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BRITISH THEATRE.

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# BRITISH THEATRE

COMPRISING

*Tragedies, Comedies, Operas,  
and Farces,*

FROM THE MOST CLASSIC WRITERS;

WITH

BIOGRAPHY CRITICAL ACCOUNT

AND

EXPLANATORY NOTES

BY

an Englishman.

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COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.

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## P R E F A C E.

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In presenting this volume to the German nation, we will not claim their approbation from the partiality they have shown to British Literature;—we will not point out to them the great utility of having the most elegant tone of English conversation for their instruction in the language; wherefore should we paint the delighting image of their identifying themselves with a sphere of individuals, whose manners and customs are so deeply tinged with originality and peculiarity of character; and invite them to consider John Bull entering their society in his own dress, touched off with his own high humour, and even with all his faults, calling upon the good-natured smile of all around him? The shades of Addison, Garrick, Steele would arise in offended pride, to hear their names once more invoked to serve the office of commendation to works which have already stood the test of nations, and out-lived the hand of time: no, their worth needs no interpreter, it speaks itself too plainly.

Yet with all the riches of the British Drama before us, we have found ourselves embarrassed to present our readers with a full specimen of its treasures; and, how plentiful soever this harvest may be, there still remains a great store behind; we wait only the fiat of the public to recommence our labours.

We refrain from entering into a detail of the many inglorious causes of the decline of the stage these last two centuries, and will content ourselves with merely pointing it out, as a reason for our work's containing very few pieces written since that time.

It is but natural for us to have a desire to become more familiarly acquainted with the man whose writings have tended to amuse or instruct us; and hence our wish, not only to have free admission to his study, but also to follow him into the circle of his acquaintance, and sit with him at his fire-side surrounded by his family. It is here we can judge the human heart, and observe, if the precepts, inculcated on his readers, have been the guide of his own actions; and whatever be the result of our examination, it must interest our feelings and be a good exercise for ourselves. We have, therefore, endeavoured to give a faithful account of the public and private life of the authors whose writings are to be found in this volume.

The opinions of the English with respect to their own authors, how much soever they may differ from those of another nation, will answer as a point of opposition, and may assist the reader in his own critique. Each piece is, therefore, preceded by reasons, more or less cogent, to add to or diminish its lustre; and these have been carefully selected from the writings of the greatest British critics, who may have noticed them, tempered by a few observations of our own.

The English nation has, of late years, become an object of curiosity to foreigners; and numerous has been the intelligent class of inquiring travellers, who have published their more or less true accounts of this people. How favourable soever may have been their opportunities for examining into the true spirit of the people,

though the most prominent and general points of character may have been fully represented in their narration yet, from the particular circumstance of their being foreigners, they could not penetrate fairly into the minutiae. A series of writings, which brand the vicious with the mark of shame and punishment, and level the shaft of irony and laughter at folly, while they encourage and support real virtue and good sense, explained and put in their true light, with as much impartiality as human nature will allow in speaking of one's own country, must open a good field for the display of character. Hence the whole is accompanied with notes, explanatory of the localities and such circumstances as are liable to a double interpretation.

We cannot conclude this preface better than by laying before our readers a passage from the "lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres," by that excellent critic Dr. Blair. In the third volume, when comparing the French and English comedy, he says, "from the English there we are naturally led to expect a greater variety of original characters in comedy and bolder strokes of wit and humour than are to be found on any other modern stage. Humour is in a great measure the peculiar province of the English nation. The nature of such a free government as ours, and that unrestrained liberty which our manners allow to every man of living entirely after his own taste, afford full scope to the display of singularity of character and to the indulgence of humour in all its forms. Whereas in France the influence of the court, the more established subordinations of ranks and the universal observance of the forms of politeness and decorum, spread a much greater uniformity over the outward behaviour and characters of men. Hence comedy has a more ample field and can flow with a much freer vein in Britain, than in France."

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# TRAGEDY.

CATO.  
MOURNING BRIDE.  
ZARA.  
DOUGLAS.

GEORGE BARNWELL.  
DUKE OF MILAN.  
GAMESTER.  
VENICE PRESERVED.

ORPHAN OF CHINA.  
DISTREST MOTHER.  
FAIR PENITENT.  
SIEGE OF DAMASCUS.

## ADDISON.

JOSEPH ADDISON was born May 21, 1672, at Milston, of which his father was then Rector, near Ambrosebury in Wiltshire. He was early sent to school, there, under the care of the Rev. Mr. Nalsh; from whence he was removed to Salisbury school, and then to the Charterhouse, under the tuition of the learned Dr. Ellis. Here he first contracted an intimacy with Mr. Steele, which continued almost to his death. At fifteen he was entered of Queen's College, Oxford, and in about two years admitted to the degrees of bachelor and master of arts in that college; at which time he was celebrated for his latin poems, to be found in a second volume of the *Musae Britannicae*, collected by Addison. Being at the university, he was upon the point of ceding to the desires of his father and several of his friends, to enter into holy orders; but having, through Mr. Congreve's means, become a favourite of Lord Halifax, he was prevailed upon by that nobleman, to give up the design. He successively filled the public stations, in 1703, of Commissioner of the Appeals in the Excise; 1707, Under-Secretary of State; 1709, Secretary of Ireland, and Keeper of the Records in Ireland; 1715 (the grand climacteric of Addison's reputation, Cato appeared) Secretary to the Lords' Justices; 1714 one of the Lords Commissioners of Trade; and at last, 1717, one of the first Secretaries of State. Dr. Johnson says, "For this employment he might justly be supposed qualified by long practice of business, and by his regular ascent through other offices; but expectation is often disappointed; it is universally confessed, that he was unequal to the duties of his place. In the House of Commons he could not speak, and therefore was useless to the defence of the Government. In the office, says Pope, he could not issue an order without losing his time in quest of fine expressions." He solicited his dismissal with a pension of 1500 pounds a year. He married the Countess Dowager of Warwick, 1716; and is said to have first known her by becoming tutor to her son. Johnson says, "The Lady was at last prevailed upon to marry him, on terms much like those, on which a Turkish princess is espoused, to whom the sultan is reported to pronounce, 'Daughter, I give thee this man for thy slave.' The marriage made no addition to his happiness; it neither made them nor found them equal." In 1718—19, he had a severe dispute on *The Peerage Bill* with Steele, who, inveterate in his political opinions, supported them in a pamphlet called *The Plebeian*, which Addison answered by another, under the title of *The Old Whig*. Some epithets, let drop by Addison, answered by a cutting quotation from Cato, by Steele, were the cause of their friendship's being dissolved; and every person acquainted with the friendly terms on which these two great men had lived so long, must regret, that they should finally part in acrimonious opposition. Addison died of an asthma and dropsy, on the 17th June, 1719, aged 48, leaving only one daughter behind him. The general esteem in which his productions, both serious and humorous in *The Spectator*, *The Tatler*, and *The Guardian* are held, "pleads (as Spakpeare says), like angels, trumpet-tongued, in their behalf." As a poet, his *Cato*, in the dramatic, and his *Campaign*, in the heroic way, will ever maintain a place among the first-rate works of either kind.—And a good man's death displays the character of his life. At his last hour, he sent for a relation of his, young Lord Warwick, whose youth he supposed might be influenced by an awful lesson, when, taking hold of the young man's hand, he said "See in what peace a Christian can die!" and immediately expired.

## CATO,

ACTED at Drury Lane, 1715. It is one of the first of our dramatic poems, and was performed 18 nights successively; this very successful run for a tragedy, is attributed by Dennis, who wrote a very bitter critique upon Cato, to proceed from Addison's having raised prejudices in his own favour, by false positions of preparatory criticism; and with his having poisoned the town by contradicting, in *The Spectator*, the established rule of poetical justice, because his own hero, with all his virtues, was to fall before a tyrant. Johnson says, "the fact is certain; the motives we must guess. Steele packed an audience. The danger was soon over. The whole nation was, at that time, on fire with faction. The Whigs applauded every line, in which liberty was mentioned, as a satire on the Tories; and the Tories echoed every clap, to shew, that the satire was unfelt." It was ushered into notice by eight complimentary copies of verses to the author, among which, one by Steele, leads the van; besides a prologue by Pope, and an epilogue by Dr. Garth: Dr. Johnson, with the abovementioned persons, nay, even Dennis's gall, has marked this tragedy as a British classic, and a succession of audiences for above a century has proved, that it has deserved "Golden opinions from all sorts of people." Johnson observes, "Of a work so much read, it is difficult to say any thing new. About things on which the public thinks long, it commonly attains to think right; and of Cato it has been not unjustly determined, that it is rather a poem in dialogue than a drama; rather a succession of just sentiments in elegant language, than a representation of natural affections, or of any state probable or possible in human life. Nothing here excites or assuages emotion; here is no magical power of raising phantastic terror or exciting wild anxiety. The events are expected without solicitude, and remembered without joy or sorrow. Of the agents we have no care. Cato is a being above our solicitude, a man of whom "the gods take care," and whom we leave to their care with heedless confidence. To the rest, neither gods nor men can have much attention; for there is not one amongst them, that strongly attracts either affection or esteem. But they are made the vehicles of such sentiments and such expressions that there is scarcely a scene in the play, which the reader does not wish to impress upon his memory."

### DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

CATO.  
PORTIUS.  
MARCUS.

SEMPRONIUS.  
JUBA.  
SYPHAX.

LUCIUS.  
DECIUS.  
JUNIUS.

LUCIA.  
MARCIA.  
MUTINEERS, GUARDS. etc.

SCENE.—*The Governor's Palace in Utica.*

### ACT I.

#### SCENE I.—*A Hall.*

*Enter PORTIUS and MARCUS.*

*Por.* THE dawn is overcast, the morning  
low'rs,

And heavily in clouds brings on the day,  
The great, th' important day, big with the fate  
Of Cato and of Rome—our father's death  
Would fill up all the guilt of civil war,  
And close the scene of blood. Already Caesar



Has ravag'd more than half the globe, and sees  
Mankind grown thin by his destructive sword:  
Should he go further, numbers would be wanting  
To form new battles, and support his crimes.  
Ye gods, what havoc does ambition make  
Among your works!

*Marc.* Thy steady temper, Portius,  
Can look on guilt, rebellion, fraud, and Caesar,  
In the calm lights of mild philosophy;  
I'm tortur'd, e'en to madness, when I think  
On the proud victor: ev'ry time he's nam'd  
Pharsalia rises to my view!—I see  
Th' insulting tyrant, prancing o'er the field,  
Strew'd with Rome's citizens, and drench'd  
in slaughter;

His horses hoofs wet with patrician blood!  
Oh, Portius! is not there some chosen curse,  
Some hidden thunder in the stores of heav'n,  
Red with uncommon wrath, to blast the man  
VWho owes his greatness to his country's ruin?

*Por.* Believe me, Marcus, 'tis an impious  
greatness,

And mix'd with too much horror to be envy'd:  
How does the lustre of our father's actions,  
Through the dark cloud of ills that cover him,  
Break out, and burn with more triumphant  
brightness!

His sufferings shine, and spread a glory round  
him;

Greatly unfortunate, he fights the cause  
Of honour, virtue, liberty, and Rome.

*Marc.* VWho knows not this? But what can  
Cato do

Against a world, a base, degen'rate world,  
That courts the yoke, and bows the neck to  
Caesar?

Pent up in Utica, he vainly forms  
A poor epitome of Roman greatness,  
And, cover'd with Numidian guards, directs  
A feeble army, and an empty senate,  
Remnants of mighty battles fought in vain.  
By heav'n, such virtues, join'd with such success,  
Distracts my very soul! our father's fortune  
Would almost tempt us to renounce his precepts.

*Por.* Remember what our father oft has  
told us:

The ways of heav'n are dark and intricate;  
Puzzled in mazes, and perplex'd with errors,  
Our understanding traces them in vain,  
Lost and bewilder'd in the fruitless search;  
Nor sees with how much art the windings run,  
Nor where the regular confusion ends.

*Marc.* These are suggestions of a mind at  
ease:—

Oh, Portius, didst thou taste but half the griefs  
That wring my soul, thou couldst not talk  
thus coldly.

Passion unpitied, and successful love,  
Plant daggers in my heart, and aggravate  
My other griefs.—Vere but my Lucia kind—

*Por.* Thou seest not that thy brother is thy  
rival;

But I must hide it, for I know thy temper.

[*Aside.*  
Now, Marcus, now thy virtue's on the proof,  
Put forth thy utmost strength, work ev'ry nerve,  
And call up all thy father in thy soul:

To quell the tyrant love, and guard thy heart  
On this weak side, where most our nature fails,  
Would be a conquest worthy Cato's son.

*Marc.* Alas, the counsel which I cannot take,  
Instead of healing, but upbraids my weakness.

Love is not to be reason'd down, or lost  
In high ambition and a thirst of greatness;  
'Tis second life, that grows into the soul,  
VVarms every vein, and beats in every pulse:  
I feel it here: my resolution melts—

*Por.* Behold young Juba, the Numidian  
prince,

VWith how much care he forms himself to glory,  
And breaks the fierceness of his native temper,  
To copy out our father's bright example.

He loves our sister Marcia, greatly loves her;  
His eyes, his looks, his actions, all betray it;  
But still the smother'd fondness burns within  
him:

VWhen most it swells, and labours for a vent,  
The sense of honour, and desire of fame,  
Drive the big passion back into his heart.

VWhat, shall an African, shall Juba's heir  
Reproach great Cato's son, and show the world  
A virtue wanting in a Roman soul?

*Marc.* Portius, no more! your words leave  
stings behind them.

VWhene'er did Juba, or did Portius, show  
A virtue that has cast me at a distance,  
And thrown me out in the pursuits of honour?

*Por.* Oh, Marcus! did I know the way to  
ease

Thy troubled heart, and mitigate thy pains,  
Marcus, believe me, I could die to do it.

*Marc.* Thou best of brothers, and thou best  
of friends!

Pardon a weak, distemper'd soul, that swells  
With sudden gusts, and sinks as soon in calms,  
The sport of passions. But Sempronius comes:  
He must not find this softness hanging on me.

[*Exit.*

*Enter SEMPRONIUS.*

*Sem.* Conspiracies no sooner should be  
form'd

Than executed. VWhat means Portius here?  
I like not that cold youth. I must dissemble,  
And speak a language foreign to my heart.

[*Aside.*

Good morrow, Portius; let us once embrace,  
Once more embrace, while yet we both are free.  
To-morrow, should we thus express our  
friendship,

Each might receive a slave into his arms.  
This sun, perhaps, this morning sun's the last,  
That e'er shall rise on Roman liberty.

*Por.* My father has this morning call'd to-  
gether

To this poor hall, his little Roman senate  
(The leavings of Pharsalia), to consult  
If he can yet oppose the mighty torrent  
That bears down Rome and all her gods before it,  
Or must at length give up the world to Caesar.

*Sem.* Not all the pomp and majesty of Rome  
Can raise her senate more than Cato's presence.  
His virtues render our assembly awful,  
They strike with something like religious fear,  
And make ev'n Caesar tremble at the head  
Of armies flush'd with conquest. Oh, my  
Portius!

Could I but call that wondrous man my father,  
VWould but thy sister Marcia be propitious  
To thy friend's vows, I might be blest indeed!

*Por.* Alas, Sempronius! wouldst thou talk  
of love

To Marcia, whilst her father's life's in danger?  
Thou might'st as well court the pale, trem-  
bling vestal,

When she beholds the holy flame expiring.

*Sem.* The more I see the wonders of thy race,  
The more I'm charm'd. Thou must take heed,  
my Portius;

The world has all its eyes on Cato's son;  
Thy father's merit sets thee up to view,  
And shows thee in the fairest point of light,  
To make thy virtues or thy faults conspicuous.

*Por.* Well dost thou seem to check my  
ling'ring here

On this important hour—I'll straight away,  
And while the fathers of the senate meet  
In close debate, to weigh th' events of war,  
I'll animate the soldiers' drooping courage  
With love of freedom, and contempt of life;  
I'll thunder in their ears their country's cause,  
And try to rouse up all that's Roman in them.  
'Tis not in mortals to command success,  
But we'll do more, Sempronius; we'll deserve

it. [*Exit.*  
*Sem.* Curse on the stripling! how he apes  
his sire!

Ambitiously sententious—But I wonder  
Old Syphax comes not, his Numidian genius  
Is well dispos'd to mischief, were he prompt  
And eager on it; but he must be spur'd,  
And ev'ry moment quicken'd to the course.  
Cato has us'd me ill; he has refus'd  
His daughter Marcia to my ardent vows.  
Besides, his baffled arms and ruin'd cause,  
Are bars to my ambition. Caesar's favour,  
That shows down greatness on his friends,

will raise me  
To Rome's first honours. If I give up Cato,  
I claim, in my reward, his captive daughter.  
But Syphax comes—

*Enter SYPHAX.*

*Syph.* Sempronius, all is ready;  
I've sounded my Numidians, man by man,  
And find them ripe for a revolt: they all  
Complain aloud of Cato's discipline,  
And wait but the command to change their  
master.

*Sem.* Believe me, Syphax, there's no time  
to waste:

Ev'n while we speak, our conqueror comes on,  
And gathers ground upon us ev'ry moment.  
Alas! thou know'st not Caesar's active soul,  
With what a dreadful course he rushes on  
From war to war. In vain has nature form'd  
Mountains and oceans to oppose his passage;  
He bounds o'er all;  
One day more

Will set the victor thund'ring at our gates.  
But, tell me, hast thou yet drawn o'er young  
Juba?

That still would recommend thee more to Caesar,  
And challenge better terms.

*Syph.* Alas! he's lost!  
He's lost, Sempronius; all his thoughts are full  
Of Cato's virtues—But I'll try once more  
(For ev'ry instant I expect him here),  
If yet I can subdue those stubborn principles  
Of faith and honour, and I know not what,  
That have corrupted his Numidian temper,  
And struck th' infection into all his soul.

*Sem.* Be sure to press upon him ev'ry motive.  
Juba's surrender, since his father's death,  
Would give up Afric into Caesar's hands,  
And make him lord of half the burning zone.

*Syph.* But is it true, Sempronius, that your  
senate

Is call'd together? Gods! thou must be cautious;  
Cato has piercing eyes, and will discern  
Our frauds, unless they're cover'd thick with art.

*Sem.* Let me alone, good Syphax, I'll conceal  
My thoughts in passion ('tis the surest way);  
I'll bellow out for Rome, and for my country,  
And mouth at Caesar, till I shake the senate.

Your cold hypocrisy's a stale device,  
A worn-out trick: wouldst thou be thought  
in earnest,

Clothe thy feign'd zeal in rage, in fire, in fury!

*Syph.* In troth, thou't able to instruct grey  
hairs,

And teach the wily African deceit.

*Sem.* Once more be sure to try thy skill  
on Juba.

Meanwhile I'll hasten to my Roman soldiers,  
Inflame the mutiny, and, underhand,  
Blow up their discontents, till they break out  
Unlook'd for, and discharge themselves on Cato.

Remember, Syphax, we must work in haste;  
Oh, think what anxious moments pass between  
The birth of plots, and their last fatal periods!

Oh, 'tis a dreadful interval of time,  
Fill'd up with horror all, and big with death!  
Destruction hangs on ev'ry word we speak,  
On every thought, till the concluding stroke  
Determines all, and closes our design. [*Exit.*

*Syph.* I'll try if yet I can reduce to reason  
This headstrong youth, and make him spurn  
at Cato.

The time is short; Caesar comes rushing on  
us—

But hold! young Juba sees me, and approaches!

*Enter JUBA.*

*Juba.* Syphax, I joy to meet thee thus alone.  
I have observ'd of late thy looks are fall'n,  
O'ercast with gloomy cares and discontent;  
Then tell me, Syphax, I conjure thee, tell me,  
What are the thoughts that knit thy brow in  
frowns,

And turn thine eye thus coldly on thy prince?

*Syph.* 'Tis not my talent to conceal my  
thoughts,

Or carry smiles and sunshine in my face,  
When discontent sits heavy at my heart;  
I have not yet so much the Roman in me.

*Juba.* Why dost thou cast out such un-  
gen'rous terms

Against the lords and sov'reigns of the world?  
Dost thou not see mankind fall down before  
them,

And own the force of their superior virtue?

*Syph.* Gods! where's the worth that sets  
these people up

Above your own Numidia's tawny sons?

Do they with tougher sinews bend the bow?

Or flies the jav'lin swifter to its mark,

Launch'd from the vigour of a Roman arm?

Who like our active African instructs

The fiery steed, and trains him to his hand?

Or guides in troops th' embattled elephant

Laden with war? These, these are arts, my  
prince,

In which your Zama does not stoop to Rome.

*Juba.* These all are virtues of a meaner rank:  
Perfections that are plac'd in bones and nerves.

A Roman soul is bent on higher views.  
To make man mild, and sociable to man;