

of the age, intensified the Puritan opposition to all and any stage plays. A patient endeavour to reform instead of suppressing the drama was not to be looked for from such adversaries, should they ever possess the means of carrying out their views; and so soon as Puritanism should victoriously assert itself in the state, the stage was doomed. Among the attacks directed against it in its careless heyday of prosperity Prynne's *Histrio Mastix* (1632), while it involved its author in shamefully cruel persecution, did not remain wholly without effect upon the tone of the dramatic literature of the subsequent period; but the quarrel between Puritanism and the theatre was too old and too deep to end in any but one way, so soon as the latter was deprived of its protectors. The Civil War began in August 1642; and early in the following month was published the Ordinance of the Lords and Commons, which, after a brief and solemn preamble, commanded "that while these sad causes and set-times of humiliation do continue, public stage plays shall cease and be forborne." Many actors and playwrights followed the fortunes of the royal cause in the field; some may have gone into a more or less voluntary exile; upon those who lingered on in the familiar haunts the hand of power lay heavy; and though there seems reason to believe that dramatic entertainments of one kind or another continued to be occasionally presented, stringent ordinances gave summary powers to magistrates against any players found engaged in such proceedings (1647), and bade them treat all stage-players as rogues, and pull down all stage galleries, seats, and boxes (1648). A few dramatic works were published in this period; while at fairs about the country were acted farces called "drolls," consisting of the most vulgar scenes to be found in popular plays. Thus, the life of the drama was not absolutely extinguished; and its darkest day proved briefer than perhaps either its friends or its foes could have supposed.

Revival of the drama.

Already "in Oliver's time" private performances took place from time to time at noblemen's houses and (though not undisturbed) in the old haunt of the drama, the Red Bull. In 1656 the ingenuity of Sir William Davenant (1606-1669), whose name, though not otherwise eminent in our dramatic literature, is memorable as connecting together two distinct periods in it, ventured on a bolder step in the production of a quasi-dramatic entertainment "of declamation and music;" and in the following year he brought out with scenery and music a piece which was afterwards in an enlarged form acted and printed as the first part of his opera, *The Siege of Rhodes*. This entertainment he afterwards removed from the private house where it had been produced to the Cockpit, where he soon ventured upon the performance of regular plays written by himself. Thus, under the cover of two sister arts, whose aid was in the sequel to prove by no means altogether beneficial to its progress, the English drama had boldly anticipated the Restoration, and was no longer hiding its head when that much desired event was actually brought about. Soon after Charles II.'s entry into London, two theatrical companies are known to have been acting in the capital. For these companies patents were soon granted, under the names of "the Duke (of York's)" and "the King's Servants," to Davenant and one of the brothers Killigrew respectively,—the former from 1662 acting at Lincoln's Inn Fields, then at Dorset Garden in Salisbury Court, the latter from 1663 at the Theatre Royal near Drury Lane. These companies were united from 1682, a royal licence being granted in 1695 to a rival company which performed in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and which migrated to Covent Garden in 1733. Meanwhile Vanbrugh had in 1705 built the theatre in the Haymarket; and a theatre in Goodman's Fields—afterwards rendered

famous by the first appearance of Garrick—led a fitful existence from 1729 to 1733. The Act of 1737 deprived the Crown of the power of licensing any more theatres; so that the history of the English stage for a long period was confined to a limited area. The rule which prevailed after the Restoration, that neither of the rival companies should ever attempt a play produced by the other, operated beneficially both upon the activity of dramatic authorship and upon the progress of the art of acting, which was not exposed to the full effects of that deplorable spirit of personal rivalry which leads actors, in order to outshine their fellows, to attempt parts for which they often have no special qualification. There can be little doubt that the actor's art has rarely flourished more in England than in the days of T. Betterton (1635-1710) and his contemporaries, among whose names those of Hart, Mohun, Kynaston, Nokes, Mrs Barry, Mrs Betterton, Mrs Bracegirdle, and Mrs Eleanor Gwynne have, together with many others, survived in various connections among the memories of the Restoration age. No higher praise has ever been given to an actor than that which Addison bestowed upon Betterton, in describing his performance of *Othello* as a proof that Shakespeare could not have written the most striking passages of the character otherwise than he has done.

It may here be noticed, that the fortunes of the Irish theatre in general followed those of the English, of which of course it was merely a branch. Of native dramatic compositions in earlier times not a trace remains in Ireland; and the drama was introduced into that country as an English exotic—apparently already in the reign of Henry VIII., and more largely in that of Elizabeth. The first theatre in Dublin was built in 1635; but in 1641 it was closed, and even after the Restoration the Irish stage continued in a precarious condition till near the end of the century.

Already in the period preceding the outbreak of the civil war the English drama had perceptibly sunk from the height to which it had been raised by the great Elizabethans. When it had once more recovered possession of that arena with which no living drama can dispense, it would have been futile to demand that the dramatists should return altogether into the ancient paths, unaffected by the influences, native or foreign, in operation around them. But there was no reason why the new drama should not, like the Elizabethan, be true in spirit to the higher purposes of the dramatic art, to the nobler tendencies of the national life, and to the eternal demands of moral law. Because the later Stuart drama was as a whole untrue to these, and, while following its own courses, never more than partially returned from the aberrations to which it condemned itself, its history is that of a decay which the indisputable brilliancy, borrowed or original, of many of its productions is incapable of concealing.

Owing in part to the influence of the French theatre, which by this time had taken the place of the Spanish as the ruling drama of Europe, the separation between tragedy and comedy is clearly marked in our post-Restoration plays. Comic scenes are still occasionally introduced into tragedies by some of our dramatists who adhered more closely to the Elizabethan models (such as Otway and Crowne), but the practice fell into disuse; while the endeavour to elevate comedy by pathetic scenes and motives is one of the characteristic marks of the beginning of another period in our dramatic literature. The successive phases through which English tragedy passed in the later Stuart times cannot be always kept distinct from one another; and the guidance offered by the theories put forth by some of the dramatists in support of their practice is often delusive. Following the example of Corneille, Dryden and his contemporaries

and successors were fond of proclaiming their adherence to this or that principle of dramatic construction or form, and of upholding, with much show of dialectical acumen, maxims derived by them from French or other sources, or elaborated with modifications and variations of their own, but usually amounting to little more than what Scott calls "certain romantic whimsical imitations of the dramatic art." The student of the drama will find much both to entertain and to instruct him in these prefaces, apologies, dialogues, and treatises; he will acknowledge that Dryden's incomparable vigour does not desert him either in the exposing or in the upholding of fallacies; and that even Rymer,¹ usually regarded as having touched the nadir of dramatic criticism, is not wholly without grains of salt. But Restoration tragedy itself must not be studied by the light of Restoration criticism. So long as any dramatic power remained in our tragic poets—and it is absent from none of the chief among them from Dryden to Rowe—the struggle between fashion (disguised as theory) and instinct (tending in the direction of the Elizabethan traditions) could never wholly determine itself in favour of the former.

Lord Orrery (1621-1679), in deference, as he declares, to the expressed tastes of his sovereign King Charles II. himself, was the first to set up the standard of *heroic plays*. This new species of tragedy (for such it professed to be) commended itself by its novel choice of themes, to a large extent supplied by recent French romance—the *romans de longue haleine* of the Scudérys and their contemporaries—and by French plays treating similar themes. It likewise borrowed from France that garb of rhyme which the English drama had so long abandoned, and which now reappeared in the heroic couplet. But the themes which to readers of novels might seem of their nature inexhaustible could not long suffice to satisfy the more capricious appetite of theatrical audiences; and the form, in the application it was sought to enforce for it, was doomed to remain an exotic. In conjunction with his brother-in-law Sir R. Howard (1626-1698),² and afterwards more confidently by himself,³ Dryden (1631-1699) threw the incomparable vigour and brilliancy of his genius into the scale, which soon rose to the full height of fashionable popularity. At first he claimed for English tragedy the right to combine her native inheritance of freedom with these valuable foreign acquisitions.⁴ Nor was he dismayed by the ridicule which the celebrated burlesque (by the duke of Buckingham and others) of *The Rehearsal* (1671) cast upon heroic plays, without discriminating between them and such other materials for ridicule as the contemporary drama supplied to its facetious authors, but returned to the defence of a species⁵ which he was himself in the end to abandon. The desire for change proved stronger than the love of consistency—which in Dryden was never more than theoretical. After summoning tragedy to rival the freedom (without disdaining the machinery) of opera, he came to recognize in characterization the truest secret of the master-spirit of the Elizabethan drama,⁶ and, after audaciously but not altogether unhappily essaying to rival Shakespeare on his own ground,⁷ produced under the influence of the same views at least one work of striking merit.⁸ But he was already growing weary of the stage itself as well as of the rhymed heroic drama; and though he put an end to the species to which he had given temporary vitality, he failed effectively to point the way to a more legitimate development of English tragedy. Among the

other tragic poets of this period, N. Lee (1650-1690), in the outward form of his dramas, accommodated his practice to that of Dryden, with whom he occasionally co-operated as a dramatist, and like whom he allowed political partisanship to intrude upon the stage. His rhetorical genius was not devoid of genuine energy, nor is he to be regarded as a mere imitator. T. Otway (1651-1695), the most gifted tragic poet of the younger generation contemporary with Dryden, inherited something of the spirit of the Elizabethan drama; he possessed a real gift of tragic pathos and of expressive tenderness; but his genius had an alloy of impurity, and though he was often happy in his novel choice of themes, his efforts were as incomplete as his end was premature. T. Southerne (1660-1746) was likewise possessed of pathetic power; but his success was primarily due to his skill in the choice of "sensational" plots;⁹ J. Crowne (d. c. 1703), Lord Lansdowne ("Granville the polite") (c. 1667-1735), Congreve, by virtue of a single long celebrated but not really remarkable tragedy,¹⁰ and N. Rowe (1673-1718) may be further singled out from the list of the tragic dramatists of this period, many of whom were, like their comic contemporaries, mere translators or adapters from the French. The tragedies of Rowe, whose direct services to the study of Shakespeare are not to be forgotten, indicate with singular distinctness the transition from the fuller declamatory style of Dryden to the calmer and thinner manner of Addison. In tragedy (as to a more marked degree in comedy) the excesses (both of style and subject) of the past period of the English drama had produced an inevitable reaction; decorum was asserting its claims on the stage as in society; and French tragedy had set the example of sacrificing what passion—and what vigour—it retained in favour of qualities more acceptable to the "reformed" court of Louis XIV. Addison (1672-1719), in allowing his *Cato* to take its chance upon the stage, when a moment of political excitement (April 1713) ensured it an extraordinary success, to which no feature in it corresponds, except an unusual number of lines predestined to become familiar quotations, sealed the doom of English national tragedy. The "first reasonable English tragedy," as Voltaire called it, had been produced, and the oscillations of the tragic drama of the Restoration were at an end.

English comedy in this period displayed no similar desire to cut itself off from the native soil, though it freely borrowed the materials for its plots and many of its figures from Spanish, and afterwards more generally from French, originals. The spirit of the old romantic comedy had long since fled; the graceful artificialities of the pastoral drama, even the light texture of the mask, ill suited the demands of an age which made no secret to itself of the grossness of its sensuality. With a few unimportant exceptions, such poetic elements as admitted of being combined with the poetic drama were absorbed by the opera and the ballet. No new species of the comic drama formed itself, though towards the close of the period may be noticed the beginnings of modern English farce. Political and religious partisanship, generally in accordance with the dominant reaction against Puritanism, were allowed to find expression in the directest and coarsest forms upon the stage, and to hasten the necessity for a more systematic control than even the times before the Revolution had found requisite. At the same time the unblushing indecency which the Restoration had spread through court and capital had established its dominion over the comic stage, corrupting the manners, and with them the morals, of its dramatists, and forbidding them, at the risk of seeming

¹ *A Short View of Tragedy* (1693).

² *The Indian Queen*.

³ *The Indian Emperor; Tyrannic Love; The Conquest of Granada*.

⁴ *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*.

⁵ *Essay of Heroic Plays*.

⁶ *The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy*.

⁷ *All for Love (Antony and Cleopatra)*.

⁸ *Don Sebastian*.

⁹ *Oroonoko; The Fatal Marriage*.

¹⁰ *The Mourning Bride*.

dull, to be anything but improper. Much of this found its way even into the epilogues, which, together with the prologues, proved so important an adjunct of the Restoration drama. These influences determine the general character of what is with a more than chronological meaning termed the comedy of the Restoration. In construction, the national love of fulness and solidity of dramatic treatment induced its authors to alter what they borrowed from foreign sources, adding to complicated Spanish plots characters of native English directness, and supplementing single French plots by the addition of others. At the same time the higher efforts of French comedy of character, as well as the refinement of expression in the list of their models, notably in Molière, were alike seasoned to suit the coarser appetites and grosser palates of English patrons. The English comic writers often succeeded in strengthening the borrowed texture of their plays, but they never added comic humour without at the same time adding coarseness of their own. Such were the productions of Sir George Etherege (c. 1636-c. 1694), Sir Charles Sedley (c. 1639-c. 1728), and the other "gentlemen who wrote at ease;" nor was there any signal difference between their productions and those of a playwright-actor, such as J. Lacy (d. 1681), and a professional dramatist of undoubted ability, such as J. Crowne. Such, though often displaying the brilliancy of a genius which even where it sank could never wholly abandon its prerogative, were, it must be confessed, the comedies of Dryden himself. On the other hand, the lowest literary depths of the Restoration drama were sounded by T. D'Urfey (1630-1723), while of its moral degradation the "divine Astræa," the "unspeakable" Mrs Aphra Behn (1642-1689) has an indefeasible title to be considered the most faithful representative. T. Shadwell (1640-1692), fated like the tragic poet Elkanah Settle (1648-1724), to be chiefly remembered as a victim of Dryden's satire, deserves more honourable mention. Like J. Wilson (d. 1690), whose plays seem to class him with the pre-Restoration dramatists, Shadwell had caught something not only of the art, but also of the spirit, of Ben Jonson; but in most of his works he was, like the rest of his earlier contemporaries, and like the brilliant group which succeeded them, content to take his moral tone from the reckless society for which, or in deference to the tastes of which, he wrote. The absence of a moral sense, which, together with a grossness of expression often defying exaggeration, characterizes our comic dramatists from the days of Dryden to those of Congreve, is the main cause of their failure to satisfy the demands which are legitimately to be made upon their art. They essayed to draw character as well as to paint manners, but they rarely proved equal to the former and higher task; and while choosing the means which most readily commended their plays to the favour of their immediate public, they achieved but little as interpreters of those essential distinctions which their art is capable of illustrating. Within these limits, though occasionally passing beyond them, and always with the same deference to the immoral tone which seemed to have become an indispensable adjunct of the comic style, even the greatest comic authors of this age moved. W. Wycherley (1640-1715) was a comic dramatist of real power, who drew his characters with vigour and distinctness, and constructed his plots and chose his language with natural ease. He lacks guile of spirit, and his wit is of a cynical turn. But while he ruthlessly uncloaks the vices of his age, his own moral tone is affected by their influence in as marked a degree as that of the most light-hearted of his contemporaries. The most brilliant of these was indisputably W. Congreve (1672-1728), who is not only one of the very wittiest of English writers, but equally excels

in the graceful ease of his dialogue, and draws his characters and constructs his plots with the same masterly skill. His chief fault as a dramatist is one of excess—the brilliancy of the dialogue, whoever be the speaker, overpowers the distinction between the "humours" of his personages. Though he is less brutal in expression than "manly" Wycherley, and less coarse than the lively Sir J. Vanbrugh (c. 1666-1726), licentiousness in him as in them corrupts the spirit of his comic art; but of his best though not most successful play¹ it must be allowed that the issue of the main plot is on the side of virtue. G. Farquhar (1678-1707), whose morality is on a par with that of the other members of this group, is inferior to them in brilliancy; but as pictures of manners in a wider sphere of life than that which contemporary comedy usually chose to illustrate, two of his plays deserve to be noticed, in which we already seem to be entering the atmosphere of the 18th century novel.²

The improvement which now begins to manifest itself in the moral tone and spirit of English comedy is partly due to the reaction against the reaction of the Restoration, partly to the punishment which the excesses of the comic stage had brought upon it in the invective of Jeremy Collier³ (1698), of all the assaults the theatre in England has had to undergo the best founded, and that which produced the most perceptible results. The comic poets, who had always been more or less conscious of their sins, and had at all events not defended them by the ingenious sophistries which it has pleased later literary criticism to suggest on their behalf, now began with uneasy merriment to allude in their prologues to the reformation which had come over the spirit of the town. Writers like Mrs Centlivre (c. 1678-1722) became anxious to reclaim their offenders with much emphasis in the fifth act; and Colley Cibber (1671-1757)—whose *Apology for his Life* furnishes a useful view of this and the subsequent period of the history of the stage, with which he was connected as author, manager, and actor (excelling in this capacity as representative of those fools with which he peopled the comic stage⁴)—may be credited with the moral intention he claims to have kept in view throughout his career as a dramatist. Sir R. Steele (1671-1729), in accordance with his general tendencies as a writer, pursued a still more definite moral purpose in his comedies; but his genius perhaps lacked the sustained vigour necessary for a dramatist, and his humour naturally sought the aid of pathos. Accordingly, taking a hint from Colley Cibber, who so well understood the public taste, Steele, passing from partial⁵ to more complete⁶ experiment, became the founder of that *sentimental comedy* which exercised so depressing an influence upon the progress of our drama. Thus the two writers whose associated efforts so largely contributed to open a new and productive vein in our literature, both signally helped to hasten the decline of its dramatic branch. With *Cato* English tragedy committed suicide, though its pale ghost survived; with *The Conscious Lovers* English comedy sank into the tearful embrace of artificiality and weakness, from which it has never again altogether torn itself away.

It seems superfluous within the limits of a summary like the present to attempt to classify with any degree of minuteness the remaining phenomena in the history of our dramatic literature. During the 18th century its productions were still as a rule legitimately designed to meet the demands of the stage, from which its higher efforts after-

¹ *The Double Dealer*.

² *The Recruiting Officer; The Beau's Stratagem*.

³ *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*.

⁴ *Sir Novelty Fashion (Lord Poppington)*, &c.

⁵ *The Lying Lover; The Tender Husband*. ⁶ *The Conscious Lovers*.

wards to so large an extent became dissociated. But the demands of the stage and those of its patrons and of the public of the "Augustan" age, and of that which succeeded it, in general were fast bound by the trammels of a taste with which a revival of the poetic drama remained irreconcilable during a long period of our literature. There is every reason to conclude that the art of acting progressed in the same direction of artificiality, and stiffened into apparently immutable forms in such actors as Macklin and Quin. The genius of Garrick, whose theatrical career extended from 1741 to 1776, opened a new era in his art. His unparalleled success was due in the first instance to his incomparable natural gifts; but these were indisputably enhanced by a careful and continued literary training, and ennobled by a purpose which prompted him to essay the noblest, as he was capable of performing the most various, range of English theatrical characters. By devoting himself as actor and manager with special zeal to the production of Shakespeare, Garrick permanently popularized on the national stage the greatest creations of our drama, and indirectly helped to seal the doom of the surviving tendency to maintain in the most ambitious walks of our dramatic literature the nerveless traditions of the pseudo-classical school. A generation of celebrated actors and actresses, many of whom live for us in the drastic epigrams of Churchill's *Rosciad* (1761), were his helpmates or his rivals; but their fame has faded, while his is destined to endure as that of one of the typical masters of his art.

The contrast between the tragedy of the 18th century and those plays of Shakespeare and one or two other Elizabethans which already before Garrick were known to the English stage, was indeed weakened by the mutilated form in which these generally, if not always, made their appearance there. Even so, however, there are perhaps few instances in theatrical history in which so strange a competition was so long sustained. In the hands of the tragic poets of the age of Pope, as well as of that of Johnson, tragedy had hopelessly stiffened into the forms of its accepted French models. Direct reproductions of these continued, as in the case of Ambrose Philips's (c. 1671-1749) and Charles Johnson's (1679-1748) translations from Racine, and Aaron Hill's (1685-1750) from Voltaire. Among other tragic dramatists of the earlier part of the century may be mentioned J. Hughes (1677-1720), who, after assisting Addison in his *Cato*, produced at least one praiseworthy tragedy of his own;¹ E. Fenton (1683-1730), a joint translator of "Pope's *Homer*" and the author of one extremely successful drama;² and L. Theobald (d. 1744), the first hero of the *Dunciad*, who, besides translations of Greek dramas, produced a few more or less original plays, one of which he was daring enough to father upon Shakespeare.³ A more distinguished name is that of J. Thomson (1700-1748), whose unlucky *Sophonisba* and subsequent tragedies are, however, barely remembered by the side of his poems. The literary genius of E. Young (1681-1765), on the other hand, possessed vigour and variety enough to distinguish his tragedies from the ordinary level of Augustan plays; in one of them he seems to challenge comparison in the treatment of his theme with a very different rival;⁴ but by his main characteristics as a dramatist he belongs to the school of his contemporaries. The endeavours of G. Lillo (1693-1739) to bring the lessons of tragedy home to his fellow-citizens were destined to exercise a powerful influence upon the early progress of the German drama, and not to remain without significance for the history of our own; but his pedestrian muse failed in the end to satisfy higher artistic demands than those met in his most popular

¹ *The Siege of Danasus*.

² *The Double Falsehood*.

³ *Marianna*.

⁴ *The Revenge (Othello)*.

play,⁵ and broke down in the attempt to carry the terrors of *Macbeth* into the regions of domestic tragedy.⁶ "Classical" tragedy in the generation of Johnson pursued the even tenor of its way, the dictator himself treading with solemn footfall in the accustomed path⁷, and Mason (1725-1797) making the futile attempt to produce a close imitation of Greek models. The best-remembered tragedy of the century, Home's *Douglas* (1757), was the production of an author whose famous kinsman, David Hume, had advised him "to read Shakespeare, but to get Racine and Voltaire by heart." The indisputable merits of the play cannot blind us to the fact that *Douglas* is the child of *Merope*.

While thus no high creative talent arose to revive the poetic genius of English tragedy, comedy, which had to contend against the same rivals, naturally met the demands of the conflict with greater buoyancy. The history of the most formidable of those rivals forms no part of this sketch (see Music); but the points of contact between its progress and the history of our dramatic literature cannot be altogether left out of sight. H. Purcell's (1658-1695) endeavours to unite English music to the words of English poets were now a thing of the past; the isolated efforts of Addison⁸ and others to recover the operatic stage for the native tongue had proved powerless. Italian texts, which had first made their entrance piecemeal, in the end asserted themselves in their entirety; and the German genius of Handel completed the triumphs of a form of art which no longer had any connection with the English drama, and which reached the height of its fashionable popularity about the time when Garrick began to adorn the national stage. In one form, however, the English opera was preserved as a pleasing species of the popular drama. The pastoral drama had (in 1725) produced an isolated aftergrowth in Allan Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd*, which, with genuine freshness and humour, but without a trace of burlesque, transferred to the scenery of the Pentland Hills the lovely tale of Florizel and Perdita. The dramatic form of this poem is only an accident, but it doubtless suggested an experiment of a different kind to the most playful of London wits. Gay's "Newgate Pastoral" of *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), in which the amusing text of a burlesque farce was interspersed with songs set to popular airs, caught the fancy of the town by this novel combination, and became the ancestor of a series of agreeable productions, none of which, however, have ever rivalled it in celebrity. Among these the pieces of J. Bickerstaff⁹ (c. 1735-c. 1788) and of C. Dibdin¹⁰ (1745-1814) may be signalized. The opera in England as elsewhere thus absorbed what vitality remained to the pastoral drama, while to the ballet and the pantomime (whose glories in England began at Covent Garden in 1733, and to whose popularity even Garrick was obliged to defer) was left (in the 18th century at all events) the inheritance of the external attractions of the mask and the pageant.

In the face of such various rivalries it is not strange that comedy, instead of adhering to the narrow path which Steele and others had marked out for her, should have permitted herself some vagaries of her own. Gay's example pointed the way to a fatally facile form of the comic art; and burlesque began to contribute its influence to the decline of comedy. In an age when party-government was severely straining the capabilities of its system, dramatic satire had not far to look for a source of effective seasonings. The audacity of H. Fielding (1707-1754), whose regular comedies (original or adapted) have secured no enduring remembrance, but whose love of parody was

⁵ *George Barnwell*.

⁷ *Irene* (1749).

⁹ *Love in a Village*, &c.

⁶ *The Fatal Curiosity* (Act iii.).

⁸ *Rosamunda*.

¹⁰ *The Waterman*, &c.

afterwards to suggest to him the theme of the first of the novels which have made his name immortal, accordingly ventured in two extravaganzas¹ (so we should call them in these days) upon a larger admixture of political with literary and other satire. A third attempt² (which never reached the stage) furnished the offended minister, Sir Robert Walpole, with the desired occasion for placing a curb upon the licence of the theatre, such as had already been advocated by a representative of its old civic adversaries. The famous Act of 1737 asserted no new principle, but converted into legal power the customary authority hitherto exercised by the Lord Chamberlain (to whom it had descended from the Master of the Revels). The regular censorship which this Act established has not appreciably affected the literary progress of the English drama, and the objections which have been raised against it seem on candid consideration untenable. The liberty of the stage is a question differing in its conditions from that of the liberty of speech in general, or even from that of the liberty of the press; and occasional lapses of official judgment weigh lightly in the balance against the obvious advantages of a system which in a free country needs only the vigilance of public opinion to prevent its abuse. The policy of the restraint which the Act of 1737 put upon the number of playhouses is a different, but has long become an obsolete, question.

Brought back into its accustomed grooves, English comedy seemed inclined to leave to farce the domain of healthy ridicule, and to coalesce with domestic tragedy in the attempt to make the stage a vehicle of home-spun didactic morality. Farce had now become a genuine English species, and has as such retained its vitality through all the subsequent fortunes of the stage; it was actively cultivated by Garrick as both actor and author, but the very best farce of this age is ascribed to clerical authorship.³ S. Foote (1720-1761), whose comedies⁴ and farces are distinguished both by wit and by variety of characters (though it was an absurd misapplication of a great name to call him the English Aristophanes), introduced into comic acting the abuse of personal mimicry, for the exhibition of which he ingeniously invented a series of entertainments, the parents of a long progeny of imitations. Meanwhile the domestic drama of the sentimental kind had achieved its greatest success in *The Gamester* of E. Moore (d. 1757); and sentimental comedy courted sympathetic applause in the works of A. Murphy (1727-1801), the single comedy of W. Whitehead⁵ (1714-1785), and the earliest of H. Kelly⁶ (1714-1785). It cannot be said that this species was extinguished, as it is sometimes assumed to have been, by O. Goldsmith (1728-1774); but his admirable character-comedy of *The Good-Natured Man*, and his delightfully brisk and fresh *She Stoops to Conquer*, after startling critical propriety from its self-conceit, taught comedy no longer to fear being true to herself. The most successful efforts of the elder G. Colman (1733-1794) had in them something of the spirit of genuine comedy, besides a finish which, however playwrights may shut their eyes to the fact, is one of the qualities which ensure a long life to a play. And in the masterpieces of R. B. Sheridan (c. 1752-1816) some of the happiest features of the comedy of Congreve were revived, together with its too uniform brilliancy of dialogue, but without its indecency of tone. The varnish of the age is indeed upon the style, and the hollowness of its morality in much of the sentiment (even where that

¹ *Pasquin*; *The Historical Register for 1736*.

² *The Golden Rump*.

³ Townley, *High Life Below Stairs* (1759).

⁴ *The Minor*; *Taste*; *The Author*, &c.

⁵ *The School for Lovers*.

⁶ *The Jealous Wife*; *The Clandestine Marriage*.

⁷ *False Delicacy*.

sentiment is meant for the audience) of *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal*; but in tact of construction, in distinctness of characters, and in pungency of social satire, they are to be ranked among the glories of English comedy. Something in Sheridan's style, but quite without his brilliancy, is the most successful play⁸ of the unfortunate General Burgoyne (d. 1792). R. Cumberland (1732-1811), who too consciously endeavoured to excel both in sentimental morality and in comic characterization, in which he was devoid of depth, closes the list of authors of higher pretensions who wrote for the theatre. Like him, Mrs Cowley⁹ ("*Anna Matilda*") (1743-1809), T. Holcroft¹⁰ (1744-1809), and G. Colman the younger¹¹ (1762-1836), all writers of popular comedies, as well as the prolific J. O'Keefe (1746-1833), who contributed to nearly every species of the comic drama, survived into our century. To an earlier date belong the favourite burlesques of O'Keefe's countryman K. O'Hara¹² (d. 1782), good examples of a species the further history of which may be left aside. In the hands of at least one living writer, J. R. Planché, it has proved capable of satisfying a more refined taste than his successors have habitually consulted.

The decline of dramatic composition of the higher class, perceptible in the history of the English theatre about the beginning of the 19th century, is attributed by Scott to the wearing out of the French model that had been so long wrought upon; while, as he points out, the new impulse which was sought in the dramatic literature of Germany was derived from some of its worst, instead of from its noblest, productions—from Kotzebue rather than from Lessing, Schiller, and Goethe. But the change which was coming over English literature was in truth of a wider and deeper nature than it was possible for even one of its chief representatives to perceive. As that literature freed itself from the fetters so long worn by it as indispensable ornaments, and threw aside the veil which had so long obscured both the full glory of its past and the lofty capabilities of its future, it could not resort except tentatively to a form which like the dramatic is bound by a hundred bonds to the life of the age itself. Soon, the poems with which Scott and Byron, and the unrivalled prose fictions with which Scott both satisfied and stimulated the imaginative demands of the public, diverted the attention of the cultivated classes from dramatic literature, which was unable to escape, with the light foot of verse or prose fiction, into "the new, the romantic land." New themes, new ideas, new forms occupied a new generation of writers and readers; nor did the drama readily lend itself as a vessel into which to pour so many fermenting elements. In Byron (1788-1824) the impressions produced upon a mind not less open to impulses from without than subjective in its way of recasting them, called forth a series of dramatic attempts betraying a more or less wilful ignorance of the demands of dramatic compositions; his beautiful *Manfred*, partly suggested by Goethe's *Faust*, and his powerful *Cain*, have but the form of plays; his tragedies on Italian historical subjects show some resemblance in their political rhetoric, to the contemporary works of Alfieri; his *Werner* is a hastily-dramatized sensation novel. To Coleridge (1772-1834), who gave to English literature a fine though inaccurate translation of Schiller's *Wallenstein*, the same poet's *Robbers* (to which Wordsworth's only dramatic attempt, the *Borderers*, is likewise indebted) had probably suggested the subject of his tragedy of *Osorio*, afterwards acted under the title of *Remorse*. Far

⁸ *The Heiress*.

⁹ *The Belle's Stratagem*; *A Bold Stroke for a Husband*, &c.

¹⁰ *The Road to Ruin*, &c.

¹¹ *John Bull*; *The Heir at Law*, &c.

¹² *Midas*; *The Golden Pippin*.

superior to this is his later drama of *Zapolya*, a genuine homage to Shakespeare, out of the themes of two of whose plays it is gracefully woven. Scott, who in his earlier days had translated Goethe's *Göts von Berlichingen*, gained no reputation by his own dramatic compositions. W. S. Landor (1775-1864), apart from those *Imaginary Conversations* upon which he best loved to expend powers of observation and characterization such as have been given to few dramatists, cast in a formally dramatic mould studies of character of which the value is far from being confined to their wealth in beauties of detail. Of these the magnificent, but in construction altogether undramatic, *Count Julian* is the most noteworthy. Shelley's (1792-1822) *The Cenci*, on the other hand, is not only a poem of great beauty, but a drama of true power, abnormally revolting in its theme, but singularly pure and delicate in treatment. A humbler niche in the temple of our dramatic literature belongs to some of the plays of C. R. Maturin¹ (1782-1824), Sir T. N. Talfourd² (1795-1854), and Dean Milman³ (1791-1868). Divorced, except for moments, from the stage, English dramatic literature in its higher forms can in the present century no longer be regarded as a connected national growth, though it would be rash to deny that with the isolated efforts of individual poets future developments may connect themselves. Among living poets Sir H. Taylor has perhaps approached nearest to the objective spirit and the fullness of style of the Elizabethan drama; R. H. Home survives as a worthy representative of the modern Romantic school; Matthew Arnold has the dignity of form of his classic models, Longfellow the graceful facility of a mellow literary culture; while R. Browning's insight into the secrets of human character, and A. C. Swinburne's gift of passionate poetic speech, are true dramatic qualities. By his *Hannibal* J. Nichol has likewise made a noteworthy contribution to the higher literature of our drama. The latest English dramatic poet is Tennyson, whose homage to the national form of the historic drama may be hopefully interpreted as a promise of the future possibly awaiting it. Far greater is the number of those English writers of the present century who, while seeking to preserve a connection between the demands of the stage and their dramatic productions, have addressed themselves to the theatrical rather than the literary public—since such a distinction must needs be drawn. The respect paid by her contemporaries to the modestly simple and judiciously concentrated efforts of Mrs Joanna Baillie (1762-1851) entitles her to remembrance in the annals of literature as well as those of the stage; but it would be going too far to make a similar exception in favour of the plays of Sheridan Knowles (1784-1862) or of the late Lord Lytton (1806-1873). At the present day the theatre commands the services of many authors of talent, a few of whose most successful productions may peradventure be destined to survive the age which gave birth to them. But here, if anywhere, the task of election must be left to time.

The history of the English stage in the present century has been one of gradual decline and decay, not (especially at the present day) without prospects of recovery, of which a praiseworthy hopefulness is ever willing to make the most. At the beginning of the century the greatest tragic actress of the English theatre, Mrs Siddons, had passed her prime; and before its second decade had closed, not only she (1812), but her brother John Kemble (1817), the representative of a grand style of acting upon which the present generation would hardly dare to look, had withdrawn from the boards. Mrs Siddons was soon followed

¹ *Bertram*.

² *Ion*.

³ *Fazio*.

into retirement by her successor Miss O'Neill (1819); while Kemble's brilliant later rival, Edmund Kean, an actor the intuitions of whose genius seem to have supplied, so far as intuition ever can supply, the absence of a steady self-culture, remained on the stage till his death in 1833. Young, Macready, and others handed down some of the traditions of the older school of acting to the very few who remain to suggest its semblance to the living generation. But even these—among whom a tribute of gratitude is specially due to Helen Faucit and S. Phelps—are now lost (or all but lost) as active members to the theatre, and they have left no school behind them. The comic stage has been fortunate in an ampler aftergrowth, from generation to generation, of the successors of the old actors who live for us in the reminiscences of Charles Lamb; nor are the links all snapped which bind the humours of the present to those of the past. It is least of all in any spirit of depreciation that the efforts of the actors of our day, in any branch of the art, should be discussed. But it is right to point out that these efforts are carried on under conditions of a partly novel character, to which the actors are forced to submit. No art stands in greater need of the help of training,—an advantage with which the modern English actor is virtually obliged to dispense. No art stands in greater need of the relief of change in the subjects of its exercise,—but the modern English actor is made to look forward, as to the height of success, to playing the same character for three hundred nights. No art stands in greater need of the guidance of criticism,—but the modern English actor is too often left to criticise himself. Finally, none stands in greater need of the protection of self-respect,—but there are few theatres in England which are not from time to time degraded in deference to tastes which in earlier days not Puritan censors only would have called by a simpler name.

The reaction against the theatre, which set in with the spread of the religious movement at the close of the last century, had the natural effect of lowering instead of raising its tone and manners, as well as those of the literature designed to supply its immediate demands. With the growth of that enlightenment which is inseparable from tolerance, this reaction seems to be giving place to a counter-reaction; while on the other hand, a larger section of the educated classes have begun to take an interest in the progress of the national drama, and the world of fashion is condescending to follow the impulse. Dramatic criticism, too—a branch of English literature to which from the days of Steele to those of Hazlitt so many writers of mark were ready to devote their efforts, but which had more recently often fallen into hands either unequal to the task or disdainful of it—seems here and there awakening to a sense of its higher duties. But all this will not permanently recover the stage for its higher tasks, or reunite to it a living dramatic literature, unless an object of serious moment for the future of the nation is pursued in a serious spirit, and unless it is thought worth while to devise means suited to this end. In a word, so long as there is no national theatre which, removed above the conditions of a commercial speculation, can cultivate the art to which it is dedicated for the sake of that art itself, the future of the English drama will be at the mercy of the likings of London, and of the adoption of those likings by the London which is not London, and by the "provinces," as in theatrical matters they are only too appropriately called. The time may come when it will be recognized that the progress and culture of a people depend upon its diversions as well as upon its occupations; and that the interests of a national art are not unworthy the solicitude of thoughtful statesmen.