

the immense distance between 1700 and 1800, measured poetically, will do well to contrast a passage of the *Essay on Criticism* with such a lyric as Robert Burns's 'O, my love's like a red, red rose,' or the 'Tiger, Tiger burning bright' of William Blake.

Turning to the Drama of the time, it must be confessed that the field is not a rich one, either for crop or diversity of product. When Anne came to the throne, the Comic Dramatists of the Restoration, as Macaulay styles them, were reduced to two. Wycherley had ceased to write for the stage; Congreve's last play, *The Way of the World*, had been played; and Vanbrugh and Farquhar were the only members of the group who were still in practice as playwrights. For many years to come their successors were only minor artists. Steele, in two or three average comedies, endeavoured honestly to purify the theatre in the sense of the precepts of Jeremy Collier, while Lillo, in *George Barnwell* and the *Fatal Curiosity*, seemed to promise a something which was not afterwards performed. Fielding maintained the Congreve tradition in its indecency only; and Cibber, Garrick, Macklin, Murphy, the elder Colman, Hoadly, Foote, and a number of lesser writers, purveyed the acted but now unreadable comedies and farces of the day. The chief novelties in stage composition which the Eighteenth Century contributed to dramatic art were the already-mentioned Ballad-opera of Gay and his imitators; and the semi-serious genre, which, based upon the *comédie larmoyante* of Voltaire and Diderot in France, became, for a brief season, the Sentimental Comedy of England. This latter, which has been not inaptly described as a 'mushy production, with all the defects of its opposite parents, and marked with sterility,' professed to deal with the virtues and distresses of private life rather than with the vices and faults which had hitherto been regarded as the legitimate quarry of the Comic Muse. Cumberland's *West Indian* and Kelly's *False Delicacy* are the most successful examples in this short-lived kind. Then, as a protest against the Comedy of Tears, and in avowed imitation of 'the poets of the last age,' Goldsmith endeavoured to lead the public taste once more back to Nature and Humour. He followed up his *Good Nature'd Man* by his inimitable *She Stoops to Conquer*, to whose perennial qualities in its comic, dialogue, plot, and character its stage popularity even to this hour abundantly testifies. His only competitor

is Sheridan, whose three best plays, *The Rivals*, *The School for Scandal*, and *The Critic*, by their unflagging wit and brilliancy, reach a point of excellence which has never since been attained.

For nearly forty years after the *Guardian* of 1713, at which date we interrupted our account of the *Essay*, no successor of any importance assumed the mantle of Addison and Steele. Imitators there were in plenty; but, with the exception of the *Champion* of Fielding, more memorable by its author than its matter, none deserves a record until we reach the *Rambler* and *Idler* of Johnson. But even the *Rambler* and *Idler*, vigorous and weighty as is their writer's style, follow the Queen Anne model 'as a pack horse would do a hunter'—to use Lady Mary's illustration; and the same must be said of the *Adventurer* of Johnson's disciple, Hawkesworth. In the *World* and the *Connoisseur*, where the touch was lighter, and the pens those of wits like Walpole and Chesterfield, the *Essay* regained a certain buoyancy and *verve*. But the high-water mark of the mid-century examples in this species of writing is reached by Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*, which, in its first form, appeared in the columns of Newbery's *Public Ledger*. After this, there is nothing which deserves serious record. The mention of the *Public Ledger*, however, serves to remind us once more of the extraordinary increase which, in spite of prohibitive stamp-duties and other obstacles, had taken place in the periodical press since the first establishment of the *Daily Courant* in 1702. In 1756 began the *London Chronicle*, that—

folio of four pages, happy work,
Which not e'en critics criticise -

and for which Johnson wrote the 'Introduction' (at about twopence a line): in 1760 the *Public Ledger*. In 1772 followed the *Morning Post*; in 1788, the *Times*; and these were a few only of the daily papers. Another fruitful feature of Journalism was the Monthly Magazine, which, from the issue by Edward Cave in January 1731 of the first number of the *Gentleman's Magazine; or, Monthly Intelligencer*, grew and flourished vigorously to the end of the century. Mr Urban's purpose, according to the preface to his first volume, was 'to give Monthly a View of all the Pieces of Wit, Humour, or Intelligence, daily offer'd to the Publick in the News-Papers' (of which he estimates that 'no less than 200 Half-sheets