
N° 12. Saturday, May 7, 1709*.

S T E E L E.

*Quicquid agunt homines—
noſtri eſt farrago libelli.*

Juv. Sat. i. 85, 86.

“Whate’er men do, or ſay, or think, or dream,
“Our medley Paper ſeizes for it’s theme.” P.

May 5.

WHEN a man has engaged to keep a ſtage-coach, he is obliged, whether he has paſſengers or not, to ſet out: thus it fares with us weekly hiſtorians; but indeed, for my particular, I hope, I ſhall ſoon have little more to do in this work, than to publiſh what is ſent me from ſuch as have leiſure and capacity for giving delight, and being pleaſed in an elegant manner. The preſent grandeur of the Britiſh nation might make us expect, that we ſhould riſe in our public diverſions, and manner of enjoying life, in proportion to our advancement in glory and power. Inſtead of that, ſur-

* Perhaps this Paper was written by SWIFT, or at leaſt, it may be one of thoſe which he gave hints for. See SPECTATOR, N° 47; and N° 504. Biters.

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vey this town, and you will find rakes and debauchees are your men of pleasure; thoughtless atheists and illiterate drunkards call themselves free-thinkers; and gamesters, banterers, BITERS*, swearers, and twenty new-born insects more, are, in their several species, the modern men of wit. Hence it is, that a man, who has been out of town but one half year, has lost the language, and must have some friend to stand by him, and keep him in countenance for talking common sense. To-day I saw a short interlude at White's of this nature, which I took notes of, and put together as well as I could in a public place. The persons of the drama are PIP, the last gentleman that has been made so at cards; TRIMMER, a person half undone at them, and who is now between a cheat and a gentleman; ACORN, an honest Englishman of good plain sense and meaning; and Mr. FRIENDLY, a reasonable man of the town.

* The species of folly here treated of, which ROWE made the subject of a farce called "The BITER," will receive some illustration from the following passage in SWIFT'S Letters. "I'll teach you a way to out-wit *Mrs. Johnson*; it is a new-fashioned way of being witty, and they call it *a bite*. You must ask a bantering question, or tell some damned lie in a serious manner, then she will answer, or speak as if you were in earnest, and then cry you, 'Madam, there's *A Bite*.' I would not have you undervalue this, for it is the constant amusement in court, and every where else among the great people; and I let you know it, in order to have it obtain among you, and to teach you a new refinement." SWIFT'S Works, vol. XIX. p. 4.

WHITE'S Chocolate-house, May 5.

Enter PIP, TRIMMER, *and* ACORN.

Ac. What is the matter, gentlemen? what! take no notice of an old friend?

Pip. Pox on it! do not talk to me, I am VOWELED by the count, and cursedly out of humour.

Ac. *Voweled!* pry'thee, Trimmer, what does he mean by that?

Trim. Have a care, Harry, speak softly; do not show your ignorance:—if you do, they will BITE you where ever they meet you, they are such cursed curs—the present wits.

Ac. *Bite* me! what do you mean?

Pip. Why! do not you know what *biting* is? nay, you are in the right on it. However, one would learn it only to defend one's self against men of wit, as one would know the tricks of play, to be secure against the cheats. But do not you hear, Acorn, that report, that some potentates of the alliance have taken care of themselves exclusively of us?

Ac. How! heaven forbid! after all our glorious victories; all the expence of blood and treasure!

Pip. BITE!

Ac. *Bite!* how?

Trim. Nay, he has *bit* you fairly enough; that is certain.

Ac. Pox! I do not feel it——How? where?

[*Exeunt* Pip *and* Trimmer *laughing.*

Ac. Ho!

Ac. Ho! Mr. Friendly, your most humble servant; you heard what passed between those fine gentlemen and me. PIP complained to me, that he had been VOWELED; and they tell me I am BIT.

Friend. You are to understand, Sir, that simplicity of behaviour, which is the perfection of good breeding and good sense, is utterly lost in the world; and in the room of it there are started a thousand little inventions, which men, barren of better things, take up in the place of it. Thus for every character in conversation that used to please, there is an impostor put upon you. Him whom we allowed, formerly, for a certain pleasant subtilty, and natural way of giving you an unexpected hit, called a *Droll*, is now mimicked by a *Biter*, who is a dull fellow, that tells you a lie with a grave face, and laughs at you for knowing him no better than to believe him. Instead of that sort of companion who could rally you, and keep his countenance, until he made you fall into some little inconsistency of behaviour, at which you yourself could laugh with him, you have the sneerer, who will keep you company from morning to night, to gather your follies of the day (which perhaps you commit out of confidence in him) and expose you in the evening to all the scorers in town. For your man of sense and free spirit, whose set of thoughts were built upon learning, reason, and experience, you have now an impudent creature
made

made up of vice only, who supports his ignorance by his courage, and want of learning by contempt of it.

Ac. Dear Sir, hold: what you have told me already of this change in conversation is too miserable to be heard with any delight; but methinks, as these new creatures appear in the world, it might give an excellent field to writers for the stage, to divert us with the representation of them there.

Friend. No, no; as you say, there might be some hopes of redress of these grievances, if there were proper care taken of the theatre; but the history of that is yet more lamentable, than that of the decay of conversation I gave you.

Ac. Pray, Sir, a little: I have not been in town these six years, until within this fortnight.

Friend. It is now some time since several revolutions in the gay world had made the empire of the stage subject to very fatal convulsions, which were too dangerous to be cured by the skill of little King OBERON*, who then

* "Mr. OWEN, or MAC OWEN SWINEY, an Irishman
"was first a Manager of Drury-lane Theatre, and afterwards of the Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket. He
"resided in Italy several years, and, at his return, procured
"a place in the Custom-house, and was made Keeper of the
"King's Mews. He died Oct. 2, 1754, and left his fortune to Mrs. WOFFINGTON. He was the author of
"several dramatic pieces." See TAT. N^o 4, *note*, and
"CIBBER "Memoirs," *passim*.

fat

fat in the throne of it. The laziness of this prince threw him upon the choice of a person who was fit to spend his life in contentions, an able and profound attorney, to whom he mortgaged his whole empire. This DIVITO* is the most skilful of all politicians: he has a perfect art in being unintelligible in discourse, and uncomeatable in business. But he, having no understanding in this polite way, brought in upon us, to get in his money, ladder dancers, jugglers, and mountebanks, to strut in the place of SHAKSPEARE'S heroes, and JONSON'S humorists. When the seat of wit was thus mortgaged without equity of redemption, an architect † arose, who has built the Muse a new palace, but secured her no retinue; so that, instead of action there, we have been put off by song and dance. This latter help of sound has also begun to fail for want of voices; therefore the palace has since been put into the hands of a surgeon, who cuts any foreign fellow into an eunuch ‡, and passes him upon us for a singer of Italy.

Ac.

* CHRISTOPHER RICH, mentioned afterwards, TAT. N^o 42. N^o 44. and N^o 69. See CIBBER'S "Memoirs," *passim*.

† Sir JOHN VANBRUGH, an excellent dramatic writer, and the builder of Blenheim-house. See WALPOLE'S "Anecdotes of Painting," vol. III. p. 286. & *seqq.* and NICHOLS'S "Select Collection of Misc. Poems," vol. IV. p. 340. N.

‡ JOHN-JAMES HEGDEGGER, Esq. styled here a surgeon, in allusion to the employment assigned to him; had

Ac. I will go out of town to-morrow.

Friend. Things are come to this pass; and yet the world will not understand, that the theatre has much the same effect on the manners of the age, as the bank on the credit of the nation. Wit and spirit, humour and good sense, can never be revived, but under the government of those who are judges of such talents; who know, that whatever is put up in their stead, is but a short and trifling expedient, to support the appearance of them for a season. It is possible, a peace will give leisure to put these matters under new regulations, but, at present, all the assistance we can see towards our recovery is as far from giving us help, as a poultice is from performing what can be done only by the grand elixir.

WILL'S Coffee-house, May 6.

According to our late design in the applauded verses on the morning*, which you lately had from hence, we proceed to improve that just intention, and present you with other labours, made proper to the place in which they were written †. The following poem comes from

at that time the direction of the operas, and afterwards of the masquerades. See TAT. N^o 18, and *note*.

* By SWIFT. See TAT. N^o 9.

† “PHILLIPS writeth verses in a sledge upon the frozen sea, and transmits them hither to thrive in our warm climate under the shelter of my Lord Dorset.” SWIFT'S Works, vol. XII. p. 108.

Copenhagen,

Copenhagen, and is as fine a winter-piece as we have ever had from any of the schools of the most learned painters. Such images as these give us a new pleasure in our sight, and fix upon our minds traces of reflection, which accompany us whenever the like objects occur. In short, excellent poetry and description dwell upon us so agreeably, that all the readers of them are made to think, if not write, like men of wit. But it would be injury to detain you longer from this excellent performance*, which is addressed to the Earl of DORSET by Mr. PHILLIPS, the author of several choice poems in Mr. TONSON's new Miscellany †.

Copenhagen, March 9, 1709.

From frozen climes, and endless tracts of snow,
 From streams that northern winds forbid to flow,
 What present shall the Muse to DORSET bring,
 Or how, so near the Pole, attempt to sing?
 The hoary winter here conceals from sight
 All pleasing objects that to verse invite.
 The hills and dales, and the delightful woods,
 The flow'ry plains, and silver-streaming floods,
 By snow disguis'd, in bright confusion lie,
 And with one dazzling waste fatigue the eye.

No

* POPE always excepted this poem from the general censure he passed upon the author's writings. See POPE's Works, vol. VII. p. 2. WARB. ed. small 8vo. 1751.

† The sixth and last volume of "DRYDEN'S Miscellanies," mentioned before, TAT. N^o 10. A principal part of that collection has since been interwoven among the productions of the respective authors in Dr. JOHNSON'S

No gentle breathing breeze prepares the spring,
 No birds within the desert region sing.
 The ships unmov'd the boisterous winds defy,
 While rattling chariots o'er the ocean fly.
 The vast Leviathan wants room to play,
 And spout his waters in the face of day,
 The starving wolves along the main sea prowl,
 And to the moon in icy valleys howl.
 For many a shining league the level main
 Here spreads itself into a glassy plain:
 There solid billows of enormous size,
 Alps of green ice, in wild disorder rise.

And yet but lately have I seen, ev'n here,
 The winter in a lovely dress appear.
 Ere yet the clouds let fall the treasur'd snow,
 Or winds began thro' hazy skies to blow,
 At evening a keen eastern breeze arose;
 And the descending rain unfully'd froze.
 Soon as the silent shades of night withdrew,
 The ruddy morn' disclos'd at once to view
 The face of nature in a rich disguise,
 And brighten'd ev'ry object to my eyes:
 For every shrub, and every blade of grass,
 And every pointed thorn, seem'd wrought in glass,
 In pearls and rubies rich the hawthorns show,
 While thro' the ice the crimson berries glow.
 The thick-sprung reeds the watery marshes yield
 Seem polish'd lances in a hostile field.
 The stag in limpid currents, with surprize,
 Sees crystal branches on his forehead rise.

collection of the "Works of English Poets." Whatever else in "DRYDEN'S Miscellany" was worth preserving, has been transplanted by Mr. NICHOLS into his "Select Collection of Miscellany Poems," in eight vol. 12mo. 1780.

The

The spreading oak, the beech, and towering pine,
 Glaz'd over, in the freezing æther shine.
 The frighted birds the rattling branches shun,
 That wave and glitter in the distant sun.

When, if a sudden gust of wind arise,
 The brittle forest into atoms flies;
 The crackling wood beneath the tempest bends,
 And in a spangled shower the prospect ends;
 Or, if a southern gale the region warm,
 And by degrees unbind the wintery charm,
 The traveller a miry country sees,
 And journeys sad, beneath the dropping trees,

Like some deluded peasant MERLIN leads
 Thro' fragrant bowers, and thro' delicious meads;
 While here enchanted gardens to him rise,
 And airy fabrics there attract his eyes,
 His wandering feet the magic paths pursue;
 And while he thinks the fair illusion true,
 The trackless scenes disperse in fluid air,
 And, woods and wilds, and thorny ways appear:
 A tedious road the weary wretch returns,
 And as he goes, the transient vision mourns.

From my own Apartment, May 6.

There has a mail this day arrived from Holland; but the matter of the advices importing rather what gives us great expectations, than any positive assurances, I shall, for this time, decline giving you what I know; and apply the following verses of Mr. DRYDEN, in the second part of "Almanzor," to the present circumstances of things, without discovering what my knowledge in astronomy suggests to me:

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When,

When Empire in its childhood first appears,
 A watchful fate o'ersees its tender years:
 Till, grown more strong, it thrusts and stretches out,
 And elbows all the kingdoms round about.
 The place thus made for its first breathing free,
 It moves again for ease and luxury:
 Till swelling by degrees it has possess'd
 The greater space, and now crowds up the rest.
 When from behind there starts some petty state,
 And pushes on its now unwieldy fate.
 Then down the precipice of time it goes,
 And sinks in minutes, which in ages rose.

N^o 13. Tuesday, May 8, 1709.

S T E E L E.

*Quicquid agunt homines—
 nostri est farrago libelli.*

Juv. Sat. i. 85, 86.

“Whate'er men do, or say, or think, or dream,
 “Our medley Paper seizes for its theme.” P.

From my own Apartment, May 8.

MUCH hurry and business has to-day perplexed me into a mood too thoughtful for going into company; for which reason, instead of the tavern, I went into Lincoln's Inn walks; and, having taken a round or two, I sat down,