

# INTRODUCTION.

## A brief View of the Rise and Progress of the ENGLISH STAGE.

**I**T is well observed by the Author of a late \* Dissertation on the Theatres, that dramatic compositions have ever been esteemed amongst the greatest productions of human genius; and the exhibition of them on the public Stage, has by some of the wisest and best men in all ages, been countenanced, as highly serviceable to the cause of Virtue.

Nothing is more certain than that example is the strongest and most effectual manner of enforcing the precepts of wisdom; and that a just Theatrical representation is the best picture of Human Nature: with this peculiar advantage, that in this humanizing and instructing Academy, the young Spectator may learn the manners of the world, without running through the perils of it.

The same Writer observes, that as pleasure is the pursuit of the greatest part of mankind (and most justly so, while this pursuit is continued under the guidance of REASON), all well-regulated States have judged it proper, both in a political and moral sense, to have some public exhibitions, for the entertainment of the people. And, indeed, what entertainment, what pleasure so rational, as that which is afforded by a well-written and well-acted Play; whence the mind receives at once its fill of improvement and delight?—Thus thought the wise and lettered Sages of ancient Greece; the Romans adopted the same sentiments, and every polished Nation in Europe hath received and cultivated the Dramatic Art. In this respect our British Islands have been most eminent; having produced admirable Actors, and excellent Authors, both in the Comic and Tragic style; and sometimes also noble

\* Cibber's Dissertation on the Theatres.