

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Molière
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Kipling Doyle
Baum Leslie Henry Flaubert Nietzsche Willis
Dumas Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Whitman Twain
Darwin Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato
Potter Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Harte
London Descartes Cervantes Voltaire Hesse
Poe Aristotle Wells Bunner Shakespeare Cooke
Hale James Hastings Richter Chambers Irving
Doré Swift Dante Chekhov da Shaw Wodehouse
Benedict Alcott
Pushkin
Newton



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**The Mirror of Taste, and Dramatic
Censor Vol I, No. 2, February 1810**

Samuel James Arnold

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THE MIRROR OF TASTE,
AND
DRAMATIC CENSOR.

Vol. I.

FEBRUARY 1810.

No. 2.

HISTORY OF THE STAGE.

CHAPTER II.

RISE AND PROGRESS OF THE DRAMA IN GREECE — ORIGIN OF TRAGEDY — THESPIS — ÆSCHYLUS, “THE FATHER OF THE TRAGIC ART” — HIS ASTONISHING TALENTS — HIS DEATH.

It has been already remarked that at a very early period, considerably more than three thousand years ago, the Chinese and other nations in the east understood the rudiments of the dramatic art. In their crude, anomalous representations they introduced conjurers, slight of hand men and rope dancers, with dogs, birds, monkies, snakes and even mice which were trained to dance, and in their dancing to perform evolutions descriptive of mathematical and astronomical figures. To this day the vestiges of those heterogeneous amusements are discernible all over Indostan: but that which will be regarded by many with surprise, is that in all countries pagan or christian the drama in its origin, with the dancings and spectacles attending it have been intermixed with divine worship. The Bramins danced before their god Vishnou, and still hold it as an article of faith that Vishnou had himself, “in the olden time” danced on the head of a huge serpent whose 110 tail encompassed the world. That very dance which we call a minuet, has been proved by an ingenious Frenchman, to be the same dance originally performed by the priests in the temple of Apollo, and constructed by them, to be symbolical of the zodiac; every figure described by the heavenly bodies having a correspondent movement in the minuet: the diagonal line and the two parallels representing the zodiac generally, the twelve steps of which it is composed, representing the twelve signs, and the twelve months of the year, and the bow at the beginning and the end of it a profound obedience to the sun. About the year four hundred after the building of the city of Rome, the Romans, then smarting under great public calamity, in order to appease the anger of heaven, instituted theatrical performances, as feasts in honour of their gods. The first Spanish plays were founded, sometimes on the loves of shepherds, but much more frequently on points of theology, such as the birth of Christ, the passion, the temptation in the desert and the martyrdom of saints. The most celebrat-

ed dramatic poet of Portugal, Balthazar, wrote dramas which he called AUTOS chiefly on pious subjects—and the prelate Trissino, the pope's nuncio, wrote the first regular tragedy, while cardinal Bibiena is said to be the author of the first comedy known in Italy, after the barbarous ages. The French stage began with the representation of MYSTRIES, by the priests, who acted sacred history on a stage, and personated divine characters. The first they performed was the history of the death of our Saviour, from which circumstance the company who acted, gave themselves the name of THE CONFRATERNITY OF THE PASSION: and in England one single paper which remains on record, proves that the clergy were the first dramatists. This paper is a petition of the clerks or clergy of St. Paul's to king Richard the Second, and dated in 1378 which prayed his majesty to prohibit a company of *unexpert* people from representing the history of the Old Testament, to the great prejudice of the said clergy, who had been at great charge and expense to represent the same at christmas.

111 It would be little to the purpose, to dwell longer on that part of the history of the drama, which lies back in the darkness of remote antiquity. Having shown that it did exist, in some shape or other, of which but very imperfect traces remain, and of course very inadequate notions can be collected, all further inquiry backward would be but the loss of so much time and trouble. The scope of human knowledge is extended at too heavy a price when the industry which might be more usefully applied, is exercised in hunting down origins into the obscurity of times so extremely distant. Where the greatest pains have been lavished on that sort of research, little knowledge has been gained; and the most diligent inquirers have been compelled either to confess that they were baffled, or rather than own their disappointment, to substitute fable for fact, and pass the fictions of imagination for historical truths.

It is in the records of Greece the dramatic art first presents itself in the consistent shape and with the circumstantial detail of authentic history. There, plays were first moulded into regular form, and divided into acts. Yet the people of that country knew so little of its having previously existed in any shape, in any other country, that the different states contested with each other, the honour of having invented it; each asserting its claim with a warmth that demonstrates the high sense they entertained of its importance: and surely

what such a people highly valued is entitled to the respect of all other nations. Of the drama, therefore, it might perhaps be enough to say that it was nursed in the same cradle with Eloquence, Philosophy, and Freedom, and that it was so favourite a child of their common parents, that they contended, each for an exclusive right to it. The credit of having first given simplicity, rational form, and consequent interest to theatrical representations has, by the universal concurrence of the learned, been awarded to Attica, whose genius and munificence erected to the drama that vast monument the temple of Bacchus, the ruins of which are yet discernible and admired by all travellers of taste and erudition.

112 The origin of tragedy is a subject of curious contemplation. A rich planter of Attica, finding, one day, a goat devouring his grapes, killed it, and invited the peasantry to come and feast upon it. He gave them abundance of wine to drink, intoxicated with which they daubed their faces with the lees, ornamented their heads with chaplets made of the vine branches, and then danced, singing songs in chorus to Bacchus all the while round the animal destined for their banquet. A feast so very agreeable was not likely to go unrepeatd; and it was soon reduced to a custom which was pretty generally observed in Attica, during the vintage. On those occasions the peasants, absolved from all reserve by intoxication, gave a loose to their animosities against the opulent, and in token of defiance of their supposed oppressors, went in bodies to their houses, and in set terms of abuse and sarcasm, called aloud for redress of their grievances. The novelty of the exhibition drew a multitude round them who enjoyed it as a new species of entertainment. Far from preventing it, the magistrates authorized the proceeding in order that it might serve as an admonition to the rich; taking special care, however, that no positive violence should be resorted to, and thus making it a wholesome preventive of public disorder. To this yearly festival which was called "the feast of the goat" the people of all parts were invited; and as this extraordinary spectacle was performed in a field near the temple of Bacchus, it was gradually introduced into the worship of that god. Hymns to the deity were sung both by priests and people in chorus while the goat was sacrificing, and to these hymns the name was given of *Tragodia* (tragedy) or "the song of the goat."

During these exhibitions the vintagers, intoxicated with wine and joy, revenged themselves not only on the rich by publishing and satirizing their injustice, but on each other with ridicule and sarcasm. In their other religious festivals also, choruses of fauns and bacchants chaunted songs and held up individuals to public ridicule. From such an humble germe has sprung up an art which in all parts of the world has, for centuries, administered to the advancement of poetry and elegant literature, and to the delight and improvement of mankind.

To these performances succeeded pieces composed by men of poetical talents, in some of which the adventures of the gods were celebrated and in others the vices and absurdities of individuals were attacked with much asperity. The works of all those poets probably died with them; nor is there any reason to believe that the loss of them is to be regretted—they are mentioned here only because they form a link in the chain of this history. By them, such as they were, however, the influence of the drama was established so far that it was soon found necessary to regulate it by law; the players who entered into competition at the Pythian games being enjoined to represent successively the circumstances that had preceded, accompanied and followed the victory of Apollo over Python. Some years after this, came Susarion of Megara, the first inventor of comedy who appeared at the head of a company of actors attacking the vices of his time. This was 562 years before Christ, and in twenty-six years after, that is 536 before Christ, appeared Thespis.

THESPIS has the credit of being the first inventor of regular tragedy. Disgusted with the nonsensical trash exhibited on the subject of Bacchus, and indignant, or pretending to be so, at the insult offered by such representations to that deity, he wrote pieces of a new kind, in which he introduced recitation, leaving Bacchus entirely out, lashing the vices and follies of the times, and making use, for the first time, of fiction. Though his representations were very rustic and imperfect they still make the first great era in the history of the tragic art: and they must be allowed to have made no slight impression upon the public mind, when it is remembered that they called forth the opposition of SOLON, the great lawgiver of Athens; who, on seeing the representations of Thespis, sternly observed, that if falsehood and fiction were tolerated on the stage they would soon

find their way into every part of the republic. To this Thespis answered, that the fiction 114 could not be harmful which every one knew to be fiction; that being avowed and understood, it lost its vicious character, and that if Solon's argument were true, the works of Homer deserved to be burned. Solon, however, exercised his authority upon the occasion, and interdicted Thespis not only from writing but from teaching the art of composing tragedies at Athens. Whether Thespis was supported by the people in contradiction to Solon, or whether he contrived to follow his business in some other part of Attica, out of the jurisdiction of that great man, is not known; but he certainly disregarded the interdict, and not only wrote tragedies, but instructed others in their composition. For Phrynichus, the tragic poet of Athens, (the first who introduced a female character on the stage) was his disciple.

In less than half a century after Thespis had, by his ingenuity, so improved the dramatic art as to form an era in its history, arose the illustrious personage, whose further improvements and astonishing poetical talents justly obtained for him the high distinction of "The Father of Tragedy." Æschylus, in common with all the natives of Attica, was bred to arms. The same genius which, applied to poetry, placed him at the head of tragic writers, raised him in the field to a high rank among the greatest captains of antiquity. At the celebrated battles of Marathon, Salamis and Plataea he distinguished himself in a manner that would have rendered his name forever illustrious as a warrior, if the splendor of his martial fame were not lost in the blaze of his poetical glories. Descended from some of the highest Athenian blood, he was early placed under Pythagoras to learn philosophy, and at the age of twenty-one was a candidate for the prize in poetry. Thus illustrious as a philosopher, a warrior and a poet, it is no wonder that he was held in the highest respect and consideration by his countrymen. He wrote sixty-six, or, as some say, ninety tragedies, forty of which were rewarded with the public prize. Of all these, seven only have escaped the ravages of time, and descended to us perfect.

115 Thespis, who had gone before him, still left the Grecian stage in a state of great rudeness and imperfection, and, what was worse, in a condition of low buffoonery. Before Thespis tragedy consisted of no more than one person, who sung songs in honour of Bacchus.

Thespis introduced a second performer; such was the state of the Grecian stage when Æschylus arose, and made an illustrious epoch in the history of the drama. Before him the chorus was the principal part of the performance; but he reduced it to the state of an assistant, which was introduced between the acts to heighten the effect by recitation or singing, and by explaining the subject in its progression. He introduced another actor, which made his dramatis personæ three. He divided his pieces into acts, and laid the foundation of those principles of dramatic poesy upon which Aristotle afterwards built his rules. Thespis and his successors before Æschylus, acted from a cart in the streets: neither his actors nor himself were distinguished by any more than their ordinary dress. Æschylus built a theatre, embellished it with appropriate scenery, machinery, and decorations, and clothed his actors with dresses suitable to their several characters. This would have been effecting much if he had done nothing more; but to the theatre which he erected, he added plays worthy of being represented with the splendor of such preparations. Abandoning the monstrous extravagancies and uncouth buffoonery of his predecessors, he took Homer for his guide, and composed pieces which for boldness and terrible sublimity have never been surpassed. His fiery imagination, when once on the wing, soared beyond the reach of earth, and seemed to spurn probability, and to delight in gigantic images and tremendous prodigies. No poet ever had such talents for inspiring terror. When his tragedy of EUMENIDES was represented, many children died through fear, and several pregnant women actually miscarried in the house, and it is related of him that nothing could surpass the terrible ferocity of his countenance while, under the inspiration of his sublime Muse, he composed his tragedies.

116 The mind of this very extraordinary man was comprehensive, energetic, vigorous, and fiery: of him may with equal truth be said what doctor Johnson has said of our Shakspeare:

Existence saw him spurn her wide domain.

For his imagination, daring, wild, and disorderly, resorted to the agency of preternatural beings, and in one of his plays called up the dead, with a degree of skill which Shakspeare only has surpassed,

and none but Shakspeare could at all equal. He selected his subjects from the highest regions of sublimity, and his morals, always excellent, are enforced by the most dreadful examples of divine vengeance. To sum up his character in a few words—Longinus, the prince of Critias, says of him that he had a noble boldness of expression, with an imagination lofty and heroic, and his claim to the sublime has never been contested. At the same time it must be owned that his style is, at least to modern readers, obscure, and that his works are considered the most difficult of all the Greek classics. The improvements he made in the drama seemed to his cotemporaries to bespeak an intelligence more than human; wherefore, to account for his wonderous works, they had recourse to fable, and related that the god Bacchus revealed himself to him personally, as he lay asleep under the shade of a vine, commanded him to write tragedy, and inspired him with the means. This story is very gravely told by the historian Pausanias.

There is little doubt that Æschylus felt a gratification in putting down the monstrous rhapsodies to Bacchus and the other deities, with which the idolatrous priests of that day blindfolded and deceived the people; his plays having frequent cuts upon the gross superstition which then darkened the heathen world. For some expressions which were deemed impious he was condemned to die. Indeed christian scholars particularly mark a passage in one of his tragedies in which he palpably predicts, the downfall of Jupiter's authority, as if he had foreseen the dispersion of heathenism. The multitude 117 were accordingly going to stone him to death when they were won over to mercy by the remonstrances and intreaties of his brother Amynias who had commanded a squadron of ships at the glorious battle of Salamis, and was regarded as one of the principal saviours of his country. This brave man reminded the people what they owed to his brother Æschylus for his valour at Marathon and at Plataæ, and then of what they owed himself for his conduct at Salamis, in which bloody but glorious battle he had been chiefly supported by that brother whom they were now ungratefully going to put to death:—having said this, he threw aside his cloak and exposing his arm from which the hand had been cut off, "Behold," he cried—"behold this, and let it speak for my brother and myself!" The multitude relented, and were all at once clamorous in their

applause and benediction of the two brothers. The highminded Æschylus however was so incensed at the ingratitude of the mob and the slight they put upon him, that he retired into Sicily where he lost his life by a most singular accident. Having wandered into the fields, an eagle which had mounted into the air with a tortoise, for the purpose of dropping it upon a rock in order to break the shell, mistaking the bald head of Æschylus for a stone, let the animal fall upon it, and killed him on the spot. The Athenians gave him the honour of a pompous public funeral with orations, and all that could denote their respect for the hero, the philosopher, the poet, and the father of the tragic art—and succeeding tragedians made it a ceremony to perform plays at his tomb.

To complete the glories of this wonderful man, the ruins of the theatre he planned and erected, furnished the Romans with the model, upon which they afterwards raised those magnificent edifices which still are the objects of admiration and delight with the world, and of imitation with the scientific professors of architecture.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF MRS. WARREN.

MRS. ANN WARREN, whose name has, for some years, stood so high in theatrical annals, was the daughter of Mr. John Brunton, who as an actor and a manager, maintained a respectable rank in Great Britain, while he remained upon the stage; and all his life has been considered a man of great worth, and an estimable gentleman. Having received a good classical education under the tuition of the reverend Mr. Wilton, prebendary of Bristol, Mr. Brunton was bound apprentice to a wholesale grocer in Norwich, and when his time was out, married a Miss Friend, the daughter of a respectable merchant of that city, soon after which he went to London, and entered into business, as a tea-dealer and grocer in Drury-Lane. Here he became acquainted with Mr. Joseph Younger, who was at the time prompter at Covent Garden theatre, and though no actor himself, knew stage business as well as any man in England. Mr. Younger, discerning in Mr. Brunton good talents for an actor, advised him to try the experiment, and gave him such strong assurances of success, that he agreed to make the attempt and actually made his first appearance in the character of Cyrus for his friendly adviser's benefit, sometime in the year 1774. His reception in this character was so very encouraging that he again came forward before the end of the season, and played the character of Hamlet for the benefit of Mr. Kniveton. So completely did the event justify Mr. Younger's opinion, and evince his discernment that Mr. Brunton soon found it his interest to abandon commerce, and take entirely to the stage. At this time his eldest daughter, the subject of the present memoir, was little more than five years of age. Having settled his affairs in London, and sold off his stock in trade, Mr. Brunton returned to the city of Norwich in which he got an engagement, and met all the encouragement, he could hope for, being considered the best actor that had ever appeared on that stage. From this he was invited to Bath and Bristol, where he continued to perform for five years, and at the end of that time returned to the Norwich theatre of which he became manager. Mr. B.'s family had now become very numerous; he had six children,—a charge which in England would be thought to lean too heavy upon a very large estate—and yet with nothing more than the income which he derived from his professional industry,

did this exemplary father tenderly rear and genteelly educate that family.

From the circumstances of her father's situation, and from her early accomplishments and success as an actress, it will be imagined by many, that Miss Brunton was early initiated in stage business; that she had seen every play acted, and had studied and imitated the many great models of her time, the Barrys, the Bellamys, the Yeates, and the Siddonses; that under a father so well qualified to instruct her, her talents were brought forth in the very bud, by constant exercise, and that while yet a child she had learned to personate the heroine. What then will the reader's surprise be, when he is informed that she had seen very few plays; perhaps fewer than the general run of citizens' daughters—and that the stage was never even for an instant contemplated as a profession for her till a very short time before her actual appearance in public. The fact is, that Mr. Brunton's conduct through life was distinguished no less by prudence and discretion, than by a lofty regard to the honourable estimation of his family. While he himself drudged upon the stage and faced the public eye, his family, more dear to him, lived in the repose of retired life, and instead of fluttering round the scenes of gayety and dissipation, or haunting the theatre before or behind the curtain, Mrs. Brunton trained her children to domestic habits, and contented herself with qualifying her daughters to be like herself, good wives and mothers. Not in the city but in the country near Bath did Mr. Brunton live in an elegant cottage, where his little world inhaled the pure air of heaven, and grew up in innocence—Mrs. Brunton herself being their preceptress. Nothing was farther from his thoughts than that any of his daughters possessed requisites for the stage; they were all very young, even the eldest, our heroine, had but turned past 120 fifteen, and, exclusive of her youth, had a lowness of stature and an exility of person, than which nothing could be farther from suggesting ideas of the heroine, or of tragic importance, when one day, by desire of her mother, she recited some select passages in her father's presence. He listened with mixed emotions of astonishment and delight—a new train of thought shot across his mind; he put her over and over again to the trial, and at every repetition had additional motives to admire and to rejoice. Then, for the first time, was he aware of the mine which

lay concealed in his family under modesty and reserve, and then, for the first time, he resolved that she should try her fate upon the stage, his fond heart prognosticating that *his* darling would, ere long, be the darling of the people. That she should possess such an affluence of endowment, without letting it earlier burst upon her father's sight, is evidence of a share of modesty and diffidence as rare as lovely, and well worthy imitation, if under the present *regime* the imitation of such virtues were practicable.

As this circumstance exhibits our heroine's private character in a most exalted and amiable view, so it demonstrates the native powers of her genius. Let it only be considered!—while she yet fell, by two months, short of sixteen years of age, or in other words while she had yet scarcely advanced a step from the date of childhood, without any previous stage practice, without the advantage of studying, in the performances of other actresses, what to do, or what to avoid, she comes forward, for the first time, in one of the most arduous characters in tragedy, and at one flight mounts to the first rank in her profession. It is a circumstance unexampled in the records of the stage, and would be incredible if not too universally known to be doubted.

Mr. Brunton immediately on discovering the treasure he possessed, resolved to bring it forth to public view. The time was nearly at hand when he was to take his benefit, and he judiciously thought that there could not be a more happy way of introducing her with advantage than in the pious office of aiding him on that occasion—nor can the most lively imagination, 121 conceive an object more interesting than a creature so young, so lovely, and so much wiser than her years standing forward to encounter the hazards and the terrors of that most trying situation in cheerful obedience to a father's will, and for a father's benefit. The selection of the character of Euphrasia for her, while he played the aged father, Evander, who is supposed to be sustained by the nourishment given from his daughter's bosom, was judicious, as it formed a coincidence of fact and fiction, which if it had been only moderately supported by her performance, could scarcely fail to excite in every bosom, in the house, the most lively and interesting sensations. Nothing that paternal affection, and good sense could dictate were wanting on the part of Mr. Brunton. Of the short time he had for instructing her, no

part was lost. The appearance of Mr. Brunton's daughter in Euphrasia, with a prologue written for the occasion, was announced, and notwithstanding there were not wanting wretches mean and miserable enough to trumpet abroad her youth and smallness of stature, as insurmountable obstacles to her personating the Grecian daughter, more just ideas of her, or perhaps curiosity brought a full house. Mr. Brunton himself spoke the prologue, which was written for him by the ingenious Mr. Meyler, and was as follows:

Sweet Hope! for whom his anxious parent burns,
Lo! from his tour the travelled heir returns,
With each accomplishment that Europe knows,
With all that Learning on her son bestows;
With Roman wit and Grecian wisdom fraught,
His mind has every letter'd art been taught.
Now the fond father thinks his son of age,
To take an active part in life's vast stage;
And Britain's senate opes a ready door,
To fill the seat his sire had fill'd before,
There when some question of great moment springs,
He'll rise — then "hear him, hear him," loudly rings,
He speaks — th' enraptur'd list'ning through admire
His voice, his argument, his genius' fire!
The fond old man, in pure ecstatic joy,
Blesses the gods that gave him such a boy!
But if insipid Dulness guide his tongue,
With what sharp pangs his aged heart is wrung —
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Despair, and shame, and sorrow make him rue
The hour he brought him to the public view.
And now what fears! what doubt, what joys I feel!

When my first hope attempts her first appeal,
Attempts an arduous task — Euphrasia's wo —
Her parent's nurse — or deals the deadly blow!
Some sparks of genius — if I right presage,
You'll find in this young novice of the stage:
Else had not I for all this earth affords
Led her thus early on these dangerous boards.
If your applause gives sanction to my aim,
And this night's effort promise future fame,
She shall proceed — but if some bar you find,
And that my fondness made my judgment blind,
Discern no voice, no feeling she possess,
Nor fire that can the passions well express;
Then, then forever, shall she quit this scene,
Be the plain housewife, not the tragic queen.

Such an appeal, delivered with all the powers of an excellent speaker, and enforced by the genuine and unfeigned feelings of a father's heart, told home — peals of applause gave assurance that her entrance was strewed with flowers, and that at least, her reception, would correspond with his fondest wishes.

The accounts that have been given by spectators of the events of that night are extremely interesting. Many, no doubt, went there with a prepossession, raised by the unfavourable reports of her personal appearance; and if lofty stature were indispensibly necessary to a heroine, no external appearance could be much less calculated to personify a Thalestris than Miss Brunton's — but the mighty mind soon made itself to be felt, and every idea of personal dimensions vanished. "The audience (says a British author) expected to see a mawkin, but saw a Cibber — the applause was proportionate to the surprise: every mouth emitted her praise, and she performed several parts in Bath and Bristol, a phenomenon in the theatrical

hemisphere." Though the trepidation inseparable from such an effort diminished her powers at first, the sweetness of her voice struck every ear like a charm: the applause that 123 followed invigorated her spirits so far that in the reciprocation of a speech or two more, her fine clear articulation struck the audience with surprise, and when, more assured by their loud approbation, she came to the speech:

"Melanthon, how I loved, the gods who saw

"Each secret image that my fancy formed,

"The gods can witness how I loved my Phocion,

"And yet I went not with him. Could I do it?

"Could I desert my father?—Could I leave

"The venerable man, who gave me being,

"A victim here in Syracuse, nor stay

"To watch his fate, to visit his affliction,

"To cheer his prison hours, and with the tear

"Of filial virtue bid each bondage smile."

she seemed to pour forth her whole heart and soul in the words, and emitted such a blaze as filled the house with rapture and astonishment. In a word, no actress at the highest acmé of popularity ever received greater applause. Next day her performance was the topic of every circle in Bath. Horatia in the Roman Father, and Palmyra in Mahomet, augmented her reputation, and in less than a month the fame of this prodigy, for such she appeared to be, had reached every town and city of Great Britain and Ireland.

It was natural to imagine that such extraordinary powers would not be long suffered to waste themselves upon the limited society of country towns. Mr. Harris, as soon as he received intelligence on which he could depend, upon the subject of Miss Brunton's talents, resolved to be himself an eye-witness of her performance, and set off to Bath with a view, if his judgment should concur with that of the public of that city, to offer her an engagement at Covent Garden.