

but, what was of more importance, a nobleman, recommended her to Garrick, and induced him to request Sir Henry Bate Dudley, then only the Rev. Mr. Bate, to attend her performances, and report upon her merits.

Bate executed his mission with discernment. He saw Mrs. Siddons in various characters, but was most struck with her in Rosiland, a part which, at her age, and in her then uncertain fortunes, she sustained with that mingled tenderness and spirit which makes it one of the finest and most difficult, though seemingly one of the easiest of all Shakspeare's characters. It so convinced him of her merits, that he persuaded her to proceed to London, and urged Garrick to grant her an opportunity of appearing before the public, confident that her talents would secure her an engagement. On Friday, the 29th of December 1775, she accordingly made her first appearance at Drury Lane, and, with that correctness of taste for which she was ever distinguished, she chose the temperate part of Portia in the *Merchant of Venice*. It was not then the custom to bespeak the approbation of the public by any of those numerous artifices with which the world has since become familiar, but nevertheless, Mrs. Siddons was received with so much distinction that, on the Tuesday following, she again repeated the part.

I am not one of those who believe that Garrick was actuated by jealousy in keeping back Mrs. Siddons; for whatever may have been his own merit as a performer, he certainly was not very perspicacious in discerning that of others; he had, moreover, too much regard for his pecuniary interest to have withheld Mrs. Siddons from the public, had he discovered the extent of her powers. The nature of the loose agreement with Mr. Bate, to afford her an opportunity of being seen by a London audience, may have also tended to prevent her from getting into any of those parts which best suited her talents; and certain it is, that with all genius there are cases in which it will scarcely rise to mediocrity, and yet possess at the time a latent energy capable of the most astonishing effects. Mrs. Siddons performed often, but she was only admired as a beautiful woman; she appeared in no character which afforded her an opportunity of showing what she could do. Those who have accused Garrick of having repressed her powers, forget that the audience saw as imperfectly as he did the energy which she was capable of exerting. The fact seems to have been, that Garrick was disposed to consider comedy as the forte of the Tragic Muse, and it must therefore be regarded as an instance of favour that he revived *The Suspicious Husband* on purpose for her. Mrs. Strickland, and played Ranger himself to her, old as he then was, and the part requiring youthful buoyancy and ease. It should also be recollected that the impression which Garrick had received of Mrs. Siddons' capacity was derived from the opinion of the Rev. Mr. Bate, and he had preferred her performance of Rosiland to all the other parts in which she had appeared before him.

I cannot, indeed, in any degree accede to the correctness of the theatrical tradition, that Garrick did not justice to the powers of Mrs. Siddons, for he revived, after several years' suspense, *Richard the Third*, and gave her the part of Lady Anne to his own character of