comedy, from Arioſto, near thirty years before any of Shakeſpeare’s were printed.

The people however ſtill retained a reliſh for their old myſteries and moralities, and the popular dramatic poets ſeem to have made them their models. The graver sort of mo­ralities appear to have given birth to our modern tragedy ; as our comedy evidently took its riſe from the lighter inter­ludes of that kind. And as moſt of theſe pieces contain an abſurd mixture of religion and buffoonery, an eminent critic has well deduced from thence the origin of our unnatural tragi-comedies. Even after the people had been accuſtomed to tragedies and comedies, moralities ſtill kept their ground. One of them, intitled *The New Custom,* was printed ſo late as 1573. At length they assumed the name of *maſques,* and, with ſome claſſical improvements, became in the two following reigns the favourite entertainments of the court.

As for the old myſteries, which ceaſed to be acted after the reformation, they ſeem to have given riſe to a third ſpecies of ſtage exhibition ; which, though now confounded with tragedy or comedy, were by our firſt dramatic writers conſidered as quite diſtinct from them both : theſe were hiſtorical plays, or hiſtories ; a ſpecies of dramatic writing which reſembled the old myſteries in repreſenting a ſeries of hiſtorical events ſimply in the order of time in which they happened, without any regard to the three great unities. Theſe pieces ſeem to differ from tragedy just as much as hiſtorical poems do from epic : as the Pharſalia does from the AEneid. What might contribute to make dramatic poetry take this turn was, that ſoon after the myſteries ceaſed to be exhibited, there was publiſhed a large collection ot poetical narratives, called *the Mirror for Magistrates,* where­in a great number of the moſt eminent characters in Engliſh hiſtory are drawn relating their own misfortunes. This book was popular and of a dramatic caſt ; and therefore, as an elegant writer has well obſerved, might have its influence in producing hiſtoric plays. Theſe narratives probably furniſhed the ſubjects, and the ancient myſteries ſuggeſted the plan.

That our old writers conſidered hiſtorical plays as ſomewhat diſtinct from tragedy and comedy, appears from numberless passages of their works. “ Of late days (says Stow in his Survey of London), inſtead of thoſe ſtage plays have been uſed comedies, tragedies, interludes, and hiſtories, both true and fained.” Beaumont and Fletcher, in the prologue to the *Captain,* say,

"This is nor comedy, nor tragedy,

“ Nor history.”

Polonius in *Hamlet* commends the actors as the beſt in the world, either for tragedie, comedie, hiſtorie, paſtorall, &c. And Shakeſpeare’s friends, Heminge and Condell, in the firſt follio edition of his plays, in 1623, have not only intitled their book “ Mr William Shakeſpeare’s Comedies, Hiſtories, and Tragedies,” but, in their table of contents, have arranged them under thoſe three several heads ; pla­cing in the claſs of hiſtories, “ King John, Richard II. Henry IV. 2 pts, Henry V. Henry VI. 3 pts, Richard III. and Henry VIII.”

This diſtinction deserves the attention of the critics : for if it be the firſt canon of sound criticiſm to examine any work by thoſe rules the author prescribed for his firſt obſervance ; then we ought to try Shakeſpeare’s hiſtories by the general laws of tragedy and comedy. Whether the rule itſelf be vicious or not, is another inquiry ; but certainly we ought to examine a work only by thoſe principles ac­cording to which it was compoſed. This would save much impertinent criticiſm.

Not fewer than 19 playhouſes had been opened before the year 1633, when Prynne publiſhed his *Histriοmastix.* From this writer we learn that tobacco, wine, and beer, were in thoſe days the usual accommodations in the theatre, as now at Sadlers Wells. With regard to the ancient prices of admiſſion, the playhouſe called the *Hope* had five different priced seats, from ſixpence to half-a-crown. Some houſes had penny benches. The two-penny gallery is mentioned in the prologue to Beaumont and Fletcher’s *Woman Hater ;* and ſeats of threepence and a groat in the paſſage of Prynne laſt referred to. But the general price of what is now called the *Pit* ſeems to have been a ſhilling. The time of exhibition was early in the afternoon, their plays being ge­nerally acted by day light. All female parts were performed by men, no actress being ever ſeen on the public ſtage before the civil wars. And as for the playhouſe furniture and ornaments, they had no othcr ſcenes nor decorations of the ſtage, but only old tapeſtry, and the ſtage ſtrewed with ruſhes, with habits accordingly ; as we are assured in a ſhort Diſcourse on the Engliſh Stage, ſubjoined to Flecknoe’s *Love’s-Kingdom, 1674,* 12mo.

@@(b) For the ſtate of the theatre during the time of Shakeſpeare, ſee Playhouse ; where a full account of it is given from the late valuable edition of our illuſtrious poet’s works by Mr Malone. During the whole reign of James I. the theatre was in great proſperity and reputation : dramatic authors abounded, and every year produced a number of new plays ; it became a faſhion for the nobility to celebrate their weddings, birthdays, and other occaſions of rejoicing, with maſques and interludes, which were exhibited with ſurpriſing expence ; our great architect, Inigo Jones, being frequently employed to furniſh decorations, with all the lux­uriance of his invention and magnificence of his art. The king and his lords, and the queen and her ladies, frequently performed in theſe maſques at court, and the nobility at their private houſes ; nor was any public entertainment thought complete without them. This taſte for theatrical entertain­ments continued during great part of the reign of king Charles the firſt ; but, in the year 1633, it began to be opposed by the Puritans from the preſs ; and the troubles that loon after followed entirely ſuspended them till the reſtora- tion of king Charles the second in 1660.

The king, at his reſtoration, granted two patents, one to Henry Killigrew, Eſq; and the other to Sir William Davenant, and their heirs and aſſigns, for forming two di­ſtinct companies of comedians. Killigrew’s were called the *King's Servants,* and Davenant’s the *Duke's Company.* About ten of the company called the *King's Servants* were on the royal houſehold eſtabliſhment, having each ten yards of scarlet cloth, with a proper quantity of lace allowed them for liveries ; and in their warrants from the lord chamberlain they were ſtyled *gentlemen of the great chamber.*

Till this time no woman had been ſeen upon the Engliſh ſtage, the characters of women having always been performed by boys, or young men of an effeminate aſpect, which pro-

@@@(b) We have been anxious to give as full an account of the ancient Engliſh drama as we could : we muſt not omit, however, to inform our readers what Mr Malone ſays of the old plays, *viz.* that not one play publiſhed before 1592 will bear a ſecond reading ; and that excluſive of myſteries, moralities, and tranſlations, there are but 34 pieces extant which were publiſhed before that period.