been taken from her countenance.

Among her principal characters were the *Duchess of Malfy*; the *Queen*, in "Hamlet;" *Aspasia*, in the "Maid's Tragedy;" *Portia*, in "Julius Cæsar;" *Monimia*, *Belvidera*; *Isabella*, in the "Fatal Marriage;" *Zara*, in the "Mourning Bride;" *Volumnia*, *Desdemona*, and *Queen Katharine*. She scarcely appeared on the stage after 1738.

Mrs. Cibber, having been formerly a singer, came out as an actress, in 1736. Her maiden name was Arne. She was the sister of the famous musician of that name. Dr. Burney, in his "History of Music," says that she captivated every hearer by the sweetness and expression of her voice in singing. Unfortunately for herself, she married Theophilus, the worthless son of Colley Cibber. She made her first appearance at Drury Lane with great *éclat*, in Hill's tragedy of "Zara," but was soon afterwards obliged to retire for awhile, in consequence of a public trial, that exposed a lapse in



her conjugal duty, if duty she could be said to have owed to such a wretch as Theophilus Cibber. It was clearly proved that he had connived at, or rather plotted, her seduction. He laid his damages at 5000*l.*: the jury awarded him ten pounds. Davies praises the symmetry of her form, the expressiveness of her features, and her preservation of the appearance of youth till long after she had attained to middle life. He says that the harmony of her voice was as powerful as the animation of her look; that in grief and tenderness her eyes looked as if they swam in tears, and in rage and despair seemed to dart flashes of fire; and that, in spite of the unimportance of her figure, she maintained a dignity in her action and a grace in her step. She was so like Garrick that she might have passed for his sister. This is observable, I think, even in the wretched portrait of her in Mathews's collection, though that portrait makes her anything but a beauty. But her countenance must have been full fraught with

expression. Tate Wilkinson, one of the most extraordinary mimics that ever lived, could imitate all the best actors and actresses of his time ; but the electrifying manner of Mrs. Cibber was beyond his reach, and he owns that he could only retain her in his mind's eye. He says that her features, figure, and singing, made her the best *Ophelia* that ever appeared either before or since. Craddock tells us that she was identified with *Ophelia*. Davies speaks with rapture of her *Cordelia* ; and John Taylor told me that she strongly resembled Mrs. Siddons in the indescribable power of her eyes. Finally, when Garrick heard of her death, he exclaimed, "Then Tragedy is dead on one side!" meaning female actors. On the other hand, there are two testimonies not wholly to be rejected, which, I think, may justify some suspicion that her elocution had a chant which would not have suited our modern ears, though in those of her cotemporaries it seemed to harmonize, heaven knows how, with Garrick's acting !

Cumberland, in his *Memoirs*, tells us that, "as *Calista*, Mrs. Cibber sang, or at least recited, Rowe's harmonious strain in a key high pitched yet sweet withal, something in the manner of the *Improvvisatore*. It was so extremely wanting in contrast, that, though it did not wound the ear, it wearied it."

Miss Seward says, in one of her Letters, "I perfectly remember Mrs. Cibber and Mrs. Pritchard, young as I was, in all their capital characters. Mrs. Cibber had very pathetic powers: her features, though not beautiful, were delicate, and very expressive; but she uniformly pitched her silver voice, so sweetly plaintive, in too high a key to produce that endless variety of intonation with which Mrs. Siddons declaims. Mrs. Siddons," she adds, "had all the pathos of Mrs. Cibber, with a thousand times more variety in its exertions."

Mrs. Pritchard played from 1733 to 1768.

She acted in her youth at Bartholomew Fair, where, we are told, she was caressed by the public, particularly for her mode of singing a favourite song, "*Sweet, if you love me, smiling turn.*" It would be at present no great recommendation for a young *débutante* at any of our great theatres to have been *caressed by the public at Bartholomew Fair*. But that place was then more respectable than it now is. The opulent used to resort to it in their carriages. When transferred to the Haymarket, Drury Lane, and Covent Garden, she shone in all walks of character. Natural, *i. e.* unrefined comedy, seems to have been her forte. Her deliverance of sprightly dialogue, according to Davies, was never surpassed, nor perhaps equalled. In her smooth and voluble enunciation not a syllable of articulation was lost to the ear; and she was a perfect mistress, if we may believe the same writer, of *familiar dramatic eloquence*. Versatility of talent she must have possessed astonishingly, since we find her

in the same seasons enjoying the first-rate popularity as *Lady Macbeth*, and as *Mrs. Doll*, in Ben Jonson's "Alchymist." Miss Seward bears testimony to her declamation in tragedy having been more free and natural than Mrs. Cibber's. Churchill speaks highly of her *Zara*, in "The Mourning Bride;" and such was her excellence as the *Queen*, in "Hamlet," that, after she left the stage, it was long before her substitute could be found in the character.

And yet something of her Bartholomew Fair origin may be traced in Mrs. Pritchard's professional characteristics. She never rose to the finest grade even of comedy, but was most famous in scolds and viragos. In tragedy, though she had a large imposing figure, she wanted grace in her manner, and was too loud and profuse in her expression of grief. Garrick told Tate Wilkinson that she was apt to blubber her sorrows. Her features, it is generally allowed, were rather expressive than pleasing;

nay, to judge by her picture in Mathews's collection, they were coarse and ugly.

Mrs. Siddons says, in her *Autograph Recollections*, "When I begged Dr. Johnson to let me know his opinion of Mrs. Pritchard, whom I had never seen, he answered, 'Madam, she was a vulgar idiot; she used to speak of her *gownd*, *Boswell* and she never read any part in a play in which she acted, except her own.' Is it possible, thought I," Mrs. Siddons continues, "that Mrs. Pritchard, the greatest of all the *Lady Macbeths*, should never have read the play? and I concluded that the Doctor must have been misinformed; but I was afterwards assured by a gentleman, a friend of Mrs. Pritchard's, that he had supped with her one night after she had acted *Lady Macbeth*, and that she declared she had never perused the whole tragedy:—I cannot believe it."

Well might our great actress wonder at Mrs.

Pritchard's sluttishness. Mrs. Siddons's own life was one of constant study and profound reflection on the characters which she played, and on their relations to surrounding parts. Mrs. Siddons had a right to be painted as the Tragic Muse, for her very manner in society was marked by an abstractedness and reserve that were the result of her studiousness. By the force of fancy and reflection she used to be so wrought up in preparing to play the *Lady Constance*, that when she set out from her own house to the theatre, she was already *Constance* herself.

Mrs. Pritchard, I dare say, was *a vulgar woman*; but, when I read the accounts of her acting worthily with Garrick, I cannot consent to Dr. Johnson calling her *a vulgar idiot*, even though she did pin an unnecessary *d* to her gown. Encrusted with indolence as she was, she was still a diamond. At the same time, being palpably devoid of devotion to her pro-

fession, she must have been unequal in her appearances. Accordingly, we find that her popularity in London fell; and, when she went over to Dublin, that she electrified the Irish with disappointment.

Next to Mrs. Pritchard in point of time, our two greatest actresses were Mrs. Yates and Mrs. Crawford. They were cotemporaries and rivals; the former bearing the palm for dignity and sculpturesque beauty, whilst the latter, though less pleasing in looks, had more passion and versatility.

Anna Maria Grahame, afterwards Mrs. Yates, acted from 1754 to 1784. She made her *début* on the Dublin stage, but with so little success that the manager made her a present to dissolve the engagement. She had the courage, nevertheless, to make a second attempt at Drury Lane, as *Marcia*, in "Cato," when her appearance interested the public. By her marriage



with Richard Yates, shortly afterwards, she acquired a valuable stage friend as well as instructor, and she had the merit of assiduous industry.

From all that I can collect respecting this actress, out of the remarks of Mr. Boaden and other writers, including even my good-natured friend, John Taylor, I believe, an unfavourable profile of her theatric endowments might be drawn without absolute injustice, though still it would be only on a one-sided view. It appears that her countenance, with the beauty of the antique statue, had also something of its monotony, and that she was defective in parts of tenderness. But it is confessed, even by her censurers, that her fine person, haughty features, and powerful voice, carried her well through rage and disdain, and that her declamation was musical. Taylor himself told me that she was the most commanding personage he had ever looked upon before he saw Mrs. Siddons. She was a superb

*Medea*; and Wilkinson compares her *Margaret of Anjou* with Mrs. Siddons's *Zara*. Davies says that she was an actress whose just elocution, warm passion, and majestic deportment, excited the admiration even of foreigners, and fixed the affection and applause of her own countrymen.

It may also temper our estimate of her defects, to find that the cotemporary criticism, which was looked up to as quite authoritative, found fault with her sometimes on very questionable grounds. For instance, the Dramatic Censor, in 1770, asserts that she had not a trace of comedy about her. Now the oldest and most judicious eye-witness of those times, who is at present alive, and one whose judgment I would prefer to that of a thousand Dramatic Censors, assures me that, in high comedy, she had an extraordinary degree of grace and refinement. Mr. Godwin, to whom I shall have further occasion to mention my obligations for

the kind interest which he has taken in this work, favoured me lately with the following note, respecting his recollection of Mrs. Yates :

“ 13, *Old Palace Yard* ;  
Jan. 12, 1834.

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ What I seem best to remember her in is *Violante*, in the ‘ Wonder ;’ and, though it is sixty years since I saw Garrick and her in that play, I remember a great deal of it as if it had occurred yesterday. It is an admirably acting play, and the two principal performers seemed to leave nothing to be desired. What I recollect best of Mrs. Yates is, the scene in which Garrick, having offended her by a jealousy, not altogether without an apparent cause, the lady, conscious of her entire innocence, at length expresses a serious resentment. *Felix* had till then indulged his angry feelings ; but finding, at last, that he had gone too far, applies himself with all a lover’s arts to soothe her. She turns

her back to him, and draws away her chair; he follows her, and draws his chair nearer; she draws away further: at length, by his winning entreaties and cajoling, she is gradually induced to melt, and finally makes it up with him. Her condescension in every stage, from its commencement to its conclusion, was admirable. Her dignity was great and lofty, and the effect highly enhanced by her beauty; and when by degrees she laid aside her frown,—when her lips began to relax towards a smile, while one cloud vanished after another, the spectator thought he had never seen anything so lovely and irresistible: and the effect was greatly owing to her queen-like majesty. The condescension, in a graceful and wayward beauty, would have been comparatively nothing,—with Mrs. Yates's figure and demeanor, it laid the whole audience, as well as her lover, at her feet.

“ It is a curious point to distinguish between

the loftiness of this actress and that of Mrs. Siddons. In Mrs. Siddons, it appeared the untaught loftiness of an elevated soul, working outwards; but, in Mrs. Yates, it was the loftiness of a person who had associated only with the majestic and the great—who was therefore complete in herself and in all her motions, and had an infallibility which could never for a moment be called in doubt. Mrs. Siddons was great only as the occasion sustained her; but Mrs. Yates was great, because, by the habit of her soul, it was impossible for her to be otherwise.

“ You desired me also to put down, though of a very trifling nature, a circumstance which I mentioned as occurring in Mrs. Yates’s performance of *Lady Constance*, but which is rather characteristic of the fashion of the times than deserving to be imputed to any defect in the performer. When *Lady Constance*, a few lines before her final exit, says, wildly, ‘ *I will not*

*keep this form upon my head, when there is such disorder in my wit;*—Mrs. Yates, to suit the action to the word, took off a thin cap which surmounted her head-dress, and merely placed it on the right side of the circumference of her hoop.

I remain, dear sir,

Very faithfully yours,

WM. GODWIN.”

Mrs. Crawford acted from 1759 to 1797. *Crawford*  
Her maiden name was Street: she was the daughter of an apothecary, in Bath. When about seventeen she was asked in marriage by a young scion of nobility, but he jilted her, and the misfortune deeply affected her. In order to recover her health and spirits, she was invited by a kind family of friends to visit Yorkshire, and at York she attended the theatre, and beguiled her sorrow so successfully as to become attached to an actor of the name of Dancer,

who married her. With him she went on the stage, to the dire offence of her relations, and accepted an engagement in the Dublin theatre, where she acquired an increasing reputation. Her husband died when she was still young, and ere long she gave her hand to Spranger Barry, commonly called the Irish Roscius. He was manager of the stage on which they both acted, so that he secured for her all the capital parts, both comic and tragic, and she filled them brilliantly. Her success coinciding with her husband's, Garrick invited them both, on very high terms, to Drury Lane.

This was the palmy state of her reputation, and for many years she had at least no superior on the stage; but Barry died in 1777. She married a third husband, who was unkind to her, and domestic distress cast such a damp over her genius, that frequently she could only be said to have walked through her parts. Mrs. Siddons's success prompted her for a time

to emulation, and she came back from Dublin in 1783, to act at Covent Garden. But, by this period, age had made ravages on her beauty, and had brought her faculties to a state somewhat beyond their ripeness. On her reappearance on the London stage, momentary gleams of her former excellence were indeed displayed, but they only suggested a melancholy comparison between what she then was and what she had once been. John Taylor says, that though once most elegant in her deportment, she became at last rough and coarse, and that her person had the appearance rather of an old man than of one of her own sex.

Let us not, however, form a general estimate of Mrs. Crawford from her appearances during the manifest decline of her powers. For, though even in her best days, it appears that she was too vehement in action, and that she neglected to insinuate herself into admiration from her ambition to create surprise, yet still it is



allowed that she could produce astonishment deep and thrilling. The effect of her question, as *Lady Randolph*, in "Douglas," to the peasant, respecting the child, "*Was he alive?*" was perhaps never surpassed on the stage. Bannister told me that it made rows of spectators start from their seats. Mr. Boaden, I conceive, has been over anxious to make it appear that Mrs. Crawford's mode of uttering this query, or, as he says, of screaming it, was unnatural, and that it succeeded merely as a *tour de force*, or stage trick. The actress's violence, he alleges, was out of nature, because *Lady Randolph* could not anticipate any hope that her son was still alive, even if the peasant had answered *yes*; since she immediately afterwards accuses him of having killed the infant. But this is arguing as if a mother in agony about a lost child could calculate as coolly as a chess-player about the moving of a pawn. *Lady Randolph* palpably utters that question in a state of transport, as if the life or

death of her hopes depended on the instant answer. The inconsistency of her still supposing him dead, though she had heard that he was found alive, is beautifully true to nature. It is fear, rushing in phrenzy to precipitate conclusions. That Mrs. Siddons could dispense with extreme vehemence in this interrogation, only shews the perfection of her acting in other points. Her *Lady Randolph* was altogether a more sustained and harmonious performance than Mrs. Crawford's. But I believe that she avoided her rival's vehemence of manner in this instance, not from thinking that it was unnatural, but from the fear of being taxed with imitation.

Mrs. Crawford died as late as 1801, and was buried near her second husband, Barry, in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey.

In this retrospect of Mrs. Siddons's predecessors, I have omitted the names of several

actresses, highly distinguished for their general powers, and partially successful even in tragedy; such as Mrs. Woffington, Anne Bellamy, and others. But as my object, in this digression, was only to advert to names of the first-rate tragic grade, I fear the reader may tax me with a fault the opposite of omission, namely, my having mentioned one or two actresses who were more famous on the comic than the graver stage—I allude to Bracegirdle and Oldfield. Still, however, let me state, in apology, that general tradition represents the former as a beautiful tragic performer, and that the Oldfield could have been no second-rate who could throw enchantment around Thomson's dramatic poetry.

## **CHAPTER IV.**

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Mrs. Siddons plays *Isabella*, in the "Fatal Marriage," at Drury Lane—Suitableness of the Part for her first new Trial—Remarks on the Tragedy—Resumption of her Memoranda—She appears as *Euphrasia*, in the "Grecian Daughter"—as *Jane Shore*—in *Calista*—as *Belvidera*—and as *Zara*, in the "Mourning Bride"—Her first Season.

## CHAPTER IV.

1782.  
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“ I WAS truly grieved,” says Mrs. Siddons, in her Memoranda, “ to leave my kind friends at Bath, and was also fearful that the power of my voice was not equal to filling a London theatre. My friends, too, were also doubtful; but I soon had reason to think that the bad construction of the Bath theatre, and not the weakness of my voice, was the cause of our mutual fears. On the 10th of October, 1782, I made my first new appearance at Drury Lane, with my own dear beautiful boy, then but eight years old, in Southerne’s tragedy of ‘ Isabella.’ This character was judiciously recommended to me by my kind friend, Mr. Sheridan, the father of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, who had seen me in that play at Bath. The

interest he took in my success was like that of a father."

It was a judicious choice undoubtedly. The part of *Isabella* had pathos enough to develop her genius, without complexity to make it an extreme ordeal for her powers on their new great trial; and, with her beautiful little son, Henry, in her hand, she looked the very personage.\*

Southerne, the author of this play, deserves our gratitude, in common with Otway and

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\* The *Morning Post* for October 10, 1782, gives the following anecdote about young Henry Siddons.—“Mrs. Siddons, of Drury Lane theatre, has a lovely little boy, about eight years old. Yesterday, in the rehearsal of the “Fatal Marriage,” the boy, observing his mother in the agonies of the dying scene, took the fiction for reality, and burst into a flood of tears, a circumstance which struck the feelings of the company in a singular manner.”

Rowe, for having sustained our graver drama in tolerable respectability, towards the close of the seventeenth century, at a time when it was threatened with the pestilence of rhyming tragedies; and he is a purer moralist than either Otway or Rowe. Inferior as all the three may be to the more immediate successors of Shakespeare, still they will seem entitled to our respect, when we consider that, more than a century has elapsed in England, without producing anything like such a triad of dramatic names.

I am glad to find that the poet Gray was a great admirer of Southerne. Critics of far less authority have contemned this very tragedy of "Isabella" for heavy and confused incidents. I confess, curtailed as it now is of the comic underplot\* which Southerne threw in, only

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\* Gray, with all his admiration of Southerne, inveighs severely against his comic intermixtures in this tra-



in compliance with the grotesque taste of the time, that there seems to me to be not the slightest redundancy of business or dialogue in the piece. On the contrary, the action advances with a beguiling rapidity, and the deeply affecting story has an air of fatalism, that always reminds me of the Greek stage. Perhaps, in all powerful tragedies, this air is to be traced. It is a cold, dramatic achievement, to shew us only the ordinary and necessary connexion between the passions and the misfortunes of our species. The poetic invention

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gedy; and, in fact, in its original state, there was a complete comic underplot, some of which seems to have been borrowed from Boccaccio. A jealous old fellow gets a sleeping potion, is put into a tomb, and made to believe that he has been dead. When he awakes he is reconciled to his wife, and promises never more to be jealous of her. When the play was revived at Drury Lane, in 1757, this comic stuff was omitted, but the original name was not changed from that of the "Fatal Marriage, or Innocent Adultery," to "Isabella," till several years after.

that affects us to the deepest degree, is that which teaches us by what surprising coincidences the passions of the bad may work more misery than even they themselves intend; and how the shafts of cruelty may strike the innocent with more than their natural force, coming like arrows impelled by the wind. My greatest objection to the tragedy of "Isabella" is, that old *Biron* moralizes most unnecessarily at the end of it; for, when poetry affects us, the heart will find its own moral.

Speaking of her first appearance on this occasion, Mrs. Siddons says, "For a whole fortnight before this (to me) memorable day, I suffered from nervous agitation more than can be imagined. No wonder! for my own fate, and that of my little family, hung upon it. I had quitted Bath, where all my efforts had been successful, and I feared lest a second failure in London might influence the public mind greatly to my prejudice, in the event of

my return from Drury Lane, disgraced as I formerly had been. In due time I was summoned to the rehearsal of 'Isabella.' Who can imagine my terror? I feared to utter a sound above an audible whisper; but by degrees enthusiasm cheered me into a forgetfulness of my fears, and I unconsciously threw out my voice, which failed not to be heard in the remotest part of the house, by a friend who kindly undertook to ascertain the happy circumstance. The countenances, no less than tears and flattering encouragements of my companions, emboldened me more and more; and the second rehearsal was even more affecting than the first. Mr. King, who was then manager, was loud in his applauses. This second rehearsal took place on the 8th of October, 1782, and on the evening of that day I was seized with a nervous hoarseness, which made me extremely wretched; for I dreaded being obliged to defer my appearance on the 10th, longing, as I most earnestly did, at least to know the worst. I went to

bed, therefore, in a state of dreadful suspense. Awaking the next morning, however, though out of restless, unrefreshing sleep, I found, upon speaking to my husband, that my voice was very much clearer. This, of course, was a great comfort to me; and, moreover, the sun, which had been completely obscured for many days, shone brightly through my curtains. I hailed it, though tearfully, yet thankfully, as a happy omen; and even now I am not ashamed of *this* (as it may perhaps be called) childish superstition. On the morning of the 10th, my voice was, most happily, perfectly restored; and again ‘*The blessed sun shone brightly on me.*’ On this eventful day my father arrived to comfort me, and to be a witness of my trial. He accompanied me to my dressing-room at the theatre. There he left me; and I, in one of what I call my desperate tranquillities, which usually impress me under terrific circumstances, there completed my dress, to the astonishment of my attendants, without utter-

ing one word, though often sighing most profoundly.

“ At length I was called to my fiery trial. I found my venerable father behind the scenes, little less agitated than myself. The awful consciousness that one is the sole object of attention to that immense space, lined as it were with human intellect from top to bottom, and all around, may perhaps be imagined, but can never be described, and by me can never be forgotten.\*

“ Of the general effect of this night's performance I need not speak: it has already been publicly recorded. I reached my own quiet fireside, on retiring from the scene of reiterated shouts and plaudits. I was half dead; and my

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\* The other parts of the play were thus cast: *Biron*, Smith; *Villeroy*, Palmer; *Carlos*, Farren; *Count Baldwin*, Packer: *Nurse*, Mrs. Love.

joy and thankfulness were of too solemn and overpowering a nature to admit of words, or even tears. My father, my husband, and myself, sat down to a frugal neat supper, in a silence uninterrupted, except by exclamations of gladness from Mr. Siddons. My father enjoyed his refreshments; but occasionally stopped short, and, laying down his knife and fork, lifting up his venerable face, and throwing back his silver hair, gave way to tears of happiness. We soon parted for the night; and I, worn out with continually broken rest and laborious exertion, after an hour's retrospection, (who can conceive the intenseness of that reverie?) fell into a sweet and profound sleep, which lasted to the middle of the next day. I arose alert in mind and body.

“I should be afraid to say,” she continues, “how many times ‘Isabella’ was repeated successively, with still increasing favour. I was now highly gratified by a removal from my

very indifferent and inconvenient dressing-room to one on the stage-floor, instead of climbing a long staircase; and this room (oh, unexpected happiness!) had been Garrick's dressing-room. It is impossible to conceive my gratification, when I saw my own figure in the self-same glass which had so often reflected the face and form of that unequalled genius: not perhaps without some vague fanciful hope of a little degree of inspiration from it. About this time\* I was honoured by the whole body of the Law with a present of a purse of one hundred guineas."

Mrs. Siddons performed *Isabella* eight times between the 10th and 30th of October. The

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\* The high compliment paid by the gentlemen of the Bar to the unrivalled merit of Mrs. Siddons is unexampled in the history of the English Theatre, except in the instance of the celebrated Mr. Booth, who, on his first appearance in the character of Addison's *Cato*, was presented by the Tories with a purse of fifty guineas, for so nobly declaiming against a perpetual Dictator.

next character that was allotted to her was *Euphrasia*, in the "Grecian Daughter."\* In this part, Mrs. Yates, with the aid of Henderson's powerful acting, still maintained a semblance of rivalry with the Siddons: but it was only a semblance; for the querulous remonstrances which Mrs. Yates's friends put forth in the newspapers against "*the infatuated attention that was paid to the rising actress*" sorely betrayed to which of the rivals public favour had inclined. Mrs. Siddons's admirers troubled the press with no lamentations for Mrs. Yates's popularity: they only regretted that the talents of their favourite, instead of being wholly devoted to Shakespeare and other great dramatists, should be wasted on Murphy's tragedy, which the *Morning Post*, a paper at that time ably conducted, denominated "*an abortion of Melpomene.*"

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\* On the 30th of October the other parts of the "Grecian Daughter" were thus cast: *Evander*, Bensley; *Dionysius*, Palmer; *Philotas*, Brereton; *Phocion*, Farren.



This was rather hard language; for there must be some merit in a drama that can be made the medium of popular acting; and the "Grecian Daughter" is a practical favourite with players. Since its first appearance, sixty-three years ago, there has been no great tragic actress who has not thought the part of *Euphrasia* worthy of her ambition. At the same time, the "Grecian Daughter," though not an abortion of Melpomene, is not one of her loveliest brood. Its merit may be placed on a level with that of our best pantomimes and melodramas. It is a tolerable tragedy in all but the words.

The wonderful power of great players to delight us on the stage with dramatic poetry which we *read* with indifference;—their power, we might rather say, of putting poetry into action where they have little or none of it on the author's page, is a subject of curious interest, and so much worthy of better discussion

than I can bring to it, that I hazard with diffidence the most general remarks. I have said that there must be some merit in a drama which can be made the medium of popular acting: and this truism is so palpable, that I am not afraid of the reader contradicting it, but only of his smiling at being told what might be taken for granted. But, supposing you went a little farther, and were to say, that a drama, which good acting can render impressive, must necessarily have a great deal of merit, you would soon find yourself mistaken, and be obliged to draw back into the former vague and trite position: for it is not more certain, that the Northern Lights can play upon ice, than that electrifying acting has often irradiated dramas very frigid to the reader. What is the "Cato" of Addison to our perusal; and yet how nobly John Kemble performed its hero? The greatest acting, it is true, cannot *create a soul under the ribs of death*, nor reconcile us to false or insipid views of human na-

ture. A tragedy, to affect us by the best possible acting, must assuredly have some leading conceptions of grandeur, some general outlines of affecting character and situation. Nevertheless, it is astonishing how faint and general those outlines may be, and yet enable, or rather permit, the great stage-artist to fill up what he finds a comparative blank into a glowing picture. Mrs. Siddons did this in the "Grecian Daughter;" and so did Fanny Kemble.

Shakespeare's plays would continue to be read, if there was not a theatre in existence; whereas, if poor Murphy, as a tragedian, were to be banished from the stage to the library, it may be said, in the fullest sense of the phrase, that he would be laid on the shelf. And yet Murphy might affirm with truth, that in playing his heroine Mrs. Siddons herself increased her reputation. The part of *Isabella* had developed her strength as well as her tenderness; but *Euphrasia* allowed her to assume a royal

loftiness still more imposing, (at least to the many,) and a look of majesty which she alone could assume. When she rushed on the stage, addressing the Grecian patriots, "War on, ye heroes!" she was a picture to every eye, and she spoke passion to every heart. I have seen the oldest countenances of her cotemporaries lighten up with pleasure in trying to do justice to their recollections of her *Euphrasia*. They spoke of the semi-diadem on her brow, and of the veil that flowed so gracefully on her shoulders; but they always concluded by owning that words could not describe "*her heroic loveliness.*" The finest effect that she produced in the part was at the crisis when *Philotas* pretends that her father was dead, and that his body had been thrown into the sea. Here she acted filial anxiety with a fidelity so terrible, that the spectators counted the moments of suspense, and felt that a few more of them would have been intolerable.

Nov. 8,  
1782.

The next part in which she appeared was *Jane Shore*.\* Here she tried her powers in a character as widely as possible contrasted with *Euphrasia*; and made a transition from the proudest pomp to the most desolate pathos of tragedy. I am glad that I can recollect the great actress in *Jane Shore*; for it was a spectacle that struck me with a degree of wonder, of illusion, and of intense commiseration, that neither she nor any other performer ever excited in my mind. I will not say that it is the part in which I should chiefly choose to see her once more, if I had the power, by some miracle, of seeing her again. It was not her most poetical, nay, it was not her most pleasing part: on the contrary, the semblance of her physical suffering was the more appalling for a sort of prosaic closeness to reality. But it was

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\* The other parts were thus cast: *Hastings*, Smith; *Shore*, Bensley; *Gloucester*, J. Aickin; *Alicia*, Mrs. Ward.

terrible and perfect acting up to the truth of nature. Mr. Boaden tells us, that she presented at the outset of the play a dignified aspect, which could never have belonged to the mistress of Edward the Fourth; and that the first look of her threw a doubt upon her situation and its sorrows. Whether this doubt ever crossed the minds of three persons among her spectators is very uncertain; but if it did, it was immediately lost in different feelings. For Mr. Boaden himself, in his next paragraph, commemorates what can be well recollected, namely, "the sobs and shrieks among the tender part of her audiences, and those tears which manhood at first struggled to suppress, but at last grew proud of indulging." Fainting fits were long and frequent in the house.

And yet this fearful semblance of reality, if it did not strictly accord with Lord Bacon's definition, of poetry being that which accommodates the show of things to the wishes of

*o/* the mind, was still in so far poetical that its terrors were sheathed in some welcome illusions. It was something to have so romantic a legendary favourite as *Jane Shore* restored, like a friend in a dream, though only to hear her speak, and to answer her with our tears. And so far was my imagination loth to identify Mrs. Siddons with the heroine she represented, that I remember, as if it were yesterday, my illusion amounting, as far as waking thoughts could go, to the belief that I was looking on reality, and seeing History revived before me.

The story of *Jane Shore* has certainly one disadvantage as a tragic subject, namely, in the catastrophe being a death by hunger. And yet the poet has met this difficulty with some skill; for, before he compels us to shudder at her physical sufferings, he has wound us up to a high interest in her moral character, and prepared us to regard her as expiring—not solely from corporeal inanition, but from having her death

at least accelerated by mental agitation. Rowe is judicious in giving her a modest and gradual progress in our sympathy. She is at first only a desolate penitent, who says of her own beauty,

“Sin and misery,  
Like loathsome weeds, have overrun the soil ;  
And the destroyer Shame hath laid all waste.”

She is at the outset nothing but contrition ; and her repentance-sheet shrouds from our view the fine lineaments of her heroic and womanly nature. But these come forth, when her fondness for Edward's memory breaks out in her anxiety for his children, though in a manner so delicate, that her husband himself cannot be imagined to take umbrage at it. Under this feeling she defies the tyrant *Gloucester*. It was here that the part ascended to the level of Mrs. Siddons's powers,—that her voice took a richness beyond the wailing of penitence, and her cheek a nobler glow than the blush of shame. The fervour of her benediction on *Hastings*,



though he had insulted her, when, in gratitude for his protecting Edward's children, she exclaims,

“Reward him for the noble deed, just heavens!”

makes *Jane Shore* now possess our hearts as a heroine. If ever words were pronounced with thrilling prolongation, it was when Mrs. Siddons uttered that line,

“The poor, forsaken, Royal little ones!”

! 24/ Her death-scene in *Jane Shore* would have baffled the power of the pencil, for it was a succession of astonishing changes. Her eagle eye, obedient to her will, at times parted with its lustre, and, though open, looked sightless and bewildered; but resumed its fire as wonderfully, when, “*with life's last spark that fluttered and expired,*” she turned to her husband, and uttered the heart-piercing words,

“Forgive me!—but forgive me!”

Whilst her impression as *Jane Shore* was

still fresh in the public mind, and whilst so many great tragic parts remained untouched by her, it may well surprise us to find her next appearing in a prose tragedy, which had no name to recommend it, and which was never found to be worth publishing. This was the "Fatal Interview," by Thomas Hull.\* It was not absolutely hissed off the stage; but it was

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\* This piece, like several others by the same author, was never published; though he was a voluminous writer of plays, novels, tales, and verses. Thomas Hull was founder of the Theatrical Fund, an institution that does honour to his memory. He was for many years deputy-manager of Covent Garden, and always valued himself on his address in making apologies to the public. During the riots of 1780, the mob pelted his house with stones, in consequence of his having sent out to them a barrel of small-beer instead of porter. The deputy-manager appeared on the first floor, with his velvet cap, and, after making three low bows, gave scope to his apologetical eloquence in these words: "Ladies and Gentlemen, Upon my honour I have sent to Gifford's brewhouse for some porter. In the meantime, I must humbly solicit your usual indulgence."

so coolly received, and so many reflections were cast on Mrs. Siddons's genius being thrown away on such a piece, that it was withdrawn, after dragging on to the third night. Mr. Genest says that Sheridan damned the play to save the actress: but the play appears to have damned itself.

On the 29th of November, she appeared for the first time as *Calista*, in the "Fair Penitent;" and her success in the character was another large step in her popularity.\* It has been common with dramatic critics to abuse *Calista*, as a person most improperly named a penitent. This objection to her character is much older than the days of Gifford and Hazlitt; but, like many an old judgment, it is unjust: for, though reluctant to repent, she

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\* The other parts were thus cast: *Lothario*, Palmer; *Horatio*, Bensley; *Sciolto*, J. Aickin: *Lavinia*, Mrs. Bulkely.

becomes in the end a deep and true penitent, and may well say,

“I have more real anguish in my heart  
Than all their pedant discipline can shew.”

Those who reproach *Calista* for not being all of a sudden repentant, forget how contemptible she would be if she were so represented. A female loathing her frailty the moment after detection, would virtually acknowledge it to have sprung from a momentary impulse, and not from that boundless affection and confidence, which, however misplaced, is at least some palliation of her fault to the charity of others, and still more naturally a pretext for slow self-condemnation in the delinquent herself. *Calista* is the victim of profound attachment. *Jane Shore* had had full leisure to repent of her errors;—but *Calista* is exposed to shame, while she is yet under the spell and illusion of her passion for *Lothario*. Love, be it ever so illicit, is of all

passions the least self-condemning whilst the mind is under its full dominion. It may reproach the infatuated heart in its growth and decay; it may have its morning and evening shadows for the conscience, but it has *none* at its vertical height.

And, after all, whilst *Calista* is slow to reproach herself for a natural passion, she is not without some right to speak of "*a base world,*" when she is doomed to infamy by the ingratitude of her seducer; and, when she is forced to marry the man whom she cannot love by a father, who, after raving about her sainted mother, and *Calista's* prattling infant days, takes upon him the fatherly duty of her executioner. If there was anything in the character of *Calista* to make it worthy of the Siddons, it was the heroine's slowly-penitent pride, which capitulates only in the last extremities.

I cannot, to be sure, confess an unqualified

admiration of this tragedy; for, though *Calista* acts consistently with the domination of passion over her mind, yet the exposure of a frail woman's dishonour seems a bad tragic subject to set out with. Her errors are not, like those of *Jane Shore*, half hid from us by the conception of their remote occurrence, but are blazoned in fresh discovery. The mind recoils from the reception of a proud and beautiful female upon the stage, being prepared by the description which her betrayer gives of the scene and circumstances of her seduction

Rowe is, however, an insinuating dramatist; and the protracted martyrdom of *Calista* is, in spite of the faults of the tragedy, very affecting. I never saw our great actress in this character; but I can easily imagine the new scope that it gave to her powers. A sensible writer of that early period remarks of her performance, that "having to shew, in *Calista*, that

haughty affectation of being above control, which the deviation from virtue ever produces in a proud mind, in this struggle between pride and shame, she walked with greater precipitation, her gestures were more frequent and more violent, and her eyes were restless and suspicious." *Calista* was therefore a new character for the display of her genius; and it particularly gave a new modification to that passion of pride which she was unparalleled in expressing. Neither *Isabella* nor *Jane Shore* are characters of such complicated agony as *Calista*. The pride of *Isabella* has to combat only with her destiny, and the shame of *Jane Shore* is aggravated by no feeling of pride. Neither of them are so distracted as Rowe's heroine, between passions entirely opposite, or put on the rack, as she is, between virtue and vice. *Calista's* shame inflames her pride, whilst her pride makes her shame more excruciating. She perishes, like *Laocoon*, between double

stings; and, though not perhaps a fair penitent for the stage, she is a strong picture of unfortunate human nature.

Such acting as Mrs. Siddons's had never been brought to Rowe's poetry, at least during the last century. Neither Mrs. Cibber nor Mrs. Crawford are alleged, by their warmest eulogists, to have been so equal to the haughtiness of *Calista's* part. Mrs. Yates, in performing it, departed from her usual grace, and sawed the air with her arms; and Mrs. Woffington, though pleasing to the eye, used to bark out the *Fair Penitent* with most dissonant notes.

For her benefit, on the 14th of December Mrs. Siddons chose the part of *Belvidera*, in "Venice Preserved,"\* a tragedy which so constantly commands the tears of audiences, that

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\* Cast of parts: *Jaffier*, Brereton; *Pierre*, Bensley; *Priuli*, J. Aickin; *Renault*, Packer.



it would be a work of supererogation for me to extol its tenderness. There may be dramas where human character is pictured with subtler skill,—though *Belvidera* might rank among Shakespeare's creations; and "Venice Preserved" may not contain, like "Macbeth," and "Lear," certain high conceptions, which exceed even the power of stage representation;—but it is as full as a tragedy can be of all the pathos that is transfusable into action.

I am glad that I have far better testimonies than my own to offer in proof of the great actress's triumph in this character; for, to say the truth, when I saw her perform *Belvidera*, she was in the autumn of her beauty, large, august, and matronly; and my imagination had been accustomed to picture the object of *Jaffier's* fondness as a much younger woman. Accordingly, I recollect having thought (it was a new thought, indeed, for her acting to inspire,) that I could have conceived another actress to have played the part more perfectly. But, with-

out retracting my general opinion that she continued to act this character when she was somewhat too old for it, I can easily conceive that in my boyish criticism I may have judged of her unspiritually, and too much by externals. Attending to the woman more than the actress, I dare say I was blind to innumerable beauties, that made her *Belvidera*, even late in life, one of her finest performances in the eyes of better judges than myself. When she was young, there were no two opinions about her perfection in the part.

I have already acknowledged that I consult the newspapers of those times for remarks on her acting with nothing like unqualified confidence. At the same time, I should not consult them at all, unless their consentaneous or well expressed opinions were not occasionally entitled to fair belief. Now, the language of her daily cotemporary critics, respecting her appearance in *Belvidera*, is so warm, so una-

nimous, and, above all, so circumstantial, that I cannot help receiving it as truth. They point out with rapture the particular traits of her excellence, such as the heart-wringing effect of her call to *Jaffier*, "Oh, thou unkind one!"—the magic delicacy with which she bade him remember the hour of twelve;—and the electrifying manner in which she sprang to his arms, on his threat to kill her. I should take Mr. Boaden's testimony to the same effect, even if it stood quite solitary; but I like it none the worse for circumstantially agreeing with the above critiques: and his description of her *Belvidera* is able, minute, and copious. She attached herself by this part with a new and bright link to public favour.

Mr. Boaden inveighs, and not unjustly, against the omission of some lines of the tragedy, both beautiful and unexceptionable, in the prompt-book from which Mrs. Siddons acted. These were tasteless omissions I own;

but, in a general view, no play was ever more indebted to the stage for purification than "Venice Preserved." As it originally came out, it was stamped with all the profligacy of the age, and offered the melancholy spectacle of genius prostituted to court corruption. It is generally supposed that, in the character of the buffoon-senator, *Antonio*, the poet meant to ridicule Lord Shaftesbury; and, from the primitive indecent prologue, it may also be inferred that he made another hit at his Lordship, in pourtraying the conspirator *Renault*.\*

This chain-shot satire seems to have been discharged against Shaftesbury by the order of Charles II., a prince who, with the love of monopolies that was inherent in his family, seems to have thought that he had a right to exclude

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\* It is said, in this prologue, that if Poland had heard of *Renault*, she would have made him her king. Shaftesbury's enemies alleged that he was ambitious of the crown of Poland.

all others from competition with him in profligacy. To preserve consistency, the poet dedicated his tragedy to the Duchess of Portsmouth, congratulating her on being the king's mistress, and on having lately borne him an illegitimate child.

In his utmost destitution, Otway appears less humiliated than in this dedication. I am sorry that his recent editors have not, in mercy to his memory, forborne to re-print all the disgusting dialogue, which has been long since expunged from stage-representation. The courtesan, *Aquillia*, I believe, has ceased to disgrace the *dramatis personæ* since the beginning of the last century. George II., so at least says the "Dramatic Censor," commanded all those scenes of "Venice Preserved," which had been already rejected by public modesty, to be restored when the play was to be acted before him; but the audience, with one consent, hooted them off. If this be true, it is

probable that our German liege acted more from ignorance of the English language than from profligacy.

The alterations of "Venice Preserved" have redeemed it as a public spectacle, and as a work of taste. *Pierre* is a miserable conspirator as Otway first painted him, impelled to treason by his love of a courtesan, and his jealousy of *Antonio*. But his character, as it now comes forward, is a mixture of patriotism and of excusable misanthropy. Even in the more modern prompt-books, an improving curtailment has been introduced. Until the middle of the last century, the ghosts of *Jaffier* and *Pierre* used to come in upon the stage, haunting *Belvidera* in her last agonies, which, God knows! require no aggravation from spectral agency.

Never were beauties and faults more easily separable than those of this tragedy. The

former, in its purification for the stage, came off like dirt from a fine statue, taking away nothing from its symmetrical surface, and leaving us only to wonder how the author himself should have soiled it with such disfigurements.\*

Mar. 18,  
1783.

For her second benefit, this season, she chose the part of *Zara*, in the "Mourning

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\* It is pretty generally known that Otway founded his tragedy on St. Real's History of the Venetian Conspiracy in 1618. Nearly the whole of the *dramatis personæ* are real persons. *Belvidera*, however, is fictitious. The real *Renault* was no villain, and the real *Pierre* was privately strangled on board his own ship, by order of the Venetian senate. The prose and true *Jaffier* was not melted in his faith to the conspiracy by a woman's tears, but was struck with compunction during a city jubilee, when he contrasted its gaiety with the horrors and massacres that would eventually result from the plot. Otway's *Jaffier* is more pathetic and dramatic, but St. Real's History is wonderfully impressive. Voltaire compares its author to Sallust, and not unworthily.

Bride." In this character I never had the good fortune to see her ; and, if it were not for the information I have received from others, I should at this moment remain half incredulous that even *her* powers of acting could have made *Zara* a captivating heroine. I by no means wish to rank among the censurers of this tragedy who call it a pantomime. Its concinnity of structure as a drama, and its many impassioned and picturesque passages, I admit, and admire. But, in reading the "Mourning Bride," I cannot *like Zara*, and I feel a predominant interest for her tamer rival, *Almeria*. Having never seen our great actress as the captive Queen, I was the more anxious to consult the most trustworthy lovers of the drama, who could remember her in the part ; and among these the first with whom I happened to converse on the subject was Mr. Godwin. I shall never forget the pleasure I received from the vivid remarks of this patriarch of our living literature. The freshness of his recollections,



and his hearty interest in the history of the stage, are worthy of his gifted genius. He spoke to me of Garrick very fervidly; but he said that, in spite of Garrick's superior versatility, Mrs. Siddons shewed at times conceptions of her characters which he thought more sublime than anything even in Garrick's acting. I confessed to my philosophical friend, that I wondered how any powers of acting could throw magnificence around a character so vicious, so selfish, and so hateful, as *Zara*; and I asked him how the part of *Almeria*, who ought indeed to be the heroine of the tragedy, had affected him? His answer was, "I recollect nothing about the acting of *Almeria*; for the disdain and indignation of the Siddons, in *Zara*, engrossed all attention, and swept away the possibility of interest in anything else. Her magnificence in the part was inexpressible. It was worth the trouble of a day's journey to see her but walk down the stage. Her *Zara* was not inferior even to her *Lady Macbeth*."

It was at this time that she sat for her portrait, as *Isabella*, to the distinguished artist, Hamilton. Her immense popularity was now shewn, in the general enthusiasm to see her picture, even when it was scarcely finished. Carriages thronged the artist's door; and, if every fine lady who stepped out of them did not actually weep before the painting, they had all of them, at least, their white handkerchiefs ready for that demonstration of their sensibility.

One day, after her sitting, Mr. Hamilton and his wife were bidding good morning to the great actress, and accompanying her down stairs, when they pointed out to her her own resemblance to an antique sculpture of Ariadne, that stood on the staircase. Mrs. Siddons was taken by surprise, and her honesty was here a traitor to her vanity. She clasped her hands in delight, and said, "Yes, it is very——" but, immediately recollecting herself, before she got out the word *like*, substituted the word, beau-

tiful. "It is so very beautiful, that you must be flattering me." She then sat down on the staircase to contemplate the sculpture, frequently exclaiming, "It is so very beautiful, that you must be flattering me." She departed, however, evidently well pleased to believe in the likeness : but it would require one to be as handsome as herself to have a right to blame her self-complacency.

On the 5th of June she acted *Isabella* for the twenty-fourth time ; and, having performed, in all, about eighty nights, and on six of them for the benefit of others, she closed a season of as brilliant success as her own wishes could have shaped, even if they had been castle-building. Her fellow-performers complained that, after her tragic parts, the best comic acting of after-pieces could not raise the spirits of the audience ; and this continued to be the case, till the enchantress, Mrs. Jordan, appeared on the same boards.

It has been said of Mrs. Siddons, by the last historian of the stage,\* that, even in this first season, she made all other actresses be forgotten. Perhaps it would be more correct to say, though it ought to be said with a due sympathy for the previous idols of the public, that she left to her still nominal rivals, Mrs. Yates and Mrs. Crawford, a remnant of reputation more painful than utter oblivion.

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\* Mr. Genest.



**CHAPTER V.**



## **CHAPTER V.**





## CHAPTER V.

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Her Second Season at Drury Lane—Plays *Isabella*, in “Measure for Measure”—Performs in the “Gamester” with her Brother, John Kemble—Performs *Constance*, in “King John”—Her own Criticisms on the Character—Plays *Lady Randolph*—The *Countess of Salisbury*, and *Sigismunda* in Thomson’s Tragedy—Conclusion of the Season, 1783-4.

## CHAPTER V.

AFTER four months, during which she acted at Liverpool, Dublin, and Cork, Mrs. Siddons returned to Drury Lane, in the October of 1783, and commenced her second season, by Royal command, with *Isabella*, in the "Fatal Marriage." Their Majesties, accompanied by the Prince of Wales, the Princess Royal, and the Princess Augusta, honoured the performance with their attendance.\*

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\* The *London Chronicle*, for October 9, 1783, gives so graphic an account of the canopies erected on this occasion for the Royal spectators, together with the dresses which they wore, that I could find in my heart to transcribe it as a picture of by-gone fashions, if I were not afraid of surly criticism demanding, What have valances, velvet draperies, golden tassels, and silks and satins, to do with Mrs. Siddons's History?

Hitherto, since her return to the London stage, Mrs. Siddons had attempted none of the characters of Shakespeare; and at this period, notwithstanding all her popularity, I find that she had still some detractors, who pretended to doubt whether she had courage to make the attempt, or would succeed, if she should make it. To this scepticism, whether it was sincere or affected, she put a practical termination, on the 3d of November, by playing *Isabella*, in "Measure for Measure," in a manner that commanded undivided applause.\*

This success was an epoch in her life; not for its merely silencing a few detractors, but for the triumph of uniting her name with Shakespeare's, in the most solemn and religious of his characters.

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\* Cast of the other parts in "Measure for Measure:"  
*Duke*, Smith; *Lucio*, Lee Lewes; *Angelo*, Palmer;  
*Claudio*, Brereton; *Clown*, Parsons; *Escalus*, J. Aickin:  
*Mariana*, Mrs. Ward.

There is so entire an exemption in Shakespeare's genius from any thing assimilating to cant or puritanism, that we listen with unsuspecting reverence to his morality when he pitches it at the highest key; and no creation of his mind gives us a finer proof of its sublime moral tone than the saintly character of his *Isabella*. By the eloquence of this fair agent he illustrates the momentous truth, that the worth of life is inferior to the worth of honour; a truth seemingly romantic, but the denial of which, if it were negatived as unreal, would involve the debasement and wreck of our species. Substitute for this principle the doctrine of Hobbes, that the preservation of *its own life* is the paramount duty of every human being, and see, by Hobbes's own theory of government, what a slave and mere animal you would make of man. In upholding the opposite doctrine, Shakespeare writes with his natural fearlessness: he makes no sophistical juggling, and tells no lies, like the stoics, about death being

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only an imaginary evil. On the contrary, he confronts the novice of St. Clair with a brother pleading to her for his life; and he depicts the horrors of the agonized petitioner with a fidelity that makes us shudder. And yet he inspires his heroine with sufficient eloquence to convince us of the *sacred principle*.

I deny not that the page of Shakespeare is competent, even in reading it, to inspire us with an exulting sympathy with *Isabella*, and to make us exclaim, "No! let not the purity of so hallowed a being be sacrificed for the life of a dastard." But it was wonderful to feel what freshness and force this sentiment acquired from our actress's impersonation of the heroine. The simplicity of her dress might be described, but not the moral simplicity of her demeanour, that brought the expression of lofty feelings in close succession to meekness, and made her final sternness to her brother as becoming as her former sisterly suavity. It is

true, that, in *Isabella*, she had less scope for impassioned acting than in *Constance* and *Lady Macbeth*; she had to represent principle more than passion: but Mrs. Siddons, with that air of uncompromising principle in her physiognomy, which struck you at first sight, and was verified by the longest acquaintance, looked the novice of St. Clair so perfectly, that I am sure, if Shakespeare had seen her among a thousand candidates for the part, he would have beckoned to her to come and perform it.

Hitherto Mrs. Siddons had been but indifferently supported by actors in the highest tragic parts at Drury Lane. Henderson unfortunately played at the other house. Bensley delivered dialogue with a propriety of emphasis and a nicety of discrimination that evinced a sound and comprehensive judgment; but when we are told that his voice and manner were well suited to *Malvolio*, and to the *Ghost* in "Hamlet," we are naturally prepared for what is added by



his most candid describers,—that he shewed a mind labouring against natural defects. He had an ungainly solemnity of action, and a nasal pronounciation. A good judge of acting, who remembers him, tells me that, in seeing him on the stage, his mind alternated between admiration of Bensley's sagacity as an actor, and regret that one so unfitted by nature for acting should have chosen it for his profession.

Smith has been immortalized by Churchill as a gentlemanly actor: but his forte was comedy. His person was agreeable, his countenance engaging, and his voice smooth and powerful, though monotonous. A potent physical personage he must have been, who could swim a league at sea, drink his bottle of port, and after fatigue and conviviality commit his part distinctly to memory. He was respectable in *Richard the Third*, and a tolerable *Hotspur*.\*

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\* In the Catalogue of Mathews's "Gallery of Theatrical Portraits," I find a quotation from Charles Lamb,

Mr. Boaden, in mentioning Smith, speaks of the "hunter's health that glowed on his shoulders." It was a strange place, if he had clothes on his back, for his health to make its appearance: but he means, I suppose, that Smith had no great refinement as an actor.

Aickin can scarcely be quoted as even considerable in tragedy. His forte lay in the representation of an honest steward, or an affectionate parent. Brereton was, with the exception of John Kemble, the most promising young actor of the day; but his career was short,\* and his

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stating that Bensley was *an inimitable Hotspur*. If so, Mr. Genest, in his "Account of the English Stage," is strangely at fault in omitting *Hotspur* among the parts of Bensley. But, much as I respect both the taste and sincerity of Charles Lamb, I should suspect that he is here speaking from some exaggerated impressions made upon him in his boyish years. Bensley great in *Hotspur!* The thing is impossible.

\* Brereton was considered but a third or fourth rate actor till the time that Mrs. Siddons acted *Belvidera*. There was none of the actors already celebrated who

end unfortunate. He died while yet a young man in an asylum for the deranged.

But Mrs. Siddons this season found a coadjutor in acting, who was an acquisition to the English stage, and not the less acceptable to her for being her own brother. John Kemble had not indeed yet reached the height of his reputation, but he was fast advancing to it; and he was already so decidedly popular, that the prejudices which had pursued her sisters for merely daring to act on the same boards with Mrs. Siddons were dropt in welcoming him. His acknowledged talents and heroic appearance disarmed invidious, or, at all events, contemptuous comparison of him with his noble sister. There was a pleasing harmony in their manner, although hers was the more natural; and, side by side, they appeared the two noblest

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could be trusted with the part of *Jaffier*. To Brereton the part was given as an experiment: he was inspired by Mrs. Siddons, and acted to admiration.

specimens that could be produced of the breed of England. Her first appearance, in conjunction with her brother, was in the "Gamester," in which she played *Mrs. Beverley*. (Nov. 22.)\* Their success was brilliant. As this tragedy has some great beauties, and as it continually affects large audiences with strong emotions, I shall trouble the reader with no lucubrations of my own on its imperfections, but content myself with stating the fact, that Mrs. Siddons made it deeply affecting. Mr. Young, the actor, related to me an instance of her power in the part of *Mrs. Beverley* over his own feelings. He was acting *Beverley* with her on the Edinburgh stage, and they had proceeded as far as the 4th scene in the 5th act, when *Beverley* has swallowed the poison, and when *Bates* comes in, and says to the dying sufferer, "*Jarvis* found you quarrelling with *Lewson* in the streets last night," *Mrs. Beverley* says

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\* Cast of parts : *Beverley*, Kemble ; *Stukely*, Palmer ; *Jarvis*, J. Aickin : *Charlotte*, Mrs. Brereton.

Dec. 10,  
1783.

“No! I am sure he did not!” to which *Jarvis* replies, “*Or if I did?*”—meaning, it may be supposed, to add, “the fault was not with my master:”—but the moment he utters the words “*Or if I did?*” *Mrs. Beverley* exclaims, “’Tis false, old man!—*they had no quarrel—there was no cause for quarrel!*” In uttering this, Mrs. Siddons caught hold of *Jarvis*, and gave the exclamation with such piercing grief, that Mr. Young said his throat swelled, and his utterance was choked. He stood unable to speak the few words which, as *Beverley*, he ought to have immediately delivered: the pause lasted long enough to make the prompter several times repeat *Beverley’s* speech, till Mrs. Siddons, coming up to her fellow actor, put the tips of her fingers on his shoulders, and said, in a low voice, “Mr. Young, *recollect yourself.*”

It does credit to the taste of George the Third, that his wish to see the Siddons

and the Kemble together, in the tragedy of "King John," was the immediate cause of her coming out this season in the new character of *Constance*.\* I find, to my surprise, the cotemporary daily newspapers exceedingly truculent in their remarks on her performance of this part; and, if their testimony were to be solely relied upon, we must believe that she was at first an infinitely less popular *Constance* than she ultimately proved to be. Attaching as I do a certain consequence to the newspaper criticism of that period,† I should nevertheless be sorry to give it my arbitrary credence only when it speaks in favour of my

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\* Cast of the other parts: *King John*, Kemble; *Falconbridge*, Smith; *Hubert*, Bensley; *King of France*, J. Aickin; *Dauphin*, Barrymore; *Pandulph*, Palmer; *Chatillon*, Farren: *Queen Eleanor*, Mrs. Hopkins.

† The dramatic criticism of our newspapers at that time was as inferior to what it has since been, as the engravings of the same period are inferior to those plates which so exquisitely adorn several modern publications.

heroine. It was her boast, that she gradually improved in all her characters, and that she never repeated her performance of any part without studying it anew to the utmost of her power and leisure. Thus I can believe it possible, that she was not at this period the same perfect *Lady Constance*, such as I saw her some ten years afterwards. Besides, the entire tragedy of "King John," from conforming to history more than to our wishes, disappoints us by *Constance* belonging to it only in two acts, and disappearing before its catastrophe. This circumstance is a disadvantage to any actress, however great she may be in the part; or, at least, a difficulty not likely to be overcome, till, by repeated impressions, she has won the public to feel the tragedy worth seeing, for the sake of *Constance* alone. "King John" had not been revived for several years; and, with Mr. Boaden's leave, it is not credible that Kemble was in the least comparable to Garrick in the dreadful death-scene

of the tyrant. Accordingly, the main weight of resuscitating the popularity of the play fell on Mrs. Siddons; a task which she ultimately, though possibly not all at once, accomplished. At the same time, I cannot help suspecting that there was even thus early an evil agency at work in the press against her professional fame, not unconnected with that which soon afterwards attacked her personal character.

Be that as it may, she was ere long regarded as so consummate in the part of *Constance*, that it was not unusual for spectators to leave the house when her part in the tragedy of "King John" was over, as if they could no longer enjoy Shakespeare himself when she ceased to be his interpreter. I could speak as a wonder-struck witness to her power in the character, with almost as many circumstantial recollections of her as there are speeches in the part. I see her in my mind's eye, the embodied image of maternal love and intrepidity; of wronged



and righteous feeling; of proud grief and majestic desolation. With what unutterable tenderness was her brow bent over her *pretty Arthur* at one moment, and in the next how nobly drawn back, in a look at her enemies that dignified her vituperation. When she patted *Lewis* on the breast, with the words "Thine honour!—oh, thine honour!" there was a sublimity in the laugh of her sarcasm. I could point out the passages where her vicissitudes of hurried and deliberate gesture would have made you imagine that her very body seemed to think. Her elocution varied its tones from the height of vehemence to the lowest despondency, with an eagle-like power of stooping and soaring, and with the rapidity of thought. But there is a drawback in the pleasure of these recollections, from their being so little communicable to others; and, besides, in attempting to do them justice, I am detaining the reader from more interesting matter which Mrs. Siddons has left me in her

Memoranda, namely, her own remarks on the character of *Constance*.

“My idea of *Constance*,” she says, “is that of *Constance* a lofty and proud spirit, associated with the most exquisite feelings of maternal tenderness, which is, in truth, the predominant feature of this interesting personage. The sentiments which she expresses, in the dialogue between herself, the *King of France*, and the *Duke of Austria*, at the commencement of the second Act of this tragedy, very strongly evince the amiable traits of a humane disposition, and of a grateful heart.

‘Oh! take his mother’s thanks—a widow’s thanks!  
Till your strong hand shall help to give him strength  
To make a more requital to your love.’

“Again, in reply to the *King’s* bloody determination of subjugating the city of Angiers to the sovereignty of her son, she says,

‘Stay for an answer to your embassy,  
Lest, unadvis’d, you stain your swords with blood.

My Lord Chantillon may from England bring  
That right in peace which here we urge in war ;  
And then we shall regret each drop of blood  
That hot rash haste so indiscreetly shed.'

“The idea one naturally adopts of her qualities and appearance are, that she is noble in mind, and commanding in person and demeanour; that her countenance was capable of all the varieties of grand and tender expression, often agonized, though never distorted by the vehemence of her agitations. Her voice, too, must have been ‘*propertied like the tuned spheres,*’ obedient to all the softest inflections of maternal love, to all the pathos of the most exquisite sensibility, to the sudden burst of heart-rending sorrow, and to the terrifying imprecations of indignant majesty, when writhing under the miseries inflicted on her by her dastardly oppressors and treacherous allies. The actress, whose lot it is to personate this great character, should be richly endowed by nature for its various requirements: yet, even when

thus fortunately gifted, much, very much remains to be effected by herself; for in the performance of the part of *Constance* great difficulties, both mental and physical, present themselves. And perhaps the greatest of the former class is that of imperiously holding the mind reined-in to the immediate perception of those calamitous circumstances which take place during the course of her sadly eventful history. The necessity for this severe abstraction will sufficiently appear, when we remember that all those calamitous events occur whilst she herself is absent from the stage; so that this power is indispensable for that reason alone, were there no other to be assigned for it. Because, if the representative of *Constance* shall ever forget, even behind the scenes, those disastrous events which impel her to break forth into the overwhelming effusions of wounded friendship, disappointed ambition, and maternal tenderness, upon the first moment of her appearance

in the third Act, when stunned with terrible surprise she exclaims,—

‘Gone to be married—gone to swear a peace!

False blood to false blood joined—gone to be friends!’

—“if, I say, the mind of the actress for one moment wanders from these distressing events, she must inevitably fall short of that high and glorious colouring which is indispensable to the painting of this magnificent portrait.

“The quality of abstraction has always appeared to me so necessary in the art of acting, that I shall probably, in the course of these remarks, be thought too frequently and pertinaciously to advert to it. I am now, however, going to give a proof of its usefulness in the character under our consideration; and I wish my opinion were of sufficient weight to impress the importance of this power on the minds of all candidates for dramatic fame. Here then

is one example among many others which I could adduce. Whenever I was called upon to personate the character of *Constance*, I never, from the beginning of the play to the end of my part in it, once suffered my dressing-room door to be closed, in order that my attention might be constantly fixed on those distressing events which, by this means, I could plainly hear going on upon the stage, the terrible effects of which progress were to be represented by me. Moreover, I never omitted to place myself, with *Arthur* in my hand, to hear the march, when, upon the reconciliation of England and France, they enter the gates of Angiers to ratify the contract of marriage between the *Dauphin* and the *Lady Blanche*; because the sickening sounds of that march would usually cause the bitter tears of rage, disappointment, betrayed confidence, baffled ambition, and, above all, the agonizing feelings of maternal affection to gush into my eyes. In short, the spirit of the whole drama took possession of my mind

and frame, by my attention being incessantly riveted to the passing scenes. Thus did I avail myself of every possible assistance, for there was need of all in this most arduous effort; and I have no doubt that the observance of such circumstances, however irrelevant they may appear upon a cursory view, were powerfully aidant in the representations of those expressions of passion in the remainder of this scene, which have been only in part considered, and to the conclusion of which I now proceed.

“ Goaded and stung by the treachery of her faithless friends, and almost maddened by the injuries they have heaped upon her, she becomes desperate and ferocious as a hunted tigress in defence of her young, and it seems that existence itself must nearly issue forth with the utterance of that frantic and appalling exclamation—

‘ A wicked day, and not a holy day !

What hath this day deserved ? what hath it done

That it in golden letters should be set  
 Among the high tides in the calendar ?  
 Nay, rather turn this day out of the week—  
 This day of shame, oppression, perjury :  
 Or if it must stand still, let wives with child  
 Pray that their burthens may not fall this day,  
 Lest that their hopes prodigiously be cross'd—\*  
 But† on this day let seamen fear no wreck,  
 This day all things begun come to ill end !  
 Yes, faith itself to hollow falsehood change.'

“ When *King Philip* says to her

‘ By heaven ! Lady, you shall have no cause  
 To curse the fair proceedings of this day ;  
 Have I not pawn'd to you my majesty—’

“ What countenance, what voice, what gesture,  
 shall realize the scorn and indignation of her  
 reply to the heartless king of France ?

‘ You have beguil'd me with a counterfeit  
 Resembling majesty, which being touch'd and tried  
 Proves valueless : you are forsworn—forsworn,  
 You came in arms to spill mine enemies' blood,  
 But now in arms you strengthen it with yours, &c.’

\* Lest they bring forth prodigies or monsters.

† “ But” here means except.



“ And then the awful, trembling solemnity, the utter helplessness of that soul-subduing, scriptural, and prophetic invocation—

‘ Arm, arm, ye heavens ! against these perjur’d kings !  
A widow cries—Be husband to me, Heavens !  
Let not the hours of this ungodly day  
Wear out the day in peace—but ere sun set  
Set armed discord ’twixt these perjur’d kings.’

“ If it ever were, or ever shall be, pourtrayed with its appropriate and solemn energy, it must be then, and then only, when the power I have so much insisted on, cooperating also with a high degree of enthusiasm, shall have transfused the mind of the actress into the person and situation of the august and afflicted *Constance*. The difficulty, too, of representing with tempered rage and dignified contempt the biting sarcasm of the following speeches to *Austria*, may be more easily imagined than explained :

‘ War ! war ! no peace—peace is to me a war—  
*Lymoges ! O Austria !* thou dost shame  
That bloody spoil—thou slave ! thou wretch ! thou  
coward !

Thou little valiant—great in villany—  
Thou ever strong upon the stronger side !  
Thou Fortune's champion—that dost never fight  
But when her humorous Ladyship is by  
To teach thee safety—thou art perjured too,  
And sooth'st up greatness. What a fool art thou,  
A ramping fool ; to brag, and stamp, and swear  
Upon my party—thou cold-blooded slave !  
Hast thou not spoke, like thunder, on my side ?  
Been sworn my soldier—bidding me depend  
Upon thy stars, thy fortune, and thy strength ?  
And dost thou now fall over to my foes ?  
Thou wear a lion's hide ? doff it for shame !  
And hang a calf-skin on those recreant limbs !'

“ But, in truth, to beget, in these whirlwinds of the soul, such temperance as, according to the lesson of our inspired master, shall give them smoothness, is a difficulty which those only can appreciate who have made the effort.

“ I cannot indeed conceive, in the whole range of dramatic character, a greater difficulty than that of representing this grand creature. Brought before the audience in the plenitude of her afflictions ; oppression and falsehood

having effected their destructive mark; the full storm of adversity, in short, having fallen upon her in the interval of their absence from her sight, the effort of pouring properly forth so much passion as past events have excited in her, without any visible previous progress towards her climax of desperation, seems almost to exceed the powers of imitation. Hers is an affliction of so ‘*sudden floodgate and o’erbearing nature*,’ that art despairs of realizing it, and the effort is almost life-exhausting. Therefore, whether the majestic, the passionate, the tender *Constance*, has ever yet been, or ever will be, personated to the entire satisfaction of sound judgment and fine taste, I believe to be doubtful; for I believe it to be nearly impossible.

“ I now come to the concluding scene; and I believe I shall not be thought singular, when I assert, that though she has been designated the ambitious *Constance*, she has been ambitious only for her son. It was for him, and him

alone, that she aspired to, and struggled for, hereditary sovereignty. For example, you find that from that fatal moment when he is separated from her, not one regret for lost regal power or splendour ever escapes from her lips; no, not one idea does she from that instant utter which does not unanswerably prove that all other considerations are annihilated in the grievous recollections of motherly love. The following scene, I think, must determine that maternal tenderness is the predominant feature of her character.

*Act 3. Scene 4. Enter CONSTANCE.*

*King Philip.*

‘ Look, who comes here?—a grave unto a soul,  
Holding th’ eternal spirit ’gainst her will,  
In the vile prison of afflicted breath:  
I pray thee, lady, go away with me.’

*Constance.*

‘ Lo! now I see the issue of your peace.’

*King Philip.*

‘ Patience, good lady! Comfort, gentle Constance!’

*Constance.*

‘ No, I defy all counsel and all redress  
 But that which ends all counsel, true redress !  
 Death, Death—Oh, amiable, lovely Death—  
 Thou odoriferous stench ! sound rottenness !  
 Arise forth from the couch of endless night,  
 Thou hate and terror to prosperity,  
 And I will kiss thy detestable bones,  
 And put my eyeballs in thy vaulty brows,  
 And ring these fingers with thy household worms,  
 And stop this gap of breath with fulsome dust,  
 And be a carrion monster like thyself !  
 Come, grin on me, and I will think thou smil’st,  
 And buss thee as thy wife—Misery’s love,  
 Oh, come to me !’

*King Philip.*

‘ Oh, fair Affliction, peace !’

*Constance.*

‘ No, no, I will not, having breath to cry.  
 Oh, that my tongue were in the thunder’s mouth !  
 Then with a passion would I shake the world,  
 And rouse from sleep that fell Anatomy  
 Which cannot hear a lady’s feeble voice !  
 Which scorns a modern invocation.’\*

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\* “ Modern” here means trite, or common.

*King Philip.*

‘Lady! you utter madness, and not sorrow.’

*Constance.*

‘Thou art unholy to belie me so.  
I am not mad. This hair I tear is mine.  
My name is Constance—I was Geoffrey’s wife.  
Young Arthur is my son—and he is lost.  
I am not mad! I would to heaven I were!  
For then ’tis like I should forget myself.  
Oh! if I could, what grief should I forget!  
Preach some philosophy to make me mad,  
And thou shalt be canonized cardinal!  
For being not mad, but sensible of grief,  
My reasonable part produces reason  
How I may be delivered of these woes,  
And teaches me to kill or hang myself.  
If I were mad I should forget my son,  
Or madly think a babe of clouts were he.  
I am not mad! too well, too well I feel  
The different plague of each calamity.’

*King Philip.*

‘Bind up those tresses. Oh, what love I note  
In the fair multitude of those her hairs!  
Where but by chance a silver drop hath fallen,  
Even to that drop ten thousand wiry friends  
Do glue themselves in sociable grief,  
Like true, inseparable, faithful loves,  
Sticking together in calamity.’

*Constance.*

‘ To England, if you will.’

*King Philip.*

‘ Bind up your hairs.’

*Constance.*

‘ Yes ! that I will. And wherefore will I do it ?  
I tore them from their bonds, and cried aloud,  
Oh that these hands could so redeem my son  
As they have given these hairs their liberty !  
But now I envy at their liberty ;  
And will again commit them to their bonds,  
Because my poor child is a prisoner.  
And, father Cardinal, I have heard you say  
That we shall see and know our friends in heaven ;  
If that be true, I shall see my boy again ;  
For since the birth of Cain, the first male child,  
There was not such a gracious creature born.  
But now will canker sorrow cut my bud,  
And chase the native beauty from his cheek ;  
And he will look as hollow as a ghost,  
As dim and meagre as an ague’s fit,  
And so he’ll die ; and rising so again,  
When I shall meet him in the court of heaven  
I shall not know him ; therefore, never, never  
Shall I behold my pretty Arthur more.’

*Pandulph.*

‘ You hold too heinous a respect of grief.’

*Constance.*

‘ He talks to me that never had a son.’

*King Philip.*

‘ You are as fond of grief as of your child.’

*Constance.*

‘ Grief fills the room up of my absent child ;  
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,  
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,  
Remembers me of all his gracious parts,  
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form ;  
Then have I reason to be fond of grief.—  
Fare you well !—had you such a loss as I,  
I could give better comfort than you do.  
I will not keep this form upon my head [*tears off her head-*  
When there is such disorder in my wit. *dress.*  
Oh Lord ! my boy ! my Arthur ! my fair son,  
My life, my joy, my food, my all the world !  
My widow’s comfort, and my sorrow’s care !’

“ Her gorgeous affliction, if such an expression is allowable, is of so sublime and so intense a character, that the personation of its grandeur, with the utterance of its rapid and astonishing eloquence, almost overwhelms the mind that meditates its realization, and utterly exhausts



the frame which endeavours to express its agitations.”

In spite of all these difficulties in the part of *Constance*, Mrs. Siddons must have been conscious that she had strengthened her reputation by performing it, and it is difficult henceforward to imagine her fearful of attempting any other great character in the drama. I therefore very much doubt the justice of Mr. Boaden's remark, when, after noticing that she selected the part of *Lady Randolph* for her first benefit this season, December 22, 1783,\* he adds, that “*perhaps the most serious moment of her professional life was that in which she resolved to contest even that character with her rival, Mrs. Crawford.*” I cannot conceive what there was to render the trial so terrific. The passion of one of *Constance's* speeches would leaven the whole

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\* Cast of parts: *Douglas*, Brereton; *Norval*, Bensley; *Glenalvon*, Palmer; *Lord Randolph*, Farren.

part of *Lady Randolph*. Mrs. Crawford's *Lady Randolph* had undoubtedly been once a great performance; but I have already noticed, that from the first night of her reappearance at Covent Garden, after an absence of five years, the general opinion regarded her as a broken-down actress. The tragedy of "Douglas" was got up for Mrs. Crawford's reappearance, on the 13th November, 1783, and Mrs. Siddons did not perform *Lady Randolph* at Drury Lane till more than a month afterwards, so that she had plenty of time to rally her courage. Indeed, when we contemplate Mrs. Siddons in the blaze of her beauty, competing with this toil and age worn rival, it is almost cruel to exult in her victory. Mrs. Siddons omitted Mrs. Crawford's scream in the far-famed question, "*Was he alive?*" but she gave the character its appropriate beauty, and made the tragedy itself more permanently popular.

The only other new characters which she

acted during her second season, were the *Countess of Salisbury*, in a tragedy of that name, and *Sigismunda*, in Thomson's "Tancred and Sigismunda." In neither of those pieces could she be said to be worthily employed. The "Countess of Salisbury" had first appeared some thirty years before, on the Dublin stage, where the popularity of Barry and of Mrs. Dancer, afterwards Mrs. Barry, supported it. Small as its merit was, its real author, Hall Hartson, was accused of having had it from his college tutor, Dr. Leland, the translator of Demosthenes: the charge against Hartson, of purloining this tragedy, was as unfounded as the claim of the piece itself to popularity. The *Morning Chronicle* for March 8, 1784, says, "The performance of the *Countess of Salisbury*, by Mrs. Siddons, turned out but an unhappy experiment, the play being so infamously underwritten, that even her great acting could not keep it from ridicule; and when Smith came on the stage to give it out for a second

representation, he was saluted with a horse-laugh."

Whilst acting in "Tancred," for her second benefit, April 24th,\* she was at least adorning the drama of an acknowledged poet, and that which is generally thought the most successful of Thomson's plays. We are told† that Garrick was very great in *Tancred*, and that Mrs. Cibber was harmony itself in *Sigismunda*. Mrs. Siddons, in the opinion of those who remembered her great predecessor in the part, fell nothing short of her, in the eloquence of her eye and gesture, and she made the death of *Sigismunda* tenderly perfect. Yet, in spite of this assurance, and of all my reverence for the poet of the Seasons, and the Castle of Indolence, I cannot imagine the powers of our actress in-

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\* *Tancred*, Kemble ; *Siffredi*, Bensley ; *Osmond*, Farren.

† Murphy's Life of Garrick.

voked to the sphere where they ought to have moved, in this verbose tragedy. The spell of Thomson's enchantment seems to be broken the moment he enters on the drama; he had cultivated his genius into a rich, soft soil, too luxuriant for dramatic poetry. The main issue of the plot of "Tancred" depends on the father of *Sigismunda*, *Siffredi*, whose inconsistency is enough to spoil a better tragedy. At first, the old chancellor of Sicily is all self-denial and conscientiousness, the *beau ideal* of political morality. So far so good; but he turns out an inhuman father, a false guardian, and a legal swindler. He has taken Prince *Tancred* into his house, and, after causing his attachment to his daughter by domestication, he chooses rather to break both their hearts than his own political views for the good of Sicily. In a heated moment *Tancred* gives *Sigismunda* a *carte blanche*, with his signature. The old lawyer, with a treachery unworthy of the lowest attorney, gets this paper from his daughter, and

fills it up with a promise on the part of *Tancred* that he will marry *Constantia*, the daughter of his father's murderer. In Poetry, the feigned description of improbable animals is as susceptible of detection as in Natural History, and such a medley of morality and mischief as *Siffredi*, probably never existed in nature.

Mrs. Siddons concluded her second season the 13th of May, 1784, with a sixth performance of *Belvidera*. Between the 8th of October and this last night she acted fifty-three times, that is, allowing for the oratorios in Lent, nearly once in every three nights of the company's performance. *Isabella* and *Mrs. Beverley* were her most frequent characters.

Before the end of the season Mr. and Mrs. Siddons left their lodgings, in the Strand, and took and furnished a comfortable house, in Gower street, and she now returned the visits of her friends in her own carriage.

*Strand*  
*Gower st.*  
*Carriage*

I shall now recur to the few Recollections of her Life which Mrs. Siddons has left me in her own writing. My last quotation from them ended with her description of her reception in *Isabella*. As her Memoranda are resumed at that point, they necessarily refer to some circumstances belonging to the history of her first season. But as she almost immediately passes into recollections of her second season, and as I wished to break upon the continuity of her Memoranda as little as possible, I postponed what I now quote from them to the end of my account of her professional appearances in 1783-4.

## **CHAPTER VI.**



## CONTENTS.

Mrs. Siddons's Memoranda—Her Summer Excursion  
to Edinburgh and Dublin—Important Quotation  
from Lee Lewes's Memoirs.

## CHAPTER VI.

“I CANNOT now remember the regular succession of my various characters during this my first season, 1782-3. I think *Belvidera* came soon after *Isabella*, who almost precluded the appearance of all others for a very long time; but I well remember my fears and ready tears on each subsequent effort, lest I should fall from my high exaltation. The crowds collected about my carriage, at my outgoings and incomings, and the gratifying and sometimes comical remarks I heard on those occasions, were extremely diverting. The Royal Family very frequently honoured me with their presence.\*

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\* As early as the January of 1783, the Royal Family began to patronize Mrs. Siddons; and they continued to see her in all her characters: her *Euphrasia*; her

The King was often moved to tears, and the Queen at one time told me, in her gracious manner and broken English, that her only refuge was actually turning her back upon the stage, at the same time protesting that my acting was 'indeed too disagreeable.' In short, all went on most prosperously; and, to complete my triumph, I had the honour to receive the commands of their Majesties to go and read to them, which I frequently did, both at Buckingham-house and at Windsor. /<sup>1</sup> Their Majesties were the most gratifying of auditors, because the most unremittingly attentive. The King was a most judicious and tasteful critic both in acting and dramatic composition. He told me he had endeavoured, vainly, to detect me in a false emphasis, and very humorously repeated many of Mr. Smith's, who was then a principal actor. He

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*Belvidera*; her *Jane Shore*; her *Calista*; and her *Isabella*; and even the offensive politics of the Manager, Sheridan, vanished before the charms of the new sovereign of the stage.

graciously recommended the propriety of my action, particularly my total repose in certain situations. This, he said, is a quality in which Garrick failed. ‘*He never could stand still—He was a great fidget.*’

“I do not exactly remember the time, (she continues,) that I was favoured with an invitation from Dr. Johnson, but I think it was during the first year of my celebrity.”\* The Doctor was then a wretched invalid, and had requested my friend, Mr. Windham, to persuade me to favour him by drinking tea with him, in Bolt Court. \* \* \* \* The Doctor spoke highly of Garrick’s various powers of acting. When Mr. Windham and myself were discussing some point respecting Garrick, he said,

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\* Mrs. Siddons is pretty nearly right in her recollection. Her introduction to Dr. Johnson took place about a year after her return to Drury Lane, namely, in October, 1783, at the commencement of her second season.

‘Madam, do not trouble yourself to convince Windham; he is the very bull-dog of argument, and will never lose his hold.’ Dr. Johnson’s favourite female character in Shakespeare was *Katharine*, in “Henry VIII.” He was most desirous of seeing me in that play; but said, ‘I am too deaf and too blind to see or hear at a greater distance than the stage-box, and have little taste for making myself a public gaze in so distinguished a situation.’ I assured him that nothing would gratify me so much as to have him for an auditor, and that I could procure for him an easy chair at the stage-door, where he would both see and hear, and be perfectly concealed. He appeared greatly pleased with this arrangement, but, unhappily for me, he did not live to fulfil our mutual wishes. Some weeks before he died I made him some morning visits. He was extremely, though formally polite; always apologised for being unable to attend me to my carriage; conducted me to the head of the stairs, kissed my hand, and bow-

ing, said, 'Dear Madam, I am your most humble servant;' and these were always repeated without the smallest variation.

“ About this time occurred a memorable evening, which is accurately described in Cumberland's Observer. I was invited into this snare by Miss Monkton, (since Lady Cork.) This lady had given me her word of honour that I should meet only half a dozen of our mutual friends; for I had often told her very seriously, that it suited neither my studies nor my inclinations to be engaged in parties, from which I begged most earnestly to be excused; for, to say the truth, I had been forewarned how eagerly any notorious person was pursued for exhibition. Miss Monkton solemnly promised me to keep her word, and assured me that I need never fear meeting a crowd at her house. The appointed Sunday evening came. I went to her very much in undress at the early hour of eight, on account of my little boy,

whom she desired me to bring with me, more for effect, I suspect, than for his *beaux yeux*. I found with her, as I had been taught to expect, three or four ladies of my acquaintance; and the time passed in agreeable conversation, till I had remained much longer than I had apprehended. I was of course preparing speedily to return home, when incessantly repeated thundrings at the door, and the sudden influx of such a throng of people as I had never before seen collected in any private house, counteracted every attempt that I could make for escape. I was therefore obliged, in a state of indescribable mortification, to sit quietly down, till I know not what hour in the morning; but for hours before my departure, the room I sat in was so painfully crowded, that the people absolutely stood on the chairs, round the walls, that they might look over their neighbours' heads to stare at me; and if it had not been for the benevolent politeness of Mr. Erskine, who had been acquainted with my arrangement, I

know not what weakness I might have been surprised into, especially being tormented, as I was, by the ridiculous interrogations of some learned ladies, who were called *Blues*, the meaning of which title I did not at that time appreciate, much less did I comprehend the meaning of the greater part of their learned talk. These profound ladies, however, furnished much amusement to the town for many weeks after, nay, I believe I might say, for the whole winter. Glad enough was I at length to find myself at peace in my own bed-chamber.

“I was, as I have confessed, an ambitious candidate for fame, and my professional avocations alone, independently of domestic arrangements, were of course incompatible with habitual observance of parties and concerts, &c. I therefore often declined the honour of such invitations. As much of time as could now be stolen from imperative affairs was employed in sitting for various pictures. I had frequently the



honour of dining with Sir Joshua Reynolds, in Leicester square. At his house were assembled all the good, the wise, the talented, the rank and fashion, of the age. About this time he produced his picture of me in the character of the Tragic Muse. In justice to his genius, I cannot but remark his instantaneous decision of the attitude and expression of the picture. It was, in fact, decided within the twinkling of an eye. When I attended him, for the first sitting, after more gratifying encomiums than I can now repeat, he took me by the hand, saying, '*Ascend your undisputed throne, and graciously bestow upon me some good idea of the Tragic Muse.*' I walked up the steps, and instantly seated myself in the attitude in which the Tragic Muse now appears. This idea satisfied him so well, that without one moment's hesitation he determined not to alter it. When I attended him, for the last sitting, he seemed to be afraid of touching the picture; and, after pausingly contemplating his work, he said, 'No,

I will merely add a little more colour to the face.' I then begged him to pardon my presumption in hoping that he would not heighten that tone of complexion so deeply accordant with the chilly and concentrated musings of pale melancholy. He most graciously complied with my petition ; and, some time afterwards, when he invited me to go and see the picture finished, and in the frame, he did me the honour to thank me for persuading him to pause from heightening the colour, being now perfectly convinced that it would have impaired the effect : adding, that he had been inexpressibly gratified by observing many persons strongly affected in contemplating this favourite effort of his pencil. I was delighted when he assured me that he was certain that the colours would remain unfaded as long as the canvass would keep them together, which, unhappily, has not been the case with all his works: he gallantly added, with his own benevolent smile, ' And, to confirm my opinion, here is my name ; for I have resolved

to go down to posterity on the hem of your garment.' Accordingly, it appears upon the border of the drapery. Here ended our interview; and, shortly afterwards, his precious life.\* Her gracious Majesty very soon procured my dear little boy admittance to the Charterhouse; and the King, who had been told that I used white paint, (which I always detest,) sent me, by my friend, Sir Charles Hotham, a condescending message, to warn me against its pernicious effects. I cannot imagine how I could be suspected of this disgusting practice.

“Sir Joshua often honoured me by his presence at the theatre. He approved very much of my costumes, and of my hair without powder, which at that time was used in great profusion, with a reddish-brown tint, and a great quantity of pomatum, which, well kneaded

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\* Mrs. Siddons is a little mistaken. Sir Joshua lived several years longer. The portrait was exhibited in 1784. Sir Joshua died in 1792.

together, modelled the fair ladies' tresses into large curls like demi-cannon. My locks were generally braided into a small compass, so as to ascertain the size and shape of my head, which, to a painter's eye, was of course an agreeable departure from the mode. My short waist, too, was to him a pleasing contrast to the long stiff stays and hoop petticoats, which were then the fashion, even on the stage, and it obtained his unqualified approbation. He always sat in the orchestra ; and in that place were to be seen, O glorious constellation! Burke, Gibbon, Sheridan, Windham ; and, though last, not least, the illustrious Fox, of whom it was frequently said, that iron tears were drawn down Pluto's gloomy cheeks. And these great men would often visit my dressing-room, after the play, to make their bows, and honour me with their applauses. I must repeat, O glorious days! Neither did his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales withhold this testimony of his approbation.

*query*

*Too late*

“Garrick’s conduct towards me was by these gentlemen attributed to jealousy; and Mr. G. A. Stevens was heard to say, in reference to the clamorous applause of my first night, ‘If Garrick could hear this, it would turn him upon his face in his coffin.’ This expression, though a compliment to myself, I take to be as unjust as it was shocking. For my own part, I never could give credit to such a notion; for it is utterly inconceivable that he should have seen anything in an untaught, unpractised girl, to excite such a feeling; and, as I have already observed, I really think it was merely for the pleasure of mortifying others that he distinguished me. Cruel, cruel, pleasure!

“My door was soon beset by various persons quite unknown to me, whose curiosity was on the alert to see the new actress, some of whom actually forced their way into my drawing-room, in spite of remonstrance or opposition. This was as inconvenient as it was offensive; for, as

I usually acted three times a week, and had, besides, to attend the rehearsals, I had but little time to spend unnecessarily. One morning, though I had previously given orders not to be interrupted, my servant entered the room in a great hurry, saying, 'Ma'am, I am very sorry to tell you there are some ladies below, who say they must see you, and it is impossible for me to prevent it. I have told them over and over again that you are particularly engaged, but all in vain; and now, ma'am, you may actually hear them on the stairs.' I felt extremely indignant at such unparalleled impertinence; and, before the servant had done speaking to me, a tall, elegant, invalid-looking person presented herself, (whom, I am afraid, I did not receive very graciously;) and, after her, four more, in slow succession. A very awkward silence took place; when presently the first lady began to accost me, with a most inveterate Scotch twang, and in a dialect which was scarcely intelligible to me in those days. She was a person of very high rank: her curiosity,

however, had been too powerful for her good breeding. ‘ You must think it strange,’ said she, ‘ to see a person entirely unknown to you intrude in this manner upon your privacy ; but, you must know, I am in a very delicate state of health, and my physician won’t let me go to the theatre to see you, so I am to look at you here.’ She accordingly sat down to look, and I to be looked at, for a few painful moments, when she arose and apologised ; but I was in no humour to overlook such insolence, and so let her depart in silence.

“ I had very soon the honour of reading to their Majesties, in Buckingham House, and it occurred frequently.\* One could not appear in the presence of the Queen except in a dress,

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\* She was this year appointed preceptress in English reading to the Princesses. The appointment exacted no farther employment than these occasional readings ; but, I believe, it was without emolument.

not elsewhere worn, called a saque or negligée, with a hoop, treble ruffles, and lappets, in which costume I felt not at all in my ease. When I arrived at Buckingham House, I was conducted into an ante-chamber, where I found some ladies of my acquaintance ; and in a short time, the King entered from the drawing-room, in the amiable occupation of drawing the Princess Amelia, then scarce three years old, in a little cane chair. He graciously said something to one of the ladies, and left the lovely baby to run about the room. She happened to be much pleased with some flowers in my bosom, and, as I stooped down, that she might take them, if so disposed, I could not help exclaiming to a lady near me, ‘ What a beautiful child!—how I long to kiss her!’ When she instantly held her little hand to my mouth to be kissed: so early had she learnt this lesson of Royalty. Her Majesty was extremely gracious, and more than once during the reading desired me to take some refreshment in the

— The King



next room. I declined the honour, however, though I had stood reading till I was ready to drop, rather than run the risk of falling down by walking backwards out of the room, (a ceremony not to be dispensed with,) the flooring, too, being rubbed bright.<sup>1</sup> I afterwards learnt from one of the ladies who was present at the time, that her Majesty had expressed herself surprised to find me so collected in so new a position, and that I had conducted myself as if I had been used to a court. At any rate, I had frequently personated queens.

“Afterwards I had the honour of attending their Majesties at Windsor also. The readings there were arranged in the apartments of my dear and honoured friend, Lady Harcourt, whom I had lately seen as the hostess of Nuneham, doing the honours of her splendid mansion, when the King and Queen and several of the younger branches of the Royal Family came, while I was on a visit there. They were

so delighted with their loyal and noble host and hostess, and so charmed with all they saw, that their attendants were sent back to Windsor for what was necessary for three days, and even then they were loth to depart. One may imagine the usual style of magnificence in which they lived, from the circumstance that they were but little deranged by the unexpected arrival even of Royal guests."

During the summer recess of 1784 Mrs. Siddons visited Edinburgh, and acted eleven times, to the delight of her Scottish audiences. Her reception in Scotland was worthy of a land already enlightened by philosophy and the Muses, and in which the very lowest class were now so far emerged from the old fanaticism, that we shall soon find them crowding in multitudes around the great actress's hotel, in their enthusiasm to see her.

What a pleasing contrast is here presented

to the gloomy temper of the Scotch, with regard to stage entertainments, that had exhibited itself in times not long gone by. Only seventeen years were elapsed since the date of an admonition and exhortation by the Reverend Presbytery of Edinburgh, to all within their bounds, declaring themselves at this time loudly called upon, *in one body and with one voice, to expostulate, in the bowels of love and compassion,* against the encouragement given to the play-house, and denouncing the sin of seeing a play with as much awful solemnity as if they had been denouncing the crime of murder. Well meaning as those mistaken kirkmen might be, it is disgusting to see them garnishing this medley of cant and ignorance with the holy and beautiful language of Scripture. They blindly asserted that the Christian church had been at all times hostile to the stage, forgetting, or not knowing, that stage-entertainments had sprung out of the church itself; and, with equal falsehood, implying that there was

good

no Christian church in the days of Shakespeare. There were sermons printed by Scottish divines within the 18th century, representing the play-house as the actual Temple of the Devil, where he frequently appeared, clothed in a corporeal substance, and possessing the spectators, whom he held as his worshippers.\* The spirit of this *Odiū Theatricū* seems scarcely to have abated when the above admonition was penned; and it was followed by the punishment of John Home, for writing the only good tragedy ever written by a Scotsman. Assuredly, Edinburgh at that period had a right to the name of the Modern Athens, from one point of resemblance to the ancient city of Minerva. In Athens the priests *persecuted* Æschylus, and in Edin-

*query*  
X.

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\* Little more than a hundred years ago, my Scottish countrymen had such an abhorrence of all carnal recreations, that they denounced dancing itself as the sin of "*louping against the Lord!*" and when a public ball-room was instituted at Edinburgh, the godly rabble came and perforated the doors with red-hot spits.

x'burgh the clergy *prosecuted* the author of "Douglas."

The people of Glasgow were but a year later than those of Edinburgh in welcoming our great actress to their city, but they were so far from being behind them in enthusiasm, that they presented her with a massive piece of plate, with an inscription, purporting that they sent it as a proof of their being able to appreciate theatrical genius as well as the people of Edinburgh. They also came in great numbers to Edinburgh during this first year of Mrs. Siddons's appearance in Scotland, and augmented the pressure of those crowded audiences which made it a service of danger to attend her performances. The over-heated houses which she drew occasioned illness to many individuals, and the medical faculty of Edinburgh owed her a token of their regard more immediately than the lawyers, for their practice was increased by a prevalent indispo-

sition, which got the name of the Siddons' fever.

In the progress of Scottish liberality, however, I cannot compliment my fellow-citizens of Glasgow on having at all had the start of their eastern neighbours. On the contrary, my worthy townsmen, in the days of their imagined godliness, shewed more practically than the people of Edinburgh how well they could appreciate theatrical genius, by badgering and burning-out the unfortunate histrions. The cause of the destruction of the first play-house that was ever erected in Glasgow, was a voice from the pulpit. The ground of that edifice was purchased by the proprietors from a malt-merchant of the city. In bargaining for the sale of it, the man of malt expressed to the purchasers his horror at the idea of disposing of his land to be occupied by a temple of Belial; and, for this devout consideration, he could not in conscience part with it for a

smaller price than five shillings the square yard. His demand, though enormous for those days, was complied with, and the temple of Belial forthwith arose. But, before it could be acted in, a fanatical preacher, who was popular in Glasgow, told his auditors that he dreamed, the preceding night, he was in the infernal regions, at a grand entertainment, where all the devils were present, when Lucifer, their chief, gave for a toast, the health of Maister John Miller, maltster, in Glasgow, who had sold them his ground to build a house upon, which was to be opened the next day, and wherein they were all to reign. The preacher's hearers hastened away in a body to the new theatre, and consumed it with fire.\* Some years later, in 1757, the Presbytery of Glasgow responded with due solemnity to the admonition of their Edinburgh brethren, which I have quoted above. They echoed its owlish hootings at the innocent amusements of the stage. They

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\* This was in 1746.

blasphemously condemned, as ministers of God, what the Gospel has nowhere reprehended. They attributed the then existing war to our manifold sins, one of which was permitting theatres; and, with a true feeling of Scotch economy, they described the dearth of provisions as one of the surest tokens of Divine displeasure against a playgoing generation.

Trifling circumstances, like straws showing the direction of the wind, are often sure tests of popular opinion. Among the veriest vulgar of Scotland Mrs. Siddons had now her devoted worshippers. A poor serving-girl, with a basket of greens on her arm, one day stopt near her, in the High street of Edinburgh, and, hearing her speak, said, "Ah! weel do I ken that sweet voice, that made me greet sae sair the streen." The poet Gray, on seeing a copy of Thomson's Seasons in a blacksmith's shop, exclaimed, "This is true popularity!" And the remark might have been equally applied to Mrs. Siddons's humble admirer.



In recording this visit to Edinburgh, Mrs. Siddons says, "How shall I express my gratitude for the honours and kindness of my Northern friends?—for, should I attempt it, I should be thought the very Queen of egotists. But never can I forget the private no less than public marks of their gratifying suffrages. There I became acquainted with the venerable author of "Douglas," with Dr. Blair, David Hume, Dr. Beattie, Mr. Mackenzie, &c., and passed with them a succession of fleeting days, which never failed to instruct and delight me.

"On the first night of my appearance, I must own, I was surprised, and not a little mortified, at that profound silence which was a contrast to the bursts of applause I had been accustomed to hear in London. No; not a hand moved till the end of the scene: but then, indeed, I was most amply remunerated. Yet, while I admire the fine taste and judgment of this conduct on the part of an audience,

I am free to confess that it renders the task of an actor almost too laborious ; because, customary interruptions are not only gratifying and cheering, but they are really necessary, in order to give one breath and voice to carry one on through some violent exertions ; though, after all, it must be owned, that silence is the most flattering applause an actor can receive." *good*

How much more pleasantly people tell their history in social converse than in formal writing. I remember Mrs. Siddons describing to me the same scene of her probation on the Edinburgh boards with no small humour. The grave attention of my Scottish countrymen, and their *canny* reservation of praise till they were sure she deserved it, she said, had well-nigh worn out her patience. She had been used to speak to animated clay ; but she now felt as if she had been speaking to stones. Successive flashes of her elocution, that had always been sure to electrify the South, fell in

vain on those Northern flints. At last, as I well remember, she told me she coiled up her powers to the most emphatic possible utterance of one passage, having previously vowed in her heart, that if *this* could not touch the Scotch, she would never again cross the Tweed. When it was finished, she paused, and looked to the audience. The deep silence was broken only by a single voice exclaiming, "*That's no bad!*" This ludicrous parsimony of praise convulsed the Edinburgh audience with laughter. But the laugh was followed by such thunders of applause, that, amidst her stunned and nervous agitation, she was not without fears of the galleries coming down.

"I took my leave," she continues, "of dear Edinburgh, and proceeded to fulfil an engagement at Dublin. After a rough voyage, we were put on shore in the middle of the night, and were obliged, sick and weary as we were, to wander about the streets for about two

hours, before we could find a resting-place; for, strange to tell, they would not at that period receive a woman at any hotel. Of this, of course, we had been quite ignorant. We found our way, however, to my brother John's lodgings, who took compassion on the helpless wanderers, and sheltered us till we were accommodated, which was very soon effected by my charming friend, Mrs. O'Neil, the late Miss Boyle.

“This visit to Ireland answered all my expectations both of profit and pleasure. I was received by all the first families there with the most flattering hospitality; and the days I passed with them will be ever remembered as among the most pleasurable of my life. The Duke of Rutland, however, the then Lord Lieutenant, was very unpopular; and upon one occasion, when I acted *Lady Randolph*, at his command, the public displeasure against him was so excessively clamorous, that not one word of the play was heard from beginning to end :

and I had the honour of participating in the abuse with the representative of Majesty.

“The Manager of the theatre also very soon began to adopt every means of vexation for me that he could possibly devise, merely because I chose to suggest, at rehearsal, that his proper situation, as *Falconbridge*, in ‘King John,’ was at the right hand of the King. During the scene between *Constance* and *Austria*, he thought it necessary that he should, though he did it most ungraciously, adopt this arrangement; but his malevolence pursued me unremittingly from that moment. He absurdly fancied that he was of less consequence, when placed at so great a distance from the front of the stage, at the ends of which the Kings were seated; but he had little or nothing to say, and his being in the front would have greatly interrupted and diminished the effect of *Constance’s* best scene. He was a very handsome man, and, I believe, was mortified that his personal attractions had failed to pervert my judgment in the

*Jealousy*

grouping of this scene. He made me suffer however sufficiently for my personality, by employing all the newspapers to abuse and annoy me the whole time I remained in Dublin, and to pursue me to England with malignant scandal: but of that anon. The theatre, meantime, was attended to his heart's content; indeed, the whole of this engagement was as profitable as my most sanguine hopes could have anticipated.

“ When it was ended I made a visit to Shane's Castle, the magnificent residence of Mr. and Mrs. O'Neil. I have not words to describe the beauty and splendour of this enchanting place; which, I am sorry to say, has been since levelled to the earth by a tremendous fire. Here were often assembled all the talent, and rank, and beauty, of Ireland. Among the persons of the Leinster family whom I met here was poor Lord Edward Fitzgerald, the most amiable, honourable, though misguided youth, I ever knew. The luxury of this establishment almost

inspired the recollections of an Arabian Night's entertainment. Six or eight carriages, with a numerous throng of lords and ladies on horseback, began the day, by making excursions around this terrestrial paradise, returning home just in time to dress for dinner. The table was served with a profusion and elegance to which I have never seen anything comparable. The sideboards were decorated with adequate magnificence, on which appeared several immense silver flagons, containing claret. A fine band of musicians played during the whole of the repast. They were stationed in the corridors, which led into a fine conservatory, where we plucked our dessert from numerous trees, of the most exquisite fruits. The foot of the conservatory was washed by the waves of a superb lake, from which the cool and pleasant wind came, to murmur in concert with the harmony from the corridor. The graces of the presiding genius, the lovely mistress of the mansion, seemed to blend with the whole scene.

“ When my visit to Shane’s Castle was over, I entered into another engagement in Dublin. Among the actors in that theatre was Mr. Digges, who had formerly held a high rank in the drama, but who was now, by age and infirmity, reduced to a subordinate and mortifying situation. It occurred to me that I might be of some use to him, if I could persuade the Manager to give him a night, and the actors to perform for him, at the close of my engagement ; but, when I proposed my request to the Manager, he told me it could not be, because the whole company would be obliged to leave the Dublin theatre, in order to open the theatre at Limerick ; but that he would lend the house for my purpose, if I could procure a sufficient number of actors to perform a play. By indefatigable labour, and in spite of cruel annoyances, Mr. Siddons and myself got together, from all the little country theatres, as many as would enable us to attempt ‘ Venice Preserved.’ Oh ! to be sure, it was a scene of disgust and confusion. I acted *Belvidera*, without having



ever previously seen the face of one of the actors; for there was no time for even one rehearsal; but the motive procured us indulgence. Poor Mr. Digges was most materially benefited by this most ludicrous performance; and I put my disgust into my pocket, since money passed into his. Thus ended my Irish engagement; but not so my persecution by the Manager, at whose instance the newspapers were filled with the most unjust and malignant reflections on me. All the time, I was on a visit of some length to the Dowager Duchess of Leinster, unconscious of the gathering storm, whilst the public mind was imbibing poisonous prejudices against me. Alas! for those who subsist by the stability of public favor."

I subjoin an extract from the Memoirs of Lee Lewes, in which he bears a manly and distinct testimony to the unblameableness of Mrs. Siddons's conduct in this whole affair.

"There, at Dublin, (he says,) I am enabled,

as I was in the kingdom, and know every particular, gathered partly from inquiries, and partly from observation, to throw some light upon as dark a transaction as was ever practised against innocence and merit. I mean that infamous combination carried on against Mrs. Siddons, which raised that opposition she soon afterwards met in Drury Lane theatre, 1785, to the disgrace of that part of the audience who were deceived into it; who were but few, after all, in comparison with her friends who opposed them, and who, on the second night, silenced them entirely.

“ In the summer of 1783, Mrs. Siddons was engaged by Mr. Daly, the Manager, to perform a certain number of nights in Dublin. I believe, twelve. Her terms were half the receipts, the charges of the theatre being first deducted, which charges were called sixty pounds. At the latter end of June she began her career, which was as brilliant here as in London. At

the conclusion she very much wished to perform for the benefit of the Marshalsea prison; but, being pressed for time by her engagements at Cork, and hoping to have that opportunity another season, she sent a sum of money to the conductors of the above prison, and had the thanks of the debtors, as well as an acknowledgment from the managers, in the public Papers; though, by her own wish, the thanks, though full, were not ostentatiously expressed. Thus ended her first season at Dublin.

In the summer of 1784 she engaged herself for twenty nights, at a certain sum each night. The theatre was again crowded, and all things went on prosperously, till about the middle of the engagement, when she was unfortunately seized with a violent fever, which confined her to her bed for a fortnight. This accident began to arouse the venal tribe against our heroine; and rumours were spread that her illness was put on for some improper purpose. She

recovered, however, and went on with her engagement. And now we come to the principal incident which introduced the injured lady into this part of my Memoirs. As she was rehearsing the part of *Belvidera*, one morning, Digges, as he was standing for the part of *Pierre*, suddenly sank down. It was no less than a paralytic stroke, which deprived him of the use of one side. He was taken from the theatre, and, I believe, never returned to where he had fretted and strutted so many hours. Mrs. Siddons's engagement was coming to a conclusion; and she was advertised for Cork a few days after. In the meantime, a person came to her, and told her that it would be a charitable action if she would perform in a benefit play for poor Digges. Her answer was, that she was sorry she had but one night to spare, and for that she thought she was engaged in honour to play for the Marshalsea prisoners, as she had intended, in the year before. This, to be sure, was a denial to Digges, though not an uncharitable

*Digges*

refusal: and yet, what an artful and fiend-like use was made of it! As will appear. The messenger had not been long gone, when it struck her that it would be more humane to assist this old unfortunate; and immediately she dispatched a person to Drumcondra, where Digges then was, to say that Mrs. Siddons had reconsidered the matter, and would be glad to perform for him. He was thankful, and the night and play were fixed. There was a good house. The next day, while preparing for her journey for Cork, she received a note from Digges, expressing his gratitude. It will be proper to inform my reader, that while she was at Dublin there was a little sparring between her and the Manager. At Cork the misunderstanding was renewed, and I there made my own observations. These little bickerings brought down many paragraphs upon her from the party; and, directly after, a paper war ensued. She was accused of having charged Digges fifty pounds for playing

at his benefit. A very artful letter, written by a Mr. F—y, upon that subject, appeared in a Morning print; and, as it was inserted with a more mischievous intent than any of the rest, so it had a greater effect. It was now predicted, that she was to be driven from the London stage whenever she should appear on it: and, among the rest, appeared a paragraph, calling on any of her profession to come forth, and say if she had ever done a kind action. This was rather an unlucky challenge; for, a few weeks before, even in the city of York, it was a fact, that she had performed three times without any emolument to herself: once for my benefit; once for that of Mr. Aickin, of Covent Garden; and once for the benefit of a poor-house. I should have thought myself base indeed to have remained neutral at such a time; and I immediately published this circumstance in several of the Morning prints. Should not Mr. Digges have done the same? But, though called upon, and

*good*

urged by many of Mrs. Siddons's friends, he, for reasons best known to himself, kept an obstinate silence, and even suffered a rumour to prevail that she had taken money from him. But, at last, being closely pressed, he sent a letter, in which he owned that she had played for him gratis. He died soon after : and peace be to his manes ! Mrs. Siddons appeared on the London boards ; and, though this confession of her having performed gratis was made public, there were persons determined not to believe it, and who absolutely insulted her : but, as I have said before, they were but few in comparison of her powerful and numerous friends, and the vipers were soon crushed."

**CHAPTER VII.**

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## CHAPTER VII.

THE falsehoods that were now in circulation respecting our great actress, she seems herself to attribute to the enmity of the Dublin Manager; but the plot, that was evidently forming against her, must have had several partakers; and the rumour of the day said, that it included some members of her own profession, whose envy sickened in the shade that her superior merit threw over them. It would be unfair, at this distance of time, to quote names on mere suspicion. The only person who was clearly convicted of calumny was the wife of Digges; but she was a poor, insignificant creature, who could not be supposed capable of envying Mrs. Siddons. Brereton the actor was but too justly condemned for having seen Mrs.

Siddons publicly insulted on his account, before he published his testimony "*that she had been in no respect the occasion of his having missed a benefit in Ireland ; but, on the contrary, that he owed her the highest obligations of friendship.*"

The calamitous alienation of Brereton's mind, that took place not long subsequent, inclines me to judge of his actions at this period with some allowance. That there was, however, a regular conspiracy, got up to insult her, in London, was made but too plain by the sequel ; and it is only to be regretted that its unknown agents had not been branded with shame in the flagrancy of their guilt. It must be owned that the artificers of calumny had a difficult object of attack in Mrs. Siddons. Against her character, as a wife and mother, scandal itself could not whisper a surmise ; and it was equally hopeless to impugn her genius as an actress. But they spread abroad that she was avaricious, uncharitable, and slow to lend her professional aid to unfortunate fellow-players. Two specific

charges alone of this kind could be alleged, and they were both met and refuted by the clearest demonstration. Digges testified that she had performed for him, as an act of charity, in Ireland. His miserable wife could only say for herself, that she had believed the misstatement to which she had given currency ; and Brereton made the declaration which I have quoted.

“I had left London,” says Mrs. Siddons, in her Memoranda, “the object of universal approbation ; but, on my return, only a few weeks afterwards, I was received, on my first night’s appearance, with universal opprobrium,—accused of hardness of heart, and total insensibility to everything and everybody except my own interest. Unhappily, contrary winds had for some days precluded the possibility of receiving from Dublin such letters as would have refuted those atrocious calumnies, and saved me from the horrors of this dreadful night, when I was received with hissing and

hooting, and stood the object of public scorn. Amidst this afflicting clamour I made several attempts to be heard, when at length a gentleman stood forth in the middle of the front of the pit, impelled by benevolent and gentlemanly feeling, who, as I advanced to make my last attempt at being heard, accosted me in these words: 'For heaven's sake, madam, do not degrade yourself by an apology, for there is nothing necessary to be said.' I shall always look back with gratitude to this gallant man's solitary advocacy of my cause: like '*Abdiel, faithful found; among the faithless, faithful only he.*' His admonition was followed by reiterated clamour, when my dear brother appeared, and carried me away from this scene of insult. The instant I quitted it, I fainted in his arms; and, on my recovery, I was thankful that my persecutors had not had the gratification of beholding this weakness. After I was tolerably restored to myself, I was induced, by the persuasions of my husband, my brother,

and Mr. Sheridan, to present myself again before that audience by whom I had been so savagely treated, and before whom, but in consideration of my children, I would have never appeared again. The play was the 'Gamester,' which commences with a scene between *Beverley* and *Charlotte*. Great and pleasant was my astonishment to find myself, on the second rising of the curtain, received with a silence so profound that I was absolutely awe-struck, and never yet have I been able to account for this surprising contrast; for I really think that the falling of a pin might have been then heard upon the stage."

On Mrs. Siddons's second entrance, this night, she addressed the audience in these words: "Ladies and gentlemen, The kind and flattering partiality which I have uniformly experienced in this place, would make the present interruption distressing to me indeed, were I, in the slightest degree, conscious of having de-

served your censure. I feel no such consciousness. The stories which have been circulated against me are calumnies: when they shall be proved to be true, my aspersors will be justified. But, till then, my respect for the public leads me to be confident, that I shall be protected from unmerited insult.

“The accusations which had been brought against me,” she continues, “were pride, insolence, and savage insensibility to the distresses of my theatrical associates; and, as I have observed already, even the winds and waves combined to overwhelm me with obloquy; for many days elapsed before I could possibly receive from Dublin those letters which, when they did arrive, and were published, carried conviction to the public mind. The most cruel of these aspersions accused me of having inhumanly refused, at first, to act for the benefit of poor Mr. Digges, and of having at last agreed to do so upon terms so exorbitant as

had never before been heard of. A letter from himself, however, full of grateful acknowledgments, sufficed to clear me from the charge, by testifying that, so far from having deserved it, I had myself arranged the affair with the Manager, and had acted *Belvidera* under the most annoying and difficult circumstances.

“ Here ended my disgrace and persecution ; and from that time forth *the generous public*, during the remainder of the season, received my *entrée* each succeeding night with shouts, huzzas, and waving of handkerchiefs, which, however gratifying as testimonials of their changed opinion, were not sufficient to obliterate from my memory the tortures I had endured from their injustice, *and the consciousness of a humiliating vocation.*”

I believe that, in spite of preponderating applause, her *entrée*, for several evenings afterwards, was met with attempts to insult her.



She made her reverence, and went on steadily with her part : but her manner was for a time perceptibly damped ; and she declared to one of her friends, that, for many a day after this insult, all her professional joy and ambition drooped in her mind, and she sickened at the thought of being an actress.

On the 3d of November, 1784, she appeared, for the first time, in Franklin's tragedy of the "Earl of Warwick," as a heroine distinguished in English history, namely, *Margaret of Anjou*.\*

This play, by Franklin, was an unavowed translation of La Harpe's *Comte de Warwick* ; in which the *French author*, says Mr. Boaden, *had the mortification to see the tender interest*

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\* *Earl of Warwick*, Smith ; *King Edward*, Palmer ; *Lady Elizabeth Grey*, Miss Kemble ; *Margaret of Anjou*, Mrs. Siddons.

*of his piece frittered away.* For the translator's concealment of his original I have no apology to offer; but, of the alleged tender interest of that original, I confess myself unable to perceive a trace: and Mr. Boaden, I conceive, is as much mistaken in eulogizing the French tragedy as in confounding its author with the Colonel La Harpe, who was tutor to the Emperor of Russia. The Gallic poet, with equal defiance of nature and history, represents the beautiful *Lady Elizabeth Woodville* as enamoured of the old iron-sheathed *Earl of Warwick*, and refusing *King Edward's* hand, from her preference of the greybeard. He also makes *Margaret of Anjou* assassinate with her own hand the *Earl of Warwick*. This is rather too bad; as every schoolboy in England may be supposed to know, that Edward the Fourth made a romantic love-marriage with Lady Elizabeth Woodville; that Warwick was old enough to be the father of the said Elizabeth; and that the tough old

king-maker died fighting in the cause of Queen Margaret.

Indifferent as the French play may be, however, I grant that the English translator has not made it better : and no information that I have ever received respecting Mrs. Siddons ever struck me with so much surprise as to learn, from unquestionable authority, that she made an imposing and electrifying stage part out of *Margaret of Anjou*. I could conceive her having been impressive in the so-called Shakespeare's *Queen Margaret*, of "Henry the Sixth;" though it is doubtful if Shakespeare wrote much in that tragedy; but her dignifying La Harpe's and Franklin's heroine, as I never saw her perform the part, appeared to me unimaginal. If it should convict me, however, of being a false critic on the written play, I am bound to confess the fact, as it is attested to me by others, that Mrs. Siddons made it interesting in representation. Mrs. Bartley told

me that "her superb disdain, as the captive *Queen*, dwelt strongly in her recollection; and that when she informed *Elizabeth* that her *Warwick* had not *an hour* to live, her dissyllabic pronunciation of the word *hour* was so powerful that it still seemed to vibrate in her ears."

Mr. Bartley, when I wrote to consult him on the subject, had the goodness to favour me with the following note :

"I despair of being able to convey any idea of the wonders which Mrs. Siddons wrought in 'The Earl of Warwick;' for wonders they may be called, as I agree with you that it is a very indifferent tragedy. But especially I feel the difficulty of giving you any idea of that indelible impression which she made upon me, as *Margaret of Anjou*, in the last act of the piece. The performance I allude to must have occurred either in 1809 or 1810, at least twenty-four years ago; and yet, to my imagination, she stands before me at this instant.

“On that occasion I happened to personate the character of *King Edward the Fourth*, who, in the scene referred to, learns that *Warwick* has taken *Margaret* and her son captives, and is momentarily expecting the triumphant appearance of *Warwick*. He does not know (nor does the audience) that *Margaret* had taken advantage of an unguarded moment to approach and stab *Warwick* as he stood in triumph over her son. Instead of *Warwick*, therefore, *Margaret* enters : and the skilful management made by this great performer to produce her effect was the following. The scene had a large archway, in the centre, at the back of the stage. She was preceded by four guards, who advanced rapidly through the archway, and divided, two and two on each side, leaving the opening quite clear. Instantly, on their separating, the giantess burst upon the view, and stood in the centre of the arch motionless. So electrifying was the unexpected impression, that I stood for a moment breathless. But the effect extended beyond me : the audience had

full participation of its power; and the continued applauses that followed gave me time to recover and speculate upon the manner in which such an extraordinary effort had been made. I could not but gaze upon her attentively. Her head was erect, and the fire of her brilliant eyes darted directly upon mine. Her wrists were bound with chains, which hung suspended from her arms, that were dropped loosely on each side; nor had she, on her entrance, used any action beyond her *rapid walk* and *sudden stop*, within the extensive archway, which she really *seemed to fill*. This, with the flashing eye, and fine smile of appalling triumph which overspread her magnificent features, constituted all the effort which usually produced an effect upon actors and audience never surpassed, if ever equalled.

“ I am, dear sir, &c.

“ G. W. BARTLEY.”

Her next new character was *Zara*, in the

tragedy so named, which Aaron Hill translated from the "Zaïre" of Voltaire. She appeared in it on the 7th of November, 1784.\* I find, from the cotemporary prints, that high expectations were entertained respecting Mrs. Siddons in this part: for tradition still told of Mrs. Cibber's brilliant performance of it. It should, however, have been remembered also, that the latter actress had Garrick to assist her, whose magic acting, as *Lusignan*, I suspect, gave the main spell of popularity to this tragedy, on its first appearance. The part of *Zara*, whatever impression our great actress made in it, certainly never became one of her favourites, nor has the play been ever revived since that season at Drury Lane.

In justice to Voltaire's "Zaïre," it must be owned, that the young *Orosmanes* and the old

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\* *Osman*, Smith; *Lusignan*, Bensley; *Nerestan*, Brereton; *Chatillon*, J. Aickin: *Zara*, Mrs. Siddons.

crusader *Lusignan* are in some degree imposing personages. But it is altogether a frigid production. Indifferent as the *Grecian Daughter* is, I think she is a better heroine than Voltaire's; for *Euphrasia* is a main agent in the drama to which she belongs, whilst *Zaire* is shut up from action; and, whilst other personages engross a paramount attention, she has only to suffer and declaim.

*Voltaire*

The French themselves seem now to appreciate Voltaire pretty soberly as a dramatic poet. Even La Harpe, after extolling "Zaire" for alleged beauties, such as might be found in the commonest melo-drama, lets out that, in his own days, it was scarcely ever acted in Paris. This circumstance he attributes to the want of such actors as Le Kain and Mlle. Gaussin; of the latter of whom it was eloquently said, that "there were tears in her voice:" a fine expression to be sure, but which will not clench La Harpe's conclusion as to the sole cause of the

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for "Zaire's" infrequent representation. Voltaire's general fame as a man of talents, and as a stormer of prejudices in their strongest holds, justly rests undiminished; but his glory as a tragic writer is as justly on the wane.\*

On the 2d of December (1784), Cumberland's tragedy of the "Carmelite" gave Mrs. Siddons a new character, in the *Lady of St. Vallori*.† The piece was well received, and deservedly, for it is respectable, though not superlative,

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\* Nothing in Napoleon's personal history is more interesting than his quick-sightedness in literature. In one of his conversations, at St. Helena, after dismissing Voltaire's miserable conception of Mahomet's character with deserved contempt, he said, "It is astonishing how ill all his dramas are adapted for reading. When criticism and sound taste are not cheated by pompous diction and scenic illusion, they immediately lose a thousand per cent."

† *St. Vallori*, Smith; *Montgomeri*, Kemble; *Lord Hildebrand*, Palmer; *Lord De Courci*, J. Aickin; *Gyfford* (an old Servant), Packer: *Matilda* (the Lady of *St. Vallori*), Mrs. Siddons. It was acted thirteen times.

nor, in my opinion, perfectly original. I will not indeed go so far as to say that Cumberland borrowed his subject from Home, but he treads close enough upon "Douglas," to show that *that* tragedy had given him strong suggestions. In both stories, a mother has for twenty years lamented the husband of her youth;—in "Douglas," a real, in the "Carmelite," an imaginary, death. And each of the mothers has a son, to whom the demonstration of her maternal love is misconstrued, and brings or threatens tragic results. To Home's heroine the mistake is fatal, whilst Cumberland's plot is wound up agreeably to our wishes, and *Hildebrand*, the counterpart to *Glenalvon*, alone perishes. The scene of *Hildebrand's* death, by-the-way, has considerable power, and contains one memorable poetical passage. When the supposed murderer of her husband speaks of mercy to *Matilda*, she replies to him,

"Mercy!—and dare thy tongue pronounce the name?  
Mercy!—thou man of blood, thou hast destroy'd it.

It came from heaven to save *St. Vallori*.  
 You saw the cherub messenger alight  
 From its descent: with outspread wings it sat  
 Covering his breast: you drew your cursed steel,  
 And through the pleading angel pierc'd his heart!"

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The interest both of "Douglas" and the "Carmelite" lies principally in maternal affection,—that deep source of pathos, by appealing to which Euripides has been more indebted than to any other circumstance for his share in the trine supremacy of Greek dramatic poetry. But Cumberland's mother, it is hardly necessary to say, is an incomparably less interesting being than *Lady Randolph*. The *Matilda* of the "Carmelite" has indeed never lost her son; but, for no discoverable reason, she educates him as her page, without revealing to him the secret of his parentage in all the years during which she falsely imagines her husband dead. With equal absurdity she sends out this unavowed son as her champion, though he has never couched a lance at tilt or tournament.

In one respect, and in one alone, the author of "St. Vallori" can compete with the author of "Douglas,"—to wit, in showing more knowledge of Norman castles and of the times of chivalry. Home was probably not profound in Scottish antiquities; but, if he had been so, prudence would have cautioned him not to awaken Popish reminiscences amongst the Scotch. He derives, however, a picturesqueness from nature beyond the charm of antiquarian knowledge, and worth a hundred Norman castles.

Cumberland's *Matilda*, in the "Carmelite," owns herself to be a little deranged in her intellects by grief. This was rather unreasonable; as, though she had lost her youthful husband, she still retained her son. But *Lady Randolph's* delirium is perfectly natural; and, in concluding the tragedy with her suicide, it was fortunate that Home merged the Scottish priest in the daring poet.

Amidst this modern poverty of the national drama, John Kemble proposed turning back upon its ancient resources. He was much better acquainted than most of his cotemporaries with our elder playwrights; and, amongst them, he particularly admired Massinger, who, with less rich sensibility than some of the nearest successors of Shakespeare, has perhaps more dignity and judgment. Kemble re-touched this poet's tragedy of "Camilla, or the Maid of Honour," so as to adapt it to the modern stage, and to produce Mrs. Siddons in the part of its heroine.

x Dr. Ireland ranks the "Maid of Honour" in the higher order of Massinger's dramas. With deference to so good a critic, I should hardly conceive this tragedy to be one that has principally refreshed the old poet's laurels; at least, it is not one that I should cite in proof of his judgment. *Bertoldo*, the lover of the *Maid of Honour*, is a disappointing hero. He is the

natural brother of the *King of Sicily*, a Knight of Malta, invested at the outset with every attribute that can make us in love with chivalry, and “*with high thoughts seated in a heart of honour.*” He woos *Camisola*, and wins a confession of her affection; but she cannot consent to wed him, because he is bound to celibacy by the oath of his order, though her refusal is prefaced by praises of the warmest eloquence.

“Truth bear witness for me,  
That in the judgment of my soul you are  
A man so absolute and circular  
In all those wish’d-for rarities that may take  
A virgin captive; that, though at this instant  
All sceptred monarchs of our Western world  
Were rivals with you, and *Camisola* worthy  
Of such a competition, you alone  
Should wear the garland.”

When *Bertoldo* answers her objection of his being bound to a single life, by saying,

“A dispensation, lady,  
Will easily absolve me:”

she replies,

“O! take heed, sir!

When what is vow'd to heaven is dispens'd with,  
To serve our ends on earth, a curse must follow,  
And not a blessing."

*Bertoldo* embarks at the head of a warlike adventure, is overwhelmed by numbers, captured, and chained in a dungeon. When the news of his fate is brought to Sicily, the *King* refuses to ransom him: but *Camiola*, sacrificing half her fortune, sends a friend with the price of his release. This friend of hers, *Adorni*, is also her lover, but unaccepted, and hopelessly devoted to her. She gives him the cruel commission of ransoming his rival; and (still worse) of exacting from him an oath to marry her in return for his ransom,—so much had the *Maid of Honour* changed her mind as to the curse that must follow a dispensation.

When poor *Adorni*, to show that he loves *Camiola* better than himself, has fulfilled this commission, and sworn-in *Bertoldo*, the Knight of Malta is brought to the Court of *Aurelia*,

Duchess of Siena, whose troops had defeated him. She falls in love with him, and, after short hesitation, and a too unexplained lapse of character, all the principles, nay, common feelings of honour, honesty, and gratitude, in *Bertoldo*, fall down like a house of cards, and the recreant pledges himself to marry *Aurelia*; nay, even accompanies her to Sicily, where he is sure to meet with the *Maid of Honour*. The whole ends in *Aurelia* giving him up, in *Camiola* devoting herself to a nunnery, and in the precious Knight re-swearing to keep his vows as a bachelor.

*Bertoldo's* metamorphosis is not dramatic. But are we not disappointed, it may possibly be asked, by daily mutations of human character in real life: and may these not be pictured in the drama? Yes; but they should be pictured with probability. In real life we know men's hearts but imperfectly, and may be utterly unable to account for their changes;



but the poet makes the hearts and natures of his personages; and if he will transmute them from good to bad, he ought to prepare us, by some natural prognostic, for the change. All that is noble in *Bertoldo* disappears like a phantom; and he forfeits our esteem like a detected cheat, who ought never to have possessed it.

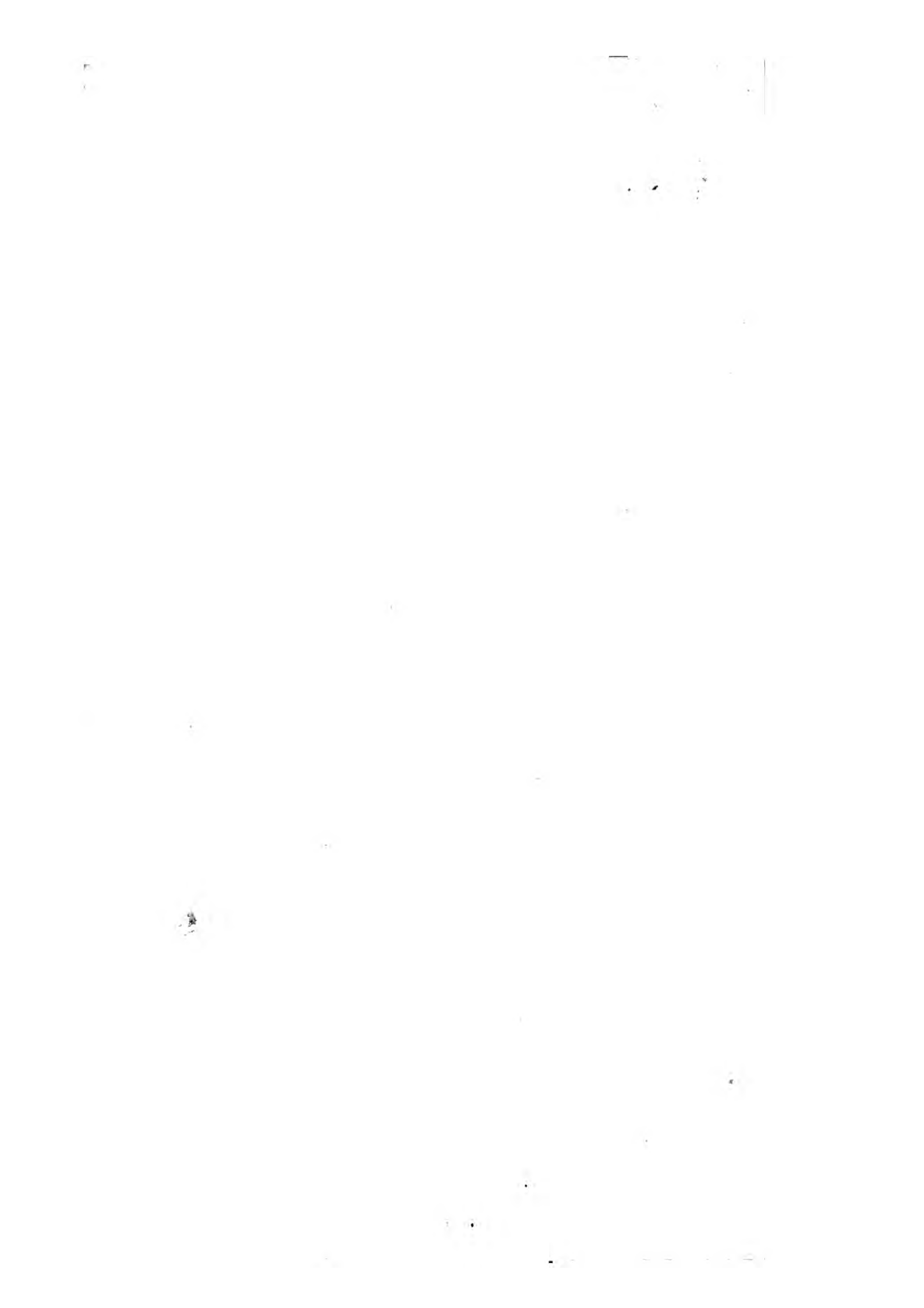
Kemble, whatever he thought of *Bertoldo*, could not well alter his character in re-modelling Massinger's play. But he removed two other defects from the piece, about which there can be no question, namely, certain gross speeches, and an entire foolish character, wholly unnecessary to the plot. *Sylli*, a creature fatuous with self-conceit, is brought constantly by Massinger into the same scene with *Camiola*, and spoils the dignity of her impression by our disgust at her endurance of his presence. Kemble threw this idiot overboard; and he is a character of most agreeable absence. The old

dramatists, all but their Chief, seldom fail more egregiously than in their efforts to create jest-makers. They exhibit foolish fellows indeed, but not the arch fools of Shakespeare, who alone knew how to dip their motley coats in the hues of immortality.

The joint powers of Mrs. Siddons and her brother prolonged the reception of this play only for three nights.

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