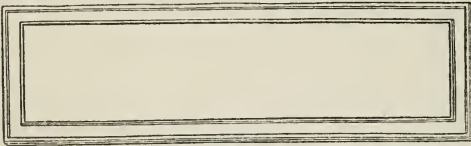


EX LIBRIS











**PROBLEMS OF THE ACTOR**





# PROBLEMS OF THE ACTOR

BY

*Inscribed*

LOUIS CALVERT

"

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

CLAYTON HAMILTON



NEW YORK  
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY  
1918

142299

COPYRIGHT, 1918,  
BY  
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

---

Published April, 1918

70 MAR  
1918

THE QUINN & BODEN CO. PRESS  
RAHWAY, N. J.

PN 2061  
C 24

## PROLOGUE

**I** HAVE been on the stage for more than forty years. My profession and its problems have been the principal interest in my life. It is natural that such an extended association with the theater should yield certain technical theories on my art; and, since I am nearing sixty, it is natural that I should want to talk about them. I do not regard any opinion I hold on the subject of acting as infallible; I learn something new about my profession every day; but there is one claim I make for the opinions I state in this book: they are not hasty. They have been two score years in taking shape.

I have watched many young people start their careers on the stage; I have seen some of them rise to success, and others sink to oblivion. It has seemed to me that the difficulties each met, and the mistakes each was

likely to make were, in a general way, always of the same character. They were the difficulties and mistakes which all actors encounter.

In my own early days I remember I used to wonder why it was not possible to guide myself somewhat by the experiences of others, as I could have done in almost any other profession. I knew there was little doubt that others had passed through the same trials that I was passing through. Why had they not left the story of their experiences to be a guide for me? Why were there no traditions, no standards in my art, as there were in every other art? Why did I, and every other novice, have to begin in the dark and carve out our own standards and traditions? It seemed to me then, and seems to me now, a great misfortune that there is no body of literature on the actor's art to which the novice might go for guidance. I do not mean text-books on "elocution" (Heaven forbid!); I mean books of opinion, books of experience which might embody the enduring,

time-tested traditions of our art. But there is no such body of literature; it has been truly said that the art of the actor dies with him. That is a great pity. Surely there are some truths which he could bequeath to posterity.

There is no lack of books dealing with the lives of those in the actor's profession. But few of them shed any light on the technique by which the admired actors of the past rose to high place. They are mostly pleasant, chatty reminiscences of their personal lives, whereas it is their professional lives that are significant. We know a great deal of Edwin Booth, for instance, as a popular idol fêted and revered by those in and out of the profession; but we know very little of Edwin Booth, the obscure, struggling youth he must have been in the beginning. The story and reasons for his unsung triumphs in those lean years preceding his success would be of infinitely more value to the profession he loved so heartily than the glowing accounts of his later triumphs. The young

actor is not concerned so much with the dizzy heights his predecessors reached as he is in how they went about it to scale the heights. It may be that the giants of the past each reached the goal by a different road, but surely it would be of advantage to the beginner if he could have some knowledge of each one.

However, in this little study, I have not attempted an autobiographical account of my early struggles in the profession, nor a story of my experiences on the stage; I have rather tried to derive from my experiences some truths which might be of service to the beginning actor, to state as concretely as possible some of the simple principles which bitter experience has made me believe are sound.

On the other hand, I do not wish to be suspected of formulating a technique of acting. I should not attempt anything so presumptuous. I am sure I know too much about the stage for that.

With regard to actual method, what is one

man's meat is another's poison. In the details of his work, each actor must work out his own salvation to a very great extent; he must find his own technique, in a sense, since it is the individual quality he is able to give his work that must raise him above his fellows. My sole purpose in this book, then, is to assist the beginner in finding his own technique.

In the light of my own career I have endeavored to inquire into some of the broad, general laws which are constant in this ever-changing craft of ours, and which must underlie all effective work on the stage. There are certainly in this craft, as in any other, some simple essentials which every beginner should know at the start, and which he can learn from others. I thoroughly believe that much depends upon the approach the young actor makes to his work, the attitude he takes toward his profession, the aims he strives for. It would seem that an analysis of some of the old-timer's experiences and opinions might be helpful and stimulating

in starting the novice along the proper road.

It is my firm belief that there are two virtues to strive for; Simplicity and Truth. I believe that as one grows in knowledge of his craft, it becomes more and more difficult to retain these blessed qualities. The great effort should be to remain simple, to acquire a more intelligent and effective simplicity, as we progress; for the more we learn of the intricacies and subtleties of our craft, the more likely we are to depart from the solid primaries which must be the foundation of all enduring work.

This belief I have tried to justify and explain in the pages that follow; and I have tried to make clear what seem to me to be the primaries from which we should never depart.

In conclusion I wish to express my very hearty appreciation of the assistance given me by my young friend, Mr. Kenneth Andrews, both in valuable suggestions as to arrangement and other matters. Without



his constant encouragement and help, I doubt if I could have stuck to this book until I had finished it, for I am a man of action, not of words, and writing is new to me. I wanted to put Mr. Andrews' name along with mine on the title page, but he was too modest, and would not let me.

LOUIS CALVERT.

New York,

December, 1917.



# CONTENTS

	PAGE
PROLOGUE . . . . .	v
INTRODUCTION. By Clayton Hamilton . . . .	xvii
CHAPTER	
I. "I KNOW I HAVE IT IN ME!" . . . . .	3
Art Must Be an Absolute Mistress—Selling Our Lives for a Price—Charlotte Cushman's Creed—Why Do I Want to Be an Actor?—Indispensable Qualifications: Enthusiasm, "Humanity," Imagination, Voice, Personal Appearance.	
II. ENTERING THE PROFESSION . . . . .	19
Competition in Actor's Profession No Keener than in Any Other—"Pull" of Little Value—The Road Company—The Evils of Endless Repetition—Staying on Broadway—How One-part Actors Are Developed—Actor and Manager Both Harmed by "Type" Casting—The Stock Company—The Varied Experience It Provides—The Repertoire—No Star, No Squirrel-in-a-Cage Routine, Team-work.	
III. THE VOICE—THE INSTRUMENT WE PLAY . . . .	43
Seeming to Speak Naturally—The Handicap of a Half-trained Voice—Our Voice: Our Point of Contact with Our Public—The Dread of "Elocution"—The Art of Concealing Art—Harry Lauder's Remarkable Voice—Charles Kean's Stage Voice—The Power of Tones—Saving the Voice—The Two Primary Tones—Distinct Utterance a Simple Achievement—Laughing Infectiously—Taste in Using One's Technical Skill.	
IV. GETTING INSIDE ONE'S PART . . . . .	61
Learning Words Before We Know Their Meaning—Study the Character for Light on the Words, Not the Words for Light on the Character—We Should Know Our Part's Relation to the Whole—The Essence of Illusory Impersonation—Dissolving Shylock into His Component Parts—How Any Character Can	

CHAPTER	PAGE
Be Made to Reveal Itself from a Study of the Lines—The Second Step: Becoming a Shylock—The Third Step: Thinking out Shylock in Wall Street Terms—The Last Step: Associating Our New Self with the Play as a Whole—This Formula Applies to Plays Modern and Classical.	
V. THE EYE AND THE HANDS . . . . .	79
“Five-finger Exercises” Necessary for the Actor, Too—Revealing the Unexpressed Emotions—Irving as Becket—“One Thing at a Time”—Doing Just Enough—Coquelin’s Peculiar Mannerism—When in Doubt Do Nothing—The Set Gestures of the Good Old Days—An Example of Splendid Repose—Saving Bits of Business for Future Use—Gestures Grow from Character, Not from Lines—Heroic Gestures for Heroic Plays—Never Let Them See too Much.	
VI. THE ART OF DOING NOTHING . . . . .	96
One Actor Cannot Stand Alone—Supplementing the Speeches of Others— <i>Sweet Nell of Old Drury</i> and <i>The Lady of Lyons</i> —Team-work Will Cover a Multitude of Sins—Pinerio’s Advice—Coaxing the Audience to Listen—Listening Through Long Speeches—Know What You Are Going to Do When Silent—Varying Our Reading—Miming Must Grow from the Character—Retaining the Illusion of the First Time—The Point, Thrust, and Lunge—Thinking Lines—Giving the Audience a Rest—Little Things All Count.	
VII. THE EMOTIONS . . . . .	121
All Acting Is Emotional, and All Actors Must Be Capable of Projecting the Primary Emotions—Tricking an Audience—Sir Herbert Tree’s Finesse—In <i>Called Back</i> —His Artifice in <i>Trilby</i> —In <i>Jim the Penman</i> —His Wolsey’s Falseness—We Must Draw Our Interpretation Solely from the Author’s Lines—Tree’s Shylock Saved by a Trick—Coquelin’s Cyrano Merely Make-believe—Ristori’s Comment on Rachel—Should We Literally Feel the Emotions We Portray?—Irving’s Opinion, and Ellen Terry’s—Guiding Oneself Through the Impassioned Speech—Crescendo of Emotion—Beginning Gently—Nervousness Often a Good Thing—Othello’s Emotion—The “After-swell”—Ignoring the Audience.	

# CONTENTS

xv

CHAPTER	PAGE
VIII. MAKING AN AUDIENCE LAUGH . . . . .	152

Audience Must Be Taken into Partnership in Comedy—The Comedian Must Sense His Audience—Allowing for the Laugh—Letting the Audience Have Its Head; *Major Barbara*—Making Them Save up Their Laughter—There Can Be Too Much Laughter in a Play—Shaw's Request—Remaining Unconscious of Our Own Humor—To Be Infectious Any Emotion Must Come from the Inside, Not from the Lines Alone.

IX. "FUTURES" AND THE PARADOX OF THE AMATEUR .	161
--	-----

Brilliant Promise of the Beginner Often Unfulfilled—Lawrence Irving's Grotesque Early Work—Henry Irving: a Prophet Without Honor in Manchester—Barry Sullivan's Disastrous Conservatism—The Dangerous Transitional Stage Between the Amateur and the Professional—The "Sufficiently Unprofessional" Wisconsin Players—Acting is Dancing in Shackles—Exchanging Intuition for Technique—The Moffat Company and *Bunty Pulls the Strings*—Studied Simplicity and Acquired Naturalness.

X. THE EFFECT OF REALISTIC SCENERY AND LIGHTING ON THE ACTOR . . . . .	176
--	-----

Work of the Actor Inextricably Interwoven with That of the Producer, Scenic Artist, and Others—Scenery Should Suggest not Copy Life, Should Stimulate not Overfeed or Starve the Imagination—The Ironworks in Galsworthy's *Strife*, "Real" and Suggested—Granville Barker's Setting for *Androcles and the Lion*: Proudly Crude and Frankly Primitive—The Primary Purpose of All Scenery—When the Imaginative Artist, the Interior Decorator, and the Landscape Gardener Clash—The Mechanical Ship That Would Not Wreck and the Simpler Substitute—How Actors Are Often Swamped by Scenery—The Need of Co-ordination—The Terrors of Strange Furniture—Many Plays Ruined by Lack of Method—Lighting Which Blurs or Silhouettes the Faces of the Actors—Natural Lighting—Distracting Lights—Moonlight—Seeking the Impression of Reality, Not Reality Itself.

CHAPTER	PAGE
XI. MUSIC AND COSTUMES VERSUS THE ACTOR . . . . .	213
<p>The Work of Each Specialist Should Be Blended into a Coherent Whole—The Function of Costume—Allowing for the Distraction of Striking Costumes—The Play Must Be Always Supreme—Irving's Clash with His Orchestra Leader—The Voice of the Actor the Melody of the Piece, All Else the Accompaniment.</p>	
XII. THE "TONE" OF A PERFORMANCE . . . . .	225
<p>Where the Real Charm of a Charming Play Lies—The Eleventh-hour Rescue of <i>Kismet</i>—Keeping One's Comedy in Key—Warfield's Rage in <i>The Music Master</i>—Tad Mortimer's Rebellion in <i>The Thunderbolt</i>—Wrong Emphasis Fatal for <i>Othello</i> and Many of Shakespeare's Plays—How <i>The Concert</i> Was Ruined in London—How to Insure Harmony of Tone—Actors Are Not Mechanics—Keeping Close to the Primaries.</p>	
XIII. TRADITIONS . . . . .	243
<p>"Lest We Forget"—The "Old-fashioned" Methods of Ten or Twenty Years Ago—Methods Change, but Art Is Constant—No Temple for the Precious Lore of the Actor's Art—There Must Have Been Great Actors to Perform the Great Plays of the Past—The Strong Appeal of the Old Method—Expressing Emotion and Repressing Emotion—Gordon Craig, the Passionate Dilettante—"Unattached" Cleverness.</p>	
XIV. THE ART OF ACTING : . . . .	257
<p>Is Acting a Dependent, Imitative Art, or Is It Creative?—Two Insignificant Plays, <i>Rip Van Winkle</i> and <i>The Music Master</i>, Which Actors Made Enormous Successes—The Folly of Comparing the Art of the Actor with That of the Poet or Painter—When a Play Is a Play—Why the Actor's Work Is Creative and Not Imitative—The Place of the Actor's Art.</p>	

## INTRODUCTION

**T**O quote that phrase so dear to after-dinner speakers,—Mr. Louis Calvert “needs no introduction” as an artist of the theater; but there is, at least, a novel pleasure in announcing his first appearance as an author.

Any treatise on the art of acting depends for its importance on the experience, and consequent authority, of the man who has prepared it. No other art, in its methods of employing means to the achievement of an end, is so little understood by non-practitioners. The laws of play-making have been codified most clearly by critics who have never written plays,—like Aristotle, for example, or—to cite a modern instance—Mr. William Archer. The most serviceable textbooks of harmony and counterpoint have been written, not by great musicians or composers, but by humbler music-teachers. The ablest explanations of the technical devices employed in painting, in sculpture, and in archi-

ecture have been made by men of letters, whose actual practice of the art which formed the subject of their study has been merely incidental. But acting is the one art whose fundamental principles are rarely, if ever, appreciated by the layman.

It is not unfair to state that no "dramatic critic" of the present time (and the writer of this sentence is one among the many) knows anything at all about the craftsmanship of acting. "Dramatic critics" are often able to elucidate the problems of the playwright. Whether or not they happen to have written plays, they are, at least, accustomed to the processes of authorship: they can tell a good play from a bad play, and can explain to the public the reason why one play is worthy of consideration and another worthy only of contempt. But, when it comes to "criticising" actors, they can merely state that they liked one performer and did not like another, and cannot—in either case—explain the reason why.

In my entire association with the theater—which stretches back over a period of fifteen years—I have never met a man, however cultured, whose opinions on the art of acting



were of any value, unless he was himself an actor, a stage-director, or a playwright; and, from conversations with my elders, I have gathered evidence of only two laymen in the English-speaking world whose appreciation of this art could be regarded as authoritative. One of these was George Henry Lewes, whose treatise *On Actors and the Art of Acting*—originally published in the early eighteenth-seventies—is still accepted as a standard work, because no subsequent “dramatic critic” has been able to transcend and supersede it. The other was Professor Fleeming Jenkin,—the friend and teacher of Robert Louis Stevenson at the University of Edinburgh; but Jenkin was noted as an amateur actor, and perhaps, on this account, cannot rightly be regarded as a non-practitioner.

In consequence of this condition, a discussion of the problems of the actor—to be at all authoritative—must be written by an actor, and not by a man of letters,—not even by that special type of literary craftsman that is generally known as a “dramatic critic.” But the unfortunate fact remains, and must frankly be admitted, that most actors cannot write. This is, of course, the

reason why the art of acting has been beggared, in nearly every period, of adequate description. The men who really understood the fundamentals of the craft were tongue-tied, and could not express themselves in print. The little that I know about the art of stage-projection—and I mention this detail because it typifies the experience of many other writers—has been taught me in the storm and stress of actual rehearsals under the direction of such actors as Henry Miller, Richard Mansfield, and George M. Cohan; yet I doubt if any of these admitted artists of the theater could have summoned either time or inclination or ability to impart to the reading public, through the medium of print, the lessons they have handed down, by word of mouth, to many authors like myself. The art of acting can be taught only by an actor; but very few actors have been able, or even willing, to convey their knowledge of the art beyond the barrier of the footlights.

The author of the present treatise has been prominent before the eyes of the theater-going public of America since 1909, when he was invited overseas to serve as classical producer and one of the leading actors of the

New Theater, in New York,—that interesting institution which failed only because the monumental edifice which housed it more nearly resembled a mausoleum than a modern playhouse. At the New Theater, from 1909 to 1911, Mr. Calvert appeared—as faithful theater-goers will remember—in the following parts: The Grand Duke in *The Cottage in the Air*, John Anthony in *Strife*, Sir Peter Teazle in *The School for Scandal*, Alfred Thompsett in *Don*, Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*, Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, James Mortimore in *The Thunderbolt*, Dr. Jüttner in *Old Heidelberg*, and Sir Pitt Crawley in *Vanity Fair*.

After the collapse of the New Theater, Mr. Calvert went back to London. In June, 1911, he appeared at the Savoy Theater as Major Bagstock in *Dombey and Son*; on June 27, he impersonated Simon Ingot in a gala performance of *David Garrick* at His Majesty's Theater; in September of the same year, he played Mercutio in Fred Terry's production of *Romeo and Juliet*; and, in November, he appeared as Micawber in *Wilkins Micawber*. In the autumn of 1915, Mr. Calvert returned to New York, to appear,

first of all, in a play of brief duration called *The Bargain*. Shortly afterward, he became associated with Grace George in her ambitious and apparently successful season of repertory at The Playhouse. In the spring of 1916, Mr. Calvert contributed to the celebration of the tercentenary of Shakespeare's death by producing, at the Century Theater, a notable rendition of *The Tempest*, in which he also played the part of Prospero.

These activities—as actor and as stage-director—have kept Mr. Calvert “on the front page,” so to speak, throughout the last ten years; but the reading public may need to be reminded of the long and arduous experience which preceded these achievements of his prime.

Louis Calvert was born in Manchester on November 25, 1859. He comes of an old and celebrated family of actors; and his mother, Mrs. Charles Calvert, is remembered not only as a very able actress but also as the author of an interesting book of memoirs, entitled *Sixty-eight Years on the Stage*. Louis Calvert made his first appearance in 1878, at the Theater Royal, Durban, in Natal. The next year, he traveled from South Africa to Aus-

tralia and acted at the Theater Royal, Melbourne. In 1880, he returned to England; toured, for a time, with John Dewhurst, Miss Wallis, and Osmond Tearle; and played a "stock" season at Margate with Sarah Thorne. Mr. Calvert's first appearance in London was made at the Drury Lane Theater in 1886, in a piece called *A Run of Luck*. The next year, he was engaged with Henry Irving at the Lyceum Theater. Mr. Calvert came to America for the first time in 1887, and toured this country for two seasons in support of Mrs. Langtry.

After his return to England, Mr. Calvert organized in 1890 a company of his own and produced, in the provinces, a large number of Shakespeare's plays, Browning's *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* and *An Enemy of the People*, and Goethe's *Clavigo*.

At Her Majesty's Theater, in London, in 1898, Mr. Calvert assisted Sir Herbert Tree in producing *Julius Cæsar* and played the part of Casca; and, the next year, he created the character of Porthos in *The Musketeers*. In 1899, he returned to the Lyceum Theater, and appeared once more in the company of Sir Henry Irving, as Billaud-Varennés in

*Robespierre*. In 1900, he directed the first English production of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, with Sir Charles Wyndham in the leading part. In 1901 he appeared, at the Globe Theater, in *Sweet Nell of Old Drury*; and, at the Comedy Theater, in 1904, he played the part of Towzer in *Sunday*.

In 1905, when Vedrenne and Barker initiated their epoch-making series of experiments at the Court Theater in Sloane Square, Mr. Calvert was a prominent participant in their undertakings. He created the parts of John Broadbent in *John Bull's Other Island* and the Waiter in *You Never Can Tell*; and—after a brief interval at Wyndham's Theater in a piece called *Captain Drew on Leave*—he returned to the Court Theater to create the part of Andrew Undershaft in *Major Barbara* and to resume his original rôle in a "revival" of *John Bull's Other Island*.

In the autumn of 1906, Mr. Calvert produced, at the New Theater in London, a successful comic opera called *Amasis*. In 1907, in conjunction with Frederic Harrison, he presented *Sweet Kitty Bellairs* at the Haymarket Theater, and appeared in the part of Colonel Villiers. In 1908, at the St. James's

Theater, Mr. Calvert created the character of James Mortimore in *The Thunderbolt*,—a part which he was destined later to resume at the New Theater in New York. During the same year—1908—he appeared at the Aldwych Theater as Captain Williams in *Paid in Full* and at the Lyric Theater as Pistol in *Henry V*.

In 1909, Mr. Calvert was seen, at His Majesty's Theater, as David Ives in *The Dancing Girl*; at the Lyric Theater, as Falstaff in *King Henry IV [Part I]*; at the Royalty Theater, as Holt St. John in *What the Public Wants*; and again at His Majesty's Theater, as Peter Stockmann in *An Enemy of the People*.

A momentary glance at the record which has been reviewed in this hasty summary of the career of Mr. Calvert should be sufficient to convince the most skeptical of critics that this "old-stager" is competent to talk about the mainsprings of an art that, to most observers, has remained beyond the reach of scientific searching. Mr. Calvert knows whereof he speaks. For forty years, he has been an actor; for nearly thirty years, he has been a stage-director; and, during these ac-

cumulated decades, very few of the tricks of his trade have escaped his observation.

If the writer of an introduction may speak personally, without sacrifice of tact, I should like to say that I have learned a great deal about the craftsmanship of acting from a studious perusal of this manuscript of Mr. Calvert's. This book has clarified and codified many principles that seemed, in my own mind, to be hovering upon the verge of formulation. To the general reader, a bald and crude confession of my honest wish that I might have been endowed, by knowledge and experience, to write this book myself may seem extraneous; but such confessions are not without significance for men whose lives are spent in a sincere endeavor to understand and to explain the problems of the arts.

Another point which seems to me remarkable is the purely literary value of this book of Mr. Calvert's. He has written not only a text-book of a craft that stands especially in need of logical elucidation, but also a creative and unconscious work in that most intimate of literary *genres* which is labeled, in our libraries, under the head of "autobiography." *Problems of the Actor* may be recommended,



first of all, as a serviceable manual for those apprenticed to the art of acting; but it is interesting also to those whose sense of life is more insistent than their sense of the theater. The sympathy, the kindness, the humor, the wisdom, the human understanding, and the tact displayed by Mr. Calvert in the composition of this commentary on the technique of an art to which the earnest efforts of nearly half a century have been applied, appear—in my opinion—to lift this unpretentious book to the level of creative literature. Literature may be defined as an adequate expression, on the printed page, of a great love for a great thing that has been felt by a great man. . . .

The after-dinner speaker is about to take his seat. . . . “Ladies and Gentlemen,—I present to you an actor and an author,—Mr. Louis Calvert. . . .”

CLAYTON HAMILTON.

New York City,  
February, 1918.



**PROBLEMS OF THE ACTOR**



## CHAPTER I

### “ I KNOW I HAVE IT IN ME ! ”

Art Must Be an Absolute Mistress—Selling Our Lives for a Price—Charlotte Cushman’s Creed—Why Do I Want to Be an Actor?—Indispensable Qualifications: Enthusiasm, “ Humanity,” Imagination, Voice, Personal Appearance.

**T**HERE can be little doubt that a man’s ultimate position in the dramatic profession depends very largely upon the motives he has when he enters it. I feel that I have seen the truth of this demonstrated over and over again. I believe I may state as a fact, and not as the exhortation of an idealist, that unless a man is drawn to the art of acting for its own sake, unless he is prepared to make great sacrifices for the sake of his art, he can never attain genuine success on the stage. If he vaguely proposes to use the stage as a means of self-glorification, as a means of selfish advancement, it is

a simple truth that he will be incapable of bringing into play those peculiar qualities of sincere application and patient study which are essential for any noteworthy progress. Speaking from the most practical point of view, it does not pay to spend one's life in an art, if we are not prepared to acknowledge the supremacy of the art, to realize that art is to be our master. Art: let it be understood at the outset that I shall try to use this much-abused word in its true sense; or rather, since it has been manhandled so promiscuously, perhaps I should say that I shall try to be consistent in my use of it. All acting is not art, just as all painting is not art, nor all writing; but when acting takes on the imaginative, creative qualities (as all great acting must do) it is art. Until the actor does endow his work with these precious attributes, no matter how skilful he may be, he is a craftsman, not an artist. So we shall speak now of the Craft of Acting, again of the Art of Acting; for they are quite distinct. We may analyze the technique or the craft of

the actor, but his art is above our analysis, and it is only confusing—and a little undignified—to use the higher-sounding word for the humbler thing. For instance, no actor has ever been a “master of his art”; he has been a master of the technicalities only; and he has made himself so with resolute patience. Art, in its true sense, is infinite and cannot be taught, and what cannot be taught cannot be mastered. We must serve our art, we must not try to make it serve us.

And if, by a blind devotion and enthusiasm and a desire and willingness to work in order to perfect the “feeling” that is in us, we do become famous at last, our reward is much nobler and worth the great effort it has cost. We shall have the satisfaction of knowing that we have run straight, and that is a consideration which looms much larger at sixty than it does at twenty. The knowledge that we owe our advancement to honest merit and a sincere study of our craft will bring a pleasure that the self-centered man never attains.

There are, it is true, thoroughly selfish men who have reached what, for want of a better name, we call Success. But those "successful actors" are not the ones who are remembered long after their work is done. They may have won a certain vogue by their cleverness; but the enduring esteem of those whose opinions count is founded upon a broader, deeper base. How much better our stage would be if we had more men like Edwin Booth in the profession. No name, in my opinion, is remembered with so much reverence and affection as his. He was a man full of the kindest consideration for his fellow actors, full of loyalty to the best in his art. His fame rests upon these personal qualities as well as upon his technical skill. The great Ristori, also, was above pettiness, above professional selfishness; and I regard her as one of the greatest tragediennes I have ever seen. But the rewards of selfishness are pretty empty at best; and I do not believe there is a single actor who has reached the pinnacle of his ambition through unscrupu-



lous methods who does not regret, in his heart, that he did not achieve it with clean hands. I know men who have won this kind of success, and they are not what I should call really happy. The reward of their life-work is this “ success ”; but of what use is it to them? Was it worth spending a lifetime to win? It is worth while to meditate on these simple considerations in the dewy period when we are preparing to sell our life for a price—a period we all pass through. It is worth seeing to it that we are striving for something we shall be glad to possess after the struggle is finished.

“ Nought’s had, all’s spent  
Where our desire is got without content.”

Charlotte Cushman, on her farewell night at Booth’s Theater in 1874, said: “ To be thoroughly in earnest, intensely in earnest in all my thoughts and actions, became my single idea; and I honestly believe herein lies the secret of my success in life. I do not believe any great success in any art can be achieved without it. I say this to the begin-

ners in my profession; and I am sure all the associates in my art, who have honored me with their presence on this occasion, will indorse what I say in this: Art is an absolute mistress; she will not be coquetted with or slighted; she requires the most entire self-devotion, and she rewards with grand triumphs."

Therefore I should advise anyone who is thinking of taking up the stage as his life-work to put himself, first of all, under a rigid and honest examination; and that he discover from whence springs his desire to become an actor. If he has a general notion that the actor's is a pleasant and varied life, and an easy way to earn his bread and butter, he should admit to himself that that is the reason he feels drawn to the stage. This illusion about the theater is not an unnatural one. No profession, I venture to say, looks so easy from the outside; but for anyone who, thus lightly, joins the ranks of actors there is sure to be an awakening eventually. I think the most pathetic spectacles, in a profession that

has its share of pathos, are the failures of those who might have been successful and content if they had followed other walks in life for which their natural attributes fitted them. But as actors they are failures, so regarded by themselves and their friends, and they will always be failures. It is surely better, then, to weigh our natural advantages and disadvantages at the beginning instead of later.

Of course it is much easier to set a man looking for natural aptitudes than it is to tell him what they are and just which ones he should possess if he is to succeed on the stage. It is not possible to catalogue and define, in such a matter, and it would be most futile to attempt it. Indeed in all our discussions of the various phases of the actor's craft, let it be borne in mind that we are not attempting to dogmatize; we are not attempting to reduce the actor's craft to any system of rules. That cannot be done. You cannot teach a person to be an actor as you teach him to become a stenographer. The

actor's real work begins where the stenographer's ends; for once the latter has mastered the technicalities of shorthand and typewriting, it is thereafter principally a question of constant practice. But the actor uses his technical groundwork merely as a foundation. As he goes on into his profession his progress depends not so much on his mastery of the simple technique of using his hands and feet, getting on and off the stage, throwing out his voice, and the like (those rudiments are taken for granted); but he must depend more upon other higher qualities: imagination, his sense of humor, his "personality." In acting, as in stenography or anything else, the simple rudiments come with practice, and only thus. But acting is a creative art, and of course the qualities which enable an artist to create are above the rule of thumb. So in this chapter, and throughout the book, we shall strive to suggest, not define, and hope to stimulate the beginner in the development of his own abilities.

There is one big attribute that a man either

does or does not start out with: that is Enthusiam. I believe Enthusiasm is the first asset a man or woman should have in setting out on the hazardous journey that is an actor's life. I mean genuine enthusiasm for the art of acting for its own sake. That is necessary. There are many setbacks, many disheartening pitfalls to be met, but enthusiasm can take care of them. If the beginner can assure himself that he would be happier having tried and failed to succeed as an actor than he could be as a moderate success in any other line of work, I believe he may feel that he has the enthusiasm I speak of. There is a great deal in being able to regard it all as a game which we play for the love of it, a game to which we give our best simply because we like the sport. It is possible to go at the difficulties as we would the hurdles on a race-course, and clear them for the fun of it. That can be done with enthusiasm, but not without it; and it is the spirit one should be pretty sure he can muster before he starts out to be an actor.

Another big attribute is what actors like to call "humanity." This may sound like a glittering generality, but in reality it is a definite and concrete thing. It is a simple fact that some people do have a certain warm response and sympathy for the moods of others, and some do not. Without this faculty, I do not believe a person can ever touch the hearts of an audience. There is a peculiar sensitive sympathy which brings a great actor or actress close to an audience in a theater, and it is not an accident; it is a real and positive attribute of the person on the stage. I should say that it comes from a consideration and sympathy for men and women. Most successful actors that I know are the kind of people who like their fellow-beings. They may not be conscious of it, or admit it, but they do. They cannot help feeling for and with other people. Humanity seems the best term for it. It is akin to what may be called artistic unselfishness, without which, I am firmly convinced, no very great success is attainable in a profession where

one must depend upon the appeal he is able to make to the sensitive group-heart of an audience.

I know a young actor who has a decided gift of clever repartee. He has the knack of turning phrases and playing with words; there is always a keen adroit thrust to what he says. He has found, it seems to me, that if there is a touch of cynicism or an under-note of cruelty in his *mots* they are more likely to strike home. Of late this cynicism and this cruelty have grown with him. In whatever he says (to my ears) there is the hollow ring of insincerity, it colors everything he says now. It is having an effect on his work. He tinges what he does on the stage with this barbed cleverness; his work does not touch hearts and warm them, it pricks them. The audiences he plays before do not give him their sympathy, they sense the superficiality of any emotion he seeks to portray; and I think it is largely because all his emotions in real life are superficial. I firmly believe that unless this young fellow takes hold of himself

and tries to overcome his ironic habit of mind, the poison will work down through his nature until it will be utterly impossible for him to hold and stir and move an audience. And this will be because he has allowed his cynical cleverness to eat away what I call humanity.

I feel a certain confidence in making this prophecy about him—or about anyone of his type—because I know an older actor in the midst of his career who has failed to reach the place his technical abilities could gain for him simply because there is no cordiality, no warmth, no humanity in the appeal he makes to the public. He too has this verbal cleverness; and he has allowed it to fester and spoil his career in large measure. There is a subtle affinity between an audience and an actor, and because this man, in reality, lacks the power—or rather has allowed himself to lose the power—of feeling and suffering sincerely, this affinity is broken, and he never succeeds in making his audiences feel his emotions as their own.

I am thinking, also, of an actress with



whom I was associated in my youth. She was full of dramatic power, she had a thorough mastery of technique; but her acting, brilliant though it was, had a coldness and detachment about it. She had few faults as an actress, but one of them was fatal: she lacked the power to attract the public. While she was young her public forgave her many things, but as she grew older, and lost the precious bloom of youth, they turned away from her. Eventually she retired from the stage in discouragement, and was soon forgotten. I believe this failure of hers lay, not the least in her work, but in herself. She herself was a brilliant woman, but cold, quite unresponsive to the gentler emotions of cordiality and simple warmth of heart. She pretended to no love of humanity, indeed she seemed rather to foster a certain disdain for mankind in general.

I do not, for a moment, believe that the germ of humanity had been absent from her nature when she was young, but certainly she had not allowed it to develop. Whether such

an impalpable quality as humanity can be deliberately cultivated may be a question, but it is my opinion that it can be. We can, by taking thought, guide ourselves in our attitude toward others; and if we are to reproduce faithfully real people and real emotions as our life-work, it is essential that we know people sympathetically, and like them, and feel with them when they laugh or sigh. In any case, it is such a vital qualification for anyone who thinks of taking up the stage, that it is worth serious thought and effort.

One should also be gifted with imagination; and be possessed of a temperament that is far from placid; while a sense of humor is indeed one of the prime requisites. If one does not possess these germs in his composition, there seems little doubt that he will be more or less handicapped from the outset.

With regard to the more obvious requirements the voice, naturally, is the most important. If there is any defect in it that cannot be remedied, it is only wisdom to cast aside all thoughts of the stage. Of course it may

have many defects, yet still be capable of becoming a powerful instrument through one's diligence and hard work in perfecting it. A great essential to the proper development and management of the voice, too, is an ear for music. I do not believe that a person who does not possess a fairly good ear can ever speak with any great effectiveness on the stage. He cannot do it, I am very sure, without a disproportionate amount of labor. The natural speaking voice, after all, is full of music; and it is as necessary, on the stage, to speak at concert pitch as it is to sing at concert pitch. One should be able to catch tones of voice from others, and to give tones accurately himself, or the quality of his speech cannot be pleasing or attractive to an audience.

Physical fitness is also a point to consider. The stage is not a place for a person who is deformed—that is one of the limitations of the art of the theater, and one of its misfortunes. Cripples have become great painters, great musicians, great writers; but the diffi-

culties such a person must overcome on the stage are, obviously, well-nigh insuperable. On the other hand, I do not regard noticeable physical attractiveness as one of the prime requisites for a successful stage career. I am not even sure that a handsome face and figure are always helpful. There is a natural temptation to depend too much on one's presence, and to disregard the development of other, more enduring, qualities. I think a reasonably healthy and pleasing appearance is all one needs.

I do not mean that one who possesses all of these indispensable primary qualifications, even in a marked degree, has any open road before him. I do not mean that they give him any particular advantage, but simply that they entitle him to enter the struggle—without them he would be foolish to enter it at all. Given, then, these general qualifications one is faced with the vital problem of choosing the door through which he is to enter his profession.

## CHAPTER II

### ENTERING THE PROFESSION

Competition in Actor's Profession No Keener than in Any Other—"Pull" of Little Value—The Road Company—The Evils of Endless Repetition—Staying on Broadway—How One-part Actors Are Developed—Actor and Manager Both Harmed by "Type" Casting—The Stock Company—The Varied Experience It Provides—The Repertoire—No Star, No Squirrel-in-a-Cage Routine, Team-work.

**I** FEEL that I should remind anyone who is ambitious to enter the dramatic profession that the purpose of this book is to encourage, not discourage. It is inevitable, as we examine the conditions which prevail in the theater,—and especially those which affect the novice—that we should speak first of all of the difficulties he may expect to meet. We should not exaggerate those hardships nor paint too dismaying a picture of them. It is well to know the difficulties are there, and to know something of their nature; but it is a mistake

to be frightened by them. If a man is to succeed in any profession he must be prepared to overcome innumerable obstacles. The competition in the actor's profession is keen, but no keener than in the lawyer's profession or the physician's profession. The secret of success in this profession, as in any other, is hard work properly directed. It is not by any divine dispensation nor any innate strain of unique genius that an actor reaches success; to my mind the successful professional actor is a greater being than the ambitious amateur only by virtue of longer experience and harder work. No matter what the youngster might set his heart on and go after, he would find a lot of others after the same thing; and his chance of getting it would be as good as theirs. The person who succeeds in this profession is the one who sets himself to master the technical phases of his craft, and guides his course unswervingly by the principles which his study proves are sound.

As a matter of fact, I think in the actor's

*but it can be made pleasant if the voice has a quality*

profession, more perhaps than in any other, the beginner starts on even terms with his competitors. "Pull" and "influence" can have little to do with progress on the stage. The young man or woman who is pushed along prematurely is only harmed. If a young actor makes a failure in a part that is too big for him, his path thereafter is much harder than that of the man who plugs along in unimportant parts, many of which may be unworthy of his ability; but which enable him to rise eventually on his own merits.

I have often been asked for advice on the best way to set about becoming an actor. It is a question about which one hesitates to be arbitrary, although to me there seems but one answer possible. Before I state my opinion, however, it might be profitable to speak of the various possibilities which are open.

Usually the first thing the novice proposes is to go to New York and make the rounds of the managers' offices looking for an engagement. If one does this, he may suc-

ceed in getting work in a road company organized to exploit some one particular play, which has already made a success in the metropolis. The majority of actors in this country earn their living in companies of this kind. They engage to play on the road for an average of from thirty to forty weeks in a season, and to give eight performances a week. This means that they repeat their respective parts over two or three hundred times. After a man finds himself and gets some sort of start in his career, such a life is not without its compensations; but while he's a fledgling, with everything to learn, it is, in my opinion, worse than useless.

Of course the part which an unknown would get would be very small, containing only a few unimportant lines. One can learn little about the art of acting by repeating the same few lines three hundred times. In spite of the best intentions in the world he is likely to fall into the way of parroting his lines, and going through the scanty stage business he may have with scarcely a thought



of its bearing on the play. Even with the best of actors, this constant and endless repetition is apt to become pretty mechanical. Forbes-Robertson once told me, when he was playing in *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*, that the part was making him terribly nervous. He said that once or twice he had actually forgotten what act he was in at the moment; and then, on coming to himself, had been amazed to find that his tongue was faithfully repeating the proper lines! And if the constant repetition consequent to a long run has such an effect on a finished artist like Forbes-Robertson it is easy to imagine what it might do to a man of tender experience.

The great Madame Ristori never played in English until she was nearly seventy years of age. She never really learned English of course; that is she thought in Italian, and learned the English words of her parts by their sound. She was able to do most effective work, great actress that she was, but this practice of parroting had its dangers. When she was supposed to say to Lord

Burleigh, "Ah, remember Babbington's bloody head, my old friend!" she said instead, "Remember Babbington's head, my bloody old friend!" This, of course, is an unusual case, but parroting of any kind is dangerous.

As a young man I was touring in England as Pierre Lorance in a play called *Proof*, which was later produced in this country under the name of *A Celebrated Case*. We opened in Nottingham one Monday night, and I believe it must have been about my two-hundredth performance of the part. When I came to the theater on Tuesday morning there was a letter waiting for me. It began:

"MY DEAR SIR,

What have you been doing to yourself? I saw you play this part three months ago and you were fine. But now, I assure you, you are lamentable. I would advise that you pull yourself together."

There was no signature or address. There was no way of finding out who the writer was. If there had been I might have supposed that it was written by someone who

wanted to impress me with his knowledge of the stage. But I could see no reason for his taking the trouble to write a letter to me except an honest artistic resentment. I told the manager of the theater about it and he said: "The man's crazy. I was in front last night and saw your performance. There was nothing wrong with it that I could see." But this did not satisfy me. I worried all day trying to determine what the man could have seen in my work which had so roused his antagonism. Then, that evening, in the second act where I came on in chains, having been put into prison for the murder of my wife (of which I was innocent), I caught myself up in the middle of my speech. I was saying something about the twelve long, weary years I had worked on the roads and inside the prison walls linked with thieves and murderers . . . and suddenly I realized that those words were meaning nothing to me! I had grown to love the sound of them, I had got far away from the poignant tragedy in them, and was thinking only of

the momentary effect the lines might have. Then I knew why my unknown friend had tried to set me right. But my fault was due to the long repetition of the part. This is certainly not the sort of apprenticeship that is of much value to the novice who is eager to learn the fundamentals of his life-work.

Another way of making a start is to remain permanently in New York and seek engagements in the new plays which are produced on Broadway each season. The parts available will be mostly so-called "walking on" parts. One is given the privilege of coming on the stage each night with the "crowd of citizens" or the "other guests"; and of course there is a chance of securing a small speaking part sooner or later. One may remain with the play until the end of the New York run, then cut himself adrift and look for another part. But such a plan requires sufficient money in hand to tide across from one engagement to the next, which periods of "rest" may be of one week or

many; and those weeks of idleness are valuable time thrown away.

There is another big danger in starting in such a way as this. The young and unknown applicant, when he does receive a part, is engaged not because he has any particular ability for it but because his physical appearance is more or less what is required. If, in his first part of this kind, he does satisfactory work the next one he is given is likely to be of the same type. As his work becomes known to the managers, they naturally associate him with this particular type which he has happened to fall into and do well. That is the way one-part or "type" actors are developed. Once a man gets definitely associated with a certain kind of part he is likely to be doomed to play the same old part for the rest of his life. This is a blessing for the man who can play only one part well, but it is hard for the man capable of doing other things equally well. If a man is strong enough he will fight his way out of the ruck, but it takes a pretty strong effort and a

great deal of courage and sacrifice often—and the better the man is at his unwelcome specialty, the harder it is for him to break away from it.

From the actor's point of view there may seem to be two sides to this special part proposition, since it enables many an indifferent actor to earn a good living who would find himself hard put to it if he did not have his specialty to carry him along. But from the point of view of the author and the producer there is only one side: the play always suffers. Indeed this casting of plays with types seems a great weakness in the system. If the play calls for a butler the actor who played butlers last season and the season before that is sent for. When he comes on the stage he is a familiar figure to many in the audience. They have seen him as a butler time and time again. They know just how he is going about it. They know just the kind of a butler he is. Surely this cannot but have a detrimental effect on the play. The suggestion received by the audience, un-

consciously perhaps, is that the old material has been hashed up for them again. This may be rather a trivial matter, but anything that tends to suggest conventionality is certainly to be shunned when a new play is put on. There are usually plenty who will see conventionality in it anyway, always plenty who will be looking for it; surely we should do everything we can do beforehand to anticipate this criticism. And, in any case, it is unquestionably bad business policy to suggest other plays while the new one is being tried. The object is to make the play seem as fresh and new as possible, and one good way to defeat this object is to remind the audience of the many other plays which have contained, in general, the same set of characters. But even from the point of view of the actor this special type casting is very unfortunate. It is deadening to the actor who has his heart set on big things, in the first place; in the second place, most one-part actors find themselves out of date sooner or later, the vogue for their special way of

doing their special kind of part has waned, and since no one thinks of them as anything but what they have been doing all their lives, they are fast relegated to the ranks of the has-beens.

The beginner in the profession with no experience of any kind who presents himself to the New York manager can only expect to be chosen because he "looks the part." I certainly do not consider this the proper way to make a beginning; that road does not lead very far or very high in the actor's profession.

These, then, are a few of the objections, to the road company and the New York company. They would seem to condemn both as avenues of advancement for the novice who has his hopes set on the better things. Two other possibilities are open: the Stock Company or the Repertoire Company.

In a stock company the novice has the chance to play many different parts in a year; though they may be small, they will be widely varied, and each one can teach



him something. He will have his chance as rich man, poor man, beggar-man, and thief, as old men and as young men. He is able to study at close range and on a simpler model the intricate mechanism which is the theater.

In a stock company the observation one is able to practise on actors of more experience is most valuable. He can study the different gaits, the variations of voice and gesture, which the older heads use in their different impersonations. The beginner is very receptive and very impressionable; if he does not start in a stock company but in a one-play company, where the star is playing one part over and over, he is in danger of aping the mannerisms of the star, and of having his ideas of successful acting too strongly flavored with the star's methods. In a stock company, too, one learns to depend on himself, for the producer who directs a new piece each week has no time to give his actors much individual attention. The actor is left to himself to a certain extent, and this in

itself spurs him on. He gets a good stiff training in learning his lines quickly, and he acquires the faculty—a blessed one—of larruping himself into doing what he has to do with directness and dispatch, for that is the way things must be done in a stock company if they are done at all. This experience does not put on a high polish, but it may be depended upon to provide a good grounding in the primaries of acting, and to give a certain versatility. I believe a season, or even two seasons, in stock is of the greatest value at the outset of any career.

In many ways it would seem to be the best place in which to make a beginning; though it is true the Repertoire possesses some advantages that stock does not. The work one does in a repertoire company is a bit more thorough, a bit more finished; but we learn lessons in stock that we cannot learn anywhere else. Our experience there is more elementary, and we should get the elementary things first. But, in this country, there are practically no repertoire companies to get

into. There have been occasional sporadic attempts to found them, and some of these have met with gratifying success; as in the case of Miss Grace George's Playhouse Company, Robert Mantell's Shakespearian Repertoire, and the Washington Square Players, who have a semi-repertoire policy. As an accepted institution, however, the Repertoire is not established and developed to the extent that some of us, who have had experience with it, could wish.

*Very good.*

Such a company has a group of four to six, and sometimes more, plays, each of which they repeat at intervals. For a young actor with a little experience in stock or elsewhere it is no doubt the ideal place in which to improve; whether it is the place to get the first lessons is a question. The virtues of such a company are apparent. Let us suppose that they have a repertoire of eight plays. One finishes his work on the Monday night, and realizes that he might have acted certain portions of his part much better. He knows the same play will be repeated the

following Monday night and he has a week in which to practise, at odd moments, the improvements he wants to make. By the time the next Monday night rolls around he has been able to correct the faults he has found in his performance and those the producer has found. He is able to get some polish in every part he plays under such conditions, and he gets many of the benefits of a Stock Company as well. But I think if one has put himself through the mill of a stock company first, he knows better what he is trying to do, and the experience means more to him.

In my youth I came to the conclusion that, if I was to do any good, in my profession, I must shut my eyes to the fact that money was to be made by joining a one-play company, and open them to the fact that it was in a company playing many pieces that I could get the things that counted. Luckily, there were plenty of such companies, and for years I managed to be continually in one or the other. With a lady named Miss Wallis

I played in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Lady of Lyons*, *As You Like It*, and *Adrienne Lecouvreur*. With Osmond Tearle (old playgoers will probably remember him as the leading man at Wallack's Theater in the eighties) I played in *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Richard III*, *Money*, *London Assurance*, *Colleen Bawn*, and many others. So I feel that I may speak with some knowledge of what the Repertoire system means.

The work in Repertoire is not irksome. The actor does not merely drag himself to the theater to repeat what he has done the day before. Each day it is something different, and the constant change keeps him on the alert. Each day he plays a part that has lain fallow for days; and if he is in good professional health, he is anxious to play it again and try improvements on it. One gets away from the squirrel-in-a-cage routine which is the great foe to keeping the precious enthusiasm we must have if progress is to come.

The young actor learns early, too, the great value of team-work, and unfortunately this great asset of the actor's craft is practically dead in America today. I happen to know of only two instances where it is kept alive. There may be stock companies here and there who have this *esprit de corps*, this give and take; but the weekly change of bill is sure to work against it. The members of a Repertoire Company, however, have generally been together for so long that they understand the abilities and shortcomings of each other, and each is ready to help the other over the difficult places. Selfishness is rarely found in such a company, because everyone knows everyone else too well; and when some over-ambitious brother tries to force himself on the attention of the audience, at the expense of the play, he is likely to be thoroughly discouraged. Generally it is the rule in such companies, whether definitely expressed or not, that the less experienced actor is to get as much consideration as his superiors in the piece. It is on this

principle that the success of a Repertoire depends; for the balance and general excellence of the productions must be relied upon to make up for the lack of big names. Thus, when Morocco speaks, the Portia will not do anything to call attention to herself, but is more likely to do all she can to help. When Menas tempts Pompey to become master of the world by cutting the throats of Caesar, Lepidus, and Antony, the actor playing Menas—though he has but two short scenes—will have the chance to make his benevolent proposition to the best of his ability. The audience will not be distracted by the buffoonery of the actor playing Antony. It was a distressing spectacle for me once, while watching a company play this scene, to see the man playing Antony pour wine over the drunken Lepidus's head, merely to focus attention on himself! The beginning actor is free from such childish annoyances in a repertoire company.

Another advantage of Repertoire over Stock is that, in the former there is no star.

In the nature of the work, there cannot well be one. Suppose, for instance, a company has a program for the week as follows: Monday, *Hamlet*; Tuesday, *Romeo and Juliet*; Wednesday, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Wednesday matinee, *As You Like It*; Thursday, first part of *Henry IV*; Friday, *Julius Caesar*; Saturday, *Macbeth*; and Saturday matinee, *The Merchant of Venice*. Under the star system it would be impossible to play such a varied program; I know of no man living who could play the principal rôle in each of these plays.

In *Julius Caesar*, for example, the three great parts, Brutus, Cassius, and Antony, should be played by actors of equal ability. It would be ridiculous for one of them to be played by a star, and the others by less accomplished actors. Then in Falstaff we have another star part which would probably not suit a single one of the three principal actors in *Julius Caesar*, while not one of the four could play Bottom. Thus, to cast the



week's program properly, all sorts and conditions of actors would be required for the leading rôles. Indeed the whole of the company—those playing “responsible business”—would have to be of star-caliber.

Many years ago—in 1874 or thereabouts—I saw the Saxe-Meiningen Company at Drury Lane in London. They were playing *Julius Caesar*, and they had reached Antony's speech over the body of Caesar. Octavius, Caesar's servant, entered, and the dialogue was given:

ANTONY. You serve Octavius Caesar, do you not?

SERVANT. I do, Mark Antony.

ANTONY. Caesar did send for him to come to Rome.

SERVANT. He did receive his letters and is coming, and bade me say by word of mouth. . . . Oh, Caesar!

As to the meaning of this cry, “Oh, Caesar!”, the Servant, on entering, cannot but see the body of Caesar. His emotion, on realizing that the greatest man in the world lies lifeless on the ground, shakes him. He endeavors to answer Antony as a servant;

but the sight is too much for him, and he breaks down and cries out in anguish, "Oh, Caesar!"

Since I knew the play I was expecting the outburst, but when it came it lifted me straight out of my seat. I can hear it ringing in my ears now after forty-odd years. The art of it was perfect, it rang true, it was a cry of anguish. I learned afterward that the part of the Servant was played by one of their best actors, who had several arduous parts to perform, and who was willing to do a small bit on some nights for the good of the whole company.

I think it is worth while to mention this little incident because it illustrates the kind of spirit found in Repertoire Companies; and it also contains a moral which every actor may well carry with him through his novitiate. It shows what can be done even with the smallest part. This man gave the lines of the Servant, few though they were, in such a way that they carried real emotion, in such a way that the insignificant character

same work

made a genuine contribution to the atmosphere and moving power of the play. In the beginning the young actor receives parts which often in his own opinion, and sometimes in reality, fall far below his abilities. But however shallow a part may seem, it will yield a "moment" or two if we search carefully. There are a dozen ways of handling a man a letter, one of which is best for the play; we can help the star into his coat in many ways, one of which may add just the right flavor to the scene. We can make a distinct person of the tiniest sketch, we can put individuality into the smallest part if we try, and it is always worth while to try. We should not judge a part by its length, but by the possible "moments" there may be in it. No part is so small but one can learn something from playing it.

So I should say that it is best to begin either in a stock or a repertoire company where we play parts which have usually been tested by time, and which are thus more or less standard material; where we work more

than one vein of whatever ability we have; where we are kept close to the big fundamental principles which must govern effective work on the stage.

## CHAPTER III

### THE VOICE—THE INSTRUMENT WE PLAY

Seeming to Speak Naturally—The Handicap of a Half-trained Voice—Our Voice: Our Point of Contact with Our Public—The Dread of “Elocution”—The Art of Concealing Art—Harry Lauder’s Remarkable Voice—Charles Kean’s Stage Voice—The Power of Tones—Saving the Voice—The Two Primary Tones—Distinct Utterance a Simple Achievement—Laughing Infectiously—Taste in Using One’s Technical Skill.

**T**HE beginner is often told by the director not to strain and shout, but to “speak naturally”; and then when he does speak naturally he is told that he cannot be heard. This is a baffling paradox, and one which everyone who takes up stage work seriously is likely to meet sooner or later. As a matter of fact the natural speaking voice is of little or no use on the stage, and neither is the shout. The secret of it is that a man should so train his voice that he

has the range, and the pitch that is necessary, but also the technique and the control which enable him to *seem* to speak naturally. If we are to be good actors we must train the voice, and study its use, with the determination to make it the best instrument it is capable of becoming. Often one is tempted to stop half-way; to develop the voice just sufficiently to pass muster and secure engagements, but this seems most short-sighted. The time is sure to come sometime when the serious worker feels keenly the handicap of a half-trained voice; when he realizes that, because of his early neglect of this vital part of his equipment, he is unable to reach the position to which his other proved qualities entitle him.

No matter how much we know about the art of acting, we must depend most of all upon our voice to express it to others. It is our point of contact with the people who give us our rating as an artist. That is why it seems so strange that the study of proper voice production is so ignored by actors of

the present. In the days of Kemble, Kean, Macready, Phelps, Edwin Forrest, and the others it was not so; the training of the voice was given first consideration. Those old giants realized that they must depend upon their voice to carry them to greatness; they realized, from what they saw others do, that wonders could be accomplished by training; they devoted themselves to this great primary as a matter of course. I once saw Samuel Phelps play Wolsey and, on another occasion, Malvolio. It was a good many years ago, but I remember most vividly the ease with which his splendid voice carried every syllable of those exacting parts to every part of the theater. It is the memory of his thoroughly satisfying voice which remains with me; it was a pleasure merely to listen to him; and I am sure his mastery was only gained by hard study and hard work, his voice was pleasing and powerful and moving because his use of it was governed by the laws of the technique he had learned step by step.

It may be that one reason young actors of the present shy at the cultivation of their voices is because of the striving for realism and naturalness which characterizes so much of what we do in the theater today. We are likely to hear a great deal more about concealing our art than about the art we are to conceal. The alert young "modern" apostle of realism and naturalness has in mind the sonorous tones and studied utterance of the actors of the Old School, and imagines that to be the dreadful result of any serious voice training. But I think this idea is due to a confusion of values—albeit a very natural confusion. I do not think the old actors of my youth went too far with their study, rather they did not go far enough. Having spent hard years to learn how to speak excellently, they saw no reason for disguising their "elocution," they were more inclined to display it with pride. They regarded it more as a virtue than a fault to speak ponderously and precisely. They sincerely thought, too, that upon their shoul-



ders rested the burden of upholding the dignity and beauty of the English language; this was not a pose with them, they took it quite seriously and labored most conscientiously at their task. On the street, or in the club, or in the shop the finished thespian of those days was always the actor with the trained voice, he could not be mistaken. But it is for us of the present to go further than they thought necessary. It is for us to learn all they knew of voice production, and correct intonation and inflection, but learn also how to make it all seem perfectly effortless and natural.

In the reaction from the old school way of doing things it has become rather the fashion to despise the study of elocution altogether; but there is no doubt in my mind that it is still essential for the man or woman whose life-work is acting. Stage effects do not come by chance, they are the result of studied effort. If an actor is to repeat night after night the effect that has once won applause, he must know how he got the

effect in the first place, and he must know the technical principles that underlie what he did. Surely that can only come by study.

If the actor in vaudeville were as lax as the actor in the regular theater, he would be out of a job in a short time. Vaudeville acting is a highly specialized form of entertainment; and success in it comes only to those who have schooled themselves thoroughly in its peculiar technique. For the twenty minutes or so they are on the stage in vaudeville, the entertainers must be well-nigh technically perfect. Consequently it is on the vaudeville stage that we see what really can be accomplished by voice training; it is there, regrettably enough, that we are more likely to find voices that are really trained. Forbes-Robertson has been greatly admired for his splendid voice—and justly so—but I do not believe it is as good an instrument as, for example, Harry Lauder's. And I believe one of the biggest factors in Harry Lauder's success is the consummate skill with which he is able to use his voice. He gives the im-

pression of perfect spontaneity, perfect ease, he appears to be "just talking"; but in any given performance he uses an astonishing range of voice. The delectable, winning inflections which somehow cajole and stroke an audience into just the warm mood he wishes are not, I venture to say, so unstudied as they seem. Night after night he deftly touches the identical notes so expertly and easily that it all seems the naïve, almost accidental charm, of a delightful personality. While all this admirable technique may be second nature to him now, I venture to say it came at the beginning only as the result of careful and rigid training. Nature had given him a pleasing and powerful voice,—whose power is guided so well that few people realize how great it is—but Lauder did not rest on what nature had done for him, he did not neglect the perfecting of his voice, the control of it. To be endowed with natural ability is one thing, to be able to use it properly is another. I have seen many a man who lacked the natural advantages of his

competitors distance them by dint of his hard work.

Charles Kean, for example, according to my father, had a sort of chronic nasal cold. At the cost of enormous effort he was able to overcome it on the stage. But in his everyday life, when there was no need for his speaking carefully, he always sounded like a man with hay fever. He was playing *Richard III* once in golden armor. He was standing in the wings waiting for his cue, and turning to his wife said, "By dear, this arbor is too heavy for addything. I really bust have a suit of golded leather bade." His cue came, and he stepped on the stage and spoke his lines with perfect clearness. It was training; and I imagine that Kean had passed any number of other men in his youth who had been far more generously dealt with by nature.

Tones are most important, I think; and tones can be cultivated, indeed they may be said to be the result of cultivation in the case of most actors; nature gave them the instru-

ment on which they play, but she did not teach them how to play it. I believe if anyone stops and thinks of the moments when he has been most deeply stirred in the theater he will be surprised to find how often the effect had to do with the tone of the actor's voice. It is the tone of the voice, more often than anything else, which makes a line powerful and moving on the stage; I am sure this has been true in my experience. Macready, by concentrating and practising on the one word "murder," was finally able to speak it so that the audience shuddered at the mere sound he was able to give the two syllables. I have heard an actor in the part of the ghost in *Hamlet* give the lines,

"I could a tale unfold, whose lightest word  
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood . . ."

in such a way that the word "freeze" did freeze my young blood and send chills down my youthful spine every time I listened to him.

Range is one of the essentials also. An

actor should be able to speak in about two octaves, startling as this may sound. It is not necessary, of course, in small parts; but the strain on the voice of holding up a heavy leading part through an entire evening is much greater than we may realize when listening to another do it. To be able to carry such a part without fatigue the voice must have flexibility; a few notes cannot stand the long pressure. The trained voice husband itself by distributing the strain.

> One learns to keep plenty of air in the lungs, and to be sparing of breath. It is not well to shout the roof off of the theater, simply because one is able to do it. Such a thing is only disagreeable to an audience. I have heard people say of a certain actor that they were sure they would take great enjoyment in his acting if he did not make so much noise about it. I am sure that many people stayed away from this man's performances because his shouting was so irritating to them, yet he very possibly supposed that he was displaying great power.

He had a strong voice, and had lost sight of the fact that the portrayal of strong emotion was not at all a question of lung power. The trained voice can always carry as far as that of the shouter, and it is always much more moving.

Broadly speaking there are two primary tones from which one shades into the manifold variety of which the human voice is capable. These two are the sonorous and the metallic. Both should be cultivated, I believe. Certain kinds of matter lend themselves to the deep, easy, sonorous treatment, the lines may and should be dwelt upon; other matter—in itself, perhaps, rather dull—can often be carried by the sharp, incisive, stimulating way of speaking which the metallic quality of voice supplies. The mere ring and tang of the voice may stir the audience and keep them alert. Moments of pathos may best be given in the softer tones which are derived from the sonorous. Sarcasm, bitterness, and the like lend themselves to the tones whose primary is the metallic.

In big parts both varieties are needed; and I think every actor should cultivate them. Our difficulty of defining and cataloguing, and the apparent futility and folly of attempting to do it, presents itself again, I realize fully, in such a discussion as this. But it is only by means of some such bald statement, that we are able to glimpse the principles which are underneath what we do. Let us realize that in such an effort to put into concrete form what is of necessity so ephemeral we are only striving to suggest, not define.

The adroit husbanding of his energies which a man learns by giving serious attention to the cultivation of his voice enables him to adjust his abilities to the requirements of exacting parts. A good actor's voice may seem to rise in power and intensity in the moments of stress, but usually it is only a seeming rise. He knows his limitations and he begins the impassioned speech at a low pitch. He knows how to make his low tones carry effectively, he is able to rest his lungs even in the heat of the



greatest climax. Then, in comparison, he seems to be soaring in the crises. He has learned to pause and breathe even when he seems to be talking at top speed. Let us suppose a man is to burst into the room and announce, "The factory is in flames, they'll all be killed!" He has presumably run all the way from the fire, he is greatly excited, quite out of breath, and the words come tumbling out. But they do not actually come tumbling out. He says, "The factory . . . (pointing and gasping) . . . in flames . . . (gasp) . . . they'll all . . . (swallow) . . . be killed!" He has seemed to pour out the words in a rush, but as a matter of fact, he has taken as much time, and breathed as regularly as if he had sat calmly in a chair with his hat on his knees and made the announcement with the utmost deliberation. It seems over-fastidious to regard such methods as tricky, they are a part of that legitimate technique of which we must avail ourselves in simulating—not photographing—reality.

Very often, however, it is hard to under-

stand an actor because his enunciation, rather than his voice, is at fault. Certainly distinct utterance is one of the prime requisites; and it also is something which may be gained by simple practice. After all it is one of the simplest things in the world to learn to speak correctly, to take thought and begin each word properly and end each word properly; and it is such a gratifying relief to an audience if they can hear, without straining, everything an actor says. A little attention to one's everyday conversation will often work wonders. If one schools himself for a while to speak a little more slowly, and to give each syllable its due, it is surprising how naturally and rapidly his speech will clarify. If we take care of the consonants the vowels will take care of themselves; though we sound stilted and pedantic to ourselves at first, this passes, and the habit of distinct speaking becomes a fixed one, and is as hard as any habit to break. While we are forming the habit, too, we sound much more conspicuous to ourselves than we do to anyone else. Ellen

Terry is one of the best speakers I have ever heard, every syllable is clean-cut and clear, yet I do not believe anyone would ever accuse her of speaking primly or unnaturally. I do not imagine her splendid enunciation is a chance thing; I have no doubt she cultivated it until it became second nature to her.

The ability to laugh in an infectious way on the stage is another important asset. I have often heard actors lament the fact that they did not have a good laugh; but most of us would like to have many things without paying for them. Anyone can train himself to laugh in a variety of ways if he first has a control over his voice, and is able to make it do his bidding. There are several laughing effects on the phonograph which would serve as models, not to be slavishly imitated, but used as guide posts. Such ejaculations as those of anger, horror, grief, and sympathy should be studied while one is in a malleable state, before bad habits and false mannerisms are acquired. In the beginning we tend to take life as our model, later we are apt

to put our reliance on the devices and tricks of others—which, if we acquire them so, can never be anything but devices and tricks for us. I would suggest that a person start by finding out how he himself expresses the various emotions, what ejaculations come most naturally to him, and then that he try to express them accurately in his own way and at will, and that he make sure he is able to convey what he feels to others.

We may say, then, that our purpose is not to speak naturally on the stage at all, but to make people think we are speaking naturally, and that this comes as the result of study and hard work. With it all, however, we should not lose sight of the danger which frightens so many young actors away from the study of voice cultivation altogether: the danger of falling in love with our voice. Henry Irving once said, "What a wonderful actor Wenman would be if he didn't know he'd got a voice." Certainly there is a great danger of becoming infatuated with our faultless diction, of taking excessive pride in

it, and of showing it off to the audience. No good actor ever does that. He never lets the audience think he is speaking beautifully, only that he is speaking naturally and clearly. If, when the audience is leaving the theater, the comments are mostly in praise of the star's voice, there has been something wrong with his performance. Never have I heard Harry Lauder's voice praised, all the praise has been for his perfect work. (An actor can become the slave of his voice, whereas it should be his slave. There is such a thing as taste in using one's technical skill;) the best-dressed woman is the one who arranges her toilet so that we notice her beauty and not her gown.

It would seem that the wisest plan is to steer a middle course between that of the old actors who proudly displayed the mechanics of their art by constantly calling attention to their clear speech and tones, and that of the new actor who is apt to disdain the cultivation of speech and tones altogether. Of the two, however, the latter is the more

profitless; the road to Stardom is strewn with the bones of many clever people who, in the flush of easy success easily and early won, scorned the humble drudgery of sound technique. But perhaps a word of caution should be added. The stage proper, during the performance, is not the place for experimenting and practising; that should, by all means, be left in the study when one goes on for a scene. We should forget our voice, and hands, and feet while on the stage, and fix the whole attention on living the character we may be playing. The true actor can analyze his part and study its separate requirements; but, when the time comes, he can blend all into an indivisible whole. The theater, when filled with an audience, is a place of illusion; and the actor who is thinking of the mechanics of his work is shattering illusion for himself and for those who are watching him.

## CHAPTER IV

### GETTING INSIDE ONE'S PART

Learning Words Before We Know Their Meaning—  
Study the Character for Light on the Words, Not  
the Words for Light on the Character—We Should  
Know Our Part's Relation to the Whole—The Es-  
sence of Illusory Impersonation—Dissolving Shy-  
lock into His Component Parts—How Any Character  
Can Be Made to Reveal Itself from a Study of the  
Lines—The Second Step: Becoming a Shylock—The  
Third Step: Thinking out Shylock in Wall Street  
Terms—The Last Step: Associating Our New Self  
with the Play as a Whole—This Formula Applies to  
Plays Modern and Classical.

**T**HE quality of the performance we ultimately give depends, to a very great extent, upon the method we use in getting into the character from the beginning. In this, as in practically everything in our craft, I believe in reducing the problem to its simplest terms, in getting down to rock-bottom truths. We are safe in saying that an actor should analyze the character of every

man he plays until the man, pure and simple, stands before him. It is a mistake—and a common one—to learn the words of the character before we know why he speaks them, and why he would not speak any others. Over and over again, in the past, I have fallen into the error of judging the words on their face value, and of learning them before I had the remotest idea of the man who spoke them. I have memorized the lines, added to them a certain idealization of my own, and have taken pleasure in spouting them for the sake of their own telling qualities, rather than as a means of revealing the nature of the man who was supposed to be speaking them. Later, when the inevitable inconsistencies of my reading became clear, I have had the greatest difficulty in shaking myself free from the first impressions, gained merely because I had begun at the wrong end.

I remember a play in which I had the part of an old family servant. I had been with the family for most of my life, and though



the present head of it was a dissolute incompetent, I had a deep loyalty and even affection for him, because of his forebears. In a fit of petulance he threatens to discharge me. Then I have a long speech in which I tell him of the years when I served his father and his grandfather before him. I speak of the great industry they built up, of what strong men they were, and of how he is doing his best to tear down what they had left in his trust. My first inclination was to give a smashing delivery of this speech, to assail him with my eloquence; but when I analyzed the part, I found that this was wrong. I found that, to be in key, the lines had to be given more in sorrow than censure, almost apologetically. A study of the lines, for themselves, would not have revealed this; I found it only after studying the lines for light on the nature of the man who spoke them.

We should have some notion of the entire play, before we begin the study of our own part. If it is impossible to read the play, in its entirety, we should at least hear it read;

and the script we study should contain the whole of the scenes in which we have a share. Managers, however, have a way of giving the actor a typed copy of his part from which it is next to impossible for him to tell whether he is supposed to be a taxicab driver or a clergyman. His own lines are there, but those of the other actors to whom he must speak and reply are scantily represented by cues—which consist sometimes of as many as four words, and sometimes of one or two. In the part I had in *The Masquerader* these are some of the cues I was given to speak on:

—————Tchk, tchk, tchk!

Yes sir.

—————Parliament yesterday.

His nerves, ma'am.

—————she almost did.

Wake up, sir. Your wife is here.

—————Ugh!

A shave and fresh linen might improve appearances.

—————Oh!

Your order for the steel billets.

—————Ha, ha!

Oh, God!

With a “part” of this kind, the actor

gets a knowledge of the words before he has any idea of what they are all about, before he has any idea of the character of the man he is to portray. And the man, the character, should come first, then his thoughts, then his words. The words are the last thing to be considered. They are the roof of the structure one builds, and the solid foundation, and the walls, should come first. For we must know, not only those thoughts the character expresses, but also we must know the thoughts he does not express. In life, we put into words but a small fraction of the thoughts which pass through our minds in the course of the conversation. While the other man is talking, we are turning over in our brain a great many things which we might reply, and we speak only of those which seem to fit the occasion best. On the stage, if our impersonation is to be life-like, we must know the man we are playing well enough to do the same. I regard this as the very essence of illusory impersonation; only thus can we gain depth, only thus can

we impart the breath of life to our creation. If the lines we speak represent the total of our knowledge of the part we can only speak as a parrot, our portrait can only be a silhouette.

To my mind the logical way to build up a character portrayal is first to get a clear and firm knowledge of the man, and to make his thoughts my own; for it seems to me if we are to learn the words intelligently, we must know the thought that generates them, and to know the thought that generates them, we must know the character of the person who generates the thoughts. Perhaps the best way to make clear what I mean is to take a character and analyze it, to take him into our mental laboratory and dissolve him into his component parts, which is what we should always do with any part.

Let us take Shylock from *The Merchant of Venice* and see if, by studying the lines he speaks, we can realize the author's conception of the character. I am led to choose Shylock because Shakespeare is accessible to

everyone, while this might not be true in the case of a modern play. Also, since we have to deal with a representative of another time and country, and with Elizabethan blank verse, the aspects of the problem are magnified somewhat, we get them on a somewhat larger scale, in clearer relief. But the principles we follow and the methods we use are quite as applicable to the study of a present-day character. There is a danger, however, in using so well-known a character because tradition is liable to play a part in our analysis. Shylock has often been played—and by great actors—as a man full of dignity, and a great Jew; and one's natural inclination is to follow in their footsteps. But the thing we should do with Shylock, or with any character new or old, is to follow the author's reasoning with an unprejudiced mind, and allow the character to expand before us as the author wrote him, and not take our interpretation second-hand from anybody.

In the beginning Shylock enters with Bas-

sanio. The dialogue goes to show, at first, that Shylock is a shrewd business man, and that he has an undisguised hate of the Christian. When he is invited to dinner to meet Antonio, he replies that he will buy and sell with a Christian, but that he will not drink or pray with one. Then follows his soliloquy. Now in a soliloquy there is no hidden meaning. The words stand for the absolute truth, their face value is their real value. It is used by the author as a means of quick exposition of character, it is a convention granted the author for putting into words the thoughts of his character. And I have actually heard actors say, "Yes, this is what he says, but he doesn't mean it." In other words this is what he says to himself, what he is thinking, but it isn't really what he says to himself or thinks! In his soliloquy, then, Shylock says:

"How like a fawning publican he looks!  
I hate him for he is a Christian,  
But more for that, in low simplicity,  
He lends out money gratis and brings down  
The rate of usance here with us in Venice."

In the first line, "How like a fawning publican he looks," we get a glimpse of Shylock's mind. We know that Antonio is the very antithesis of a "fawning publican," since we have learned in an earlier scene that he is a fine fellow, generous to a fault. Thus at once we see that Shylock's judgment is distorted, at least so far as Antonio is concerned. The next two lines show that Shylock values money more highly than he does his religion. The fact that Antonio is a Christian is bad enough, but his methods of interfering with Shylock's business of piling up the ducats makes him, in the old Jew's eyes, much more of a reprobate.

The lines,

"If I can catch him once upon the hip  
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him,"

speak eloquently of Shylock's vengeful and brooding disposition.

"He hates our sacred nation; and he rails  
E'en there where merchants most do congregate,  
On me, my bargains, and my well-won thrift,  
Which he calls interest. Cursed be my tribe  
If I forgive him."

In this Shakespeare, like the painstaking workman he is, deliberately underlines the idea that Shylock's greed is a greater force in his nature than his religion. He starts with, "he hates our sacred nation," but his penurious mind gets back promptly to the deeper grievance: Antonio rails against his "well-won thrift," and against his "bargains." We feel that the oath, "cursed be my tribe if I forgive him," is torn from him, not because Shylock hates Antonio as a Christian but as a business enemy. It seems to me that Shakespeare has been most careful to make this clear, and yet how often has he been misunderstood. Thus, in the first few lines, we get a clear thumb-nail sketch of Shylock's character, and we know something of his relation to the rest of the play.

Shylock is shown to us thus far as a cunning, avaricious, malignant man; and we find, as the play proceeds, that this preliminary outline is carefully filled in. His own daughter, Jessica, confides to Launcelot



Gobbo that her home is a Hell. Later she tells how Shylock has declared that he would rather have Antonio's flesh than twenty times the value of the sum owed him. Shakespeare misses no opportunity to drive home the cruelty and greed of Shylock's nature. When the old rascal learns of his daughter's treachery; and when he expresses love for his dead wife, Leah, we are inclined to have a little compassion; but his greed is likely to turn our compassion to disgust.

He says,

“Go, Tubal, fee me an officer, bespeak him a fortnight before. I'll have the heart of him if he forfeit, for were he out of Venice I can make what merchandise I will.”

In other words, he means to kill Antonio, not for the sake of religion, but that he may be unhampered in his commercial operations.

To my mind this is the first step in the study of a part like Shylock, classic or modern. From a study of the lines themselves we get the primaries of his nature in hand. We

find that he is a certain kind of a man, with whom certain considerations will always come first. And if the man we happen to be playing is a Wall Street magnate, or a bloated politician, or a crusty old land-grabbing rural tyrant, we can get at the primaries of his nature in this way.

Then, being convinced that Shylock is an avaricious, revengeful old usurer, the next step is to get inside him, to *become* a Shylock. In doing this I believe in fixing my mind on the evil qualities in my own nature, in locking up and forgetting the good. Here again it is easier for me, always, to go back to primary things. When I was a youngster, I remember, there was a boy I did not like. I saw him one day leaning peacefully against a tree; and I remember the cold-blooded way in which I weighed the possibilities of slipping up behind him and kicking him, and making my escape. I daresay anyone can recall such moments; and if one fixes his mind on them, he can bring to the surface those old primitive instincts which convention

has since tended to soften and iron out. If we concentrate on such moods for a time, it is amazing how clear the motives and the psychology of a Shylock may become. By exerting the will we can grasp the conception of such a nature and hold it firmly in mind; and the more clearly we grasp it, and the more firmly we hold it, the better will be the performance we shall ultimately give; for this is the foundation and framework of the structure we are building, and if we are uncertain and wavering here the finished work cannot be right.

As a third step we can forget that the man we are studying is a character in a play. We can get him out of the world of fiction and into the real world about us; we can think of him as a human being whom we might meet in the street. In the case of Shylock I should forget his medieval costume, his Elizabethan speech, forget even his name. I should give this second self of mine a new name; I should call myself "Stingy" Smith, the tightest man in town. People shrug

when I pass along the street, I am used to being snubbed and insulted. This has had a natural effect upon me: I am soured, I hate them, every one of them. I take a bitter satisfaction in gloating over the fact that many of them are in my power. I have lent many dollars to them (dollars, not ducats); and I hold mortgages on much of their property which I could foreclose if I wished. I try, thus, to practise thinking—above all, thinking—and walking, and gesticulating, smiling, and shrugging as such a man would. Then, from the book of the play, I think it is a good plan to get the gist of the conversations in which Shylock takes part. This is not the time to study the words as they are written; but to read them over, and get their general trend, then I should attempt to read the part in the language that comes most readily to my lips.

Let us suppose I have called Bassanio “Brown.” “Brown” has asked me to let him have \$3,000. Perhaps we should read the dialogue something like this:

YOU: So you want me to lend you three thousand?

BROWN: Yes, for ninety days or so.

YOU (repeating, that there may be no mistake).  
Three months.

BROWN: Robinson will go security for me.

(The name Robinson fills you with hate, but you check yourself.)

YOU (calmly): Robinson, eh? So Robinson will back your bill?

BROWN: Right. What do you say?

YOU (with a tinge of sarcasm): Hm. Your friend Robinson is a good man.

BROWN: He certainly is. Do you know anything against him?

YOU (hastily): Oh no, no, no. Lord no, not in the least! I simply meant that his credit's good. I meant his name to a bill should satisfy anyone. But I'm a cautious man. I go slow. Robinson is a shipper, and all he's got is in his ships. They're likely to be wrecked, of course. Still, I think I'll take a chance.

I think it will pay to continue this through to the end. It may seem rather an indirect way of going about it, but I am sure it will be found that the idea we have formed of the part will gain in vitality and pliability, and that we are much nearer what the author had in mind. For we have again been simplifying. We have been transmuting the pre-

pared speeches of the character into our own simpler vernacular, and his emotions have become clearer in the light of our own emotional experiences.

The last step in this preparation is to get back into the atmosphere of the play, to associate this new self we have found with the time and place and the other people imagined by the dramatist. It may be argued that this sort of thing may be necessary in a classical play but is superfluous with a character of present-day life, since in such a play the language is natural to start with. But this, of course, is very far from true. The playwright has carefully selected the words for the actor to say. They are the words which unfold the story as the author wishes it unfolded, and which disclose the character in the way he thinks compatible with the economy of the play. We often compress into a few lines what, in life, we might take half an hour to say. If three or four people are talking in a room, one of them is likely to monopolize the con-

versation for fifteen or twenty minutes. Then there may be a pause of many minutes before the next word is spoken. That is natural dialogue, but imagine such a scene on the stage! So, in a modern part as well, we must, I think, disrobe the lines of all this polish and arbitrary arrangement and dramatic sequence, just as we deprived Shylock of his wig and cadenced verses.

Surely this is the logical way to build up a character portrayal. It is undoubtedly the course the author himself had to follow. He thought of the man first—long before he conceived “speeches” for him. Then he put down words for his new creation, but in rather crude form. Later he polished them into shape, into appropriate prose or blank verse as the case may be, and gave them to us as we find them in the finished play. And as the author, consciously or unconsciously, stumbles first of all upon the crude elements of his created characters, so we must deliberately go searching for them; and, having

found them, we must, after a fashion, re-assemble them for ourselves if our work is to be marked with confidence and grounded in truth, as all truly artistic work must be.



## CHAPTER V

### THE EYE AND THE HANDS

“Five-finger Exercises” Necessary for the Actor, Too—Revealing the Unexpressed Emotions—Irving as Becket—“One Thing at a Time”—Doing Just Enough—Coquelin’s Peculiar Mannerism—When in Doubt Do Nothing—The Set Gestures of the Good Old Days—An Example of Splendid Repose—Saving Bits of Business for Future Use—Gestures Grow from Character, Not from Lines—Heroic Gestures for Heroic Plays—Never Let Them See too Much.

**I** HAVE been told by young actors that, in their opinion, it is foolish to bother one’s head about the mechanics and the technique and the principle of what they do. They say they feel restrained and self-conscious and stilted if they do this. They want to forget that they are acting and depend upon their innate artistic sense for results. I suppose in no other profession would this absurd attitude be met. The beginning musician never dreams of plunging

into the difficult compositions of the master composers, until he has spent years in study of the mere mechanics of his art. He starts with finger exercises, then practices scales, and at length tries very simple pieces. He rises above, and forgets, his elementary lessons after a time, but he never thinks of trying to skip them. But on the stage, the novice often chafes at the primary lessons, and often scorns them altogether. But finger exercises in the actor's art are just as essential as they are in the musician's; the mechanical, technical groundwork must be there, but of course eventually we must become unconscious of it.

In the last chapter we spoke of how the actor, on the stage, must be able to let the audience see that his character is thinking thoughts and having emotions which are not expressed in words. Also in many cases, we convey many emotions to the audience, which the other characters of the play are supposed not to know about. And it is, to a large extent, with the eyes that such emotions are

conveyed to the audience. These emotions, it is apparent, are often as important as any in the play, for they reveal the inner qualities and the soul of the person we are playing. Clearly in speaking of the use of the eyes on the stage, it is impossible to be dogmatic and arbitrary. The skilful use of the eye, however, adds enormously to the effectiveness of one's performance, and until an actor is able to use to advantage this potent weapon in his equipment he can never achieve big results.

I was once forcibly impressed with how very much can be accomplished by a mere glance, while watching Irving play Becket in Tennyson's play of that name. The King had just offered him the Archbishopric of York. Becket was Chancellor of the Exchequer and a laymen when the offer was made to him. It is, we all realize, a momentous crisis in the lives of the two friends, the King and Becket. It is as though, in some vivid premonition, Becket realizes it too. Irving, as Becket, listened to the proposal in respectful silence. Then his eyes,

for an instant, darted away from the King, then back to him. In that glance was compressed all the vague terror he felt, all the ominous foreboding lest the appointment would, in the end, sever their friendship, and mean disaster. It was done with that look of his eyes, merely that instant's flash; yet it conveyed to me most powerfully the emotions in the breast of Becket. It is the moment which stands out in my memory of the performance. Of course Irving had wonderful eyes, or rather he had wonderful control over them. I would not say that they were good eyes for the stage, because they were so small; but he was able to use them with exceeding skill.

There are one or two technical principles which must govern the effective use of the eyes, but the most important of all is the one which applies to so much of our work. We must be immersed in the character to be able to feel these unexpressed emotions. That is the starting point. Once the part is really our own, these inner reactions cannot fail

to be clear to us. The question for us, in the present work, is to discover if there are any general rules which we should follow in attempting to impress upon the audience these emotions which have revealed themselves to us.

One rule there certainly is of universal application. When an actor wants the audience to notice his eye, he should give them nothing else to look at. He should not, for instance, move his eyes and his head at the same time. "One thing at a time" is a good maxim to remember. If an actor is to bestow a look of bitterness on a man he is not facing, his natural inclination is to turn and face him. But to do this might convey nothing. The audience might very well miss the expression of hatred entirely. I think it is a good plan, in any situation of this kind, to let our eyes seek the man before we turn our head, to dart our black look at him just the instant before we move the head. There should be a flash, an instant's picture, just enough to photograph the look on the

minds of the audience. The time required for this is infinitesimal. Irving's glance at the King, which was as memorable as anything else in the play, probably took but an instant's time, but I got the expression clearly; and I have no doubt it was because he was very careful that for that instant he should do nothing to distract attention from his eyes.

Another thing to bear in mind is that, in many cases, the eye the audience see is not always the eye the other actors on the stage see. This is a fact that is often ignored by actors good and bad. Their eyes express many vital things, but they forget that the actors in the play are the ones who see these expressions, instead of the audience. We should not only know precisely what we can do to reinforce our performance with our eyes, but we should take every care to see that each shade of feeling is registered unmistakably on the people in the auditorium.

This, of course, does not mean grimacing and glaring and rolling the eyes at the gal-

lery. In this, as in everything on the stage, we should be frugal. We should find out just how little is needed to register any effect. And anything more than just enough is likely to be a great deal too much. It is easy to waste the eye on little things, whereas it is a powerful medium which should be saved for the big. It is an abiding principle with me that we should save all we can of all our powers for the big things. The less we spend, the more we will have in reserve; and the impression of reserve power cannot fail to add power and confidence to our work.

I once saw Coquelin in *Cyrano de Bergerac*; and I am not sure that he did not carry this economy in the use of his eyes a little too far for my personal enjoyment. Certainly he had a most peculiar way of using them. He played most of the time with his eyes shut, only opening them to emphasize some particular point. He had, in a way, discarded technique entirely. The impression his performance made on me was a mixed

one. I did not know whether he had impressed me as being bored with the part—he had played it over a thousand times—or whether he seemed to me merely affected. I am sure that it was a most distracting mannerism. It shattered the illusion for me. He may have done it because his eyes were weak and could not stand the glare of the lights, or he may have thought that his acting gained power, since he was able to make more effective the few points he did accentuate by the use of his eyes. I should admit that the method, after all, attracted me in a way, but after leaving the theater I came to the conclusion that it was merely the novelty of it that had pleased. I did not consider the performance a remarkable one for a man of his reputation; I cannot conceive of such an energetic enthusiast as Cyrano going about with his eyes closed. It is very likely, however, that the performance I saw failed to do Coquelin justice. He had played the part so often; and the audience, I am sure, understood little French and were thus small



inspiration for him. But his method of using his eyes illustrates our point. We should jealously save our eye for the vital things, though I do not think it is necessary to close them. Such an obvious method calls attention to the mechanics of our art.

We should always, in striving for effects and impressions, seek to conceal the means by which we gain them. If an actor's gestures are not perfectly natural to the actor himself they are pretty likely to seem awkward to him; and if they are awkward for him, they will be noticed by the audience. That is, the audience will be conscious of the gesture itself, rather than of the impression the actor wishes to create by it. Many young actors seem to think that unless they are able to do something with their hands, they will be suspected of being amateurs; but the most difficult thing in all the actor's art is the faculty of doing nothing at the right time. A good general rule to follow is: when in doubt, do nothing; never make a gesture until there is absolutely no doubt of its pro-

priety in your own mind, wait until you are compelled to make it.

This matter of the use of the hands has undergone a great change as the art of the actor has developed. In the days of Kemble and Kean it was very different from what it is today. Then every emotion had a set gesture by which it should be expressed. Gesturing was a canonized thing. A certain position of the hands indicated pity, another supplication, another horror. Many of those gestures today seem as meaningless as the flourishes some pianists indulge in—raising their hands high above the keyboard and the like. In those days the hands and arms were gracefully manipulated according to certain definite laws, and the artist was known by his ability to squeeze everything he did into the rigid mould they provided him. Not for a moment do I mean to condemn or sneer, in the modern fashion, at those old conventions. Then it was art. I have no doubt that the conventions we have today (and we have plenty of them) will, in the

future, seem quite as quaint and futile. But rightly or wrongly, we have grown away from that set way of using our hands and arms. We have been bringing the stage closer to real life—as we suppose. I do not think we can be sure that it is better art, it is merely new methods applied to the same art. It is merely a big change in point of view. So it is from real life and real emotions, not from tradition, that an actor must learn his gestures today.

One of the finest and most impressive illustrations of the modern way of doing nothing that I have ever seen, was in the play *Hindle Wakes*, as it was given by Miss Horniman's company in Manchester, England. The son of the household had come in when everybody else in the family had been hours in bed. His father has come downstairs with a candle in one hand and a poker in the other, evidently expecting to find a burglar. But when the old gentleman finds it is his son, he proceeds to give him a lecture. He speaks in a low voice so as not to

disturb the others who are asleep. The father's speech is thirty or forty lines in length, and throughout his delivery of it, the actor playing the father stood perfectly still, without making a single gesture. As the quiet voice went on in the stillness, and the old man stood motionless with the candle and the poker in his hands, utterly unaware that he had either, we got a sense of the intense earnestness of the father, and the ominous significance of the quiet scene. It is interesting to speculate on what some actor of the old school might have to say of such a scene if he could rise from his grave and look in upon it. To him, I am sure, it would not be acting at all. But it is the way we do things today.

We should be very cautious about adopting gestures which we see others use. To do that blindly stifles our creative originality. When we see another actor do an effective bit of business we can remember it and apply it to our own work and make it our own; and then, when it seems to fit our part, we can

modify it to our needs and make use of it. But before we do use such a gesture we should be very sure that the gesture is our own. I have saved a gesture for years before it seemed to me that I could use it with propriety; I had seen an actor whom I admired make a certain gesture, and I was strongly tempted several times to try it myself, yet I knew quite well that I should simply be copying him if I did, I knew there was no actual place for it in my performance. But I did not forget the gesture; and when I did finally employ it, it had become my own. We should never force a gesture on our character, it is better to wait until the character forces a gesture on us.

It may be said that nowadays the gestures grow from the character of the person we represent, rather than from the lines he speaks. Thus if we have assimilated the character, the gestures are likely to follow inevitably. It is a good plan to bend our thought on the characteristics of the man we are playing, to bend our thought on those

habits of mind and conduct which make him what he is and which differentiate him from the other people in the play; then we need not think of just how we are to move our hands or shoulders, that knowledge will come as a natural corollary to the solution we have found of the problem.

Oddly enough, then, in a chapter which sets out to examine the problem of gesturing on the modern stage, we find that the best way is to turn away from the problem of gesturing altogether. But if we really succeed in making this point, we have accomplished a great deal. If we have seen that there can be nothing hard and fast about this phase of the craft, because there is nothing hard and fast about human nature, we have touched upon a useful truth. If the young actor sees that because he is supposed to be angry there is no reason for his clenching his fists, because some men would never clench their fists, we may feel that we have made our point.

In Shakespearian parts, and plays of the

heroic, costume type generally, it is possible to be a little more dogmatic. Those "heroic" parts, human though many of them are, are human in a magnified form. Their emotions are thrown into high relief; they are exaggerated according to the art-conventions of the time. With them we must project our emotions on a larger scale. Our gestures, corresponding with the emotions expressed, should be freer and, in a sense, more formal in that we are guided, not by real life, but by the artistic canons of the time in which the plays were written. In plays of the old type the arms should as a rule be moved from the shoulder, I should say; while in modern plays we work more from the elbow. Today we suggest more than we actually do on the stage. We do just enough to register the emotion, to inoculate the audience with the right germ—and we stop there. But in the past they were not content with that; they strove, perhaps we may say, to visualize the tempests of emotion which in reality took place in the soul of the character.

?  
An actor can afford to be very careful what he lets his audience see him do, and he should strive never to let them see too much. It is always surprising to find how quick an audience are with their eye, how very little is missed. Even when the attention is riveted on an exciting scene, the sight of a white handkerchief unexpectedly taken from the pocket of an actor is enough to switch the thought, for the moment, away from the center of interest. Unless there is a definite reason we should never move on another's speech. We should move on our own; and the movement should come at the end of the sense, at a natural break in the thought, not in the middle of it. If we find it necessary to cough, we should try to cough during our own speech, when the audience are paying attention to us, rather than during the other man's speech when they are giving their attention to him.

4  
So, after all, repose is what we should aim for. With gesturing, as with almost everything else, the less one does of it the better.



Too many gestures are worse than too few. We should never make a big gesture where a little one will suffice; and we should never use one at all unless it has a definite function, and unless we take care to register it properly on the audience. Thought should always precede our gestures, they should always grow from something inside.

These, I realize, are simple truisms of the actor's craft. But it is the simple truths, that everyone knows, that are apt to be taken for granted and forgotten. Let me repeat here that as we learn more and more about the intricacies of our craft, we are more and more in danger of forgetting the fundamentals upon which our knowledge is based. The great task is to remain direct and simple as we master the complexities and subtleties of our craft.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ART OF DOING NOTHING

One Actor Cannot Stand Alone—Supplementing the Speeches of Others—*Sweet Nell of Old Drury* and *The Lady of Lyons*—Team-work Will Cover a Multitude of Sins—Pintero's Advice—Coaxing the Audience to Listen—Listening Through Long Speeches—Know What You Are Going to Do When Silent—Varying Our Reading—Miming Must Grow from the Character—Retaining the Illusion of the First Time—The Point, Thrust, and Lunge—Thinking Lines—Giving the Audience a Rest—Little Things All Count.

**T**HE art of doing nothing and the art of listening on the stage are about as important and about as difficult as anything an actor has to do; for as long as he is on the stage, he is contributing to or detracting from the effect the play is making on the audience, whether he is speaking or not. As long as the curtain is up, somebody is always speaking or something is always happening; and whatever is done, or

not done, in silence, is sure to have a good or bad effect on the play. We never have nothing to do on the stage. It is always our business to make what the other fellow is doing or saying as effective as we can. The effect a play makes on an audience is a composite thing. One actor cannot stand alone, he cannot get along without the others, and the others cannot get along without him. Half of our work is to make our own speeches effective, half of it is to make effective the speeches of our associates in the piece. If someone insults us on the stage that insult will not carry much force with the audience unless we *show* them that we have been insulted. In real life we would try to give no sign of our chagrin, but on the stage we rob the play of an effect if we conceal our hurt feelings. We appear perhaps to take the insult as we should on the street, but the audience must see by some subtle movement of the body or some flash in our eye, that we have been hurt.

It may seem incredible, but I have known

actors and actresses so selfish, so inartistic, that they would deliberately refrain from supplementing another's speech in this way. I remember once in England I was producing a play called *Sweet Nell of Old Drury* in which there was a war of wits between Nell Gwynne, the orange girl, and Lady Castlemaine. Lady Castlemaine is sadly worsted in the conflict, and the actress who played her, not liking this, remained perfectly indifferent to the galling thrusts of sarcasm she received. I tried to point out that she was wrong, but she did not agree with me. So I gave up remonstrating with her finally, and told her to do it her own way, if she was determined not to listen to advice. When the dress rehearsal came I spoke to her again after this scene. "I suppose," said I, "you imagine you are going to make a big hit in this part? I'm afraid I must tell you for your own good that your performance is going to be rather a colorless affair." Since it was the dress rehearsal, she was worried and nervous, as I had known she would be.

She asked me what was the matter with her acting, and I replied, "You should do as I suggest and register the hits Nell Gwynne makes on you."

She retorted, "I am not going to let that woman see that she is getting the best of me!"

"I never intended that you should. I only want you to let the audience see it," I replied.

The truth of it dawned on her then, and on the opening night she played the scene in that way. The result was that she gave a splendid performance. The audience were interested not only in Nell Gwynne's words, but also in the effect of them on Lady Castlemaine. Until they were satisfied on both these counts the scene was incomplete.

In *The Lady of Lyons* there is another good illustration of how one actor must depend on another. Toward the end of that sturdy old play, Claude Melnotte unmask the villain in a grand speech. The real nature of the villain is revealed by the hero,

to the great delight of the audience. I recall an occasion on which this scene was received with more ecstasy than usual. The actor who was playing Melnotte was quite elated, afterwards. "Well," he said to the villain, "that was a fine round of applause I got tonight, wasn't it?"

"Yes," was the reply, "we did get a good one."

"We!" echoed the star. "Do you think you had anything to do with it?"

The villain admitted that such had been his impression. The hero stiffened a little, "You flatter yourself," he said.

When the next performance came Claude Melnotte unmasked his adversary in his finest manner; but the latter, instead of acting with the deepest mortification and rage, remained perfectly still, quite impassive. The round of applause which had begun as usual took a sudden drop and died altogether. Afterward the hero admitted that his fine denunciation was no good unless the effect of it on the villain was shown. I may add

that I was playing one of those parts, and it was not the hero.

The value of this "team-work" in a company cannot be over-estimated. One actor cannot stand alone. He must depend upon his fellows to shade and emphasize his work. It would be splendid if every actor should realize that half of his work is the reading of his own part, half of it is the "playing-up" to the others. A scene simply cannot make its effect through the efforts of one actor; it must come through the concerted effort of all the actors in the scene; and these various efforts, must be blended the one into the other. Anyone who goes to the theater often has felt a scene building up steadily and powerfully, only to be shattered by the mere voice of some minor character, perhaps, who is out of key, out of the mood, of the whole. I once saw a repertoire company of average capacity give a performance of Arnold Bennett's *What the Public Wants*. I myself had taken part in Charles Hawtrey's London production of the piece; but I real-

ized very clearly that, as a complete work, this repertoire production threw ours completely in the shade. The individual parts, of course, were not played nearly so well as they had been in London, but the ensemble was infinitely better. The effect of the play, as a whole, was much more clear-cut and powerful than ours had been. This was due to the superb team-work of the company. They all devoted themselves to the play; they forgot themselves, they all helped each other. But there is not the least reason, that I can see, why this team-work should be confined to repertoire companies. The faculty of rendering all possible aid to his fellows should be cultivated by every actor as a matter of course.

We always find, in any play, a certain amount of necessary exposition, a certain routine of stating the relations and conditions upon which the story is based; and this material in itself may not be particularly interesting. We should expect these arid stretches in every part we play, and it would



be well if we prepared ourselves to make an extra effort through them. A striking case in point is Sir Arthur Wing Pinero's *The Thunderbolt*. In that fine play there is a scene in which many of the characters sit about a large table while two lawyers explain to them the law governing the making of wills. We were rehearsing the play at the St. James Theater in London, and during this bit Pinero stopped the rehearsal, and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I know this is very prosaic and uninteresting to you, and that it will be so to the audience; but it is absolutely necessary, for the sake of what is to come, that this be driven into their minds. Now if you show by your attitude that you are not interested in it, you may be sure the audience will not be interested in it either. So when you reach the more interesting matter later on, which is founded on this dry law business, you will be surprised to find that you have lost your hold on the audience and that they do not realize what you are talking about. Therefore I

beg of you to listen to this explanation of the law, and to show by your attitude and attention that the characters consider it of vital importance to them. Then the audience will listen to it, too." Into this sage advice is packed a great truth, for the searching test of the actor lies in his ability to keep the audience alert and interested through what is often mere routine preliminary exposition. It is in the silent things he does here, and indeed in the silent things he does throughout, that the actor proves himself; it is not in the powerful speech and powerful moment. I have found that the "big" scenes are often the easiest work I have had to do in an evening; they will, if they are genuine, almost carry themselves. It is the things we do to supplement our spoken words, and the spoken words of others; the things we do throughout (but especially toward the beginning) to foment interest, that call out our best resources. The successful actor is he who can touch out and reinforce and make attractive the less attractive portions of the play; just

as the successful lawyer is not the man who sums up his case in a burst of oratory on the last day of the trial, but the one who is able to make the simple, prosaic facts on which his argument is based burn their way, willy nilly, into the minds of the jury.

The power of listening to the speech of another in such a way that the audience are coaxed to listen also, is one of the most direct means by which we are able to burn the simple prosaic facts of the play into the minds of the audience; and it is a supremely important branch of the actor's craft.

The first scene in Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara* is an amazing example of that author's bland disregard of convention. He has a volume of comparatively uninteresting facts to place before the audience before the people of the play can be understood. Does he devise some winning little incident to start the play, some incident into which he can unobtrusively insinuate this involved "exposition"? Not Shaw. Lady Britomart and her son, Stephen, sit on a settee in the center

of the stage, and for fifteen minutes or more the actor playing Stephen must listen to an exhaustive and detailed summary of the situation in the Undershaft family, past, present, and future. Lady Britomart begins by telling Stephen that he was twenty-four years old the previous June; she goes on to sketch the education and travel he has enjoyed, he has been to Harrow and Cambridge, in India and Japan. She then speaks of his sister Sarah's engagement to "Cholly" Lomax, who will be a millionaire at thirty-five; she tells him that his other sister, Barbara, is to marry an impecunious professor of Greek; she states the exact income of her own father; then turns to a consideration of her husband, Stephen's father. We learn that he is a maker of munitions, that he was an illegitimate son; that his name is not really Undershaft, but that that name was bestowed upon him when he was adopted by his predecessor in the office of president of the munitions plant. We might suppose that this information was sufficient for Stephen, but

Lady Britomart has only begun. She says, "Now be a good boy, Stephen, and listen to me patiently." And she launches off into a long explanation of the Undershaft custom of leaving the great industry in the hands of a foundling, when one generation gives way to the next. Throughout this long scene Stephen has only a few perfunctory speeches; for most of the time he must listen. A good actor playing this part is able to point and make more vital what Lady Britomart says, by his appearance of rapt, and at times painful, attention; he makes it more amusing by his tendency to be shocked at his mother's blunt statements, he can keep in the picture, and add vitality to the long speeches; though it is true the scene is so brilliantly written that the audience forgets the prosiness of the facts themselves, forgets that nothing whatever is happening.

But an actor playing a scene of this kind must know exactly how he is going to behave while the other is speaking to him. It is a grievous mistake to leave it to chance, as

unfortunately a great many do. If he happens to be in just the right mood he may fare well enough; but he cannot expect to be always in the right mood. The workmanlike thing, for anyone who is striving to fit himself for worth-while work on the stage, is to study out for himself some sort of broad technique for his listening, which will be a guide—merely a general guide, of course—for any part he may play.

Not that he should try to force himself to do precisely the same things night after night. Every actor should be able to vary his performance slightly every night, otherwise the monotony of his work would be fatal to all freshness and spontaneity. We should be able to try little variations of emphasis, to show more emotion here on some nights, and less there; we should try to give a comic turn to a situation sometimes, and a pathetic turn at others, to see which is more effective. But we should always have some sort of guide which will prevent us from going too far afield. Our ship should always be firmly an-

chored; we may, and should, pay out more rope some nights than others, but we should always be very sure we are not adrift.

Years ago when I was associated with Sir Charles Wyndham, he interrupted me at a rehearsal and said, "But, see here, my boy, you are not speaking the author's lines." I replied that I knew I was not speaking the exact text, but that I had the sense of it. He took the occasion to give me a little lecture. He impressed upon my mind the absolute necessity of having the exact words of the text in hand at the start. The time would come when I should not find the substitute words coming easily, when I should get involved in words, and stray from the point, if I did not have, as a firm anchorage, the original words the author had written. Joseph Jefferson once said that there were a thousand ways of playing one part; and he must have found many of them for Rip in *Rip Van Winkle*, or he could never have played the part for years on end as he did. I should imagine that David Warfield has

his subtle variations for his impersonation of The Music Master, by which he is able to stimulate himself and freshen his performance from week to week. But no one will doubt that both of these men started first of all with a solid anchorage to which they were sure they could always return. In the silent portions of our parts—and the silent are fully as important as the spoken, often—we do not even have words to guide us and keep us true. It must be apparent, then, how necessary it is to devise a guide for ourselves which will roughly govern us always.

Of course it would be stupid and presumptuous to lay down any hard and fast rules in a matter which depends so much on the individuality of the actor, and so much on the various requirements of various parts. In some cases we may achieve our end by remaining perfectly still with our eyes fixed on the speaker, thus focusing attention on him; sometimes it is better to obliterate ourselves from the scene entirely; again it is the listener who gives the real point and drive



to the other's speech, he may convey to the audience by his expression of horror or pity the depths of the suffering through which the other is passing; and how often a line "gets a laugh," not because it is given in a clever way by the actor who speaks it, but because of the way it is received by the listener! In a tense scene the slightest movement of the hand or head, even on the part of a minor actor, is apt to take on a profound significance in the eyes of those absorbed in the play. An actor may mar the carefully-wrought effect of a situation by a false move; or he may, by some simple gesture, enhance the effect enormously. More than anything else we do, perhaps, our mode of listening must grow directly from the particular character we are playing; for it is by our expression and gesture—our silent moments—that we convey the actual thoughts of the character. Thus, in turning our attention to this question of listening with effect, we must deal more with principle than with method.

There seems little doubt that, unless we

have founded our interpretation on some such analysis as we outlined in an earlier chapter, there will be difficulty in sustaining the proper illusion through these silent moments. If our miming is to be genuine, there must first be a clear and firm knowledge of the character we are playing; we must have forgotten ourselves, and be immersed in the character as we understand it. This seems almost self-evident. If this is the case, and our minds are fixed on the truth of the character as revealed by our analysis, we may say in a broad sense, it is not necessary to think much about the specific movements with which we are to attend and register what is said to us. These will develop naturally from our knowledge, they will not be tacked on, and we are not likely to be so self-conscious in them. A certain mental discipline is implied in this, of course; a discipline which will force us to keep our minds unwaveringly on the character. As a step in finding the technique which suits him best, every young actor, I should say, would be repaid if he tried to

devise ways which will aid his concentration and make him proof against the distractions that increasing familiarity with the part is pretty apt to bring. Then, with this fixed knowledge there should be the purpose—the common one of all phases of our study—to make what we do a simple and sincere expression of what we conceive the character to be. Thus we are again driven back to primary things; as we strive to examine and roughly codify this rather subtle and complex business of listening we are led back to the simple primary which had to do with correct part-study. No matter how finished a performance we give, we find it essential to keep intact the lines of communication back to our base.

The real difficulty of listening with this curious persuasive effect, I have always found grows greater as the run of the play continues. The familiarity which is born of this prolonged repetition, will, if care is not taken, eventually kill the freshness of the words we speak. The little touches by which we

suggest the many thoughts behind the spoken words, the nicely calculated hesitancies in the delivery of them, are apt to become so worn by constant use that they will be scarcely noticeable. Of course we should always attempt to forget that we have ever heard the words before, and that we are speaking our own for the first time. This is an extremely difficult thing to do, and it is not a thing to leave to the will, it is a problem for our technique. The problem is that we know exactly what is to be said to us by the other characters, yet must give the impression that we are hearing it for the first time. We must give the impression, too, that our answer is the unstudied response to what we hear. In real life we rarely have a glib answer on the tip of our tongue. At the risk of seeming to make a petty analysis of the obvious, let us say that there are usually three steps: we listen to what is said, we take an instant to grasp its meaning, then out of the thousand and one things we might say in reply, we select the words which fit the occasion best.

On the stage if we are to give the impression that we are hearing a remark for the first time, I am certain that each of these three steps must be suggested. Of course it should be most delicately done, but it should be done. It is much like fencing. If a layman were watching a fencing bout he would see two men hopping about and lunging at each other with the foils, and that is about all he would see. But a trained eye would know at once whether the fencers knew their business. There are three distinct steps to an attack in fencing. First the sword is pointed at the opponent, then the arm is straightened, then there is the forward lunge of the body. The point, thrust, and lunge are necessary in fencing; but the expert does the three things in rapid succession, almost as one. He himself, no doubt, is scarcely conscious of the separate steps, though in the beginning he had to learn them one at a time. No one watching him could detect the three movements, but if the attack is to succeed properly they must all be there. Yet significantly for our point

the success of the attack depends upon the concealing of what is done, for if it is not concealed the man attacked will know what is coming and act accordingly.

There should be a point, thrust, and lunge to every stage conversation; three distinct steps blended into one. First the actor receives the words; second he "judges" them; third he replies to them. Thus when another character speaks to us there should be some suggestion that we are taking in his meaning as he goes along, some suggestion that we are hearing his words for the first time. Next there should be some sort of momentary hesitation, as though we were forming our reply, for the first time. Then we should give our reply. But no one watching us should be conscious of the three steps; as in the case of the fencer our success depends upon the concealing of our technique. If we school ourselves into this method—as the fencer schools himself in his—so that it becomes second nature to us, so that we ourselves are scarcely conscious of the three separate steps,

we overcome, to a great extent, the tendency to "parrot" our lines, which comes from long repetition. I believe any actor could adopt this method to advantage.

A qualification, however, should perhaps be added. There are times when the listener knows just what the end of the speech is to be, and the audience is waiting for the reply which they know will be of a certain kind; here the listener must give his answer almost before the speech of the other is finished, and it is evident our little formula does not apply. But such a scene as this, where the speeches often "overlap" each other, falls a little outside the scope of the present discussion. In such a scene there is really little listening done, that is one actor does not do most of the speaking while the other does most of the listening, both actors may be said to play first fiddle, while in this chapter we are concerned with the trials of the second fiddler who must listen for long periods to others and yet, somehow, keep in his character and sustain illusion.

The whole question of effective listening to more or less dull material, then, may be said to resolve itself into the problem of submerging oneself in the part and remaining in it, throughout the dull, as well as the spirited, portions of the play. I have found that it helps me to do this if, during rehearsals, I can study out lines for myself to think while the other characters are speaking; and if I can force myself actually to think them—the same lines—night after night, I usually find it easier to keep my mind on the story of the play, and on my connection with it. The lines I do speak then are, in a way, the outgrowth of my thought, and the effect of the scene, speech by speech, upon me. It seems to me that this, in theory at least, is correct, for it tends to create for the actor himself the conditions through which his character is supposed to be passing.

I believe, also, that if one can give the audience a rest from his character at times, he adds greatly to his effectiveness. It seems that some actors never learn the great value



of this; they insist on thrusting themselves on the attention even when another character has the floor; but selfishness never pays, and if we distract the attention of the audience from what they want to hear, they only resent the interference. If an actor uses his discretion and takes himself out of a scene as completely as he can—by turning his back, or remaining perfectly still—when it is time for him to speak again he comes to the audience with added freshness. But in doing this, naturally, we ourselves must be sure that our thoughts are not allowed to wander, that we are in the scene though we may not appear to be so to others.

There are a great many of these devices; and they will undoubtedly occur to the person who studies his part with the purpose of making the dull moments live. He guards against the tendency to slide over them in his thinking, he studies over and over the lines to which he must listen and makes them meaningful to himself. If the author has given him little to work on, he is able to

delve into himself for the vitality that will make his character live. He can invest the prosiest bits with his own imagination, and give a tinge to them that will shed light on the character he is playing. I believe we even come to welcome these uninteresting bits, for in them it is our own originality that tells. It not only brings satisfaction to tackle and solve the harder portions of a part, but it has a great deal to do with the impression our evening's work is to make. For the audience, on leaving the theater, think of an actor's performance as a whole, they do not think only of his great moments. Unconsciously there is a flash back over the entire portrayal he has given, the small things he did at the beginning when they were first getting an insight into his character, assemble themselves; and if the actor has been consistent they feel the logic of it all. It pays, then, to build conscientiously from first to last, to spend as much energy on the arid stretches as on the fertile.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE EMOTIONS

All Acting Is Emotional, and All Actors Must Be Capable of Projecting the Primary Emotions—Tricking an Audience—Sir Herbert Tree's Finesse—In *Called Back*—His Artifice in *Trilby*—In *Jim the Penman*—His Wolsey's Falseness—We Must Draw Our Interpretation Solely from the Author's Lines—Tree's Shylock Saved by a Trick—Coquelin's Cyrano Merely Make-believe—Ristori's Comment on Rachel—Should We Literally Feel the Emotions We Portray?—Irving's Opinion, and Ellen Terry's—Guiding One-self Through the Impassioned Speech—Crescendo of Emotion—Beginning Gently—Nervousness Often a Good Thing—Othello's Emotion—The "After-swell"—Ignoring the Audience.

**I**T may be said that all acting is emotional. Of course there is a wide range in the intensity of the emotion expressed in the various scenes of any given play; but unless a scene is expressive of some emotion of some kind, it can scarcely be a dramatic scene. Using the word emotion in this broad sense,

I mean that any scene with the power of quickening the pulse of the auditor—whatever be its appeal—is emotional.

Therefore it would seem indispensable that every actor should have the power of expressing the primary emotions of grief, anger, fear, despair, humor, love, desire, hope. He should have the power of projecting these emotions over the footlights, which means that, in the beginning, his own nature must respond to them. The lack of this power has been the explanation of many a failure in the profession. I have always believed that the extent to which an actor moves and convinces his audience is determined by his ability to portray the deeper feelings, the hidden emotions, the soul within and behind the words he speaks. And the test comes in his ability to give this portrayal purely and simply on his own merits, with no accessories of make-up and costume to aid him; simply by his power of himself feeling the emotions of his part, and making the audience feel and appreciate and believe in their genuineness.

The actor who really moves audiences—to laughter or tears—does not trick them; he himself feels keenly the various emotions he seeks to express, his task is to inoculate his hearers with the same emotion; to do this he resorts to technical methods which are calculated to aid him in projecting his emotions, but the great mistake often made by the beginner is that he regards these technical devices as the whole of acting. He regards acting as make-believe; and that is an attitude of mind that the novice should rid himself of as speedily as possible, for it is inimical to the development of the more vital faculty—that of really feeling the emotions of his part.

I have known only one man who succeeded on the stage without this faculty, that man was Sir Herbert Tree. I should say that he found it such an effort to put his soul into the mood of his characters that he simply did not bother to try it seriously. At a performance, here and there, I have seen him inject a certain amount of true feeling into

his work, but this was rare; I am rather inclined to believe that he despised the primitive and simple in most things artistic. In my opinion, he reached his fame by means of a wonderful finesse. He clung to this finesse and superficial cleverness of his throughout his career. In some characters this produced admirable results; in others, like Shylock, Othello, Macbeth, and Wolsey, it did not. It should be said that Tree came into the profession at a time when actors considered that nothing but the bald, primitive emotions was necessary. They paid too little attention to the deft shading and the intimate touches which make a character rounded and individual. Tree, in playing Macari in *Called Back*, for instance, illumined his impersonation with little movements of the hands, he twirled his mustache in the Italian manner (Macari was an Italian), he flicked the ash of his cigarette, and did countless other tiny things which came as a revelation to the actors and audiences of the time and which were received with enthusiasm. It was his

first great success and he did indeed give a most lifelike picture of Macari. His facial make-up was perfect, his facial play was perfect, his suggestion of callousness all combined to make a tremendously vital performance.

The same was true of his Svengali in *Tribby*. But when the stress of powerful emotion came in this play he fell far below the standard he had reached in the quieter portions. We realized that he was circumventing the real thing by artifice. This was illustrated in the death of his Svengali. He had missed the fervor of the Jewish prayer entirely, it seemed to me, in spite of the fact that he had sought to make it impressive by speaking it in Hebrew. Then when he came to the moment of death, with the audience clearly little moved, he fell across a table with his head hanging over the edge, so that those in the theater saw it upside down with the eyes staring weirdly in death. This artifice did succeed, and was regarded by many as a piece of great acting!

In *Jim the Penman* he employed a peculiar

little trick which disguised his lack of real feeling. He was playing the Baron in that piece, and when Jim lay dead in the chair Tree had to make the audience realize that he knew the forger was dead. The usual actor would have looked into the face of the dead man, and by means of his own facial expression and gesture would have conveyed his realization of the death. But Tree did not use his face at all, he simply walked to the dead body in the most callous, almost unconcerned way, passed his hand over the dead man's brow, and coolly wiped the death sweat off his hand onto his coat. This proceeding made the audience shiver, as it was designed to do; but though such pieces of business are effective, anybody could do them, and I do not think they can be called great acting.

He carried this trickery into his interpretation of Shakespearian parts, and there its inappropriateness was plain. It was as though he realized that he could not sound the depths of emotion in those giant parts, and so took



refuge in his finesse. His well-known device of carrying an orange while playing Wolsey was surely a grave error. When he first did this I heard people praising him for his cuteness—it was the one thing commented upon in his performance. His idea was that Wolsey kept the orange near his nostrils because the scent of human beings was so distasteful to him. Tree must have rooted this idea out of some book on Wolsey, and it may be that the real Wolsey did actually express aversion for the common herd in this way; but whether the orange is fact or fiction, it is certainly true that in Shakespeare's Wolsey, there is not the slightest suggestion of such a man. Tree made this excessive fastidiousness Wolsey's predominant trait, it was the one thing dwelt upon wherever his performance was discussed. From an artistic point of view this was appalling, for Shakespeare's Wolsey was a giant among men: a giant who, in his fall from high place, showed qualities that made of him a great tragic figure, a greater man than he ever was at the zenith of his

power. Whether Tree was incapable of portraying the tremendous emotions of the character is a question; but it is a simple matter of fact that he did not portray them, that he circumvented them by means of this orange device and others as questionable.

It may be said that he was led away by the success of his little trickeries until he lost sight of, and lost belief in, the profounder things. This is indeed a danger which any actor should realize. We are apt to be deceived by a momentary success of some ingenious little adornment we have added to our performance, and forget that artistic progress, in the last analysis, depends upon the straightforward appeal we are able to make. If we are able to add to the attractiveness and give point to this appeal by bits of finesse, well and good. Indeed we should make each part we play as individual as we can. This is done, of course, by such devices as Tree used. We cannot depend altogether upon the primitive unadorned emotions, but we should never forget that these emotions

should be the basis of everything. It is a great mistake to substitute these external embellishments for the real feeling. The two must be judiciously blended.

Again I repeat that we must draw our conception of any character from the author's lines; and we must resist the temptation to let it be colored by other knowledge we may have. In the case of a character like Wolsey, it is an artistic misdemeanor to go to history for our idea of his nature. A play is like a painting or a piece of sculpture, it is what it is, it must be its own justification, its own explanation. Shakespeare conceived and created a clearly defined, consistent man in Wolsey—whether he is the Wolsey of history or not. It is for the actor to play Shakespeare's Wolsey, being guided alone by Shakespeare's lines, otherwise the balance of the play is certain to suffer.

The career of Tree provides a fruitful theme for a discussion of this kind. Clever man that he was, he never missed a chance to appeal to the audience's love of novelty.

But in many cases, there can be no doubt, his cleverness spoiled his good work. I recall his Shylock, in the great emotional scene with Tubal where the old Jew runs the whole gamut of hate, rage, and tears. But Tree in the part left me quite cold. I believe the effect on the audience would have been negligible also if the curtain had been brought down upon the closing words of Shylock's speech, as it customarily is. But Tree had evolved a piece of business which he tacked on at the end of the scene. He fell on his knees before the threshold of Shylock's house, and with agonized cries scraped ashes from the ground and showered them over his head. The touch electrified the audience; and the scene, which up to this had been flat, was awarded great applause. How different to this were the Shylocks of both Booth and Irving! Those men drew upon nothing for their effects except their magnificent power of expressing great emotion.

Tree, when playing Hamlet, never got the response other actors had received in his out-

burst over the grave of Ophelia; but here too he was able to cover his tracks and save himself. After the scene was finished, and when the others had departed, he would return to take a last mournful look at the dead body of Ophelia; and this rarely failed to win over the audience. And thus, throughout his career, he concealed his natural shortcomings by resorting to more or less extraneous, but always clever, artifice.

Very  
interesting  
indeed

I never felt that Tree was full of the emotion his character was supposed to be feeling. It never seemed to me that his interpretation was coming from the inside. This was the great fault with his work; and it may be because of it that he is so often accused of insincerity and falseness.

I had some such feeling also about Coquelin's performance of *Cyrano de Bergerac* (to which I referred in an earlier chapter). It seemed to me that Coquelin, with all his superb technique, was concerning himself merely with the externals and superficialities, the visible attributes of Cyrano, instead of

feeling him. I had produced the play for Sir Charles Wyndham, and knew what fine possibilities there were in the part. Coquelin never once moved me. I did not feel that he ever put himself in Cyrano's place, but that throughout he was playing at make-believe.

Whether one should actually feel the emotions he portrays or merely simulate them has always been a debatable matter. Ristori, in contrasting the Italian and the French methods, says, "Rachel was a tragic genius of France, but we followed two widely different schools. We had two different modes of expression. She could excite the greatest enthusiasm in her transports, so beautiful was her diction, so statuesque her pose. In the most passionate situations, however, her expression was regulated by the rules imposed by the traditional French schools. We, on the contrary, do not believe that in culminating passion this self-possession is possible." Those were Ristori's words, but the difference between the two is not so marked as might appear on the surface. For my part

I do not agree with the "rules imposed by the French school"; but neither do I believe that in "culminating passion" Ristori ever lost her self-possession. She was, I think, the greatest tragedienne I have ever seen. I shall never forget her performance of Marie Antoinette. Her rage was terrific, but the next moment she was able to clasp her son to her heart and speak in accents of the most touching grief. To make this sharp transition of mood she must have retained great control, after all. Ristori herself tells of what I believe to be the only occasion on which her passion carried her away to the extent that she did not realize what she was doing. At the end of her tremendous scene she advanced several steps toward the audience and fell exhausted near the footlights, and was only saved from being burned by the presence of mind of someone from the audience who pushed her inanimate body out of danger.

But after all is it ever really possible for an actor literally to feel the passions he portrays? There are times when he must ap-

appear so blinded with rage that he must commit murder; can that passion be literally felt by the actor? It seems to me that all passion must be kept under a certain control and within the pale of art. It is also evident that to retain this control of necessity grows more difficult as the actor gains in his power of expressing great passion. In the beginning it is easy to remain master of our resources, because they are not vast; but the actor who has trained his whole being, his voice, his face, his muscles until they are capable of great power, finds the problem of control and discretion one which requires a keen sense of dramatic values and proportion, and a strong exertion of the will at times to carry out what he knows is the proper course. In the rehearsing we may do in private it is perhaps well to give way to uncontrolled passion to develop our powers of expressing it; but while acting we must always remain master of our resources.

An actor once told me that when he was playing with the great Jefferson he was so



affected by the brilliant man's work during one of the scenes that his face was suffused with tears. Jefferson called him into his dressing-room after the act and said, "You mustn't cry on the stage. Make your audience do that. If you do not control yourself how can you expect to control your audience?" The latter part of this advice no one can take exception to, but always to repress one's tears is another matter. Ellen Terry, in her finest parts, wept copiously and so did her audience. She was able to allow herself to be moved by the pathos of the story, yet to control herself and her audience at the same time. Jefferson was right and Miss Terry was right, but because they were what they were they got their effects in different ways.

Guiding oneself through the impassioned moment is much like striking the ball on the golf links. I once asked a professional golfer, James Braid, how much strength he used in driving. "I hit as hard as I can," was his innocent-sounding reply. With this advice I

laid down several balls and whacked at them for all I was worth. They shot to right and left, straight up in the air, or went bounding along the ground. Even those I did manage to hit fair went only about a hundred yards. Mr. Braid had neglected to tell me that he held his club in a certain way, that he "addressed" the ball in a certain way, that he applied his full strength only at a carefully-timed moment. He could indulge himself by slamming the ball with all his strength because he knew his swing would be governed by the technique he had drilled into himself. Thus, indeed, it is with acting. Ristori was able to throw her whole passionate soul into her emotional scenes, because she knew quite well her technique could not desert her.

It should be pointed out, too, that there are ways and ways of throwing one's whole soul into a strong speech. The speech of Constance in *King John* is charged with intense passion. She cries:

"Arm, arm, you Heavens, against these perjured kings!  
A widow cries! Be husband to me, Heavens!"

These two lines the actress may give with all her power. Then come the lines:

“ Let not the hours of this ungodly day  
Wear out the days in peace; but ere sunset  
Let armed discord 'twixt these perjured kings!  
Hear me! Oh, hear me!”

After pouring out those first two lines in a flood of passion, the skilful actress would pause, and appear transfixed; she would make a complete break. This would be thrilling to the audience, preparing them for what is to follow; and the words, when they do come, have acquired a deeper, more terrible significance. And incidentally the actress has regained control of herself. Then she speaks again, substituting for the force of the preceding lines an intensity which, in contrast, is just as moving but which puts no tax on her physical powers. She speaks each word clearly and slowly, pausing often, thus:

“ Let . . . not . . . the hours . . . of this . . . ungodly day . . . ”

And so on to the end, gradually increasing both pace and power till “Hear me! Oh,

hear me!" is given with enormous tragic force. But an untrained actress would be likely to attempt to keep up the whirlwind of the beginning of the speech straight through to the end. The result might well be that she would "pump" her lungs and exhaust her strength.

There is, also, a deeper technical principle involved in such a delivery of such a speech: that is the anticipation of emotion. When Constance pauses before uttering her curse, we are prepared for what is to come. In a broader sense this anticipation applies to a play as a whole. In the early scenes of a play all of the emotion should be of an introductory, preparatory nature. In good plays it is; and it is the actor's part to treat the emotion in the early acts of a play from that point of view. In Othello's speech in the second act we get an example of this foreshadowing:

"If I once stir or do but lift this arm the best of you shall sink in my rebuke."

This speech indicates that Othello is cap-

able of great emotion, though so far in the play he has not displayed it.

On the other hand, in Shakespeare's play *Cymbeline* a totally different technique is used by the author, and consequently must be used by the actor. Instead of foreshadowing in this play, Shakespeare lets the emotion of the heroine come as a surprise; for we do not think of her as anything but a gentle creature, incapable of great transports, until the moment of stress comes. We see Imogene, the heroine, a gentle dainty lady, mild, and kind. That is carried through consistently with regard to her, until she looks on the body of her murdered husband. Then her pent-up fury and despair blaze forth. When I saw this part played by Helen Faucit her outburst came as a glorious surprise to the audience because, in a way, we were quite unprepared for it. In a deeper sense, however, we had been prepared for it by the skilful acting. The mere fact that we were given the gentler side of the character first acted as a subtle preparation for the revelation of the

other side, which came with all the more force. Modjeska, when she played *Odette*, employed this method. In the first act we have seen her as a delightful, witty hostess; then comes the peculiar thrill, the strange surprise when she cries, "Coward!" to her husband at the end of the act. Thus we are always preparing for the emotional moment; but sometimes it is better to do it by foreshadowing, sometimes by arranging it as a surprise.

The foregoing plainly implies, I think, that the emotion in a play must be a matter of crescendo of one kind or another. And since the play must be cumulative in its effect it follows that the individual characters must reveal their emotions with a certain cautiously graded increase of intensity. Power of voice, stirring action, suffering should be adjusted to the rise of the play. They should not be thrust into the early portions while the audience are becoming acquainted with the persons, and while their interest is being fostered and guided. If the author has written power

into the first act he has handicapped his actors. The strength of any play, if it is written properly, lies in its climax—usually in the third or fourth act. All the power possible must be concentrated into this climax. The rise to it should be as gradual and gentle as it is possible to have it while retaining the interest. If there is passion in the first act the actors should try to keep it in the realm of suggestion; it should not be portrayed outright. That is, there should be a suggestion about all strong acting in the earlier scenes that things are brewing, that stronger clashes are certain to come. The suffering and passion indicated in these preliminary scenes should imply that the character is affected more by the anticipation of what is likely to come out of it all, than by what is actually taking place.

The first act is, after all, explanatory and introductory. The acting also should be explanatory and introductory. The audience are getting acquainted with the people in the play; and until they know them and feel

? Yes.  
M.P.

with them and for them they can never be greatly stirred by their woes or joys. When the curtain goes up the audience are thrown into a strange world whose people are quite strangers to them. Naturally at the beginning of any play the audience are cold. They are critical, waiting to see what they are to get for the money they have spent. To appeal to them successfully the author and the actors must go gently. The characters should be allowed to expand slowly so that the audience are not given too much to digest at once. We should not be afraid of losing their interest at the beginning of the first act. They are quite ready to be interested—they hope they haven't wasted their money—but first they must understand; little things will interest them if they are given time to grasp them. I never believe much in using the sledge hammer with an audience, or blustering at them, and putting in "punch" at the start. That is likely to be merely confusing.

It is wisest to assume that any audience will need warming up, and this cannot be



done in a hurry. They must be coaxed along. When a man is frostbitten we do not pour hot water on him, we rub him with ice. We begin at his own temperature and gradually warm him back to normal. I think this applies to an audience. By all means the actors and the audience must start together if they are to finish together. If the play takes a leap at the rise of the curtain and smashes along to the end of the first act, the audience will be unable to keep up because they have not received a fair start. When an engine driver starts his train he doesn't jam on full steam at once; if he did he would probably jerk his engine off the rails.

I think it is often a good thing if a company is a little embarrassed and nervous at the start of the evening. This self-consciousness is a sort of sensitiveness; and the actors are reaching out to their audience and seeking a common ground. Also the audience can sense the feeling of the actors, just as the actors can sense the feeling of the audience; and if the actor is inwardly quaking in his

shoes the audience, in a subtle way, are flattered and respond to it with their encouragement and sympathy. I have seen, on the other hand, an actor come on the stage with such an air of offensive assurance that I have taken a dislike to him at once. I have been hypercritical of his work from the outset; he has had to struggle throughout the performance against the prejudice his own attitude had roused in me.

I shall never forget a certain performance I took part in once. There were about four hundred members of the theatrical profession in the house, and just before I went on I thought I was going to collapse with nervousness. My knees knocked together and I seemed to have lost all control over my lips and tongue. I made a haggard attempt to gather myself together and walked unsteadily on the stage. Afterwards they told me that I had never given such a splendid performance in my life. The manager was enthusiastic in his praise of my work; I received hearty compliments from the rest of

the company, and generous applause from the audience. I believe the reason for the good impression I was able to make was the caution with which I had begun; my nervousness had caused me to take every means to relieve the strain between the audience and myself, to make sure that I had them with me before I proceeded. Thus the crescendo of the part was provided.

The necessity of allowing for, and preparing for, the big moments is illustrated by the part of Othello. That part demands of the actor, in the fourth and fifth acts, a power of endurance, an intensity and rage of the first magnitude; but it decidedly requires an adherence to some of these technical principles if the character is to be realized as Shakespeare wrote him. I remember a performance of this part in which the actor—and a good one he was too in many parts—threw all his reserves into the fray before he reached the end of the third act, and had to limp through the fourth and fifth acts hopelessly exhausted.

He started in grand shape with the lines:

“ Hold your hands,  
Both you of my inclining, and the rest.  
Were it my cue to fight, I should have known it  
Without a prompter.”

These he gave with grandeur and authority. His speech to the Senate was full of martial tones and vigor. And in the second act the speech beginning:

“ Now, by Heaven,  
My blood begins my safer guides to rule,  
And passion, having my best judgment collied,  
Essays to lead the way. If I once stir  
Or do but lift this arm, the best of you  
Shall sink in my rebuke,”

he delivered with such force and fire that the audience rewarded him with great applause.

On reaching the great jealousy scene in the third act he naturally tried to eclipse the passion he had shown in act two. He charged his lines with his greatest intensity, added to it all the power of his lungs. The result was that he shouted all his strength away, was totally exhausted at the end, and was saved

from collapse only by the timely fall of a merciful curtain.

The audience applauded; but I think it was more in kindness than in praise, for a man close to me turned to his companion and said, "Poor fellow, didn't he work hard?" The curtain was kept down twenty minutes in order, no doubt, to give the poor Othello a chance to recover himself; but for the rest of the play he was a beaten man, and though he struggled manfully and though the audience, realizing the great effort he was making, indulgently gave him every assistance with their applause, the last two acts were wretchedly given. And when the curtain fell the audience dispersed more in sorrow than in anger. This actor had a fine artistic temperament, so fine possibly that he felt he could not allow his art to associate with such a humble mechanic as technique—and his art suffered lamentably in consequence.

His failure was due to the fact that he had ignored the need of crescendo in the portrayal of Othello's emotion. He would have seen

otherwise that all the first act needed was quiet dignity; that the speech in the second beginning,

“If I once stir . . .”

required only a suggestion of restrained power. The fury in the third act he would have tempered with a certain amount of restraint, and not have punished his throat by shouting constantly. If he had allowed himself to be led by these technical rules, his natural abilities would have enabled him to give a really good performance; for he was well-built, had a good voice, and was very good-looking.

In *Othello*, though the climax of the fury is reached in the third act, the intensity is inexorably mounting higher and higher. The terrible phase of passion that Othello has passed through has weakened him physically as well as mentally; and it is in this that we are able to sense with fresh clearness the depths through which he has passed. Indeed all great emotion may be likened to a storm

at sea. Just as a great storm leaves an after-swell, so must an actor indicate, by his reaction after the stress, how great the stress has been. He must not, in other words, allow his emotion to vanish too rapidly. The effect of a passionate outburst will be ruined if the actor throws away the emotion entirely as he passes into the next incident of the play.

As an example of this after-swell we may take Antony's speech over the dead body of Caesar. His soliloquy finishes with a tremendous outburst of rage. Then follows the lines to the servant,

“ You serve Octavius Caesar, do you not? ”

This is an unemotional line; but in it, and indeed through to the end, Antony continues to show the effects of the preceding rage.

I remember Booth as Bertuccio in *A Fool's Revenge*. In that part he had a similar speech of rage. The rage itself was moving enough, but Booth made it stronger by showing carefully the after-effects of it. After

pouring out the torrent of words, he paced back and forth across the stage as though to regain control of himself. He always gave a peculiar little shudder and twist to his body, which indicated eloquently that the rage was still seething in his heart. It was at this point that the audience were moved to applause; it was here that the situation was brought home to them in its fullest force. It was comparable with the ground swell after the storm. If we had not seen that his rage was still in him, after he had spoken the words, the effect of his passion would have been lost.

All of this, it seems to me, yields a simple technical rule: in emotional acting we must be imbued with the emotion we express, we must, to a certain extent, blind ourselves to everything but those emotions. Only in this way, it is clear, can we observe the various laws which we have, I hope, glimpsed through this discussion. We must, that is to say, be largely oblivious of the fact that we are playing before an audience. I think



it is quite possible to be utterly oblivious of the people in the theater. In my younger days when I toured England playing such parts as Othello, Shylock, Macbeth, etc., I found that I was always able to do better work when the audiences were small, so that the interruptions in the way of applause were few and far between. I have often found myself literally forgetting that there were an audience, and thoroughly soaking myself in my impersonation. This can be done—and profitably—in tragedy; but in comedy, curiously enough, quite the opposite is true.

121

## CHAPTER VIII

### MAKING AN AUDIENCE LAUGH

Audience Must Be Taken into Partnership in Comedy  
—The Comedian Must Sense His Audience—Allowing for the Laugh—Letting the Audience Have Its Head; *Major Barbara*—Making Them Save up Their Laughter—There Can Be Too Much Laughter in a Play—Shaw's Request—Remaining Unconscious of Our Own Humor—To Be Infectious Any Emotion Must Come from the Inside, Not from the Lines Alone.

**W**HEREAS in tragedy it is often well to ignore the audience so far as possible, in comedy the actor must take his audience into partnership. He must always be conscious of them, and of their changing moods. He has to lead them at times and give them the rein at others. A true comedian manages his audience as a good rider manages a high-spirited horse. And here again the principle of crescendo applies. A comedian, if he is a good one, is

very careful to get on cordial terms with his audience before he tries any of his clever tricks. If a man playing an exaggerated character part bursts on the stage and showers his whole bag of tricks on his audience in the first few minutes, he only succeeds in making himself irritating. His antics are regarded as simply grotesque and strained, because the audience have not been made acquainted with him beforehand. But if he keeps a rein on his comedy until the third act is in full swing, and then gets into full swing, the audience are in full swing with him and ready to laugh at anything he may do. So often audiences will accept in the third act what they would resent in the first.

There is great value in sensing an audience, of feeling keenly their mood, of feeling their response to what we say. So it is clearly essential that the actor must keep control over himself, and over his audience at the same time. Such a statement as this, however, should not be misunderstood; it does not mean that everything we do must

be coldly calculated. A great comedian, confident of his own powers and sure of his audience, is able to play with abandon and enthusiasm and sweep his auditors along with him; but before he does this he will make very sure of his ground. I think the great comedian depends for this peculiar knowledge partly upon that intuitive sensitiveness that is part of the actor's temperament, but a great deal more upon his mastery of technique.

For instance, if the audience laugh at the end of A's speech, B must carefully time his reply. He must not speak while the laugh is going on, and he must not wait too long for it to die. He must allow just enough time for the laugh to reach its height, then judiciously weave it into his next lines so that there is no break, so that the enjoyment does not subside entirely but is allowed to taper off through his own speech. If there is no laugh at the end of A's speech, as B expects there will be, the latter must guard against an awkward pause. He may begin

his reply unobtrusively, in rather a low tone, and let his voice die if the laugh comes; then when it is time to break into the laugh he can repeat what he has said.

As an example of this, in Shaw's *Major Barbara*, Barbara introduces Bill to her betrothed, Adolphus Cusins. The scene ends with Bill's saying to Cusins, "You take my tip, mate, stop her jaw, or you'll die afore your time. Wore out, that's what you'll be, wore out." Cusins is impressed. "I wonder," he replies. But on the words "wore out" Bill has left the stage, and his exit invariably received a big laugh and applause. It is thus impossible for the actor playing Cusins to speak this comedy line, "I wonder," through the storm of laughter; he must wait until it is dying down before he can speak. But that does not mean that he cannot convey what he is thinking, and thus preserve the continuity of the scene. If Cusins rubs his chin reflectively with his drum stick while the audience are howling at Bill, this attitude of pained perplexity may even add to the comedy; then

his words, "I wonder," come as the culmination of the doubt in his mind; and the scene has been unbroken, though the audience have had their way and laughed to their heart's content.

In the same scene Cusins says to Undershaft, Barbara's father, "You will have to choose between your religion and Barbara," and the father replies, "So will you, my friend. She will find out that that drum of yours is hollow." (Cusins has taken to playing the bass drum in the Salvation Army to make an impression on Barbara.) Cusins retorts, "Father Undershaft, you are mistaken!" But sometimes the laugh came on the word "hollow," sometimes it did not; and Cusins was ready either way. He commenced his reply in a low tone, with "Father Undershaft . . ." and then stopped if the audience laughed; if they did not he repeated as though to give firmness and emphasis to his words, "Father Undershaft! etc." There are other ways of meeting such a situation, but I believe this is the best.

In cases like the foregoing the audience have been allowed to have their head more or less, but there are times when it is far better to hold them in check. There are times when it is better to kill a laugh in order to get a bigger one later. Sometimes we can deliberately kill one, two, or even three laughs and force the audience to bottle them up, until we reach a more humorous point still when they all come in an explosion of mirth that is worth a great deal more than a dozen smaller laughs. We may kill the laughs by hastening our reply, or raising the voice, and generally speeding up the scene so that the audience will repress their laughter in order not to miss anything.

There is a great deal in being able to choose the exact moment at which it is wise to break into the audience's laughter. It is a great mistake, as we have seen, to let the laugh die away altogether; but we should also seek to begin our speech just when the decline in the intensity is beginning. We should break off a bit of the laugh each time. Sir Charles Wyndham once said to me, "Break off

the end of the laughs, and the audience will give you all the bits welded together into one big laugh before the end of the play.”

Extraordinary as it may seem there may be too much laughter during a play's performance. Shaw realized this when he put up a notice in the theater while we were playing *John Bull's Other Island*, begging the audience not to laugh as it disturbed the progress of the play. This was ridiculed in the papers, and put down to Shaw's eccentricity and desire for advertisement; but I think Shaw may have been perfectly serious. He may have felt that constant laughter tended to make the actors self-conscious; and this is often true. Also, at Shaw's plays, there are always a few in the audience who are eager to show the keenness of their appreciation of the Shavian wit, and who guffaw on the slightest provocation or on no provocation at all. Many plays—Shaw's especially—rely greatly on pace and tempo for their best results, and constant laughter does disturb this tempo. In the case of *John Bull*, Shaw's



notice had a curious effect. The audience bore the admonition in mind and did refrain from laughing during the whole of the first act; but as the play proceeded they seemed to forget all about it and made up for their abstinence by laughing all the harder through the other acts.

It was Shaw, too, who taught me never to show that I was enjoying my own jokes; and the lesson should be taken to heart by many and many of our comedians of today. One can, in a subconscious way, enjoy his part, and be gratified at the way it is going; but the moment he lets the audience realize his pleasure his work is certain to deteriorate in quality. Again it is a question of art concealing art. The moment we let the audience feel that we are seeing the humor of our actions they will lose interest; they like to feel it is through their own cleverness that they detect the comedy. This is governing the audience—letting it appear that we are unconscious of the humor; and audiences love to be governed in this way. I have heard of

actors being told that, to make the play go with a swing, they should laugh at each other's jokes; and over and over again I have seen an audience stop laughing, when this was tried, and let the actors do it all.

In brief summary, then, it is wise in all emotional parts to map out each act and adjust our reading to the general crescendo of the play; to take every precaution that our lungs are saved from "pumping" in the impassioned moments; to realize that all passion, if it is to be infectious, must come from the inside, that the words alone cannot provide it; to remember that we should retain control over our audiences, both in tragedy and comedy, and conceal from them the art which produces our artistic results.

## CHAPTER IX

### “FUTURES” AND THE PARADOX OF THE AMATEUR

Brilliant Promise of the Beginner Often Unfulfilled—Lawrence Irving's Grotesque Early Work—Henry Irving: a Prophet Without Honor in Manchester—Barry Sullivan's Disastrous Conservatism—The Dangerous Transitional Stage Between the Amateur and the Professional—The “Sufficiently Unprofessional” Wisconsin Players—Acting Is Dancing in Shackles—Exchanging Intuition for Technique—The Moffat Company and *Bunty Pulls the Strings*—Studied Simplicity and Acquired Naturalness.

**I** DO not think anyone can be long associated with the theatrical profession without becoming very cautious about forming opinions on the future prospects of beginners. In my salad days when the sprouts of judgment were vigorous but green, I had no hesitation in forecasting the careers of others. But as time went on, and I saw how easy it was to make mistakes I indulged less

and less in this pleasant diversion. I think as one gains in his knowledge of the actor's art, he is more and more impressed with the marvels which hard work and serious application will accomplish. It is not so much the brilliant promise the beginner may show that determines his career; it is his unknown capacity for hard work, with the provision of course that his hard work takes the proper direction. Many a career has begun with a flourish, with every promise of big things ahead, and ended in mediocrity; many another has begun inconspicuously, and ended in a blaze of glory.

One man whose early work bore no trace of his future success was Lawrence Irving. When I first knew him he was very diligent, he took immense pains; but there was a distortion about everything he did. I have often seen him at rehearsal toiling away. He would reach a certain point of excellence, and I would feel like shouting, "Hold! Make fast!" But on he would go. He would overtrain himself, and end up with his whole

conception out of focus, fantastic and unnatural. His performances, at the beginning of his career, reminded me of those grotesque drawings by Cruikshank of Shakespearian scenes, which were so admired in my youth. I loathed them because I hated to have my idea of Shakespeare's creations fogged by those (to my eyes) mussy caricatures. Lawrence Irving's performances had the same distressing effect on my mind. He was floundering about with his very clever brain, and his work was invariably abnormal and overdone. I saw very clearly that Lawrence Irving would never make an actor, that he should stop at once and get into something else before it was too late.

But a few years later *The Typhoon* was produced, and Irving played an important part. Many and loud were the praises I heard of his work. But I smiled to myself and said that I knew exactly how he played it. Many of my friends urged me to go and see it, but I refused until one of them told me that I did not know how he played it, but that

I should see the play and receive a lesson. I did go then, and I did receive a lesson. I stood up and cheered him at the end of the performance. He had harnessed his ideas and his cleverness at last. His own judgment had cried, "Hold! Make fast!" and he had obeyed the order. It was a magnificent piece of work. I had been entirely wrong about him; and after that I was much more reserved with regard to my ideas of another's chance of success. Lawrence Irving, unfortunately, lost his life when the Empress of Ireland went down in the St. Lawrence River in 1914. He was, there can be no doubt, on the threshold of a brilliant career, and his death was a genuine loss to the stage.

But such snap judgments on the abilities of beginners may be the cause of a great deal of injustice. Such a hasty condemnation on the part of a group of people nearly drove one actor out of Manchester. It was Henry Irving, father of Lawrence. Here it was indeed a case of a man returning to his own country and finding himself without honor.

I happened to be in Manchester at Irving's first appearance there after having achieved his fame in London. In his novitiate he had been a member of the old stock company of Manchester; and the local playgoers knew him only as a member of that organization. He had not been a great favorite with them. I was at luncheon at the Brazenose Club of the city when the subject of Irving came up. The members of the club were all supposed to be patrons or lovers of things artistic. To my great surprise one gentleman remarked, "The idea of Irving coming here as a star when we knew him in the old stock days as a miserable actor. He may be good enough for London, but he's not good enough for Manchester." Perhaps as many as fifty heard the remark, and of them all there was not one dissenting voice. That attitude, it was clear at Irving's opening night, was not confined to the members of the club. There seemed to be a widespread and violent prejudice against him. To his great credit he succeeded in overcoming this to a large ex-

tent, but it might very well have forced him into failure. Many of the Mancastrians admitted later that they had been wrong to feel as they had. But here was the ghost of the judgment they had formed years before come to haunt Irving, who had been working with all his energy, and with great success, to overcome the very faults they had found with him. For some, it is true, he never succeeded in overcoming them. Many could never see any good in his work because his peculiar walk and utterance irritated them so they were incapable of admiring his good points. He never wholly conquered these faults, but in spite of them he was a brilliant actor, as his fame attests.

On the other hand, I have made mistakes, and seen others make them, with regard to youths who showed all the promise imaginable at the start. One of the most poignant instances of this is referred to in my mother's book, *Sixty-eight Years on the Stage*. It had to do with the tragedian, Barry Sullivan. In speaking of him she says: "There is no doubt



that in his youth he was an admirable actor. He had a fine presence and a powerful voice, which he used from the lowest note to the top of its compass. With the enthusiasm of youth he had studied his parts inch by inch. Every movement of the body, every inflection of the voice was—studied! At that time he was a success, and a great one, but there he stopped.

“The years rolled by. Many blemishes of the old school of acting were reformed not ‘indifferently’ but ‘altogether’; but Barry Sullivan stood still, a fatal thing to a student of any art. He played Hamlet at forty-five just as he had played him at twenty-eight. The same stilted movements, the same meaningless inflections had grown with age into mere mechanism, for the youthful enthusiasm was no longer there. For many years before his death London absolutely refused to accept him. He tried once or twice, but each attempt ended disastrously.”

He failed, I believe, through over-confidence. He had been content to rest on his

laurels. But in his youth there would have been few to predict that he would not be a great actor.

In any career there is sure to come a turning point, when a man is either content to plod along the path he knows well, or when he realizes that he must put forth his best energy and find a harder and better road if he hopes to reach the goal of his ambition. It is a transitional stage, while we are losing the bold confidence of youth; when we become conscious of the methods which have been quite spontaneous. That is a dangerous period; and the successful actor is the one who can come through it still possessing his spontaneity and confidence, yet having learned to harness them and guide them deliberately instead of by instinct.

When I was about twenty-four years of age I found myself in that wobbly state of mind. My technique was being given to me ready-made by the producer who insisted on showing me how to do things without telling me why. I was simply copying his methods.

This was robbing me of all freedom in my work; I felt that what natural aptitude I had was being smashed. The feeling I had had for acting was slipping away from me. I was unable to lose myself in the part I might be playing. An old actress, whom I knew quite well then, watched one of my rehearsals critically, and told me afterwards that I had mistaken my vocation, that I could never be an actor, and that if I were wise I would take her advice and get out of the profession. I did not follow her advice, but it had the effect of making me take my work and its problems very seriously. I overcame that lack of confidence in time; and now I believe it was only a stage we all must expect to pass through.

I believe there is a time in every career where the amateur gives way to the professional; when the actor comes to regard acting, not as an agreeable diversion, but as his business in life. This season the “Wisconsin Players,” an amateur organization, appeared at the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York

for a few performances. Mr. Ralph Block, of the New York Tribune, made this comment on their work: "The acting was excellent and sufficiently unprofessional to achieve the illusion of life that the sharp edges of the trained actor are always successful in keeping at arm's length." That was an interesting comment, and no doubt true to a certain extent. But why is it that these inexperienced young persons from the West apparently succeeded in doing with greater perfection what we professional actors have spent our lives in trying to learn? I believe the answer suggests one of the paradoxes in the actor's profession. The spontaneity, freshness, directness, and unself-consciousness possessed by the proficient amateur are the very qualities which the professional seeks to gain by his long study and experience; yet they are the very qualities which that training tends inevitably to destroy!

All professional actors begin as amateurs (whether they receive pay for their work or not); and most of us have been praised, in

our beginning days, for our spontaneity and refreshing naturalness. Why do the “sharp edges” creep in? Certain it is that there is often a refreshing naturalness about an amateur’s work, and I think that is because his work *is* perfectly natural; it is not studied. But as the amateur goes on, and makes acting his profession, he must learn to know just how he gets his effects, he must be able to repeat them unerringly. He comes to know the innumerable mistakes he may make and how serious they may be for him. He sees that acting is not a parlor game but a difficult mixture of science and art. He becomes appalled at the many shoals that lie in his treacherous course. It is pretty difficult through such a time to keep that beguiling air of perfect confidence which the early praise engendered. He is impressed with the exacting laws of his calling. He is afraid to let himself go. He, as an amateur, had been dancing because it was fun, he had danced with perfect freedom and fine abandon; now he realizes that acting is really

dancing in shackles. It is a case of accepting the rigorous limits and doing the best he can inside them. This is hard until he comes to take the limits for granted. His charming spontaneity is pretty sure to give way to self-consciousness. And that is what I mean by the transitional stage between the amateur and the professional. Our young actor must then set himself to recapture that first fine furious rapture, which is where his real initiation into the difficulties of his art is given him.

I think, when a man becomes a professional actor, he is constantly attempting to achieve, by means of his technique and his art, what as an amateur he achieved by his very lack of technique and art. He is trying to simulate a lack of self-consciousness, which effort in itself is enough to make him self-conscious! As an amateur one's work is not self-conscious, because it is not a conscious thing; it is a natural thing. The amateur pleases because his work is direct and simple, but this simplicity comes because his knowledge of the

craft is direct and simple. It does not come because his art is sound, but because he has no art at all! As an amateur the young actor knows a few simple rudiments of the actor's art; and those few things he does spontaneously with no thought or knowledge of the many other ways the same things might be done. It is when an actor begins to do consciously what he has been doing intuitively that he runs the danger of losing the very virtues which accounted for his early successes.

I remember seeing the Moffat Company in London. They had been playing in the provinces of Scotland with no pretense of being anything but what they were—a company of sincere amateurs. They brought *Bunty Pulls the Strings* to London, and carried that piece to a flattering success. They were the veriest amateurs, every one of them; but their total lack of mannerisms of all kinds, their absorption in their play and the atmosphere this created, their perfect naturalness and unstudied simplicity captivated London.

They were hailed as great actors. But after "Bunty" their popularity dwindled. Only one member of that company has ever been heard of since. That is, when they stopped playing this little Scotch piece, which was peculiarly their own, a picture of themselves and their everyday life, they failed. When they tried to do, by means of their technique, what they had been accustomed to do quite spontaneously, they brought themselves into competition with the regular profession; and their lack of solid training and experience was quickly and disastrously shown. They became self-conscious; they were unable to retain, as their knowledge increased, the delightful, unstudied simplicity which had first opened the doors for them.

What was true of this company has been true of many and many an actor, in a greater or less degree. I believe it must be true—in a greater or less degree—of all actors. And for the beginning actor I believe there is only one maxim which can guide him safely through this critical time, and enable him to



fulfil the bright promise he may show at the start. That maxim is the theme of this little book: Simplicity must be our aim. The more we know the greater grows the danger of losing that precious simplicity, that illusion of life, which is the end and aim of all our painfully-won knowledge. No actor can be a master of his craft until he has spent years in acquiring knowledge; and having acquired it, has learned as well how to conceal it from the audience and to appear as natural as the unprofessional player. This acquired naturalness is, in reality, infinitely more effective theatrically than that of the amateur—as is shown when the true professional and the amateur are placed side by side—but no man can realize his fullest powers as an actor who does not strive to refine his knowledge into an intelligent simplicity.

## CHAPTER X

### THE EFFECT OF REALISTIC SCENERY AND LIGHTING ON THE ACTOR

Work of the Actor Inextricably Interwoven with That of the Producer, Scenic Artist, etc.—Scenery Should Suggest not Copy Life, Should Stimulate not Overfeed or Starve the Imagination—The Ironworks in Galsworthy's *Strife*, "Real" and Suggested—Granville Barker's Setting for *Androcles and the Lion*: Proudly Crude and Frankly Primitive—The Primary Purpose of All Scenery—When the Imaginative Artist, the Interior Decorator, and the Landscape Gardener Clash—The Mechanical Ship That Would Not Wreck, and the Simpler Substitute—How Actors Are Often Swamped by Scenery—The Need of Co-ordination—The Terrors of Strange Furniture—Many Plays Ruined by Lack of Method—Lighting Which Blurs or Silhouettes the Faces of the Actors—Natural Lighting—(Distracting Lights—Moonlight—Seeking the Impression of Reality, Not Reality Itself.

**W**HILE an actor is naturally concerned primarily with the art of conceiving the characters he plays and of projecting them properly, so much depends upon the mechanical accessories of the

stage production that it may be well to turn our attention to that phase of the craft for a time. The work of the actor is inextricably interwoven with that of the producer, and the scenic artist, and the others. Together they are striving for a common end: the creation of theatrical effects, if by theatrical effects we mean those artistic illusions which are the legitimate and unique province of the theater.

These effects, as we have seen with regard to the actor, come best when the attempt is made not to copy life, but to suggest it. ) This great principle of stagecraft would surely seem to imply that absolute realism in staging is not, in itself, desirable. It is quite evident that the scenery and properties may be too realistic and thus defeat their purpose; instead of stimulating the imagination, they may banish it by giving it nothing to do. There is a tendency to regard absolute realism as an end in itself, whereas it is properly a means to an end.

If the scene is a grocery store, and the

storekeeper, to make a point in the play, must ring up a purchase on the cash register, he must have a cash register to ring it up on. But the actual realism need not go much further. It is not necessary to fill the stage with real barrels and boxes and shelves of canned goods and glass counters of candy. It is only necessary to give the audience the impression that all the things are on the stage. The problem is to give them just enough to suggest a grocery store, yet not give them too much. There are simple ways of giving the impression that there are many barrels and boxes and shelves on the stage without their actually being there. There are no bounds to illusion, while realism is limited by the dimensions of the stage.

It is possible to make the audience imagine that they are looking at a battle in which thousands of people are taking part. It is possible to suggest a labor riot in which hundreds of laborers swarm around their employer's office. But these things could never be put on the stage, no matter how many

thousands of dollars one were ready to spend. The second scene of the second act of Galsworthy's *Strife* is in the ironworks. I saw the play given once with splendid scenery in which wherever possible the real article had been provided. We had before us a railway track, a wagon, a practical chimney, warehouses, windows that opened and closed, and a great number of supernumeraries. It must have cost thousands to stage this one scene. The woodwork alone must have represented the salary of a first-class actor. But to me all this "realism" was a dead waste of time, energy, and money; for I had seen the play given before where this scene had been suggested by a very old and worn back cloth. The painting was faded, but it had been well done and still served to conjure up in the imagination vast warehouses and towering chimneys; there was a sense of great spaces and immense power, and grim monotony, and drifting smoke, which was quite lacking in the "real" chimneys and windows of the more expensive set. I do not know just how

many supernumeraries were used in the mob scene, but very few I am sure. The lights were lowered and carefully manipulated, which gave the effect that masses of men were surging over the stage. In the former case I had been impressed by the lavishness of the production; I had admired the way the crowds were moved about, and had realized that the tracks and chimneys were very realistic stage tracks and chimneys; but in the latter case my imagination was warmed and stirred, not dwarfed, and the consequent illusion was infinitely better, while the expense of production was slight, quite negligible compared with the other.

On the other hand, I do not have much admiration for stage settings which merely challenge and baffle our imagination. I am not among those who champion post-impressionism in stage settings. In Bernard Shaw's *Androcles and the Lion* there is a scene in a jungle, and it is of course a question how this jungle should best be indicated. In Granville Barker's production of the play (a produc-

tion which was admirable in many respects) this scene consisted of a painted drop cloth at the bottom of which was a low-arched hole festooned with strips of green cloth—that was all. It did not suggest a jungle to my imagination. It looked to me for all the world like a painted drop with a hole in it festooned with strips of green cloth. I merely punished and confused my imagination when I tried to make a jungle of it. I think we recoil from the proudly crude and frank primitive in art. Simplicity is all very well, but crudity is simply crudity. For my part, I do not believe in the rigorous asceticism that starves the imagination as much that is ultra-modern in staging does; that is quite as bad as overfeeding it.

Where realism shall end and give way to suggestion is, I believe, the problem of effective staging; and only by keeping unclouded the primary purpose of our stage setting can we meet it properly. That purpose must always be to supplement as definitely, yet as unobtrusively, as possible the

work of the actor and the dramatist. The test of any stage set is the impression it makes on the imagination of the audience, not in the comments they may make on the magnificence or ingenuity of its construction. If it is absorbed by the play, *good*; if it stands out on its own, *bad*. This means that we are working in the realm of suggestion and illusion rather than in the actual, that our methods are those of the imaginative painter rather than those of the mechanically skilled decorator; and that we must be careful not to confuse the methods of the two. It is possible to be too fantastic (as in the case of Granville Barker's jungle) and thus fail to convince; it is also possible to be too realistic in minor points and thus succeed merely in calling attention to the artificiality of the whole.

As an example of the latter I remember seeing a garden scene once which at first glance seemed a delightful piece of work. It was a beautiful garden, but there was something about it that was false. As I



looked at it there was no sense on my part that I was looking at a garden. I was simply admiring a most ornate bit of stage decoration, an attractive bit of scene-painting. This was certainly not the impression the scenic artist had tried to produce; he had been trying to create the illusion that we saw a real garden before us, and he had failed. I wondered why. Then I noticed that near the footlights on each side of the stage was a wing painted quite beautifully to represent trees and flowers. Just behind the wings, on each side of the stage, was an arch over which the stage manager had trailed either real flowers or very excellent imitations. I am sure those "real" flowers were the secret of the failure. They gave the painted wing dead away. The wings themselves were really more beautiful than the realistic flowers, for the former were fanciful and the latter actual. To have the actual in juxtaposition with the fanciful served to point out that the whole was an imitation; in other words, the imaginative artist and the landscape gardener had

clashed and both had come to grief. Very likely the real flowers might have been arranged so that they could have aided the illusion of the painted ones. There was a point in this scene where realism could have been shaded into suggestion, I have no doubt; but this fusion could not have been made by a man who had set out to put a real garden on the stage, only by the one who sought to give the audience an impression of a real garden; and how much simpler and more artistic, and less expensive, his work would be.

I once knew a scene painter by the name of Richard Douglas. I often used to drop around to his paint-room and talk shop with him. He had painted scenes all his life and was full of experiences with managers good, bad, and indifferent. He told me a little tale one day which comes to mind as I write, and which seems to indicate so clearly how simplicity and suggestion may triumph over elaborate realism. He had been called to a theater a few days before the opening of a

play to—as it were—save the sinking ship, for the play contained a difficult scene representing a ship tossed by a storm at sea. The sea had been managed easily enough. They had a “sea-cloth” and the effect of the storm was procured by concealing stage-hands on each side of the stage and having them send wave after wave across the ocean by the simple expedient of shaking the cloth. The miniature vessel was a marvel of engineer’s skill. By intricate contrivances, wheels, planes, a huge steel pivot, and Heaven knows what else, it was made to heave up and down, roll, and turn, and give a very realistic idea of a ship in distress. Everything had looked perfect, but there was a flaw—the complicated machinery failed to work. So the management in despair had called in Douglas; they had sent for him on Tuesday and the performance was to be given on the following Friday.

Douglas went and took one look at the ship, and came back to his little paint-shop. The management had asked him frantically if he thought he could fix things for them by

Friday, he had replied that he could do it in forty-eight hours. And he did. He made a replica of the boat with strips of bamboo, covered it with canvas and painted it to represent the ship; ten feet away it looked quite as lifelike as the ingeniously contrived little failure. At the bottom of his canvas-and-bamboo ship Douglas left a hole large enough for a man to get his shoulders through, and then he fastened the boat to the sea-cloth. A stage-hand got under the sea-cloth and put his shoulders through the hole in the ship. They had cut a trap-door in the stage for him, which enabled him to stand at the requisite depth. The result was perfect. The mechanically prescribed twists and turns of the original were as nothing compared with the results accomplished by that man's shoulders and his unfettered imagination. He not only made it toss and roll and twist at will, but he could even make it shudder as it was struck by an unusually towering wave! The original machinery which had cost two thousand dollars was scrapped. The cost of

Douglas's device was well under one hundred dollars!

I remember another similar incident he used to tell. In a certain pantomime, in the transformation scene were eighteen large and beautiful sea-shells which, at a given cue, turned round and displayed eighteen beautiful mermaids. The shells were to have been turned by machinery, but it broke down and the old-timer was hastily summoned. His method of solving this difficulty was even simpler. He merely had the shells fastened to the backs of the girls playing the mermaids and, at a given cue, they *turned themselves round!* Both of these effects, done in the simpler, less obtrusive way, were much more impressive than anything the elaborate and expensive mechanical devices could have produced even if they had worked.

Some years ago one of the daily papers in London sent a letter to all the producers in the city asking them if genuine antique furniture would not add richness to the stage scenes, and if it was not therefore greatly

to be desired. Most producers were in favor of it, but some were not, myself included. I replied that so long as the furniture looked real I preferred the imitation to the real, for to have furniture that cost thousands of dollars would require the greatest care in the handling and would thus take much longer to set and take away. Also the imitation could be easily replaced if breakages should occur, as they probably would. One producer stated that he would welcome any such gift and that he would be glad to state its value and the name of the donor on the program. Such an attitude seems to me the result of a misconception of what we try to do in the theater. Instead of calling the attention of the audience to the "real" things on the stage, are we not rather hoping to make them forget the real and actual; are we not using our properties to beguile their fancy and to make them forget that they are in a theater at all? How can this be done if they are reminded that the room on the stage has been furnished by So-and-so or if,

when the curtain goes up, they think of the value and beauty of the tables and chairs instead of the story that is being enacted before them? On the stage the actor and the play should always be supreme. The only notice directly paid to the work of the scenic artist and property man *per se* should come from the trained few who realize that the settings are skilfully contributing to the illusion created by the actors.

How often this fact is lost sight of! How often we allow ourselves to become blinded to the fact that the scenic artist and the property man, and the costume designer and the electrician and the others are called in to help the illusion of the play and for no other reason. How often these people are allowed to display their own prowess at the expense of the actors whom they are supposed to be helping. I saw this painfully demonstrated in a Shakespearian play on Broadway not many months ago. The company was headed by a lady whose name is associated with the best things in the theater and in her support

were several others who hold high positions in the profession. I went to the theater in high hopes of seeing a memorable performance. But I was keenly disappointed. The really splendid acting of the company was swamped by the astounding scenery. In one of the scenes most of the acting was done on a peculiar bridge which somehow gave the impression of being miles distant up the stage. The dramatic effect of the lines spoken from this strange perch can be imagined. One of the other scenes was a sloping platform, and we had the uncomfortable feeling that the actors were having difficulty in keeping their feet. Still another scene was ruined because the light at the back of the stage was so brilliant that the actors' faces were silhouetted against it in shadow. All facial play was out of the question. It is easy to imagine what became of Shakespeare's lines.

I do not think the scenic artist was so much to blame, in this case, as the producer. The latter should have realized that the slop-



ing platform would make the actors' work exceedingly difficult; and he certainly should have known that to allow his artist to display his sense of blazing colors would be distracting to the audience and fatal to the play. The impression made by the performance was indicated in the remarks I heard as I left the theater: "Wasn't the scenery beautiful?" "I loved that wood scene—and that inn too, with the touch of purple in the walls." The inn had had purple walls, and the sense of those purple walls had been the strongest impression left on my mind. I did not hear a single comment on the acting of the company, and much of it had been superb. But the actors had been working against an enormous handicap and I felt sorry for them—I was also deeply dissatisfied myself, for I had gone to see one of Shakespeare's plays, not a blazing exhibition of modern scenic art. I thought as I left the theater of an old saying of Sydney Smith's. He had had a very mean dinner in a room whose decorations were gorgeous and

faultless. "I would have preferred," he remarked, "a little less gilding and a little more carving."

It may be that such brilliant fiascos as this occur—and there are always two or three every season—because the work of the different specialists is not co-ordinated and intelligently directed. I thoroughly believe that all should co-operate, all should be in the confidence of the producer; they should not be allowed to do their work independently. Many managers give orders for scenery and costume and properties to firms or individuals who execute them without having the faintest idea of what the play is about! Asked why he does this, the manager would probably reply that the fewer the people who know the nature of the play beforehand the less danger there is of having somebody steal a march on him by producing a similar play ahead of him. Whether the manager is in any very great danger of having the wind taken out of his sails in this way I do not know. But certainly endless confusion is

often caused by keeping the scenic artist and the others ignorant of how their work is supposed to apply to the whole. I have often heard a costume designer complain at the dress rehearsal that the color of the scenery was damaging to the color scheme of his costumes. Very often this is true, and merely because the two men have had no chance to get together and compare notes and co-ordinate their work. If a round table discussion had been arranged everybody would have been working in harmony with everyone else from the start.

Indeed, I think that the first thing a producer should do when he sets to work on the mechanical accessories of the production is to call a meeting of the scenic artist, the costume designer, the electrician, the property man, the carpenter, the musician, and the stage managers and have the play read to them. Then he should welcome the discussion of its technical aspects which will follow naturally enough if he does nothing to stop it. He will encourage his assistants to discuss

the play from their different points of view, for it is astonishing how many really good ideas may come out of such a discussion. I once heard a stage carpenter at a meeting of this kind make a suggestion of great value. The play's first act required a large exterior set and the second act required another. In the opinion of the scenic artist two sets would have to be built, and it would have taken from ten to fifteen minutes to change them. But the carpenter explained that by painting the platforms and back drop on their reverse sides the first set could be turned about and made to serve for the second. This advice was carried out and the wait between the first and second acts was actually reduced from ten or fifteen minutes to two. No one but the stage carpenter would have understood that this could be done. If he had not been at the meeting he would have got his models from the scenic artist and built the two sets according to specifications. The cost to the management would have been double, and a long wait

would have been necessary. Many a time I have heard a stage carpenter grumblingly explain how he could have built his sets with half the labor and a fraction of the expense if he had been informed in time just what the entire requirements of the play were.

The lack of co-operation among producer, actors, and scenic artist and the others frequently is the cause of great hardship to the actor; and I believe it may be the partial cause of the failure of many plays. The actor studies his lines and perfects his part with only a vague notion of what the stage set is to be like; the scenic artist designs the scenery with an even more vague notion of what the actors are to do; the electrician arranges his light with little regard for the principal purpose of lights: the emphasizing and accentuating of the actor's work. Is it surprising that there are many clashes at dress rehearsals, many disheartening obstacles for the actor to meet—the more disheartening because they are unnecessary? For surely it would be a simple thing for the producer

to give the actors, before rehearsals begin, the exact dimensions of the stage on which they are to play; and above all he should realize the importance of rehearsing with furniture of the same size as that to be used in production. He may not be able to get the actual furniture at the start—though this can often be done—but it would always be possible, and is always supremely desirable, that the substitutes used be the same dimensions as the real furniture is to be. It is something of a shock for an actor, who has been rehearsing with a chair whose seat is twenty inches from the ground, to come on at the dress rehearsal and drop into a chair only sixteen inches high. It is enough to throw him off for the entire evening.

The actor may have been rehearsing for six weeks with a stock table of considerable size, and he has found that he gets a rather good effect by planting his elbows on the table and leaning across toward the man facing him. He comes on the stage at the dress rehearsal and finds a beautiful antique where he has

grown accustomed to a broad and solid deal table. He leans forward as per custom to plant his elbows on it—and finds the table is too small to permit the gesture. This, at a dress rehearsal when he is naturally keyed up nervously, is enough to strike terror into his heart and jar all his carefully planned business out of his head. For an actor comes to the dress rehearsal in the highest pitch of nervous excitement. He wishes to put the final touches on his performance, and with a fair chance would do so to the delight of the producer. But after a few rebuffs like the foregoing he is lucky if he remembers his lines. I once heard a producer shout at an actor, “Why, you don’t even know your words, sir!” “Well, give me a decent chair to sit on, sir, and they’ll all come back!” the harassed actor replied angrily. It is most disheartening when the actor has been straining every energy for from three to six weeks putting in the most delicate workmanship, if he comes to the dress rehearsal keyed up for his final and best effort, and then finds

himself thrown completely off his stride because the accessories have not been properly looked after.

Such mishaps are due to the lack of method. They could be avoided by taking a little trouble at the start, and securing the real furniture and the real scenery which is to be used, or having substitutes of the same dimensions. When one reflects that the man who backs a play often has many thousands at stake, and when we think of the narrow margin that often separates success from failure, of the trifles that have again and again determined a play's success or failure, is it not surprising that these slipshod methods are followed? It is only on the stage that such laxity is tolerated; other businesses are not conducted in any such manner. Not long ago I heard a producer explain that the scenery was not ready, but though it was sadly needed, the scenic artist was too valuable a man to quarrel with! The proper way to handle these details surely would be to have contracts with the scenic artists, and costum-



ers, and the rest, which should stipulate that if the goods were not delivered by a certain date there should be a forfeit for every day lost. Then the dress rehearsal would put a polish on the work done before and not tend to tear it down.

I am quite aware that it is the custom to try out new plays in small towns near New York where they are polished up for their metropolitan opening; but many of those plays are never brought into New York, being unable to survive the ordeal of such a try-out. After a disastrous first night in one of these "dog-towns," author, producer, and actors work frantically at cruelly high pressure trying to whip the play into shape in a week or so. How can painstaking and efficient work be done under those hectic conditions? There can be little doubt that many plays are killed because they come up to the dress rehearsal in a ragged, half-ready condition; are harmed still more by the dress rehearsal itself; and go to pieces on their first night. If care could be taken to have a fin-

ished dress rehearsal, by allowing the actors to become familiar from the start with the scenery and properties, a great many plays might be saved. Certainly the opening performance in New York could not fail to be benefited if the out-of-town performance were made as thorough and finished as possible; and it would seem so simple to do this—by giving the actor a fair chance to do his best.

I suppose one of the most common sources of distress for the actor is injudicious lighting. As we have seen, the words spoken on the stage derive much of their force from the emphasis they receive from the facial expression of the actor. The lighting of any stage set should be designed principally to throw the actor's face into high relief, therefore to enable him to register on the audience the subtle movements of his eyes and the significant and fleeting expressions that flit over his face. If the actor's face is not clearly seen throughout it is inevitable that his effectiveness be greatly diminished. But, as more and more attention is paid to the creation of strik-

ing stage pictures and clever lighting effects, we seem to forget that these should only serve as a background for the actor, that the face of the actor should be the high-light of any stage picture.

In scenic design there is one kind of set that is almost always the same wherever we see it, that is the outdoor set. It is very rarely that we find one that does not give us the sky at the rear directly facing the audience. Naturally there must be more light on the sky than on any other portion of the scene, and with the sky at the rear the faces of the actors who must play in front of it cannot be in relief; they cannot be the high-lights of the picture. If you should ask a producer if a strong light at the back of an actor is not, in general, a good thing he would probably lay the question to your stupidity. He might, to make his point clear, hold a light behind and above his own head to show you the effect. But it never seems to occur to him that the bright sky at the rear is doing precisely the same thing for his

stage. Yet it is so easy to break the glare of the sky with trees or houses so that the faces of the actors are in light and not in shadow. I recall a play which turned on a scene in which a man stood at the rear and listened in silence to an important conversation. The light was mostly behind him and the color of his face merged into that of the back cloth. How were we to know that the words he overheard had such tremendous significance for him? It was impossible for us to see the expression on his face at all; we could not even be sure that he was listening to what the others were saying. If the welfare of the play had been the first consideration in the minds of the scenic designer and electrician this error would never have been made. Clearly they had been thinking not of the events which were to take place during the scene, but had bent their energies to the making of a striking stage picture. And with this mistaken motive it is easy for the scenic artist to be captivated by an idea which entails a brilliant flood of light at the

rear, and it is easy for the producer to be beguiled by it. In the theater, however, the eye is invariably attracted to the brightest light; and it is sure to be damaging to the play if the attention of the audience is lured away to the back drop or the ceiling when what they should be noticing always is the actor on the stage. In my youth I used to hear old actors say that they would sooner play their best scenes in an oak chamber than in any other set. They could never tell me why; but I have no doubt the reason was that the closed-in scene was a better conveyor of sound, and especially because the somber color of the walls threw their facial expression into clearer relief.

But even in interior sets the lighting is often distracting. It may be said that usually ceilings are too light. In real life the ceiling receives less reflected light than any other portion of the room. In almost any room this is true. The ceiling probably is painted a lighter color than the rest of the room, but it doesn't look so. Since the light of the win-

dows misses it and it catches only the reflection of the light, the white color (if it is white) takes on a grayish tint, and too, most ceilings have their tones dulled by time; so the impression a room gives one is that the floor and walls are light and the ceiling is in shadow. To get this effect in the theater is essential if we are to give the scene its precious tinge of naturalness; and this cannot be done if there is a dead white canopy overhead reflecting its light on everything in the room. If the scenic artist is asked why he insists on painting his ceilings so light he will doubtless answer, with truth, that that is the way they are painted in real life; but he forgets that the effects sought in the theater must be contrived by artificial means, and that he must aid the impression by painting his ceiling darker to enable the electrician to suggest the shadows that normally would be on it.

As a rule too little attention is paid to natural lighting in scenic designing. The artist certainly should always bear in mind,

when placing his shadows, where the sunlight is supposed to be coming from, and sometimes this vastly important consideration seems never to have crossed his mind. He should paint his scene with the sun coming from the right or left as best suits the design, and it should be possible to arrange the lighting accordingly. If the sun is supposed to be coming from the right, this should surely be indicated by the scene painter as well as the electrician. On the opposite side of the room from the sun the colors should be somewhat subdued, though not crudely so, and the light should be the reflected light we get in nature. Footlights too should be used to suggest reflected light only. Such observations as these seem almost too elementary to be worth setting down, but the carelessness of producers with regard to their lighting is astonishing. I have in mind a scene which contained a large French window at the rear. At the end of one act I watched the sun set through this window; and in the next act was amazed to see it rise in precisely the same

place. In a case of this kind there may not be a dozen people in the audience who will know just why they feel that something is wrong, but a great many of them will have the feeling that something *is* wrong, that there is somehow an air of unreality, a false theatricality; and such a feeling cannot fail to be detrimental to the actors and the play.

As in so many things we do on the stage it is very easy to be too clever and too ingenious with our lights. (It is so easy to make the lighting effects more interesting than the play, for the moment, and so rob it of the attention it may sadly need if it is to succeed at all.) The first act of a play which ran on Broadway—for a time—showed a room with a window at the back. Through the window could be seen a row of houses on the opposite side of the street. The time was late afternoon, and as the sunlight grew dimmer the lights in the distant windows winked on one by one, as though the people behind them were lighting up for the evening. This spectacle held a peculiar fascination



for the audience. Gradually their attention came to be fixed on the back drop. That is to say, while the author was attempting to introduce his characters, and state their relations with each other, and to lay down the necessary foundation for the play, the audience were engrossed in a speculation as to where the next light would appear on the back drop and how the effect was managed. This was, it seemed to me, very bad, because it ran the risk of sacrificing the whole play for a momentary theatrical effect which really had not the slightest bearing on the story. (The whole of any play rests upon the preliminary material that is given in the first act.) Often a mere sentence or two in the first act may be the mainspring of powerful situations that come later; and if these vital bits are missed the subsequent acts lose much of their meaning. The play in question was one of those unexplained failures; it seemed to have everything in its favor, but lasted only a week or two. I should not insist that this blemish in the first act accounted for the failure, but

it is interesting to wonder how much it had to do with it—interesting since the effect itself was quite delightful while it was going on.

It should always be borne in mind that the eye is much quicker than the ear. Anything that catches the eye on the stage has a definite effect; it either helps or harms the play, and I believe a great deal of money is wasted every theatrical season because, when planning our mechanical effects, we lose sight of this fact. A mechanical effect is not justified because it is realistic or ingenious. A change of lights which merely indicates the time of day is wrong. Unless there is something in the action or the lines referring to the fact that evening is approaching, or the sun is setting, or a storm is brewing it is wrong to distract the attention of the audience from what is being said by contriving such effects. Of course, often it can be arranged to dim the lights during some unimportant scene where the talk is not of much moment; but it is, I think, far better to have

the characters refer to the change of light in some way, thus making it a part of the action, or else leave out the change altogether.

The question of shadows is another that is always causing annoyance to actors and to audiences. What illusion is possible for the audience if they see an actor enter the doorway at the rear of the stage and throw his shadow over the church steeple supposed to be in the village eight miles away? With such a start as this for his scene, how is the actor going to carry conviction? And the way to avoid these shadows, so irritating to both actor and audience, is so simple that one hesitates to put it on paper. If the standard lights are placed at least nine feet high the actor can pass beneath them, and not between them and the back cloth!

To obtain natural lighting the light should really fall on the stage from the front as well as from the top and sides. But in most theaters, except in vaudeville houses where a spot-light is thrown from the gallery, the only front light is provided by the footlights.

These can only be sparingly used or they will conflict with the top and side lights. I think the best way this front lighting can be obtained is by placing a series of "baby spots" in the balustrade of the first balcony; and the light furnished by these, supplementing those on the stage, will help greatly in simulating natural lighting. I believe Granville Barker used this device in his production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. If there is an unnatural luminance about the stage there will be a sense on the part of the audience, however undefined it may be, that there is an unnaturalness, a theatricality, about the performance. This sense places another handicap on the play, makes the work of the actor just that much more difficult.

The lighting of a scene at night where the moon is supposed to provide the only illumination is another problem that has always been a sore trial to the producer. Experience has taught me that when such a scene opens—supposing it is an interior set—the audience should see a dimly-lighted room. The

flood of moonlight will appear to give the only light, but in reality it is coming from other sources. This must be done or the actors are striving against hopeless odds. It is frightfully irritating, after a time, to listen to spoken lines and be unable to make out the faces of the persons speaking them. The actors must work against this natural irritation, and it may take them the rest of the evening to counteract the restlessness such a scene may engender. So if it is impossible to bring on some candles or otherwise light the room by apparent means, I have always found that it is best to resort to a little artifice. After giving the audience time to get the impression of a dim room, lighted only by the reflected light of the moon, we may assume that they have once more become engrossed in the story of the play. Then the electrician may be instructed to coax his lights up gradually so that the room actually becomes lighter, but by such insensible degrees that the audience, interested in what the actors are doing, are quite unconscious of the

change. I have tried this many times, and not once have I heard of anyone in the audience detecting the little trick; not even those connected with the stage. They may have the vague impression, after a time, that the room is brighter than they thought it was at first; but any darkened room seems brighter to us as we become accustomed to it; and thus it may quite conceivably be that this device adds to the impression of reality.

Indeed, it is this sort of "reality" only that is worth striving for. It is not enough to put a real room on the stage, we must consider the impression a real room makes on us and attempt to reproduce the impression, not the room. It is this subtler, and as a rule simpler, realism which serves its purpose—the purpose of supplementing the impression of reality which the actors try to give.

## CHAPTER XI

### MUSIC AND COSTUMES VERSUS THE ACTOR

The Work of Each Specialist Should Be Blended into a Coherent Whole—The Function of Costumes—Allowing for the Distraction of Striking Costumes—The Play Must Be Always Supreme—Irving's Clash with His Orchestra Leader—The Voice of the Actor the Melody of the Piece, All Else the Accompaniment.

**A** DRAMATIC production, as the two preceding chapters indicate, is a complete thing made up of many parts. There are the actors, the play, the scenery, the lights, the costumes, and sometimes the "incidental" music. All of these parts, however, should be nicely calculated and measured and fitted into the scheme. Each should be kept in its proper place. The appeal which we seek to make with any play should be a clearly defined one, and all the accessories we summon to assist in making this appeal

should be rigidly shaped and subordinated that they may contribute to the welfare of the whole, and not disturb the balance by focusing attention unduly upon themselves. Helen Faucit says of the Germans: "Their scenery is good, appropriate, harmonious, and stands as it always should in subservience to the plot and the human interest in the play: it is so unostentatiously good that you never think of it. So the costumes: you think you see the persons represented, as all is in keeping, so you never criticize what the characters wear. You feel at once they looked or did not look as they should, and give this subject no further heed. Being but accessories at the best, they are very properly only treated as such." This can scarcely be said of our theater.

So often there seems no coherent theme in our theatrical productions. The scenery is beautiful, the lighting is clever, and the costumes are marvels of the dressmaker's art, but there is no particular harmony among them all. Each specialist has developed his



own ideas; but there has been no unifying hand to blend all into an intelligible and coherent whole. This difficulty could be partly met, I believe, if we employed a costume designer for modern as well as costume plays. Most managers are content to deal direct with costumers like Redfern or Madam Frances; but it would seem to be much safer, and less expensive in the end, to have a special designer to work in harmony with the scenic artist, so that there may be no clash between the costumes and the settings. The designer arranges the hangings and the draperies so that they blend properly with the tints of the walls and the furniture as well as with the costumes. He may be depended upon to plan his work so that these accessories will merely tend to suggest the atmosphere of the play without calling attention to themselves.

And this is the function of costumes: to suggest the atmosphere of the play. If they do more than this they injure more than they help. The constant hum and whisper of com-

ment aroused by striking gowns on the stage is not helpful. Again we should remind ourselves that the play is the thing, and that it cannot afford to share the attention which should be paid it. The temptation to use the stage as a milliner's shop or a costumer's display room is one that some men seem unable to resist. But not once, to my knowledge, has this costly game ever made a play a success. Aside from the question of expense it is just as detrimental to the play to dress the actresses extravagantly as it is to decorate the stage with elaborate and unusual scenery. The more unobtrusive the costumes can be, and still be correct, the better. People do not come to the legitimate theater to see stunning gowns; if that is what they are interested in, they will go to the reviews and musical comedies where they are displayed on a large scale. But in the legitimate theater the prime interest must be the play itself.

Some plays of course require striking costumes; but even in such cases we should

realize that the notice these up-to-the-moment creations are to attract will be extraneous. We should arrange the play so that such notice will not interfere with the concentration of the audience on the story. The author, if he is wise, will allow for the distraction certain to be caused by the entrance of an actress in an unusual and stunning gown. He can take care that the dialogue is of no real consequence during such an entrance, so that the audience may have a chance to take in the dresses and then be ready for the play to go on. That is, far from relying on the smart costumes to pull our play to success, we should regard them as a necessary distraction, which the play must overcome.

With regard to music also, it is often so difficult to impress upon the mind of the musician that his music is meant to add a certain quality to the performance, to be a modest accompaniment, and nothing more. He finds it hard to understand that the moment his music is noticed for itself, it defeats the very end for which it is written. The producer

who knows what he wants explains what he wants to the musician; and the musician, having found out what the producer wants, either goes and does it or tells the producer to get someone else to do it. The musician may regard himself as an artist in the highest sense of the word and may consider that the work required is far beneath his dignity.

This suggests a little story about Sir Arthur Sullivan. He was at his piano one afternoon thumping away at what seemed to be the most elementary kind of a finger exercise. It ran something like this: *Tumpty tumpty tum. Tumpty tumpty tay. Tumpty tumpty. Tumpty tumpty tee.* A friend entered and listened with a shocked and grieved expression.

“Great Scott, Sullivan!” he cried. “What are you doing?”

Sullivan replied that it was a tune for his next opera.

“Nonsense!” his friend remonstrated. “You surely aren’t going to put that childish rubbish in!”

Sullivan only laughed and told him to wait until he heard the opera. The opera was *The Sorcerer*; and the music accompanied Sir William Gilbert's words which begin:

“ My name is Wellington Wells,  
Genius of magic and spells . . . ”

and the simple, jaunty, choppy music was precisely what was needed. No one thought of the music at all; all the interest was centered in the words, which was what Sullivan, thorough artist that he was, desired. Sullivan was not only a great composer, of his kind, but he was as well a technician who did not scorn the simple when simplicity was required. He realized, in this instance, his music was merely an accessory to Gilbert's words.

Thus in the legitimate theater the words are always supreme. I am aware that I have repeated this often; but I wonder if it could be repeated too often. In play after play that we see, the words are crowded out and choked down by a dozen other factors of the

performance, all interesting enough in themselves, but not the play, not what the people have come to the theater to see—and not what they will send their friends to see. It is something of an undertaking to provide an audience with sufficient mental food, or sufficient amusement, sufficient emotional stimulation to fill, to their satisfaction, an entire evening of their lives. Only by touching their imagination deeply—and they cannot be amused if their imagination is not touched—can we do this. Never can their imagination be touched if the play fails to provide illusion, fails to disguise itself, fails to take the audience out of themselves, and make them forget the theater and themselves. Anything that tends to crowd the words of the play out of first place in the minds of those in the theater, is interfering with this illusion, is striking at the vitals of the play. No effort should be spared, no sacrifice should be shirked, to keep the spoken word supreme. Music is a great art, and she has her own temples where she is worshiped, but the

legitimate theater is not one of them. When she is called to help her sister art she should come to serve; she should leave all thoughts of self behind.

My mother, Mrs. Charles Calvert, in her book, *Sixty-eight Years on the Stage*, says that when she was playing in Boston in the early fifties Rachel, the great French actress, and her French company, came to the city. At her final performance, in addition to the evening's bill, Rachel recited the *Marseillaise*. "The band played so faintly that you could only catch the beat, and Rachel's words rose rhythmically above it. After the first few lines she snatched a tricolor and raised it proudly above her head, as she cried, 'Aux armes! Aux armes!' The effect was electrical . . ." But this powerful effect could never have been obtained if the music of the orchestra had not been subordinated to Rachel's voice, and to the words of the song. It is possible that the music of the *Marseillaise* is even greater than the words; but in this case the words

were more important and the music was merely accessory.

I remember many years ago, when I was filling an engagement with the late Henry Irving, there was a passage at arms between the orchestra leader and the chief. We were rehearsing Lord Byron's *Werner*. This play lent itself particularly to incidental music, and Irving stopped at one rehearsal and said to the conductor, "I'd like to give this speech to music. See if you can have something ready for me next time." At the next rehearsal the music was ready and Irving tried his speech with it. But something was wrong. "I don't like that music somehow," said Irving. "I don't feel that it suits." The orchestra leader saw nothing wrong with it, himself, and told Irving so with some emphasis. But Irving insisted that they attempt to find what the matter was. "Let's try it without the flute," he suggested. This was done, and Irving gave his lines with it; but still the music seemed out of place. Next the cornet was omitted, but still the result



was unsatisfactory. Then it was tried without the trombone, still wrong. So they went on, leaving out all of the other instruments one at a time, until it came time to do without the first violin. The music had been written for the first violin (the instrument played by the orchestra leader himself) and that artist objected strongly to remaining silent. But the piece was tried without him, and Irving found it to be exactly what he wanted to supplement his speech. Loudly did the orchestra leader expostulate with Irving, pointing out, with many flourishes of his bow, that if the violin were cut out there was nothing left of the music, since the melody was gone. But Irving turned a deaf ear to his lamentations. And Irving knew what he was about. He knew that the secret of writing music to accompany the voice is that the voice takes the place of the melody. It was a bit of a blow to the musician in this case, for he had grown attached to his little melody, but it had been out of place. If it had been used it would have fought Irving's

voice for first place, and thus would have defeated the end for which it had been composed.

And in this little incident lies the secret, I believe, of mounting plays for production. The voice of the actor should always be regarded as the melody; and scenery, lights, properties, costumes, and music are only meant to supply the accompaniment.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE "TONE" OF A PERFORMANCE

Where the Real Charm of a Charming Play Lies—The Eleventh-hour Rescue of *Kismet*—Keeping One's Comedy in Key—Warfield's Rage in *The Music Master*—Tad Mortimer's Rebellion in *The Thunderbolt*—Wrong Emphasis Fatal for *Othello* and Many of Shakespeare's Plays—How *The Concert* was Ruined in London—How to Insure Harmony of Tone—Actors Are Not Mechanics—Keeping Close to the Primaries.

**I**N any production there should be, as we have seen, a central theme to which all factors should be made to contribute.

That is, the appeal of any play must be a localized one. A play must appeal to the sense of the whimsical primarily, or the sense of the tragic primarily, or the pathetic, or the comic, or the absurd—there must be one primary appeal to every play, there must not be more than one, we cannot mix the appeal—

that is, the primary appeal—without disaster. There must, in other words, be an atmosphere or tone to which the whole of any given performance must be keyed. And this atmosphere counts much more with an audience than skilled technique. It is the atmosphere, far more than the particular incidents of the story, that remains in our senses after we have left the theater. Most people have seen a play and liked it immensely, tried to tell the story to friends, and wondered, after a recital of the unadorned skeleton of the action, what there was in the play that was so pleasing. We have, in such cases, been charmed not by the story itself half so much as by the peculiar atmosphere or tone the actors were able to give the performance.

Most plays can be played in one of many tones; and often a great deal depends upon the one sought for by the producer. This was illustrated strikingly by the experience of Oscar Asche when he produced *Kismet* in London. Asche not only produced the play but he also played the part of the Beggar

himself. Otis Skinner played the part in America. Asche had rehearsed *Kismet* as a tragic drama, the drama of a disappointed, hungry life. His own part he had realized as a serious study of an aged vagabond who, by a peculiar series of circumstances, had his day. In rehearsals he had put a poignant significance into his recurring cry: "Alms, for the love of Allah!" It typified the plaint and prayer of a broken-hearted, disappointed old man. But on the opening night of the play his cry: "Alms, for the love of Allah!" tickled the audience immensely, and they rewarded it with hearty laughter. After recovering from his amazement, Asche, with a splendid eye to the main chance, at once shifted his whole reading of the part. He tinged it with comedy, instead of pathos, and thus altered the tone of the whole play. *Kismet* is a sort of an *Arabian Nights* tale and might have been played in several ways; but the curious, fantastic, semi-humorous, semi-tragic tone seemed, on experience, the one which really carried the play to the

hearts of the audience. For my part I am sure that this humorous treatment was one of the big factors in the success of the piece. It gave a delightful whimsicality to the whole thing; so that even when the Beggar sold his daughter to the Rich Man the audience were amused at the old rascal instead of being shocked, as Asche (and the author perhaps) had supposed they would be. I believe if the play had been produced in the serious tone originally attempted its success would have been doubtful.

It may be objected that such a proceeding as Asche's is truckling to the mood of the audience, at the expense of truth. I do not think this is valid. To my mind it is rather finding truth under the stimulus of the audience's response. We are striving in the production of any play to make the emotions of the people in the play as real and moving as possible to the people in the theater. We are striving to shed upon the story just the light which will impart the strongest illusion to the characters and incidents in it.

That emphasis which proves on experience to be the one that gives the highest degree of veracity to the play is the correct one for the play; and discovering this emphasis is discovering truth, not sacrificing it.

I once played a part in *Captain Drew on Leave*. I was a matter-of-fact, commonplace husband who had allowed his home life to fall into a dull routine. My wife was a young and pretty woman who, since our two sons had been away at school, found the home rather uninspiring. As the husband I was something of a gawk and the audience laughed at everything I did. But in the last act I realize that my wife has been captivated by the dashing young Captain Drew. And with this realization my part really turned into one of pathos. In this lay a difficulty. I had to take great care that the audience did not come to regard me as too great a boor in the early acts or they would refuse to take me seriously in the pathetic scene at the end, where I held out my hands to my wife, saying simply, "Let's go up to Winchester and

see the boys." I tried to keep this scene before me throughout the play; I tried to keep my comedy within certain bounds, I tried to have their amusement touched with affection, not contempt. This meant that this thought had to govern the reading of almost every comedy line; and I do not believe I ever failed to touch the hearts of the audience with the pathos at the end. But when I left the company—as I had only been loaned for a few weeks—the man who took my place revelled so much in his comedy, in acts one and two, that when the last act came they refused to take him seriously, they laughed at him uproariously and one of the biggest moments in the play came to naught. It seemed to me that he had allowed himself to forget the atmosphere of the part; his performance, highly amusing though it was, was out of key with the proper tone of the play.

I think this matter of keeping in key was phrased most eloquently by the old stage manager at the Lyceum in London. *Faust*



was in rehearsal and the Brocken scene had been reached. This scene requires a considerable number of supers and they were laughing and joking with each other through the somber scene, in bland disregard of the effect they were supposed to make. The stage manager stood it for a time, then yelled indignantly, "'Ere, 'ere, 'ere! Not so 'appy, not so 'appy! You're not in 'Ampstead, you're in 'ell!"

The atmosphere of the play must dominate every actor's work. It is a mistake to allow clever bits of business to creep into one's performance merely because they are cunning and momentarily effective. Very frequently a laugh may be obtained by pointing a line with humor; but it is wrong to do it if the laugh is out of keeping with the atmosphere of the whole. Very frequently the actor playing the part of the hero can color his lines with sarcasm and deliver a body blow to the villain; but if the hero is not the sort of a man who resorts to sarcasm, if this will mean a discord in his interpretation, he

achieves a momentary effect at the expense of something vastly more important.

David Warfield's performance in the *Music Master* is a fine example of beautifully sustained atmosphere. The rage of the harmless little Music Master is done with splendid artistry, kept perfectly in keeping with the tone of the play. An ordinary actor would doubtless have thrown all his energy into that rage scene, used it as a means of displaying his great power of voice and range of emotional power, but Warfield clung faithfully to his character. His rage, intense and bitter as it is, still is the rage of a gentle, timid man who realizes after all how futile his anger is. Like a hurt child Warfield impotently bangs some sheets of music on the piano—and how infinitely more moving and true that pathetic action is than roaring and pacing and tearing the hair. This was the work of a great artist, who was subduing all to truth and simplicity.

The part of Tad Mortimer in Pinero's *The Thunderbolt* required, I think, some

such treatment as this. Mortimer is a man in middle age who has always been dominated and bullied by his two elder brothers. For the first half of the play we see him as a meek, mild spirit accustomed to being overridden by his relatives. But in the third act he is driven to desperation by an attack made by these brothers on his wife, and he confronts them with a violent defiance. When we played the piece in London George Alexander played the part of Tad, and in this act he threw all his emotional power into the fray. He played the scene with as much fury as the part of Cassius requires in the quarrel scene with Brutus. This was surely decidedly a case of falling completely out of the atmosphere of the character. I discussed the matter with Alexander, but he confronted me with the script and pointed out that Pinero had written such stage directions as "with fury" and "goaded to desperation"; but still I believe that the fury should have been that of helpless, long-suffering nature, the desperation of the sort

that comes after injustice has been endured supinely; and both should be expressed as by a man unused to asserting himself, a man a little frightened at his own rage. This would have kept the character consistent and would not have been a false note.

Othello is a character which relies for its effectiveness greatly upon the tone of the actor's work. Shakespeare created a man full of pride in his own powers, whose every act is touched by the great underlying belief he has in himself. His manner is grandiose, and would be overbearing and offensive were it not for his great dignity. Forbes-Robertson and Lewis Waller both played Othello and failed to make any noteworthy success. I believe the failure in both cases was due to the fact that those actors played him from the juvenile point of view. They made Othello a lover; and consequently the real tragedy of the story, indeed the point of it, was lost. Othello, Lear, Macbeth, and Coriolanus are all tragedies of over-conceit, tragedies of the downfall of men who had an exag-

gerated belief in their power. They believe themselves supermen, and the tragedy in each play comes when, because of this, they are hurled from their high place. If other qualities are emphasized unduly in the playing of these parts they lose their meaning, and failure is likely to result. The atmosphere of such characters must be preserved at any cost.

In speaking of *Romeo and Juliet*, Madame Modjeska says: "It was my belief that in that poetic scene Shakespeare had not intended to give an impression of sensuousness. These two children are unconscious of their passion. They meet because they love, because they want to be together, to hear each other's voices and to look in each other's eyes and cherish and kiss or die.

"If they succumb to the natural law and the calling of their southern blood it is not done with premeditation. There is no necessity either to remind the audience what has just happened in Juliet's room by such naturalistic effects as a disarranged bed or the

turning of a key of a locked door at the nurse's entrance or Romeo's lacing his jerkin, and a dishevelled Juliet in a crêpe de Chine nightgown. Such details are cheap illustrations and unworthy of a true artist."

It might be added that they are not only "cheap illustrations" but may very well be fatal to the play. They cloud the real story, they destroy the directness of its appeal, and mar its harmony; they interfere with the focus of the production.

It may be said that we are splitting hairs in such a discussion as this. It may be stated that a theatrical production is not so frail and delicate an affair as we may seem to imply; that whereas a few trained souls may feel such dissonances, the bulk of the audience, who come to be interested and amused, will enjoy the story for itself, and that there will be an end of it. But it seems to me that the history of the stage is full of incidents which prove that this subtle matter of atmosphere will have its effect inexorably with any play and with any audience. Two

cases occur to me. I am told that when *The Manœuvres of Jane*, by Henry Arthur Jones, was first produced in London it was treated as light comedy. But as such it came perilously near to ignominious failure. Rehearsals were called for the morning; and on the second night the comedy was greatly broadened until it verged on farce. It is said that this change saved the play. And the principle worked conversely with that wonderful Belasco production, *The Concert*. The haunting butterfly atmosphere of that play was ruined by the broad tone in which it was played in London. In New York the treatment had been so delicate that the coarseness of the central situation was never apparent. In London a different interpretation was used; and the situation degenerated to coarseness and vulgarity—and the play was not a success in England.

It is, then, for the producer to find the correct tone of any new play. He should, it seems to me, have a round table discussion with his company before rehearsals begin

After determines  
success or failure  
play.

*help actors* (for the purpose of giving them a general notion of what he conceives the atmosphere of the play to be. He should make as clear as he can the particular emphasis he wishes to give the piece, the tone of it, the way he thinks the various strands of interest and character can best be woven into a coherent pattern. All of this preliminary talk will prove of great help to the actors when they come to study their parts. It gives them a start in the right direction and stimulates their thinking along the proper lines. They have a general notion of the play to begin with; and as they read their own lines they cannot fail to apply them to the main story as they conceive it. If their original conception and the producer's are the same a great deal of time and energy may be saved.

I believe that if this harmony and smoothness is to be imparted to a production by the producer, there must be a certain harmony and smoothness in his relations with the members of his company. The best



policy is surely for the producer to treat the company as comrades who are working with him for the success of the play. It is understood, of course, that the ultimate authority must rest with the producer, since it is his job to co-ordinate the work of all; but the days of the drill sergeant producer are numbered. Shakespeare said, "It is excellent to have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous to use it like a giant." With regard to producing the manager has all the power, but it is not only tyrannous for him to use it like a giant, it is absurd and fatal as a business policy. The good producer's methods are persuasive, not commanding. It is only the foolish producer who thinks he knows everything who will use the bludgeon; or else it is the man who is aware of his limitation, and who relies on bluster to avoid being found out. The actor cannot do his best unless he is allowed a free rein, to a certain extent, in the working out of his character. I do not believe in forcing a conception of a part on an actor. It is rarely a

good thing to force a man into a reading he does not "feel"—that is uncongenial to him. But if, instead of going at him rough-shod, the producer requests him to try it the new way once, he may often swing round himself.

It is wrong to regard the company as a group of mechanics. If they are mechanics no one is to blame for their being in the play except the producer who engaged them. And if they are treated as mechanics their work is pretty apt to be mechanical. Unless they are given freedom in the expression of what they feel in their own way, so far as possible, how can the producer expect their ultimate performance to have much spontaneity and naturalness about it? There are stars—so-called—who seem to prefer to surround themselves with soulless mechanics presumably that their own work may shine in contrast; but such a policy does the ambitious star more harm than good. In the case of a road company, where the actors have been told to copy the original company in every detail, the work is

mechanical, however clever the particular actors may be; but in shaping up a new play for its maiden performance the greatest producer is the one who sets himself merely to enable his actors to give better performances than they have ever given before. That is the surest way for the producer's own work to prove successful.

That is, the well-being of the play must come first of all in the minds of every single person connected with its production. That, it would seem, is a simple and obvious primary upon which to base all our work—but like so many simple, primary things it is often forgotten, as each struggles to thrust himself forward; forgetting, apparently, that the success of the play is the only thing that can bring advancement to those associated with it! If we would keep our primaries in mind! If we would keep in mind—what we all know well enough—that the greatest effects of the producer's art, and the playwright's art, and the actor's art are simple effects whose great appeal lies in their sim-

plicity and truth! I think there would be fewer failures. I believe in most failures we will find that somewhere the primary things were forgotten.

## CHAPTER XIII

### TRADITIONS

“Lest We Forget”—The “Old-fashioned” Methods of Ten or Twenty Years Ago—Methods Change, but Art Is Constant—No Temple for the Precious Lore of the Actor’s Art—There Must Have Been Great Actors to Perform the Great Plays of the Past—The Strong Appeal of the Old Method—Expressing Emotion and Repressing Emotion—Gordon Craig, the Passionate Dilettante—“Unattached” Cleverness.

**H**ANGING inconspicuously and rather forlornly in the smoking-room of the Cohan Theater in New York City is a yellowish old lithograph on which are the portraits (and very poor portraits they are!) of a score or more of the famous actors of the past. Booth is there, and the elder Sothern, and Salvini, and Modjeska, and Kean, and Irving, and many others. Mighty names they were not so many years ago; men and women who had touched the heart of nations with their art, who had numbered their admirers

by the thousands. And under their portraits is the tragically significant legend: "Lest We Forget!" The portraits of men and women who a few short years ago were recognized over the world as great artists, grouped together over that humiliating legend in the smoking-room of a theater!

I believe that the art of acting suffers more from change of method than any other—with the possible exception of the art of playwriting. The values are ever-shifting, ever new. We strive in one generation to avoid the very things we most sought to do in the preceding one. The methods which we regard as the ultimate reach at the present time will presumably be obsolete in ten or fifteen years. Those actors who, in the seventies, were received with open arms by an adoring public would probably be laughed off the stage to-day. The art of the actor is a most sensitive one, susceptible to every influence varying fads of fashion and thought may bring to bear. It is on the stage that we find the most faithful expression of the moods of

thought which are peculiar to each generation; and which make each generation "modern" and those that have gone before "old-fashioned." This may be the reason why we know so little of the methods our forefathers followed, why tradition pays so lamentably small a part in shaping our work today. The young actor is likely to take the attitude that he must deliberately shut his eyes to the old-fashioned ways, and model his work on the methods of the successful actors of his own time. To a certain extent this is very true, of course, but only to a certain extent.

The novice should not lose sight of the fact that after all it is not the art of the actor that changes, it is only the method. The material we work with is the same; though each season or two we shape it according to new patterns. The art of the actor, the art of making stage people and stage emotions real to those in the theater, has never changed. We adapt ourselves to the ever-changing tastes, but our end is always the same. Vogue has a profound influ-

ence on the actor's methods; but it is wrong to confuse vogue with art. It is a grievous error—a great misfortune—that we pay so little heed to the few traditions of our craft which we have. It is a great pity that so much of the past has been lost. Instead of shaping our work and guiding our progress by fixed standards which have grown up through centuries—as the painter or the sculptor does—we are constantly setting up new standards; we are always beginning over again.

This is partly true because of the constant change in method (which is only superficial), and partly because actors are a happy-go-lucky lot. They allow the precious lore of their profession to remain scattered over the country in countless museums and libraries, and private collections. They have never taken the trouble to found a temple of their own. The stage should have a library of its own, a museum of its own, where the history of the actor's art could be coherently preserved, and studied. In the library of the



Players' Club of New York is the only noteworthy collection of theater lore in this country; and while this collection is valuable and interesting, it, of course, fails to cover the ground in any comprehensive way.

How much of inestimable value for the beginning actor there would be in such a study, we can only guess. But the meager facts we are able to glean from the past are sufficient to tell us that there were in the old days great actors of whom we know little or nothing. In my youth I read everything I could lay my hands on that related to Shakespeare and his time; and I came to the conclusion that the great plays would never have been written had there not been a brilliant company of actors to perform them.

We know that in most cases Shakespeare wrote with definite actors in mind. He was closely associated with them and knew their abilities to a nicety, no doubt. He could never have written his great tragedies by keeping any but exceedingly fine actors in mind. It is too bad we cannot know the

work of those actors, as we know the work of Shakespeare. It is too bad that the actor is denied such a classical standard of excellence as that provided the playwright by Shakespeare's plays. Some actors' names have come down to us in association with Shakespeare's time; we know there were excellent actors—Richard Burbage, William Kemp, John Heming, Henry Condell, and some others, but we know nothing of their art. How, in that distant time, they went about it to equip themselves for the interpretation of the greatest dramas in the English language, we have not the remotest idea. Their art, which must have been almost as remarkable as Shakespeare's own, died with them.

There are plenty of biographies of famous actors of the past, but those tell mostly of great triumphs, not of the methods that made those triumphs possible. In the lives of Edwin Booth, Henry Irving, and the many others we may read, we get no sense of *how* they acted, only of the great heights they

reached. Ristori gives us some insight into her technical methods; Joseph Jefferson, in his long autobiography, writes a few pages that are of great value. But there are only a few oases in the desert. For the most part these books are personal history; interesting enough, but of little real help to the ambitious beginner, who could probably be helped so much had the giants of the past bequeathed their wisdom to posterity. There is no doubt that we would all be better actors for such reading. Certainly it would seem that the great artists who have attained enduring fame were able to put a quality into their work which we, of today, have lost. We never hear today of ten thousand people swarming around a hotel to bid farewell to a retiring actress as they did to Charlotte Cushman. We do have actors who are widely known and regarded with a certain affection, but I do not believe their admirers have ever tried to draw their carriages through the streets, as they did Modjeska's in Dublin. There must have been something in the "old-fash-

ioned" way of acting that took a powerful hold on the heart strings. It is a pity we have no way of knowing what it was.

The vigor and power of the old way of doing things was brought home to me when I played Ives in *The Dancing Girl*. That play was indicted by the critics as an old-fashioned play. Old-fashioned or not, it did make certain demands on the actor, called out certain faculties, which modern plays do not. I tried to play my part as it was written, in key with the tone of the play. I have never been so severely criticized in my life. The press flayed me for my shockingly antiquated methods. But I believe I played the part the way it was written, I believe I allowed myself to be guided by the author's reasoning. The strange thing about this experience was that in spite of the disfavor of the critics, I never got such hearty applause from any audience before or since! I do not believe I ever played a part where I felt so vividly the response of the audience. My individual performance seemed out of keeping

with the rest of the play, I know, because Sir Herbert Tree and his company, who played the piece, attempted to bring it up-to-date by applying modern methods of acting to it. But it was not a modern play, and did not lend itself to the modern way of acting. The production was not a success; but I think it very likely that it might have been, if it had been played in the proper melodramatic key for which it had been written, in which it had been played with great success years before.

Something there was in that old technique which found the hearts of the public as we rarely do today. The plays that have lived through the centuries all have tremendous acting parts. They are parts which give the actor great opportunities, but they also place heavy demands upon him. Those demands must have been met by the old actors, or the plays would not have lived. How silly it is therefore to deride the old schools of acting. How unfortunate that we are not able to benefit by their sound traditions.

I do not want to lay myself open to the

charge of being out of date. I realize that the restrained, simple way of expressing emotion may be quite as artistic as the more forceful method of the past. But I think actors are likely to fall into the same fault that some painters have done. I think there is a tendency toward futurism and post-impressionism in much of the very modern acting. In both cases the aim is to achieve certain praiseworthy results unhampered by tradition and technique. But before an actor is justified in throwing technique to the winds, he must know very well what he is throwing away. I am sure that the attempt to gain originality by relying on enthusiasm and imagination is a dangerous course for the young actor to follow. It is only the master of technique who is able to rise above it, and discard it as his guide.

The desire for originality has led many worthy beings astray. Gordon Craig, with his designs for stage settings, has won some distinction on the Continent, especially in Russia, where he is hailed as a great inno-

vator, a great creator. I have no desire to deprecate his work, much of which is exceedingly clever; but I think his achievement would be much more noteworthy and enduring (if he insists on working for the stage), if he curbed his originality and directed it more in accordance with the history and tradition of the theater. In his writings he continually attacks the actor, evidently regarding him as a superfluity. He says that if he had his way all actors would wear masks that they might not interfere with his great conceptions. His place, I think, would be much higher if he realized that his work, in itself, has nothing in common with that of the actor. It really has no place on the stage. He is a clever dilettante whose work is designed for the drawing-room, not the stage.

His design for Macbeth's castle is a case in point. On the left side of the stage is the castle stretching its gloomy length before us. It is a dismal, forbidding building, the only relief to its bare walls being a succession of semicircular buttresses as plain

and uninviting to the eye as the castle itself. The bleak walls are unadorned. There are steps which extend across the stage from the castle to the opposite side, filling the picture. They also are innocent of adornment of any kind. The impression given is one of utter desolation. This was no doubt intended by the designer to convey an impression of the atmosphere of tragedy, to prepare us for the terrible events about to take place. But this scene was Gordon Craig's idea, not Shakespeare's. Shakespeare's description of the castle is as follows:

“ This castle hath a pleasant seat. The air  
Nimbly and sweetly commends itself  
Unto our gentle senses.

This guest of summer, -

The temple-haunting martlet, does approve  
By his loved masonry that the Heaven's breath  
Smells wooingly here: no jutting, frieze,  
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird  
Hath made his pendant bed and procreant cradle;  
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed  
The air is delicate.”

I should consider this documentary proof



that in this particular design at any rate Craig had thrown aside a great deal more than technique and tradition in the effort to gain originality. I think, too, it illustrates very well the excesses into which we are apt to be led if our only purpose is to be ultra-modern and original. Once we cast adrift and depend upon our own cleverness to lead us we are pretty sure to stray far from the course. Craig's work, in this case, was not attempting to interpret Shakespeare, or to serve the welfare of the play. There was nothing in the scene he imagined to supplement the lines to be spoken by the actors. His design stood alone and apart from the play of *Macbeth*. It expressed one of Mr. Craig's ideas; it did not express, or seek to express anything else; it bore no connection with Shakespeare's play and thus, as an integral part in the production of *Macbeth*, it had no place.

So it is with acting. The moment we permit ourselves to become blinded to the fact that a play when performed on the stage is

a composite, made up of several factors each of which must be co-ordinated with the others, we fall into just the mistake that Mr. Craig did. We create, out of ourselves, a highly original and possibly clever thing, but it has no value for anyone except as a bit of original cleverness. I think, at times, that the modern attitude toward acting is apt to encourage this sort of "unattached" cleverness; and I believe a greater regard for the in such cases; surely it has been creative art! of what the experience of those who have gone before has taught, would keep many an impetuous young actor from making costly indiscretions which mar his career and multiply his difficulties.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE ART OF ACTING

Is Acting a Dependent, Imitative Art, or Is It Creative?—Two Insignificant Plays, *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Music Master*, Which Actors Made Enormous Successes—The Folly of Comparing the Art of the Actor with That of the Poet or Painter—When a Play Is a Play—Why the Actor's Work Is Creative and Not Imitative—The Place of the Actor's Art.

**I** FEEL that before I conclude these observations I should say a word in defense of the actor's art. I believe in many quarters the actor is sadly misunderstood. He is likely to be regarded patronizingly by the members of other arts; he is told that his art is an imitative one as contrasted with that of the painter and the writer, which are creative. By many, even in this day, the actor is regarded as a troubadour or vagabond as he was in old English times. It is strange that that prejudice should cling to the actor.

I believe—and of course I know there are many who agree—that the art of the actor is quite as dignified, quite as “creative,” and perhaps even more vital and potent than any other of the fine arts. But by many we are considered disciples of a “minor” art because it is pointed out that we must depend upon the dramatic author for our material; that we merely “imitate” or reproduce his conceptions. Anyone who knows the real story of a play’s precarious journey to public favor, knows how often that process is reversed: knows how often the playwright relies on the art of the actor to endow his characters with life, knows how often a play, in the hands of the actors, grows far beyond the conception of the author. In my own case I have often been compelled to play characters which have been quite impossible and absurd as the author conceived them. I have felt that I would sooner carry bricks up a ladder than earn my living by perpetrating such trash with pen and paper. I believe the faculties I have brought to the “interpretation” of

such characters to be of a much higher order than those the author employed in writing them. I have had to tax my own powers to the utmost to overcome the author's deficiencies. Surely my art has not been imitative in such cases; surely it has been creative art!

The play of *Rip Van Winkle* is a case in point. It was founded on a short story by Washington Irving. As a short story it has its place in the literature of this country; but, as a play, it is remembered as a vehicle used by Joseph Jefferson. It is common knowledge that many actors had been struck with the possibilities which a dramatization of Washington Irving's story possessed. They saw that it might provide a splendid means for the exploitation of their art, they felt that they could use the idea as a vehicle. Many authors were commissioned to try their hands at refashioning the story into a play; but for a long time all their attempts were unsuccessful. Jefferson then took it up; and he actually failed in it at the start. But he stuck to his guns and had it rewritten again

and again. For years he worked at the play, polishing, rearranging, fitting it for his purpose. At last he got it into shape so that it did serve his purpose; that is to say, it enabled him to display his art to the best advantage. Millions flocked to see his performance. The play was, in his hands, one of the greatest successes in all the annals of stage history; but Jefferson is dead now, and the play lies on the shelf a lifeless, worthless thing. It has no value as literature and is quite dead as a play, requiring the genius of a second Jefferson to give it life.

Nobody would dream of calling *The Music Master* a great play; it is old-fashioned and mechanical and false in many ways. But, using it as a model, David Warfield created one of the most remarkable stage portraits of contemporary times. He was able to breathe life into the dead words of the play. I do not think it can justly be said that the art of David Warfield was inferior to that of Charles Klein! Here, then, are two great successes which, as plays, are worthless. I

am not sure, but I do not believe that either play has ever been published in standard form. Surely it is clear that the actors, in these two notable instances, supplied their share of creative force.

There are hack actors, it is true, just as there are hack authors, and hack painters. But it is no more possible to place the *art* of the writer above that of the actor, than it is to place the art of the poet above that of the painter. They are all creative arts; though they may, on occasion, minister to each other. If the poet chooses to take a painter's picture and put on paper what the painter has expressed on canvas, is the poet's work any the less dignified, any the less creative because he has taken the painter's subject? Aren't the word pictures he paints fully as individual as the oil pictures of the painter? Doesn't the creation of such a poem depend upon the same faculties as the creation of any of his other poems? When Abbey painted his gorgeous picture of Tennyson's "Search for the Holy Grail" for the Bos-

ton Public Library, did he lessen the value of his work because he put on canvas what Tennyson had put on paper? When the actor with his art expresses on the stage what the author has expressed on paper, he stands in exactly the same relation to his author as Abbey does to Tennyson. He is not imitating any more than Abbey was imitating. He is merely accomplishing his artistic results by means of a different medium.

The case is even stronger for the actor, because a play does not exist as a play until it is performed on the stage. It may have artistic value as a piece of literature, but until it lives and breathes on the stage it is not a play. A play—if it is really a play, and not a story in the form of dialogue—is constructed according to the peculiar requirements and conditions of the theater. It depends for its effectiveness upon the emphasis which only the theater can give. In reading a play we can only imagine what it will be like, in manuscript it is not a complete thing. And a great many plays must be performed on the



stage before we can judge their value. Even the most experienced managers and play-readers insist that you never can tell, you never can be sure of the success of any play. This certainly means that the actor has his important share in the creation of the play. To say that his work is imitative is absurd.

Rostand wrote *Cyrano de Bergerac*, and declared to the world that Coquelin was the perfect embodiment of his creation. If we accept the view that acting is merely a supine imitation of the author's work, surely any actor who wished to play *Cyrano*, in order to give the best performance of the author's conception, would imitate Coquelin. Anyone knows that such a course would mean failure. The actor who plays *Cyrano* today does not bother his head about Coquelin's method, he creates his own *Cyrano*; he expresses his own conception—just as Rostand himself did in the beginning.

And let Rostand select six great actors who could play *Cyrano*, and let him talk to them until he was black in the face explaining to

the minutest detail just how the part should be played. Then let the six actors separate and work out their character individually. What would be the result? There would be six different Cyranos, of course! There would be just as much difference in them as there was in the Hamlets of Booth, Irving, Fechter, and Mounet-Sully! The reason for this is not far to seek. Each actor must create his characters according to his abilities.

This great play of Rostand's, as a play, is quite useless until some qualified actor takes it from its library shelf and, by his creative power, gives it a new birth, a new lease of life as a play. It would have a very short stage-life if a poor actor attempted it. The same is true of *Hamlet*. If Hamlet should be produced in New York today with an ordinary actor in the part, it would be pretty promptly withdrawn, for it is only great acting that will induce the public to see again a play they know so well.

And again if a well-known actor were secured to play Hamlet, and told that he should

give a faithful copy of Booth's Hamlet, or Irving's or anybody else's but his own, it is easy to imagine what the result would be. Every actor must express his own conception of any character, and must express it in his own way; out of the imagination of the actor must grow the image that is to appeal to our imagination.

Acting in its true sense is as boundless in its scope, as unfettered, as "creative" as any of the other fine arts. I believe that the art of Modjeska and Ristori, and Booth and Irving cannot fairly be judged by a lower aesthetic standard than the art of Whistler or the art of Beethoven or the art of Goethe or the art of Rodin. I sincerely hope that this little book has shown that the art of the actor calls into play the same imaginative and creative faculties as the art of the painter or the composer or the poet or the sculptor, and that the beginner in the profession should guide and judge his work by ideals as lofty and exacting as theirs.



## INDEX

- Abbey, E. A., 261-262  
Accessories, stage, 176-212  
Acting, art and craft, 3-4; art and science, 171; change of method, 244-247; defense of the art, 257-265; literature lacking, 246-247. *See also* Art of acting  
Actor, inability to write, xix-xx; not a mechanic, 240  
*Adrienne Lecouvreur*, 35  
After-swell, 149-150  
Aldwych Theater, xxv  
Alexander, George, 233  
*Amasis*, xxiv  
Amateur and professional, 168-175  
Andrews, Kenneth, x-xi  
*Androcles and the Lion*, 130  
Anthony, John, xxi  
Antonio, 68, 69, 70, 71  
Antony, Mark, 39, 149  
Applause, 151, 250  
Aptitudes, 9  
*Arabian Nights* tale, 227  
Archer, William, xvii  
Aristotle, xvii  
Arms, 89, 93  
Art, concealing, 46, 159, 175  
Art of acting, v, xviii, 3-4; history, 246; principles, xxvi; teaching and writing, xxix-xx; unchanging, 245-247. *See also* Acting; Craft of acting; Technique  
Artifice, 125  
Artistic sense, 79  
*As You Like It*, 35  
Asche, Oscar, 226-229  
Assurance, 144, 167  
Atmosphere of a play, 76, 225-242; costumes and, 215-217  
Audience, being oblivious to, 150-151; giving them a rest, 118-119; evidence as to "tone" of play, 226-229; making them laugh, 152-160; managing, 152; quickness with the eye, 94, 208; response, 250; sensing, 153; starting with, 142-143, 145  
Australia, xxii-xxiii  
Bagstock, Major, xxi  
*Bargain, The*, xxii  
Barker, Granville, xxiv, 180, 182, 210  
Becket, 81  
Beethoven, 265  
Beginners, predicting future prospects, 161-167  
Beginning, possibilities, 21  
Belasco, 237  
Belch, Sir Toby, xxi  
Bennett, Arnold, 101  
Bertuccio, 149  
Billaud-Vareennes, xxiii  
Biographies, 248  
Block, Ralph, 170  
*Blot on the 'Scutcheon*, A, xxiii  
Books, vii  
Booth, Edwin, vii, 6, 130, 149, 243, 248, 264, 265  
Boston, 221

- Boston Public Library, 261-262  
 Braid, James, 135  
 Brazenose Club, 165  
 Breath, 52, 55  
 Bridge, 190  
 Britomart, Lady, 105-107  
 Broadbent, John, xxiv  
 Broadway, staying on, 26-30  
 Browning, Robert, xxiii  
*Bunty Pulls the Strings*, 173  
 Burbage, Richard, 248  
 Byron, Lord, 222
- Caesar, 39, 149  
 Caesar's servant, 39-40  
*Called Back*, 124  
 Calvert, Louis, autobiographical, v-xi; biographical, xx-xxvii; parts played, xxi-xxv  
 Calvert, Mrs. Charles, xxii, 166, 221  
*Captain Drew on Leave*, xxiv, 229-230  
 Caricatures, 163  
 Casca, xxiii  
 Castlemaine, Lady, 98  
 Ceiling, 203-204  
*Celebrated Case, A*, 24  
 Century Theater, New York, xxii  
 Chairs and tables, 196-198  
 Character, getting into, 61-78; knowledge of, 91, 112, 129  
*Clavigo*, xxiii  
 Cleverness, 256  
 Climax, 141  
 Cohan, George M., xx  
 Cohan Theater in New York, 243  
 Cold in the head, 50  
*Colleen Bawn*, 35  
 Comedy, audience in, 152-160  
 Comedy Theater, London, xxiv
- Company, producer and members, 238-241  
 Competition, 20  
 Concealment of art, 46, 159, 175  
 Concentration, 72-75, 113  
*Concert, The*, 237  
 Concerted effort, 101  
 Constance, 136  
 Control, 134-135, 137, 153  
 Conventionality in plays, 29  
 Conventions, 88  
 Conversation, 115, 116  
 Co-operation of managers and stage specialists, 192, 193-195  
 Coquelin, 263-264; use of eyes in *Cyrano*, 85-87, 131, 132  
 Coriolanus, 234  
 Costume designers, 193, 215  
 Costumes, function, 215-217  
*Cottage in the Air, The*, xxi  
 Condell, Henry, 248  
 Cough, 94  
 Court Theater, London, xxiv  
 Craft of acting, 3-4, 95, 105, 172-173. *See also* Technique  
 Craig, Gordon, 252-256  
 Crawley, Sir Pitt, xxi  
 Creative art, 257-259  
 Crescendo, 138-149, 152, 160  
 Critics, xviii  
 Cruikshank, 163  
 Cues, 64  
 Cushman, Charlotte, 7, 249  
 Cusius, 155.  
*Cymbeline*, 139  
 Cynicism, 13  
*Cyrano*, 263-264  
*Cyrano de Bergerac*, xxiv, 85, 131, 132, 263
- Dancing Girl, The*, xxv, 250  
*David Garrick*, xxi  
 Dewhurst, John, xxiii  
 Difficulties, v. 19

- Dilettantism, 253  
 Distinctness of speech, 56  
 "Dog-towns," 199-200  
 Doing nothing, art of, 87, 96-120  
*Dombey and Son*, xxi  
*Don*, xxi  
 Douglas, Richard, 184-187  
 Dramatic critics, xviii  
 Dress rehearsal, 197, 199-200  
 Drudgery, 60; *see also* Work  
 Drury Lane Theater, xxiii, 39  
 Dublin, 249  
 Dull moments, 119-120  
 Durban, xxii
- Ear for music, 17  
 Earnestness, 7-8  
 Elementary lessons, 80  
 Elocution, vi, 46, 47  
 Emotions, 121-151; cumulative, 140-141, 147, 148; definition, 121-122; expressing mimicry, 22; eyes for conveying, 80-81, 82-83; feeling, 123, 150; feeling and simulating, 132; preparation for, 138, 139-140; restrained and expressed, 252; unadorned, the basis of all, 128-129  
*Empress of Ireland* (ship), 164  
*Enemy of the People*, *An*, xxiii, xxv  
 English language, 47  
 Entering the profession, 19-42  
 Enthusiasm, 11  
 Enunciation, 56  
 Experiences, vi, viii  
 Exposition of play, routine, 102, 104  
 Expression, 122  
 Eyes, rule, 83; use, 79-87
- Face of actor, 200, 202
- Failures of actors, 8-9  
 Failures of plays, partial cause, 195-198; primary things, 241-242  
 Falstaff, xxi, xxv, 38  
 Fame, 5  
*Faust*, 230-231  
 Faucit, Helen, 139, 214  
 Fechter, 264  
 Fencing, 115  
 Finesse, 124  
 Flexibility of voice, 52  
 Flowers, real and painted, 183-184  
*Fool's Revenge*, *A*, 149  
 Forbes-Robertson, 23, 48, 234  
 Frances, Madam, 215  
 "Freeze," 51  
 French school, 132, 133  
 Fundamentals, 95  
 Furniture, stage, 187-188, 196-198  
 "Futures," 161-167  
 Futurism, 252
- Galsworthy, John, 179  
 Garden scene, 182-184  
 George, Grace, xxii, 33  
 Germans, 214  
 Gestures, 87-95  
 Ghost in *Hamlet*, 51  
 Gilbert, Sir William, 219  
 Glance, value of, 81-84  
 Globe Theater, London, xxiv  
 Goethe, xxiii, 265  
 Goff, 135-136  
 Grand Duke, xxi  
 Grocery store, 177-178  
 Gwynne, Nell, 98
- Hamilton, Clayton, xxvii  
 Hamlet, 167, 264  
*Hamlet*, 35, 264  
 Handkerchief, 94  
 Hands, use of, 87-95  
 Handsomeness, 18  
 Harrison, Frederic, xxiv

- Hawtrey, Charles, 101  
 Hay fever, 50  
 Haymarket Theater, xxiv  
 Hemming, John, 248  
*Henry V*, xxv  
 Her Majesty's Theater, London, xxiii  
 Heroic parts, 93  
*Hindle Wakes*, 89  
 His Majesty's Theater, London, xxi, xxv  
 Horniman, Miss, 89  
 Humanity, 12-16  
 Humor, 16, 159, 227-228  
  
 Ibsen, xxiii  
 Illusion, scenery, 178, 180, 182, 189  
 Imagination, 16, 220  
 Imitation, 258-259  
 Imogene, 139  
 Impersonation, essence of, 65  
 Individuality, ix  
 Ingot, Simon, xxi  
 Inn with the purple walls, 191  
 Insincerity, 13, 131  
 Interior scenes, 203-206  
 Iron works, 179-180  
 Irving, Sir Henry, xxiii, 58, 130, 243, 248, 264, 265; Manchester experience, 164-166; orchestra leader and, 222; use of eyes, 81-84  
 Irving, Lawrence, 162-164  
 Irving, Washington, 259  
 Ives, David, xxv, 250  
  
 Jealousy, 146  
 Jefferson, Joseph, 109, 134, 135, 249; *Rip Van Winkle*, 259-260  
 Jenkin, Fleeming, xix  
*Jim the Penman*, 125  
 Jokes, one's own, 159  
*John Bull's Other Island*, xxiv, 158  
 Jones, Henry Arthur, 237  
  
*Julius Caesar*, xxiii, 38-40  
 Jungle scenes, 180-181, 182  
 Jüttner, Dr., xxi  
  
 Kean, Charles, 243; voice, 50  
 Kemp, William, 248  
 Key. See "Tone."  
*King Henry IV*, xxv  
*King John*, 136  
*Kismet*, 226-229  
 Klein, Charles, 260  
  
*Lady of Lyons, The*, 35  
 Lauder, Harry, voice, 48, 59  
 Langtry, Mrs., xxiii  
 Laughter, 57, 231; killing an audience's, 157; making an audience laugh, 152-160; sensitiveness to audience's, 154-155; too much, 158  
 Laws of acting, ix  
 Laws of play-making, xvii  
 Lear, 234  
 Lewis, George Henry, xix  
 Lighting effects, 190, 200-203, 205; natural, 209-210; too ingenious, 206-209  
 Listening, art of, 96, 105, 108, 110, 111, 113, 117, 118  
 Literature, vi, vii, 246-247  
 Little things, 119-120  
*London Assurance*, 35  
 Lorange, Pierre, 24  
 Low tones, 54-55  
 Lung power, 53, 138  
 Lyceum Theater, London, xxiii, 230  
 Lyric Theater, xxv  
  
 Macari, 124, 125  
 Macbeth, 124, 234  
*Macbeth*, 35, 255  
 Macbeth's castle, 253-254  
 Machinery, elaborate stage, 186, 187  
 Macready, 51  
*Major Barbara*, xxiv, 105, 155, 156

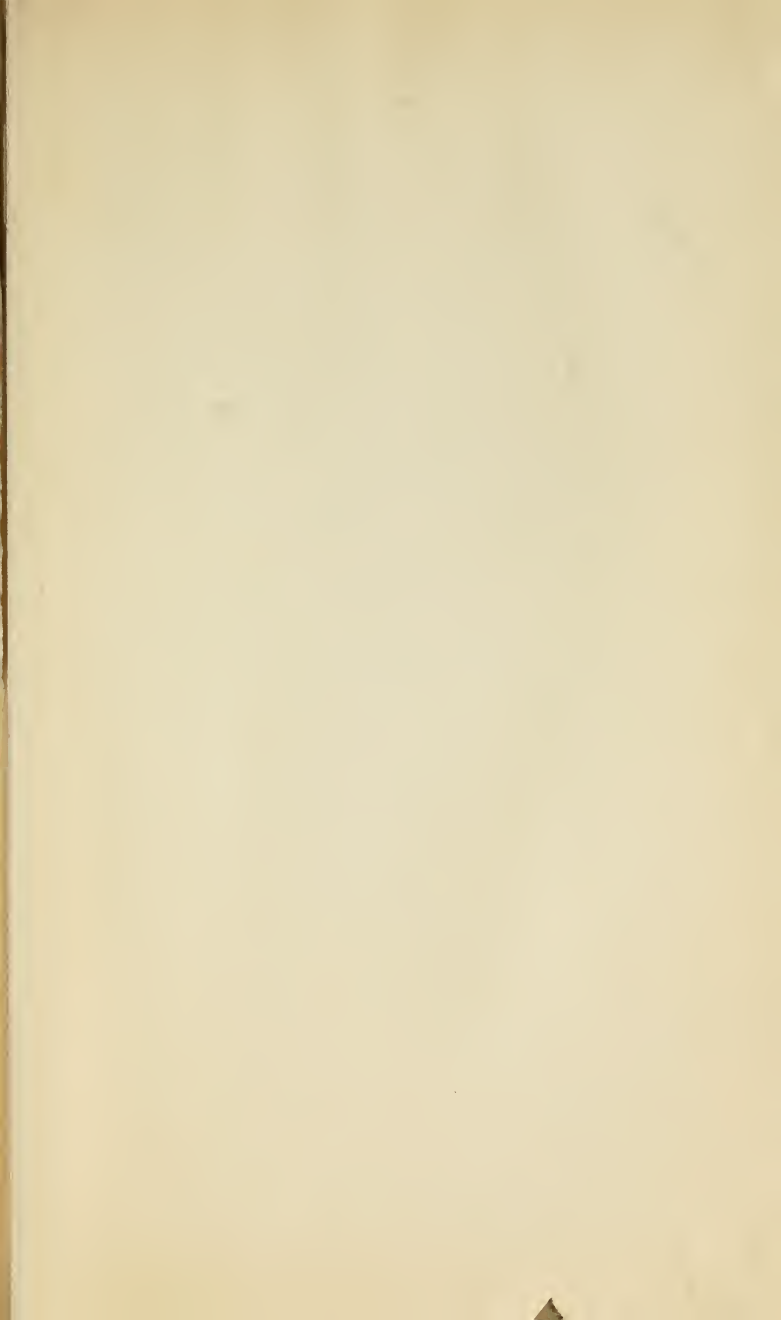


- Malvolio, 45  
 Manchester, England, xxii, 89; Irving in, 164-166  
*Manœuvres of Jane, The*, 237  
 Mansfield, Richard, xx  
 Mantell, Robert, 33  
 Margate, xxiii  
 Marie Antoinette, 133  
*Marseillaise*, 221  
*Masquerader, The*, 64  
*Measure for Measure*, 35  
 Mechanics, 59, 60, 79, 80  
 Melbourne, xxiii  
 Melnotte, Claude, 100  
*Menas*, 37  
*Merchant of Venice*, 66-75  
 Mercutio, xxi  
 Mermaids and sea-shells, 187  
*Merry Wives of Windsor, The*, xxi  
 Metallic tone, 53  
 Method, change in, 244-247; lack, in producers and managers, 198  
 Micawber, xxi  
*Midsummer Night's Dream, A*, 210  
 Miller, Henry, xx  
 Miming, 112  
 Modjeska, Madame, 140, 235-236, 243, 249, 265  
 Moffat Company, 173  
 Moments, 41  
*Money*, 35  
 Moonlight, 210-211  
 Mortimer, James, xxi, xxv  
 Mortimer, Tad, 232-234  
 Motives, 3  
 Movement, 94, 111  
*Much Ado About Nothing*, 35  
 "Murder," 51  
 Music, costumes and, 213-224; function, 217-222; Irving and, 222-224  
*Music Master, The*, 110, 232, 260  
*Musketeers, The*, xxiii  
 Natal, xxii  
 Natural speech, 43-60  
 Naturalness, 171-175  
 Neighborhood Playhouse, 169  
 Nervousness, 143-145, 197  
 New Theater, London, xxiv  
 New Theater, New York, xxi, xxv  
 New York Company, 26-30  
 New York try-outs in small towns, 199-200  
 Nottingham, 24  
 Oak chamber, 203  
 Observation, 31  
*Odette*, 140  
*Old Heidelberg*, xxi  
 Old-fashioned play, 250  
 Old school methods, 46, 47, 59, 250, 251  
*On Actors and the Art of Acting*, xix  
 One-part actors, 27-30  
 Ophelia, 131  
 Orange, 127  
 Orchestra leader, 222  
 Othello, 124, 138, 234; requirements of the part, 145-148  
*Othello*, 35, 148  
 Outdoor scenes, 201  
*Paid in Full*, xxv  
 Parrotting, 22-24, 66, 117  
 Part, enjoying one's own, 159; exact words, 109; getting inside of one's, 61-78, 118; variations of performance, 108  
*Passing of the Third Floor Back, The*, 23  
 Passions, portraying, 133-135  
 Personal appearance, 17-18  
 Personality, 10  
 Phelps, Samuel, 45  
 Pinero, Sir A. W., 103, 232-234

- Pistol (part), xxv  
 Plays, atmosphere, 76; composite, 256; notion of whole, 63; cause of failure, 195-198; single appeal, 225  
 Players' Club, 247  
 Playhouse, The, New York, xxii  
 Playhouse Company, 33  
 Playing-up, 101  
 Play-making, xvii  
 Point, thrust, and lunge, 115  
 Porthos, xxiii  
*Portia*, 37  
 Possibilities, 21  
 Post-impressionism, 252  
 Prejudices about actors, 162-166, 257  
 Primaries, x, 241-242  
 Producers' work, faults, 190, 192, 193; scenery and accessories, 176-212  
 Production, coherency needed, 213-215  
 Professionalism, 168-175  
*Proof*, 24  
 Prospero, xxii  
 Pull, 21  
 Purple walls, 191  
 Purpose of the writer, ix  
 Qualifications, 3-18  
 Rachel, 132; Marseillaise, 221  
 Rage, 133, 148, 149, 232-234  
 Range of voice, 51-52  
 Realism, 46; scenery and lighting, 176-212; subtler effects, 212  
 Realizing a part, 73  
 Redfern, 215  
 Repertoire company, advantages in beginning with, 32-42  
 Repetition, dangers, 23-26, 113, 117  
 Replies, 114, 117; timing, 154-155  
 Repose, 94  
 Reserve power, 85  
 Restraint, 148, 252  
*Richard III*, 35, 50  
*Rip Van Winkle*, 109, 259  
 Ristori, 6, 23, 136, 249, 265; quoted on conditions, 132, 133  
 Road company, 22-26  
 Robespierre, xxiv  
 Rodin, 265  
*Romeo and Juliet*, xxi, 35, 235-236  
*Rosmersholm*, xxiii  
 Rostand, 263-264  
 Routine exposition, 102, 104  
 Royalty Theater, xxv  
*Run of Luck, A*, xxiii  
 Russia, 252  
 St. James's Theater, London, xxiv, 103  
 St. John, Holt, xxv  
 Salvation Army, 156  
 Salvini, 243  
 Savoy Theater, London, xxi  
 Saxe-Meiningen Company, 39  
 Scenery, astounding, Broadway, 189-192; baffling, 180-181; crudity, 181; outdoor set, 201; realistic, effect, 176-212  
 Scenic artist, 177, 189, 193, 201  
*School for Scandal, The*, xxi  
 Scotch play, 173-174  
 Sea-shells and mermaids, 187  
 Self-consciousness, 172  
 Self-examination, 8  
 Selfishness, 98, 119  
 Self-possession, 133  
 Sensitiveness, 143  
 Servant, part of, 62-63  
 Shadows, 209  
 Shakespeare, xxii, xxiii, 66, 70, 71, 247-248, 254-255

- Shakespearian parts, 92-93, 126-129, 139  
 Shakespearian plays, 234-236; Broadway, astounding scenery, 189-192  
 Shaw, Bernard, 105, 155, 158, 180; wit of plays, 158  
 Ship in distress, 185-187  
 Shouting, 52  
 Shylock, 124, 130; study of the character, 66-75  
 Silent work, 104, 110, 111  
 Simplicity, x, 173-175  
 Simplifying, 75-76  
*Sixty-eight Years on the Stage*, xxii, 166, 221  
 Sky, 201, 202  
 Sloping platform, 190  
 Small parts, 40-41  
 Smith, Sidney, 191  
 Soliloquy, 68  
 Sonorous tone, 53  
*Sorcerer, The*, 219  
 Sothorn, the elder, 243  
 South Africa, xxii  
 Speaking naturally, 43-60  
 Specialists, co-operation, 192, 193-195  
 Spontaneity, 170-175  
 Stage carpenter, 194-195  
 Stage-projection, xx  
 Stage setting. *See* Scenery.  
 Standards, vi, 246  
 Stars, 38, 240  
 Stevenson, R. L., xix  
 Stock company, advantages in beginning with, 30-32  
 Stockmann, Peter, xxv  
*Strife*, xxi, 179  
 Success, 6-7, 168  
 Suggestion in scenery, 178, 181, 182  
 Sullivan, Sir Arthur, 218-219  
 Sullivan, Barry, 166-168  
 Sully, Mounet, 264  
*Sunday*, xxiv  
 Sunlight, 205  
 Supers, 230-231  
 Svengali, 125  
*Sweet Kitty Bellairs*, xxiv  
*Sweet Nell of Old Drury*, xxiv, 98  
 Sympathy, 12  
 Tables and chairs, 196-198  
 Taste, 59  
 Teaching the art of acting, xx  
 Team work, 36, 97-102, 241-242  
 Tearle, Osmond, xxiii, 35  
 Tears, 135  
 Teazle, Sir Peter, xxi  
 Technique, viii, ix, 10, 15, 49, 55, 60, 79, 80, 85, 112, 114, 116, 123, 147, 168, 252  
 Temperament, 16  
*Tempest, The*, xxii  
 Tennyson, 261-262  
 Terry, Ellen, 56-57, 135  
 Terry, Fred, xxi  
 Thinking, 74, 91, 95  
 Thompsett, Alfred, xxi  
 Thorne, Sarah, xxiii  
*Thunderbolt, The*, xxi, xxv, 103, 232-234  
 "Tone" of a performance, 225-242  
 Tones, 50-51  
 Towzer, xxiv  
 Traditions, vi, 243-256  
 Transitional stage, 172  
 Tree, Sir Herbert, xxiii, 251; trickeries, 123-131  
 Tricks, 123-131  
*Tribby*, 125  
 Truisms, 95  
 Truth, x  
 Try-outs, 199-200  
 Turning points, 168-175  
*Twelfth Night*, xxi  
 Type actors, 27-30  
*Typhoon, The*, 163

- Undershaft, Andrew, xxiv, 156
- Vanity Fair*, xxi
- Variations of performance, 108
- Vaudeville, 48
- Vedrenne, xxiv
- Villiers, Colonel, xxiv
- Voice, 16-17; cultivation, 43-60; first place in the play, 224
- Waiter (part), xxiv
- "Walking on" parts, 26
- Wallack's Theater, 35
- Waller, Lewis, 234
- Wallis, Miss, xxiii, 34
- Warfield, David, 109-110, 232, 260-261
- Washington Square Players, 33
- Weeping, 135
- Wenman, 58
- Werner, 222
- What the Public Wants*, xxv, 101
- Whistler, 265
- Wilkins Micawber*, xxi
- Williams, Captain, xxv
- Wisconsin Players, 169-170
- Wolsey, 45, 124, 127, 129
- Words, exactly as written, 109; learning before studying character, 62, 65; supremacy, 219-221
- Work, 20, 50, 162
- Writing, xix-xx
- Wyndham, Sir Charles, xxiv, 109, 132, 157
- Wyndham's Theater, xxiv
- You Never Can Tell*, xxiv







14 DAY USE  
RETURN TO DESK FROM WHICH BORROWED  
**LOAN DEPT.**

This book is due on the last date stamped below, or  
on the date to which renewed.  
Renewed books are subject to immediate recall.

MAR 1 1965 7 6

DEC 01 1987

REC'D LD

FEB 22 '66 - 2 PM

OCT 1 1973 1 7

REC'D LD SEP 28 '75 - 11 AM 1 2

NOV 11 1975

State Library, Pretoria  
Rep. of South Africa

REC. CIR. MAR 19 76



AUTO. DISC.

~~5~~  
Oct. 26  
REC. CIR. OCT 25 '76

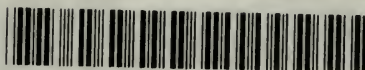
DEC. 06 1987

LD 21A-60m-10,'65  
(F7763s10)476B

General Library  
University of California  
Berkeley



U.C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES



C004079277



