

BX
8684.3
.L17p

B.Y.U.
LIBRARY

A PLAY-HOUSE.

A PLAY-HOUSE

BEING A SKETCH
IN THREE SHORT LETTERS.
REMINISCENCES
OF THE SCENE-PAINTER'S GALLERY:
WITH GLIMPSES OF THE PIONEERS
AND A FEW NOTABLES.
SIDELIGHTS UPON PAST VOTARIES OF
THÁLIA, CLIO, AND MELPOMÉNE.



ALFRED LAMBOURNE.

175517

Embellishments by

George M. Ottinger

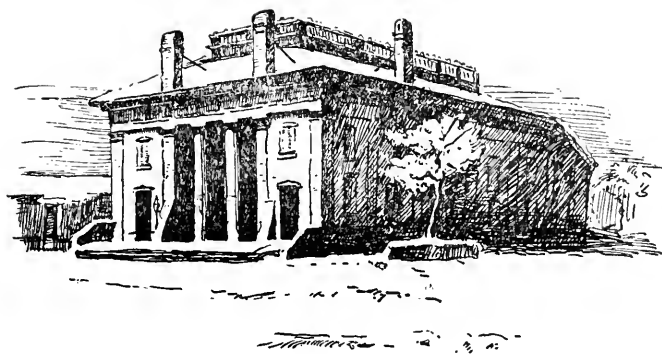
James T. Harwood

Lee Greene Richards

Mahonri M. Young

“The play’s the thing
Wherein I’ll Catch the Conscience of the King.”

“There are more things in heaven and earth,
Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”



A PLAY-HOUSE

I

“Something is it which thou hast lost,
Some pleasure from thine early years?”

THE Play-House concerning which I have promised to write is one with an exceptional history. In certain ways one could not name its like. It is a place of amusement, a theatre in every meaning of the word; from its very beginning all classes of plays were put upon its boards

—classical, romantic, domestic, melo-dramatic, tragical, farcical, and yet it was opened with prayer. Its every adobe, board and nail was blessed by special invocation. The early settlers of New England would have looked upon it as an institution of the devil, and yet it was built by religious pioneers. It was erected by a people who had come over seas and plains and mountains, and through a country infested with savages and wild beasts, and into what had been formerly described as a region where the white man could not dwell, and this to establish a new commonwealth in the western wilderness.

A Puritan Play-House, if that combination be possible, and conducted under religious censorship. It would, indeed, have appeared strange unto the old dramatists, to those whose plays were presented therein. I mean to Ben Jonson, Massinger, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Shakespeare, and, for that matter, the later ones, Goldsmith, Bulwer, and Victor Hugo. Never in the world's history, I may repeat, was there such another theatre; one existing and supported, I mean, under like conditions. Not here the place

to analyze, to expound, or to question, the faith of the people who built it. They were believers in the beneficent potency of the drama. Their faith in its power for good took the shape of the Play-House of which I write.

This building I first looked upon one autumn day, in the eighteen hundred and sixties. The September sun was declining over a large, wide valley, with great mountains on either side; in the valley, at its northern end, was a new and growing city—"The City of the Saints," and its streets and houses were almost hidden by the trees of many orchards, which made an oasis of brighter green amid the sage-gray sadness of the open valley. And in the midst of the green, above the trees, one could see as he came out of a canyon mouth and across the eastern benchland, a white, oblong building. It was this Play-House. But beyond this building, at one point on the road appearing directly above it, one could also see a strange, huge curve. This, as I afterwards learned, was the just-erected central arches of the Big New Tabernacle. Thus soon was a fact forced upon my notice; thus I was

compelled, as it were, to see a peculiarity of thought and purpose in the erectors of those two buildings—the House of Pleasure and the House of Worship—the relationship between Church and Stage.

With the then existing conditions, this theatre might be said to have been out of all proportion with its surroundings. No other building in the western Mecca was so imposing. It was the only edifice in which art and luxury were shown. The Temple walls were then but even with the ground, the Council House, the City Hall, the then existent Tabernacle, were mean in comparison with the Play-House. How chaste, how severe, and yet how rich was the scheme of decoration in its auditorium! I admired the combination of white, pale green, and gold, as it then existed, upon the ceiling and walls, and this contrasted with the deep scarlet of the plush-lined seats. How unlike were the latter to the hard wooden benches in the Little Tabernacle! Once in Salem, as I stood by the Witch-House, and on Gallows Hill, I tried to imagine correctly the early New England Puritan. Did I do so? Per-

haps no more correctly than, in the future, others will imagine those western pioneers who built this Play-House.

It is a bit of subtle flattery, my friend, when one is asked to bring back from the past aught concerning one's self or of others seen through his eyes. Once in our lives we listen to far-away voices—those that come from the Land of That-Which-Is-to-Be, and those that come from the Land-That-Has-Been. Look through my eyes you must, think through my brain you shall, and afterwards you may swing as wide a circle around my vision and thought as you will.

In my mind's eye, I do not see the Play-House, as it now is, overlooked by buildings higher than itself, but as the structure was when its bulk entirely dominated all that was around it. How calmly imposing it used to appear, how grandly massive it showed in the twilight, or when the moonlight was falling upon its white walls! I, for one, could not go from home to the Play-House without passing through and inhaling the odor of the Artemisia and the sun-flower. That

odor is mixed up in my mind with the first-seeing of many a great play. But how can I bring back to your understanding those times? How suggest the indefinable something that then existed—out amid the semi-solitude, the isolation? How am I to recall the humorous earnestness, the fineness or roughness of fibre, the pathetic side, the laughing determination of religious pioneer life as associated with a theatre? Yet such are all mixed up, again, with my memories of the Play-House.

Swing a circle around the Play-House—I mean as it was in those early days; swing a circle of hundreds, of thousands of miles, and how unique it was! Men who assisted in the building of that theatre acted upon its stage. That was the strong time of the legitimate drama. Even the people in the isolated west became connoisseurs. In this particular Play-House, people would go to the performance not to see a new play, but to see some new actor or actress in the old parts. Each star, man or woman, as they stepped upon the boards, was tested by the acting of those who had gone before. Damon and

Pythias, Pizzaro, Virginius, The Duke's Motto, The Man with the Iron Mask, and the like plays, not to mention those of the Bard of Avon, were those in which the new-comers were held to the



The Eagle Gate, Moonlight

lines. How many times in that Play-House did I not see Shakespeare's masterpiece? How many actors did I not see play Hamlet? Pouncefort, Lyne, Adams, Kean, McCullough, Daven-

port, Miss Evans, Chaplin, Barrett, Booth—that is not the half.

The greater number of actors and actresses who belonged to the regular stock-company of the Play-House, and who supported the stars, had crossed the plains and mountains in ox or mule trains, and one, I believe, in a Hand-Cart Company. And who were their critics? Men and women who had done the same. There was a peculiar sympathy between those who acted upon the stage and those who comprised their audience. Many a man who watched the play at night, had done the roughest of pioneer work during the day. Perhaps he had “grubbed sage” for an order for a theatre ticket; perhaps he had toiled in the fields, irrigated an orchard, or dug on a water-ditch. Perhaps he had helped at buiding a saw-mill, or at blazing a trail up to the mountain pines. It may be that he had brought down a load of logs and stood, thereafter, for many hours in rain or shine, in the wood-yard opposite to the Play-House, until he had sold that load of fire-wood, and the pay that he received for it might have partly been used for

his theatre admission fee. There was, indeed, a strange bond existing between the stage and the auditorium. All were friends; they would meet in daily labor, they would dance together, they might bear "their testimony" in the same meeting-house or listen to the same sermon on the coming Sunday. Every actor was "Brother;" every actress was "Sister." Their salaries were partly paid in that which had been received by their Church as religious tithes. The man who guffawed at the comedian might talk with him on the morrow, whilst he chiselled granite on the Temple Square. Another who watched the tragedian might visit him during the coming week in the capacity of "Teacher." Those who sympathized with the hero and heroine of the play, might soon meet them in the social intercourse of a "Surprise Party," and they might tell how they had "Crossed the Plains" in the same "Company." All were one big family, Thespians and audience, performers and watchers. And more than this, each and every actor was liable to be "Called on a Mission," to Europe or to "the States." Again, each and every actor was liable

to become a Church Official, and each and every one of the actresses to become a worker in the "Relief Society." On the morrow, perhaps, all would look with the same emotions on the great, watchful mountains, and take a like interest in the planting of trees and vines, or, it may be, the setting out of a flower-garden. All were alike interested in bringing about that miracle—when the desert should blossom as the rose.

Do you think that I put it too strongly, my friend? Not in the least. Certain of these facts justify me in the claim that this Play-House and that theatrical organization were unmatched by any other in the world.

There are two modes of thought, are there not, my friend?—to make the simple complex, and the complex simple. It is the latter mode that I would follow, and yet my reminiscences of the Play-House are so intricate that it is somewhat a difficult task. They make but a piece of autobiography, and I would not have too much of the personal creep into this letter. That is valueless, save as it might be a drop in the great

ocean of human life. To the individual, of course, the life experience is the all in all, but my problem now is not to have self intrude too much into my thought, so that you, my friend, obtain through my writing a clear view of the Play-House as it was, and, as I said before, the times and the lives of the people who were around it.

These are among the thoughts: I cannot separate them from the Play-House, the coming of the locusts, the Three Days' Military Drill—one of the then two lessees of the theatre was an Adjutant General, and the other a member of Congress,—and the coming of the Railroad, too, when the dream of Daniel Webster had been fulfilled—"There lies the East, there lies India," and across the Play-House front was a banner inscribed with the legend, "The East and West United with Iron Bands." These and the morning and evening guns from Fort Douglas on the hill, and the great, massive-wheeled carts that used to go past the theatre door, drawn by slow-paced oxen, and with huge squares of granite, fastened by ponderous chains, swinging beneath the axle-beams. And even of the quarries from

which these great rocks came, the monstrous boulders, rounded by the elements, toned by the suns of centuries, and lying where roared the mountain streams, all ready to be split into blocks and carved, and built into the Temple walls. "Your town has changed its character." These words were spoken by the English actor Couldock, when he had stepped down, on his last tour of the West, not from a mail-coach, but from a railway carriage. He missed that which I would recall. Couldock missed and lamented for the clear, mountain waters that once rippled through the streets, the orchards and quaint gardens, and, with these lacking, he also missed a certain quality in the people themselves. Mingled with my memories of the Play-House, the tragedy and comedy of human life, is the fragrance of such homely flowers as the Sweet William and the common pink, and of sweet briar and mignonette.

To tell of the early days when this Play-House was built would require a trenchant pen. The dominant note is religious faith. Orthodox or heterodox, we will not debate about that, my

friend. They have the wild, impressive background of yet unconquered nature, these and yet sterile valleys, untrodden canyons, and peaks unscaled. The surrounding territories have this, but without the central note, the concrete form. Other Play-Houses that were built in this western land were conducted by "theatrical people." But, as I have said, with this one it was different. In the Green Room of this theatre one could often hear a recital of religious "Experiences," and conversations about the Sermons and "Teachings" at "Conference," and among the actors there were those who possessed the gift of healing by the "Laying on of hands." Match me these facts in the history of any other Play-House!

Macbeth—Certainly the play is one to stir the imagination of a boy! Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Duncan, Banquo, Fleance, Macduff, Hecate the Apparitions, the Witches! How it seized upon one! On that night on which I first attended a Shakespearean play a terrific storm burst over this now historic theatre; the crashes

of thunder made the house fairly rock. But this is what I more especially intended to tell; on that same night, I received another powerful object lesson, I mean in that harmonious working of church and stage.

“To the echo, to the echo, to the echo
Of some hollow hill.”

Yes, those grotesque figures upon the stage were indeed witch-like, but later, when the curtain rolled down, I well remember that they were not really witches.

“How beautiful upon the mountains.”

On that Saturday night, they were the creatures of Shakespeare's brain; but I had heard them sing on the Sunday before, raising their voices in praise and thanksgiving, for then they were the Tabernacle Choir.

It is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous. It is true, as one returned from the Play-House on that night, there might have been read

—posted on the Eagle Gate—and by the light of the storm-cleared moon, a notice of reward issued by the Governor of the Territory, for the apprehension of a murderer. It is true that the “star” who played Macbeth died the proprietor of a Japanese tea-garden. It is true that I have read, cut in the marble above the one who played Lady Macbeth, these lines:

“Fear no more the heat o’ the sun
Nor the furious winter rages.
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone and ta’en thy wages.”

But it is true, also, that the terrible Hecate died as a high Church official. But this is also true, that before that time arrived he handed me out, through an opening in the upper half of the Tithing Office basement door, so many pounds of meat, for which my “order” entitled me. It is also true that I afterwards talked with Macduff and Banquo about the allowance of potatoes that were rightfully mine, and it is true, again, that Lady Macbeth’s gentlewoman once advised me

to hurry with my tin pail to the Tithing Office Produce Store, as she believed that the officials there were about to distribute a cask of molasses.

A friend of mine, a dear old citizen, whom I met on the street the other day, told me that he had just been to visit the place where he had made love and proposed to his wife. Sensible man! It is sometimes wise to look along the backward road—

But what has this to do with my remembrances of the Play-House?



The Scene-Painters' Gallery

II

“But O for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still.”

ARE these letters official? Not in any way.
They are but individual. You asked for
thoughts, my friend. Then read between the lines.

Thus you may find something of the loves, the hopes, the toils, the fears, the ambitions, the mistakes, the disappointments, the triumphs, of the Pioneers. I have reason, sometimes, to think of my school-room; of the ethics I was taught upon the Scene-Painter's Gallery of the Play-House that I laud.

"The thing done avails," said Landor, "and not what is said about it." Being of that same opinion, I have always, even around the Play-House, taken a greater interest in the happenings, those that affected real lives, and helped to shape events, than in the plays themselves. I have taken more interest in actual men than in imaginary men. Once I was asked to write a romance, characters and plot to be taken from the material around me. But no, I felt myself too close. Yet I might have drawn the portraits of men and women whom I met in the Play-House. "The half-hour! The half-hour!" Between that warning of the bell-boy, and the rising of the curtain, one could have picked them out. But my

pen was not for hire. The romance was never written.

Upon the Scene-Painter's Gallery I digested strong food. Before reaching my twenty-first birthday, well known to me were Thalia, Cleo and Melpomene. There I looked upon the ludicrous and the tragic, and often they were blended, for Thalia will not always make her exit when enters Melpomene. And there I first learned of many events of world interest, and such as I knew that Clio would consider as being worthy of record. There, too, as a boy, I watched friendships that ripened into love; there I saw how "the course of true love never did run smooth." Upon the Scene-Painter's Gallery began acquaintance that ended in wedded life, and there, from love, a life went out, self-slaughtered. There one could make comparisons between what he had learned of the social experiment of "Equality" at Brook Farm, in Massachusetts, and the religious experiment, the "Order of Enoch," in this western land. It was on the Scene-Painter's Gallery that I digested the sermons—

“The New Jerusalem,” “Revelation,” and “The Resurrection,” the first by Apostle Orson Pratt, the two latter by the President of the Mormon Church, Brigham Young. There I listened to or took part in debates upon the Immortality of the Soul; and once, through its northern windows, there came a white mist and an odor of burning flesh. It was from a specially constructed cremation furnace, built at his own request, and where crumbled away the body of one who had been my friend—physician, surgeon, geologist, botanist, traveler and sceptic—the man who had first spoken the word to me, Nirvana.

Upon the Scene-Painter’s Gallery, I looked upon these people and listened to their voices: the Hon. Mrs. Yelverton; the younger Charles Dickens; Oscar Wilde, in his mediæval suit; Stephen Masset; George Francis Train; Tennie C. Clafin and Victoria C. Woodhull, of Woman’s Rights fame; the wonderful but unfortunate elocutionist Walter Montgomery; Theodore Tilton; the Medium, Anna Eva Fay; Col. Robert G. Ingersoll; the temperance workers, Charles Bright and John B. Gough; the Evangelists, Moody and

Sankey; among divines, the Rev. Joseph Cook, of Boston Monday Lectures; De Witt Talmage and Henry Ward Beecher; and besides these, the English divine and writer Charles Kingsley, author of *Hypatia* and *Westward Ho!*

But as I write these lines, I realize that even now, over some of the once famous names, time is beginning to draw a veil.

Indeed, a place for thought was the Scene-Painter's Gallery. How gloomy it was of a rainy autumn or a winter's afternoon! On a "Dark Night," if the Scene-Painter worked, what strange shadows were cast upon the walls from the beams of the suspended coal-oil lamps! How black were the stairs leading to it from the Barber Shop below! On play-nights one worked in a blaze of light, keeping time with his brush-strokes to the sound of music or dancing feet. But the Barber Shop, what was that? Why, my friend, it was one of the many features that once made the historic theatre so complete. In the "early days," the Play-House was as well equipped for all demands as is an ocean-going ship. Let us imagine ourselves there for an hour,

and look again upon some of those who lived in the vanished time.

The years have rolled backward, the snow is falling, there is spread a mantle of white over the "City of the Saints." They shake the snow from their shoulders, those who come through the theatre side-door. "A New Way to Pay Old Debts,"—why, this is to be a Benefit Night. No doubt the attendance will be large. The persons whom we will look upon live in the Territory of Utah, but they hope that some day it will be the State of Deseret. First there are door-keepers, stage-hands, property-men, musicians, actors, actresses. But others whom we will see are civic dignitaries and high officials of the Church, for many of these come in at the Play-House side-door. Many of these, too, are owners of stalls, benches, I should say, and the social rank which the theatre holds makes them not averse to certain prerogatives. The watchman, he who sits implacable as fate at the private entrance, he knows them all. He knows each one's status;

he knows the rights or the accorded privileges of all those who come to the theatre side-door.

The opposites are here tonight. The Scene-Painter, like others, lingers in the Barber-Shop to listen to, or to exchange a word with, those who will pass through. The actor who is to impersonate Sir Giles Overreach is dressed for the part. He re-enters the Barber-Shop for a few moments and speaks to the premier danseuse who has just entered. The latter will not take part in the play tonight; but will go to her seat in the parquette stall. She has bright, merry eyes and an infectious laugh. Angels were once seen to watch, so the writer was told by the one who claimed to have seen them, a performance in the theatre. They stood at the base of the proscenium arch. They must have been Puritan angels, for they objected to a shortness of skirts. When the danseuse appeared, in spite of all her fairness, her skill and grace, the angels were seen to weep.

Now there enters the Barber-Shop a notable. He is a large and very portly man. He has

a rugged face, a face very much like, I should imagine from Reynolds' portrait, unto that of Doctor Johnson, he whom Boswell has written to fame. He is the Church Historian; he is a Counselor, too; he was the man who first planted a potato in all this surrounding land. The Scene-Painter has heard him preach. It was in the Tabernacle last Sunday, and the sermon was very like the man. The Scene-Painter has heard him "speak," too, in the Bowery, under the roof of gathered tree-branches upon the Temple Square. The Historian and Counselor spoke in praise of peace. That was on the anniversary of Pioneer Day—July 24—and he deprecated in the celebration the firing of cannon. He loved the stillness of the mountain valleys, he did not like to hear it thus broken, the noise reminded him too much of the bells of Babylon. But the sermon was in the Little Tabernacle, that building soon to be removed, the one with the sunburst above the door, and which is partly below the ground, and to reach whose floor one descends a flight of steps.

This appears to be a night of "Firsts." Here is

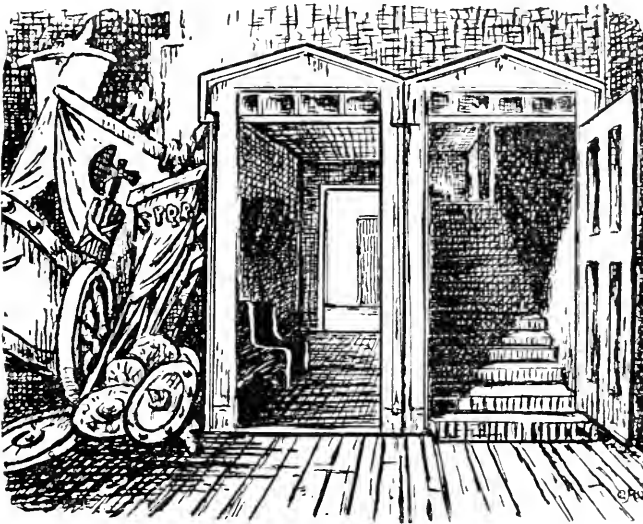
a young lady who takes the leading female role in the play. She is charming, vivacious, petite. There are young men among the assembling audience who will fall in love with her tonight. She has this distinction, also, she was the first female child born in this mountain valley. Some day, however, her daughter is to win a much wider fame as an actress. Her name will shine brightly through all the theatrical world.

Speed my pen! Who is at the side-door but "Crazy Bob?" He asks for the Scene-Painter. The time has come, he says, to paint "the banner." There is a star within his brain, the madman tells. He has visions of consuming fire. Like Mucklewrath, he preaches. Of money, silver or gold, "Crazy Bob" has none. He cannot pay thus for the service which he asks the Scene-Painter to perform. But in return for the painting of the banner, he will give a thousand fold. The emblazoned banner of silk he will carry as he marches at the head of his procession—the meek, the lowly, and the pure in heart. Ah! and he will plead for the soul of the Scene-Painter when the proper time shall come. Grand

old madman, with his guidance, with his password, I shall go triumphant through the Gates of Heaven.

The demented one who called for the Scene-Painter at the private door, was large of stature, a man of wondrous strength, and of mighty voice, and with that bright light in his eye, one would fear to provoke his ire. But now there passes through the Barber-Shop a man who in size is a dwarf. He is slightly hump-backed, his face is pale, he is fragile, he looks downward as he walks. He is the bill-poster of the house. Talk to this man in public, and he is gentle, he is humble. But talk to him in private, touch him on this one subject, and his eye will burn as flame, his voice will be shrill, as though he writhed in pain. What subject? Hopeless love. Ah! there is a heart in that misshapen body. Aye, and by the rood, the one whom he loves is at this very moment out in the theatre audience. She is in her father's private box. She is a blonde, she has eyes of blue, and hair of gold. Indeed, her father is very important. Under the auditorium, in the southeastern corner of the

Play-House, the dwarf is allowed a room. There he has sacred relics, there he has bits of wearing apparel, there he has trinkets, a program that her hand has touched. "O I know what I am," he will



The Barber-Shop

sometimes say to the Scene-Painter, "but may I not worship? And in the coming world, shall I be thus?" Poor dwarf! Then there are in reality such beings as that, such beings, I mean, as Quasimodo? Yes, this dwarf can love as blindly,

as hopelessly, as did *The Bell-Ringer of Notre Dame*.

O my friend, what a mystery is life, how strange are the meeting, the parting of its ways! And the human heart? Does not each individual take away with him when he departs this life something of his times as well as of himself; something that belongs to his times as well as to himself alone?

Certainly, did he but know, the young Scene-Painter would look with wondering interest at the three men who now pass through the Barber-Shop. But he is thinking not of the future now, but of the passing moments. Two of the men are not attaches of the house in any way, but the third person conducts tonight the theatre orchestra. The first one is called "Judge." A time is to come when his son will be manager of the House. A day will dawn, too, when for the Scene-Painter he will perform the marriage ceremony. The second person shall one day be called "The Blind Poet." He is not unknown to the Scene-Painter, for in his luxurious home the latter first ate bread in this land, and that bread

was made from wheat that was raised from the soil of "Zion." This man, to alleviate a deep sorrow, will write some beautiful verses, "Rest; on the Hillside, rest." The orchestra leader will set beautiful music, a plaintive melody, to the beautiful words, and they will yet be sung over the mortal remains of tens of thousands. Indeed, the words and music will be sung over the wife that is to be, of the Scene-Painter when she, alas, lies dead. The Poet and the Scene-Painter shall yet speak together of this, that is, when the Poet is poor, when the now brown, glossy locks are white as snow, when his eyes are still of a wonderful blue—but, sightless. And tears shall stream down the cheeks of the blind poet; and he shall say in a tremulous voice, "Ah, there in the love of the people; I am secure."

But the other, the slightly-built musician, he with the dark eye and hair, and the quick, nervous gait? It will be his task, too, to compose the Funeral Hymn of the leader, Brigham Young.

Brigham Young, that is his voice, and it is a voice slow, measured, filled with an infinitude of self-will and determination. As this man passes

through the Barber-Shop, all other voices are stilled, and all ears are strained to hear what the President may say. It is a Yankee voice, too; with all its distinctiveness, there is no mistaking this fact. By his side walks a "Counselor," and his son will be the first Governor of the future State. Soon the word will go from dressing-room to dressing-room and everywhere upon the stage that the "Big Chief" has come tonight. Each actor and actress will do their best. Such was always the case when the President was in his box.

But the audience has become impatient; it calls for the play. Perhaps there is at this moment a tall boy among the "gallery gods," who is vociferous as the others. If so, he has gained his admission into the Play-House by the carrying of water from a well, a block away, and then up the steep and winding stairs that lead to the upper circle. I wonder if he imagines that some day he will be President of the Dramatic Association? The orchestra plays; "A New Way to Pay Old Debts" begins. The Scene-Painter goes up to his gallery to work. Perhaps he may leave it

for a few moments to watch, from the vantage place of "the flies," some focal point in the play; perhaps at some tender passage, some love speech, he might feel the repressure of a hand in his—

"Look into thine own heart," says the proverb, "if thou wouldst look into the hearts of others."

To write about the Play-House, which is my subject, and not to make Brigham Young the central thought, would be to use the oft-used simile, like the play of Hamlet with the part of Hamlet left out. He caused this theatre to be built; with the Play-House, and with the dance, he counterbalanced the effect of isolation and of the stern nature around them, upon the "Peculiar People." The then President of the Church, and Governor of the Territory, was once styled "The Last of the Puritans." He was, indeed, singularly like, and yet unlike, those who came across seas in the Mayflower; he was singularly like, yet unlike, that one to whom he has been compared, the Lord Protector of England, Oliver Cromwell.

In him there was the blend—but I leave analysis to others.

It was upon the Scene-Painter's Gallery that the writer first met Brigham Young. It was of a late afternoon in autumn; the rehearsal for that night's play was over, the Scene-Painter's brush was moving rapidly upon the broad spread of canvas before him and he thought himself alone. Anon was heard the sound of firm, yet almost inaudible footsteps upon the gallery stairs. Then the maker appeared, and it was the President, the great Mormon leader. Unheralded he had come upon a tour of inspection. Brigham Young was famed for completeness; he possessed a genius for details. Carefully the President examined each water-tank, each barrel of salt. He appeared to think that day of the Play-House's danger from fire. He broke, with the end of his gold-headed cane, the thick crusts that had formed over the tops in the barrels of salt. I watched him shake his head and compress his lips; there came a frown upon his face. His orders for safety, one could see, had been neglected, he did a labor which should have been

remembered and performed by others. No doubt someone would be reprimanded. I have always believed that during the handshake that came a few minutes later, that the "Moses of the West" "sized me up," as we are wont to say, spiritually, mentally and physically, with those steady, keen and searching eyes.

Henry Ward Beecher was an accomplished actor. We know with what startling effect he once impersonated a slave-dealer in Plymouth Church. Brigham Young was a wonderful mimic! I had both seen and listened to his skill as an actor. It was in the Tabernacle, during his Conference sermons. None could use better the whip of satire; none could better bring ridicule or antipathy to the one of his dislike. None had greater personal magnetism. Often his congregation laughed and almost shed tears in a breath. How often I had heard men and women exclaim as one voice, "Amen!" But now these two men who could be so impassioned, were passive. I mean at the time when I beheld them meet on the Play-House stage. Henry Ward Beecher, the scholar, the famous divine and man of

thought of the East; Brigham Young, that famous leader, the man of action of the West—for a moment they looked into each other's eyes, ere they shook hands, and the President passed on to the entrance of his box. In build, the men appeared almost as twin brothers; Beecher's face, however, was the more pleasant of the two. There was upon it something more of benevolence; something more kindly and paternal, the more emotional. Brigham Young's face was the more reserved in expression, the more stern, the more masterful, it showed greater power. But the men, otherwise, were much alike.

Certainly I consider it one of the most interesting sights that I ever beheld. But one might just as well have attempted to solve the riddle of the sphinx, as to decipher at that moment from the faces of those two great men what were their thoughts, what was their impression of each other.

How difficult it is to be in the first class, in the first class as a man, I mean. When the writer used to tell the following little anecdote verbally,

he used to spice it with rather a malicious pleasure, perhaps, with the names of the second and third-class men. But now they shall be left out. It may be that they are dead, and if yet living, they cannot play the game of little autocrats as once they did!

“The Big Picnic,” as pioneers remember, was held at the head of a Canyon in the Wasatch Mountains. The pine is yet standing, trimmed of its upper branches, of course, that served as a flag-pole on these occasions. One day, as the string of vehicles that brought back the picnic party at the end of the week was winding its way down the canyon road, it so happened that there was, also, trudging his way homeward, a poor wood-cutter, a logger, a man loaded down with his blankets, his pots and kettles, and making his way but wearily, through the hot dust of the canyon road. Nothing remarkable about that—but wait! Mr. Second-Class Man went by; Mr. Third Class-Man went by. Did either of them stop to take up his poor “brother”? No. Neither one nor the other offered to carry along his road

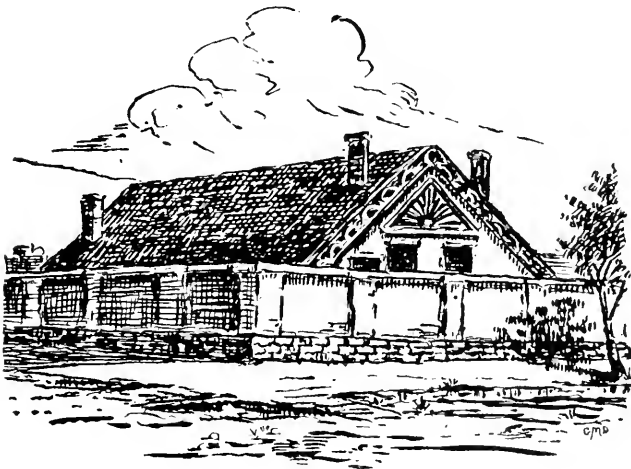
the poor, tired wayfarer. Only there was more dust upon him than there was before. Mr. President's carriage went by. No! that is wrong. Mr. President's Carriage did not go by. The man who had been unnoticed or ignored by the many, was taken up by the one. The President of the Church, the Governor, the Trustee-in-Trust, and what not, gave a place to the logger, and he was carried homeward, deposited at his very door.

Not much of an anecdote after all, my friend. Yet I am inclined to believe with Thomas Carlyle. I believe that one such action recorded reveals to us more, a man who once lived, than a thousand glittering generalities.

And the funeral of Brigham Young? It is impossible for me to disassociate that event from my memory of the Play-House. How hushed and still was the place that day! The great man's presence seemed everywhere. On the Scene-Painter's Gallery there were the idle brushes, there lay dry the brilliant colors on the big palette. The chrome, the vermilion, the cobalt; how they shone! The white, the black, how sym-

bolic they were! One could hear from the Scene-Painter's Gallery, the footsteps of the gathering crowds upon the streets.

In the Tabernacle, the Scene-Painter listened



The Little Tabernacle

to the rolling of the organ, the singing of the choir, and the sermons, too. He stood not twenty feet away when the massive casket was lowered into the open tomb. Then, again, after the crowds that followed on foot behind the hearse, the interment in the little private cem-

etry, the roped streets, the passing of country vehicles that had come from afar; how still the theatre was! In the Tabernacle was the vacant seat, there was the vacant seat in the theatre. Brigham Young, President of the Church, Prophet, Seer and Revelator, Pioneer, Governor, President of the Deseret Bank, the Zion's Co-operative Mercantile Institution, builder of the Play-House, patron of the drama—there it was!

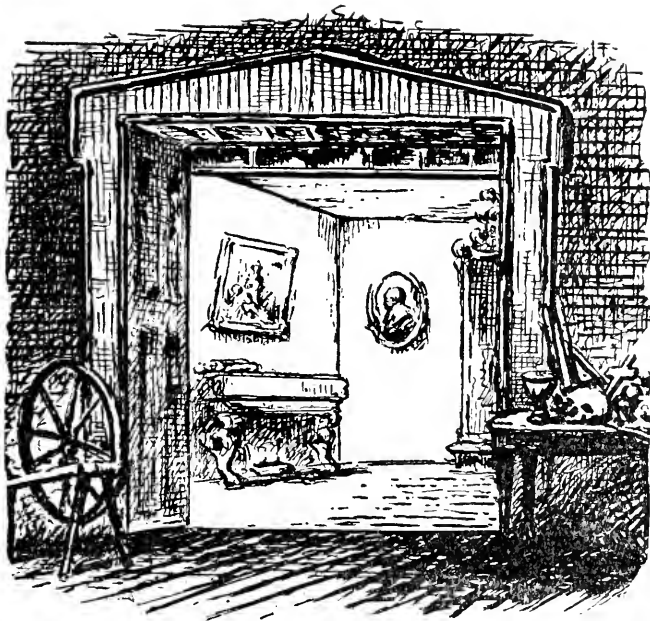
Later in the day, I met an artist friend. He had taken the death mask. He told me some interesting facts. He spoke of the delicate hands and feet; but that I knew already.

It was a strange day on which I last looked on the living Brigham Young. On that day occurred a memorable and tremendous explosion of giant powder upon Arsenal Hill, northwards of the Eagle Gate. A huge boulder, torn from the mountain side, was hurled over the Play-House to plunge through a building on the opposite side of the street. The theatre shook as never before, showers of broken glass fell from the wrecked sky-light of the gallery, and the disturbed dust filled stage and auditorium like a

fog. The Scene-Painter laid down his brushes later to pick up the fragment of a human body. That was the day! President Young stood upon the carriage step, which bore the legend "B. Y., 1855," before the Church Office, midway between the Lion and the Bee-Hive Houses. He was motionless; he wore his broad, green-lined cloak, and one corner of this was thrown back over his right shoulder, and in his hand he carried the gold-headed cane. It is in this pose that I best remember the famous man. Yet I cannot recall if the President was among the highly nervous audience that gathered in the Play-House that night.

A word or two more about the great leader at the Play-House and I have done. "Uncle Brigham," as we sometimes styled the President around the theatre, occupied the lower proscenium box on the east side of the stage, that is, he did so during such performances as those in which he wished to see the actors at close range. On the presentation of scenic pieces, he sat in a rocking-chair placed about the center of the east part of the parquette. One bench was shorter

there than the others, so as to allow a space for the placing of this chair. Sometimes the President would shift during the same performance from box to parquette or vice versa. When the Play-House was remodelled, this rocker was removed from its position and taken to an upper room of the theatre. It afterwards played an important part in the writer's life.



The Green-Room

III

“Show his eyes, and grieve his heart;
Come like shadows, so depart.”

SAINTE BEUVE once asked of Chateaubriand: “Is he an actor retired from the stage, who chats about himself and others, and discloses

the secret of the comedy? Is he an actor still on the stage continuing to play a dramatic part?" Those were unnecessary questions; the dramatist has answered them for all men—"We are both actors and spectators, too." We are, each and all, among the ghosts that Carlyle says "walk the earth openly at noon-day." Only the play-actor tries to make live "a shadow of shadows." I fear to become tiresome, my friend, in remembering your wish, if I insist too much upon the actual. But I recall the creations of the stage through a drama of reality.

Three men—Charles Kingsley, Oscar Wilde, and Henry M. Stanley—a few words of these: The English Divine—the Thinker of Eversley Rectory, Speaker of the Westminster Sermons, the Controversialist with Cardinal Newman, the writer of Essays, the author of Hypatia and other romances—how astonished was the Scene-Painter, after he had shown a dignified, yet most pleasant person through the Play-House, and bade him good-day at the private door, to learn that he had been talking with that wonderful

man. And Oscar Wilde? Only to tell how disconcerted for a moment,—but for a moment only—was the poet-lecturer at an array of young men who occupied the front rows of seats in the parquette and were decorated each with an enormous sun-flower. But my memory of Stanley is of another kind.

Bright, golden butter-fly; foolish little girl! How she could laugh, how she could dance, and how she could sing! Henry M. Stanley—could such a creature almost wreck the life of such a man? It was whispered so. When in after years the intrepid explorer gave his lecture in the Play-House—How I Found Livingston—he stood on the self-same spot as that on which the Comedienne had capered and warbled her merry notes. He looked out toward that seat in the circle where he had sat and glowered, as, in gauze and tinsel, she went through her part. As, in his almost stern, his measured voice, the explorer told of “Darkest Africa,” of his perils and toils in the interior wastes; how he had been compelled to abandon his luggage, piece by piece, carrying, at last, besides absolute neces-

saries of life, only three books—Shakespeare, Sartor Resartus, the Bible—and of his final success, I thought, time and again, if he were recalling that bitter hour, if the poor dead and gone little girl was in his mind.

Shakespeare, Comedy, History, Tragedy—did you think, my friend, that I was not going to mention the actors at all? What, in writing about a Play-House upon whose stage had trodden Julia Dean and Edwin Booth! And between these two? Ah, the genius and the beauty! What sparkling wit, what words of badinage, what brilliant repartee those walls have heard! And those of beauty—the “Ballade of Dead Ladies”? Rose Evans, Ada Isaacs Menken, Kate Claxton, Celia Howson, Betty Reel, Lucille Western—these are among the ones who, having put aside their assigned parts, have, like the originals, gone to dust.

And among the living, “The Jersey Lily,” the Langtry, in her fairest hour, and Mary Anderson—da Navarro—she who has been called the Saint of the Stage.

Lean with me, my friend, over the edge of the Scene-Painter's Gallery; look on the mimic stage. What procession is that? Juliet, Ophelia, Desdemona, Rosalind, Imogen, Helena, Sappho, Camille, Heloise—and those who loved them. Why the air of the Play-House seems filled with the speeches of love, its very timbers seem vibrant with impassioned words. Strange, is it not, that the actually spoken words, the outpourings of real love, have passed into the silence, and the imagination of the poet, his words should go on and on? But then, perhaps, the actual has borne immortal fruit, and the words of the poet, though they have thrilled the hearts of listeners for how many years, and will for years to come, are but barren after all. Yet the words of the poet, they breathe the loves of the race.

“Out; out brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more.”

True, true! But, ah! there is eternity.

Do I say too much? Edwin Booth—the greatest actor of all time.

How wonderful a gift is genius, how like a god to be the master! No vain efforts, no commonplaces, no dull mediocrity. Not even the struggles of talent; no creaking, as it were, of the intellectual machinery. And thus it was with Edwin Booth. No straining after effect with him, no missing of the goal. Booth, Shakespeare,—they were forgotten. Iago, Romeo, Lear, Shylock, Hamlet—they were before you.

The black drapery hanging in festoons from thousands of windows and above thousands of doors; great bands of black swaying across the streets and giving a funeral appearance to a whole city—the City of Saint Louis—was one of the strongest impressions of my boyhood days. The sombre decorations expressed the sorrow of a people stricken by the death of Abraham Lincoln, the Martyr President. John Wilkes Booth, the man who slew him, was a handsome man! I looked upon pictures of his face until I knew by heart its every feature. Instinctively when, after the passing of years, I stood in the Play-

House by the great actor's side, I sought to scan what likeness there might be in that calm and magnificent face to that of his impetuous brother. As mobile it was, yet less mercurial, quite as sensitive and beautiful, if I may use that word, yet more grand. Sorrow and undying pain could be traced upon the face, the work of the fates, the Eumeniades. Every sympathy of my heart rushed out to Edwin Booth; my admiration of him as man and artist knew no bounds. So I repeat, then, for me he is the greatest actor of all time.

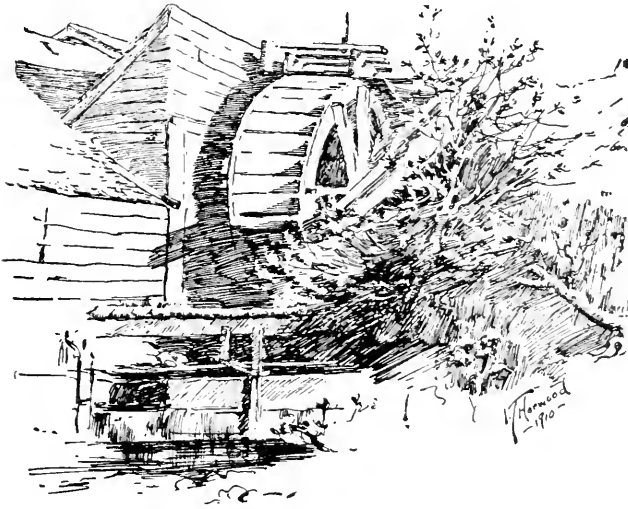
It is a proof of the evanescence of the actor's art, that we cannot make the proof. How should we make comparisons between great actors? How, for instance, between Edwin Booth and Philip Kemble; how between David Garrick and Edwin Forrest? How shall we compare either of the four with the Greek and Roman actors? How shall we determine the merits of those actors who declaimed in the open air, and drew applause from the multitudes in the theatres of Eretria, Megalopolis or Corinth? We have comedies of Terence and Aristophanes, tragedies of

Sophocles and of Æschylus, but we do not know how the actors in those days deported themselves. We know not of those who acted at Taormina, in that great theatre that looks over the Mediterranean to Sicilian Ætna. What do we know of those who acted in the theatre of Dionysius at Athens, or of those who presented the Greek dramas in the magnificent theatre near the Temple of Æsculapius? We have tradition, and tradition only. Perhaps it would be a question of schools, too, the rich complexity of the Shakespearean drama, and Booth's mastery of it, would make him, at least, of modern times, the greatest actor.

Ask me what was the more notable event in the theatrical history of this particular Play-House and I shall answer—the acting of Edwin Booth.

One day my father, digging in his garden, unearthed a skull. That skull I afterwards presented to the "Property Man." "Alas, poor Yorrick; I knew him, Horatio: a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy." How strange it was to hear Edwin Booth, with his pale, clas-

sical face, his thrilling voice, repeat, over that piece of mortality of an aboriginal man, the words of Hamlet. Could Shakespeare himself have conceived of a thing more strange? The skull of



The Rustic Water-Mill

that poor Indian, was it not honored above its kind?

Booth was a culmination. Since Booth a change has come; we are not likely to hear again in this day the words of Henry V, or of Richard III, mouthed as they once were. Might one live

to be a hundred years he might not hear another Booth so "coach" a pupil. It was a privilege to see it. But fear not, my friend, I am not about to write a lament for the decay of the drama.

Actors and locusts, locusts and visions of feminine beauty. O the locusts, the locusts, the locusts! They made dim the sun, the gleaming of their myriad wings, as they circled high in air, was as though some terrible spider's web was thick woven over all the sky. And when they descended to their work of destruction, they filled gardens and fields, orchards and streets. They came into the houses, they made unpalatable the food; they were ever before one's eyes by day, they came into his bed at night. That was the period, the Grass-hopper War, when the most hopeful, the most determined "Settler" was sorely tried. Yet the Plays in the Play-House went on. O the locusts, the locusts, the locusts! There were locusts in the lobby, there were locusts in the Green-Room, locusts flew or hopped across the stage, they were in the auditorium, they were in the dressing-rooms, they were in

the clothing of the actors and the people who comprised the audience. Certainly my memories of the early drama and "the Grass-Hopper War" form a singular combine.

So were the times. And noted actors made their appearance in the Play-House during the Grass-hopper War. The locusts—how we strive to destroy them! We beat them with tree branches; we beat them with wet cloths, we attempted to drive them into the water ditches, there to drown, and we attempted also to drive them into heaps of dry grass and brush-wood, there to destroy them with fire. But it was mostly in vain. And some of the star actors who came and then went their way, wondered what would be the end. How precious was a sack of flour, who could tell that which might come to pass? How proud was the young Scene-Painter when, through his labors on the Scene-Painter's Gallery, there was a sack of flour stored away in his father's cellar! He was yet more proud when there were two, and prouder yet when the number was increased to three. Five, I believe, it ultimately became, and his

pride knew no bounds. And so locusts and flour, and locusts and actors, the coming of a new "Star," the presentation in the Play-House of some famous drama, it may be, are blended in his mind. And the myriads of locusts are there associated, too, with more than one miracle of beauty in the flesh, and with the declamation of immortal verse, by voices whose impassioned tones he seems to hear to this very day.

And there, too, I see and hear—Levy, and the wondrous music from his golden cornet, and Ole Bull, the Grand Old Man, as divinely he plays upon his violin.

And what of the Prima Donnas—Abbot, Patti, Neilson—whose notes have filled ever nook and corner of this dusty building, and who smiled across the footlights to rapturous encores, and gifts of home-garden flowers?

While I write, there lies on the table a letter. It bears the autograph of a scene-painter of Berlin, and he was the writer's tutor. In that day there used to stand, but a short distance within the Eagle Gate, a most picturesque blacksmith's shop, and a rustic water-mill. How quaint, how

rural a scene so near the Play-House! But both are gone; no actor will see again the gray adobe walls of the shop, the wheel and burdock-edged flume of the mill, and both reflected in the pool of the mountain stream. It was once the wont of actors to go there at the twilight and "pull themselves together," before their "night." And there were "Stars" who were surprised to read the notice of their own appearance, posted at the blacksmith's door. Yes, it was very unique, not to be seen again.

Couldock went there; dear old Couldock, the past grand master in the art of expletives. He whose ire was so terrible, who could so well run up and down the scale of vituperation. And Warner, who, also, could become the raging lion, and Regnold, the handsome. And Emmet, the daintiest of comedians, and who suffered from melancholia; and Vivian, who was par excellence, the master of bitter yet laughing sarcasm. And yet—who are these? "Sic transit gloria mundi"—and the little vanities as well.

But I have told you enough about the Play-

House, have I not, my friend? Sham! sham! sham! The Theatre is the home of the make-believe. Wander through the Play-House by daylight—everything is sham. There are the sham scenes, there are the sham thrones, the jewels, the crowns, the sceptres—there are the sham belongings of sham kings and queens. There is the great wooden sword, sham, that the sham Richelieu shall in vain—sham— try to wield; there are the sham treasures of Louis XI, there is the sham sleeping potion for sham Juliet, the sham coffin and flowers for poor sham Ophelia. All sham! sham! sham!

There are strange echoes that linger about the walls in the Play-House of which I write. It is changed somewhat; yet quickly, for me, it brings back the past. It makes one half-believe that the intervening years are but a dream, that one will awake.

“There’s a divinty that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.”

How easy to imagine that one heard again the

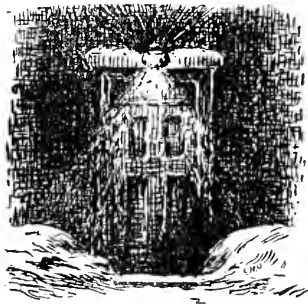
words that have been so often spoken upon that stage!

Some of us have traveled since then; since the time, I mean, when one believed so implicitly and lived so much in imagination. Life is real, but the real becomes as shadows. Yes, some of us have been at the birthplace of the Bard, and in Stratford Church by gentle Avon; some have watched the moonlight fall upon the stone terrace at Elsinore, or the twilight behind the towers of Glamis Castle; others have walked upon the Rialto and seen the tomb of the Capulets; and others, yet, have beheld where Lear stood upon Dover Cliff, or lingered in Queen Catherine's Room in the Tower of London. And each remembered the glamor of the Play-House in other years.

Tick! tick! The clock runs fast. I had become so interested in these few reminiscences that I had almost forgotten that I was alone. Shall I take my hat, shall I don my coat, shall I go and look once more at the old Play-House? Shall I go in at the small side-door and ascend

the stairs? No! no! not tonight. The Scene-Painter's Gallery is dark and silent—there is no one there. It would be too solemn; after these years there would be preached too sad a sermon. Tonight I would be with the living and feel a peace for the dead. It is the Sabbath, too! It is the Day of Rest. Rest, then, my heart! Can you not feel that all is well? Let the shadows be never so dark, there will come a time of light. Let the years glide by, then, until adobe and timber have crumbled away; we have lived our lives. And, in the words of Hamlet—

“The rest is silence.”



Date Due

All library items are subject to recall 3 weeks from the original date stamped.

SEP 19 2007		
MAR 27 2009		
FEB 02 2010		

Harold B. Lee Library



3 1197 00494 1743

Utah Bookbinding Co. SLC, UT 6/13/06 195

