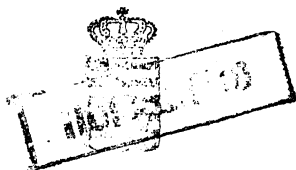


LIFE OF MRS. SUMBEL,

LATE

W E L L S.



London:—Printed by Ballintine & Byworth, Duke-street, Adelphi.

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MEMOIRS
OF THE
LIFE OF MRS. SUMBEL,
LATE
WELLS;

*Of the Theatres-royal, Drury-lane, Covent-garden,
and Haymarket.*



IN THREE VOLUMES.

WRITTEN BY HERSELF.

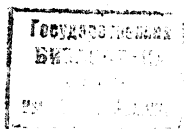
INCLUDING
HER CORRESPONDENCE WITH MAJOR TOPHAM,
MR. REYNOLDS THE DRAMATIST,
&c. &c. &c.

VOL. III.

"..... My soul abhors
The man, who breaks through Nature's sweetest laws;
Whose heart so callous to each tender tie,
So deaf to gratitude, to pity's sigh,
Can see that form he vilely has betray'd
Now pine in want, and never lend his aid. .
Alas! much-injur'd,, gen'rous WELLS,
How oft on thee my thought with sorrow dwells!
Accept a tear---t is all I can bestow---
That, and to hate the author of thy woe."

Vide ANTHONY PASQUIN'S "Pin-basket."

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR C. CHAPPLE, PALL-MALL,
OPPOSITE ST. JAMES'S-PALACE.
1811.



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MEMOIRS AND CORRESPONDENCE

OF

MRS. SUMBEL.

THE benefit given Mr. Pope induced me to solicit Mr. Taylor to let me have the Opera-house for one night for the same purpose; and I also requested Mrs. Siddons to play for me: conceiving that as they had used such exertions in behalf of a person who did not actually want, they would certainly take into consideration a person situated as I was: but I received a refusal from them both. To me it would have

been a *real* service—Mr. Pope it would merely oblige. We no longer live in that age when the drama is exhibited with the idea of inculcating morality and virtue; it is almost reduced to the state of stock-jobbing; and the *most* money every proprietor or performer can put into his pocket seems now to be the order of the day; while, if they can form a strong party in their favour by *any means*, the opinion of the rest of the audience, or the world, is totally disregarded. The late commotions in Covent-garden, and the still more recent squabbles in the King's Theatre, ought to make Mr. Taylor recollect, that the approbation of the public is a very necessary prop to all such institu-

tions. However, I wish to do Mr. Taylor and Mrs. Siddons every justice on the occasion: they have, in their conduct towards Mr. Pope, fulfilled the words of the Scripture, which, in the nineteenth chapter of Luke and twenty-sixth verse, has the following words—
 “ For I say unto you, unto every one
 “ who hath shall be given....” In answer to my request Mr. Taylor informed me, that the theatre could not be spared:—perhaps he may not have that complaint to make long, as there is a likelihood of its having many a *spare* night.

But I cannot take leave of Mr. Pope without letting the world know his conduct towards me.—I wrote to him, requesting an admission, but I

received a refusal. What could be his motive for such conduct I cannot say, unless he wished me to pay for going in, and by that means to finish the rest of the verse above quoted, which says, “and from him that hath not, even “that he hath shall be taken away “from him.”

Mr. Pope played *formerly*, at Covent-garden, the same parts as the late Mr. Palmer played at Drury-lane; but he is as like Mr. Palmer as “I am to Hercules”!

The speculation of building Well-close-square theatre by Mr. Palmer is well known to the public, and was the ruin of that liberal man. At its first opening, Mrs. Martyr, Mr. Quick, and

myself, were engaged at very good salaries; but the winter managers set their face against it, and sent us word that, if we attempted to perform, they would have us taken into custody for playing without a licence, which brought us under the denomination of vagabonds, according to the act of parliament. Mr. Quick did not care for being taken up, but he could not bear the idea of being molested under that denomination; and was so exasperated at it, that in picking a bone after dinner the day the message was sent to him, venting his choler upon it, he broke one of his front teeth in two! which gave him very great concern, as they were really a handsome set; and

as the *manufacturer* who made them was dead, it could not be replaced. The play was to be “As you like it:” Mrs. Martyr was to play Audry, Mr. Palmer Orlando, and Rosalind was allotted for me; but as Mrs. M. and I did not choose to be made vagabonds of, we did not go; so that Mr. Palmer was obliged to provide a strolling company from the country to make up the deficiency, who were every one of them taken into custody.

Mr. Palmer next offered me fifty pounds a night to give my imitations, which I did for three nights, and a fourth for Mr. Lee Lewis’s benefit. My exertions produced the following encomiums in the daily papers.—

“THE WELLS, a long-enrolled favourite of
 “ the public, took a new field of action for the
 “ display of her abilities at the Royalty.—New,
 “ yet pleasing; delicate, yet interesting and
 “ impressive. The stage has not been in pos-
 “ session of a mimic so chaste in manner and so
 “ striking in effect. Siddons, Crawford, Cargill,
 “ &c. she did justice to; nor was her own
 “ *Cowslip* forgotten, or unrewarded by the plau-
 “ dits of the audience, who fully entered into
 “ the spirit of her mimicry. We are free to
 “ confess, high as our opinion has ever been of
 “ this lady’s talents, we never conceived them
 “ possessed of so happy a versatility.”

“ At the close of the above [Almerina] Mrs.
 “ WELLS made her second appearance on this
 “ stage, and the universal applause she received
 “ could only be equalled by the continued plau-
 “ dits every imitation received, and which, with-

“ out transgressing on the verge of truth, every
 “ imitation most justly merited. Mrs. Wells’s
 “ countenance is by nature beautiful and ex-
 “ pressive, and never did that countenance
 “ depicture the features of others so faith-
 “ fully as on this evening. The audience saw
 “ the admirable resemblance, and gave proofs
 “ in the most unequivocal manner of their judg-
 “ ment; but when manners coalesced with the
 “ organs of speech, which gave not the defects,
 “ but the beauties of a Crouch, George, Wrighten,
 “ Martyr, Sestini, and a Cargill, what pen can
 “ describe the congratulations that gave vent on
 “ the occasion! Yet Mrs. Wells had a reserve su-
 “ perior (if possible) to those given;—the almost
 “ inimitable Crawford and Siddons were to draw
 “ forth the sweetest test of applause—the heart-
 “ felt tear! The experiment was made; the
 “ effect of which was, involuntary bravos! from
 “ those who had the power to speak; from
 “ others the tear of sensibility! and the most

“incessant marks of approbation that ever rent
 “the walls of a theatre. Mrs. Wells wound up
 “the whole of her imitations by taking off her-
 “self in *Cowslip*—and let those who heard her
 “say in what manner, we decline the task.

“Mr. Palmer, on her retiring, came on, and
 “informed the audience, that with their per-
 “mission Mrs. Wells would attempt a repetition
 “of the same on [a future evening]. The re-
 “quest was granted with three plaudits.”——
Public Advertiser.

“A MOST overflowing house was the conse-
 “quence of Mrs. WELLS’ second appearance at
 “Palmer’s theatre. The lady introduced
 “an imitation of Mrs. Siddons, which had a
 “wonderfully fine effect, and was loudly encored
 “by the house. This imitation was the *apparent*
 “feeling of Mrs. Siddons, with the real sensi-
 “bility and the real beauty of Mrs. Wells. This

“ is not said in malice, nor in fulsome *praise*.
 “ It is a truth unbiassed by partiality, and a fact
 “ to which flattery gives no countenance.”——
Universal Register.

Giving my imitations so often had nearly cost me my life, the exertion being very great; and when Covent-garden opened, the following week, I had entirely lost my voice. An apology was made for me to the audience, but I came forward notwithstanding; and the great applause with which I was received made me forget my inability to speak loud, and I went through my part with their kind indulgence.

The various publications of the day have at different periods given me se-

veral occupations, and placed me in situations I never occupied ; but a magazine published by Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, in Paternoster-row, in the month of October, 1807, actually killed me outright, having prior to my dissolution put me under the protection of a Mr. Hewerdine. Who the gentleman is I cannot say, nor did I ever see or hear of such a person, but rather fancy he is the offspring of the editor's brain. I should even have forgiven him that breach of truth, as I should have looked upon it with contempt ; but he has exposed his ignorance so far as to say, in his absurd account of my life, that when playing Macheath I borrowed the clothes I wore from dif-

ferent people! The man must certainly have served his time to a tailor, to have made them fit me so well: however, he most assuredly cannot know any thing about a London theatre, when he could overlook the most necessary thing in it—A WARDROBE. I strongly recommend him, whoever he may be, in the next biography he writes from his *attic parlour*, to adhere more closely to the truth; or at least endeavour to find out the real facts, before he has the audacity to send them forth to the world: for when once so palpable a deviation from the real circumstance is known to have crept into such a publication, the conductors are often stigmatised for what,