

liques of servility, and only are retained in our London theatres as vehicles of humiliation at the introduction of a new play, and traps for false wit, extravagant conceits and female shyness at the conclusion of it: Where authors are petitioners, and players servants to the public these condescensions must be made, but where poets are not suitors, and performers are benefactors, why should the free Muse wear shackles? for such they are; though the fingers of the brave are employed to put them on the limbs of the fair.

As I am satisfied nothing ought to be admitted from beginning to end, which can provoke comparisons, I revolt with indignation from the idea of a lady of fashion being trammelled in the trickery of the stage, and taught her airs and graces, till she is made the mere *fac-simile* of a mamest, where the most she can aspire to is to be the copy of a copyist: Let none such be consulted in dressing or drilling an honorary novice in the forms and fashions of the public stage; it is a course of discipline, which neither person will profit by; a kind of barter, in which both parties will give and receive false airs and false conceits; the fine lady will be disqualified by copying the actress, and the actress will become ridiculous by apeing the fine lady.

As for the choice of the drama; which is so nice and difficult a part of the business, I scarce believe there is one play upon the list, which in all its parts and passages is thoroughly adapted to such a cast as I am speaking of: Where it has been in public use I am sure it is not, for there comparisons are unavoidable. Plays professedly wrote for the stage must deal in strong character, and striking contrast: How can a lady stand forward in a part, contrived to produce ridicule or disgust, or which is founded upon broad humour and vulgar buffoonery?—

*Nempe ipsa videtur,
Non persona Læti.*

'Tis she herself, and not her mask which speaks.

I doubt if it be altogether seemly for a gentleman to undertake, unless he can reconcile himself to cry out with Laberius—

*Equi Romanus lare egressus meo
Dum reuertam minus.*

'Esquire I sign'd myself at noon,
'At night I counter-sign'd Buffoon.'

The drama therefore must be purposely

written for the occasion; and the writer must not only have local knowledge of every arrangement preparatory for the exhibition, but personal knowledge also of the performers, who are to exhibit it. The play itself, in my conception of it, should be part only of the projected entertainment, woven into the device of a grand and splendid *fête*, given in some noble country house or palace: Neither should the spectators be totally excused from their subscription to the general *gala*, nor left to doze upon their benches thro' the progress of five tedious acts, but called upon at intervals by music, dance or refreshment, elegantly contrived, to change the sameness of the scene and relieve the efforts of the more active corps employed upon the drama.

And now let me say one word to qualify the irony I set out with and acquit myself as a moralist.

There are many and great authorities against this species of entertainment, and certainly the danger is great, where theatrical propensities are indulged in young and inexperienced minds. Tertullian says, (but he is speaking of a very licentious theatre) *Theatrum sacrum est Veneris*—'A playhouse is the very sacrifice of Venus.' And Juvenal, who wrote in times of the grossest impurity, maintains that no prudent man will take any young lady to wife, who has ever been even within the walls of a theatre—

*— Cunctis an habent spectacula totis,
Quod securus ames, quodque inde excerpere possis?*

'Look round, and say if any man of sense
'Will dare to single out a wife from
hence?'

Young women of humble rank and small pretensions should be particularly cautious how a vain ambition of being noticed by their superiors betrays them into an attempt at displaying their unprotected persons on a stage, however dignified and respectable. If they have talents, and of course applause, are their understandings and manners proof against applause? If they mistake their talents, and merit no applause, are they sure they will get no contempt for their self-conceit? If they have both acting talents and attractive charms, I tremble for their danger; let the foolish parent, whose itching ears tingled with the plaudits, that resounded through the theatre, where virgin modesty deposited its blushes, beware how his aching heart shall throb with sorrow, when the daughter, *que pudica ad theatrum accesserat*