



A N

E P I S T L E

A D D R E S S ' D T O

Sir T H O M A S H A N M E R,

O n h i s E D I T I O N o f

S H A K E S P E A R ' S W O R K S.

By Mr. W I L L I A M C O L L I N S.

S I R,

W H I L E born to bring the Muse's happier days,
A patriot's hand protects a poet's lays :
While nurs'd by you she sees her myrtles bloom,
Green and unwither'd o'er his honour'd tomb :
Excuse her doubts, if yet she fears to tell
What secret transports in her bosom swell :
With conscious awe she hears the critic's fame,
And blushing hides her wreath at Shakespear's name.

Hard

Hard was the lot those injur'd strains endur'd,
 Unown'd by Science, and by years obscur'd,
 Fair Fancy wept; and echoing sighs confess'd
 A fixt despair in ev'ry tuneful breast.

Not with more grief th' afflicted swains appear,
 When wintry winds deform the plenteous year;
 When ling'ring frosts the ruin'd seats invade
 Where Peace resorted, and the Graces play'd.

Each rising art by just gradation moves,
 Toil builds on toil, and age on age improves:
 The Muse alone unequal dealt her rage,
 And grac'd with noblest pomp her earliest stage.
 Preserv'd thro' time, the speaking scenes impart
 Each changeful wish of Phædra's tortur'd heart:
 Or paint the curse, that mark'd the ^d Theban's reign,
 A bed incestuous, and a father slain.
 With kind concern our pitying eyes o'erflow,
 Trace the sad tale, and own another's woe.

To Rome remov'd, with wit secure to please,
 The Comic sisters kept their native ease.
 With jealous fear declining Greece beheld
 Her own Meander's art almost excell'd!
 But ev'ry Muse essay'd to raise in vain
 Some labour'd rival of her Tragic strain;
 Ilyssus' laurels, tho' transferr'd with toil,
 Droop'd their fair leaves, nor knew th' unfriendly soil.

^d *The Œdipus of Sophocles.*

As arts expir'd, resistless Dulness rose ;
 Goths, priests, or Vandals,—all were Learning's foes.
 Till ^e Julius first recall'd each exil'd maid,
 And Cosmo own'd them in th' Etrurian shade :
 Then deeply skill'd in love's engaging theme,
 The soft Provencial pass'd to Arno's stream :
 With graceful ease the wanton lyre he strung,
 Sweet flow'd the lays—but love was all he sung.
 The gay description could not fail to move ;
 For, led by nature, all are friends to love.

But heav'n, still various in its works, decreed
 The perfect boast of time should last succeed.
 The beauteous union must appear at length,
 Of Tuscan fancy, and Athenian strength :
 One greater Muse Eliza's reign adorn,
 And ev'n a Shakespear to her fame be born !

Yet ah ! so bright her morning's opening ray,
 In vain our Britain hop'd an equal day !
 No second growth the western isle could bear,
 At once exhausted with too rich a year.
 Too nicely Johnson knew the critic's part ;
 Nature in him was almost lost in art.
 Of softer mold the gentle Fletcher came,
 The next in order, as the next in name.
 With pleas'd attention 'midst his scenes we find
 Each glowing thought, that warms the female mind ;

^e Julius II. *the immediate predecessor of Leo X.*

Each melting sigh, and ev'ry tender tear,
 The lover's wishes and the virgin's fear.
 His ^f ev'ry strain the Smiles and Graces own;
 But stronger Shakespear felt for Man alone:
 Drawn by his pen, our ruder passions stand
 Th' unrival'd picture of his early hand.

§ With gradual steps, and slow, exacter France
 Saw Art's fair empire o'er her shores advance:
 By length of toil a bright perfection knew,
 Correctly bold, and just in all she drew.
 Till late Corneille, with ⁿ Lucan's spirit fir'd,
 Breath'd the free strain, as Rome and He inspir'd:
 And classic judgment gain'd to sweet Racine
 The temp'rate strength of Maro's chaster line.

But wilder far the British laurel spread,
 And wreaths less artful crown our poet's head.
 Yet He alone to ev'ry scene could give
 Th' historian's truth, and bid the manners live.
 Wak'd at his call I view, with glad surprize,
 Majestic forms of mighty monarchs rise.

^f *Their characters are thus distinguished by Dryden.*

§ *About the time of Shakespear, the poet Hardy was in great repute in France. He wrote, according to Fontenelle, six hundred plays. The French poets after him applied themselves in general to the correct improvement of the stage, which was almost totally disregarded by those of our own country, Johnson excepted.*

ⁿ *The favourite author of the elder Corneille.*

There Henry's trumpets spread their loud alarms,
 And laurel'd Conquest waits her hero's arms.
 Here gentler Edward claims a pitying sigh,
 Scarce born to honours, and so soon to die!
 Yet shall thy throne, unhappy infant, bring
 No beam of comfort to the guilty king:
 The ⁱ time shall come, when Glo'ster's heart shall bleed
 In life's last hours, with horror of the deed:
 When dreary visions shall at last present
 Thy vengeful image in the midnight tent,
 Thy hand unseen the secret death shall bear,
 Blunt the weak sword, and break th' oppressive spear.

Where-e'er we turn, by Fancy charm'd, we find
 Some sweet illusion of the cheated mind.
 Oft, wild of wing, she calls the soul to rove
 With humbler nature, in the rural grove;
 Where swains contented own the quiet scene,
 And twilight fairies tread the circled green:
 Dress'd by her hand, the Woods and Vallies smile,
 And Spring diffusive decks th' *enchanted isle*.

O more than all in pow'rful genius blest,
 Come, take thine empire o'er the willing breast!
 Whate'er the wounds this youthful heart shall feel,
 Thy songs support me, and thy morals heal!

*i Tempus erit Turno, magno cum optaverit emptum
 Intactum pallanta, &c.*

There ev'ry thought the poet's warmth may raise,
 There native musick dwells in all the lays.
 O might some verse with happiest skill persuade
 Expressive Picture to adopt thine aid!
 What wond'rous draughts might rise from ev'ry page!
 What other Raphaels charm a distant age!

Methinks ev'n now I view some free design,
 Where breathing Nature lives in ev'ry line:
 Chaste and subdu'd the modest lights decay,
 Steal into shades, and mildly melt away.
 — And see, where ^k Anthony in tears approv'd,
 Guard the pale relicks of the chief he lov'd:
 Over the cold corse the warrior seems to bend,
 Deep sunk in grief, and mourns his murder'd friend!
 Still as they press, he calls on all around,
 Lifts the torn robe, and points the bleeding wound.

But ^l who is he, whose brows exalted bear
 A wrath impatient, and a fiercer air?
 Awake to all that injur'd worth can feel,
 On his own Rome he turns th' avenging steel.
 Yet shall not War's insatiate fury fall,
 (So heav'n ordains it) on the destin'd wall.
 See the fond mother 'midst the plaintive train
 Hung on his knees, and prostrate on the plain!

^k See the tragedy of Julius Cæsar.

^l Coriolanus. See Mr. Spence's dialogue on the Odyssæy.

Touch'd to the soul, in vain he strives to hide
 The son's affection, in the Roman's pride:
 O'er all the man conflicting passions rise,
Rage grasps the sword, while *Pity* melts the eyes.

Thus, gen'rous Critick, as thy Bard inspires,
 The sister Arts shall nurse their drooping fires;
 Each from his scenes her stores alternate bring,
 Blend the fair tints, or wake the vocal string:
 Those Sibyl-leaves, the sport of ev'ry wind,
 (For poets ever were a careless kind)
 By thee dispos'd, no farther toil demand,
 But, just to Nature, own thy forming hand.

So spread o'er Greece, th' harmonious whole unknown,
 Ev'n Homer's numbers charm'd by parts alone.
 Their own Ulysses scarce had wander'd more,
 By winds and water cast on ev'ry shore:
 When rais'd by Fate, some former HANMER join'd
 Each beauteous image of the boundless mind:
 And bade, like thee, his Athens ever claim
 A fond alliance with the Poet's name.

