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In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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“ sufficient abilities, I will endeavour to make up with industry and fi-
 “ delity what I want in parts and genius. I am,

SIR, Your most obedient Servant, Charles Lillie.

N^o 18. *Wednesday, March 21.*

----- *Equitis quoque jam migravit ab aure voluptas*
Omnis ad incertos oculos et gaudia vana. Hor.

IT is my design in this paper to deliver down to posterity a faithful account of the *Italian Opera*, and of the gradual progress which it has made upon the *English Stage*; for there is no question but our great grand-children will be very curious to know the reason why their fore-fathers used to sit together like an audience of foreigners in their own country, and to hear whole Plays acted before them in a tongue which they did not understand.

Arfinoe was the first Opera that gave us a taste of *Italian Musick*. The great success this Opera met with, produced some attempts of forming pieces upon *Italian Plans*, which should give a more natural and reasonable entertainment than what can be met with in the elaborate trifles of that nation. This alarmed the Poetasters and Fiddlers of the town, who were used to deal in a more ordinary kind of ware; and therefore laid down an established rule, which is received as such to this day, *That nothing is capable of being well set to Musick, that is not Nonsense.*

This maxim was no sooner received, but we immediately fell to translating the *Italian Opera's*; and as there was no danger of hurting the sense of those extraordinary pieces, our Authors would often make words of their own which were entirely foreign to the meaning of the passages they pretended to translate; their chief care being to make the numbers of the *English* verse answer to those of the *Italian*, that both of them might go to the same tune. Thus the famous song in *Camilla*,

Barbara

Barbara si t'intendo, &c.

Barbarous woman, yes, I know your meaning,

which expresses the resentments of an angry Lover, was translated into that *English* lamentation,

Frail are a Lover's hopes, &c.

And it was pleasant enough to see the most refined persons of the *British* nation dying away and languishing to Notes that were filled with a spirit of rage and indignation. It happened also very frequently, where the sense was rightly translated, the necessary transposition of words which were drawn out of the Phrase of one tongue into that of another, made the Musick appear very absurd in one tongue that was very natural in the other. I remember an *Italian* verse that ran thus word for word.

And turn'd my rage into pity;

which the *English* for rhyme sake translated,

And into pity turn'd my rage.

By this means the soft Notes that were adapted to *Pity* in the *Italian*, fell upon the word *Rage* in the *English*; and the angry sounds that were tuned to *Rage* in the original, were made to express *Pity* in the translation. It oftentimes happened likewise, that the finest Notes in the Air fell upon the most insignificant words in the sentence. I have known the word *And* pursued through the whole Gamut, have been entertained with many a melodious *The*, and have heard the most beautiful Graces Quavers and Divisions bestowed upon *Then*, *For*, and *From*; to the eternal honour of our *English* Particles.

The next step to our refinement, was the introducing of *Italian* Actors into our Opera; who sung their parts in their own language, at the same time that our Country-men performed theirs in our native tongue. The King or Hero of the Play generally spoke in *Italian*, and his Slaves answered him in *English*: The Lover frequently made his court, and gained the heart of his Princess, in a language which she did not understand. One would have thought it very difficult to have carried on Dialogues after this manner, without an Interpreter between the persons that conversed together: but this was the state of the *English* Stage for about three years.

At

At length the audience grew tired of understanding half the Opera; and therefore to ease themselves intirely of the fatigue of thinking, have so ordered it at present, that the whole Opera is performed in an unknown tongue. We no longer understand the Language of our own Stage; infomuch that I have often been afraid, when I have seen our *Italian* performers chattering in the vehemence of action, that they have been calling us names, and abusing us among themselves; but I hope, since we put such an entire confidence in them, they will not talk against us before our faces, though they may do it with the same safety as if it were behind our backs. In the mean time, I cannot forbear thinking how naturally an Historian who writes two or three hundred years hence, and does not know the taste of his wise fore-fathers, will make the following reflection, *In the beginning of the eighteenth Century the Italian tongue was so well understood in England, that Opera's were acted on the publick stage in that language.*

One scarce knows how to be serious in the confutation of an absurdity that shews it self at the first sight. It does not want any great measure of sense to see the ridicule of this monstrous practice; but what makes it the more astonishing, it is not the taste of the rabble, but of persons of the greatest politeness, which has established it.

If the *Italians* have a Genius for Musick above the *English*, the *English* have a Genius for other performances of a much higher nature, and capable of giving the mind a much nobler entertainment. Would one think it was possible (at a time when an Author lived that was able to write the *Phædra* and *Hippolitus*) for a people to be so stupidly fond of the *Italian* Opera, as scarce to give a third day's hearing to that admirable Tragedy? Musick is certainly a very agreeable entertainment, but if it would take the entire possession of our ears, if it would make us incapable of hearing sense, if it would exclude Arts that have a much greater tendency to the refinement of Human Nature; I must confess I would allow it no better quarter than *Plato* has done, who banishes it out of his Common-wealth.

At present, our notions of Musick are so very uncertain, that we do not know what it is we like; only in general, we are transported with any thing that is not *English*: So it be of a foreign growth, let it be *Italian*, *French*, or *Higb-dutch*, it is the same thing. In short, our *English* Musick is quite rooted out, and nothing yet planted in its stead.

When a Royal Palace is burnt to the ground, every man is at liberty to present his Plan for a new one; and though it be but indifferently put together,

gether, it may furnish several hints that may be of use to a good Architect. I shall take the same liberty in a following paper, of giving my opinion upon the subject of Musick; which I shall lay down only in a problematical manner, to be considered by those who are Masters in the Art.

N^o 21. Saturday, March 24.

----- *Locus est et pluribus umbris.*

Hor.

I Am sometimes very much troubled, when I reflect upon the three great professions of Divinity, Law, and Physick; how they are each of them over-burdened with practitioners, and filled with multitudes of ingenious Gentlemen that starve one another.

We may divide the Clergy into Generals, Field-officers, and Subalterns. Among the first we may reckon Bishops, Deans and Archdeacons. Among the second are Doctors of Divinity, Prebendaries, and all that wear Scarfs. The rest are comprehended under the Subalterns. As for the first Class, our Constitution preserves it from any redundancy of incumbents, notwithstanding Competitors are numberless. Upon a strict calculation, it is found that there has been a great exceeding of late years in the second division, several Brevets having been granted for the converting of Subalterns into Scarf-officers; inso-much that within my memory the price of Lustring is raised above two pence in a yard. As for the Subalterns, they are not to be numbred. Should our Clergy once enter into the corrupt practice of the Laity, by the splitting of their Freeholds, they would be able to carry most of the Elections in *England*.

The body of the Law is no less encumbered with superfluous members, that are like *Virgil's* Army, which he tells us was so crouded, many of them had not room to use their weapons. This prodigious society of men may be divided into the Litigious and Peaceable. Under the first are comprehended all those who are carried down in coach-fulls to *Westminster-hall*, every morning in Term-time. *Martial's* description of this species of Lawyers is full of humour:

II *Irasc*