



Bodleian Libraries

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

For more information see:

<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.

A
GENUINE NARRATIVE
OF THE
L I F E
AND
THEATRICAL TRANSACTIONS
OF
MR. JOHN HENDERSON.

[Price One Shilling.]



EUROPEAN MAGAZINE.



T. Gainsborough pinx.

J. Jones fecit.

A
GENUINE NARRATIVE
OF THE
L I F E
AND
THEATRICAL TRANSACTIONS
OF
MR. JOHN HENDERSON,
COMMONLY CALLED
THE BATH ROSCIUS.

By Thomas Davies.

Καὶ κεραμεὺς κεραμεῖ κολέει, ἢ τέκλωνι τέκλων.

HESIOD.

— *Nunquamne reponam,
Vexatus toties?*

JUVENAL.

L O N D O N :

Printed for T. EVANS, in Pater-noster-Row; and sold by
S. LEACROFT, Charing-Cross.

MDCCLXXVII.



A N E C D O T E S

O F

MR. HENDERSON.

MR. JOHN HENDERSON, the Actor, was born in London; his family *in 1747.* was originally Scotch, and was settled at Fordell, a town in the north of Scotland. He is descended in a right line from the famous Dr. Alexander Henderson, who maintained the cause of the Covenant, and the Presbyterian church discipline, in a conference at the Isle of Wight with

B

Charles

Charles the First, in opposition to the hierarchy and the government of the Church by Bishops.

He discovered, in his early youth, a propensity to drawing, and was, for some time, a pupil of Mr. Fournier, an eminent master in that art. He was soon after invited to the house of a near relation, a silversmith of very considerable business, in St. James's-street, who purposed to employ him in making drawings and designs for his own profession; but the death of this gentleman put an end to all schemes of that nature.

When Mr. Henderson was very young, his mother put a volume of Shakespeare into his hands; the constant reading of this author inspired him with a passion for representing on the stage characters so much admired by him in his closet: he fancied that he understood and could act them with propriety.

1767 So long as ten years since, he made application to Mr. George Garrick, and begged

MR. HENDERSON. 3

begged that gentleman would hear him rehearse, and give his judgment of his abilities for the stage. His voice was then so feeble, that he was told by Mr. G. Garrick, that he could not possibly convey articulate sounds to the audience of any theatre; and indeed, at that time, his friends were apprehensive that he was in danger of falling into a consumptive habit.

In a few years he recovered health and spirits: he was still pursued by an ardent passion for acting. By Mr. Becket's interest, he was introduced to the Manager of Drury-Lane.

The permission to attend the levee of so great a man as Mr. Garrick, was, for some time, sufficient food to Henderson's appetite; who thought it a degree of happiness to be favoured with half a look, to be smiled upon, to be saluted with a distant bow, to be asked in familiar terms the news of the day.

4 ANECDOTES OF

But when he understood, by that great mistress of instruction, Experience, that he could make no progress by the closest attendance in his favourite plan of raising his fortune by acting; that the great dispenser of theatrical favours was engaged either in business or in pleasure; he began to feel all that anxiety and vexation which must affect a liberal mind; that painful situation, that corroding torture, which Cowley so emphatically describes :

“ — Is there a man on earth I hate ?

“ Attendance and dependence be his fate.”

Tired with paying daily, though fruitless, homage to the presiding Genius of Drury Lane, he was determined to try his fortune with the Acting Manager of Covent-garden Theatre, Mr. Colman, a gentleman equally celebrated for his polite behaviour, and his learning and genius. But here he was miserably disappointed: for the first question this Manager put to him was, whether he had ever been upon the stage before, or was a principal

pal performer? Our young Hero was disconcerted with this unexpected demand; and modestly answered, that he wished to know the Manager's opinion, whether he had any theatrical abilities or not? Mr. Colman gave him no opportunity to display his talents, and dismissed him rather abruptly.

After two years close attendance and constant sollicitation, Mr. Garrick condescended to grant Henderson a day of audience; he heard him rehearse several scenes in variety of characters. After some hesitation, the Manager gave it as his opinion, that his voice was not sufficiently melodious or clear, nor his pronunciation articulate enough; or, to make use of his own terms, "that he had in his mouth too much wool or worsted, which he must absolutely get rid of before he was fit for Drury-Lane stage." However, not to discourage him entirely, he furnished him with a letter to Mr. Palmer, the Manager of the Bath Company,

6 ANECDOTES OF

who engaged him at a salary of one guinea *per* week.

It is not unreasonable to ask, what could induce a gentleman of Mr. Garrick's excellent understanding and perfect knowledge of the world, to hold in suspense a young fellow for so long a period of time as two years; when, in all probability, his prospect of rising in life, nay his dependence for the means of support, might be derived from his hopes of succeeding on the stage? Candour forbids we should impute this conduct either to wantonness or malevolence; but, I fear, it was owing to something equally pernicious to the sufferer, though not proceeding from causes so censurable—To the giving way to an idle custom of seeing dependents at a levee; to a mode of indulging unmeaning proffers and promises of service; to the keeping up a barbarous parade of politeness, which few men of large fortune and great power have resolution to break through.

Henderfon

MR. HENDERSON. 7

Henderfon has complained to his intimate friends, that he has often fet out from his lodgings to the Manager's house in Southampton-street, with a heavy and desponding heart, and returned home more melancholy than he fet out.

This custom of encouraging the vain attendance of expecting sollicitors, is too frequent every where; but, I believe, more encouraged by managers of theatres, than even by the first officers of the state.

It would be ungenerous, as well as ungrateful, to deny the efficacy of Mr. Garrick's recommendation of Henderfon. When it was buzzed about the rooms, in the walks, and all over the city of Bath, that a new actor was arrived from London under the patronage of the great Roscius, all people, of whatever rank, were eager to see the phænomenon. The house was soon filled, and he had the satisfaction to act Hamlet to a very brilliant audience. † His apprehension of not pleasing was so excessive, that he

B 4

could

† He appeared for three or four nights under a feigned name. On the fourth or fifth night he was announced by his own name, and he spoke a prologue written by himself.

1773

8 ANECDOTES OF

could scarce be heard at first; but the generous indulgence of the spectators, who felt their own importance in the awe and respect he paid them, soon eased him of his fears, and inspired him with courage. He finished his part not only with great applause, but loud acclamation.

Many judicious persons, who were present at this first trial of Henderson's abilities, and who have seen him often since in the character of Hamlet, give it now as their opinion, that though practice has somewhat bettered his manner, improved his action, and increased the strength of his voice; yet that, in drawing the outline of the part, he was very exact, and that his feeling in many important scenes was natural and affecting. He was particularly approved and applauded in the short interview between Hamlet and Horatio, in the 3d act, where the Prince breaks out into that honest effusion of cordial friendship so natural to
a great

a great and generous mind. His advice to the players, and the celebrated closet scene, produced the same effect then as they have done since at London.

The Bath Manager, who found his account in the frequent employing of Henderson, plied him with great variety of characters; he is supposed to have acted not much less than thirty different parts the first year of his engagement, and generally to large audiences. He became so great a favourite, that he very soon acquired the title of the Bath Roscius. People of the first rank spoke highly of his merit. Men of genius, such as Paul Whitehead, and Mr. Gainborough the painter, soon distinguished him from the common herd of Players. Dr. Schomberg and the amiable Mr. John Beard joined their voices to that of the publick in general, and recommended him warmly to the notice of the London Managers.

After

After the first Bath campaign, not a little elevated with his success, and full of the applause and approbation of men whom he had been taught to believe judges of theatrical merit, he paid a visit to London. He imagined that the doors of Drury-Lane and Covent-Garden Theatres would be thrown open to him; and, with a vanity natural to young minds, he fancied he had nothing to do but to make his choice where he should fix his standard.

But, alas! he was greatly disappointed; the Managers either did not give credit to the praises conferred upon him by his friends, or thought they had a right to judge for themselves.

Leake was invited to an entertainment, where Henderson exerted all his skill to convince him of his merit:—He uttered speeches, he repeated fables, gave him some select passages of Sterne's Tristram Shandy; and spoke, or rather acted, merry tales of honest Mat. Prior. In
this

this whimsical and motley farrago of entertainment, Henderson displayed much ease, great spirit, elegance, and humour—but all in vain—Leake, like the deaf adder, was insensible to all the arts employed to charm him. His objections I never could learn. Mr. Leake is a gentleman of profound taciturnity. It is most probable that he referred Henderson to the Acting Manager: some are of opinion, that his most cogent argument for not encouraging him, sprung from oeconomic principles; he was afraid that he should demand a salary of at least three or four pounds *per* week; others would insinuate that he did not like Henderson's manner of pronouncing his two favourite vowels.

Chagrined and mortified with the repulses he had encountered at London, Henderson returned to his station at Bath: however, the vexation he felt did not slacken his ardour for improvement; he quickly added new lustre to his theatrical fame,

fame, by acting Falstaff, and several others of Shakespeare's characters. His friends at Bath, by their constant and repeated applause, soothed his vexations and disappointments; and he began to be reconciled to his situation. Before the end of his second campaign, the several Patentees of the London theatres had seen him act a variety of characters; but although the public was as loud in his favour as ever, the still and powerful voice of the Manager was as strongly against him.

Whether the timber of which the London stages are made may be of a different composition or structure from that of Bath; or whether there may not be a certain magic or incantation belonging to the first, of which the other cannot pretend to boast, I will not pretend to say: but, in answer to the continual recommendations of various and respectable persons, it was said, "That
" the young fellow was destitute of every
" requisite

“ requisite for a London theatre—he
 “ will do mighty well in a confined and
 “ small stage—vastly so, for *Bath*; but
 “ give me leave to tell you, Sir, that
 “ the boards of Drury-Lane, &c. are
 “ quite another thing.”

This was an excellent reason, it must be confessed, where no better could be given.

Mr. Colman, indeed, honestly told Henderson his objections to him in *Shylock*: the dress, he said, was too shabby; it had the appearance of one hired from a pawnbroker; and in the third act, in his impassioned scene with Tubal, he seemed to him a black Lear, or an odd resemblance of the mad king in a storm. I shall leave these powerful objections to be weighed by the reader.

Not discouraged by his former repulse, the Bath Roscius, at the end of his second campaign, visited Mr. Garrick in London: who received him politely; heard him rehearse parts at his own house, and upon
 the

the stage, but all in vain. Whether the *wool* had not been sufficiently picked out of his mouth, or for what cause I know not, after the usual civilities, he was dismissed from attendance. Some persons, more remarkable for warmth of temper than prudence, ventured to assure Mr. Garrick, that as soon as Henderson could be seen in certain characters, such as Benedict and Don John, the people of this metropolis would all run after him.

These sanguine people should have recollected, that as a General of an army wishes to have the glory of a victory or any great action to himself, so a Manager of a playhouse, if he cannot discern merit in a candidate for theatrical fame, will not find it out by the judgment of another man.

Before Henderson left London, he was advised to try if Mr. Foote would not give him an opportunity of shewing himself at his theatre in the Hay-market. Two friends accompanied him to North-

End. Our modern Aristophanes welcomed the visitants with great civility; but such is the volatility of his genius, that it was not possible to announce the errand immediately; he must be permitted to indulge his peculiar humour, and to let off a few voluntaries before he could be induced to hear of any business whatsoever. Foote's imagination is so lively, and his conceptions so rapid as well as exuberant, that his conversation is a cataract or torrent of wit, humour, pleasantry, and satire. The company had scarce unfolded their business, when he gave them the history of Sir Gregory Grinwell and my Lady Barbara Bramble. The whimsical situations into which he put his characters, with his lively and farcical remarks, threw the company into convulsions of laughter.

However, Henderson's friends thought it was now time to stop the current of Mr. Foote's vivacities, by informing him of the reason of their visit: one of them
took

took the lead:—" Sir, our young friend,
 " the Bath Roscius, would think him-
 " self extremely happy to have the opi-
 " nion of so acknowledged a judge of
 " theatrical merit as you are; he wishes
 " you would permit him to rehearse a
 " scene of a play."

" Well, Sir, what are you for, the
 " sock or the buskin? I'll be hanged if
 " you are not quite enamoured of that
 " bouncing brimstone Tragedy."—" Mr.
 " Henderson is not confined, Sir, to
 " either."—" Stick to the sock, young
 " gentleman; the one is all nature, and
 " the other all art and trick. Tragedy
 " is mere theatrical bombast, the very
 " fungus of the theatre. Come, Sir,
 " give us a taste of your quality."—
 Here Henderson began a speech in Ham-
 let; when Foote, turning round to one of
 the company, said, " Have you not heard
 " in what manner this impudent little
 " scoundrel has treated me?"—" I pro-
 " test, Sir, I don't know whom you
 " mean."—

“ mean.”—“ No! where have you left
 “ your apprehension? Let me but tell
 “ you what a damned trick he served
 “ me lately, by lending me a large sum
 “ of money.”—“ Consider, my dear Sir,
 “ the time grows late, and we are to
 “ dine in town.”—“ No, no,” said Foote,
 “ you shall dine with me upon a stewed
 “ rump of beef and a dish of fish. Now
 “ Mr. Henderson begin.” Well, once
 more he endeavoured to open, when,
 behold! an unlucky joke, a *petite*
histoire, some droll thought, or some
 unaccountable idea, prevented the dis-
 concerted actor from displaying his
 powers of elocution. His case was now
 become extremely pitiable.

However, after hearing this singular
 genius read an act of his new comedy,
 take-off Lady Betty Bigamy, recite the
 whole trial of himself and George Faulk-
 ner, ridicule the Irish ~~Lord Chief~~ Justice
 Robinson for condemning his Peter Pa-
 ragraph for a libel, speak a prologue in

the character of Peter, laugh at our most celebrated orators of the bar, mimic the Members of both Houses of Parliament, tell some ludicrous stories of Capt. Boudens and the Irish chairman; Henderson was permitted to repeat, without interruption, Mr. Garrick's prologue, which he spoke on his first appearance after his arrival from the continent. This being no caricature, but a genuine and fair representation of the great Roscius's manner, without the least exaggeration, we cannot be surprized that it did not make any impression upon Mr. Foote: however, he paid the speaker a compliment upon the goodness of his ear. Dinner was now announced; every thing was princely, and in splendid order. Wit flew about the table; I mean Mr. Foote's, for I would advise every man that has any wit of his own, who shall have the honour to dine with this gentleman, to bottle it up for another occasion, for he is himself master of enough,
and

MR: HENDERSON. 19

and to spare, for ten companies. I need not observe that many portraits were drawn, and some of them in a masterly stile.

The humorous and satirical paintings of this gentleman are attributed by many to mere rancour and malevolence ; I cannot be of that opinion ; scarce any man, like Foote, who has been generous even to profusion, was ever known to be very malicious. The excellent Hogarth recorded faces for his humorous and moral pictures, as he walked in the park or in the streets, at the playhouse, or elsewhere ; he stole whatever Nature presented to his view in all places, and made what he saw his own. So our modern Aristophanes obliges every friend and every foe to contribute to his characteristical plan. Every man he is familiar with, sits to him for his picture, and thus he gets matter for his Comic Muse.

When Henderson took his leave of him, he whispered one of the company

in the ear, “ *that he would not do**.” Mr. Foote confirmed the death-warrant that had been already signed by *Garrick, Colman, Leake, and Harris.*

Thus was Henderson, for the third time, through want of encouragement at London, reduced to the necessity of returning to Bath; but so eager was he to change his situation, and to exhibit upon a London stage, that, towards the end of the year 1774, he wrote to Mr. Garrick, and proposed, at his own risque and expence, to act on Drury-Lane stage in the characters of Hamlet and Shylock; and to be determined by the voice of the public, respecting the event of his good or ill success in those parts. This offer was likewise communicated to Mr. Garrick by Mr. Taylor of Bath, a common friend of both, who solicited and urged Mr. Gar-

* Since Mr. Foote has seen Mr. Henderson act, he not only congratulated him in the strongest terms upon his great and deserved success, but has very obligingly spoken of him to his friends, as an actor of genius.

rick to accept the propofal of Mr. Henderfon. Mr. Garrick answered Mr. Taylor very explicitly:—He thought the propofal would be very injurious to Mr. Henderfon himfelf; he could not fuppose that his playing two characters would give the public a proper idea of his merit. As an actor of fenfibility, fuch a flender or partial exhibition of his talents might, from his too great feelings, injure his representation, and render him lefs capable of pleafing the public, who would be called upon to eftimate his merit.

Mr. Garrick, in the fame letter, obferved, that if Mr. Henderfon could have an opportunity to act ten or twelve times in two or three different characters, his genius would have fair play. As his well-wifher, he ftrenuoufly protefts againft the other fcheme; but if Henderfon chofe to be with him, why not fix upon Hamlet, Shylock, Benedi&ct, or any other part he pleafed to appear in

next winter. He thinks the former a partial manner of trial, which would be of no service to the manager, and of prejudice to the actor.

It must seem very singular, that Mr. Garrick should appear all of a sudden so warm in the interest of Henderson; and I would ask the reason why he would not accept an offer that was scarce ever refused, of giving a man who had any pretensions to abilities, an opportunity to shew them? This manager, who had for three years turned a deaf ear to all solicitations in Henderson's favour, by an unaccountable revolution of temper, or a perfect reverse of politicks, seems to be awakened all at once to the tenderest feelings of humanity, generously to support a man whom he had hitherto despised, rejected, and discountenanced. There is something not reconcilable to common apprehension in this. Mr. Garrick says, that Henderson's acting a part or two would be of no service to the manager—

nager—but, why so?—Would not he be sure, on such an occasion, to fill his house? His expences of cloaths and scenes could be but a mere trifle; for what new ornament does an old play, such as Hamlet or the Merchant of Venice, require?

In answer to Mr. Garrick's letter, Henderson, who seems greatly upon his guard, after thanking him profusely for his anxious apprehensions in his favour, and after some compliments due to a man so very eminent, makes a new offer—which is, to act the ensuing winter, at Drury-Lane theatre, the parts of Hamlet, Shylock, Richard, and Lear; with such other characters, in the course of the season, to which he could give a proper finishing; but as to these he reserves a negative voice. In a second and third season he proposes to add four more additional characters each year, and to act other parts under the same restriction as already mentioned.

This little anecdote conveys a striking lesson to mankind. A young raw adventurer, who had in vain for two years solicited a great and distinguished Manager for the favour only of a hearing, and had for three years after successively intreated to be admitted one of his troop, by a capricious reverse of fortune, presumes to dictate the terms upon which he will condescend to covenant with the man who had treated him with so much neglect.

On a slight view of Henderson's conduct, I can have no doubt of his being generally condemned by those who are unacquainted with the seducing tricks, and captivating arts, which are practised in a theatre, and are congenial to the spot on which it stands.

It seems too that Mr. Garrick proposed, that Mr. Henderson should be engaged for a certain term, I think three years, the salary to be settled by their common friends, with this proviso, that it was
not

not to be less than 5*l.* *per* week, nor to exceed 10*l.* But how miserably cautious is this!—why no more than 10*l.* if the public voice declared in the actor's favour? Did Mr. Garrick himself submit to such paltry and unjust limitations? Far be it from me to lessen the merit of the great Roscius, or to compare any man to him, who stands alone; but there are, and will ever be, degrees of excellence.

But to wave digression.—Henderson's situation, if he had swallowed the bait thrown out, would have been very disagreeable as well as precarious. Two actors of good estimation, Mr. Smith and Mr. Reddish, were then in possession of the principal characters; the salary of the first was estimated at 14*l.* *per* week, of the other at 12*l.* The friends of Henderson and Garrick were to determine his weekly income; which could not, upon an average, exceed, as they were restricted to terms, 7*l.* or 8*l.* *per* week.

The

The balancing of accounts does not furnish much pleafantry or wit ; but the reader will pardon the dullnefs of the narrative, when truth is eftablifhed, and perhaps curiofity effentially gratified.

Eminent actors, I am told, claim a right by their articles to the principal parts in all acting plays. What then could Henderfon expect? Nothing but the leavings or offals of Smith and Reddih ; fo that, after he had figured in a part or two, and gained what the managers wanted, much more than his falary, in two or three times performance ; he muft have been afterwards perfectly idle, or little more than a mere looker-on.

The generofity of a Manager, we are well authorized to fay, cannot be depended upon. Holland acted all the principal characters in tragedy, five years fucceffively, under 5*l.* *per* week. If any young actor deferved a noble reward and fingular encouragement, we may prefume to fay that it was the late Mr. Powell.

Mr.

Mr. Lacy, the manager, ingenuously avowed his obligations to him : he publicly declared, that the winter in which Powell first acted was, by his means, rendered the most profitable he had ever known. It is computed that Powell's great fame and abilities, and his incessant labours, brought no less a sum into the treasury of Drury-Lane theatre than nine or ten thousand pounds ; for all this meritorious service, his weekly income was not more than fifty shillings. Mr. Lacy, indeed, after the first month's performance, *generously* presented him with a bank note of fifty pounds ! However, this gentleman received from his employers no more than the sum of 130l. or 140l. for supporting the credit of Drury-Lane theatre a whole year, during the absence of Mr. Garrick *!

* Candour requires us to inform the reader, that Mr. Powell's salary, the second year of his acting, was increased to 10l. or 12l. *per week*. Mr. Holland's weekly income was put on the same footing with Mr. Powell's.

I pre-

I presume nobody will now very much blame our Bath Roscius for his extreme caution ; or call that insolence and arrogance, which was, indeed, the effect of reason, prudence, and sagacity.

Mr. Garrick, we may suppose, was not a little surprized on the receipt of Henderfon's proposal. He answered his letter in terms of anger and resentment ; he reproached him for his attempt to take the management of the theatre out of his hands, and to render him a mere cypher in his own dominions. This indeed was an affront that no actor of the highest merit had ever presumed to put upon him.

Henderfon, in his reply to Mr. Garrick's angry letter, endeavoured to convince him of the propriety of his behaviour ; he disclaimed the most distant intention of insult, and tried every method in his power to convince him that he wished to be subordinate to his directions,

tions, provided he did not feel himself unequal to the task imposed upon him.

When we candidly examine the matter in debate between Mr. Garrick and Mr. Henderson, we must conclude that the latter had reason to suspect and to be on his guard; and that the former, if we suppose him sincere in his professions of friendship, was justly offended, and that he properly resented the other's ill treatment. By finesse in conduct, and the practice of too much art, we gain a character, which on certain occasions, when we are really open and sincere, we do not deserve; but this is the consequence of a behaviour which is not regulated by uniform sincerity and plain dealing*. Perhaps, after all, Henderson's feelings were too exquisite; we may suppose that he feared where he ought to have trusted;

* It is said that a manager's situation is a very ticklish one.—I grant it; but firmly believe it is often made so by artificial behaviour, when a plainer manner of acting would do the business as well or better.

however,

however, his fault is pardonable, if it be one, when we consider all circumstances.

Henderfon had so often attempted to make a figure upon a London theatre, and was so repeatedly repulsed, that he gave up all ambitious hopes of shining in any part of England, except in Bath and the places adjacent.

At last, what neither the united petitions of the nobility, of men of genius, and the professors of the polite arts, and indeed of persons in all ranks could effect, was brought about by mere chance and necessity.

When Mr. Colman purchased of Mr. Foote the patent for acting plays at the theatre in the Haymarket, he must have seen at the same time the possible contingences arising from his situation. From the infirmities, as well as advanced age, of Mr. Foote, he conceived it not improbable that that gentleman might not be enabled to furnish his quota of public entertainment, either in writing or act-
5
ing.

ing*. He cast about then, and his good sense informed him, that it was not impossible but that Henderson might occasionally supply Mr. Foote's place, and prove a happy succedaneum. We must not suppose that this manager entertained any exalted ideas of the player's abilities ; but the bare possibility of his being well received by the public, was an object worthy his attention. His proffer of a hundred pounds for the summer cam-

* When this narrative was at the press, news arrived of Mr. Foote's sudden death at Dover. The dramatic world has not, for many years, sustained a loss so great and irreparable. His genius struck out a new path to fame. His comedies abound in wit, satire, humour, and character. He boldly attacked vice in the higher orders of life, and unmasked the great and dignified robber, the pretended patron of merit, the absurd fine gentleman where greatness takes its rise from plunder, the shy demure hypocrite, the enthusiastic and ridiculous politician ; in short, wherever vice, absurdity, or affectation was to be found, he was sure to let fly his shafts, and never missed hitting the mark he aimed at. Foote, in drawing dramatic figures, resembled that great and immortal genius Hogarth, in his moral paintings. Their pictures were equally true, striking, and characteristical. They contain a faithful history of the vices, follies, customs, and corruptions of the age they lived in.

paign

paign was eagerly embraced by Henderson, whose supreme and only wish was to be seen by a London audience. He took no care to stipulate any advantages respecting a benefit, and Colman was in hopes that he had cheaply purchased a good nest-egg.

The public has justified the conjectures of the manager, which were fulfilled beyond his hopes. Mr. Foote, after acting twice or thrice, was attacked with a paralytic disorder, which rendered him incapable of farther service during the remainder of the season. Gay's Polly, or the second part of the Beggar's Opera, from which great expectations were raised, was acted several times with little or no emolument to the manager.

The Barber of Spain was judged more farcical than comic, though it certainly did not want laughable merit; and Digges, though much approved in Wolfey, did not draw audiences to fill the theatre. But Henderson's name was a
powerful

powerful charm, that, in the heat of summer, and during the dog-days, brought to the theatre all that was great and beautiful, lovely and commanding, in both sexes; grave Ministers* and ancient Dowagers forgot their cares and their cards, to observe the Jew's malignity, to enjoy Falstaff's mirth, to partake the terrors of Richard, and to laugh at the frolic of Don John.

It is computed that no less a sum than 4500l. was taken during the 34 nights of Henderson's performance.

I should not act the part of a faithful narrator, if I did not observe that Mr. Colman's behaviour to Henderson was as polite as generous; he gave him a benefit free from all charges, and upon a day that made it very advantageous to him.

But, notwithstanding this great and unexpected success, so constant to their own opinion were Leake and Harris, that

* Lord North and his family were frequently at the Haymarket when Henderson acted.

D

they

they could not be converted by the voice of an unprejudiced public. By their wife interpreter and aid-de-camp Mr. Sarjant the box-keeper, they insinuated, that Henderfon would not presume to act upon Covent-garden or Drury-Lane stage, because he was not equal to a second or third character.

But Mr. Sheridan was not to be swayed by such grave authority as Mess. Harris, Leake, and the Box-keeper. When he had seen Henderfon's Hamlet the second time, he engaged him; and, to his honour it must be said, upon no mean and parsimonious conditions; his salary was fixed at 10*l.* and Mr. Sheridan undertook at the same time to pay the forfeiture of articles to Palmer the Bath manager, which amounted to 300*l.**; so that upon an average he receives a greater salary than any young actor ever enjoyed the first year of his engagement.

* Henderfon is in articles for two years; and the additional 300*l.* to his weekly income makes it amount to 15*l.* per week.

There

There was nothing wanting to Henderson's felicity, but the countenance of Mr. Garrick. Though this great man had refused, from perhaps very justifiable reasons, at least to himself, all the efforts made in his favour for many years; and though, when he seemed inclined to receive him upon certain conditions, an unhappy misunderstanding had prevented an union; yet still the friends of both gentlemen wished they might no longer continue on disagreeable terms.

Mr. T. a member of the Irish parliament, a gentleman well known for his great abilities, and much esteemed and beloved for his many amiable virtues, laboured strongly to reconcile Mr. Garrick to Mr. Henderson; and at last brought matters to such a crisis, that he wrote to Henderson, for whom he has ever manifested a sincere regard and friendship, that Mr. Garrick was willing to give up all resentment; and that, when he should arrive in town, it was expected

Mr. T. Tighe

pected that he would pay his respects to Mr. Garrick.

These little gossiping stories seem to be of little importance—But of what is the history of man composed? Man, made up of passion and weakness, subject to caprice and governed by humour!—Besides, the dignity of the person gives consequence to trifles. A Garrick quarreling with Henderson for a straw, becomes an object of attention. But to resume my story:—Upon the strength of Mr. T's letter, Henderson desired a friend of his, who was well acquainted with Mr. Garrick, to call upon him with his respects, and to assure him that he should think himself happy in waiting upon him as soon as he arrived in town.

This was communicated in a letter to Mr. Garrick, from their common friend. The answer was unexpected, and to this purpose: That he should be very glad at all times to see the writer of the letter; but that he could not think of having any connection

connection with a man who had ridiculed him by mimickry, and had exposed and laughed at his letters.

The charge of mimickry we shall beg leave to dismiss, till the other accusation, which is of a much deeper dye, is fairly answered and confuted. The letter to which Mr. Garrick alludes, I have read; a very good one it is, and of the most friendly and cordial kind. The chief purport of it was, to warn Henderson not to be too much elated with success, and to instruct him how he might improve his time to the best advantage. He admonished him to be cautious of his company, and to avoid the rocks which many of the *dramatis personæ* had split upon, by mispending their time, and acquiring a habit of idleness and drinking among the vain pretenders to theatrical merit. He likewise advises him to peruse other books besides plays, and to acquire such farther knowledge as might add to his importance in life. In short, the whole

letter consists of kind, I had almost said parental, admonition. If we could possibly suppose that any man could be so dishonest and absurd as to ridicule such a letter, he ought to be shunned as an ungrateful and a worthless wretch; but the reverse of this is true: Mr. Garrick has been grossly abused. There is a letter (written by Henderson, soon after the receipt of Mr. Garrick's, to the common friend whom I have just mentioned) still extant; in which Henderson, after acquainting him that he had retired from company to apply himself closely to study, declares, that he had no pleasure but in the correspondence with which Mr. Garrick was pleased to honour him. Add to this, that Henderson absolutely denies the charge: he positively declares he never could be guilty of such baseness and treachery; he challenges Mr. Garrick to produce his witnesses, whom he will confront before himself, or any person or persons he shall appoint.

appoint. I shall be excused in dwelling the longer upon this question, as Mr. Henderfon's moral character was deeply concerned in its being cleared up.

Should I gravely undertake to refute the dismal charge of mimickry, I should deserve to be laughed at for my pains.

The habit of taking-off, or mimickry, though not one of the elegant and polite arts, is at least an imitative one, and greatly depends upon a good ear and lively imagination; nor do I know any man, that has this gift in his possession, who will take a self-denying ordinance, and forbear the use of it. While confined within moderate bounds, the practice may be permitted as harmless and diverting. A cruel use of it has been made in public, by which some people have suffered more than vexation. I need not repeat instances fresh in every body's memory. Mr. Garrick was himself so truly sensible of the injury given to individuals by stage mimickry, that, after a

very short trial of his powers in that bewitching art, he gave it up, and never could be persuaded to resume it upon any account of profit or of pleasure.

But this gentleman, who disclaimed and resigned the use of a talent when applied to mischievous purposes, did not refuse to regale his friends with grotesque pictures of themselves and others in private. No man so quick as Mr. Garrick in discerning an aukward gesture, a foolish stare, a dissonant tone in speaking, a shambling gait in walking, &c. &c. and I will add, no man more ready than he to ridicule upon the spot what was amiss, for the benefit of the person whose picture he drew; the more original the character, its peculiarities are more striking.

If Henderson should in conversation make free with some few particularities in Mr. Garrick's manner, which the most accomplished man is not without; Mr. Garrick must not impute this to malice, spleen, ill-nature, or any illiberal motive;

tive ; nor should he think that he ought to be exempt from a treatment universally and indiscriminately bestowed by the person who has it in his power to give it. You may as well rob the musician of his harpsichord, the painter of his pencil, the statuary of his chizzel, or the poet of his muse, as the mimick of his trick in taking-off.

Mr. Henderson can have no inclination to give the least offence to Mr. Garrick ; he wishes to be on the most friendly terms with a man who is the honour and boast of the English stage, and whose great merit in acting we must despair of seeing surpassed, or perhaps equalled ; one too, whom for his various and extensive abilities I should not scruple to rank with a Hogarth or a Foote ;—a triumvirate of genius not easily to be paralleled.

It is to be regretted that Mr. Henderson had not been introduced to the theatre under the care and instruction of so great a master as Mr. Garrick ; and we
must

must wonder that a man who has been self-taught should make such a progress in his profession.

Notwithstanding the ill-natured prognostications of the criticks, Henderson did not find the boards of Drury-Lane stage more rugged than those of Bath or the Haymarket. It is computed that the sum of 2500l. was taken in the first nine nights of his acting at that theatre, in the most barren part of the season, and when none of the great people chuse to make their appearance, for fear of playing to empty benches.—The applause he met with was in proportion to the audiences.

Before we venture to give our opinion of Henderson as an actor, let us say something of him as a man, and give some idea of his conduct in private life.

His intimate acquaintance give him the reputation of a modest, unaffected, and unassuming person. His conversation is easy, and occasionally sprightly. He does not attempt to shine, and overpower the
the

the company, by brilliant wit, bold vivacities, or brisk fallies of imagination. What pleasantry or facetiousness he gives into, is unlaboured, spontaneous, and natural. Upon the whole, he is rather grave than gay in his deportment. He understands the French language well, and is not unacquainted with the Latin classicks. He is perfectly conversant in the best English writers; many select passages of whom he has by heart, and repeats very judiciously and agreeably. He is certainly a most excellent mimick, not a mere ape of sound or action; but will enter like Estcourt or Foote so perfectly into a character, that he will give a faithful resemblance of the person he describes, by dialogue or long discourse, accompanied with proper look, gesture, and attitude.

I shall not insist upon, or make a virtue of, his good behaviour to his mother; the age is not so degenerate as to be obliged to praise a man for a duty, the want

This is not true. He did not understand Latin.

want of which would render him a detested character.

To speak critically of Henderson as an actor, will require great skill and much attention to the subject : to the first I have very small pretensions, nor can I spare leisure enough for the second ; therefore I must beg the reader's indulgence for the little I shall presume to say.

Henderson's external requisites for heroic, or what they call amiable characters, are not equal or striking ; but, however short of our ideas he may fall when we see him in a pathetic lover or a mighty conqueror, he is not deficient in figure for some of Shakespeare's most masterly characters—for Shylock, Falstaff, Richard, Hamlet, and Lear. Should we listen to the ridiculous criticisms of some very hypercritical writers, we should conclude that he was a lump of deformity, gross and unwieldy in his make, with flabby cheeks of dough : his eyes too, they say, are little and blue ; and indeed

indeed I should think, according to these gentlemen, we must make use of telescopes to find them out; for, if you will believe them, they are sunk into his head, or gone to pay a visit to his brains. However, this is mere hyperbolic exaggeration; the publick must judge whether the criticks are to be believed or not. Great expression in his countenance he hath not; yet, it has been justly observed, there is a strong intelligence in his look, which convinces the spectator that his mind is sufficiently awake to what he is about, and that he understands the character he represents, and feels the passion he assumes. His action, except in a few characters, such as Falstaff, Shylock, and Don John, is rather partial and restrained; whether owing to caution or want of fire, I will not pretend to say. He certainly is a most judicious speaker, which proceeds from his perfect knowledge of his author. His voice has not that fine flexibility,
nor

nor that sharp and pleasing tone, we admired so much in Mr. Garrick; but Henderson's emphasis is always rightly placed. His attention to character, and to the business of the scene, was never exceeded by the great Roscius himself. He is such a master of his voice, that he never strains it to an improper height, nor ever sinks it so low as to destroy articulation. He is a complete master of what the players call *chaste acting*; nor does he ever betray that eagerness for applause, which often disconcerts the actor when he misses it.

The great variety of characters, totally dissimilar, which he has acted, proves the universality of his genius. To go through a view of the several parts he has represented, would be a task superior to my abilities. I have a more than common liking to the inimitable character of Sir John Falstaff; and hope I shall be indulged in giving my sentiments, crude as they are, upon *humour*

in general, and on this great master of it, the Fat Knight.

To trace the progress of humour in society, would be thought a vain and superfluous labour; and yet we cannot deny that this peculiar distinction, this characteristic mark, owes its being to Liberty. Under our old Norman and Saxon kings, when the feudal system predominated, the court and city were equally strangers to honest mirth and to that singularity of temper called humour. The stiff ceremony which attended the parade of chivalry, banished all freedom of speech; no man durst to laugh at another, where the single combat must have decided the goodness of the jest. But so prone is man to mirth, that it must find vent some way or other. Those who durst not seriously contradict or railly one another at a feast or entertainment, employed others to do that business for them. This urgent necessity of nature for unbending the mind, was the origin of the fool
or

or clown. Nobody could pretend to be angry at the gibes or jests which a party-coloured hireling threw at them; for he treated all alike, the inviter and the invited, and was himself the butt and jest of the company in his turn; and I doubt not but he often revenged the unhappiness of his station, by uttering severe truths and cutting satire, which none could resent without exposing themselves to laughter.

At length Commerce, and her companion Freedom, ushered into the world their genuine offspring, True Humour. To these she owed her birth; and when they expire, it will require no great sagacity to prophesy that she will follow her parents to the same grave.

To reckon humour among the many other blessings of Queen Elizabeth's reign, would raise a laugh of contempt in many a grave countenance; and yet I will presume to say that it was no inconsiderable one. It was a strong proof that the subject enjoyed all his dearest

dearest rights, when he durst be himself, be open, undisguised, and free. Humour in France is lost in cringe and ceremony. In Italy it degenerates into burlesque. In Spain, its native soil, it is shackled by bigotry and the Inquisition. In England alone it flourishes unchecked. But to proceed: till the time of Elizabeth the word humour was not well understood, and scarce heard of; but it then grew of such consequence, that to be esteemed a man of humour was the ardent wish of every fashionable young fellow. This is sufficiently proved by the abuse and misapplication of the term; for if a man wore a particular feather in his hat, or had something singular in his garb, or uttered a parcel of strange words, or swore a ridiculous and uncommon oath, he called himself a man of humour. The dramatic poets, who, in all ages, hold up the best mirror of common manners, caught the public characters; and Shake-

E

speare

Shakespeare and Jonson exhibited their various drawings of this fantastical Lady. The portraits of Jonson were true and exact, but confined rather to the dry and disagreeable absurdities which arise from certain singularities of humour. His Morose, in the *Silent Woman*, is a finished but disagreeable picture of a man who secludes himself from the world to enjoy his own perversities; but this author, even in his characters of humour, is learnedly pedantic. Let any man read Morose's soliloquy, in the second act of the *Silent Woman*, where he enjoys the ruin of his nephew, and then tell me if the writing does not smell most rankly of the lamp. Shakespeare, like the sun shining upon a landscape, brightens and beautifies every object. Jonson* degrades human nature, Shakespeare exalts it. The birth of Falstaff

* Jonson wears too servilely the hue and livery of the times he lived in. Shakespeare is not confined to time or place, he is of all nations and of all ages.

was the pride and glory of human wit; a character that is made up of absurdities and contradictions, and yet is the most pleasing and delicious entertainment that the dramatic page can furnish : the robber, the * coward, the braggadocio, the luxurious and debauched rascal, in the creative hands of Shakespeare, becomes the most agreeable, the most facetious, diverting, gay, and lively companion in the world : as if this great genius had a mind to shew his all-conquering powers, he makes us in love with the most profligate and abandoned fellow that ever reveled in a bawdy-house. The bright colours the rogue continually throws upon his vices, disguise them so, that we always view them through a favourable medium ; but in truth it is the *levity* of the character

* Notwithstanding all that the very ingenious and elegant writer of the essay on the character of Falstaff has said in justification of the Knight's bravery, I shall not chuse to give up such a glaring feature of the character as his cowardice ; I should as soon believe Roderigo to be a man of sense, and Iago a man of virtue, as suspect Falstaff to have any spark of bravery in him.

E 2

that

that carries him triumphantly through all his scenes of roguery and debauchery : he no where appears dark, malicious, cruel, and treacherous. My Lord Chief Justice, in the second part of Henry the Fourth, after giving Falstaff many a severe reproof, is brought into good humour with him by the very wantonness of Falstaff's behaviour, in circumstances of great seriousness to himself :—" Now," says his Lordship, "*the Lord lighten thee, for thou art a great fool.*" Falstaff, we may be sure, was happy to get off so easily ; and if he got clear of the head of the law, we may fairly acquit him.

Beaumont and Fletcher, and other dramattick writers, have attempted to give us imitations of Falstaff ; such as Bessus, Cacafogo, Sir Epicure Mammon, &c. but these are faint shadows, or rather caricatures, of the inimitable Knight. The author of Falstaff's Wedding has, indeed, exhibited a very good resemblance of the
character

character he has revived, the comick mirth and true humour of Sir John.

I am of opinion that Falstaff is the master-piece of Henderson : he had no original before his eyes to draw from, so that the acting of this part was entirely of his own creation. I know that some of the old jovial bottle companions of Quin look upon this attempt of our young comedian as high treason against the memory of their friend ; no man must dare to act Falstaff after Quin.

Let us fairly examine the pretensions of this great comedian to such superiority : I have often conversed with those who knew him well ; a man of quick conception, and ready wit, he certainly was ; but his general turn of mind was prone to the farcical, and his poignant wit was calculated to excite laughter often at the expence of others ; his mirth was not generally of the joyous, liberal, and jovial kind. He had little of the milk

of human-kindness about him*; he took too much pleasure in wounding and degrading those whom he saw were inferior to himself: but it must be owned that he had his happy intervals of festivity and good humour; he was particularly lively and gay when his venison was well flavoured, and his claret of the genuine sort; then, indeed, was he a most excellent companion, and the very soul of mirth. Though little acquainted with books, Quin knew mankind perfectly; he discerned with a quick eye characteristic folly and absurdity, and took delight in exposing them by strong and pungent ridicule.

Such a man, with the advantage too of a large figure, an expressive countenance, with a full and well-toned voice, was not ill qualified to act Falstaff. When we make allowance for the applause he

* Quin could occasionally do a very good-natured action; he, at one time, in the politest manner, made a present of 300l. or 400l. to Mr. Thomson, the Poet; and was, through life, the generous friend of Ryan.

really

really deserved, and the partiality of friends and admirers, we cannot help saying, that upon the whole, though he pointed out many essential beauties of Falstaff's character, he fell short in some of the frolicksome, licentious, and joyous scenes of the humorous Knight. The actor was easily to be unmasked; he was still the surly James Quin, with that sternness of brow, and severe gravity of speech, of which he could never divest himself entirely.

I will grant, that in some of the high domineering scenes of Falstaff, Quin must have excelled all that went before him, or may possibly succeed him; but in the loose, easy, merry, ludicrous, gay, and elbow-chair situations and attitudes of the character, Henderson is greatly his superior, by the confession of many judicious persons, who have seen both actors. For a young man to forget himself so far as to adopt all the infirmities and incumbrances of an old fat fellow of sixty,
is

is certainly a difficult task; nay, to give the proper tones of voice peculiar to such a part, is no easy matter; but that he should enter strongly into the high impudent roguery of Falstaff, is scarce to be believed: and yet Henderson's bragging of his unmatched valour, and his arch recovery from his being detected by the Prince and Poins, in the second act; his high-finished satirical description of Bardolph's face in the third; and his inimitable soliloquy where he enjoys the cheating the King of his press-money in the fourth act, are such irrefragable proofs of comic powers, as must place him, in my opinion, amongst the first-rate actors of the age.

I

POST-

P O S T S C R I P T.

I should not forget to inform the reader, that Mr. Harris, the patentee of Covent-Garden theatre, claims the honour of having rejected Mr. Henderson. What makes the refusal of this Manager altogether dishonourable, was his first inviting Henderson to a treaty, and then, without any cause assigned, breaking it off abruptly, and in terms not only peremptory, but absolutely affronting.

The fact stands thus: about the middle, or rather towards the end of January 1775, an acquaintance of Mr. Henderson, from his zeal to serve him, applied to Mr. Harris, and informed him that Henderson was then totally disengaged from Mr. Palmer; which indeed was a solemn truth, for the latter had given the former a month's time to determine whether he would or not renew
his

his articles of engagement with him. Upon this gentleman's application, Mr. Harris expressed an eager desire to encourage an actor, of whose great merit he had repeatedly heard so much from all sorts of people. I have before me a copy of Mr. Henderson's letter of application to the Manager, in which he offers his service upon the terms formerly prescribed by Mr. Garrick, his salary to be ascertained by two common friends, restricted to the proviso of its not exceeding 10*l.* nor being less than 5*l.* *per* week. I have likewise in my hand an original indeed, the Manager's remarkable answer, dated February 6th following, in which he insinuates, that he (Mr. Henderson) might possibly be in treaty with Mr. Palmer; the reader must know that he does not directly charge him with it; but his own words will best interpret his meaning. " I informed
" him (meaning Mr. Henderson's ac-
" quaintance) that if you was in treaty
" with my particular friend Mr. Palmer, or
" had

“ had any intention of continuing with
 “ him, I would by no means consent
 “ to come between you, whatever might
 “ be the eventual advantages of the
 “ Covent-Garden theatre ;” but, with-
 out waiting for an answer from Hender-
 son, by which he might learn whether
 he was really or not in any treaty with
 Mr. Palmer, the Manager concludes his
 letter in the following very striking words :

“ I must therefore inform you, that
 “ though I think myself much obliged
 “ to you for the preference you have
 “ given our theatre, I must now (*what-*
 “ *ever may be the result of your treaty*)
 “ ABSOLUTELY DECLINE ALL THOUGHTS
 “ OF ENTERING INTO ANY TREATY WITH
 “ YOU FOR AN ENGAGEMENT AT OUR
 “ THEATRE.”

The bare exposition of fact is of itself
 sufficiently strong and expressive ; there
 needs no commentary to explain it. Hen-
 derson’s sole ambition was then, and al-
 ways was, to appear on the London stage ;

no

no terms could be more moderate than those which he proposed. Compared to this extraordinary, and I had almost said insidious, conduct of Mr. Harris, Mr. Garrick's behaviour was generous and princely.

I would here rectify an error of some consequence, which I had fallen into : instead of the several London Patentees having seen Mr. Henderson act, I should have said *several of the Patentees* ; Mr. Garrick was not present at any play in which Henderson performed a part at Bath, till the spring of 1775. I would likewise inform the reader, that the very letter of Henderson's, which gave Mr. Garrick so much offence, was dictated by his intimate acquaintance.

F I N I S.