

Patrons, who have done honour to themselves, by becoming the Friends and Protectors of Men of Genius.

It is well known to the Learned, at what expence the Athenians supported their Theatres, and how often, from among their Poets, they chose Governors of their Provinces, Generals of their Armies, and Guardians of their Liberties.—Who were more jealous of their liberties than the Athenians? Who better knew that Corruption and Debauchery are the greatest foes to Liberty?—Who better knew, than they, that the freedom of the Theatre (next to that of the Senate) was the best Support of Liberty, against all the undermining arts of those who wickedly might seek to sap its foundation?

If it be asked, How came the Athenians to lay out an hundred thousand pounds upon the decoration of one single Tragedy of Sophocles? May we not answer, It was not merely for the sake of exhibiting a pompous spectacle for idleness to gaze at, but because it was the most rational, most instructive, and most delightful composition, that human wit had yet arrived at; and consequently, the most worthy to be the entertainment of a wise and warlike nation?—And it may still be a question,—Whether this public spirit inspired Sophocles; or, whether Sophocles inspired this public spirit?

The divine Socrates assisted Euripides in his compositions. The wise Solon frequented Plays, even in his decline of life; and Plutarch informs us, he thought plays useful to polish the manners, and instil the principles of virtue.

As Arts and Sciences increased in Rome, when Learning, Eloquence and Poetry flourished, Lælius improved his social hours with Terence; and Scipio thought it not beneath him to make one in so agreeable a party. Cæsar, who was an excellent Poet as well as Orator, thought the former title an addition to his honour; and ever mentioned Terence and Menander with great respect. Augustus found it easier to make himself Sovereign of the world, than to write a good Tragedy: he began a Play called Ajax, but could not finish it. Brutus, the virtuous, the moral Brutus, thought his time not misemployed