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Vol. XV

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MONOGRAPH XXVII

THEATRE BUILDINGS

(Part 1)

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Lawrence Estavan Editor

San Francisco

February 1940

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# PROGRAM OF THE BELLA UNION THEATRE 1880



PHOTO COURTESY M. H. de YOUNG MUSEUM

PRIORING OF THE DEFT. UNION THEATRE

#### PREFACE

The material contained in this volume and in the two to follow on the same subject -- Theatre Buildings -- is perhaps the most important produced in this series so far when judged from a purely reference point of view. Here will be found a brief chronicle of every legitimate theatre that ever existed in San Francisco from the famous Bella Union of Gold Rush days to current Geary and Curran.

The stories of these theatres are presented chapter by chapter according to the chronology of their establishment or appearance on the San Francisco scene; and the story of each theatre is completed before another subject is introduced, no matter how many years are contained in that story. The book is, in effect, a series of biographies or "profiles" of the theatres. And these stories are no mere encyclopaedic record of architecture, programs, actors, etc., but colorful presentations of the whole spirit of each theatre, set, wherever research or remembrance has made it possible, in the colorful life that permeated and surrounded the building.

Months of research, writing, and editing have gone into the making of these volumes; many old timers have been

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interviewed and the best authorities have been consulted in the final phases of the work. However, inasmuch as so large a percentage of this work is concerned with dates and names and other items of time and fact, some errors must inevitably have crept in. We hope they have been reduced to a minimum. Often accepted sources have proved wrong when research has been prosecuted through several channels, and in these cases the time-honored errors of history have been corrected.

In the appendix to this first part of the three proposed volumes will be found a handy and graphic list of all San Francisco theatres, halls, beer gardens, malodeons, etc., that came into being between 1849 and 1861, together with the changing locations and the years of their duration. The second volume of this monograph contains a list of theatres from 1861 to 1906, and the third volume from 1906 to the present day. Also throughout the body of the work will be found mimeographed spot maps showing relative locations of San Francisco's most famous theatres in the various theatrical districts, decade by decade; and there are included in these pages rare photographs of the buildings themselves wherever possible. To all this has been added a single complete index.

Finally this project wishes again to thank those friends and volunteer consultants who have given liberally of their time and scholarship toward making these monographs as historically accurate as possible. We are especially grateful to Mr. George W. Poultney, actor and singer of old Tivoli

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Lawrence Estavan

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### INTRODUCTION

### FROM FORTY-NINE ON

This monograph deals with theatre buildings in San Francisco from 1849 -- the year of the Gold Rush -- to the present time, a period covering more than ninety years time and more world changes than had been effected in the two centuries preceding. Forty-eight, for instance, was the year of revolutionary action throughout Europe and since that time the world has been swept by every conceivable kind of war -- civil, international, economic, revolutionary, and undeclared -- even a war of the sexes which is supposed by our later thinkers to be the deadliest and most fundamental of them all. The map of the world has been changed and rechanged beyond recognition; railroads have been built; automobiles, airplanes, the wireless, the telephone, and radio invented.

This, of course, only touches on a few of the most outstanding inventions and discoveries. Mechanized industry has invaded every walk of life and every acre of occupied land until the individual who owns the land from which he obtains his living is as rare as a four leaf clover. Political and

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economic cults, which spring up as profusely as weeds on such fertile soil, have come, wreaked their utmost havoc, and have been supplanted by others equally deadly and at the same time impotent. New educational and moral breeds of thought have come to save the world and the world remains as saucy and unregenerate as ever, which is to speak mildly. Through such changes in the world's history, whether for better or for worse, (plus ça change plus c'est la même chose) has the city of San Francisco had its being.

## THREE PERIODS IN SAN FRANCISCO HISTORY

Three events divide the history of the city into distinct eras: the Gold Rush of 1849, the Civil War of 1861-65, and the Earthquake and Fire of 1906. This is not to say that certain other happenings (the discovery of the Comstock Lode in 1859, joining of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads in 1869, and the failure of William C. Ralston and the Bank of California in 1875) were not strong factors in forming and reforming the face of the city; but these more or less fall into the periods mentioned and cannot be said to have been as powerful epoch-makers as the events decided on as historical milestones.

# YERBA BUENA

Prior to 1849 the history of theatricals in San Francisco is negligible, but some outline of the city's origins should be given in order to better understand the

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background against which its post-Spanish life has been played. The Spanish village of Yerba Buena had been established on the peninsula of San Francisco in 1835 when Governor Figueroa appointed an English sailor, William Antonio Richardson, as captain of the port of San Francisco. Richardson put up the first building in San Francisco (other than those of the presidio and mission) and around this house, which was really not much more than a tent, the settlement of Yerba Buena grew up. It was primarily a trading post, receiving goods from the infrequent ships from Mexico and supplying wares to the towns and farms in the interior and to the trappers who came to town at regular intervals.

# LACK OF ENTERTAINMENT

The town, which by 1846 numbered only about fifty buildings and about two hundred inhabitants, furnished very little in the way of entertainment for its citizens. There were drinking and dancing, of course, and frequent fiestas, rodeos, and picnics. There were bull and bear fights, cockfights, horse races, and occasionally a wandering dancer or singer, or group of these, would stray into town; but the trip was difficult and not very lucrative and these occasions were consequently rare. There were numerous religious festivals and every Christmas the padres of the Mission Dolores presented the traditional nativity pageant, La Pastorella. Of formal secular drematic entertainment there was none.

## ORIGINS: THE MISSION AND PRESIDIO

It has been stated that Yerba Buena, which changed its name to San Francisco in January of 1847, was established in 1835; but the city had a far earlier origin than this. was in 1776, the year of American independence, that Lieutenant Colonel Juan Bautista de Anza at the instigation of the Viceroy of New Spain, Antonio Bucareli, arrived on the shores of the bay and selected the sites for the mission and presidio Anza, with two priests, Fathers of San Francisco de Asis. Font and Garces, had previously made an arduous and difficult trek from Sonora in Baja California to Monterey, the capital of Alta California. In his charge was a party of two hundred and forty, composed of soldiers and their families. arrived with the loss of but one life, truly a remarkable feat when one considers the difficulties of the terrain and the ever present menace of attack by Indians. And there had been eight births on the way, so actually he arrived with seven more people than he had started with. As to the object of the journey, Charles E. Chapman says in his History of California:

> "The crowning event of the expedition was to be the founding of two missions at San Francisco, for which the married soldiers were to serve as a guard."

This had been the dream of Father Junipero Serra, who had long wanted to found a mission dedicated to St. Francis. The bay had been entered before, but never had it

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been reached by an overland route. This, Anza -- leaving the main party in Monterey and taking only the two priests and a small guard of soldiers -- proceeded to do.

"Upon arrival, (says Professor Chapman) he picked a site which the Spaniards called the Cantil Blanco (White Cliff), near where Fort Scott now stands. He selected a place for the mission along a little rivulet, which he named Dolores...so-called because that was the name of the day he visited it in the religious calendar, March 29; this was the origin of the name which eventually superseded the one the Spaniards first applied to designate the mission. Though rarely given to enthusiastic comment, Anza had now seen enough of San Francisco to speak of it and the famous port in terms of warmest praise. Father Font was even more expressive of his delight. The port of San Francisco is a marvel of nature, he said, and may be called the port of ports."

## ENTER THE YANKEES

Yet it was to be nearly sixty years before this "port of ports" was to be utilized. Anza departed. His lieutenant, José Joaquin Moraga, accompanied by Fathers Palou and Cambon, then acted on his orders and brought the entire party from Monterey to San Francisco where they arrived on June 27, 1776. A fort, or presidio, was established on the spot indicated by Anza and dedicated on September 9 of the same year. On October 9 the mission of San Francisco de Asis (which was to take the name of the rivulet, Dolores) was dedicated, and in January of 1777 the second mission, at Santa Clara, was founded. Yet it was not till 1835, when Figueroa gave his commission to Richardson, that the place

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was thrown open to general settlement. By 1836 the American influx was great enough for Jacob Leese to dedicate his store, on the corner of what is now Grant Avenue and Clay Street, with a Fourth of July celebration, though California was then under Mexican rule. It was not to be many years before Yankee numbers, energy and general cantankerousness were to bring the entire state under American domination.

## AMERICAN RULE AND THE GOLD RUSH

Spanish rule had ended some years before, on April 11, 1822, when the oath of allegiance to the independent Mexican Empire was taken at Monterey; but the change was merely a matter of personnel and form of government, and not of temper. The people and officers were still of the same race and habits, and life under Mexican rule was still the same indolent, unenterprising and probably very pleasant existence that it had been under the Spanish regime. More and more Americans were coming in and as they grew in numbers they also grew more vociferous and unruly. They cheated, grabbed land and defied the authority of the Mexican officials.

Finally in 1846 the inevitable happened. A body of American soldiers and freebooters under Captain John C. Fremont revolted and proclaimed the existence of an independent California Republic under the Bear Flag. In May of 1846 the United States went to war with Mexico in a dispute about the boundary of Texas and this was made a pretext by the

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Americans for the annexation of California. There were a few skirmishes and finally on February 2, 1848 the inevitable treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was signed whereby California, along with New Mexico, passed forever from Mexican rule and became a part of the United States. Included, of course, was the village of Yerba Buena, which in the previous year had been rechristened San Francisco.

On January 24, 1848 gold was discovered at Sutter's mill by James Marshall and in November the rush for the yellow stuff was in full swing. San Francisco was deserted by most of its small but active population. Then in February of 1849 there arrived in San Francisco Bay the first boatload of gold hunters from the East. By July of 1849 the city — it could be called one now — had a population of 5,000 which by September had jumped to 20,000. During the entire year of 1849 it was estimated that more than 75,000 people passed through San Francisco — probably an unmatched example in history of overnight growth.

Prior to 1849 there had been no organized public theatricals in San Francisco; that is, entertainment in which the public itself did not share the action. People gambled, drank, danced, sang, went to barbecues, witnessed occasional bullfights at the Mission, took part in fiestas and probably had a very enjoyable time in general without theatricals; but the point is that there was no place where, for the price of admission, they could sit down, do nothing and be entertained.

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Their best bet was still the saloons, most popular of which were John Vioget's and la casa de bebida de Brown, where they could meet friends, dance if they chose, exchange views and blows and drink away the dull hours of the evening. The more genteel, less robust citizens could even listen to the local intellectual light, one William D. M. Howard, who would get on his feet with alarming alacrity to recite Shakespeare or do imitations.

## FIRST ENTERTAINMENTS

The first organized entertainment given in the city was presented by members of Colonel Stevenson's Volunteers, a regiment of military adventurers from New York. During March of 1847 they organized a minstrel band and gave a series of performances at Leidesdorff's City Hotel on the southwest corner of Clay and Kearny Streets, the first building in the city with enough pretension to be called by that title. (It was built in 1846.) In the band were C. R. V. Lee and his brother, and Messrs. La Forte, Staten, Tilden, and Carpenter. The first night's take of \$63 could hardly have flattered them into the idea of performing for anything but their own amusement.

For regular dramatic performances San Franciscans were forced to take a boat to Sonoma, where during the year 1848 regular dramatic performances were given at the suggestion of General Vallejo. In an article called "The First Theatre in California," published in the June 1908 issue of Out

# West, William A. Curtis reports that

"For a month a small boat was operated between Sonoma and San Francisco simply for the purpose of affording the homesick an opportunity to see a real show once more."

Nevertheless there were some amateur dramatic societies formed in San Francisco, as is evidenced by this notice in the Californian of May 10, 1848:

"We learn that at a meeting of some of the young men of San Francisco on Monday evening last, an association was formed and named as the 'Eagle Olympic Club,' for the 'purpose of producing plays, etc.' A committee was appointed to prepare By-laws, and one to obtain subscriptions to select a proper building for a Theatre, etc. Our informant states that great unanimity prevailed at the meeting, and that the determination to 'go ahead' was strongly manifested. Success to them say we."

The presence of another such organization in the city is revealed by notices in the same paper for October 21 and 28, 1848 announcing the "regular meeting of the American Dramatic Association" at the Shades Tavern "at 6½ P. M." These notices were signed by C. R. V. Lee, "Acting Manager," who had been one of the members of the Stevenson Volunteers minstrel band. On November 4, 1848 the Californian once more calls attention to the existence of these dramatic societies:

"We have heard it stated that a subscription has been very successfully set on foot for the immediate establishment of a Theatre in this city. An enterprise of the kind would undoubtedly take very well this winter, and reap a golden harvest. We understand that quite a numerous company has been organized, among which are several performers who have appeared with considerable eclat in the principal theatres of the State. We wish them success-full houses they are sure of."

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# STEPHEN MASSETT PERFORMS

But before the month was out word had spread of a "golden harvest" in earnest and before long the city was Those who were to fill the town during the early deserted. months of Forty-Nine had their minds on far richer enterprises than theatricals, and it was to be some months before their minds were to be turned toward formal relaxation. There was no theatre built. When Stephen C. Massett gave the first public entertainment in English in San Francisco on June 22, 1849, he was forced to use a small redwood building on the southwest corner of Portsmouth Plaza which had served both as the city's first schoolhouse and as a police office.\* cleared \$500 profit that night, at \$5 a person; yet if there had been an adequate hall available he might have made double that amount, for many a miner was forced to take his wellstuffed pockets somewhere else for lack of room. But Massett had started something and before the next year was well along the city boasted several ramshackle houses which it called by the name of theatre.

# SAN FRANCISCO IN THE FIFTIES

San Francisco in the fifties must indeed have presented a fantastic and rather terrifying aspect to a man of civilized habits. Imagine a horde of men of all nations, classes and moralities suddenly let loose on a town with more

<sup>\*</sup> See Monograph on Stephen C. Massett, Theatre Research, Vol. I.

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money than they could believe was theirs. And such a town! The streets were so full of holes that it was actually dangerous in muddy weather for a man and pack animal to go down Montgomery or Kearny Street. Indeed it became a stock joke to say of a man who had been missing for any length of time that he was probably "down in Montgomery Street." In spite of the ridiculously high price of commodities, warehouses were so scarce that it was actually cheaper to fill these holes with sacks of flour and crates of merchandise than to pay for labor to have sand or gravel put in. Dwellings were put together with sacking, tarpaulin, packing boxes, and pieces of furniture; and such was the lack of order that no absent owner could be sure that on returning he would find anything left of his elegant domicile. If the wind had not blown it down, his enterprising civic brothers were more than likely to have hauled it away. And the rents! New arrivals were astounded to learn that for a dingy room with board they would have to pay as much as \$10 a day, and ambitious merchants were obliged to hand out as much as \$4000 a month, in advance, for a small store. Empty ships in the harbor, whose crews had deserted for the gold fields, were driven up on the shore at Sansome Street and used as saloons, hotels and stores, best known of which was the Niantic at the foot of Clay Street.

The manners and morals of the city were on a par with its appearance. The municipal government was so confused that at one time three city councils were sitting at



the same time. The Annals of San Francisco in 1851 spoke of

"a community...lawless and reckless...passion actuated and fancy governed...wild, desperate and daring...pregnant with vices and...barren of virtue."\*

The Reverend William Taylor was, as was natural to his calling, symbolically damning:

"The city of San Francisco may, with propriety be regarded as the very citadel of his Satanic Majesty." ""

A French visitor was less lavish with adjectives and theological symbols and more precise:

"A stroll in the streets at night was a dangerous adventure. Moreover, if you stay too long
enjoying the moonlight on the bay, the chances
are that on the way home you will be held up by
some of the escaped bandits from Sidney, who
live in the cheap hotels along the waterfront.
To get a few cents they will slug you and drop
your body into the bay. After eight o'clock in
the evening it is hardly ever safe to walk
alone on the wharves and even if you go with a
friend, you must be sure to carry a revolver.
Murders are very common and it is always unwise
to go beyond the two or three busy streets
where there is no danger."

# THE ACTORS ARRIVE

Into this delectable city came the actors and actresses of the Eastern cities, having heard of the fabulous wealth waiting to be poured into their pockets by the dramasterved miners. They risked the hardships of the long trip and the almost equal discomforts of the ramshackle town for

<sup>\*</sup> Soule, Gihon, Nisbet. The Annals of San Francisco.
\*\* Taylor, William Seven Years of Street Preaching.
\*\*\*Russailh, Albert Benard de, Last Adventure.

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a fortune that could be as disastrous as it was sometimes golden. Yet many of them prospered so well that they remained here for years, sometimes for the remainder of their careers. Money was all around them and the miners had only to be made to laugh or weep for a shower of nuggets and gold dust to rain on the stage. Before the arrival of the stage-folk it had all gone into the saloons and gambling places. As the Annals put it, the men

"...spent money freely at different places of riotous excess, and were indeed forced to pass their hours of leisure or recreation at drinking bars, billiard rooms and gambling saloons. To vary amusements, occasionally a fancy-dress ball or masquerade would be announced at high prices...Gambling saloons, glittering like fairy palaces, like them suddenly sprang into existence, studding nearly all sides of the plaza and every street in the neighborhood."

# TOM MAGUIRE, THE GAMBLER

And it was in these gambling saloons that the first, however crude and sketchy, entertainments were produced. Most of them, with the arrival of legitimate actors and the building of legitimate houses, soon passed out of the picture theatrically speaking; but one, the Bella Union, continued for almost sixty years as the home of some of the finest variety, minstrel, and burlesque shows in the country. And it was a gambler and saloon keeper, Tom Maguire, who for twenty years was to dominate the theatrical life of the city. His Jenny Lind Theatre was the first house of any pretensions

<sup>\*</sup> See Monograph on Tom Maguire, Theatre Research, Vol. II

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in San Francisco and his Opera House was for many years the chief theatrical pride of the city. Furthermore it was Maguire who brought many of the finest shows and performers in the country to San Francisco and who, by his stubborn courage in the face of fire, financial depression, and general public apathy, kept the theatre alive in the city when otherwise it might have died of sheer inertia.

# FIRE! FIRE!

The first volume of this monograph, which treats of theatres built before the Civil War, will be found to contain one other dominant motif beside the name of Maguire -- that of Fire. Fire was the chief dread of this otherwise optimistic conglomeration of gold-lined pockets and wooden shacks during the fifties. No sconer was a building put up than a general conflagration might come along and sweep it into the wind. No less than six general fires destroyed the main portion of the city between December 24, 1849 and June 22, 1851 and the individual fires that devastated buildings throughout the history of San Francisco are numberless. Perhaps it was the customary role of fire in the city's existence that enabled its citizens so well to withstand the shock and devastation of the catastrophe of 1906.

# THE JENNY LIND AND THE AMERICAN

But fire was not the only means of ending the short careers of these early houses. There was a fever and ferment

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in the atmosphere of the city, of which Maguire might as the symbol but not the only representative. It is amazing with what rapidity theatres were built and rebuilt in a town of this size and remoteness from civilization. No sooner was one house installed in popular favor than another larger one was built, and the old place was soon collecting cobwebs. When the third Jenny Lind was erected on October 4, 1851, its seven arched doors were believed to lead to the seven floors of paradise; yet exactly sixteen days later the unheralded American Theatre was opened to the public and within a year Maguire was forced into the "Jenny Lind Juggle," whereby for the sum of \$200,000 his erstwhile temple of the Muse was converted into a sanctuary for those more princely mummers, the politicians -- in other words, into a city hall. The editors howled and the streets were loud with echo, but Maguire merely tugged his moustache and caressed his plump wallet; and the sale stood.

Within another year and a half the American Theatre itself was forced into the shadows by the building of another paragon of elegance, the Metropolitan Theatre. In 1857 the Metropolitan was gutted by fire and was replaced in 1861 by another house of the same name and of even greater grandeur. But in the meantime Maguire had opened his Opera House, and the theatre history of the sixties is mainly that of the rivalry between these two houses. Within their walls during this period appeared practically all of the great "names" of

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the contemporary stage: Edwin Booth, James W. Wallack, Edwin Forrest, Adah Menken, Julia Dean Hayne, Charles Wheatleigh, Frank Mayo, Lotta Crabtree, Joseph Jefferson, Charles Kean, Ellen Tree, Charles Thorne, Matilda Heron, Laura Keene, John McCullough, Lawrence Barrett, and a score of others of more or less equal fame.

## THE METROPOLITAN AND MAGUIRE'S OPERA HOUSE

The bitter, unscrupulous rivalry between these two theatres reveals the very essence of the turbulent life in San Francisco during that period. Behind the many quarrels and law suits of Tom Maguire one can feel the lawlessness and political ferocity of the times -- the animosities brought out by the forming of the Vigilance Committees of 1851 and 1856, and by the Civil War; the uneasiness incurred in the minds of optimistic Argonauts by continual fires and sudden financial panics during the middle fifties -- the whole mad, intoxicating pageant of life in this reeling metropolis suddenly sprung up in the midst of a wilderness. Perhaps no more fitting symbol of this age and this city -- with all its flerce intensity, its mapulsive generosity and lavish display of wealth, its incurable and individualistic optimism, its lack of cultural and intellectual background and its general emotional unstability -- no more typical representative of all this could be found than the figure of Tom Maguire gambler.

#### THE CALIFORNIA THEATRE

the second volume, which treats of theatres built from 1861 to 1906, the name of Maguire begins gradually to fade from the picture as certain men of the new Bonanza Age branched out as builders of theatres. First of these was William C. Ralston, head of the powerful Bank of California and chief figure in the wave of mining speculation that swept the city during the late sixties and early seventies, who in 1869 built the California Theatre for John McCullough and Lawrence Barrett. Ironically enough, these men had been first brought out to San Francisco by Maguire himself and had made their first local appearances at his old Opera House. For several years the California Theatre under John McCullough --Barrett soon withdrew from the management -- almost completely dominated the theatrical scene in San Francisco, until 1875 when Ralston failed and committed suicide. But there others to take his place. In 1876 "Lucky" Baldwin built his hotel and Academy of Music and James Flood and John Mackay, two of the Bonanza Kings, took over the Grand Opera House which had been projected in 1873 by Dr. Thomas Wade, a dentist who for once was forced to admit that the operation hurt.

These theatres were for the remainder of the century the chief legitimate houses in San Francisco, though they could never be called paying institutions. Their owners could afford to indulge in them as expensive playthings and men like Maguire, to whom the business was bread and butter, simply

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could not keep up with them. The Civil War, the discovery of the Comstock Lode and the completion of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads had brought the city out of its romantic, happily anachronistic aloofness and made it a part of the nineteenth century world of encroaching industry and speculative finance.

Whereas in the old Gold Rush days the common man had shared in the general, if feverish, prosperity, he was now becoming more and more the plaything of a few men and corporations. These men -- notably Ralston, William Sharon, Fair, Flood, Mackay, O'Brien, Baldwin, D. O. Mills; and the Big Four of the railroad, Huntington, Stanford, Crocker and Hopkins -- now began to drop the venerable "man-to-man" attitude of good fellowship (whether real or pretended) and built themselves huge, showy mansions on Nob Hill and vast country estates in Belmont, Palo Alto and Santa Anita and went in for horse-breeding, lavish receptions and European marriages. San Francisco was developing a "society" complex.

#### CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

This "class consciousness" also worked in the opposite direction, for it was against these "toffs" and plutocratic bookkeepers that Dennis Kearney and his Workingman's
Party fulminated during the seventies, though the more important of Kearney's hatreds was summed up in the slogan:
"The Chinese Must Go." The vital Chinese problem had been
posed to a great extent by the railroad men, who had imported

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coolies to work on the Central Pacific during the sixties. Following the completion of the railroad, these disoccupied coolies were let loose on the state and their willingness to work for next to nothing caused great dissatisfaction among labor's ranks. The result of Kearney's agitation was, after many years of stormy politics and bloody riots, the passing of a law by Congress in 1882 suspending Chinese immigration for ten years. But the bitterness lasted for years and even today, when the Chinese have been long accepted as worthy members of the community, the anti-Oriental feeling exists as transferred to the Japanese. Kearney's fight against the financiers and industrial moguls has today resolved itself into the chief political and economic issue of the time. This, of course, is not to say that these issues began with Dennis Kearney; he was merely their strongest voice in San Francisco during the days of the Big Four and "cheap Chinese labor."

#### MELODEONS AND GARDENS

These, of course, are not theatrical matters, but no picture of the theatre in San Francisco would be complete without a realization of the background against which stage life was played. In particular are these facts important in an understanding of the burlesque, minstrel, and variety houses, known as "melodeons" which were so abundant in the city throughout the sixties, seventies and eighties. These

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houses, perhaps better than any other, really gave in essence the flavor of life in San Francisco during those hectic days, which may explain to the casual reader their preponderance among the theatres listed in these volumes. Many of the minstrel and burlesque shows were direct satires on political, social and cultural life as exemplified in the San Francisco of those days.

It was in those melodeons that many of the best known players of their time began their careers: notably Ned Harrigan, Joe Murphy, Jefferson de Angelis, Eddie Foy, Lotta Crabtree, and Junie McCree. And the popularity of that lost tribe, the minstrels, who mostly played at these houses must not be forgotten. While the Baldwin, and later the California or the Grand Opera House, would be losing money on some fabulously high priced star like Henry Irving, Lily Langtry or even Modjeska, Billy Emerson and his black-faced boys would be standing them on their heads at the old Standard with a quickly whipped-up burlesque of the Great One's performance of the preceding night.

Also important in the life of the city were the numerous gardens which are here listed, though they cannot strictly be classed as theatre buildings. During this period these melodeons and gardens, though so different in kind and atmosphere from each other, were the most consistently popular places of entertainment in the city. Indeed it can be stated that they were the only places of entertainment here

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with a native flavor of their own; and there are many people still living who can wistfully remember being taken to Wood-ward's Gardens as a child and certainly there were not many men young at that time who did not take in the "notorious" Bella Union.

#### THE TIVOLI, THE ORPHEUM, AND THE ALCAZAR

But there were other places of a more formal nature than the melodeons and more modest than the swanky Baldwin or Grand Opera House which are remembered with perhaps more affection than any other houses in the city. Among them were the Bush Street Theatre, the Standard, and, most notably, the Tivoli, the Orpheum, and the Alcazar. The "stock company" of the Alcazar was the only real successor to that of the old California, which had been claimed as the greatest stock troupe in the country during the early seventies. And from the Alcazar too came actors and actresses whose names were later famous throughout the world. For twenty-five years the Tivoli Opera House never closed its doors, its starless company providing during that time some of the best light opera entertainment to be heard in the world at the price.

And so it was with the Orpheum, out of which sprang one of the two "big time" vaudeville circuits of the country and at which all the great "acts" in the business made at least an annual appearance. All of these theatres, until time and circumstance forced them out of the way, were really

successful in paying their way, which is more than can be said for the larger, more pretentious houses with heavy purses behind them.

#### HISTORIC NAMES: THE "SYNDICATE"

As in earlier days, the history of theatres during this second period is found to be studded with historic names of the stage: Barrett, McCullough, Booth, Modjeska, Adelaide Neilson, Dion Boucicault, W. E. Sheridan, Joseph Jefferson, E. H. and E. A. Sothern, Julia Marlowe, James A. Herne, John Brougham, David Belasco, Ned Harrigan, Clara Morris, Mrs.D. P. Bowers, Sarah Bernhardt, Coquelin, Jane Hading, Robert Mantell, John Drew, Maurice Barrymore, Henry Irving, Ellen Terry, Lester Wallack, W. H. Crane, James O'Neill, Stuart Robson, Ada Rehan, etc. The distinguished list would take pages to complete and gives much strength to the contention that San Francisco was the greatest theatre town of the time.

During the seventies and eighties this was more or less true, though it must be remembered that San Francisco contributed practically nothing of worth to the development of the native American drama. Probably no city in the country produced more actors and managers of note during the latter half of the nineteenth century than San Francisco and certainly no more receptive audiences for the great imported stars could be found; but of original contributions to the drama itself it can boast very little.

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In extenuation, it must be added that in all large countries it is the financial capital -- in this case New York -- which attracts all the native talent, and the outlying cîties are naturally forced to dine at the second table. Furthermore it was a San Francisco man, Al Hayman, who gave the impetus to the formation of the "Frohman Syndicate" in the nineties, which gained an almost complete control of the American theatre and practically forced the stock companies out of business. After the disruption of the California Stock Company during the seventics, there was only one such organization in San Francisco theatre history which maintained itself for any considerable length of timo -- that of the Alcazar Theatre. It was in the nineties that San Francisco entered the theatrical doldrums and it was the "Syndicate" which was mainly responsible, or rather it was the grasping spirit of the times which could give rise to such a monopoly.

#### DECLINE OF THE THEATRE

of age at the same time as the stage itself was entering into decline and that in spite of such unprecedented American dramatists as Eugene O'Neill, Susan Glaspell, Maxwell Anderson, Robert E. Sherwood, S. N. Behrman, and Clifford Odets the stage is still in an unhealthy state. The blame cannot all be laid on the "movies," as is the custom. These men of the "Syndicate" by their commercialization and monopoly of

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the theatre had done their best to wreck the framework on which it must stand in order to survive. One big city like New York cannot support the American drama; it needs road shows and stock companies to keep it vigorous in the people's imagination. And San Francisco, at a time when there was no such American drama to suckle as there is today, was one of the most motherly of theatre towns. Even as late as December 29, 1902 the Evening Post was able to report, without fear of contradiction:

"It has been said that, according to the ratio of population, San Francisco supports more theatres than any other city in the United States,"

This can be said no more. Often there is not a single legitimate play running in the city and the number of shows which come to town is not enough to keep even one theatre the year around. For a while the Federal Theatro Project at the old Alcazar took care of this problem but since its discontinuance there is no house in the city where for a reasonable price a man can see a legitimate show. (This excepts those houses where amateur or semi-professional groups perform, such as the Theatre Union, the Wayfarers, or the Reginald Travers Players; also the foreign language organizations, such as the Andre Ferrier troupe.)\*

Thus it is that the third volume, that section

<sup>\*</sup> See Little Theatres, Vol. XI, and Foreign Theatres, Vol. IX, this series.

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treating of theatres built since the Earthquake and Fire, will be found to be much scarcer in material than those of the preceding two sections. (This does not count motion picture houses, which are not in the scope of this monograph.) The reasons are obvious. Partly due to the rise of these motion picture houses, partly to that of radio, partly to managerial monopoly and excessive expense in production, and the consequent decline of the legitimate road show and vaudeville, there have been comparatively few theatre buildings constructed since 1906. Thus the last volume, the material for which is so abundant and readily available and which should be the richest of the three, is to our shame the poorest of all in color and activity. And there is no indication that conditions may change in the near future. But this is a history of theatre buildings in San Francisco and not a thesis on the legitimate theatre's chances of survival; that interesting question must be left for some other volume.

#### SCARCITY OF EARLY RECORDS

The method chosen as most thorough and least confusing has been to take each building from its inception and continue it to its close, irrespective of whether it lasted one year or sixty. Thus the history of the Bella Union, which covers two of the three periods of this monograph, is entirely contained in the first volume. As regards some of

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the very early houses, it will be noted that detailed architectural descriptions are lacking. This is because, unfortunately, none exist -- the newspapers, periodicals of the time, either having omitted descriptions or having themselves gone up in smoke.

It is one of the melancholy aspects of this most combustible of cities that so many valuable documents and records have been destroyed by fire. Every care has been taken by research workers to consult carefully all available sources of information and the occasional scarcity of material simply cannot be helped. This applies mainly to those houses built and destroyed during the early fifties. Fortunately, it has been possible in the cases of most theatres erected after 1860 to give minute contemporary descriptions of the buildings, and histories of important performances and incidental events. The result the reader must judge for himself.

# BELLA UNION THEATRE 1850



ALSO IN THIS SCENE ARE THE VERANDAH AND EL DORADO WITH PORTS-MOUTH PLAZA IN THE FOREGROUND, TELEGRAPH HILL IN THE BACKGROUND

PHOTO COURTESY M. H. de YOUNG MUSEUM

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#### THEATRE BUILDINGS

PART I (1849 - 1861)

Chapter 1

The Bella Union, "Temple of Chances"

#### MR. BONES RETREATS

he Bella Union literally started off with a bang. On October 22, 1849 the first minstrel show to be presented in San Francisco was given at this house by the Philadelphia Minstrels. After several lucrative performances one of the members of the band, Charles Reynolds, was shot

and killed in the Bella Union saloon by Reuben Withers. The prudent minstrels stopped to ask no questions but immediately packed themselves off to the Sandwich Islands.

#### SHOTS THAT KILLED

The shots never ceased. In the days of Lotta Crabtree at the "Belly" Union another minstrel, Frank Hussey, while trying to frighten a drunken man with a revolver, accidentally shot his best friend, Tom Raleigh. Samuel Tetlow,

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the founder and owner for nearly twenty-five years, killed his partner, Billy Skeantlebury, and was acquitted on a claim of self-defense. In 1873, James Dowling, then stage-manager, was killed by Johnny Tuers, described as a champion flat-foot dancer. Presumably murder was more lightly taken in those days, for Johnny too was acquitted and promptly retired to Colma with the avowed intention of raising pigs. Another stage-manager of the Bella Union, one Elias Lipsis, departed violently, this time by his own hand.\* After attempting to kill his wife, Lipsis made the attempt good on himself in a room of the International Hotel.

#### SUICIDE AND THE EDITOR

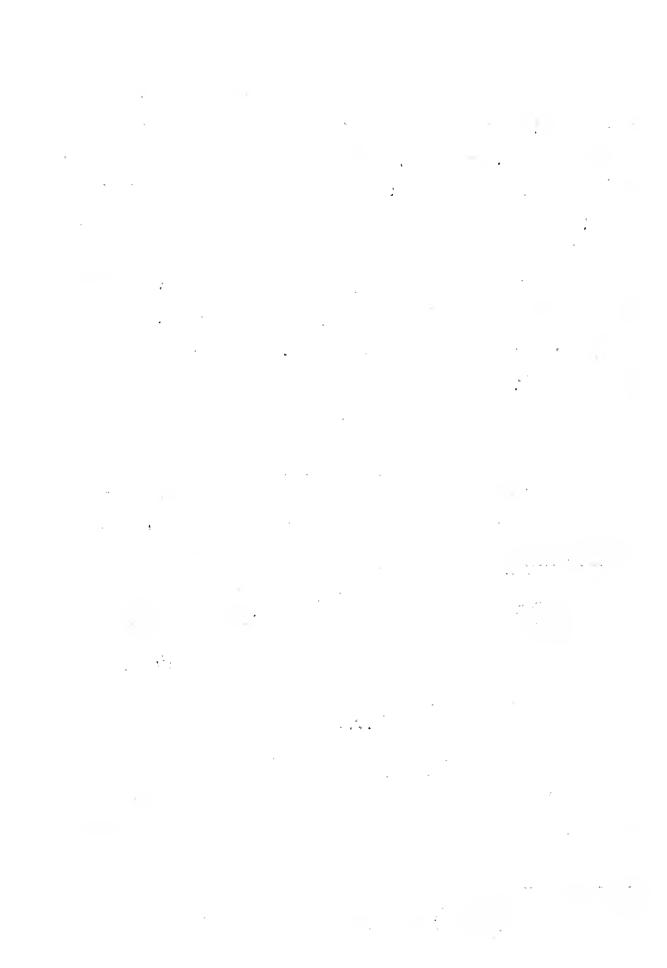
Newspaper editors seemed to take a humorous view of suicides in those days, if this notice of Lipsis' death in the Evening Post of May 5, 1879 is any indication:

"Up to last Saturday the Bella Union had a stage-manager named Elias Lipsis, but the place that knew him, now knows him no more, he having successfully riddled himself with a pistol bullet in a room of the International Hotel, in the presence of his wife and a friend. On Friday evening he evinced a mild disposition to shoot his wife, and was arrested on the charge of attempt to murder..."

#### HIGH WAGES OF SIN

No proprietor of the Bella Union emerged from the house with anything to show for his years of undoubted

<sup>\*</sup> According to McCabe's Journal he was a half-brother of Adah Isaacs Menken.



prosperity. Tetlow, Patrick McAtee, Ned Foster -- all of them died "broke" or thereabouts. Yet for nearly sixty years this "den of iniquity" continued to flourish, weathering fire, sin, and wind from the press and pulpit before going up in the flames of 1906. It passed its last days in melancholy respectability as a combination wax-works and penny arcade known as the Eden Musée. Before this ignominious end it passed through brief reincarnations as the Haymarket Theatre and the Imperial Concert Hall. But it was the Bella Union or nothing and the Bella Union became moribund in 1893 when a city ordinance was passed forbidding the sale of liquor in the theatres of San Francisco. Whiskey went out of the theatre and with it went the Bella Union.

#### ORIGIN AS GAMBLING DEN

Beginning in 1849 as a gambling saloon, the Bella Union was situated on the north side of Washington Street near Kearny, facing Portsmouth Plaza. Not until later years did the theatre have a box office. There was an auditorium, provided with chairs -- though with no stage at first -- which one entered by passing through the saloon or a long narrow hallway adjoining the saloon, at the end of which Madame Tetlow sat and sold tickets. Here was given the performance of the Philadelphia Minstrels on October 22, 1849 which was repeated with great success three times a week until the engagement ended with the fetal brawl already mentioned and the minstrels' speedy retreat to the Sandwich

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Islands. Also featured at this time was a Mexican quintette composed of two harps, two guitars, and a flute. Their repertory was described rather lyrically in later days as containing

"...the popular waltzes and dances of the time and many weird, curious airs of old Spain, sad refrains...which centuries ago, floated on the moonlit night in old Seville, beneath the iron-latticed balconies where lovely senoritas listened with bated breath, and thrilled with sympathetic recognition..."\*

Prior to the Bella Union's establishment as a gambling saloon, Bancroft (History of California, Vol. 6, page 182) reveals the original site to have been occupied in 1848 by the Colonnade Hotel. And it is interesting to note that this building was originally the real estate office of Stevenson and Parker -- the Stevenson part of the firm having been Col. J. D. Stevenson for whom Stephen Massett -- the town's first professional entertainer -- worked.

#### ORDEAL BY FIRE

Engagement of the Pacific Minstrels to appear at the Bella Union was announced for December 24, 1849 but this date was canceled by the first of the six great fires of San Francisco which during the next two years were to terrorize the city. The Bella Union escaped the first conflagration but was burned to the ground in the second fire of May 4, 1850. The new building seems to have survived the next four fires, for after the sixth fire of June 22, 1851 the Herald of June 26 remarks, rather bitterly it would appear:

<sup>\*</sup> Barry, T. A. and Patten, B. A. Men and Memories of San Francisco.

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"The Bella Union, Verandah, Custom House, El Dorado and California Exchange have again escaped almost unscorched."

The irony was that all of these were not much more than glorified saloons and not a single one of the more sumptuous, doubtless nobler theatres was left standing.

#### THE FIRST MELODEON

It was not till 1856, when gambling was "abolished" in San Francisco, that the Bella Union began its true theat-rical career. It became a melodeon. To quote Pauline Jacobson, from the Bulletin of August 4, 1917:

"The melodeons were variety theaters, or, as at Gilbert's Melodeon and the Bella Union, had variety performances in conjunction with minstrelsy.... In the melodeons women were permitted only as performers or as waitresses to sell drinks. These waitresses were on the legitimate order of the barmaids of London. They were not introduced as a dive feature until a much later period, as was likewise the capitalizing of vulgar performances. This was essentially true of the Bella Union Melodeon. Under the regime of its founder, Samuel Tetlow, neither the girls nor questionable entertainments were hinted at in the advertisements and while the entertainments at times were ultra sensational in character, yet at other times it put on such plays as Dombey and Son, by James A. Herne."

#### THE BAWDY "BELLY" UNION

In spite of these occasional bids for culture, one need not assume that the Bella Union ever lost or desired to lose its bawdy flavor, its refreshing impudence in the face of mere respectability, its true native character. Customers who wanted their drama straight could always go to the Metropolitan, the California, Maguire's Opera House, or any of the



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more grandiose theatres. What they wanted from the Bella Union -- comfort, liquor, handsome women, entertainment without ornament -- they could get nowhere else. There were rivals, true, such as Gilbert's Melodeon, the Melodeon, and the Adelphi; but none of them offered such continuously satisfying entertainment as the "Belly" Union. Here alone could be had any penetrating criticism of the drawing-room moralities and "company" manners of the age.

In a sense its dubious status helped realize the Bella Union's claim to being a unique house of entertainment in San Francisco. The conventional, more pretentious houses could be matched and more than matched in any of the great world capitals. Their productions could be seen, indeed had been seen long before, in London, Paris, and New York. But the free and easy atmosphere, the laugh-and-grow-fat attitude, the pungent ribaldry of the Bella Union could be had elsewhere only in duplicate of the original; whereas, reversing the situation, such places as Maguire's Opera House were themselves only second-hand versions of the Paris Opera or London's Covent Garden.

#### LATER DETERIORATION

It is true that under Patrick McAtee, and particularly under Ned Foster, the Bella Union degenerated; it lost the salty tang of early burlesque days under Tetlow, became a mere parade of thighs and baggy-panted comedians of the modern burlesque type. But this was because burlesque itself

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had lost its meaning. It had become a sort of peepshow for small boys, aged forty to sixty; it had lost its virility. Yet even in those days the Bella Union had some claim to originality, for it was here that Harry Montague first introduced the modern type of burlesque show into the theatre.

#### TETLOW PRODUCES

Under Samuel Tetlow the Bella Union produced for nearly twenty-five years as high a quality of burlesque, minstrel, and variety shows as was shown anywhere else in the country during that time. That there was both variety, in the special and general sense, and high quality is revealed by the names of stars who appeared there, many of them still famous in the annals of the American theatre. Among them were Lotta Crabtree, Ned Harrigan, later of the famous Harrigan and Hart team, James A. Herne, Joe Murphy, Junie McCree, Ned Buckley, Jefferson de Angelis, Eliza Biscaccianti, Eddie Foy, and Harry Courtaine.

#### THE EDITOR DISAPPROVES

Early performances at the Bella Union are difficult to list, since it did not, in its first years, advertise in the newspapers but by means of handbills or dodgers scattered around the streets of the city. This perhaps would

<sup>\*</sup> See Monograph on Lotta Crabtree, Vol. VI, this series.

\*\*See Monograph on History of Opera in San Francisco, Part II,

Vol. VII, this series.

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account somewhat for the moral indignation of the newspapers at the expense of the melodeons and in particular of the Bella Union. In illustration, it is interesting to quote the Dramatic Chronicle of August 10, 1867:

"The Belly Union still continues to advertise this paper at the head of their bill in this fashion, 'The Belly (sic) Union does not advertise in a paper called the Dramatic Chronicle.' As it is a well-known fact that we do not advertise for dens of inquity, their announcement is simply superfluous."

However, one suspects that a little outlay of cash would have quickly soothed the conscience of the worthy editor. This might have made the melodeons respectable, which happily they were never to be.

# BURLESQUE AS DRAMATIC CRITICISM

There is one performance recorded, though not in detail, which reveals the salutary character of the early Bella Union. This was during the Mazeppa craze in 1864. This sensational drama, with which Adah Isaacs Menken\* had shocked the public the year before, featured a woman performer in tights whose final trick was to ride a horse up an inclined ramp into the cardboard mountains of the stage and finally disappear. Besides the tights the part had also the thrill of being dangerous and Adah had been hurt several times during the first run of the play at Maguire's Opera House. In

<sup>\*</sup> See Monograph on Adah Isaacs Menken, Vol. V, this series.

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the fall of 1864 Mrs. Jordan revived Mazeppa at the Metropolitan and immediately there was a whirl of tights and horses
at every important playhouse in the city. No less than six
houses simultaneously featured this horse opera, according to
Clay Greene. Then in September the Bella Union produced a
burlesque of Mazeppa, with a different actress playing the
part in every scene. This reductio ad absurdum seems to have
had its effect, for there were no more Mazeppas to be seen in
the city for sometime afterward.

## TETLOW PROSPERS

Samuel Tetlow was one of those rare men wise enough to choose associates of more talent than himself and to trust their judgment. The financial end he left to Mrs. Wilhelmine Tetlow, a shrewd hard-bargaining German woman who sold the tickets, hired the performers, and counted the take; the productions he entrusted to his stage-managers, among whom were James Dowling, who was killed in 1873, W. C. Crosbie, Buckley, J. H. McCabe, Elias Lîpsis, and R. G. Marsh of the Marsh Juveniles. This procedure so profited the Samuel that he built his home in what is now the Sutro In 1868 he demolished the old Bella Union Melodeon Gardens. and opened a new house, now more grandly entitled The Bella Union Theatre. The seats he bought at an auction of the fittings of Maguire's defunct Academy of Music.

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### THE NEW BELLA UNION

With the entrance around the corner, on Kearny Street one door removed from Washington, the new theatre opened on December 12, 1868 with a so-called fairy extravaganza entitled The Sirens, or The Enchanted Isle, starring Minnie Corbyn. Said the Morning Call, December 15:

"This new theatre was opened Saturday night last in the presence of an immense crowd. Hundreds were unable to obtain admission. Mr. James Dowling is stage-manager."

And here is a contemporary description of the new house, published nearly a month before the opening in the <u>Figaro</u> of November 14, 1868:

"This new theatre is the prettiest and best arranged of its kind in the city ... The theatre is 114 x 48 feet ... The parquette is placed on an incline which enables everyone to see over the heads of those in front of him. The upper portion is entirely devoted to private boxes. The orchestra is built on a drum or sounding board....This building is the most perfectly ventilated of any in the city--a draft of passing continually through all parts of it, and carrying all exhalations through seven ventilators in the roof. The cost of the building will be about \$23,000. It has a seating capacity of 700. The staging is furnished with a new style of footlight, the burners being sunk below the stage and the light thrown upwards by means of reflectors. It is better supplied with scenery than any theatre ever opened in San Francisco, having fifteen sets of scene with connecting flats and wings. The curtain has been painted by G. Rogers; the subject is Ariel's song in The Tempest, 'Come unto these yellow sands, and represents the nymphs dancing the waves..."

# AN EVENING AT THE BELLA UNION

Ariel may have been on the curtain, but it was Caliban who came to see the show and he was not disappointed.

And here is what he saw, from the testimony of a <u>Call</u> reporter at an unspecified date in 1869.\*

"Who has not heard of the Bella Union? Go to the farthest ends of the sage brush in the mountain country, and you will meet some antique miner of the primeval days who will tell, with glistening eye, of the many queer sights he enjoyed at the ancient Bella Union. We enter, and passing through a large bar room find ourselves seated in a very pretty little theatre, surrounded by a circle of curtained boxes, that resemble so many pigeon holes...."

The reporter goes on to ease the consciences of his readers with references to the "rabble," "obscenity," the "licentious and obscene character" of the entertainment; and then:

"But what is this? Don't be alarmed, my friend; this is simply the pretty little danseuse who performed the evolutions in the horn pipe in the last act come to solicit the wherewithall to purchase a bottle of champagne. The request is a modest one, partaking of the character of the fair petitioner. 'Only \$5, now don't be stingy. But you are stingy and the request drops to a bottle of claret. 'No! Under the depressing influence of your meanness it continues to drop until at last it reaches the humble solicitation of 'at least a whiskey straight.! In the next box are seated 3 or 4 young men of respectable connections, said respectable connections, dozing away in their residences on Rincon Hill and elsewhere, under the hallucination that their worthy scions are attending a levee of the Young Men's Christian Association...Well, night gives license to many strange things; but we won't moralize, although that pretty girl with the intellectual forehead that sits near one of the centers on the stage might tell you some very queer things about some very worthy people, but she won't.

<sup>\*</sup> Quoted by Herbert Asbury in The Barbary Coast, p. 128.

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## ENTER SKEANTLEBURY

Unlike the reporter many did moralize, publicly at least; but in spite of the deplorers, or perhaps because of them, the Bella Union continued to fill Tetlow's pockets until his forced retirement in 1880, after his trial and acquittal for the murder of his partner, Billy Skeantlebury. In the Figaro of February 6, 1880 Tetlow and W. C. Crosbie listed as proprietors with Crosbie as manager; and the are advertisement announces that "this theatre will be closed tonight and until further notice." On the bill is the melodrama Retribution, featuring Fanny Young, Miss Josephine, J. M. Johnson, W. C. Dudley, Flora Franks, and others. Also a "laughable sketch," Dead Drunk, with Palmyra Holloway and Fred Mackley; Wilson and Ford as the Alabama Twins; The Lady Minstrels with Fred Cooper as "Bones"; T. W. Bree as interlocutor and J. M. Johnson as "Tambo"; "motto songs" by Flora Franks and "the great and only Frank Gibbons, King of the Air."

# SKEANTLEBURY TAKES OVER

The notice and the bill were repeated through February 10. Then on February 11 William Skeantlebury is listed as sole proprietor, with the announcement by him that the theatre would be open as soon as it was redecorated. There is also an advertisement for "talent in the variety, specialty or dramatic lines...also first class Lady Vocalists." On Saturday, February 21 the house reopened under the management

of R. G. Marsh, presenting J. M. Johnson and Fred Cooper in a "sensation" piece called <u>Sunny South</u>, which was claimed to have

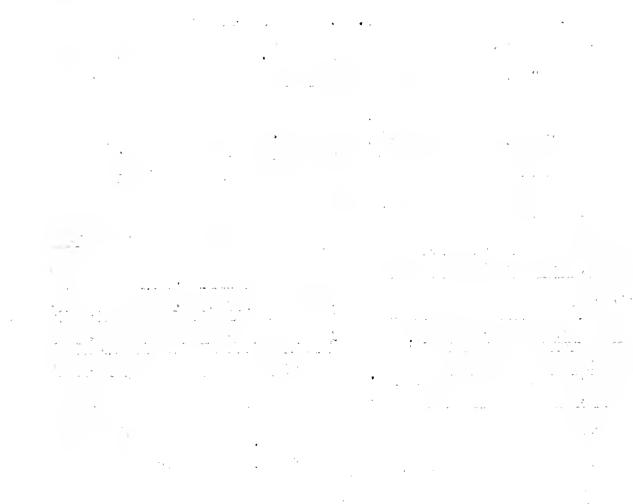
"The finest Railroad Scene and Steamboat Scene ever presented in any Theatre. The Crashed and Burning Bridge and Train are truly realistic."

This piece continued prosperously for two weeks and was succeeded on March 6 by another thriller entitled White Slave, or The Isle of Dominique. The lurid procession continued, as evidenced by such titles as Dyrkyle, the Robber, or The Innkeeper and the Ostler; The Wizard of the Wave, or The Ship of the Avenger; and The Shoemaker of Toulouse, or The Avenger of the People. But it is notable that these bloody offerings were last on the program, when the minstrels and dances and comic sketches were done, and anyone was free to walk out without fear of missing the happier parts of the program.

# TETLOW RETURNS

The Bella Union was booming (prices had been raised from a "bit" to twenty-five and fifty cents) and Tetlow evidently regretted his retirement, for on April 5, 1880 his name again appears on the advertisement as co-proprietor with Skeantlebury. It was not the first time Tetlow had decided to retire and then changed his mind. On October 16, 1877 a notice had appeared in The Footlight:

"On account of the present proprietor retiring from business, the goodwill, lease and fixtures of the best and oldest variety theatre in California, which has been open and doing a first



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class business for over 22 years, and has not been closed in all that time for more than two days, on account of a death in the family, and when removing from the old to the new theatre. The fixtures of the two bars consist of two counters, bar fixtures and gas fixtures, with two elegant lamps and figure in front of the theatre. The fixtures of the theatre consist of benches, covered with elegant plush back and sides, stuffed with the best white hair; the cushions are of the same material. The stage machinery, scenery, stage properties and gas fixtures throughout the theatre and dressing rooms, with the furniture of three suites of rooms for a dwelling, with kitchen and cooking range, etc. The above will be sold cheap if applied for soon. Apply between 11 A. M. and 1 P. M. and between 7 P. M. and 10 P. M. to S. Tetlow, at the Bella Union Theatre."

And now, in 1880, Sam Tetlow was still in business and the Bella Union was flourishing more than ever. But his time was coming to an end. On July 10, a Saturday night, the main performance advertised at the Bella Union was Making A Night of It, with J. M. Francoeur as star. The following Monday, July 12, in the space reserved in Figaro for the Bella Union advertisement, this notice appeared:

# "THE PUBLIC ARE INFORMED

"That in respect to the Memory of Mr. WILLIAM SKEANTLEBURY, the late joint Proprietor of this Theatre, the house will remain closed until after his funeral ceremonies."

# TETLOW SHOOTS -- EXIT SKEANTLEBURY

This simply meant, though there is no notice of it in the discreet <u>Figaro</u>, that between Saturday night and Monday "the late joint-proprietor" had been shot and killed by his partner, Mr. Samuel Tetlow, in a quarrel over a woman.



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But Mr. Tetlow was evidently a gentleman of the old school; he was not lacking in respect to a fallen foe! But the ghost of William Skeantlebury was not to be so easily laid. On July 16 a further notice appeared in Figaro:

"Bella Union Theatre--Owing to the legal complications it is impossible to state when this theatre will reopen, at present. We await the tide of events."

The tide of events was to bring Samuel Tetlow to trial and acquit him on a plea of self-defense, but it was not to be successful in bringing him back to popularity. The Figaro of August 13, announcing the reopening of the Bella Union for the following night, made a gallant plea for its profitable client:

"...The public will be glad to note that the well-known and popular name of Samuel Tetlow stands at the head of the management of this house as of old, and that W. C. Crosbie holds the position of stage manager. The Bella Union Theatre reopens with live and popular attractions, and everything tends to warrant for this old and popular theatre a long and prosperous season."

# TETLOW RETIRES -- ENTER MCATEE

Tetlow carried on in the old style for more than a month, when on September 23, in the middle of a week, <u>Figaro</u> again announced that the theatre would be closed "for a short time." But on September 30 all pretense was dropped and a "Theatre for Sale" advertisement appeared in the same columns. Tetlow's finances had been exhausted by the expenses of his trial; and the Bella Union went begging until December when

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it was purchased by Patrick McAtee. But it was not to take up where it left off; it was to begin an entirely new career.

### AFTER TETLOW

The departure of Tetlow was not to mean the decline in fortune of the Bella Union. It was still to enjoy twelve more years of opulence and its fame, or infamy if one likes, was to spread all over the country. But the Bella Union of McAtee and Foster was of a different and lower order than that founded and maintained for nearly twenty-five years by Sam Tetlow. Under him it had developed from a gambling saloon to the first melodeon in the city, the progenitor of the variety halls which were to change the face of the theatrical world during the sixties and seventies. Burlesque during that period had become the dominant form of theatrical entertainment and even the "legitimate" palaces had to follow Burlesque and variety in the later period lost their meaning, both merging and branching into the leg-show, modern vaudeville, the spectacular revue, and their vulgar relation, the "strip tease." Under Tetlow these had kept their character. Unlike his successors he had never found it necessary to pander to mere erotic curiosity, either by advertising means or by the nature of his productions. One production might be cited to give an idea of the nature of entertainment at the Bella Union under Tetlow. This was a futuristic piece called 1 9 7 1. The year of presentation was of course 1871, on January 4. How prophetic it was, even as far as 1939, cannot be

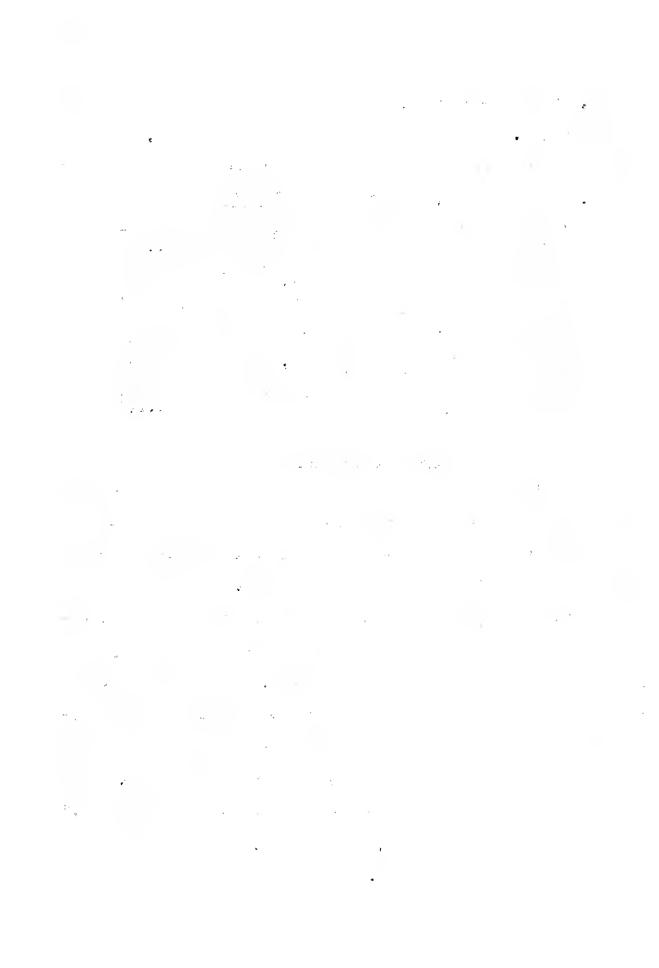


judged, since there is no available sketch or synopsis of the burlesque. Yet the very idea of such a piece, however poorly conceived, would not have occurred to McAtee or Foster. On January 7, Figaro said of 1 9 7 1:

"The new extravaganza of 1971 has run successively throughout and is very attractive...The scenes in the new play are some of them very fine, and the prismatic wheel, or chromatrope, which forms the background of the last scene, is very effective, and must have cost a great deal of money. Sam Tetlow, however, does not care how much money he spends on a piece as long as it pleases the public, and the ringing peals of laughter which greet the many funny jokes in the dialogue prove how thoroughly the talented author hit the taste of the public..."

### BATTLE OF THE BALLOONS

Also mentioned as features of the show were the famous Emperor Norton and a character called the Guttersnipe as they would appear a hundred years hence, the latter being pictured as a newly wakened Rip Van Winkle. A "battle of the balloons" was a popular scene in the play, but whether it referred to future wars in the air or of the parliamentary kind is interesting but impossible to decide. The piece probably consisted mostly of plain tomfoolery -- happily for the customers -- but it was certainly foolery of an entirely different kind from that indulged in under McAtec and Foster. The change in tone can best be revealed by citing two "dodgers," one from the time of Foster, dated 1890, and the other from that of Tetlow, dated 1862.



Here is the Foster handbill:

# FULL GROWN PEOPLE are invited to visit the

#### BELLA UNION

If They Want to "Make a Night of It"
The Show Is Not of the Kindergarton Class.
But Just Your Size, if You Are Inclined
to be Frisky and Sporty. It Is Rather
Rapid, Spicy, and Speedy--Sharp as a Razor,
and as Blunt at Times as the Back of an Ax.
At The

#### BELLA UNION

You Will Find

#### PLAIN TALK AND BEAUTIFUL GIRLS !

#### REALLY GIRLY GIRLS !

No Back Numbers, But as Sweet and Charming Creatures as Ever Escaped a Female Seminary

Lovely Tresses! Lovely Lips! Buxom Forms! at the

BELLA UNION

and such fun.

If You Don't Want to Risk Both Optics,

#### SHUT ONE EYE.

As for the Program, That Is Enough to Make a Blind Man Sce--It is an EYE OPENER

We Could Tell You More About It, But It
Wouldn't Do Here. Seeing Is Believing, and
if You Want Fiery Fun and a Tumultuous
Time Come to the
BELLA UNION THEATRE

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And here is an invitation from Samuel Tetlow:

#### NIGHTLY

A CONSTANTLY VARIED ENTERTAINMENT
Replete With FUN and FROLIC
Abounding in SONG and DANCE
Unique for GRACE and BEAUTY
Wonderful ECCENTRICITY
Extraordinary for Its NOVELTY
And Perfect in Its Object of Affording
IAUGHTER FOR MILLIONS
in which

#### HARRY COURTAINE

Sally Thayer, Maggie Brewer, Sam Wells, J. H. O'Neill, William Lee, J. Allen, Marian Lee, Nellie Cole, A. P. Durand, J. H. McCabe, G. Staderman, Amanda Lee, Ellie Martell, H. D. Thompson, Joe Mabbot, T. M. Wells, G. Woodhull and a Host of the Best DRAMATIC TERPSICHOREAN and MUSICAL TALENT WILL APPEAR Emphatically the MELODEON OF THE PEOPLE Unapproachable and Beyond Competition.

Tetlow's "wonderful eccentricity" may have been and probably often was as "spicy and speedy" as that of Foster, but his advertising methods certainly have not that sticky quality, like imitation absinthe, which prevailed in the "dive era." And the mere presence of Harry Courtaine is an assurance that the show was of a type superior to those produced by the energetic Montague. No better comedian, burlesque or otherwise, appeared in San Francisco than this prodigal son of the San Francisco stage whom the public was never tired of forgiving because there was none to take his place.

# HARRY MONTAGUE -- FUN WITHOUT VULGARITY

The Bella Union was closed after the killing of Skeantlebury until December of that year (1880) when Patrick

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McAtee took over the proprietorship. McAtee was a contractor who knew very little of the theatrical business but, like Tetlow, he had the sense to choose a good stage-manager and to entrust the productions to him. Harry Montague was not only stage-manager; he wrote most of the burlesques, dramas, and variety acts and appeared in them himself. It was hard work but Montague made the theatre pay. It was he who introduced the new note into the advertising bills which was to be continued by Ned Foster when he took over the house in July of 1887. So impressed, indeed, was Foster by Montague's skill and technique that he called him back from London to manage the Bella Union for another year during which the house averaged \$100 a day profit. With him were the popular Duncan Sisters.\*

Tetlow had been content to let the show speak for itself. Montague teased the public into the house with such catch phrases as "Fun Without Vulgarity -- Voluptuousness Without Coarseness," or (describing the girls) "Clad in dainty but curtailed raiment." "A Sunday School teacher could read and not object," he declared in private, "although he was privileged to think all he wanted." It is evident that Foster, after Montague's departure, thought such methods too slow, for there is nothing in his handbills that is merely calculated to tease. They have the delicacy of a panhandler demanding the price of a cup of coffee.

<sup>\*</sup> Not to be confused with the later impersonators of Topsy and Eva.

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## WHISKEY MUST GO -- LAST DAYS

Foster managed to keep the Bella Union going until 1892, but the fortune of the Bella Union was definitely on the wane. It reached bottom May 22,1893,\* when the city ordinance forbidding the sale of liquor in San Francisco theatres was passed, and the Bella Union entered the final agonies of senility. It was opened and closed many times until 1895, when it was opened for the last time as the Bella Union by "Big Bertha, the Confidence Queen" and her British Blondes. Bertha lasted until the following February.

# "FORMERLY THE BELLA UNION"

In a short time Fisky Barnett opened a sad affair called the Haymarket Theatre and in as short a time he closed it again. The Bella Union by its own or any other name was dead, finished, done with, as the music conductor who opened the Imperial Concert Hall was soon to learn. The house made its last drab stand as the Eden Musée, one of those dreary institutions with a penny arcade in front and a wax-works in the rear. Finally the Bella Union-Eden Musée -- "Who has not heard of the Bella Union?" -- burned to the ground in the fire of 1906.

Yet sometimes a name dies hard. Even in June 1939,

<sup>\*</sup> Foster's license expired shortly after the ordinance was passed. The Police Commissioners refused his application for a permit under any circumstances and Judge Murphy upheld their right to do so. An obliging police force let the Bella Union run for some time without a license, but the back of the dive era was broken and Foster was finally forced to retire. (San Francisco Examiner, Sept. 2, 1893.)

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thirty-three years later, a burlesque house on the same approximate site advertised itself in a newspaper with this subtitle: "Formerly the Bella Union."

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# Chapter 2

SALOONS, SHACKS, AND CIRCUSES

Big El Dorado Tent, Washington Hall, Dr. Robinson's Hall, Rowe's Olympic Amphitheatre, California Exchange

# WASHINGTON HALL BECOMES EAGLE THEATRE

f the theatres to be treated in this chapter only Washington Hall and Rowe's\* Olympic Amphitheatre were used as theatres proper, and these only for a short time.

in 1849, was a

cheap second-story den that stood at the rear of the old Alta California newspaper office, on Washington between Kearny and Dupont (Grant Ave.) Sts. Used occasionally in that year for minstrel shows, it was taken over early in 1850 by John B. Atwater's Eagle Theatre troupe from Sacramento, quickly provided with a temporary stage, feebly lighted with whale-oil lamps, sentimentally renamed the Eagle Theatre, and miserably

Washington Hall, built

<sup>\*</sup> See Monograph on Joseph A. Rowe, Vol. I, this series.

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opened on January 16, 1850. The hall did not have even the customary sloping floor, the lack of which, together with the dimness of the lighting, should have served to keep both customers and actors happily in the dark as to the dismal nature of the presentations.

The program included James Sheridan Knowles! The Wife: Charles II, or The Merry Monarch by John Howard Payne and Washington Irving; and a "laughable farce" called The Sentinel. The lighting may have been poor, but the audience evidently saw too much, for John H. McCabe, a member of the company, records in his Journal that "the engagement was short, sharp, and decisive."

# TREASURER GAMBLES, COMPANY GOES UNPAID

He blames this on the treasurer, a Mr. Mattinson. On payday, he turned up with a sad face and no money and informed the troupe that he had become engaged in a game of monte with unfortunate results. From contemporary reports it may be assumed, however, that the cast would soon have accomplished what the treasurer and the elusive cards might have overlooked in the task of emptying the coffers, for according to the authors of the Annals:

"The most that can be said of the exhibition is, that the performance was poor and the room was filled."

# COMPANY DISBANDS

The room was not filled long, however, for immediately after the incident of the monte game the company

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disbanded. Mr. and Mrs. Ray were reported as having sailed to the ever convenient Sandwich Islands. Incidentally Mrs. Ray was the lady whose classical dialect is reproduced by Stephen Massett\* in his book, <u>Drifting About</u>. Describing her appearance in Sacramento in a play called <u>The Bandit Chief</u>, he quoted a sample of her delivery thus:

"'Is 'art is as 'ard as a stone--I'd rayther take a basilick, and rap 'is old fangs areound me--than surrender meself to the cold himbraces of a 'artless willain."

# EAGLE THEATRE DESTROYED

This was the end of drama at the Eagle Theatre. On May 4, 1850 the second great fire of San Francisco mercifully burnt it to the ground. Its one claim to glory is that of having briefly housed the first legitimate dramatic production in San Francisco.

# ROWE'S OLYMPIC AMPHITHEATRE

On October 12, 1849 a young circus rider named Joseph Rowe arrived in San Francisco and on October 29 \*\* he opened Rowe's Olympic Amphitheatre, on Kearny between California and Sacramento Streets. His company included Mr. and Mrs. Rowe, Master Rafael (equestrians); Mr. Wm. H. Foley (clown); Signor and Signora Levero (slack-rope dancers) Mr. Westcott (ringmaster); and Messrs. Steven and Long. This was the first circus entertainment to be given in the city, that

<sup>\*</sup> See Monograph on Stephen C. Massett, Vol. I, this series. 
\*\*The Alta California of Thursday. Nov. 1, 1849 says, "Rowe's Olympic Circus opened on Monday evening last to a crowded audience..."

is by English-speaking people. Only a few Mexican acrobats had been seen before this time.

Rowe's Circus became an immediate success as there was practically no entertainment to compete with it other than occasional performances by minstrels at Washington Hall and the Bella Union•

### TWELVE HUNDRED A WEEK TOO LITTLE

After several weeks however, William Foley, the clown, quit the show with the apparently absurd statement that he could not live on his salary of \$1,200 a week. It has been suggested that the high level of prices at the time might account for his complaint, yet some suspicion is thrown on his explanation by the fact that Foley was able several months later to buy Rowe's Amphitheatre.

### CIRCUS CLOSES

On December 10, 1849 an interest in the circus was sold to Dave Long, another circus clown, and shortly afterward the amphitheatre was closed for renovation, the popularity of the circus having worn off and Rowe having decided to put on dramatic shows.

### REOPENS WITH DRAMA

On February 4, 1850 the amphitheatre reopened, presenting Othello, the first taste of Shakespeare San Franciscans had yet had, and an afterpiece called <u>Bachelor's Buttons</u>. Admissions were \$3 for boxes; \$2 for parquette; \$5 for

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\$  private boxes. The dramatic company was composed of five men and three women from Sydney, Australia. In addition to drama Rowe produced his regular circus entertainment.

### ROWE SELLS OUT TO FOLEY

tress Mrs. J. H. Kirby, later Mrs. James Stark, in an arrangement of Bulwer-Lytton's The Lady of Lyons. The circus and stage people then put on a battle for supremacy until two months later when the stage company admitted defeat and retired. But Rowe was not to stay in town much longer. On April 30 he sold his amphitheatre to Foley and after a series of farewell benefits, one for himself, one for Foley, and one for Dave Long,he departed from Sacramento. Foley continued to operate until the building was burned down in the fire of June 14, 1850. In the meantime it presented, with mediocre success, a troupe of Spanish dancers and several deeply deplored and unprofitable bullfights.

### NEW OLYMPIC AMPHITHEATRE

When Rowe returned to San Francisco in August he erected a new circus building, The New Olympic Amphitheatre, on Montgomery Street, between California and Sacramento. Foley's Amphitheatre opened on September 30, 1850 but Rowe did not suffer from the competition and continued "with tremendous success" until December of that year when he too

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left for the Sandwich Islands. Before leaving however he managed to slip in a few more benefits, for himself, for his wife, and for Master Rafael. These benefits were popular institutions of the time, and were promoted by the actors and managers. On occasion they were sorely needed by the beneficiaries, but were more often a recognized form of bonus and the number to be given was included in the actor's contract.

### BIG EL DORADO TENT

The Big El Dorado Tent was never more than a gambling saloon, built in 1849 at the corner of Kearny and Washington Streets, adjoining Tom Maguire's Parker House above which latter the Jenny Lind was later built. But it must be noted in the history of entertainment in San Francisco for the beautiful French woman violinist, who

"...played with ravishing skill upon a genuine Stradivarius that she and her husband had brought from Paris as a treasure too precious to leave behind; and a treasure, indeed it proved, for her pay was two ounces a day in the Big El Dorado Tent band...."\*

### EL DORADO BURNS, IS REBUILT

In the first great fire of December 24, 1849 the El Dorado was completely demolished, but in the Alta California of January 14, 1850 (written however on January 5) appeared a story of the rebuilding of the El Dorado which

<sup>\*</sup> Overland Monthly, February 1883.

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referred again to the mysterious Frenchwoman:

"The El Dorado has been rebuilt by Chambers and McCabe. It is very neatly finished in the interior and has an orchestra at one end in which last evening a very fair band was playing. The novelty of the orchestra was Madame Paris, a very clever French musician, who plays the violin with remarkable skill and vigor."

From then on the El Dorado played little part in organized entertainment and in the fire of June 14, 1850 it was again burned to the ground, only to rise again within a week "in full blast, monte table and all."

### DR. ROBINSON'S HALL

Dr. Robinson's Hall formed the first background for the ballads and "wisecracking" of the later famous showman. Robinson took over an old hall on a side street in the summer of 1849, put up a makeshift stage with his own homemade backdrops and scenery. For make-up he is said to have used mustard and curry which may have added the needed flavor to his performances for he continued with some success until May 4, 1850 when the wretched hall went up in the flames of the second great fire.

### CALIFORNIA EXCHANGE

From this fire only Rowe's Amphitheatre and the California Exchange survived. The latter, a former saloon, opened with a musical concert on January 5, 1850. Indeed the California Exchange was to weather all the six great fires, the Herald reporting that after the last fire of June 22, 1851:

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"The Bella Union, Verandah, Custom House, El Dorado and California Exchange have again escaped almost unscorched..."

Like other places of amusements mentioned here, the California Exchange was fundamentally a saloon, but it did give occasional instrumental and vocal concerts and on April 13, 1851 it presented <u>Magic Violin</u>, the first pantomime to be shown in the city.

### STOOD TILL 1860

Located on the northeast corner of Clay and Kearny Streets, the original structure of the California Exchange stood intact until 1860 when it was torn down to make way for a new building. In those combustible days, ten years was a long time for a building to endure. In the <u>Bulletin</u> of January 3, 1860 appeared these words of farewell:

"We cannot take leave of the old California Exchange without a passing remark on its history. In nearly all of the numerous engravings of San Francisco and of matters pertaining thereto, it has occupied a conspicuous place, and perhaps there is no part of the civilized world in which it has not been the subject of criticism.

"It was erected in 1850, and was for some time occupied in part as a Court House and in part as a fashionable gambling saloon; two institutions which in those days had a strange affinity..."

It is certain that such an affinity existed between the theatre and the gambling saloon in 1850, for all of them, The Bella Union, El Dorado, California Exchange, and the rest, staged the earliest theatrical entertainments in San



Francisco. In strange metamorphoses the California Exchange became the first home of the Mercantile Library and the Young Men's Christian Association in 1853, the headquarters of the "law and order troops" in 1856, the Post Office, and, in a last astonishing reincarnation, a wild animal museum.

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### Chapter 3

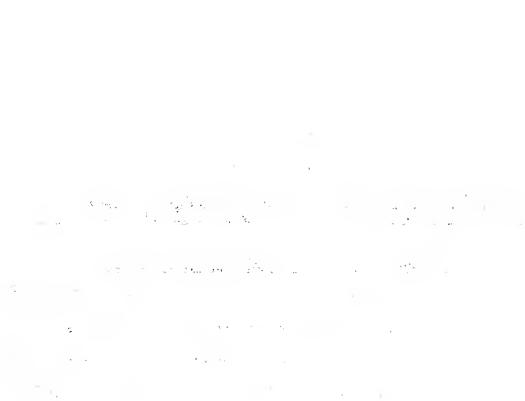
### THEATRES OF 1850

The National, The Phoenix, Phoenix Exchange, Dramatic Museum, Italian Theatre, Foley's Amphitheatre

### NATIONAL IS FIRST CONVENTIONAL THEATRE

he first conventional theatre to be built in San Francisco was the National, a small brick building located on the north side of Washington Street, between Kearny and Montgomery. The proprietor, Henry Gunter, opened his house on February 19, 1850 with a combined French and English per-

formance, directed respectively by Monsieur Delamare and James Evrard. The program consisted of French vaudevilles, Yankee stories, pantomime, farces, songs, dancing, and the Sable Brothers, minstrels, "in their unique performances." It was well attended and continued to be so until March 15 when the French company's season ended. Less than two months later the National went up in the flames of May 4, 1850 and was never rebuilt.



### PHOENIX THEATRE AND PHOENIX EXCHANGE

A little more than a month after the opening of the National two more houses were opened, the Phoenix on March 23, 1850 and the Phoenix Exchange on March 24. Seeing the Elephant was the premiere offering at the Phoenix, introducing the popular Sophie Edwin to San Francisco audiences. The Phoenix was a crude little place, on Pacific near Montgomery Street, and its name was not to save it any more than its namesake, the Exchange, located on Portsmouth Square. Both of them were destroyed in the fire of May 4, 1850.

### DOC ROBINSON BUILDS DRAMATIC MUSEUM

Doctor Robinson, however, had evidence of Phoenix blood in him. Burned out of his hall on May 4, 1850, he had begun preparations for a Dramatic Museum, together with James Evrard, former English manager of the National and lessee of the Phoenix Exchange. Hardly had he selected a building wherein to establish his new theatre than the third great fire of June 14, 1850 destroyed it. The good doctor was evidently made of stern stuff, for, wrote the Evening Picayune, August 29, 1850:

"With his own hands, he shovelled out the sand for the foundation of the...Dramatic Museum, and he also handled every piece of timber in the frame of the building."

### DRAMATIC MUSEUM DESTROYED

By July 4, 1850, scarcely a month after the doctor began work, the Dramatic Museum was completed and opened to

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the public. It was the first theatre in San Francisco to advertise in a newspaper, its ad appearing in the Evening Picayune and listing private boxes at \$3; upper seats at \$2; and lowers at \$1. The first piece presented was Seeing the Elephant with Dr. Robinson, Mrs. Burrill, as well as a group of amateurs in the cast. From then on it was always crowded to its limited capacity -- it seated only 280 -- but inside of a year, on May 4, 1851 to be exact, it was in ashes again. One wonders how citizens had the heart to build in those years of 1850 and 1851 -- only to see their buildings burn to the ground. Yet they did more than build; they rebuilt -- and rebuilt again.

### ITALIAN THEATRE HAS SHORT LIFE

of all the short-lived theatres in San Francisco, and there were to be many, the Italian Theatre's existence was briefest. Opened by Signor Rossi and his wife, Fanny Manten, at the southwest corner of Kearny and Jackson Streets on September 12, 1850, it presented Rossi in a magic and ventriloquist act, dances by his wife, and songs and dances by Signorina Canova and Signor Suar. For four nights they performed to crowded houses (admission \$1 & \$2) and on the fifth night, September 16, 1850, the Italian Theatre\* disappeared in flames.

<sup>\*</sup> See Monograph on the Italian Theatre, Vol. X, this series.

### FOLEY'S AMPHITHEATRE

This fire of September 16 discouraged building for sometime, to the profit of Foley's Amphitheatre, which for two or three months had for rival only its fellow circus, Rowe's Olympic. William Foley, who had bought Rowe's original amphitheatre and there staged the unpopular bullfights before seeing his building burn, had opened his own specially built amphitheatre on September 30, 1850. It was on the west side of Portsmouth Square and here performed a full troupe of equestrians, supported by a group of dancers who had moved from Dr. Robinson's Dramatic Museum. The show closed early in November, after a brief but successful season, and then reopened on December 14 with Rob Roy by Sir Walter Scott, a surprising production in the grand style and "with horses," according to the old time actor, McCloskey.

Though the year 1850 was a disastrous one in the city, yet there were eleven theatres built in that year. Among them must be mentioned the Jenny Lind and the American, the first "glamour" theatres of their time; the Adelphi and the Athenaeum, the last named to be called in after days the Minstrel Hall and the Olympic II.

Due to the story of their rivalry, the Jenny Lind and the American theatres require special chapters to themselves. The rise of Maguire, though his career did not culminate till after 1860, is another reason for treating these two buildings separately. Also the pathetically swift rise

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and fall of the courageous "Doc" Robinson, the delight of all those honest hecklers who know a good retort when they hear one. The Adelphi and the Athenaeum continued, under one name or another, to play a part in San Francisco theatre life for years, and thus cannot be classed with the ephemeral buildings treated in this chapter.

These can be truly called the "Theatres of 1850." They were all built in that year, and with the exception of the Dramatic Museum and Foley's Amphitheatre none of them existed in 1851. Only the Dramatic Museum took any real hold on San Francisco's theatre public, and this no doubt was due mainly to Dr. Robinson's connection with it. He died in 1856, while in Alabama on his way to New York, and was temporarily forgotten; but some memories have a way of being revived after a lapse of years; and so it is that the figure of Dr. Robinson comes down to us as one of the chief showmen in early San Francisco's theatrical history. Perhaps it is the vision of him grinning and genially exchanging insults with the audience and perhaps it is a mental picture of him in a red flannel shirt and a pair of duck trousers containing only twenty-five cents in their pockets, "with his own hands, shoveling out the sand for foundation of the Dramatic Museum...."

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# Chapter 4 THE ATHENAEUM AND THE ADELPHI

### LONG CAREERS

mong the theatres of 1850 the Athenaeum and the Adelphi, though obscured in later years by the more grandiose Jenny Lind and American theatres, certainly merit a setting apart from the short-lived buildings treated in the previous chapter. The Athenaeum is included not only for

its comparatively long life, but because it sired the Adelphi. This latter theatre was for four or five years the scene of some of the most meritorious performances given in early San Francisco, both dramatic and operatic. In its short career it might have been called a miniature Tower of Babel; in its narrow hall had been heard the mouthings and mumblings of English, French, Italian, German, Spanish and even, in its declining years, Chinese. Here, among many others, had appeared Dr. Robinson, Mrs. Judah, James and Sarah Stark, Mr. and Mrs. Hambleton, C. R. Thorne and, a month and a half before he died, the great Junius Brutus

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Booth Sr. By the time the Adelphi II had breathed out its last puff of smoke in the fire of 1858, it had fallen into disreputable neglect and was hardly to be missed, but in no account of the theatres of San Francisco should its honorable and valiant career be omitted.

It will be noted that the Adelphi I and Adelphi II are treated as essentially one theatre; the same being the case of the Athenaeum I and II, the Minstrel Hall, and Olympic, these last two being only briefly assumed pseudonyms of the Athenaeum II. An exception, however, is made in the case of the Adelphi III, since it was not built until 1877, nineteen years after the burning of the Adelphi III, and beyond its name having little relation to the old Adelphi. This will be treated in Part II of this monograph, which includes theatres erected in the period 1861 to 1906.

### ATHENAEUM SHOCKS

The Athenaeum began in the popular way; it shocked or at least titillated genteel sensibilities. Immediately after its opening August 13, 1850, on Commercial Street between Kearny and Montgomery, it became a question, not too hotly debated perhaps, whether Dr. Collyer's Model Artists were or were not an immoral presentation. Naturally this had a pleasant effect on box-office receipts. Dr. Collyer, evidently an Argonautic Ziegfeld, began to look around for larger quarters to house the impartial judges of his art. This he did later in the year, and thus it was that the eventually



"quiet and genteel" Adelphi sprang from the pockets of the unregenerate.

To quote from the <u>Evening Picayune</u>, August 30,1850, the wickedness of the Athenaeum seems to have been a pretty mild affair:

"We have occasionally looked in upon the exhibitions brought forward every evening at this place by Dr. Collyer, for the amusement and instruction of his crowd of patrons. We are aware of the objections seriously felt on the part of certain portions of every community where Dr. Collyer has opened his exhibitions through the United States, on account of the supposed or real immoral tendency upon the public mind. So far, however, as we can under-stand the designs of the exhibitor, it is the farthest possible from his wish or intention to pander to any morbid curiosity of vicious imagination. His purpose is to illustrate by living forms, the works of some of the greatest masters in sculpture and painting that have ever lived..."

### COLLYER MOVES TO ADELPHI

And so Collyer, this apostle of Art, went handsomely along until September 16, 1850 when he gave his farewell performance at the Athenaeum. On October 16 he moved into his newly constructed Adelphi, where all who desired could look on "beauty bare" to their eyes' content, until November 9, when the Adelphi became a dramatic theatre.

### FRENCH ACTRESS AT ADELPHI

That there were other presentations at the Athenaeum during the stay of Dr. Collyer is evidenced by this item from the Evening Picayune of August 20, 1850:

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"Mademoiselle Duprez, from the French and London Theatres, made her first appearance at the Museum last night. She is a pleasant actress, and was well received by a crowded house. She appears again this evening in two popular pieces, Matrimony and Perfection."

### MAGICIAN VANISHES

In the <u>Picayune</u> of September 25, 1850 one reads of the reopening of the Athenaeum on the previous evening. There were two parts to the bill: one a play, <u>Bachelor's Buttons</u>, with Mr. and Mrs. Hambleton in the leading roles; the other a double act by Signor Rossi, magician, and Signora Fanny Manten, dancer. Signor Rossi was that unfortunate person who had practiced his art so well that his Italian Theatre had completely vanished in five days. On September 30 a benefit was given for Mrs. Hambleton who inside of six months was beyond all benefits, having taken her own life; and the following day Signor Rossi performed his final vanishing act, he himself disappearing, supposedly in the general direction of South America.

### ATHENAEUM II

Thereafter there is little mention of the first Athenaeum. McCabe lists the opening there of the <u>Tyrolean Alpine Singer</u>, but there is no further presentation recorded for the year 1850, nor for 1851. In fact, there is no further mention of the Athenaeum until January 28,1860 when the opening of the Athenaeum II was thus announced in the <u>Evening</u> Bulletin:



"The new hall just erected over the entrance to the old Metropolitan Theatre, Montgomery Street, will be opened this evening by Billy Birch and Sam Wells, together with a numerous troupe of aids for a round of negro minstrelsy and general fun. The price of admission is only 25 cents."

### ATHENAEUM BECOMES MINSTREL HALL

As in the case of its predecessor, there is no detailed description of the Athenaeum II beyond such generalities as "this spacious new hall...is being fitted up in neat style." Kidder and Company were listed as the proprietors, I. F. Beatty as business manager, and S. A. Wells, stage-manager. Billy Birch was one of the famous minstrels of his time, and his presence, together with the low price of admission ensured full attendance. On the 22nd of April, Birch leased the Athenaeum II for himself, and continued the old policy with Birch's Minstrels, though he changed the theatre's name to Minstrel Hall.

### MINSTREL HALL BECOMES OLYMPIC

On July 9, 1860 the house changed hands and names again, being newly christened the Olympic Theatre, featuring Mrs. Burrill and the Chapman family in light farces and comedies. This is not to be confused with the Olympic Theatre which had been the Union and which in a short time had become the Union again. Evidently the change of names was, as is

<sup>\*</sup> See Monograph on The Chapmans, Vol. III, this series.



not unusual, a bad sign, for there is to be found no further record of the Athenaeum II or the Olympic and it is unlisted in any city directory thereafter.

### ADELPHI ALSO SHOCKS

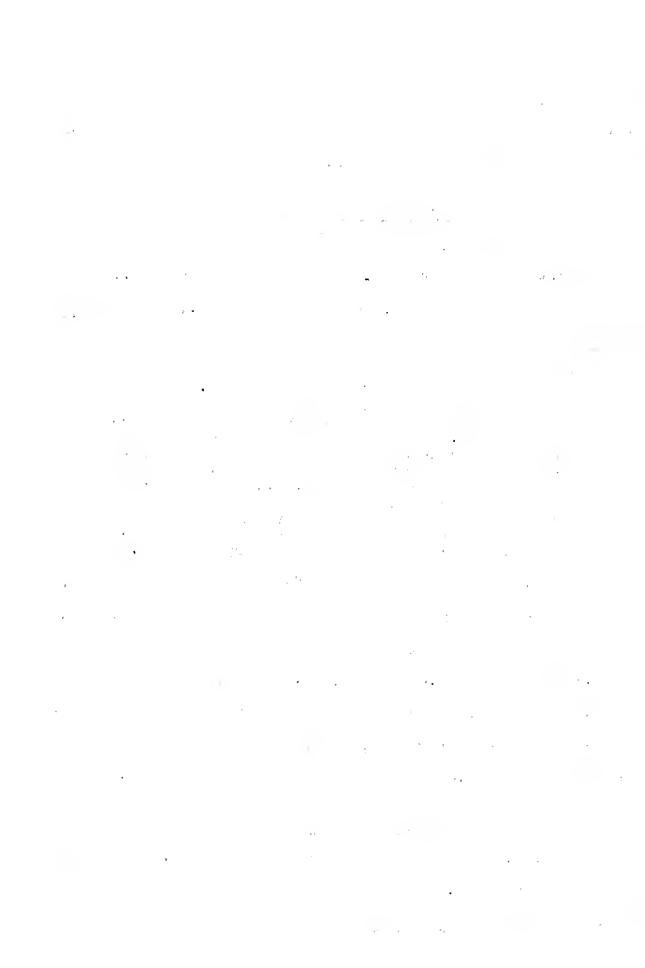
The Adelphi, as has been stated, began like the Athenaeum -- as a hall for Dr. Collyer's Model Artists. The day following its opening, October 17, 1850, the Evening Picayune reports:

"The beautiful little theatre of the above name recently erected on Clay Street by Dr. Collyer was opened last evening with an exhibition of the Model Artists and a diversity of other entertainments. The house was crowded as might have been expected from the appreciation that has been so generally placed upon Dr. Collyer's efforts and means to please...We understand that the doctor desires to offer through the season a variety of attractive amusements and to render his establishment a scene of diversion that shall always have a salutary tendency."

What the "serious portions" of the community thought of this "salutary tendency" has already been recorded, and their righteous indignation had its usual stimulating effect on box-office receipts. However, Dr. Collyer's season at the Adelphi soon came to an end when the theatre was opened under new management on November 9, 1850 though a final benefit performance for Mrs. Collyer was presented November 16.

### DRAMA COMES TO ADELPHI

D. F. Wilson was the new lessee with W. Barry acting as stage-manager. The opening bill of the Adelphi's new career included The Golden Farmer and a farce called The

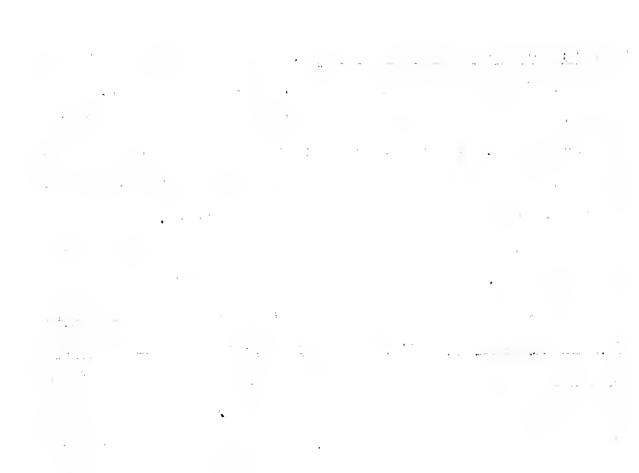


Secret; or The Vagaries of Thomas. In the company were Ned Bingham, Tench Fairchild, and Mrs. William Mestayer. The Adelphi was on the south side of Clay Street between Kearny and Montgomery. As in the case of the Athenaeum, there is no detailed description of it in the newspapers or periodicals of the time. Prices were from one to three dollars.

On December 21 it was closed for the usual repairs and remodeling. The caliber of the plays presented up to this time may be indicated by a few of their titles: Therese, or The Orphan of Geneva; Luke the Laborer; and The Dumb Girl of Genoa. The theatre was soon "repaired and remodeled" and it reopened December 24 under Ned Bingham. Three plays were given before the end of the year. Bingham was of a sportier turn than his predecessors and his choice of plays was lighter: Fortune's Frolic, Man About Town, and The Day After The Wedding. Bingham's season closed January 5, 1851.

### FIRST ITALIAN OPERA IN SAN FRANCISCO

From January 14, 1851 the Adelphi I was given over completely to concerts, Italian opera and, in the last month of its career, French vaudeville. Signor and Signora Pellegrini presented several Italian concerts, alternating with Madame von Gulpen, who gave German concerts. Also the Pellegrinis gave repeated performances of the operas La Sonmambula, Norma, and Ernani. The presentation of La Sonnambula was the first complete performance of an Italian opera ever given in San Francisco. The journalists and historians seem to place high importance on these "firsts in San Francisco,"



so we shall duly record them when we reach them, without however stressing the importance or even the necessity.

#### ADELPHI DESTROYED BY FIRE

The pioneer taste for opera seems to have been temporarily exhausted early in April when a new company of actors was welcomed to the Adelphi for one performance only. The theatre closed on April 8 and was dark until May 4, 1851 when for a few hours it became exceedingly bright indeed and at the end of the day the Adelphi I was a job for the ashman.

This second group, under the direction of Alexandre Munie, had as business manager one M. Benard. Irked by the refusal of the first French Vaudeville Company to accept the competition of his group on their own stage, Benard successfully negotiated for the use of the Jenny Lind Theatre for his Second French Vaudeville Company. This theatre too was swept away on May 4, ending Benard's career in San Francisco as an impresario.

#### ADELPHI II IS FIRST FRENCH THEATRE

The Adelphi II was the first theatre to be erected in the city after the May 4 fire and for two months following its opening, August 1, 1851, had things its own way, being the only legitimate theatre in San Francisco at the time. It was opened on the west side of Dupont Street between Clay and Washington as a combination French and English theatre. The English productions were handled by that old heckler's

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delight, Dr. Robinson -- he of the red flannel shirt, duck trousers and two bits to his name -- and a newcomer to the theatre named Weisenthal. Incidentally the Adelphi II was the first stronghold of French drama in San Francisco. The French company continued long after Robinson had gone over to the American Theatre in October of that year.

#### DOCTOR ROBINSON LEAVES THE ADELPHI

Before the doctor left he took full advantage of the situation, featuring Mr. and Mrs. Stark in a series of popular stock plays of the time, such as <u>Village Lawyer</u>, <u>Eton Boy</u>, and <u>The Limerick Boy</u>. Several benefits, among them one for himself, helped add to the doctor's original two bits. Among his productions should be mentioned a presentation of Romeo and Juliet, starring Harriet Carpenter.

But Tom Maguire, the man who built 'em big, was opening his Jenny Lind III on October 4 and the doctor felt that his little Adelphi was going to be a good place in which to be forgotten. So, leaving his temple to the French, he prepared to move into his new American Theatre, which he did on October 20, thus entering into his gallant and, for a time, successful struggle to outdo the Goldwyn of that time.

#### ADELPHI OVERSHADOWED

From then on the Adelphi, though it was to endure for years, was definitely overshadowed by the bigger (and therefore better) theatres of the city. It continued as a

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French theatre, occasionally acting as a music hall, featuring Buckley's New Orleans Serenaders or the Concert Alleghanians. Through the years every major language in Europe was to be both sung and spoken within its walls. Bad melodramas and worse farces were presented there, as well as the Comedy of Errors, The Bride of Lammermoor, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan's The Critic. Bad actors could not have missed the place, but there were also the Bakers, the Starks, the Thomans, Oceana Fisher, John Torrence and the old warhorse, Junius Brutus Booth Sr. Perhaps these were overrated, but they were the best any San Francisco theatre of the time had to show.

A German dramatic company appeared, a Spanish dramatic company, Tracy's Minstrels, an Italian opera company, Donnelly's Minstrels, a French opera company producing La Fille du Régiment and the Barber of Seville; and there was a fight to the death between a wildcat and a white bull terrier, the last named a "classic event" which

"...had the effect to draw together a large number of the elite of the city...."\*

### REPRESENTATIVE THEATRE

It was small, the Adelphi, and after 1852 it was never considered important, but the total of its presentations make it an archetype of the rich variety productions, good, bad, and indifferent, characterizing San Francisco

<sup>\*</sup> Dana, Julian. The Man Who Built San Francisco, p. 91

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theatre history during the fifties. The last company to play there was a Chinese troupe, and then the building was dark, occupied only by a French eating-house called the Adelphi Restaurant, until on June 2, 1858 the inevitable San Francisco flames swept around the corner and ended the career of the Adelphi II.

## THE THIRD JENNY LIND THEATRE (1851 - 1852)



ENGRAVING FROM LEWIS F. BYINGTON'S AND OSCAR LEWIS' "HISTORY OF SAN FRANCISCO."

(1851 ~ 1850)

ENGRAVING FROM LEVIE F. SKINGTON'S AND OSCIB DIVIC'S CISCO."

#### Chapter 5

#### THE JENNY LIND AND AMERICAN THEATRES

#### MAGUIRE BRINGS RIVALRY

hen came Maguire. Heretofore the theatres of San Francisco had been modest affairs. After Maguire it was to be all gilt and gingerbread and grandeur. From the time this illiterate gambler and saloon-keeper flashed forth with his first Jenny Lind Theatre on October 30, 1850, there was to

The boom in building had begun, and there were always the city fires to assure more than one building of the same name. There were three Jenny Linds and three Americans. Prices and salaries went up and as they rose, the actors -- those of the big names and bigger demends -- came in flocks from the East Coast. Thornes and Chapmans, Starks, Bakers, and Booths played the little Adelphi. Rivalries grew fierce, for Maguire had set the pace and there was no quietism in this man's make-up. Fire was a frequent guest in his house, but it had a permanent home in his eye.

be no respite in the building of "bigger and better" houses.

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#### MAGUIRE LOSES OUT

The rivalry between the Jenny Lind and the American was the first of its kind in the city. In the end Maguire had to retire from the field, temporarily; but not until after a He built a Jenny Lind and it burned down; he bitter battle. built another and it burned down; so he built a third. When it profited him no longer, he sold it to the politicians as a city hall, evoking a storm of protest that must have done the old dog-in-the-manger good to hear. The sale stood. But he was not through as "San Francisco's first impresario." a few years' rest from the wars he built Maguire's Opera House and entered into the second and longest phase of his "knock 'em down and drag 'em out" career. But it is his first phase, the period of the three Jenny Linds, that we have to do with here.

#### FIRST JENNY LIND

The first Jenny Lind had no rival. Built over Maguire's Parker House Saloon, on Kearny Street near Washington, facing Portsmouth Plaza, it opened October 30, 1850 with a concert featuring the soprano, Madame von Gulpen. The theatre did not fail to draw the expected response from the newspapers. San Franciscans were accustomed to small theatres, seating two or three hundred at most, with small stages, undecorated walls, and no drop curtain. The Jenny Lind more than doubled its former seating capacity. It had white woodwork, deep rose panels, and plenty of gilt. And it had a

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painted drop curtain. Reports the Picayune, November 5:

"...The hall is the neatest and most commodious in the city and when the side galleries which are in the process of construction shall be completed it will accommodate some 700 to 800 persons."

It was not till November 4, after the theatre was leased to James Stark and Sarah Kirby that the first dramatic performance was given. Damon and Pythias was the piece. Boxes were \$3; parquette \$2; gallery \$1. An afterpiece was given called The Dumb Belle. Among those appearing, beside Stark, were Buck Zabriskie, James Byers, Harry Coad, Mrs. Mestayer, Mrs. C. E. Bingham and Mr. and Mrs. Hambleton. From then on till March 16, the closing night of the Stark-Kirby management, the programs at the Jenny Lind were a hodgepodge of high and low in entertainment. One night Hamlet was given, another night Slasher and Crasher; one night King Lear or Macbeth or even Massinger's New Way to Pay Old Debts; then such things as Crossing the Line, Faint Heart Never Won Fair Lady, or Black-Eyed Susan.

#### SHAKESPEARE AND MAGUIRE

It has been remarked that there is an anomaly in all this: the enthusiasm, for instance, with which Shakespeare and cheap melodrama were equally received by pioneer audiences. It need not be regarded thus. Melodrama was the spirit of the times; the very lives of the audience were melodramatic. They did not go to the theatre because they were bored, they went because they wanted more and more excitement.

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Shakespeare is good melodrama and in those times he was certain to be played melodramatically. The people wanted to see a good show with action in it, and if the author's name happened to be Shakespeare, that was all right with them. Undoubtedly they did not go to hear the great poetry or the subtle psychology, but it is impossible that out of the fire and thunder and violence of the spectacle a wind of rumor did not reach the gallery of something that was not before their eyes and yet pertained to each of them. Perhaps Maguire produced Shakespeare merely for vanity and show. But Shakespeare is capable of bringing even to a Maguire more than he bargained for.

#### FIRST JENNY LIND BURNS

Misfortune clung to the Jenny Lind from the start. First Mrs. Kirby's second husband, Wingate, was thrown from a horse and killed on November 16, 1850; then Mrs. Hambleton committed suicide on January 14, 1851; and finally on May 4, 1851, after a brief period under the managership of Ned Bingham, the theatre was burnt to the ground, together with Maguire's Parker House downstairs.

### SECOND JENNY LIND

Hardly were the ashes cool before incurably optimistic Magnire was planning to rebuild. The Alta California reported May 31, 1851:

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"The proprietors of the Parker House are pushing on and upward the walls for their new theatre, which is to occupy nearly two-thirds the front breadth of the old Parker House, with a depth of one hundred and fifty feet. The walls are brick. It is to be fireproof. It is intended to make it worthy of California, beautiful, airy, commodious and safe. The stage will be seventy-five feet deep, and the theatre of a capacity to seat three thousand persons."

In the meantime the small Theatre of Arts had opened. Maguire immediately announced that a temporary theatre would be arranged in the finished portion of the "fireproof building." This temporary -- very temporary indeed -- theatre was called the Jenny Lind II and was opened June 13 with the Stark-Kirby company presenting a play entitled The King's Gardener, or Nipped in the Bud. A very apt subtitle for the theatre itself: Three days later James Stark and the bereaved widow, Sarah Kirby, were married in Sacramento, and on their return, the 18th of June, introduced a new French singer, Mme. Foubert, to the audience. On the bill was also a farce, Lend Me Five Shillings. At least the title was humorous. On the 22nd that regular bridegroom, Fire, came to town again and quickly consummated his second union with the Jenny Lind.

#### THIRD JENNY LIND

As a measure of insurance against further disaster, Maguire decided to build his third theatre entirely of stone. It was to stand on the same site -- facing Portsmouth Square from Kearny and Washington Streets -- as the former buildings, and was opened October 4, 1851. This time he was successful. The Jenny Lind III did not burn down, though it later burned

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a beautiful hole in the pockets of the city taxpayers.

Being built by Tom Maguire, the Jenny Lind III was of course to be like nothing ever seen before. And it was. Its size was tremendous for the time, with a frontage of seventy-five feet, a height of sixty feet and a depth of one hundred and forty feet. The stage itself was fifty feet deep by forty-one wide, enough room in which to drill a regiment. There was of course a handsomely painted curtain, representing a scene from The Bride of Abydos and, what was more novel, an ingenious ventilating system whereby air was admitted through a cupola in the center of the ceiling. The cost of the Jenny Lind III was estimated at \$150,000.

#### SEVEN DOORS TO PARADISE

Inside and out the admiring populace walked around and held its breath. The massive front was composed of a creamy white sandstone imported from Sydney, Australia and, lighted up at night, must have had somewhat the effect of a white shirt-front gleaming out of the dull black of a dress suit. There were seven arched doors through which to enter and, once inside the vestibule, seven more through which to reach the inner sanctuary. On the second and third stories there were seven windows reaching from floor to ceiling. It was all very classical.

But one can imagine a newly arrived miner sloshing up Kearny Street and wonder how it would strike his already fogged brain to be confronted with this gleaming pearl of the

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desert. All around him were muddy streets and squalid ramshackle buildings, and here before him suddenly loomed a white palace -- a mirage no doubt. There would be but two courses open to him: to shake his head and turn into the nearest saloon or, more manfully, to brace his shoulders and march through two of the fourteen doors, look around at the white and gold walls, at the Bride of Abydos on the curtain, look up at the Muses and Apollo painted on the ceiling, wonder if the chandelier would fall on him if it fell, settle down in one of the handsome plush chairs and blissfully go to sleep. What was the play to him after this? He had seen everything.

#### TRIUMPH OF MAGUIRE

Maguire's triumph was complete. Opening night was really a gala one, with more than two thousand people in the audience. The plays presented were Faint Heart Never Won Fair Lady and All That Glitters Is Not Gold. Among the company were such names as Mrs. E. Woodward, Mrs. J. B. Booth Jr., Kate Grey, J. B. Booth Jr., H. F. Daly, James Evrard, George Mitchell, T. Lobey and the celebrated ballet troupe, the Llorente Family. Before the play an ode by an unblamed poet was read by Mrs. Woodward. Here are the last lines of this little gem:

"The Muses welcome ye within these walls; And though they boast a home in marble halls, The humblest votary, the rich, the wise, Find equal favor in their grateful eyes. Then crowd the Temple at their nightly call, Ye patrons of the Drama, one and all...."

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#### TOM TAKES A BOW

And so on. But it was after the show that Maguire's turn came. Every actor in the house was applauded, and then the audience called for Maguire. But the modest man did not appear. Wrote the Alta California, October 5, 1851:

"...The audience were not to be put off at all but cried out, 'Let us see him!' and the fourth time the door opened and Mr. Maguire appeared. Deafening cheers arose as he passed across the stage and behind the curtain, and he has the happy satisfaction of knowing that our whole community appreciates his endeavors, are grateful to him for the results of his labors and smile upon his new enterprise."

#### THE SNUG SALOON

Maguire was not so overawed by his new grandeur that he failed to put up a new saloon next to his theatre. Four of his Parker Houses had burnt to the ground, but pioneer audiences liked whiskey with their drama, so Maguire built a new saloon and called it The Snug. This he was to keep, with profit, long after he sold the pretentious Jenny Lind.

#### THE JENNY LIND AND AMERICAN THEATRES

In the meantime, October 20, 1851 the American Theatre was opened at Sansome and Halleck Streets. The Jenny Lind now had an equally imposing rival. But Maguire was not to feel the effects for a while. Rumors had reached the East of a new lucrative field for the theatre, and the newly inaugurated Yankee clipper lines each brought its quota of eager actors. Every week a new actor would make his San Francisco

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debut at either the Jenny Lind or the American, playing at both in turn. There were only two theatres that counted in the city at that time, and for the present there was room enough for both.

#### THE BOOTHS AT THE JENNY LIND

Rivalry was intense. Actors and managers trooped back and forth between the Jenny Lind and American Theatres, no doubt dumbfounded by the excessive demand for their serv-Performers destined to become famous, for years made their debuts at both theatres. Mrs. Judah, Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, Mme. Biscaccianti, Caroline Chapman and her brother William, all made their first appearances here at the Jenny Lind. The three Booths -- Junius Brutus Sr. and Jr., and Edwin himself -- made the house resound with Shakespearean echoes. It was here that Edwin Booth first trod the boards of a Califormia theatre -- subordinate to his father, of course -- on July 31, 1852, in a piece called The Iron Chest. This farewell engagement of the Booths, ending on August 15, was also to be farewell to the Jenny Lind as a theatre. For the next two years, until its dismantlement in 1854, it was to serve as San Francisco's city hall.

#### MAGUIRE SELLS OUT

What factors most contributed to Maguire's sudden decision to sell out is not entirely clear. Business had been good from the start. But overhead was high, higher than

he had realized. Robinson had lowered prices at the American (\$2 was top price there with a low of 50¢) and Maguire, to meet the competition, was forced to lower his own. He had been charging from \$3 to \$1. It was rumored that his creditors, those who had advanced the money for the building of the theatre, were clamoring for quicker payment.

#### THE JENNY LIND SWINDLE

Whatever the reason or reasons for sale, the common council and board of aldermen suddenly in the summer of 1852 passed an ordinance resolving to purchase the Jenny Lind for \$200,000 and to appropriate half that amount again for dismantling the interior of the building and remodeling it as a city hall. The newspapers gleefully took up the issue. There were rousing denunciations of Maguire and the board of supervisors, and the affair was referred to as the "Jenny Lind Swindle" and "Jenny Lind Juggle." The mayor, Dr. Stephen R. Harris, promptly vetoed the ordinance. The council, just as promptly, on June 4, 1852 readopted the bill and passed it almost unanimously.

This was the signal for revolt. People were supposed to be very angry; at least the newspapers said they were, and anyway this was an excellent chance to let off a little steam. An open meeting of protest was held in Portsmouth Plaza. There were speeches, catcalls, accusations, brawls, minor riots, and in the end, of course, nothing done. Dr. J. H. Gihon spoke eloquently against the bill and was

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stormily cheered; David C. Broderick spoke just as eloquently for it, but nobody heard him. It didn't matter. The Jenny Lind definitely belonged to the city, and the sale was later upheld by the State Supreme Court.

Surprisingly enough, the Jenny Lind when altered was found to make an excellent city hall. Two years later it was declared inadequate for the growing needs of the city, and the once glorious building passed its latter years as warehouse and commercial structure until its destruction in the fire of 1906. Meanwhile Maguire, once more the saloon-keeper and man of substance, was biding his time while the American Theatre basked in the sun alone till the rise of the Metropolitan late in the year of 1853.

#### THE AMERICAN THEATRE

When the Jenny Lind III was opened October 4, 1851, it was thought that a rival was out of the question. Why, here was the most beautiful building in California, there was nothing like it in the West; it was ridiculous to think of emulation. Yet just sixteen days later, October 20, Dr. Robinson threw open the doors of his American Theatre\* on

<sup>\*</sup> Of an earlier American Theatre there is little or nothing known. Contemporary periodicals and newspapers make no mention of it and it is listed neither in the city directory

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the northeast corner of Sansome and Halleck Streets, south of Sacramento Street. And within a year he was to drive, or help drive, the incomparable Jenny Lind Theatre out of business.

Construction of the building had been going on for some time, but people were too dazzled by the magnificence of the Jenny Lind to pay much attention. Sansome Street stood on recently filled-in ground, where tide flats had been before, and few people thought as yet of buildings being erected there. As a matter of fact the American Theatre was one of the first edifices to stand on the new ground. It was not

nor in McCabe's Journal. It is supposed to have been built sometime in 1850, probably in the fall, and to have burned down in the fire of June 22, 1851. There is only one authority for this, that of George Barnes in the Bulletin of August 22, 1896. Barnes had discovered a heap of old letters in the Montgomery Block, a place much frequented by theatre people in the old days, and from these letters he testifies that

<sup>&</sup>quot;...the site of the first (American), destroyed in the June fire of that year (1851), (was) on the northeast corner of Sansome and Halleck Streets...The first American was built in 1850 by Captain J. L. Folsom...."

We might add that in the Alta California September 20, 1849 there had been previous mention of a projected theatre called the American to be built by Hypolito Adler and Marius Chapelle, but no record exists to connect it with the theatre built by Folsom.

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until October 9 that the surprised reporter of the Alta California noted that

"...everything is going on at the same time. Masons are clicking the bricks and spreading the mortar, carpenters are pounding the beams, joiners are...etc....We stopped in for a moment last evening and found all these occupations going all at once....The proscenium boxes are in an advanced stage of preparation. The first tier will be furnished with sofas, and every care will be taken and no expense spared to render the theatre for comfort and elegance unsurpassed."

It was then that doubts were expressed of the solidity of the new building and under the weight of the crowd it did sink two inches on opening night, but after that remained solid, which was no doubt very disappointing to Maguire and his friends. The opening, October 20, was two days later than the proprietors, Robinson and Weisenthal, had hoped, but on October 17 and 18 the lights were thrown on for a press preview of the theatre. The Alta California, October 18 reported:

"...Last evening the building was lighted up and presented inside a most brilliant appearance. The lights are arranged so as to extend from the two circles, there being no chandelier. On each side of the curtain and over the proscenium boxes two hanging lamps were suspended, each held up by an eagle's beak. The harmony between the gilding and prevailing colors of the house, the richness of the dome, with the pendant brilliancy of the center piece, the warmth, comfort and at the same time the aspect of drawing room elegance which the coverings of the seats give to the interior, all make the American an exceedingly pretty little theatre..."

#### PARISIAN PREFERS AMERICAN

From foregoing description it may be judged that the American Theatre could not compare in magnificence with the

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Jenny Lind. No reporter would have referred to the latter as a "pretty little theatre." Yet, on the other hand, there is the testimony of Albert Benard de Russailh, a young Frenchman visiting San Francisco at this time:\*

"I have always preferred the American, which is extremely agreeable. It has two balconies and a gallery, a dress-circle, orchestra seats, and several stage boxes. There is a great deal of typical English and American comfort. The carpets are thick and soft, and deaden your footsteps so that you can walk peacefully through the lobby and glance into the boxes without disturbing the audience.

"The house is nicely decorated with paintings and gilt-work. The boxes have red velvet curtains and the seats are upholstered in red plush. In many ways the luxury and good taste of this little theatre remind one of the Opera Comique. The company is directed by two intelligent and capable men, Mr. Robinson and Mr. Evrard...The company as a whole is not remarkable, but the public finds it adequate and shows its affection for the actors by filling the houses every evening. The orchestra is well-conducted and fairly large, and during intermissions plays all the quadrilles, waltzes, and polkas that were popular in Paris some years ago."

This, from a Frenchman accustomed to the theatres of Paris, is not bad testimony for the American Theatre. It was probably because it was less pretentious than the Jenny Lind that Russailh preferred it, though Maguire no doubt would have found it difficult to follow his reasoning.

# STARK WAVES THE FLAG

Opening night, under the management of James Stark, was of the same order as that at the Jenny Lind and was

<sup>\*</sup> Russailh, Albert Benard de, Last Adventure: San Francisco in 1851.

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equally successful. Stark, anticipating George M. Cohan, threw in a patriotic stunt, no doubt to assure the audience that they were all Americans and that this was the American Theatre.

After the inevitable opening ode, composed by Dr. Robinson, the rising curtain revealed the entire company on the stage, down the center of which Stark and Weisenthal marched bearing the American flag. Stark then recited the "American Flag," to great applause, followed by a Mrs. Eyres who sang the "Star Spangled Banner" with the company in chorus.

### ODE TO SHAKESPEARE

Not wishing to slight a poet, we give some of Dr. Robinson's rather cryptic ode:

"Could we tonight the eternal slumbers break Of Avon's Bard, and bid the dreamer wake, The astonished Muse would bid the Poet turn And sleep again beneath his honored Urn. The immortal Mind, in its unchecked career Is wed with Time, whose errand is not here; But on whirling, through each varying zone, Seeks for its rest in vast Eternity alone....

"This shrine is yours, where falls the grateful tear-Your cherished gifts have raised this temple here.
Then join with us, while we the offering bring,
A sacred gift to Avon's heaven-born King;
The God-like Poet, on whose sacred Urn,
Shall Memory here like heavenly incense burn!"

After this sublime nonsense, the company proceeded to forget the "bard," leaving him to sleep beneath his "honored urn" while they presented a piece called Armand, or The Peer and The Peasant by Anna Cora Mowatt. There followed the Misses Rivers and Chapman performing something called a

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"grand pas Styrien." Dr. Robinson then rendered one of his original songs, which must have been very comforting after his ode. The program concluded with a short farce A Day In Paris.

# THE AMERICAN THEATRE ISSUES STOCK

The American was successful from the start and it was helped financially by its policy of issuing stock to its creditors. Dividends were declared monthly and all share-holders of more than two hundred and fifty dollars were entitled to free admission in any part of the house at all performances. This solved the problem of small nagging creditors, those fleas in the dog-life of a theatrical producer, and while it did not liquidate its debts certainly enabled the American Theatre to escape the lot of the Jenny Lind. The real stroke of genius however was the issuing of free admissions. No promise of dividends could equal it in the life of a two hundred and fifty dollar creditor.

The history of the American Theatre up to the desertion of the Jenny Lind on August 15, 1852 is essentially the same as that of Maguire's theatre. The same companies and the same stars -- with the exception of Edwin Booth and his father who did not appear at the American -- alternated at the two theatres in practically the same repertory.

# THE AMERICAN THEATRE STANDS ALONE

With the Jenny Lind gone, the American Theatre definitely had things its own way with only the Adelphi and

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the San Francisco Hall (later Maguire's Opera House) to offer competition. Occasionally new stars made their appearance, such as Catherine Hayes, James Murdoch, Matilda Heron, Mrs. Catherine Sinclair (later manager of the Metropolitan) and that shameless hussy herself, Lola Montez.

### FIRST CHINESE ENTERTAINMENT

Mention should be made here of a novel presentation at the American Theatre from October 18 to October 25,1852; the appearance of the Hook Took Tong, a Chinese company of 123 performers. This was an astonishing success probably due to the novelty and exotic nature of the performances. Prices for the engagement were boosted to six dollars for box seats, three dollars for the pit and two for the gallery. And they paid. This was the first Chinese entertainment presented in San Francisco\*\* -- another precious "first" for the records -- and encouraged by their welcome the Hook Took Tong company soon built its own theatre. But the novelty was worn off and, forced to cater almost entirely to the Chinese population, the Hook Took Tong company departed in a short time for the East Coast.

### LOLA MONTEZ APPEARS

For the first appearance of Lola, May 26, 1853, an auction of choice seats was held beforehand, with first choice priced at \$65, second choice \$25, and further choices declining gradually down to \$1. Evidently there were seats left

\*\*This leaves out of account a Chinese puppet show produced in Portsmouth Square in early summer of 1852; also the occasional Chinese entertainments which catered solely to the Chinese.

<sup>\*</sup> McCabe's Journal refers to the same company as the Hong Took Tong and Hook Took Tong company. The Golden Era of Dec. 19, 1852 uses the name given in the text. Prof. Frank Fonton, of San Francisco State College Department of English, has unearthed another variation—Hook Tong Hook. With these clues the reader is left to his own orientation.

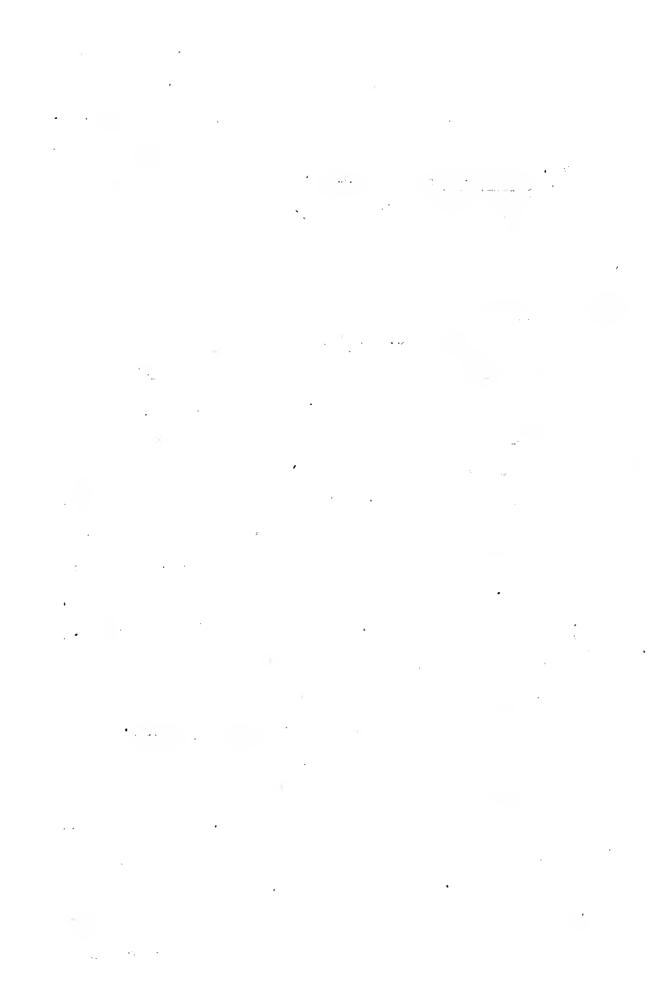
over from the auction for, at the box office, prices were raised to an unprecedented level: Private boxes, \$15; dress circle and parquette, \$5; family circle, \$2; and gallery, \$1. On the 30th she was presented in her assertedly autobiographical play, Lola Montez in Bavaria. As a dancer and actress Lola was not an unqualified success, but she excited interest enough for the Chapmans to present a burlesque of her play by Dr. Robinson at San Francisco Hall on June 20, called Who's Got The Countess?

### THE AMERICAN CLOSES ITS DOORS

On Christmas Eve 1853 the third "colossal" theatre of San Francisco, the Metropolitan, was opened and from that time on the American was relegated to a secondary position from which it never fully recovered. Very few performances are listed there during 1854, partly due perhaps to the beginnings of the first financial depression the city had suffered, and in July of that year the American I was forced to close its doors. One event of later theatrical importance, however, occurred on March 18, 1854, when Charles Thorne Jr., -- then a child and later one of the bright lights of the New York stage -- made his first appearance on any stage as Ali, the Slave, in his father's presentation of Monte Cristo.

# THE SECOND AMERICAN

Late that summer the first American was torn down and on the same site at an estimated cost of \$60,000 a new theatre, the American II, was built. It opened December 4, 1854 under management of J. A. Neafie with J. W. Thoman as stagemanager. Neafie, a newcomer to the city, had shortly before this made his San Francisco debut at the Metropolitan.



Thoman and his wife were already well-known figures on the San Francisco stage.

"The building...was three stories high, and the front part, corner of Sansome and Halleck Streets, was 46 feet by 44, while the main body of the house measured 54 feet by 120. The stage was of extraordinary depth, and contained among other appliances, a peculiar trap used in representing the Corsican Brothers, and enabling a man to be shown slowly crossing the stage, and rising gradually into view at the same time. The auditorium was divided into orchestra seats, parquet, dress circle and balcony, family circle and gallery, besides the usual private boxes at the rear of the parquet, and three spacious proscenium boxes on each side of the stage. It would seat about 1400 people but could be made to hold 2,000, being of about the same capacity as the Metropolitan Theatre."

### POOR INVESTMENT

Unfortunately the seating capacity was seldom strained by the paying public, and the American II was to be a poor investment. The opening night program, consisting of The Rivals, a Grand Pas de Deux by the Monplaisirs, a farce called Two Bonnycastles and an opening address written by Frank Soulé and recited by Neafie, was successful enough but the sour note of prophecy was struck at once by the Pionèer Magazine of January 1855 in describing the theatre:

"We are forced to say with regard to the interior of this new structure that it does not bear evidence of an educated taste. It is spacious, its general effect is brilliant and we suppose it will seat as large an audience as the Metropolitan. But there is a want of harmony in its internal architecture. The proscenium seems to be a mixture of the Grecian and the Oriental. It is neither the one nor the other....

<sup>\*</sup> Daily Dramatic Chronicle, February 22, 1868.

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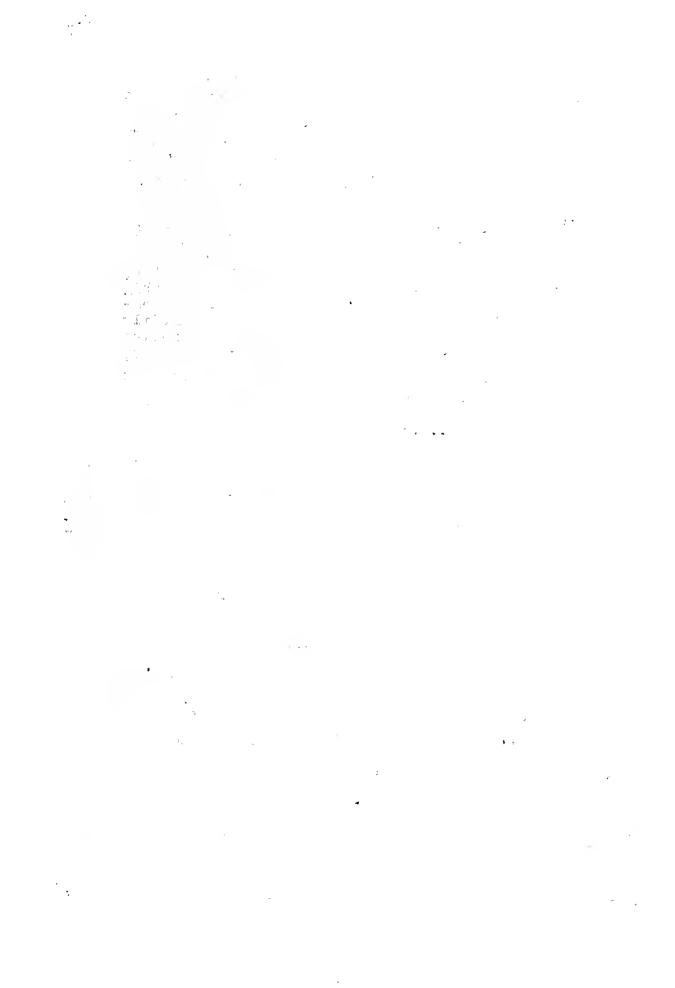
"The act drop is only less objectionable than at the Metropolitan. It is a sad hodge-podge, made up of a representation of the Golden Gate, a far suggestion of a clipper ship, a steamship such as we venture to say has not its counterpart upon the surface of the Pacific, Atlantic, Indian or Frozen Oceans, two pillars and between them a melancholy Washington upon a pedestal."

"The Wide West (it was a weekly newspaper) facetiously remarks that the cannon at Washington's
feet was unfortunately located by the painter
upon one of his little toes; which, it must be
admitted, sufficiently accounts for his lugubrious cast of countenance. We join in its recommendation that the piece of ordnance be speedily
rolled off. In short, the entire painting
means nothing. But there it is, and, if we are
to judge anything from the past, there it will
be with its fellow at the Metropolitan for the
next two years—a species of chronic intermittent eyesore, visiting the community five
times nightly..."

Like the unfortunate general on the curtain, the second American was in pain from the start. So much indeed that a little more than two months after its opening, on February 26,1855, the owner's equity in the theatre was auctioned off to P. W. Van Winkle for a meagre \$30,000.

# THE HAUNTED HOUSE

The name of the American, in the days of Dr. Robinson almost a synonym for the drama in San Francisco, had evidently lost its magic. Men's eyes were turned toward the Metropolitan, Maguire's Opera House, anywhere but toward the faded glory of the American Theatre. Conditions became so bad that the Evening Bulletin of April 5, 1856 reports the engagement of the theatre by a "party of spiritualists," who would deliver a series of lectures there while in an entranced state."



Whether the public was "entranced" enough to attend is not recorded, but that the American Theatre was not yet entirely divorced from the legitimate drama is evidenced by a report in the <u>Bulletin</u>, June 24, 1856, of the presentation of <u>Pauline</u> and <u>Slasher and Crasher</u> in its newly spiritualized but long dispirited halls.

### THE AMERICAN IS REMODELED

The theatre was thoroughly remodeled in 1859 by Mrs. John Wood who took over the managership, but it was not till the regime of Lewis Baker in 1860 that the American

"...gained much of its lost ground by quietly establishing itself as the headquarters of the legitimate drama...."\*

Under Baker such popular plays of the time as The Sea of Ice, Extremes, and Three Fast Men were put on in "hand-some style" (Daily Dramatic Chronicle, February 22,1868), and in the last play named he "was the first to introduce the female minstrels on this coast."\*\* During Baker's tenure both Edwin Booth and James Henry Hackett appeared at the American Theatre. But the revival of the American was of short duration and after its burning the Dramatic Chronicle, in the issue referred to, reports that

"...Of late years no regular performances were given at the American Theatre, but during the past few months it has been occasionally used for French and German dramatic performances, Italian Opera, boxing and wrestling matches, lectures, etc..."

<sup>\*</sup> Jacobsen, Pauline The Bulletin, August 25, 1917. \*\*\*Ibid.

### LOW RECEIPTS

How "occasionally" it was used may be shown by comparing the theatre receipts for 1867, published in the <u>Dramatic Chronicle</u>. It gives the total take at the American for that year as amounting to only \$16,359 as compared with \$172,712 for the Metropolitan and \$158,576 for the Opera House. As a matter of fact the Metropolitan and the Opera House took in \$21,643 and \$17,418 respectively in one month, more than the American Theatre collected all year.

### FOREIGN LANGUAGE THEATRE

Among the French and German plays presented at the American in the last week of its life was Adrienne Lecouvreur by Scribe, already made famous by the acting of the great French actress, Rachel. In this appeared Mademoiselle Eugenie Sen and Monsieur Bonnet, the latter -- mimus a Christian name in the records -- being considered the finest French actor ever to appear in San Francisco. Also given were the German plays Mutter und Sohn, Der Verschwender, and Graupenmueller, with a cast including Madame Ottilie Genée, Miss Franziska Roland, Julius Ascher and others. It was reported that this company interpreted "the German drama to the hearty satisfaction of their subscribers and the public."\*\*

<sup>\*</sup> See Monograph on German Theatre, Vol. IX, this series. \*\*\*Dramatic Chronicle, Jan. 4, 1868.

### FIRE ENDS CAREER

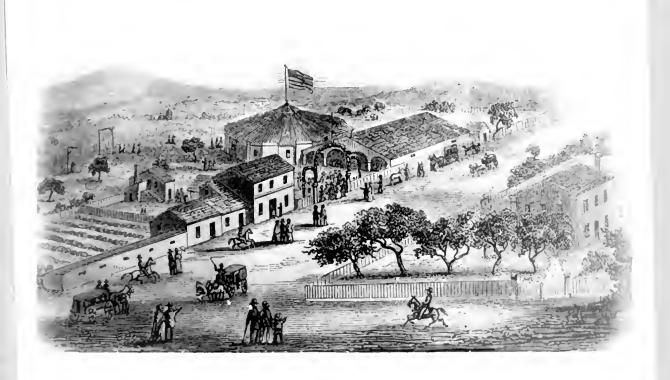
However, as the receipts show, the demand for foreign drama in the original tongue could not have been great, and it was considered no terrible loss when fire broke out in the theatre on February 16,1868 between three and four o'clock in the morning; and by five o'clock nothing remained of the old American Theatre but the bare walls. The <u>Dramatic Chronicle</u> of February 22, reviewing the history of the theatre, stated that:

"Its value as a theatre had depreciated so far that its proprietors, General Naglee and Dr. Toland, had for some time contemplated its demolition...."

The fire, however, saved them the trouble and expense, and thus it was that the American II for two hours on a February morning presented its last show before its biggest crowd in years. "The scene of a thousand dramatic triumphs" and at that time the oldest theatre in the city, it now passed into memory. Dr. Robinson, its founder and guiding spirit of its great days, had long ago left the city. Maguire lived on.

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# RUSS GARDENS



ENGRAVING COURTESY M. H. de YOUNG MUSEUM

RUSS GARDEAS

# Chapter 6

### MINOR SPOTS OF THE EARLY FIFTIES

Theatre of Arts, Armory Hall, Chinese Theatre, Union Theatre, Musical Hall, Russ Gardens, Guillot's Theatre, Turnverein Hall

### SHORT CAREERS

one of these can be called important, theatrically speaking; some of them were
theatres of a month or two, or even of a
night; among the theatres proper only the
Union had a long, if unprofitable career.
Indeed, the only successful buildings in
this chapter, the Russ Gardens and the

Turnverein Hall were not theatres at all but amusement and social resorts for the German societies. The Theatre of Arts burned down a little more than a month after its opening; Armory Hall, after a short success as a minstrel and concert hall, changed its name to the Olympic and was soon closed. The life of the Chinese Theatre was even shorter and Guillot's was permanently closed on the second night, yet all these places took a part, however small or brief, in the mad scramble of early San Francisco for more and more varied

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entertainment and cannot be left out of the account.

### LONG, FITFUL LIFE OF THE UNION

The career of the Union Theatre might be compared with that of an international fugitive, now French, now English, now German, even Chinese at the end; quickly assuming aliases as quickly dropped, with mysterious gaps in its record and with an end as shadowy as the season for its long and fitful life.

### THEATRE OF ARTS

The history of the Theatre of Arts reads like a short short story, a slice of life cut especially thin. It was opened May 19, 1851 by Ned Bingham and J. Johns on Jackson Street near Dupont, and until June 13 -- the opening date of the Jenny Lind II -- was the only theatre in the city, though no more performances are listed there. Nine days later it experienced its first and last blaze of glory, burning to the ground in the fire of June 22.

# ARMORY HALL

Armory Hall, as its name implies, was built originally as a home for the First California Guards. The building stood on the N. E. corner of Dupont and Jackson Streets and was used as far back as December 16, 1850 for a benefit concert by and for Mme. von Gulpen. Moving to Washington and Sansome Streets, it was inaugurated as a regular house of entertainment on September 13, 1852 when the Alleghanians, a group of minstrels, were presented.

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(C) •  From that time on it was utilized as a minstrel and concert hall, Mme. Biscaccianti appearing there on November 4,1852 in a benefit for the victims of the great fire which had recently occurred in Sacramento. Tickets were sold at \$3 and San Franciscans proved they had not forgotten their own conflagrations by producing a profit of \$715.

### ARMORY HALL BECOMES THE OLYMPIC

On May 15, 1853 a German theatrical company, the first in the city, took over the building which they occupied until July 1. It was renamed the Olympic Theatre October 1, presenting dramatic performances under the management of L. F. Beatty and J. H. Vinson. As in the cases of the Athenaeum and the Union, both of which adopted the name Olympic, the change of title seems to have had its usual effect of jinxing the house, for the Golden Era reports on October 30, less than a month after the opening:

"Our theatres, during the past week, have been drawing frightfully meagre audiences. At the American, Murdoch and the Bakers have been throwing their dramatic pearls to deadheads and empty boxes, and at the San Francisco Hall but few people have condescended to darken the doors, while la petite Olympic has been forced, for very lack of patrons, to 'dry up' entirely."

After this the Armory Hall seems to have returned to a military career, for no further performances of any kind are listed there nor is it mentioned again in the journals of the time.

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### FIRST CHINESE THEATRE

It has been recounted in another chapter how the Hook Took Tong company first captured the fancy of San Francisco and how, encouraged by their success, they built a theatre of their own. The Chinese Theatre, standing on Dupont Street near Green, was opened December 23, 1852, but public interest in the Hook Took Tong company seems to have been well satisfied at the American Theatre, where they had first appeared; and the final performance in the Chinese Theatre was given on March 23, 1853. One thing, however, seems to have excited journalistic curiosity: the exotic arrangement and decoration of the theatre. A paragraph from the Golden Era of December 19, 1852, the first issue of the paper, should be quoted:

"To 'outside barbarians' the style of architecture is novel. The interior is arranged in a manner quite different from our own theatres, and is, we imagine, a perfect model of a Chinese theatre. They have no tier or boxes, the whole body of the house being thrown into one parquette and pit. The stage is ornamented in rather a fantastical manner, with curious devices, the figures of men, trees, domestic animals and all sorts of sea monsters. They use no scenery other than a display of beautifully wrought shawls, raised sills, wands, etc. This singular establishment is well worth the visit. A good natured 'John' who seems to delight in pointing out the main features of the building, can always be found on the premises."

### HOOK TOOK TONG COMPANY DEPARTS

Evidently the establishment was too "singular" for any but a few curious sightseers and on March 26, three days



after the closing performance, the handsome trappings of the Chinese Theatre were sold at public auction. On the 1st of April the Hook Took Tong company departed for the East. Obviously the time was too early for a Chinese theatre in San Francisco. The patronage of Americans could be courted only as long as their curiosity was aroused, and the Chinese population of the time was hardly numerous enough to support a theatre of its own.

### UNION THEATRE A JINX

The Union Theatre, a long-lived ghost, was unfortunate from the start. Though it was to change its name many times, it could never change its luck and, as if in despair of hiding its sad identity, always returned to its original name. We see it as the People's Theatre, the Olympic, the German Stadt, the New Idea, the Chinese; but always in the directory it is the Union, except for 1862 when it is the New National and in the last record, 1871, when it is listed as the Chinese Theatre.

# OPENS AS FRENCH THEATRE

It opened May 22, 1853 on Commercial Street between Kearny and Dupont with a production by Mme. Felice and a French company. Opening night seems to have been closing night too, for no more performances are listed until September 13 when a French company under management of M.Munie presented a spectacle in fourteen tableaux entitled La Biche au

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Bois, or Le Royaume des Fees. In the cast was M. Bonnet, greatest of French actors in San Francisco. A week later he appeared for the first time as a lead, playing Silvain in George Sand's Claudine. The difficulties of a foreign troupe, aside from the natural ones of language, are well revealed by this excerpt (Italics ours)

"The French population have likewise another theatre, the 'Union,' in Commercial Street above Kearny, which for a short time was devoted exclusively to the performances of that class of people."\*

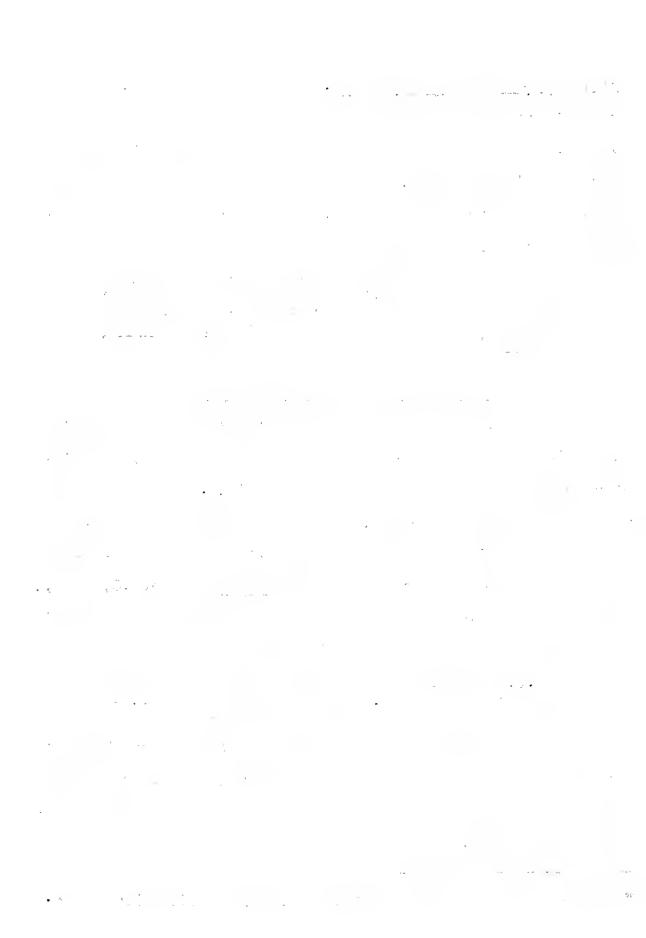
### AMERICANS ALTERNATE WITH FRENCH

Another "class of people" called Americans performed the following night under management of Ned Bingham, who had been opening and closing theatres since '49. It was another case of "hail and farewell," for no performances are listed till June 29, 1854 when Laura Keene leased the house. This in spite of the statement of the Golden Era, Sept. 8, 1853, that the Union was "in the full tide of successful operation," at the same time bespeaking for Bingham:

"...that public favor which should be extended to one whose name, as an actor and soldier, has become so familiar to our citizens."

As a soldier he was accorded full military honors; but the citizens, as always at the Union, seem to have been under the impression of attending not a dedication but a service for the dead.

<sup>\*</sup> Soule, Frank, et alia. The Annals of San Francisco. 1854.



### LAURA KEENE TAKES OVER

Under Laura Keene the Union improved its standing somewhat, if the flattering report of the Golden Era for July 8, 1854 can be trusted:

"The Union Theatre, the bijou of the Pacific Thespian establishments, opened on Thursday evening last, to an overflowing house—a house crammed almost to suffocation in every part, by an audience composed of the elite of San Francisco. It reminded us forcibly of the gay assemblages at the New York Opera House, in Astor Place, as the formation of the house resembles that of the latter....The attendance since has been extremely flattering, and is but an index of what the season will be. Last evening that sterling comedy Road to Ruin, was most admirably performed, and will be repeated tonight in conjunction with the Camp at the Union."

Included in the company was Edwin Booth, the famous Caroline Chapman, and the actors Phelps, Wheatleigh and Coad; and the troupe enjoyed the season predicted by the Golden Era, until August 1 of the same year when:

"Miss Laura Keene left quietly for Australia, to the astonishment of the community, particularly of her company at the (late) Union Theatre;—her name having been announced on the bills in connection with the play to be performed the evening of the day of her departure. Messrs. Edwin Booth and Anderson sailed on the same ship with her. The name of the late establishment was promptly changed from the Union Theatre to the People's Theatre,—the prices reduced, and the doors reopened on the 5th of August, under the management of Messrs. Ham and Wheatleigh. Excellent plays have since been brought out here by the stock company."

# THE UNION, ALIAS THE PEOPLE'S THEATRE

However excellent the plays may have been, Miss Keene evidently had some wisdom behind her apparent whim, for



the life of the People's Theatre was not a happy one and it soon became the Union again. In April of the following year Laura Keene returned from Australia, reappearing at the American Theatre April 9, but she does not seem to have renewed her connection with the Union. This reluctance of managers and actors to stay at the Union is difficult to reconcile with journalistic reports of successful engagements there, such as we have seen in the Golden Era; but the listed performances prove that engagements were invariably short and amply spaced. Even the favorite minstrel, Charley Backus, who leased the house in August 1855, was soon forced to take his grease paint elsewhere.

In February 1856 the theatre was leased by Miss Goddard and Mrs. Woodward -- their first presentation being rendered on February 6 -- the former starring in The Jewess and Mrs. Woodward in Lucrezia Borgia. Prices, as advertised in the Bulletin of February 11 were: boxes \$1; pit 50¢; gallery 25¢: private boxes, \$6 to \$10. Previously, during January, Mrs. Stark and Mrs. Woodward had held the theatre for a brief and unimportant season.

Several performances of this company are advertised in the <u>Bulletin</u>. Among the plays given were <u>Dombey and Son</u>, <u>Forty Thieves</u>, <u>Jack Sheppard</u>, <u>Clarissa</u>, <u>The Violet</u>, <u>Ernest Maltravers</u> and <u>Ben</u>, the <u>Boatswain</u>. The <u>Bulletin</u> of June 2 declares that the theatre was well attended, but the reason is perhaps explained by the news that it was

<sup>&</sup>quot;...the only place of amusement in the city at this time where the 'legitimate drama' is produced."

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The year, for the Union, was a good one. Succeeding the lady lessees were J.B. Booth Jr. and A.R. Phelps and the story of their management is the longest continuous one in the disconnected history of the Union Theatre. The first engagement of any importance under their guidance was that of the Gougenheim sisters, who played to good houses through the month of March and whose run was termed by the Herald "one of the most successful ever played in this city." Then on April 9, 1856 came the versatile Mile. Marie Duret, whose engagement was featured mostly by the display of tights. She appeared in the male roles of Romeo, Jack Sheppard, George Barnwell, and William in Douglas Jerrold's Black-Eyed Susan. Then, as if to atone for this disregard of sex, she appeared on the 21st in The Four Sisters, playing all four parts. Shortly afterwards she left for Australia.

After a brief engagement of Mr. and Mrs. E.S.Connor in a stock repertory came Edwin Booth -- as yet regarded only as the son of the great Junius Brutus -- in the title role in Hamlet. This was on May 5. Booth also appeared as Othello, with his brother Junius as Iago; and as Macbeth, with W. C. Chapman in the supporting cast. Then followed a local play grandiosely entitled The Past, Present, and Future of San Francisco, which played to excellent houses from May 14 to May 28. This was all the more remarkable since it was during the run of this play that James King of William was assassinated and the Vigilantes hanged his murderer, James Casey,

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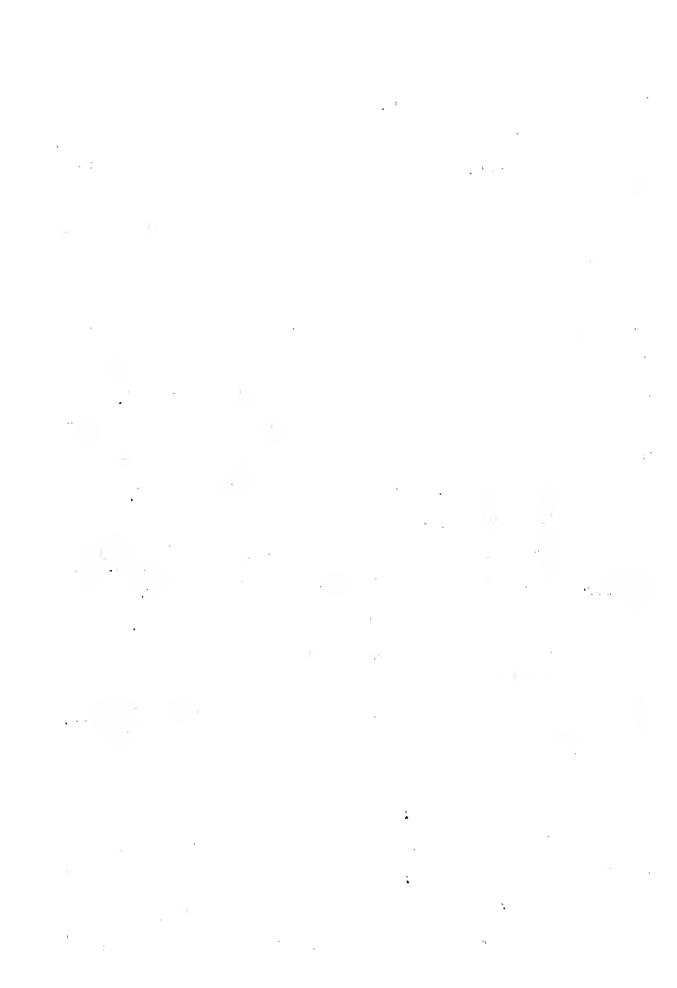
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together with Charles Cora, a gambler who during the previous autumn had shot and killed United States Marshal Richardson. The past, present, and future of the city would seem to have been too real in the streets for its imitation to attract much attention, yet the fact is that the house was crowded all during the run of the play.

McKean Buchanan stormed and fretted up and down the stage for a few days in July, after which the theatre was closed to be reopened on October 27 as a hippodrome for the galloping horses of Joseph Rowe and his Pioneer Circus. For this show, advertised as "educational," the house was remodeled so that all parts of the ring would be visible from any part of the house. A very profitable week ensued.

On January 26, 1857 the Union again attempted to break a long silence with a "Great Panorama": The Tour of Europe, advertised in the Bulletin as covering 75,000 feet and taking two and a half hours to pass a given point. After viewing the capitals, cities, towns, and landscapes of Europe the sedentary traveler finally hopped across the Atlantic to watch the comparatively simple feat of Washington Crossing the Delaware. Whereupon he stretched his legs and took up the really difficult task of welking across Kearny Street without falling in a hole.

This European tour actually did well, even at the exorbitant prices of \$1.00 for dress circle and 50¢ for parquette seats; but Max Zorer's Ethiopian Minstrels who had been knocking them in the aisles at the American were not so



lucky at the Union. In the <u>Bulletin</u> of March 2, 1857 it was announced that Zorer had taken a long lease, promising "novelties without end, 15 unequalled musicians, vocalists and delineators of negro characters in new songs, overtures, choruses, refrains, witticisms, comic scenes, and eccentricities." This long lease lasted exactly one week. The only other activity at the Union that spring was a benefit given by the German colony to a Madame Mueller when a piece called <u>Heirathsantrag</u> auf Helgoland was performed with the added novelty of an Irish Jig "getanzt von Madame Mueller."

### ALIAS THE OLYMPIC

Once more, on May 30, 1857, the Union went into disguise, changing its name to the Olympic with a joint stock company under management of James Evrard. Hamlet was the opening play, followed by a "musical mélange" and a farce entitled The Jacobite. But the house continued its old jack-inthe-box tactics (now you see it, now you don't) until December 26,1857 when the company of Mme. Céleste McKinlay closed the last recorded engagement at the Olympic.

## THE UNION THEATRE AGAIN

Neither as the Olympic nor the Union was the theatre listed in the city directory until 1862, but McCabe in his <u>Journal</u> records for 1859 a "German performance for the benefit of the Ladies' German Benevolent Society," at the Union. He tells a less benevolent story of the following year (1860)

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when the Model Artists' Exhibition was announced for the night of January 17. This proved enticing, for at 8:30 P. M. a "large audience" expectantly awaited the revelation of "Art." Revelation was not lacking nor was art, but it was not what had been anticipated. Some quiet soul had walked away with the receipts, estimated at \$600. There was no show, except for the undoubted one spontaneously produced by the cash customers. Who the thief was, was never discovered, but he must be anonymously credited as the first and last person to make the Union a paying institution.

Sometime before this there was a New National Theatre listed in the city directory for 1861 on the same site, Commercial between Kearny and Dupont. As there was no other theatre building located in that block, the New National Theatre must have been yet another in the long list of aliases for the Union Theatre. It was occupied by Frank Hussey's Minstrel Company, with Hussey and a Mr. Harvey as managers. It seems to have attained some notoriety, and consequent success, for on August 3 this notice appeared in a local newspaper:

"THE NATIONAL THEATRE CASE. -- The trial of Harvey and Hussey, managers of the 'New National Theatre,' on a charge of misdemeanor in causing to be represented an alleged immoral drama entitled the Woman of the World, commenced in the Police Court on Thursday and was ended yesterday by the jury bringing in a verdict of acquittal. A large number of gentlemen who witnessed the performance were summoned as witnesses for the prosecution; and among them we recognized several who we know wouldn't visit an improper place of amusement. So we are satisfied that the verdict of the jury was correct. The effect of the proceeding against the establishment has been to give it a wide-spread notoriety..."



This seems to have been one time when a man's "respectable character" counted against him as a witness; or the jury for once, like the reporter of the case, was not without its sense of irony.

## THE GERMAN STADT THEATRE

On April 26, 1862 the following announcement appeared in the Bulletin:

"The old Union Theatre, on Commercial Street, which has undergone so many changes, has within a few weeks been metamorphosed from a melodeon into an elegant theatre. The building has been entirely renovated with new seats, scenery and properties, and painted and gilded in elegant style. The whole expense of refitting must amount to several thousand dollars. It will hereafter be known as the 'German Stadt Theatre,' at which dramatic performances will be given by the most talented German performers in the State. The proprietor is R. Gruenwald, the building is said to have been leased for a term of fifteen years for dramatic purposes."

# THE UNION AGAIN

Evidently Herr Gruenwald did not lack a rosy optimism but in the case of the German Stadt-Union it was unfortunately founded, for on July 28, 1862 the Union was taken over by McKean Buchanan.

The humiliating prices at this now "elegant theatre" were 50¢ for dress circle and parquet; 25¢ for gallery. Buchanan, with these alluring prices and with a company composed of "greats" and future greats of the time, enjoyed an unusual success at the Union. But, like Laura Keene before

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him, Buchanan was probably wise in not extending his stay, leaving October 4, 1862. The Union's history had shown that nothing could be long alluring within its walls.

This engagement was one of the few bright spots in the history of the theatre; was in fact its farewell as a legitimate house. Walter Leman, writing in 1886, said:

"In the summer of 1862 an organization was formed, of which I was a member and the 'Union Theatre' (a building now demolished), was opened and successfully run for some three months. Some of the best of the old stock were in the venture and it deserved to succeed. Mr. Mayo was a rapidly rising young man and with Buchanan, Barry, Thayer, Mrs. Saunders and Miss Virginia Buchanan, the manager's daughter, made a company worthy of praise. Our benefits were all successes; Mrs. Julia Dean Hayne and Mrs. Judah played for mine and I had an audience up to the roof..."

On October 4,1862 the company closed its engagement with a performance of Massinger's New Way to Pay Old Debts, followed by a farce The Dutchman's Duel. Among the cast beside those already mentioned were Mr. and Mrs. Charles Pope, Walter Bray, and Walter Leman himself. It was the last gleam in the life of the Union. The rest of the way was dark or briefly overbright.

### THE NEW IDEA

It has been noted in the <u>Bulletin</u> of April 26, 1862 that the Union at some unrecorded time had become a melodeon. It was to be one again. Up to and through 1870 the Union did

<sup>\*</sup> Leman, Walter M., Memories of An Old Actor.

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not fail to be listed in the city directory, always under its proper name and always with the respectable title of "theatre."
But on January 18, 1868 the Dramatic Chronicle announced

"...the opening of the old Union Theatre, on Commercial street above Kearny, now occupied by the Chinese company, under the joint management of Shoridan Compun and Fred Bert, the latter being the present manager of the Olympic. A new style of melodeon will be given, in which the naked truth will predominate. It is calculated to open in the later part of March."

This was the New Idea, though what was new about the "naked truth" is not explained. Ferdinand Gilbert, founder of Gilbert's Melodeon, was also a partner. References to the New Idea Melodeon are difficult to trace, the house being still listed in the directory as the Union and no advertisements appearing in the newspapers; but on September 23, 1868 the Figaro, reporting the death of Ferdinand Gilbert on the 21st, refers to his partnership in the New Idea. After stating that this was located in the old Union Theatre, it goes on to say that

"...after a time he closed this theatre and bought back into his old establishment, now the New Olympic Theatre."

## THE YUN SING PING COMPANY

On the very day of the Figaro report, September 23, 1868, McCebe's Journal notes the first advertisement for the Yun Sing Ping Chinese company, appearing that evening at the New Idea. Evidently the house itself, regardless of the performing company, was being called the New Idea at the time, though the directories for 1868-1870 list it only as the Union.

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#### END OF THE UNION

The directories for 1869-70 list the Union for the last time; but in 1871 a Chinese Theatre on the same site, Commercial between Kearny and Dupont, is listed. The following year this too disappears from the record, though other Chinese Theatres are mentioned. Two items, from the Alta California and the Sacramento Union, both dated September 12,1871, refer to the demolition of the Union going on at that date. And so the Union ended. Its only glory had been its comparative longevity, but even that was something of a triumph in this city of blazing nights, and buildings, and theatres that darkened in a day.

## "HONEST HARRY'S" MUSICAL HALL

Musical Hall, not to be confused with Platt's Music Hall, had the honor of being built by Henry Meiggs, one of the boldest adventurers who ever kept out of jail. "Honest Harry" was ostensibly a dealer in lumber, but there was nothing lumbering about his style. The pride of his life was his building of Meiggs! Wharf, now Fisherman's Wharf, and nobody was ever allowed to forget the fact. So persuasive were his ways that after building Musical Hall he was elected to the board of aldermen, in which position he was accused of having issued warrants on the city treasury to the extent of \$600,000 which may have had something to do with his sudden urge for travel." Later this Balzacian manipulator built the first railroad through the Andes, running from Peru to Chile, a

<sup>\*</sup> History of California, Vol. IV, edited by Zoeth Skinner Eldridge; and History of California, Vol. III, Theodore H. Hittell.

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truly prodicious feat, at the time considered impossible and which of course brought tremendous profit to Henry Meiggs. This time he had really earned his gain -- enough incidentally to make the disputed \$800,000 look like pocket money -- which might easily be degraded into a moral lesson. (It was estimated that his contracts with the Peruvian government netted him more than a hundred million dollars.) But the builder of railroads never forgot that he had built the dingy wooden wharf which bore his name and which, as described to his Peruvian listeners, might easily have bridged the bay of San Francisco.\*

Meiggs! Musical Hall, on the south side of Bush Street between Sansome and Montgomery, was opened July 26, 1853 with a concert by the Pacific Musical Troupe conducted by George Loder and composed of Mrs. Laura A. Jones, Miss M. Leach, J. Beutler, and I. C. Smith. Tickets were two dollars.

## GENTEEL HOUSE

This is a typical example of the genteel nature of the entertainment at Musical Hall which, considering the

<sup>\*</sup> Though Meiggs was said to be in debt for \$800,000 when he left the city, he claimed that he arrived in Chile, his first stopping point in South America, with only \$8,200 and that "before he got on the high road to prosperity again, he had become so poor that he was compelled to pawn his watch." (Hittell).

Meiggs, according to Eldridge, later "bought up the claims of many, if not all his San Francisco creditors, and sought to arrange matters so that he might escape arrest and prosecution if he returned to California, but in this he never succeeded. A susceptible legislature in 1874 passed an act directing all indictments against him to be dismissed and forbidding that any others be found; but Governor Booth vetoed it, and although it was passed over the veto, Meiggs was too fond of his liberty, which a vast fortune accumulated in railroad building had made more than ever agreeable, ever to venture to take advantage of it."

nature of its founder, is surprising enough at first thought. Second thought however reveals many examples of this indulgence in "culture" by the rough and ready masters of combat. And so it went on: concerts by the Pacific Troupe, by Mrs. Robb, by Mrs. Waller, by the celebrated violinist, Miska Hauser, by Anna Bishop; and a Shakespearean reading by Catherine Sinclair. Also presented was one of the panoramas popular in those days, Overland Route to California.

One kind of production rare in San Francisco should be mentioned: the performance of an oratorio, The Seasons, on January 16,1854 for the benefit of the Roman Catholic Orphans' Asylum. Musical Hall was never used as a dramatic house.

## MUSICAL HALL DESTROYED BY FIRE, REBUILT

On January 23, 1860 a fire, beginning in the Albion House around the corner on Montgomery Street, completely destroyed the Musical Hall, along with several other buildings. It was obviously rebuilt, for the city directory, which records this fire, lists it for that year among the places of amusement, this time on Montgomery Street near Bush. On September 27 of the same year, according to the same source, another big fire broke out, again completely demolishing Musical Hall.

# MUSICAL HALL BECOMES PLACE OF WORSHIP

However, the directory again lists the house in 1862, adding that on August 15 it was to be fitted up as a "place of worship," whether of God, the devil, or Henry Meiggs it does not say. It continued in the directory until 1864.

# RUSS GARDENS

Russ Gardens, the first of the many and popular German beer gardens in San Francisco, was built by Christian

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Russ, a native German, sometime in 1853. Though opened earlier in the year, it was first advertised (in the Alta California) for a "great attraction" on October 2, 1853 featuring the "celebrated Hercules," the "Lion Hero," Monsieur Guillot who was to exhibit his "feats of strength." Monsieur Guillot, a one-man show, must have been a very fatigued Frenchman that night, for the program lists no less than nineteen "feats" to be performed by him. There were "feats on the Roman Column," "feats of Hercules," "feats with one, two, three, cannon balls," "feats of terrible strength," (three of these); and, as if ashamed of himself for loafing on the job, Monsieur Guillot topped off the program with a "fight with a California lion."

## RESORT FOR GERMAN SOCIETIES

But Russ Gardens, located on Sixth and Harrison Streets, did not merely feature strong men. It was primarily a beer garden and a place of resort for the numerous German societies in the city, notably the Turnverein; it was patronized by all who desired relaxation, entertainment, a bit of greenery, food, and beer to wash it down. Following is a detailed and colorful description of the place by an early frequenter, Charles Warren Stoddard:

"It was a little bit of the Fatherland, transported as if by magic and set down among the hillocks toward the Mission Dolores. Well I remember being taken there at intervals, to find little tables in artificial bowers, where sat whole families as sedate, or merry, and as much at ease as if they were in their own homes. There was always something to be seen, to be listened to, to be done. Meals were at all hours, and beer at all minutes; and the program contained a long list of attractions, -- enough to keep one interested till ten or eleven o'clock at night.



"I can remember how scanty the foliage was--it resembled a little the toy-villages that are made in Tyrol, having each of them a handful of impossible trees that breathe not balsam, but paint. I remember...the pavilion that was a wonder-world of never-failing attractiveness; and how on a certain occasion I watched...a man...wheel a wheelbarrow with a grooved wheel up a tight rope stretched from the ground to the outer peak of the pavilion...The man... was Blondin."

#### MAY DAY AT RUSS GARDENS

May Day, to German republicans a day of political commemoration, was the great day at Russ Gardens. Soule, in the Annals of San Francisco, reports the first May Day celebrated in 1853 (thus setting the opening of Russ Gardens at least as far back as May 1, 1853):

"May Day was celebrated very enthusiastically in 1853, the most active group being the Turner Gesang Verein (Gymnastic Musical Union). They marched 'with banners flying, and musical instruments sounding, to the gardens of Mr. Russ, near the Mission Road.' There they celebrated by dancing, singing, drinking, and smoking all day. Of course, 'Das Deutsche' was sung ardently."

The festival lasted three days with "music, oratory, gymnastics, eating, and drinking" as the features. Thus was a precedent set. (Incidentally at one of these May Day Festivals, held at the Pacific Gardens on Third and Harrison Streets, in 1856, a cannon was prematurely discharged -- killing one man and maiming another for life. The Wide West, May 18, 1856, reports that the society buried the dead man and subscribed \$500 for the survivor, and seems to think it a very handsome act.) Russ Gardens, though never listed in the city directory as were

<sup>\*</sup> Byington, Lewis Francis and Lewis, Oscar, eds. The History of San Francisco, p. 232.

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its successors -- Woodward's, The Willows, and the City Gardens, for instance -- continued prosperously for many years. These gardens, which had been the Russ residence, formed part of the rich Russ estate on a section of which stands the present Russ Building at Montgomery and Pine Streets.

#### LATER GARDENS LARGER

It was almost destroyed by fire in the summer of 1861, but in the following year it is mentioned, along with The Willows, as one of the popular resorts of the city. (Harry Gates, Call, April 21, 1901). It is not certain, but probable, that it ceased to function sometime in the sixties; for, though there is much mention of Woodward's and the City Gardens and even The Willows in the periodicals of the day, there is no talk of Russ Gardens. These later gardens were huge, pretentious establishments, all of them featuring a zoo and charging only 25¢ as against Russ' \$1 admission; and it is likely that their popularity made the original garden seem like a cheap imitation of itself.

# BEER GARDENS BECOME POPULAR

It is interesting and pleasant to note the steady growth of these German beer gardens in the city. But anyone who has ever been in Germany, or even in a transplanted "bit of the Fatherland," will not be surprised. As in the old country, they were primarally Sunday resorts for the family. Papa sat in the shade with his undramable stein of beer and talked of beer and Bismarck with his cronies; and mama, also

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well-fortified, sat in the shade with other mamas and talked, among other things, of the ubiquitous little Kinder scampering back at intervals with breathless news for mama and papa and with modest but unrelenting demands on papa's fortune. And of course there was beer for Fritz and beer for Gretchen. Warum nicht?

And of all these gardens, because smaller and closer to the old world from which it sprang, the pleasantest must have been the first of a long and noble line -- Russ Gardens.

### THE TURNVEREIN

First mention of the Turnverein has already been made in connection with the May Day festival of 1853 held at Russ Gardens. Organized sometime in 1852, its first meeting hall was located on Pine Street between Montgomery and Sansome Streets. Charles Krug was president. The worthy object of this organization, as announced, was "to maintain liberal political and religious principles, to encourage morality, to improve health, and to cultivate music."

# CENTER OF GERMAN ACTIVITIES

The Turnverein was the center of all German social activities in the city. Many of these Turnvereins had already been founded in the large cities of the United States, and the San Francisco organization preceded several more in the smaller cities of Northern California, all of which gathered annually on May Day in San Francisco. In this country

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they were simply physical culture and singing societies for German-Americans, a strange combination of purposes for any but this equivocal people of metaphysics, music, and muscles.

#### THE TURNVERLINS IN GERMANY

But in Germany they were primarily political organizations, founded originally in 1811 near Berlin by the patriotic Doctor Jahn for the purpose of organizing resistance to Mapoleonic France. After the downfall of Napoleon they continued, under their health and cultural guise, as liberal institutions for the establishment of republicanism in Junker-ridden Germany. The failure of the May revolution of 1843 caused many persecuted republicans to flee to America where they established the non-political Turnverein of which the San Francisco chapter was one of the latest. The first American Turnverein was established by Doctor Beck, a pupil of Jahn, at Northempton, Massachusetts in 1825.

# FIRST MAY DAY CELEBRATION

American citizens has already been related in connection with Russ Gardens. This date was in commemoration of the abortive revolution of 1848, a sort of July 4, you might say, with its fortune still to be made. But the celebration had all the sir of a triumph. It was a day of brass bands, parades, orations, arriving delegates, concerts, athletic events, picnics, and beer. It was a great day for all, but the happiest

men in town must have been the brewers. A good picture of the first May Day in 1853 is given by the violinist, Miska Hauser, in a letter of May 4:

"We had a marvellous supper at the Governor's house after our performance was over. When we arrived home the German Liedertafel came to each of our homes to serenade us while half of the population listened. All in all it could truly have been called a festive night.

"No other effort to unite the German people has been as successful as the singing societies. Their fine social affairs, often repeated and always welcome, give the true and maybe the only splendor in the social life of Germans in California. The brave German 'Saenger,' who truly deserve their good name, are to be thanked. It certainly is admirable of them to find so much time after days of hard work and struggle for self-preservation, to organize and give performances of such excellent calibre.

"With music and flying banners, the singers paraded by torch light through the streets of San Francisco, the women folk greeting them from open windows, and throwing corsages, wreaths, and other signs of approval from their windows. It was the women too who donated many of their magnificent flags.

"The celebration lasted till deep into the night. It seemed that the local brewers and singers were in cahoots—there was always something left for the singers, while all other people either had to pay ten-fold, or go thirsty. Sometimes the Yankees were chagrined, but after all it was only due to German humor and German thinking that they helped one another. No trespassing of social etiquette occurred during the whole procedure. Everything went off very properly—I almost forgot I was in San Francisco."\*

<sup>\*</sup> Letters of Miska Hauser, quoted by W.P.A. History of Music Project, Vol. I, Music of the Gold Rush Era.

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Just what "German humor and German thinking" had to do with the high price of Yankee thirst the patriotic Herr Hauser fails to explain; but the chagrin does not seem to have gone too deep, for these events continued to be as popular with the non-German population as they were with the humorists and thinkers themselves. They became so much a part of the city life that, without losing their native character, they almost ceased to be thought of as German.

#### THE TURNVEREIN MOVES

Turnverein Hall soon moved to the north side of Bush Street between Stockton and Powell and was used by all the numerous German musical societies in San Francisco. The Turnverein Society itself, composed of 110 members, 40 of whom were in the vocal department, was not so important musically as it was athletically and socially. (Also attached to it was a school for boys between seven and eighteen years, numbering ninety-five pupils in 1857.) Nevertheless, it remained the leader in German social life, and most of the concerts by the Germania Philharmonic Society, the Eintracht Singing Society, the Harmonie and others were given in Turnverein Hall.

# ANNUAL MUSICAL JUBILEE

Most of the professional musicians in San Francisco -- as in other cities at that time -- were Germans, and the development of these societies is probably the most important

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chapter in the history of music in San Francisco.\* And the center of all their activities was Turnverein Hall, the main scene of their concerts and headquarters of the annual German Musical Jubilee begun in 1857.

#### TURNVEREIN REBUILT

The Alta California, May 5, 1862, reports a festival staged by the "Turners" the day before, with the avowed purpose of raising funds for a new hall. It remained on the same site, Bush Street between Stockton and Powell, till 1873 when the Turnverein Hall is listed in the city directory as standing on the north side of O'Farrell Street between Mason and Taylor. \*\* In 1905 it moved to 347 Turk Street, between Leavenworth and Hyde, where it is listed in the city directory of 1910, along with a "Mission Turnverein" for which no address is given. The last stage of the Turnverein Hall began in 1915 at 2450 Sutter Street, near Divisadero, and continued on that site until 1922, the last year the hall is listed in the directory. Officials for the final year are given as Alfred Furth, president, and Carl H. Spitzer, physical director. The organization still exists, meeting in California Hall, Turk and Polk Streets.

<sup>\*</sup> See Music of The Gold Rush Era, W.P.A. History of Music Project, Vol. I.

<sup>\*\*</sup>The hall is also listed as Janke's Turnhalle. See Monograph on German Theatre, Vol. IX, p. 194, this series.

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#### BELASCO AT THE TURNVEREIN

Turnverein Hall properly belongs to social, musical, and sporting history; but one dramatic performance given there on June 23, 1871, and reported in the <u>Figaro</u> of the following day, deserves to be in the record. It was an amateur production, given by the Fire-fly Social and Dramatic Club, presenting David Belasco in his first leading role.

The play was entitled A Life Revenge, or Two Loves for One Heart. Assisting Belasco, who was highly praised for his performance, were Isidore Levin, Harris Rubin, Louis Lipman, Hattie Roach, May Corcoran, and Fanny Gibson. It is interesting to note that all the male performers, including the principal, in this German hall were Jews, or at least had Jewish names.

#### GUILLOT'S THEATRE

Last, and certainly least, in this chapter comes the sad, short story of Guillot's Theatre, opened by the "Lion Hero" of Russ Gardens on Christmas Eve of 1853. This, unfortunately, was also the opening night of the Metropolitan Theatre. Guillot's was on Pacific Street between Stockton and Dupont, but few people bothered with the address or the price of seats, which was a flat two dollars. On the following night the strong but sad Monsieur Guillot closed his doors for good. He could fight his California lion or do his "feats of terrible strength," but evidently he could not contend with the terrible strength of an indifferent public.

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## MAGUIRE'S OPERA HOUSE 1869



THE POSTER SHOWS AN ADVERTISEMENT OF "THE BRITISH BLONDES"
PHOTO COURTESY M. H. de YOUNG MUSEUM

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#### Chapter 7

#### Maguire's Opera House And The Metropolitan

#### MAGUIRE AGAIN



Re-enter Maguire. For several years after the Jenny Lind Swindle the old war horse had been content to sit in his saloon and let the theatre struggle along without him. But the unchallenged dominance of the first Metropolitan was evidently too much for him, for in 1855 he leased the

San Francisco Theatre (or San Francisco Hall) where, in a bad year, his minstrels continuously played to packed houses. In 1856 he tore down all but the foundations of the old hall and built the resplendent Maguire's Opera House. Thus began a bitter rivalry between the Opera House and the Metropolitan, which was to endure until 1873 when both buildings were torn down to make way for the opening of Columbus Avenue into Montgomery Street.

#### THE RIVALS

Though there was a four-year gap in the career of the Metropolitan -- the building was burned in 1857 and not rebuilt until 1861 -- these two theatres completely dominated the

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entertainment world in San Francisco until the building of the California Theatre in 1869. This house was established on Bush Street, which was soon to become the new theatrical center, leaving the two old rivals almost deserted in their Montgomery Street glory. This, of course, did not bother Maguire. He then proceeded to buy two Bush Street houses, the Alhambra and Shiel's Opera House, where the name Maguire nightly glared across the street at the name Maguire. Rival-ry could go no further.

But it is with his old Opera House we are here concerned and the story of its long and happy feud with the Metropolitan. And it is a story! Maguire, of course, was always great, even in decline, but in later life it must have been to these years that he turned and sighed for the greatness of his youth.

#### MAGUIRE SETS THE PACE

This bitterness should have disappeared when Maguire bought into the new Metropolitan in 1862 and even moved his troupe there for a few months; but he was soon back in the old Opera House that bore his name, working as feverishly as ever to outstrip his rivals. Indeed Maguire was always suspected of having a monopoly interest in all San Francisco theatres, but you would never have guessed this from his actions. Star succeeded star at the Opera House; novelty succeeded novelty. One night Hamlet would be played; the next night you would see Professor Anderson, the Wizard of the

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North, or a burlesque, or Billy Emerson's Minstrels, or a Chinese company en route to Paris and the imperial gaze of Louis
Napoleon. It must have been confusing at first, but the public soon oriented itself, knowing that at Maguire's one
should always expect the unexpected. This tended to deaden
the effect of his "sensations," but failed entirely to deaden
his sense of their importance.

#### THE METROPOLITAN KEEPS STEP

Thus it was Maguire who set the pace, but the Metropolitan was not easily left behind. In fact it was not left
behind at all. In 1868 the <u>Dramatic Chronicle</u> (January 18)
published the theatre receipts for the preceding year, revealing the Metropolitan as \$14,000 ahead of the Opera House, both
of them being far in advance of the other houses. At this
time neither the California Theatre nor the Alhambra had yet
been built, and there was no theatre in town to challenge
their supremacy.

However, year in and year out there was not much to choose between the two of them, and it was fitting that when they declined they should both be destroyed together, to make way for another street and another time. Their time was over, but the men who "remembered when" would be a long time here. Better out of sight than out of mind.

### SAN FRANCISCO HALL

It began shortly after the "Jenny Lind Swindle" when Maguire was keeping himself and his \$200,000 in the back-

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 ground and when, November 22, 1852, San Francisco Hall was opened on the north side of Washington Street above Montgomery. Its career began tamely enough -- no sign of the future Maguire's Opera House here -- with a vocal recital by Madame Biscaccianti, at that time very popular in the city. A short time later Kate Hayes, the "Swan of Erin" and even more popular, appeared at San Francisco Hall in a series of recitals. At this time the American Theatre, rivaled only by the small Adelphi, had the field of legitimate drama pretty much to itself; and the managers of the new hall were probably wise in featuring other forms of entertainment. At first anyway.

But on December 24, 1852 Junius Brutus Booth and George Chapman leased the theatre for dramatic productions, alternating with Kate Hayes whose concerts promised to go on forever. Booth's father, J. B. Booth Sr., had died less than a month previously, alone on a river boat near Cincinnati, Ohio. His death seems to have been a release to his sons as well as himself, for the year 1853 saw great activity on their part, all of it at San Francisco Hall. Edwin's first appearance was on February 3 in a play entitled The American Fireman.\* Others in the company were Mrs. J. B. Booth, W. B. Chapman, John Fairchild, W. H. Hamilton, and Caroline Chapman. Among their plays were Rouge et Noir, Trumpeter's Wedding, and Lessons for Ladies; not very elegant vehicles, it must be confessed, for the royal Booths to be traveling in.

<sup>\*</sup> The Golden Era, Feb. 6 (Saturday) 1853 says: "On Wednesday evening was produced another new piece, entitled The American Fireman, which introduced Mr. Edwin Booth as the hero. A fine house was in attendance and gave the new comer a hearty reception. He has a fine figure and an excellent voice, and promises a high rank in the profession."

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#### DOC ROBINSON RETURNS

On January 2, 1853 The Golden Era reported:

"The company here (the San Francisco Theatre) has recently had an acquisition in the person of the far-famed Dr. Robinson. He will sing a new and popular song....

"This must render the San Francisco Hall under the management of Chapman and Booth one of the most popular places in the city."

(It will be noticed that the terms San Francisco Hall and Theatre were used interchangeably and without discrimination, though there is no record of an official change of name.)

The "Doc," though somewhat out of voice after a period of retirement, was soon rolling the customers in the aisles with his old comic songs such as "The Umbrella Man" and "The Used-up Miner" and his "Random Rhymes," burlesquing public figures of the city to the great delight of the public. On January 16 he appeared in the comedy All Is Not Gold That Glitters. Said the Golden Era again:

"The Doctor, for once in his life, cast aside the role of comicality and gave us a new proof of his versatility as Jasper Plum."

San Francisco Theatre continued merrily with Doctor Robinson and the dramatic company, alternating these with distinguished musical performers such as Miska Hauser, George Loder, and the flutist, Christian Koppitz. All of these, judging from the repetition of their recitals, enjoyed success. On May 9 Catherine Sinclair, who was soon to open the Metropolitan Theatre, leased the hall and continued until May 25 when Booth and W. H. Hamilton took over again.

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#### WHO'S GOT THE COUNTESS?

But Lola Montez had arrived and was now drawing the curious to the American Theatre where they were dazzled nightly by her famous and daring Spider Dance. Dr. Robinson and Caroline Chapman one night attended a performance of in which Lola took three parts. By the following night they had a burlesque put together called The Actress of All Work in which the remorseless Caroline Chapman took seven parts. Came another Montez play at the American Theatre, Lola Montez in Bavaria, and as quickly and relentlessly came another burlesque by Dr. Robinson called Who's Got The Countess? In this Caroline Chapman, with exquisite spite and obvious zest, did a very suggestive imitation of Montez! Spider Dance called Spy-dear, which title was not so clever as roguish Caroline. These burlesques drew sharp comment from the would-be-shocked critics but, more important to the principals, they filled the San Francisco Theatre with howling audiences. Shortly afterward Lola withdrew from the stage.

Lola, who had stayed at the Robinson home on Telegraph Hill for some time after her arrival, was hurt and demanded an explanation of the Doctor. Replied Robinson, not very originally: "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery," which answer could hardly have satisfied the spirited darling of Ludwig of Bavaria.

Later in the summer Edmund Pillet appeared at the San Francisco Theatre in Othello, following a benefit for the

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dancer, Mme. Démier. Benefits were very successful at San Francisco Hall. Several were given for Dr. Robinson, Caroline Chapman, Junius and Edwin Booth, the Rousset Ballet Dancers and finally in that year a farowell benefit for Catherine Sinclair on December 21, 1853, three nights before she opened the new Metropolitan Theatre.

#### MAGUIRE'S MINSTRELS

One incident, important in the entertainment history of San Francisco, was the beginning of minstrel show popularity at the San Francisco Theatre. There had been minstrel shows here as early as 1849, but never had they figured as competition to the legitimate theatre. Maguire, who leased the theatre after the bank panic of 1855, succeeded in making these minstrel shows a serious factor in the life of San Francisco. Charley Backus! Minstrels, Christy's, Maguire's, The San Francisco Minstrels: all of them appeared at the San Francisco Theatre with great success, particularly Backus! Minstrels.\*

### MAGUIRE'S OPERA HOUSE

Maguire was never to lose his fondness for these minstrel shows, but he had other plans in his restless mind, and the San Francisco Theatre was too modest for the plans of Tom Maguire. Besides, the Metropolitan was being called the

<sup>\*</sup> See Monograph on Minstrelsy Vol. XIII, this series.

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The second secretary of a second seco  finest theatre in the West (some said in the entire country), and this was intolerable, seemed in fact a direct affront. So, in the summer of 1856 he sent his minstrel troupe on tour, tore apart the old San Francisco Theatre and on November 29, 1856 opened the doors of Maguire's Opera House. Around the corner, on Montgomery Street, was the Metropolitan. And the battle was on.

among other things, he began as a gambler; whereas it should be said in his praise that he always remained one. Fire, hard times, public indifference, nothing could shake his tremendous confidence in the fortune of Tom Maguire. He would try anything, not once but a dozen times. Theatres were losing money in 1856; even the Metropolitan was shaky. It was a bad time to build. So Maguire stroked his moustache and built the Opera House.

### VIGILANTES AND MINSTRELS

Conditions were really bad in San Francisco. What with the financial depression and the Vigilantes, the town was counting its pennies and not inclined to be amused. The Vigilantes -- after hanging Charles Cora and James Casey earlier in the year for the murders of United States Marshal Richardson and James King of William -- had infected the usually free and easy city with their self-righteous arrogance. Yet Ma uire in his old San Francisco Theatre had continued blithely, and successfully, with his minstrol shows. On May 29,

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a week after the double hanging, all the theatres in town except the San Francisco Theatre were closed. John Nugent, editor of the <u>Herald</u> and a bitter opponent of the Vigilantes, notes sarcastically on this date:

"The Minstrels are now the only legitimate source of amusement in our city, with the exception of the Vigilance Committee."

#### NOVELTY NEEDED

And now Maguire was sinking thousands of dollars in his new Opera House and intending to bring whole troupes of grand opera singers from the East at his own expense. True. his minstrels had been playing to packed houses and his Snug Saloon, conveniently near the new house, could be counted on for revenue: but a theatre of this size and initial cost needed continuous success to keep it going. No one could tell when the people would tire of the minstrels; drama was in the doldrums, and even in New York grand opera had never been, nor is it now, a paying venture. Novelty was needed and variety. But Maguire was the man to produce them. he not been, the history of the theatre in San Francisco would most likely have been a much different and much lustrous story. Whatever his motives, it was due to this belligerent bartender and illiterate gambler that San Francisco can now boast of its great theatrical tradition.

#### OPERA HOUSE PRAISED

The day before the regular opening, November 28, 1856, Maguire threw open the doors of his new house for

inspection. It was a spacious theatre, 55 feet wide by 137 feet deep and 50 feet high. The stage was 35 feet deep with a large orchestra pit in front. It was entirely lighted by gas with a huge chandelier containing twenty burners suspended from the dome. Unfortunately this did not arrive in time for the opening, but even without it the building was amply lighted. However, this was one time Maguire could not claim to be an innovator, the Metropolitan having been illuminated by gas some time before this. But the Opera House brought high praise from the critics. The Bulletin, November 28, 1856 wrote:

"On each side of the drop curtain, or at the proscenium, there are two large private boxes, constructed in the style of those in the Metropolitan Theatre of New York. They are placed one above the other, and are highly ornamented with gilded mouldings and rich hangings of crimson and gold. The drop curtain, a very large and fine one, represents the sea-born city of Venice, with its domes, towers and palaces. One of the great canals is seen in front, with barques and gondolas floating upon it. foreground is the marble porch of a palace, with columns and tapestries; and there are not wanting the figures of high born ladies and gallant chevaliers. The view of the stage is very pleasing. When the curtain is up, the spectator looks upon the scenes, which are all new, through a rich framework, as it were, of golden mouldings and decorations of crimson."

#### NO CURTAIN LIKE IT

Even after a lapse of sixty-one years Maguire's Opera House and its resplendent curtain were to be remembered with admiration. Johnny Ryan, once a call-boy there, told

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Pauline Jacobson, who interviewed him for the <u>Bulletin</u> on August 18, 1917:

"Maguire's looked exactly like the Columbia Theatre (formerly Stockwell's Theatre, built in 1893) only not all that g-r-and gilt. There was fine cushions, but not all that velvet like in the Columbia but fine cushioned chairs. It was lighted with chandeliers but no electric lights. Everything was lighted with gas in them days. But no one didn't have any more elegant curtain. It was like a ballet dance. Oh, they ain't got no curtain in town like it."

Johnny may have been looking back to the Golden Age, but his account does not conflict with the reports of contemporary newspapers and periodicals. This same <u>Bulletin</u> for November 28, 1856, sixty-one years before Johnny Ryan's eulogy concludes:

"Taking a view of the whole-the pure white walls and the high and extensive dome over head --the spectator is struck with the airy appearance of everything about him. As he casts his eyes forward towards the stage, he must be pleased with the crimson and gold in contrast with the white, all glittering in the gas light. How all these may stand the test of time and familiarity we do not know; but they certainly look very fine as they have come from the hands of workmen and we think that great taste has been displayed throughout, especially upon the proscenium."

#### MORE MINSTRELS

Maguire continued with his blackface shows, opening with the San Francisco Minstrels, assisted by members of the former Backus Minstrels in "songs, refrains, jigs, banjo solos, tragedy, ballads, burlesque, opera, fancy dances, comedy, and farce." Billy Birch also appeared in a popular farce entitled



Schermerhorn's Boy. Prices were \$1 for dress circle and orchestra seats, 50% for parquet and \$10 for private boxes. Legitimate drama was still playing to small houses early in 1857 and Maguire's merry crew of minstrels was all the rage. Even the Metropolitan and the American theatres followed his example early in March, deserting the drama for variety and circus shows. Concert Hall presented a magician called Monte Cristo and two minstrel shows. Maguire, not to be outdone, countered with the "Wizard of Wizards" Jacobs, of whom it was advertised that he played to 14,645 people in thirteen nights.

#### MINSTRELS AND THE DRAMA

Legitimate drama was getting to be a novelty in San Francisco, so it is not surprising that in the spring of 1857 Maguire turned back to it again, presenting Julia Dean Hayne supported by such players as Mrs. Judah, Charles Pope, Walter Leman, and Frank Mayo. The opening drama was The Wife which had been the first play produced in San Francisco at Washington Hall early in 1850. Mrs. Hayne remained three weeks at the Opera House, but the time for the revival of drama had not yet come and she was replaced by the San Francisco Minstrels, featuring Birch, Campbell, and Wells.

It was not till after the burning of the Metropolitan in August of 1857 that Maguire attempted to revive the legitimate drama again, presenting Mlle. Duret.

This engagement was followed by that of Miss Emma Stanley on October 10. She was a remarkable monologue artiste



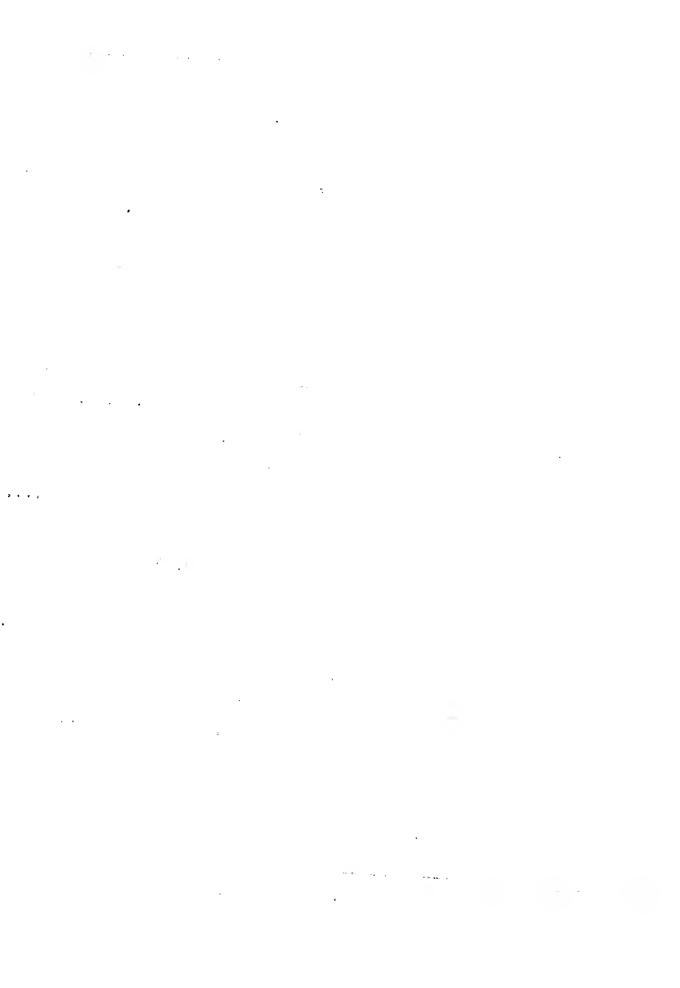
who undertook the presentation of <u>The Seven Ages of Woman</u>, playing no less than 24 characters "with instantaneous change of voice, look, manner and costume."

The San Francisco Minstrels, which had added Charley Backus to the roster of stars, returned for two weeks with a change of performance each night until November 7.

What followed must be one of the longest farewells on record for the advertisements each evening in the <u>Bulletin</u> recorded an additional performance of the farewell appearance of Miss Annette Ince which culminated on the 39th night of the farewell engagement. <u>The Marble Heart</u> was given with a distinguished cast which included Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Booth, Mrs. Judah, and Messrs Phelps and Ryer. The advertising for this long farewell had promised that Miss Ince would be "supported by the combined histricnic talent of the State.... The Standard and Classical Drama will be produced during this engagement in its Grandeur and Purity."\*

It was during this run that the brilliant actor Harry Courtaine made his first bow to San Francisco audiences. On November 23 a <u>Bulletin</u> advertisement announced he would play in <u>The Little Treasure</u> as Capt. Walter Maidenblush "with songs." Courtaine was a popular actor, though unreliable and a notorious drunkard. He spent so much time in jail that he is said to have had a special cell, always kept in readiness for his next debauch.

<sup>\*</sup> Daily Evening Bulletin, November 7, 1856.



#### MAGUIRE IS SUPREME

From this time until 1861, the year of the building of the second Metropolitan, Maguire had no rival with the exception of the Lyceum Theatre, built in 1858 and burned in 1860. Yet even he had a hard time beating the financial depression, his only continuously popular star being Mrs. John Wood, a highly praised comedienne of the day whom he first presented at the Opera House on January 18, 1858 and who appeared for forty-four consecutive nights. Time and time again Maguire was forced to call her back to the Opera House, after disastrous orgies of badly played Shakespeare and cheap melodrama.

Mrs. Wood's first appearance was in a musical comedy, Josephine, or The Fortune of War, and a burlesque of The Merchant of Venice with Harry Courtaine as Shylock. Others of her productions, mostly burlesques, were The Invisible Prince, in which Caroline Chapman appeared, The Corsair, Cinderella, Fortunio, Actress by Daylight, and London Assurance.

#### NO TRAGEDY WANTED

Maguire then made the mistake of presenting the aging James W. Wallack in a series of tragedies and romantic melodramas, including <u>Werner</u>, <u>The Maid's Tragedy</u>, and <u>William Tell</u>. Not even a production of <u>Macbeth</u> could move the harassed and weary public into the theatre. They wanted comedy, variety, minstrelsy, burlesque, anything but tragedy or Schilleresque bombast. Even Shakespeare failed to draw -- at

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least the kind of Shakespeare they were supposed to like and sure to get. Seeing this, Maguire brought back Mrs. Wood and her husband, whose happier stay endured till April 18, 1858 when Maguire closed the Opera House for alteration. The redecorated theatre, enlarged by an extra tier and now seating 1700 people instead of 1100, was reopened on May 6 with the unfortunate Wallack, enforced by the Booths and Mrs. Judah, appearing in Civilization.

#### MRS. WOOD SAVES THE DAY

That year was not unsuccessful for Maguire, in spite of the low state of the drama, though for this he could thank Mrs. Wood. There were engagements of the Christy and San Francisco Minstrels, of the Booths, of the John Lewis Bakers; but always it was Mrs. Wood who returned to the Opera House to save the situation. One peculiar and triumphant production should be mentioned however, that of a new play entitled The Mormons, or Life at Salt Lake City. At that time there was strong feeling in California against the Mormons who were supposed to have dreams of empire in the West and were already claimed to have great proprietary interests on the West Coast. However false this probably was, these rumors proved highly profitable for their dramatic exploiters.

#### MAD MAGUIRE AND THE HATTER

And, since we are dealing with Maguire, his quarrels cannot be omitted, this year's foe being John Wilson of the

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Lyceum who several times, on the same night, offered the same play as offered by Maguire. Another battle culminated with Maguire's arraignment in court by Ross M. Adems on May 3 on charges of threatened assault and battery. Adams, a hatter, who subleased a storeroom next to the Opera House, claimed Maguire demanded his store be vacated and when he refused "threatened to put Adams out of the house, and said that if it would not cost over \$500 he would batter his face so that he would not do any more business."\*

Perhaps it was the cheap price put on his face that moved the hatter to bring suit; maybe it was merely caution; but the result was that Maguire promised not to molest Adams further and the case was dismissed. But in this case it was obviously not the hatter who was mad, for that same day Maguire was hailed into court by William M. Barker on another charge of assault and bathery, this time carried out; evidently a thorough job too, for the case was continued when the plaintiff failed to appear.

# THE IRISH COMEDIANS

In the early part of 1859 Maguire, with Lewis Baker as his manager, continued to present Mrs. Wood and a new arrival, John Collins, who played Irish character parts and was also considered a fine Irish ballad singer. Collins figured as a counterattraction to John Drew who was appearing in the

<sup>\*</sup> The Bulletin, May 3, 1858.

. 7.0 ,  same roles at the American and the Lyceum. To those who still remember Drew's son, the suave imperturbable John Drew, it is odd to note that Drew was considered the better man in low comedy roles, while Collins was rated as the more polished actor of high comedy.

## OPERA HOUSE REMODELED

On March 27 Maguire again closed his Opera House for remodeling, reopening on April 20 with James Stark, the Bakers, Mrs. Judah, Sophie Edwin, and the Sisters Mandeville in The Hunchback. It was now that Maguire developed that passion for opera production which, though remunerative at times, was to cost him so many thousands of dollars. It was said in later years that if it had not been for grand opera Maguire would have died a millionaire, which is a very doubtful claim. Men like Maguire live like millionaires; they die how they can.

# MAGUIRE GOES INTO OPERA

On May 5 he introduced Bianchi's Italian Opera Company in Il Trovatore, alternating opera with productions by his stock company and the San Francisco Minstrels. But by the end of the month he had quarreled with Signor Bianchi and canceled the engagement. The Italian Opera Company then moved to the American Theatre and Maguire soon filed suit, claiming that Bianchi was using his musical scores without permission. These scores were valued at \$400.



# BLUE SATIN SOUVENIR PROGRAM 1859



PHOTO COURTESY M. H. de YOUNG MUSEUM

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Maguire however had only started, and immediately after the falling out with Bianchi he imported the English Opera Troupe from New Orleans, presenting such old favorites as La Sonnambula, The Barber of Seville and The Bohemian Girl. This company was popular, but Maguire suddenly abandoned opera for that year, presenting in June and July the Irish comedian, John Collins, who had had such a successful engagement earlier in the year. With him appeared Fanny Morant and Avonia Jones, who also had awakened interest in San Francisco audiences, partly because she was known to have been involved in scandal sometime before in the East.

## THE WIZARD OF THE NORTH

For the rest of the year he presented no star or company of great importance, though another of his novelties, Professor Anderson, Wizard of the North, attracted large audiences late in the year and through the beginning of 1860.

# NOVELTIES AT THE OPERA HOUSE

About this time Lewis Baker was reviving the old glory of the American Theatre but Maguire continued to turn from one form of entertainment to another, almost all of them with success. He put on the English Opera Troupe again, the Grand Italian and English Opera Company, Madame Biscaccianti, "The Gorgeous Mongolian Spectacle," the Wizard of the North again, the Martinetti-Ravel pantomime troupe, Billy Birch's

Minstrels, Julia Dean Hayne, James Hackett, Charles Wheatleigh -- any and all performers in anything from an "electro-biological" demonstration to a performance of Othello. Baker left the city and the American Theatre faded again; the Lyceum burned down in November of 1860, and Maguire was alone and supreme.

## REBUILDING OF THE METROPOLITAN

Then in the spring of 1861 a fever for drama swept the city again; it was now up to Maguire to produce drama, and he did, though he did not neglect occasional novelties. All that spring his theatre was packed at performances as varied as Othello and The Octoroon, Julius Caesar and The Colleen Bawn and The Dead Heart. And then on April 10 John Torrence, Maguire's old carpenter, stated that the old Metropolitan would be duplicated by a new theatre of the same name and on the same site as the original. The new Metropolitan was opened on July 1, 1861. Four years had gone by and now the battle was to be renewed with no letdown for twelve years, till both theatres had been razed into memory. But Maguire was ready.

# JOSEPH JEFFERSON

To combat the new sensation, Maguire introduced Joseph Jefferson to San Francisco audiences. Jefferson, at that time in his early thirties and fresh from a successful season at the New York Winter Garden, does not seem to have

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been so lucky in San Francisco, though he stayed on at Maguire's for six weeks. At that time he appeared, August 2, 1861, in Rip Van Winkle, which was to be his lifelong triumph when later revised by Dion Boucicault.

## MAGUIRE AND THE COLLEEN BAWN

Maguire was not long in becoming enbroiled with the Metropolitan management. Charles Wheatleigh had announced a performance of Boucicault's <u>Colleen Bawn</u> for August 29. So on August 28 Maguire produced the same play with the Irish comedian, William O'Neil in the principal male role. Wheatleigh immediately commenced suit in the United States Circuit Court, claiming that he had the sole right to play the piece in California. Pirating plays was an established custom in those days, and the suit was unique. But ideas had evidently changed, for the injunction was granted and Maguire was forced to close his theatre on September 1, reopening the next evening with <u>The Seven Sisters</u> while around the corner Wheatleigh was producing the "authorized version" of <u>The Colleen Bawn</u>.

# CIVIL WAR BITTERNESS

There followed months of fierce competition, of "sensational offerings" at both theatres, of things novel and yet more novel, of changing casts and stars; yet in November the unpredictable Maguire had persuaded Wheatleigh to forget their differences and appear at the Opera House in a series



of Boucicault pieces. The rivalry between the two theatres remained as hot as ever, but it was a tempest in a teapot compared with the unreconcilable bitterness between the Civil War factions which had finally reached San Francisco. News had been slow at first, relying as it did on the Pony Express, but in October this was replaced by the telegraph, and war fever burned as hotly as the news that came off the wires.

## MAGUIRE MAKES UP

California had already come out for the Union in 1860, and in the fall of 1861 many volunteers were being shipped east; but there were many secossionists in the state and feeling ran high. In the face of this it was difficult to harbor mere grudges of the box office for long; and besides, Maguire was nover the man to sulk when it paid him to be reconciled. No Wheatleigh, no Boucicault; he wanted Boucicault, so he took Wheatleigh. In fairness, it must be added that Maguire, even apart from his interests, was never the man to hold grudges long. He flamed with fury, he fought; but he was also too fired with the future to dwell in the cooled heat of the past.

# THE VARIETIES

And then in early March of 1862 Maguire bought an interest in the Metropolitan and moved his dramatic troupe to that theatre. The Opera House was renamed The Varieties, under management of Frank Hussey, and advertised as "The only



place in the city where you can witness Opera, Comedy, Tragedy, Farce and Minstrelsy. Even this remarkable choice of entertainment failed to draw and in mid-October Maguire, who had been indulging in grand opera again at the Metropolitan, moved back into his Opera House, now again so called, and opened season with a minstrel show, featuring Tommy Peel, William O'Neil, Billy Birch, and Charley Backus.

## THE OPERA HOUSE AGAIN

But opera had become a grand passion for Maguire, and though the results were anything but grand, he was soon back at it again, alternating with minstrelsy, variety, and burlesque. The Metropolitan was once more the enemy, and the two went on rivaling each other in the old spectacular fashion until the end of their days. The problem was for one house to find plays offering a greater sensation than those presented at the other house. East Lynne followed The Dead Heart and The Mistake of a Life followed that, and the Lord only knew what weird form of entertainment would suggest itself next to Maguire or whatever rival was installed at the Metropolitan.

# THE HAKED LADY

And then on August 24, 1863 Maguire introduced "The Naked Lady," Adah Isaacs Menken, in her famous role of Mazeppa. This woman -- the shock and delight of her time, admired by Mark Twain, Bret Harte, Walt Whitman and later by

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Swinburne and Alexandre Dumas, romanticized by all and by no one more than herself—was, of course, a sensation. Mazeppa was a male role, featuring a daring ride into the hills by the hero, played by Adah Menken with short hair, flesh-colored tights and very little else. The fide was really dangerous and Menken was hurt several times in the Opera House; but the mingled shock and excitement evinced by the audiences must have been a delight to her romantic soul.\*

She attempted other roles, which required more acting ability than she possessed, but Adah Menken didn't need it. Until her departure, January 24, 1834, Maguire's Opera House was the only theatre in the city worth mentioning. The Metropolitan might as well have closed its doors. But with Adah gone the Metropolitan revived and the old rivalry went on as fiercely as ever. Menken returned to Maguire's on April 12 for a short engagement and sailed for the East on April 23.

# CHARLES KEAN, "OUR CHARLEY"

Autumn of 1864 brought Charles Kean and his wife, Ellen Tree, to Maguire's Opera House, in a repertory of Shakespearean plays and minor tragedies. Their popularity may be attested by the fact that when they left the city in February of 1865 they took with them \$30,000 in return for sixty nights of acting, an average profit of \$500 a night. Verses by an unknown local poet may be cited, comparing Kean with the elder Booth:

<sup>\*</sup> See Adah Isaacs Menken, Volume 6, this series.

•  "When Booth's Shakespearean spirit fled,
The drama's orb grew dim-Methought the crooked hunchback king
Had died along with him.
But no! by kindred spirit raised,
The crown we will still maintain-For in our gifted Charley Hean
Richard's himself again."

Besides "our Charley," 1864 also brought a return of the Sunday blue laws which remained effective for years. Maguire, with several others, defied the law by remaining open on Sunday, but a fifty dollar fine quickly convinced him that Saturday was the last night in the theatrical week.

## MAGUIRE'S BRIGHT IDEA

The year 1865 marked the end of the Civil War, but not the private ones of Maguire. He had opened his unfortunate Academy of Music; he lost thousands of dollars in operatic binges, and in September he took another fall on the Wheatleigh-Boucicault question. Wheatleigh, again at the Metropolitan, announced Boucicault's Arrah-na-Pogue for the 25th of the month. And Maguire had a bright idea. On the 21st he produced an "original version of the celebrated story of Arrah-na-Pogue," (the story itself was common property) entitled The Wicklow Rebel. Unfortunately this seems to have been pretty inferior treatment and the opening of the original Boucicault play saw the closing of the Maguire version.

According to Puck of October 1865:

"This extremely bright idea was productive of no other effect than to advertise the genuine Arrah-na-Pogue..."



## MAGUIRE THREATENS A LADY

Maguire had acquired a new star, Mme. Vestvali, in the meantime, who he had hoped would effectively combat the success of Wheatleigh at the Metropolitan. "Vestvali the Magnificent," he called her, but he was soon using less endearing terms, for on October 27 the lady had Tom arrested. According to her complaint Maguire had threatened to "break every bone in deponent's body before deponent shall leave the city," furthermore calling her a "damned fiend under the mask of a woman" and adding that she had "come to the right man." She certainly had.

She also added a thirty thousand dollar suit for breach of contract, but both this and the criminal complaint were dismissed when Maguire promised to be good and not molest her again. But Maguire, just to round the year off, was soon in another brawl with a W. J. McDougal, and the town was entertained with a jingle, written by Mark Twain, in celebration of these two epic battles:

"For shame! oh, fie!
Maguire, why
Will you thus skyugle?
Why curse and swear
And rip and tear
The innocent McDougal?

"Of bones bereft
Almost, you've left
Vestvali, gentle Jew gal;
And now you've smashed
And almost hashed
The form of poor McDougal."

<sup>\*</sup> Rourke, Constance. Troupers of the Gold Coast, or the Rise of Lotta Crabtree. p. 88

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## EDWIN FOREST AND McCULLOUGH

But Maguire, in between fights, was still very much in the picture. On May 14, 1866 he introduced the famous Edwin Forrest to San Francisco audiences. He had prepared for this honor by again improving the Opera House, enlarging it by 400 seats and 6 private boxes, installing a new ventilating system, redesigning the whole theatre and building new scenery.

Forrest opened in <u>Richelieu</u> and continued with some box-office success for six weeks, though the critics were not kind. He had always been accounted a ranter yet accepted as a great actor, but now he was a man in ill health, broken by his own savage temperament and his long continued and still active legal battle with his wife, Catherine Sinclair. The one thing important to San Francisco about his stay was that he brought with him John McCullough, soon to become one of the main props of the San Francisco stage.

# HARRY COURTAINE GETS DRUNK

son of romantic plays such as <u>Camille</u>, <u>East Lynne</u>, <u>As You Like it</u>, and <u>Romeo and Juliet</u> with McCullough, Harry Courtaine, Mrs. Judah, Kate Denin, and John Wilson. But the heavy hand of Forrest still lay like a policeman's on the bowed shoulders of the public and it was slow to respond to its release. The only bright incident of the season was the breaking out of Harry Courtaine into one of his periodic and entertaining sprees. Maguire's bad boy was drunk again.

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## HARRY REDEEMS HIMSELF

But a brighter season followed with the arrival of a new comedian and musical comedy star called Lady Don, who was an instant hit. This time Courtaine redeemed himself by staying sober, and in a review of a burlesque of Orpheus and Eurydice, we hear (Bulletin, Aug. 16, 1866):

"Harry Courtaine did the crusty old ferryman marvellously well, considering he had only ten minutes to prepare in."

Two weeks later the same critic informs us, in the <u>Bulletin</u> of Aug. 30, 1866, that

"The farce of <u>Tommy</u> and <u>Sally</u> was received with the highest favor. Lady Don made a capital hit as 'Sally Scraggs,' while Harry Courtaine kept the house in a perpetual roar by his inimitable personation of 'Tom Tape.' This man's versatility is wonderful, and if he only took a little better care of his reputation he would take rank among the greatest actors of his time..."

## THE THIRSTY IRISHMAN

This thirsty Irishman was evidently, in spite of his "reputation," just that: one of the best loved actors of his time, whether he "took rank" or not. For twenty years he sinned, went into confinement, repented and was forgiven with unrelenting regularity; but he always returned to delight the public and even the most grudging of critics could not deny his appeal.

# THE TOLERANCE OF MAGUIRE

It is remarkable with what toleration Maguire treated the man. Courtains must have caused him a great deal

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of trouble, expense, and vexation; yet all through the days of the Opera House the name of Courtaine is found on the bills and press notices. It is related that a month after his arrival from London, Harry went on his first San Francisco binge and Maguire had him jailed. The cast, thinking Courtaine unjustly treated, bailed him out. And Harry of course took up where he left off. Maguire the next morning called the company together. His talk was brief:

"Well, boys," he said: "you've seen fit to bail Courtaine out and to undo my work. You have done him a great injury. If you had known the character I received with him from London you might not have been so hasty. I cut him short, as I was advised to do, as the only means of keeping him at work. Your action has upset the whole business. Good morning."\*

Another who first appeared with Lady Don at the Opera House was Harry Edwards, a popular actor of his time but better remembered now as a charter member and first vice-president of the Bohemian Club, at that time a club for Bohemians and ungraced by the august presence of a solitary banker.

# MAGUIRE MAD AGAIN

In April of 1867 Maguire again went to the wars, this time with justice on his side though it was not rendered him. If Maguire seems to have been wrong in most of his

<sup>\*</sup> Bulletin, Articles on Maguire, by Pauline Jacobson, Aug. 18. 1917.

battles, it must be remembered that the dramatic papers which were then springing up, notably the <u>Dramatic Chronicle</u>, constantly gave him the worst of it because he refused to advertise in their pages. These papers had great influence, but they can hardly be relied on for evidence.

## BY HOOK OR BY CROOK

Maguire, who had gone East earlier in the year, had purchased a play in New York called The Black Crook, a spectacular leg-show which had caused great furore in the East, being well advertised by copious denunciation from the pulpit. This spicy display had opened at the Opera House April 15. During the previous month both the Metropolitan and the Opera House had advertised for "young ladies," the Metropolitan calling their version of the play The Black Rook. Julien Martinetti, manager of the Metropolitan, immediately applied to Judge Deady of the United States Circuit Court for an injunction to prevent Maguire from presenting his play. Martinetti claimed that James Dowling had copied his "original" version and sold it to Maguire for \$100.

Maguire countered with his own claim, demanding an injunction against Martinetti. The question of who got "rooked" and who was the crook was recolving itself into a real comic opera, vastly more entertaining than the play could possibly have been. On April 19 the Olympic Theatre put it in its place, advertising in the <u>Daily Dramatic</u> Chronicle:

"Tonight, for the first time in California, will be presented the UNSTOLEN COPY of the BLACK HOOK WITH A CROOK!

And the public may rest assured that there will be NO INJUNCTION as this wonderful Scenic Spectacle has been arranged expressly for this Theatre by MERCURY, THE GOD OF THIEVES...."\*

#### JUDGE DEADY DECIDES

But his solemn Honor, Judge Deady, proved himself the greatest comedian of the lot by denying both injunctions, though finding Maguire to be the owner of the original play. Said the judge:

"It cannot be denied that this spectacle of 'The Black Crook' merely panders to the pernicious curiosity of very questionable exhibitions of the female person...I am strongly impressed with the conviction that an injunction should not be allowed in this case, on the grounds that it is not within the...power of Congress to encourage the production of such exhibitions, as neither promote the progress of science, or the useful arts."\*\*

A remarkable man, Judge Deady, both in his use of the English language and of his reasoning powers; but it is difficult to see what the progress of science and the useful arts or the Judge's regard for public decency had to do with a man's claim to his own property.

Maguire evidently was of the same opinion, for at the end of April he withdrew the play, while the <u>Black Rook</u> cawed merrily on at the Metropolitan until May 16. Its success was due to the superiority of the ballets produced by the Martinettis.

\*\*Ibid.

<sup>\*</sup> Daily Dramatic Chronicle, April 20, 1867.

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## LAWRENCE BARRETT COMES TO TOWN

The Opera House had entered into a decline from which it never fully recovered, but Maguire still had an occasional ace up his sleeve. On February 17, 1868, to match Wheatleigh's success at the Metropolitan, Maguire introduced Lawrence Barrett in <u>Hamlet</u>. McCullough appeared with Barrett. Unfortunately Harry Jackson was so drunk that he could not appear as the Gravedigger and, worse yet, the equally drunk David Anderson did appear. Nevertheless Barrett made a good impression, the <u>Bulletin</u> reporting February 18:

"Hamlet...was sustained in a manner that stamps the newcomer as one of the foremost actors of the day. Mr. Barrett has a fine stage presence, a manly carriage, a thoughtful face, a rich voice, and is an accomplished elocutionist."

The <u>Chronicle</u> was harsh as usual, but it should again be remembered that Maguire did not advertise in its critical pages.

Barrett enjoyed one of the longest and most remunerative engagements in Opera House history, playing through May 2 when he made his seventy-seventh appearance. McCullough, too, definitely established himself as a local favorite during this run, alternating leads with Barrett in Othello and Julius Caesar.

## MORE OPERA

After Barrett things did not go so well at the Opera House, though Maguire soon became "sole director" at the



rival Metropolitan. It was an unfortunate way to kill competition for, according to the <u>Figaro</u> of October, Maguire lost heavily at the Metropolitan that summer. He was indulging in grand opera again. In this same issue of the <u>Figaro</u> it was estimated that Maguire had dropped \$120,000 in operatic ventures. Since it is not mentioned, we can assume that Maguire was not a drinking man, but he certainly found an expensive substitute in his grand opera sprees.

About this time a benefit for Maguire was given at both the Metropolitan and the Opera House. Whether the public misinterpreted the advertisement or the management wished to put over a hoax, there was no little confusion and there were many complaints the next day. The <u>Dramatic Chronicle</u> did not waste the opportunity. Remarked that organ of virtue on August 1, 1868:

"Quite a number of people who attended the Maguire benefit given at the Opera House and Metropolitan on Monday evening last, considered themselves badly hoaxed in being denied admittance to both entertainments on one ticket. The bills and advertisements for the occasion said: 'All tickets issued good for either house.' The public very naturally supposed that this an-nouncement had the same meaning as when used in previous instances, when the holder of a ticket was free to pass from one house to the other. When they tried it on, however, the hoax became unpleasantly evident, and imprecations both low and loud were freely bandied at the box-offices. The Opera House Management has a business agent connected with it at the present time who is distinguished for such shrewd underhanded financial dodges as this. Humbug and imposition are his cardinal virtues."

What the <u>Chronicle</u> man did not know, or did not care to know, was that the word "either" is not the same as



the word "both." The unnamed business agent may have been as black-hearted a humbug as the paper says, and it may have been the custom to pass back and forth from one house to the other. Nevertheless the advertisements did not promise admission to both houses and no business man can be justly blamed for not doing what he did not promise to do. This article reveals the bitterly unfair attitude of these dramatic papers toward all managers who failed to advertise in their pages.

### LAST STAND OF THE OPERA HOUSE

Late in November the Opera House made its last great stand, Maguire again securing the services of Charles Wheatleigh in a new Boucicault play, After Dark, a Tale of London Life. This time it was not through Wheatleigh that Maguire obtained the right to produce the play, having purchased it in the East through D. C. Anderson. The play was an instant success, running from November 16 through December 3.

But on January 18, 1869 the California Theatre on Bush Street, built by William Ralston, was opened to the public; and Maguire's Opera House, together with the Metropolitan, was permanently relegated to the rank of a second-class theatre.

# DECLINE OF THE OPERA HOUSE

The last year of the sixtles was a bad one for Maguire, his magicians and variety shows offering small competition to the new Bush Street theatres and the thriving

melodeons. But there was a kick in the old horse yet. On December 13, 1869 he was again the first in a new field, importing a complete ballet troupe from Niblo's Jarden in New York. Robinson Crusoe was the first presentation, starring Mlle. Bonfanti and M. von Hamme. This Teutonic monsieur, said the advertisements, was capable of doing twenty pirouettes in succession. But Maguire had pirouetted for twenty years and was not to stop until he died. Only now he was on the backward whirl.

Montgomery Street in the early seventies had become that most desolate thing -- a place of silence where sound had been jubilant. Yet there were echoes. Through the first months of 1870 the Bonfanti ballet troupe continued its fortune, adding Rita Sangali, Sue Robinson and the still thirsty Harry Courtaine to its list. Even the Black Crook came back to the Opera House, bringing with it a happy memory of the great feuds of old Montgomery Street.

# FROU - FROU

But times had changed. During March Maguire attempted a brief return to drama with Charles Thorne as his star. The Opera House was then dark until May 23 when William Horace Lingard and his wife, Alice Dunning, lighted it again, with brilliant presentations of Captain Jinks of The Horse Marines and Frou-Frou. Frou-Frou was especially popular, with Alice Dunning completely capturing the fancy of this most fanciful of cities.

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### THE BRITISH BLONDES

Then came the British Blondes and one of those feuds that always gladdened the heart of Maguire. On June 16 he introduced this burlesque troupe, headed by Rose Massey, in Luna, or The Little Boy Who Cried for the Moon. Full houses followed. But on June 22 the California Theatre offered the original Lydia Thompson Troupe in Sinbad the Sailor. The British Blondes had originally worked for Lydia Thompson and were now setting up as rivals of their former employer. Maguire worked the situation for all he could, even giving a travesty of La Sonnambula on the same night it was offered at the California.

Once more the Opera House was the scene of excitement, but it was short-lived. Says Clay Greene in his memoirs:

"As a matter of fact, the chances should have been equal, for neither of the companies was any better than the other, and although Rose Massey was infinitely more beautiful than Lydia Thompson, the latter was the better actress, singer and dancer, and so, finally, drove her rival out of town."

But there was sympathy for Maguire, and on July 9 when the British Blondes retired from the field a benefit for the old gladiator was attended by a large crowd, bringing not only a few wandering dollars back into his pockets but probably no small warmth into his tough old heart.

# BILLY EMERSON'S MINSTRELS

It was not until January of 1871 that Maguire's Opera House was again to play to full houses. It was also the

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last stage of its glory. At that time Maguire bought a halfinterest in Billy Emerson's Minstrels. Emerson was the greatest minstrel of his time, some say of any time, and he and his
company continued gloriously at the Opera House until late in
February when Maguire took them to the old Alhambra where
they remained for the rest of the year. So Maguire went on,
but his Opera House was dead.

There were a few flickers but the house was doomed to be dark for the most of its remaining existence. For a short time Sheridan Corbyn took it over for his unexciting Gaiete Troupe. This ordeal done with, McCullough leased it for his California stock company with Charles 30ndmann, a German tragedian, starring in Shakespearean roles and an opening play called Narcisse. He seems to have been a rather eccentric actor, which fact, added to his limited English, made his stay short -- from March 27 to April 9.

# THE BIANCHIS AND THE FABBRIS

Dark, dark, dark! So runs the history of Maguire's Opera House until February 23, 1872 when Signor Bianchi opened a season of grand opera with Signora Adelina Planchel as star. In a short time the Bianchi company moved to the Metropolitan, but opera was still destined to put the finishing touch to Maguire's Opera House, not ingloriously, when Madame Fabbri's operatic company moved into the house in September of 1872. All that autumn the Fabbri troupe at the Opera

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House and Bianchi's at the Metropolitan strugeled for supremacy, the Fabbri troupe appearing occasionally at the California. And finally in mid-October it was the Bianchi troupe who admitted defeat and retired from the field.

### THE OPERA HOUSE TORN DOWN

Thus, just before the end, it was Mamire's Opera House that won its last battle with the Metropolitan. And in grand opera too! Maguire, who meanwhile had pitched his tent on Bush Street, must have smiled at the ironic climax. Grand opera, his old bugaboo, had finally won the day, or rather the evening. Early in 1873 Maguire's Opera House was torn down, to make way for the opening of Columbus Avenue into Montgomery Street. But with it went the Metropolitan and the last remnant of the faded glory of Montgomery and Washington Streets. The theatre had moved.

# THE FIRST METROPOLITAN

When the Metropolitan was opened, December 24,1853, there was only one important theatre in the city, the American. Inside of a year the new theatre became the unchallenged center of San Francisco's night life. Catherine Sinclair was the manager, and the opening play was Sheridan's The School for Scandal, with Mrs. Sinclair as Lady Teazle and James Murdoch as Charles Surface.

The Metropolitan was situated on Montgomery Street near Washington and formed part of the Metropolitan Block,

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which covered the entire west side of Montgomery Street between Washington and Jackson. The whole block was built and owned by Joseph Trench, an architect. The theatre proper, he said, cost \$250,000 and he valued the block at a million dollars. Also included in the block was a five story hotel. The block had a frontage of 275 feet on Montgomery Street and ran 180 feet back, along Washington and Jackson Streets.

### MOST BEAUTIFUL THEATRE

High praise greeted the opening of the Metropolitan. Catherine Phillips in her book, Portsmouth Plaza, The Cradle of San Francisco, quotes an unnamed Washington, D. C. correspondent thus:

"The Metropolitan Theatre near the Plaza is the most beautiful in the United States. It is furnished with splendid gold mountings and crimson velvet. Every scene is a finished meritorious picture, and the stage machinery is all conducted with a view to natural effect. A moon may rise or gradually disappear as the scene may call for. Ships sail as ships should sail. They do not appear to slide off. Trees look as though they could grow real leaves and fruit. Houses are built and painted with due regard for the times and places they represent..."

#### CURTAIN NOT SO GOOD

Fortunately there was a malcontent around to inject a little realism into the picture. After a formal appreciation of the new house, in the January 1854 issue of The Pioneer, he complains:



"If there be fault about the appearance of the house when the green curtain is down, it is the unnecessary hugeness of the balustrade that separates the orchestra from the parquette. It strikes us that it is all out of character with the lightness and grace of the rest of the work. However, whether we are right or wrong in this instance, we must enter a decided exception to the drop curtain. What are the figures in the foreground (with their excruciatingly bronze legs) trying to do?"

#### FIRST THEATRE LIGHTED BY GAS

Next to the Jenny Lind III, the Metropolitan was the largest theatre built in San Francisco until the building of the California Theatre in 1869. It covered 67 feet in front and was 120 feet deep. The stage was forty feet wide and went back fifty feet. There were three tiers of roomy seats, accommodating 2000 persons. The Metropolitan was the first theatre in the city to be lighted by gas, adopting this system a few weeks after it was installed in the city on February 11, 1854.

An interesting comparison was later made by Walter Leman in his Memories of an Old Actor:

"The Metropolitan Theatre was certainly one of the handsomest temples of dramatic art in America. Its general construction interiorly was not unlike that of the St. Charles Theatre in New Orleans."

# CATHERINE SINCLAIR IN CHARGE

Catherine Sinclair was not only a fine actress but one of the most astute managers of her time. During her tenure the Metropolitan presented some of the finest entertainment ever given in the city. But times were bad and

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though there was little competition she was forced to give up her lease in June of 1854.

Things started well, according to The Golden Era of January 1, 1854:

"At the 'Metropolitan,' we have Murdoch-glorious Murdoch; and Mrs. Sinclair-talented and generous-who stand forth as the standard bearers, while Mrs. Woodward, the Booths, Nilder, Anderson, Barry, Miss Gould, Mrs. Burrill, Miss Montague, and a host of others, close the column in bright array."

J. B. Booth Jr. was stage-manager and acted in many of the plays presented at the Metropolitan. Matilda Heron, not yet famous, made her first great sensation there; Madame Anna Thillon sang in French operas; and Laura Keene, a widely-heralded actress of the time, was politely but coldly received by San Francisco audiences. The Alta of April 9 says of her:

"Although Miss Keene has by no means made a failure, it would be useless to deny that she has not made a 'hit.'"

## MAMA BATEMAN WRITES A PLAY

Among early performers at the Metropolitan must be mentioned the Bateman children, Kate and Ellen, shrewdly managed by Papa and Mama Bateman. The girls were clever and capable of almost any type of performance. They even ventured into Shakespearean tragedy and were warmly applauded by the sentimental public. Papa Bateman was quick to take advantage of their popularity and soon advertised a thousand dollar

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award to the writer of the best play with parts suitable for his daughters. Mama Bateman con the prize. A bitter tone crept into the newspapers, the best example of which is in The Golden Era of July 2, 1854. Of Mama Bateman's thousand dollar play it said:

"The features of the week have been the opening ... of the Union Theatre and the production of the 'Mother's Trust,' which, as a drama, is as vile a composition as ever disgraced the stage.

Mrs. Sydney Bateman must feel proud of having produced such an affair...."

### PAPA BATEMAN FIRES A SHOT

In August, after Mrs. Sinclair's departure, a burlesque of Mama Bateman's classic was presented at the Metropolitan. It was entitled Above and Below, or The \$1000 Prize Drama. Papa Bateman had added to the general derision by taking a shot at Frank Soule, coauthor of The Annals of San Francisco. He missed and was fined \$300. All this was of course incorporated into the burlesque, which was one of the few successes of 1854. Yet the Batemans on their return to the city in September again played to crowded houses. In November they left by boat for the East Coast.

# A YEAR OF DEPARTURE

It was a year of departures. During the summer Matilda Heron, Catherine Hayes, Charles Thorne and his wife, Kate Denin, McCloskey and many others departed for the East or for Australia. In November the Golden Era complained:

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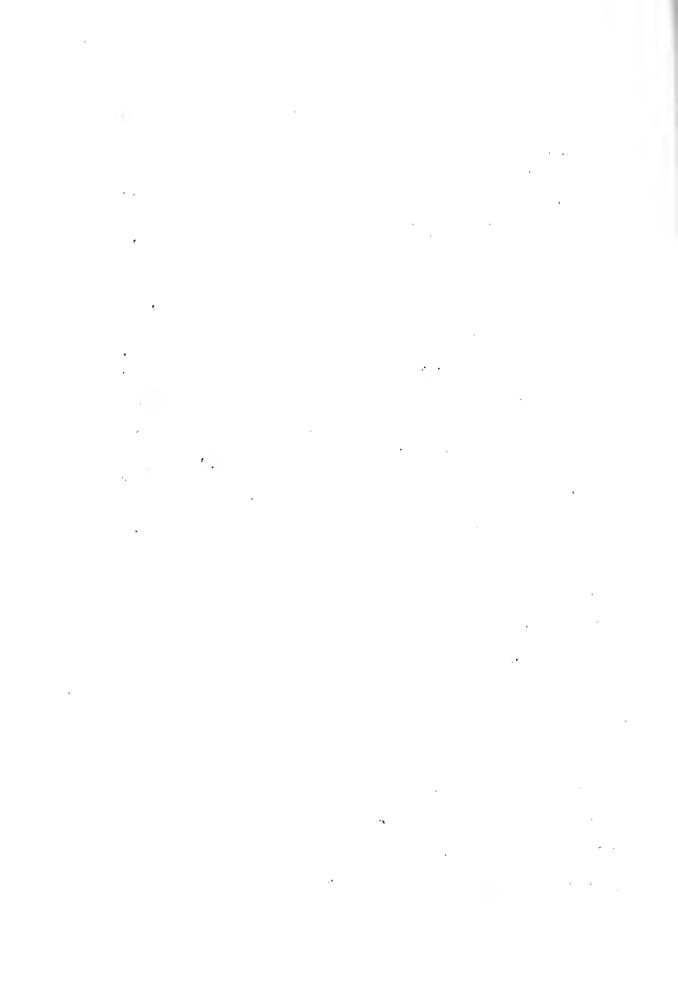
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"With the exception of Mr.Stark and Mr. Weafie, we have no one able to bear with dignity the weight of tragic duties, and a very sufficient reason for the scarcity of performances of such calibre is the lamentable incompetency of our stock companies to act up to the principals... California does not even own a leading lady save Mrs. Stark! In comedy we are slightly better off, with Mr.Wheatleigh and Mr. Pielps."

But a more amusing comment on the situation is found in an earlier issue of the same paper, May 21, 1854:

"One of the leading gentlemen of the theatre was playing Horatio to Mr. Murdoch's Hamlet, not long since...In the scene between Hamlet, Horatio, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the two latter gentlemen imitated humanity so abominably that Mr. M. turned up the stage in despair, and addressing Horatio in an undertone said 'My God, Mr., what do such men as these come on the stage and play for?' to which interrogatory he received the very cool reply of 'Seven dollars per week.' Mr. M. was so taken aback that he had to get the word from the prompter before he could proceed with the play."

Nevertheless Mrs. Sinclair, who had returned to the Metropolitan that fall, had regained much of her early loss by presenting Mr. and Mrs. Barney Williams in a series of character comedies. The Starks ned previously had a bad season at the theatre and the success of the Williams brought an almost forgotten gleam back into the theatrical sky. By the end of the year the Metropolitan was the only house of any popularity in the city, though the second American had been built and opened in December. But the American was no longer a place of importance. It was to be the Metropolitan all the way, until the building of Maguire's Opera House late in 1856.



### ROBERT, THE DEVIL

On January 9, 1855 Mrs. Sinclair closed the Metropolitan, advertising a coming production of Meyerbeer's opera Robert, the Devil. On the 10th the American Theatre attempted one of those "steals" so dear to the hearts of San Francisco impresarios. Its production of the same opera was two days ahead of Mrs. Sinclair's, but opening night at the Metropolitan found a full house in attendance. The cast was much superior to that of the American, including Herr Mengis, Mr. Leach, Mr. Collins, Julia Gould, Mme. Anna Bishop, Mlle. Thierry, Mr. Stadtfeldt, and Mr. Rogers.

Repetition however was not so successful. Mrs. Sinclair suffered from the same disease that was to prove so costly to Maguire, and she persisted in her attempt to bring grand opera to San Francisco. She combined her singers with an Italian opera troupe and produced <u>Lucrezia Borgia</u>; she added pantomime, operetta, ballet, and skits; she reduced prices. But the public wasn't having any. Neither opera nor drama could lure crowds into a theatre.

Mrs. Sinclair continued to alternate drama and opera. She presented Mr. and Mrs. Barney Williams, Jean Davenport, Louis Mowbray, Josh Silsbee, and Edwin Booth. Booth, who was just back from Australia, made his appearance as Benedick in <u>Much Ado About Nothing</u>. Mrs. Sinclair was Beatrice. This was well received and on the fourth night Booth appeared in Richard III, in which play he was already

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recognized as a master of his art.

#### MRS. SINCLAIR FINDS OPERA DEAR

Opera was to be the downfall of Mrs. Sinclair. On May 3, on which date the Italian opera troupe had been announced to appear in <u>I Lombardi</u>, Mrs. Sinclair appeared before the curtain and explained that the company had refused to go on because of "insufficiency of the attendance." She went on to detail the high cost of grand opera production and declared her intention to form a stock dramatic company with the promise of extra "novelties" from the East in the near future.

A long siege of bickering followed, letters pro and con being printed in the newspapers till Mrs. Sinclair ended the controversy by publishing a statement of her financial losses during the engagement of the Italian opera troupe. The sixteen operas produced in the fell of 1854, she said, had cost her \$3,908; and the second series given that spring, also totalling sixteen, had resulted in a loss of \$9,977.

# FAREWELL TO CATHERINE SINCLAIR

The Italian troupe soon moved to the Union, but the departure of these expensive folk did little to help Mrs. Sinclair. May at the Metropolitan was a fitful month of benefits and one-night stands by out-of-town companies. On June 6 Mrs. Sinclair advertised that "being about to relinquish the management of the Metropolitan Theatre, she will take her

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farewell benefit on Saturday evening, June 9, 1835."

For eighteen months Catherine Sinclair had struggled to make the Metropolitan pay, during a period when nothing paid; and in recognition the finest actors then present in the city joined to help make her last night a successful one. The School for Scandal, the play that had opened the theatre, was first on the bill with Mrs. Sinclair as Lady Teazle. Others in the cast were Edwin Booth, David Anderson, George Ryer, and Mrs. Woodward. Also presented was the trial scene from Henry VIII, with Mrs. Sinclair, George Ryer, and James Stark. Mile. Thierry and E. Bernardelli gave several dances and Josh Silsbee rounded out the bill in a comic skit. Thus ended the first stage in the career of the glorious Metropolitan.

# BAD YEAR FOR DRAMA

Joseph Trench then handed over the management of his theatre to B. A. Baker, formerly of Mitchell's Olympic Theatre in New York. The Metropolitan temporarily became a vaudeville house, one of the features of which was a Professor Risley and his infant-prodigy son. Drama was in bad shape that summer, which saw the rise of the minstrel shows, and it was not until August that Baker offered anything of value at the Metropolitan, featuring the Gougenheim sisters, Adelaide and Josephine. Supporting them were Charles Wheatleigh, William Chapman, Paullin, Coad, Mansfield, and J.B. Booth.

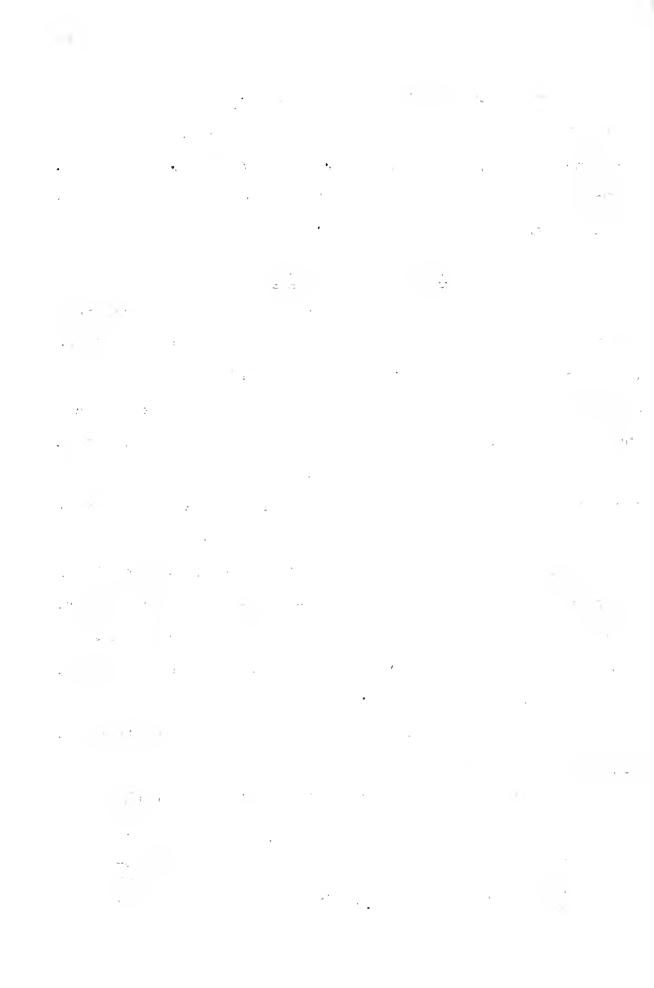
In mid-September Laura Keene opened a short but profitable season featuring, beside herself, William and Caroline Chapman, Edwin and J. B. Booth, and Mme. Monplaisir. On October 4 she closed her season with a farewell benefit which was given to a packed house.

## CORA SHOOTS TO KILL

which deserves mention, as it led to the formation of the Vigilance Committee in 1856. On November 15,1855 Charles Cora, a notorious gambler, attended a performance at the American Theatre with his equally notorious wife or mistress, Belle Cora. General Richardson, United States Marshal for Northern California, was also present with his wife. This rather pompous gentleman became indignant that such a woman as Belle Cora should breathe the same air as his wife and demanded of the manager that he eject the two miscreants. The manager, being a sensible man, refused. Subsequently Cora and the marshal met on the street, became involved in hot argument, and Cora shot Richardson dead.

On November 21 James King of William wrote in a Bulletin editorial:

"We have understood for sometime past, that the most abandoned women are taken to the various places of amusements in this city, seated promiscuously amongst the audience; and that it is almost as much as a man's life is worth to object to such a proceeding, particularly when the women are accompanied, as they usually are, by such a man as Cora."



Since Cora had not acted at the time and since no one knew exactly what had passed between him and Richardson afterward, it was carrying indignation a little far to say that a man's life was necessarily endangered by such proximity. However on December 8 the proper response was forthcoming from the manager of the Metropolitan, B. A. Baker. It appeared in James King's Bulletin and read as follows:

"The Manager of the Theatre states that: So long as he is manager of the 'Metropolitan'... he will prevent the admission of any disreputable females into such parts of the building as are occupied by respectable ladies."

The following summer James King was killed by James Casey, who was hanged by the Vigilantes. And Charles Cora was hanged with him!

The beginning of 1856 saw B. A. Baker again installed as manager of the Metropolitan, presenting Mlle. Duret and J. B. Booth in dramatic productions. It may be noted that, though rivalry was supposed to be intense among actors and managers, Booth's wife was at this time playing in the stock company at the American Theatre. Companies and individual actors went back and forth from one theatre to the other, yet this did not hinder the natural jealousies of the stage from taking their normal course.

An example of this was the production of <u>Camille</u> at both the American and the Metropolitan theatres late in December of the preceding year. Mrs. Stark had been first in the field at the American Theatre, but her triumph was soon



eclipsed by that of Mlle. Duret in the same part at the rival Metropolitan. Mlle. Duret was supported by J. B. Booth as Armand and by Mrs. Judah as Prudence.

### MRS. SINCLAIR RETURNS

It was a bad year, but one notable event was the return engagement of Mrs. Sinclair at her old stand, the Metropolitan. In January she produced The Marble Heart, with herself, Edwin Booth, and Henry Sedley as stars. There followed a revival of Shakespearean plays, starring McKean Buchanan and the Gougenheim sisters, and then the engagement of the Ravel pantomime troupe. The theatre was dark on March 5, as was the American Theatre.

# LAST APPEARANCE OF MRS. SINCLAIR

There were no performances at the Metropolitan until March 15, when an enthusiastic farewell benefit was given for Mrs. Sinclair who was departing for Australia after three years in the city. This woman had come to San Francisco under difficult circumstances, her divorce quarrel with her husband, Edwin Forrest, then being fresh in the mind of the public. Prejudice had been strong against her, yet she had made a brave stand and her charm and talent had finally won her a permanent place in the affections of the theatre-going public. She had opened the Metropolitan, had fought valiantly against hard times and public apathy, and it was fitting that her farewell performance should be given before "one of the

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most brilliant houses ever brought within the walls" of the theatre she had almost made her own.

### BRIEF ENGAGEMENTS

It was a good time for departure. The Vigilantes were coming, financial conditions were to be bad for a long time to come; and only the minstrels were to have any continuous success during that year. On March 24 Charles Krug took over the management of the Metropolitan, featuring Mile. Duret, Mrs. Judah, Charles Wheatleigh, William Chapman, and George Ryer. It was a brief and not too successful engagement, Mile. Duret going over to the Union Theatre in April.

She was replaced as star by Mr. and Mrs. E. S. Conner, who put on a series of Shakespearean plays, as well as popular favorites of the day. This engagement too was unfortunate and on April 16 a comedian, John Dunn, appeared as the featured player.

He was followed on April 18 by Estelle Potter, who opened in The Hunchback and continued with some success in stock plays until April 24. "Miss Potter," said one reviewer, "evinced real genius, particularly in the expression of grief"; but evidently her genius, was not sufficient for more than a week's stand. In that disordered year the expression of grief was too commonly met in the streets to be much appreciated as a source of entertainment.

# JOSEPH TRENCH DEPARTS

So bad were conditions that Joseph Trench himself took a benefit early in May pefore his departure for Mexico.

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He left the theatre in the hands of John Torrence, a carpenter and the husband of Mrs. Judah. It was Torrence who in 1861 was to build the second Metropolitan.

### EDWIN BOOTH AT THE METROPOLITAN

One memorable event at the Metropolitan that month was the first appearance of Edwin Booth in Richelieu, which was to be one of his featured plays to come. The Herald was not too enthusiastic, declaring that "for a maiden attempt" it was "quite successful." Booth had served almost his entire apprenticeship in California and was not unappreciated, yet never fared well financially here. Even when the critics praised him, it is obvious that they did not know what manner of actor they had in their midst.

# FAREWELL BOOTH

Yet at the last they seemed suddenly to wake to what they were losing. Booth gave a farewell benefit performance at the Metropolitan, September 3, presenting King Lear, and this huge house was found to be too small for all who wished to see Edwin Booth for the last time. On September 5 the Alta California said:

"Edwin Booth will leave on the steamer today for the Atlantic States, whither he goes on a professional tour. Mr. Booth has now been in this State nearly four years, during most of which time he has been playing at our theatres. He is a young man of undoubted genius, and, with care, time, and study, bids fair to reach to the very head of his profession. We wish him a pleasant journey, and a speedy return to California. We learn that he will play his first engagement at the Broadway theatre, New York."

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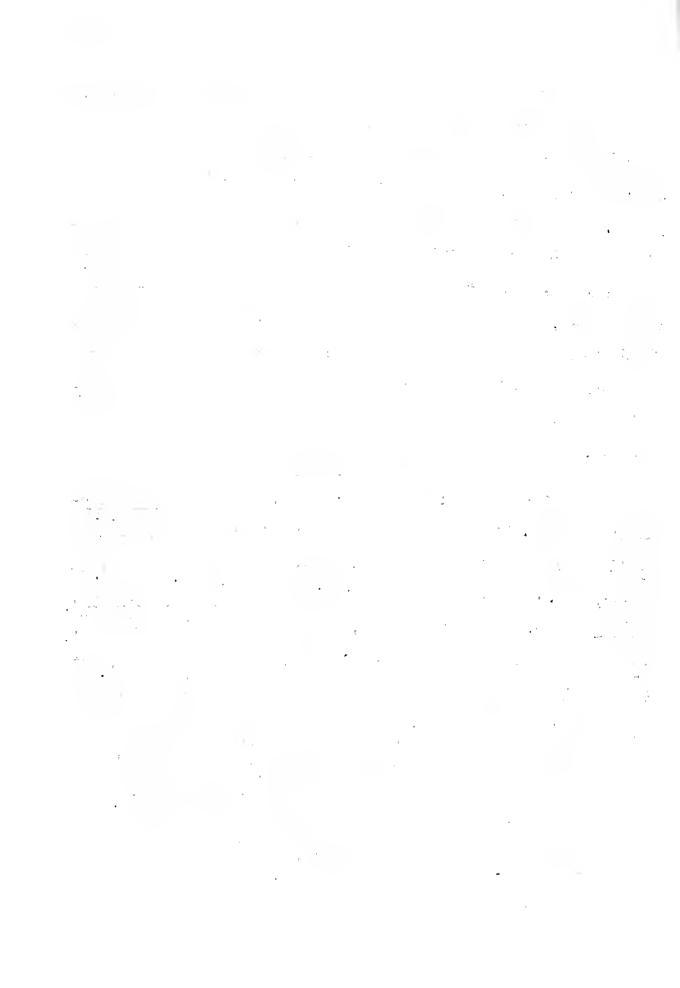
It was to be twenty years before San Francisco saw Edwin Booth again, then not as the king's son but as the royal man himself, triumphant as few kings are, yet just as lonely.

But before Booth's departure the Metropolitan enjoyed one fruitful season in that year of general sterility. George Ryer, engaged by Torrence as manager of the theatre, introduced Julia Dean Hayne on June 23 and for one month not even the fear of the Vigilantes nor the attraction of the minstrels could keep people away from the doors of the Metropolitan.

## JULIA DEAN HAYNE

Mrs. Hayne opened in that old standby, The Hunch-back. Among those in the company were Charles Pope, William Barry, Mrs. Judah, Walter Leman, J. A. Smith, Mrs. Thoman, and Miss Mowbray. This play was followed by Romeo and Juliet, Camille, and other old favorites, along with a few new pieces. Critics were slower than audiences with their admiration, but on July 14 the Alta so far forgot its conservatism as to say:

"This evening Mrs. Julia Dean Hayne will commence the fourth week of her engagement, one of the most successful engagements which any artist has ever played in California. Coming here as she did, at a time of unparalleled excitement, she has continued through three consecutive weeks to draw not only remunerative but crowded houses, and has gained a hold upon the theatregoing people of San Francisco, such as no other artist has ever attained."

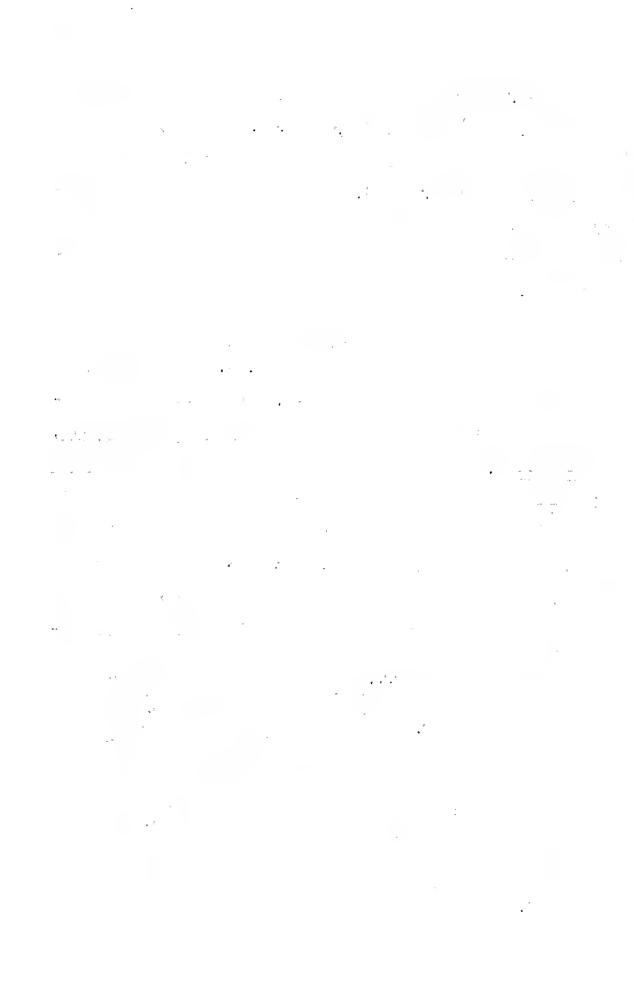


Mrs. Hayne finished her engagement in late July and was followed, with ill success, by J. H. Warwick, a mediocre tragedian, who later deserted the stage for the halls of the California legislature. There, where audiences are less critical, not paying but being paid to listen, he probably passed many happy hours in the development of his hitherto unappreciated talents.

## A BENEFIT FOR EDWIN BOOTH

During the summer Edwin and J. B. Booth co-starred with Charles Pope at the Metropolitan. Edwin had been appearing at the Union in such pieces as Julius Caesar, Othello, and Richard III. To these he now added Richelieu and King Lear. Lear, as has been mentioned, was presented at Edwin's farewell benefit on September 3, which was the last notable event of the year at the Metropolitan. J. B. Booth appeared as Edgar. Of Edwin's performance his old friend, Ferdinand Ewer, wrote in the September 8 issue of the Alta California:

"We were not prepared for the complete triumph which he achieved ... in his performance of Lear. It was a triumph of art, and a triumph of which any actor on the stage might well be proud. The readings of Mr. Booth (note this particular, as to his evident hard study in overcoming the objections of delivery remarked by this same critic on his first portrayal of Hamlet) are very beautiful and his style of acting pleasing and impressive; and with care and study he will yet become as great an actor as his father. In the 'curse scene' and the 'mad scene' he was particularly great, and throughout the whole performance exhibited more enlarged powers as an actor than we have ever given him credit for."



Reading history backward we may smile at the thought that Edwin Booth <u>might</u> become "as great as his father." But Ferdinand Ewer was an honest man, always putting criticism before friendship, and to his generation the florid style of the elder Booth was still preferred to the more natural one of his son. Doubtless Edwin was not yet the actor he was to become. Still, these were nobler words than had yet been said of him, and with this farewell in his ears Edwin Booth took leave of San Francisco.

The rest of the year was dull, enlivened only by the opening of Maguire's Opera House around the corner from the Metropolitan. The rivalry was on, though there was to be a gap of four years from the time of the burning of the Metropolitan in 1857 to the building of its successor and namesake in 1861.

## FIRE IN THE METROPOLITAN

The disastrous fire of 1857 was not the first to visit the Metropolitan. On September 8, 1856 the <u>Bulletin</u> reported:

"Last night, about half-past eleven o'clock, the gas works attached to the Metropolitan Theatre, and situated in the rear of that building, were discovered to be on fire. To prevent explosion inside the theatre, the gas was turned off, leaving the audience there listening to a French dramatic performance in darkness. The alarm was very great and everybody hastened to make tracks for the street. They did not stand upon the order of their going. The alarm bell in the City Hall pealed, and the Fire Companies hastened to the spot. They soon checked the flames. Many of the adjoining buildings are of

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wood, among which, if the fire had spread, there would have been a terrific blaze and serious pecuniary loss. The damage done is estimated within \$1,000."

## ANOTHER DULL YEAR

Another dull year for the drama was 1857. Maguire, at his Opera House, was attempting to enliven things by the introduction of various novelties. Other theatres followed suit. After a fair dramatic season in February, featuring J. E. McDonough, tragedian, the Metropolitan engaged Hernandez, an equestrian, with a company including Monsieur D'Evani, the India Rubber Man; Joseph Rowe, Professor Rowe, Nat Austin, tightrope dancer, and a French ballet. In the middle of March Nat Austin was featured in a "novelty production" of Mazeppa with Caroline Chapman as Olinska.

During this month Ned Bingham, who had been identified with California theatres since 1849, returned from a three year service with the filibusters in Nicaragua. He had lost his wife there in a cholera epidemic at Graneda and all his children but one daughter, Rose, and he himself was crippled and ill from wounds suffered during the Siege of Granada and earlier at Aspinwall. On March 18 a benefit was given for him at the Metropolitan. Mazeppa was the play of the night, and Bingham himself read a poem entitled "The Siege of Granada."

There was little doing at the Metropolitan until May 4 when the American Theatre stock company moved to the

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larger theatre. Previous to this there had been brief engagements of Mrs. Lesdernier, an elocutionist, and of Miss
Albertine, "The Little Yankee Girl." Nights at the Metropolitan could hardly have been very exciting.

## MOTHER GOOSE AND THE GOLDEN EGG

The American company was a good one, starring Annette Ince, with Caroline and William Chapman, J. H. Warwick, the tragedian not yet turned legislator, and Mr. Fleming. Henry Coad and Charles Tibbetts were the managers. Later Annette's sister, Caroline Ince, joined with her in songs between plays. On May 4 the company opened with The Hunchback and continued its repertory with great critical success. Unfortunately it had to be content with this, and on May 29,1857 the Alta California reports:

"The only place of public amusement in the musical and theatrical line open last evening, was the Opera House. It was crowded. Mother Goose continues to draw well; she lays a golden egg for the managers every night."

## YOUNG CALIFORNIA

The Metropolitan did not reopen until June 22, presenting at that time a stock company composed of Annette Ince, J. B. Booth and his wife, David Anderson, Mrs. Judah, and James Evrard. In July Mary Prevost and Charles Kemble Mason headed the company, one of the features of their stay being the production on July 12 of a piece entitled Young California. This was an adaptation of a play then popular in the

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East, Young New York. Special settings representing local scenes were the feature of the performance.

## FIRST METROPOLITAN DESTROYED BY FIRE

On August 15, 1857 after having been dark for several days, the Metropolitan gave its last show, thousands of spectators looking on as the "handsomest theatre in the United States" burned to the ground. The origin of the fire was undetermined, there having been no performance in the theatre since a farewell benefit had been given for Billy Birch some days before. The watchman had locked the doors of the house and departed at five o'clock that evening and no one had been known to enter between that time and eight o'clock, three hours later, when smoke was first observed. Before midnight the theatre was completely destroyed, though it could have been saved had not the cisterns for the fire pumps gone dry forcing the firemen to lose time by removing to a farther source of water. Nevertheless they did manage to save Maguire's Opera House and the other stores and buildings in the Metropolitan Block.

The building represented a complete loss to the owners, Henry Hentsch and Louis E. Ritter, as they had failed to insure it. They estimated that it would cost \$50,000 to rebuild the theatre, but times were bad for theatrical investment and as no insurance company could be found to underwrite the building they abandoned the project. There was to be no Metropolitan Theatre in San Francisco until 1861

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when John Torrence erected a house on the same site which was supposed to be an exact replica of the original.

## MR. JOHNS IS CALLED OUT

Before leaving the first Metropolitan however, we should mention an amusing incident that took place there in the early part of its last year. It was during J. E. Mc-Donough's engagement in February. The play <u>Jack Cade</u> had just ended and after McDonough and J. B. Booth had taken their bows and left the stage the audience continued to shout and stamp the floor, obviously not from enthusiasm. Henry Coad came out and asked what it wanted. "Johns, Johns," it howled, meaning one of the actors.

## MR. JOHNS IS DEFIANT

Mr. Johns was not bashful and coming quickly onto the stage he shouted defiantly that he had been called out by larger audiences than this. This acted like a match on gunpowder. Hisses, groans, catcalls, boos filled the air and threatened to last the night, but Johns stood his ground like a gamecock and during a lull in the storm cried out: "You may hiss and stamp, but I will put you down. I have helped to put you down before."

This, of course, only made things worse, but Johns was made of stern stuff and, though implored from the wings to retire, firmly refused to budge. Then he uttered these words, applying the master touch to the situation:

"Vigilantes, I call upon you!"

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### MR. JOHNS RETIRES

And for a moment -- such still was the power of that name -- there was silence. Then the ridiculousness of such an appeal struck home and riot turned into revolution. And still Johns, trouper Johns, held the stage. At last Hahn, the stagemanager, came forth and after great argument forced the besieged hero to retire, followed by the unchivalrous gibes of the triumphant mob.

The <u>Bulletin</u> of February 9, 1857, from the pages of which this incident is taken, sums up the fiasco in this rather solemn manner:

"The incident has, of course, given rise to a great deal of talk and discussion among play-going people. All condemn Mr. Johns for his presumption and folly, but opinion is divided as to the conduct of the house. Some claim that an audience has a right to show its disapprobation of an actor in this way, while others say it was too bad to call a man out to make game of him. It is certain that Mr. Johns acted very imprudently and the audience very boisterously. As the question, however, involves no important matter, it is left to be decided by those interested."

## A REVEALING INCIDENT

It was not an "important matter" perhaps, yet to one looking backward an incident like this serves more to reveal the tone and temper of the city and the time than whole chapters of formal narrative and description. Unfortunately not enough reporters believed or were allowed to believe in this and for too much of the record one is forced to rely on the bare bones of history. But occasionally such happenings

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were reported; and from this one the atmosphere of the stage in early San Francisco can be realized as vividly as that of a modern baseball park and Mr. Johns becomes as real as Babe Ruth arguing with an umpire.

## THE SECOND METROPOLITAN

And now Maguire had the field to himself. For four years there was rumor of a new Metropolitan, but no theatre was built until the spring of 1861 when John Torrence began work on the house which was to duplicate the original "temple of dramatic art." On July 1, 1861 the second Metropolitan opened its doors to the public. It was a ripe time for a new theatre, for there had revived in San Francisco that spring an enthusiasm for drama such as the city had not known for years. A new era had begun, and Torrence had fired the starting pistol.

Construction of the house had begun in April. Reported the Alta California on April 11:

> "Work on the reconstruction of the new Metropolitan will begin today. A portion of the old walls will be used."

On June 27, four days before the opening, the same paper ran a detailed description of the new house:

"There are but two tiers exclusive of the parquette, the designers having wisely dispensed with the insufferable fourth tier, or gallery—an apartment never needed in a theatre, except in such cities as London, Paris and New York. After passing through the main entrance (which is the same as that of the old Metropolitan), the visitor has to mount some six steps to reach the lobby of the dress circle (for there

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are lobbies in the theatre), or descend an equal number to reach the parquette.

"There are four entrances from the lobby to the dress circle which is divided by four aisles, the seats being arranged in such a manner that no matter when one enters one will not have to pass more than three or four people to reach a seat. Then the benches are sufficiently far apart to allow a moderate sized individual to pass without inflicting any serious injury on those already seated...."

The Alta goes on to praise the arrangement of the house both as to allowance for vision and comfort and as to beauty, also the excellent ventilation. The dimensions of the stage were more than fifty feet deep by twenty-four feet wide, though its width narrowed as it went back. Also praised was the elimination of the stage boxes. There were four proscenium boxes and eight boxes behind the parquet.

The morning after the opening, July 2, 1861 the Bulletin after describing the packed house (some 2,000 people paying between \$1,600 and \$1,700) remarked:

"The magnificent proportions of the new building, the spacious stage, the beautiful act drop curtain (painted by Charles Rogers)...attracted all eyes, and almost exhausted every feeling and admiration, to the neglect somewhat of the play itself."

## SUPERIOR ENTERTAINMENTS

Charles Tibbetts was stage-manager of the new house and James Dowling was stage-director. The company starred Josephine Gougenheim and included Mrs. Judah (Torrence's wife), James Stark, David Anderson, Harry Courtaine, Frank Mayo, John Wood, and Miss Mowbray. The opening play was The

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Love Chase, with a companion farce <u>Ticklish Times</u>; and on the following night, July 2, a new piece <u>Babes in the Wood</u> was given. Josephine Gougenheim was an old favorite in the city and the season at the Metropolitan drew great crowds, while around the corner at Maguire's Opera House Joseph Jefferson was entertaining small houses. McKean Buchanan also joined the Metropolitan troupe, giving occasional Shakespearean plays and being proclaimed after a performance of <u>Othello</u> as "the tragedian of the age." During this engagement the Herald stated:

"We believe it no exaggeration to affirm that the theatrical entertainments given at the Metropolitan in this city, are superior to those given in any other portion of the United States at the present time."

Josephine Gougenheim quit the theatre on July 28, following which Buchanan and his daughter Virginia successfully put on a repertory of old-time plays until August 5, when Julia Dean Hayne and Charles Wheatleigh joined the company.

## MAGUIRE IS RESTRAINED

At the end of August occurred the first of the Maguire-Metropolitan brawls when Tom attempted to pirate Boucicault's <u>The Colleen Bawn</u>, the rights to which were held by Wheatleigh. It has been related, in the story of Maguire's Opera House, how Wheatleigh sought and obtained an injunction restraining Maguire from producing this play, thus drawing first blood in the battle.

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On September 2, 1861 the Metropolitan produced the disputed play, with undisputed success. Then followed the Martinetti pantomimists for a brief run and were succeeded by Josephine Gougenheim who, after a dispute with the management, took over the theatre herself for several nights. R. A. Eddy and A. R. Phelps then became managers.

## A GREAT YEAR ENDS

The rest of the year was a whirl of swiftly succeeding stars and events. Josephine Gougenheim returned, went, and returned again; the Charles Dillons and Caroline Chapman were featured; then followed the Charles Thornes with their son, Charles Jr. Wheatleigh made up with Maguire and brought Boucicault to the Opera House; Julia Dean Hayne replaced the Thornes at the Metropolitan, joined by the Dillons and Frank Mayo, and then rejoined Wheatleigh for a brief stay at Maguire's. Early in December Joey Gougenheim returned and the end of the year saw the Martinetti troupe again at the Metropolitan.

## MAGUIRE BUYS INTO THE METROPOLITAN

The beginning of 1861 saw W. H. Leighton installed as manager of the Metropolitan. Leighton produced several new plays and some grand opera but did not have much luck. Then, early in March, Tom Maguire bought an interest in his rival theatre and moved his dramatic company, including Wheatleigh and J. B. Booth Jr. whom he made stage-manager, into

the house. Wheatleigh soon left for the East and Maguire engaged Mrs. Hayne and Charles Dillon as his stars.

Maguire stayed on at the Metropolitan until fall, offering variety shows, extravaganzas, (one of which was called <a href="https://doi.org/10.10

## MAGUIRE GOES BACK TO THE OPERA HOUSE

Late in August Maguire decided to inject some talent into the Bianchi company, engaging Mme. Biscaccianti, Mme. Klebs, Alfred Pierre Roncovieri, Mr. Grossi, Mr. Charles and Stephen Leach. And still grand opera would not pay. So in October Maguire threw up the sponge and went back to his Opera House and minstrel shows.

## BUMMER AND LAZARUS

Maguire gone, the Metropolitan went back to drama and enjoyed lucrative houses for the remainder of the year. Among those appearing at the theatre that fall and winter were Julia Dean Hayne, the Charles Thornes, the Charles Popes, J. B. Dooth, and Mrs. Judah. One bill announced two pieces,

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The Foundling of the Forest and a burlesque, Life in San Francisco. "Mrs. Hayne," it was advertised, "will appear in the former piece and Eummer and Lazarus in the latter," Bummer and Lazarus being two inseparable mongrels belonging to no one in particular but generally attached to that harmless eccentric, Emperor Norton, and regarded as community property. And Bummer and Lazarus were no doubt the hit of the show. No actor in the world has ever been able to compete with a dog or a child, not to mention two dogs.\*

<sup>\*</sup> Louise E. Taber, in a phamplet entitled Gold Rush Days, pp. 42-44, says: "Emperor Norton had two devoted friends who never left him--two dogs, named Bummer and Lazarus. Bummer was first to appear on the scene. He belonged originally to a newspaper man who had picked him up in some interior town, but after Bummer got a taste of San Francisco life he decided to shift for himself. He was a lover of crowds and never missed an exciting one. Like Emperor Norton, he too learned the saloons with generously filled lunch counters. One day Lazarus appeared -- just a stray mongrel. The two dogs met and immediately struck up an enduring friendship. These two canines first sprang into fame as self-appointed executioners of rats along the water front. Again and again they were pitted against thoroughbred terriers of fancy breeds; the two always won....After Bummer and Lazarus attached themselves to Emperor Norton, they went with him into saloons, waiting politely until he handed them their food. They were pets of all saloon-keepers. Once a poundman, newly appointed, lassoed Lazarus. This terrible news spread like wild fire, and the astonished poundman was nearly mobbed by an angry crowd. Money was quickly raised to secure the dog's release. The citizens wishing to make sure that this would not happen again, took the matter before the Board of Supervisors who passed a special ordinance giving the two loved dogs the freedom of the city." See also, Emperor Norton, the Mad Monarch of America, by Allen Stanley Lanc.



### COME AND GO

In January 1863 Charles Tibbetts was manager of the Metropolitan. He held a dramatic session until January 13, then for a week featured a circus and on January 23 formed a new dramatic troupe called the "Star Company," with Mrs. Hayne as star and including J. B. Booth, Mrs. Judah, and Agnes Perry. Then, on March 19, Leighton moved in from the Eureka Theatre, opening with <u>Uncle Tom's Cabin</u> in which his wife was the star.

During April, Tibbetts again managed the house, at the same time running the Eureka, from which house he retired after two weeks. Grand opera with the Bianchis was again offered and was followed by a circus troupe. Then came more opera, the opening piece being a new work called <u>Luisa Miller</u>. On May 1 the first grand opera matinee ever offered in California was given at the Metropolitan.

Maguire's Opera House dominated the city that summer, offering among other things Adah Isaacs Menken in Mazeppa; and it was not until fall that the Metropolitan gave any noteworthy entertainment, presenting the Bianchis and other singers in a repertory of operas. On December 5 Thomas McKeon leased the theatre, intending to star Charles Pope and his wife, Virginia. A week later the season ended when Pope withdrew and went over to Maguire's Opera House.

Simmons, King of Conjurors, was next in line and was replaced Christmas by two woman managers, Mrs. Stark and

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Mrs. Emily Jordan. Aurora Floyd was their first production. This play, dramatized by Thomas McKeon, drew full houses in spite of Adah Menken's triumphant return engagement at the Opera House. Julia Dean Hayne then returned to the Metropolitan for two weeks of fair success and was followed by that old-time favorite, James Stark. Among the plays in his repertory were Richelieu, Macbeth, King Henry IV, The Robbers, and King Lear.

## JAMES STARK SAYS GOODBYE

Stark had not appeared in San Francisco in nearly three years and he was to leave for the East in February. He had not lost his old popularity and a farewell benefit tendered to him on February 1, 1864 was a great success. Said the Daily Alta California, in announcing it:

"As an exponent of the higher walks of the drama, an interpreter of Shakespeare, and the brilliant but lesser lights which revolve around the great luminary of the stage, Mr. Stark has few, if any, equals. Chaste and correct in his readings, natural yet dignified in his actions, he approaches nearer to that intellectual perfection, which the advance of the age requires, than any living American actor."

## RIVALRY

Rivalry between the two leading theatres grew bitter again that year. Maguire produced <u>Lady Audley's Secret</u>; the Metropolitan fanned the flames of feud again by advertising that it possessed the "only genuine five-act play of <u>Lady Audley's Secret</u>." Annette Ince was the star of the Metropolitan company. Later, on February 13, Maguire produced <u>Three</u>

Travellers of the Tyrol, or The Accusing Spirit. The following day the Metropolitan presented the same play, calling it by the subtitle.

"Sensation plays" continued at both houses in rapid succession; Joseph de Angelis and the Worrell Sisters appeared at the Metropolitan in <u>The Cross of Gold and The Guerrilla</u>. Then, at a benefit for the Shields Guard, the theatre offered <u>Enos</u>, the Avenger, an original play by a member of the guard.

The Metropolitan was closed at the end of February but reopened on March 2 under managership of Thomas McKeon. Mrs. Stark and Mrs. Jordan were joint directors. Leah, the Forsaken was the opening play. Charles Thorne, J. H. Allen, and R. G. Marsh moved in on March 21,offering popular dramas, original plays by local writers, and occasional operas. On April 12, a double benefit was given at the Opera House and the Metropolitan for Mrs. Charles Thorne, who was retiring from the stage. She appeared at both houses. Another benefit held during April was for E. G. Bert, who had just lost an estimated \$20,000 in his New Idea Melodeon and was consequently low in funds. On April 23 the 300th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth was celebrated with a benefit at Maguire's where Macbeth was offered. The Metropolitan presented Fanny Morgan in Midsummer Night's Dream.

## SIX HOUSES AND A HORSE

Thorne dropped the management during this month and little was presented at the Metropolitan until the end of May

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when Julia Dean Hayne appeared for a brief season, supported by Harry Courtaine and J. H. Allen. On June 10 Mrs. Hayne and Annette Ince took over the joint managership of the theatre, being replaced in August by Mrs. Jordan, with A. R. Phelps as stage-manager and McKeon as acting manager. On August 24 Mrs. Jordan appeared in the Adah Menken specialty Mazeppa, thus starting another craze for that sensational piece. So great grew this craze that six houses, according to Clay Greene, were playing the piece at the same time. The Bella Union put on a burlesque of the spectacle in which each scene revealed a new actress in the role of Mazeppa.

Said "Inigo" in the Alta California of September 14, 1864:

"So much has been said by so many pens in so many different ways, about the introduction of horses to play the leading parts at our best theatres, that I approach the subject with the respect and reverence due to its age...A very worthy friend of mine, who keeps a livery stable on Kearny Street...tells me that he has found a very serious difficulty, since the Mazeppa rein commenced, in persuading his horses to take ordinary burdens, as they absolutely refuse to be mounted by any people wearing clothes. Bewitched with the nude they have no idea of permitting the old order of things to be renewed."

### SUNDAY BLUE LAWS

The Metropolitan was forced into the background that fall when Maguire brought out Charles Kean and his wife Ellen Tree in a sensational season. The theatre was opened for two weeks in November by W. P. Hoffman, then closed again.

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But the main event of the year was the revival of the Sunday Blue Laws which were to affect the theatres of San Francis-co for years.

The year 1865 saw Maguire still holding all the cards. A return engagement of the Keans was as successful as the first one and was followed by the even more sensational Matilda Heron. Meanwhile the Metropolitan offered a pantomime on January 26 following which the theatre was dark until March, when Fanny Brown appeared in the irrepressible Mazeppa. A short time later Julia Dean Hayne reopened the house, appearing for a week in a season of drama with A. R. Phelps, E. N. Thayer, and Fanny Morgan. Then in April grand opera returned to the Metropolitan, with the inevitable Bianchis and a Signorina Brambilla.

#### GRAND OPERA

Maguire's Opera House and the Metropolitan that spring. The Bianchis presented La Traviata; the next night Maguire's troupe presented the same opera. The Bianchis gave a production of Faust, its first in the West; Maguire did the same. All this only succeeded in emptying the coffers at both houses and it is not surprising to discover a newspaper announcement early in June which read:

"Having not received the salary due to me for eight days past, from the Impresario of the Metropolitan Theatre, I have declined to sing TONIGHT, FRIDAY.

ELVIRA BRAMBILLA"\*

<sup>\*</sup> Bulletin, June 9, 1865.



This, for the time being, ended grand opera at the Metropolitan; but Maguire was stubborn. He engaged the Bianchis to appear at his Academy of Music and continued to offer their vocalizings at that house until August.

In September Charles Wheatleigh, who had been presenting "novelties" at the Eureka Theatre, moved into the Metropolitan. Included in his company were Mrs. Judah, George Pauncefort, J. H. Warwick, Mr. Shiels, H. D. Thompson, and Stephen Leach. Then began another Maguire-Metropolitan feud which was to be more lucrative for both parties than the opera fight of the spring and early summer.

## WHEATLEIGH, MAGUIRE, AND BOUCICAULT

During this feud occurred another of those Wheat-leigh-Maguire, Boucicault fiascos and once more it was Wheat-leigh who triumphed. Wheatleigh had advertised the opening of Boucicault's Arrah-na-Pogue, a new play. On September 21 Maguire presented The Wicklow Rebel, flaunted as the "original version of the celebrated story of Arrah-na-Pogue." This time Maguire was within his legal rights, as the story was common property. The only flaw was that The Wicklow Rebel was a very poor play and when Wheatleigh produced the Boucicault piece at the Metropolitan there was no argument about who was the winner. Arrah-na-Pogue had a run of fifty nights and even after it was withdrawn on November 13 it was constantly returned to the stage of the Metropolitan.

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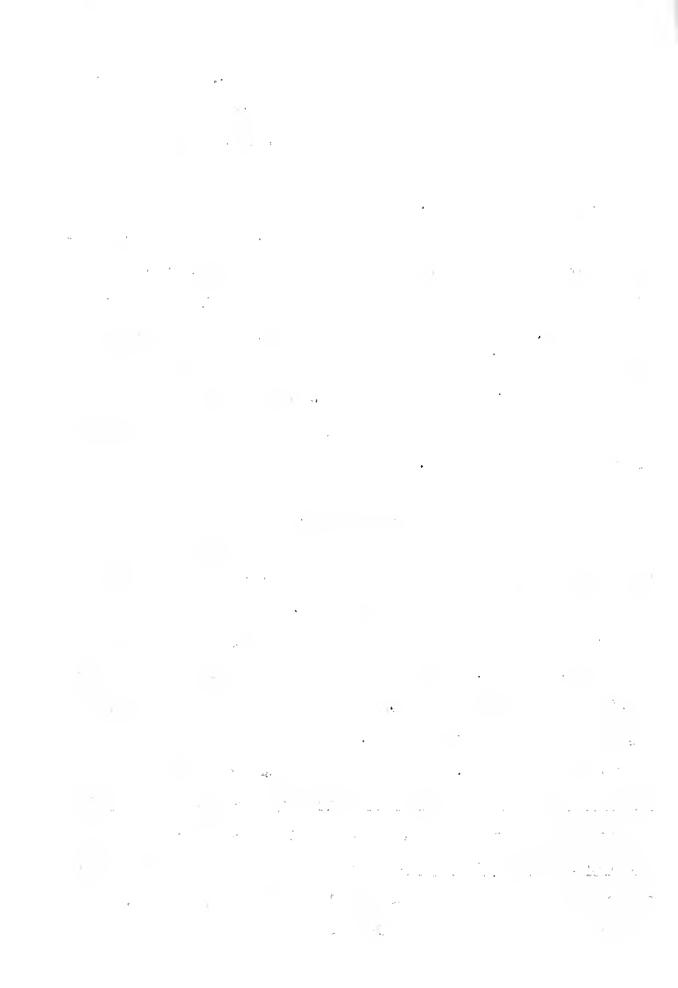
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Later in November Madame Vestvali, whose pretty face the irascible Maguire had recently threatened to damage, appeared under Wheatleigh at the Metropolitan until December, when Wheatleigh closed one of the most successful seasons ever held at the theatre.

The year 1866 was not so bright. The Buislay family appeared at the Metropolitan in pantomime until April
with fair success and was followed by the Bianchis in an
opera season. Later that summer the Bianchis alternated with
the Howson English and Italian Opera Company at the Metropolitan and Maguire's Academy of Music. In November the Bianchis
moved out entirely and the Howson company presented musical
comedy with some success.

## THE MARTINETTIS

But it was not till the Martinetti-Ravel pantomime and ballet troupe moved in that the Metropolitan again entered into competition with Maguire. In fact this clever troupe soon pushed Maguire into the shade, as the receipts for December show. The Metropolitan for that month drew \$17,964 as compared to \$11,219 drawn at the Opera House and \$8,000 at the Academy of Music. The Martinettis alternated with the Howsons who, with Willie Edouin, gave farces such as Did You Ever Send Your Wife to Stockton? Among the popular pantomimes presented by the Martinetti company were The Green Monster and The Golden Egg. Willie Edouin also pleased audiences with imitations of Maguire's Japanese jugglers, then appearing at the Academy of Music.



The Martinettis continued to delight the public and the Metropolitan to dominate the theatrical scene until March 1867 when the Martinettis went on tour. They were successfully followed by Robert Heller, described as a "magician-comedian-pianist." It was clearly a year for novelties. Then in April came the "leg-show" war, or the battle of the crook and the rook. The Martinettis, who had returned to the Metropolitan, claimed The Black Rook had been written for them and had been stolen for Maguire by James Dowling, formerly stage-manager at the Metropolitan. Maguire claimed his Black Crook was the original play. Both applied for an injunction.

#### THE BLACK ROOK

Judge Deady's remarkable decision has already been described in this chapter. He denied both parties an injunction and Maguire's production, with its inferior ballet, was soon withdrawn. The Martinettis offered The Black Rook on April 20, the day of the decision, and continued with success until May 16. The Martinettis then moved to the Opera House and were followed at the Metropolitan by the minstrels, Harry Leslie and Harry Raynor.

# FIRE! ALMOST

During the run of the <u>Black Rook</u> an accident was reported which might have proved disastrous had it not been for the quick thinking of one of the stagehands. Said the <u>Dramatic Chronicle</u> of May 13, 1867:

"On Saturday evening, at the Metropolitan, at the conclusion of Black Rook, while the Chaos scene curtain was on the stage, one of the gauzes for the last scene, while being adjusted in its place, caught fire from one of the top border lights, and was almost instantly one sheet of flame. The Fly-man with great presense of mind, immediately cut the rope holding it and let it drop to the stage; the Chaos Curtain was then quickly pushed forward and raised to prevent it coming in contact with the blazing gause, displaying to the audience a stage of fire; great confusion ensued, and a rush was made for the doors. Men shouted fire! and women screamed and fainted. 'Keep your seats!' cried out several cool men, while the prince of jokers, Charley Schultz, the leader of the orchestra, struck up his celebrated 'Fireman's March' never letting his orchestra stop during the continuance of the excitement.

"As the fire was soon trampled out, and the stage-manager came forward to assure the audience that there was no danger, the stampede was stopped and the audience remained standing until the conclusion of the piece. Mons. Gruet, who held the rope sustaining the car upon which Paul Martinelli as Neptune descends to the center of the stage, had his hands badly burned by the friction of the rope while rapidly lowering Paul to the stage, he being endangered by the burning gauze.

"The arch little Clelia Howson went into a corner and quietly swooned away. One lady in trying to get out had nearly the whole skirt of her dress torn off. Great credit is due those in charge of the stage for the cool and prompt manner in which they extinguished the fire."

Thus The Black Crook, which had turned into The Black Rook, very nearly finished by becoming The Black Cook. But, as could be seen by the audience's reactions, the subject of fire was certainly no joke to San Franciscans of those days. They had seen too many magnificent buildings turned into ashes overnight, too many of them had returned

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home to find they no longer had a home and to count themselves fortunate if they still had wives and children.

#### RAILROADS AND RACETRACKS

It was not till November that the Metropolitan was to return seriously to the drama. All that summer they had offered a hodgepodge succession of pantomime, Japanese jugglers, farce, and mediocre stock plays. Now on November 23 the theatre, under joint management of Harry Edwards, F. M. Bates, and J. H. Vinson, offered Charles Wheatleigh in <u>Under the Gaslight</u>. This was one of those railroad melodramas so popular in those days, in which the hero is tied to the track by the villain and saved only at the last minute. Women fainted, little boys shouted; and the play grossed \$7,622 in one week, an amount unprecedented in the history of the city.

Included in the cast besides Wheatleigh were Harry Edwards, Vinson, A. Fitzgerald, Mrs. Bates, Mrs. Saunders, and Julia Corcoran. Also, playing Peanuts, the Newsboy, was Ed. J. Buckley, later a well-known actor. Mr. and Mrs. Bates, it should be noted, were to be the parents of the famous Blanche Bates.

Wheatleigh followed this with another sensational melodrama, Boucieault's <u>The Flying Scud</u>. This was a story of the racetrack, in which the enterprising Wheatleigh once more gratified his admirers by introducing a real racehorse onto the stage. At least it was a real horse. Then came Sam;

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Arrah-na-Pogue; and Lottery of Life -- all of them highly profitable to Wheatleigh who took with him more than \$15,000 when he closed his season on February 8, 1868. The Metropolitan averaged \$537 a day during his stay, which could not have left Maguire much public to draw from.

## CLIMAX AT THE METROPOLITAN

The year 1868 was the last great year in the life of the Metropolitan. A year later the California Theatre was built and the Metropolitan entered into its declining period, along with its old rival, Maguire's Opera House. There were to be flashes of brilliance but the theatre was never to regain its old splendor.

## RMELIE MELVILLE

But the Metropolitan still had some life before it and proceeded to prove it now, on February 10, 1868, by introducing Emelie Mclville to the city. Emelie, then seventeen years old, drew high praise from both critics and public, and was especially successful in musical comedy. For more than sixty years, until her death, Emelie Melville was to remain in San Francisco and for most of that time was one of the city's favorite daughters of the stage.

Emelie continued through the spring at the Metropolitan, though the long run of Lawrence Barrett at the Opera House cut down her houses toward the end of her engagement. Then came John Collins, the Irish comedian, followed by the



Couldocks. But the big event of the early summer was the engagements of Mrs. D. P. Bowers who opened at the Metropolitan April 13 and continued her season highly successfully until June 6. Among her offerings were Elizabeth, Queen of England; Marie Antoinette; and The Jewess of Madrid -- all highly emotional pieces for which her talents were well fitted.

During the summer, Bates, Edwards, and Vinson announced a plan to form a new Metropolitan circuit, with theatres in Sacramento, San Jose, Oakland and even Portland. Armory Hall in San Jose was opened under the Metropolitan managership, but in June, Bates and Vinson retired from the theatre. Maguire then became sole director, with Harry Edwards as lessee.

## PAREPA-ROSA COUNTS THE CASH

Then came one of those operatic sprees, which had come to be normal events in the life of Maguire. Mme. Parepa-Rosa was the star of his company and she was really a fine singer who drew both praise from the critics and crowds into the Metropolitan. But the expense of grand opera was too much for the receipts and though Parepa-Rosa, who loved both cigars and money, took away \$20,000 for her efforts, Maguire was soon back in his Opera House counting his change.

## HARRY COURTAINE SOBERS UP

On November 21 Charles Poole leased the Metropolitan, installing Harry Courtaine as stage-manager. Seeing that Harry had spent several holidays in the county jail that

year, this was a rather remarkable trust. But then Harry was a remarkable man.

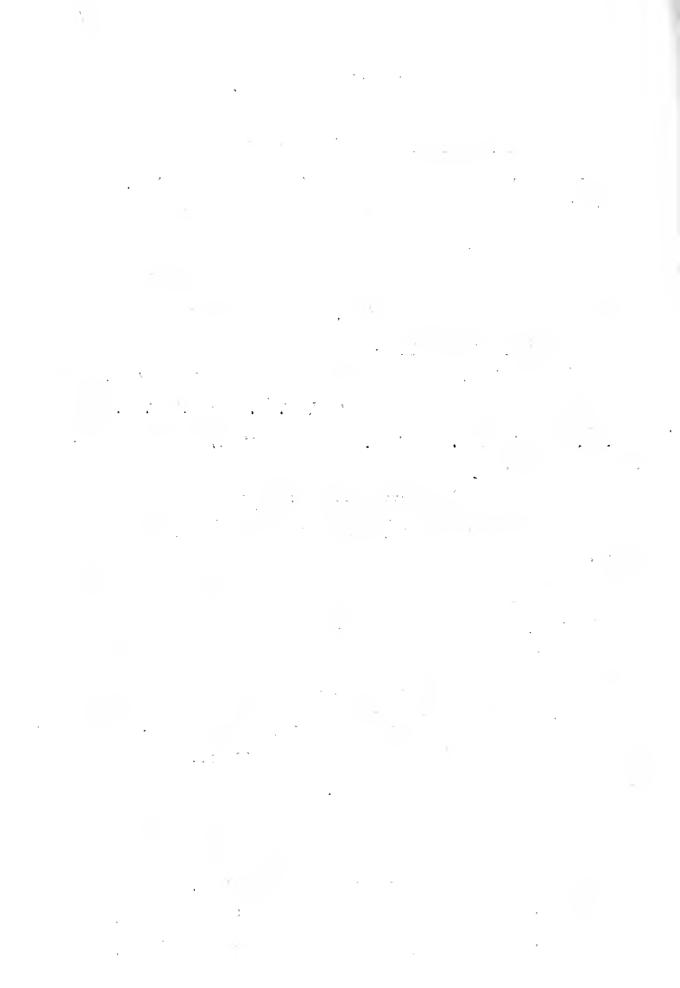
Dream of Destiny was the opening play, featuring James A. Herne, Sophie Edwin, and Mrc. Charles Poole. Several of Herne's own plays followed, including his dramatization of Dickens' novel Dombey and Son.

The year ended with the Lyster Grand Opera Company in possession of the theatre, opening on December 21 with Meyerbeer's Les Huguenots, the first production of that opera in San Francisco. Among the company were Fred Lyster, Alfred Pierre Roncovieri, Henry Squires, J. E. Kitts, W. F. Baker, J. H. Sutcliff, Mr. Charles, Georgina Hobson, Geraldine Warden, and Lucy Escott.

## BEGINNING OF THE END

On January 18, 1869 the California Theatre was opened, and the Metropolitan entered into its last stage. Little of note was offered at the once great house during that year. Magicians were offered there during the early months, with slight success. Nell Warner gave a mixed and disastrous season of Shakespeare and sensational dramas of the period. On September 4 the <u>Figaro</u> remarked that the Metropolitan was "in the wrong part of town...the day of its glory seems to be passing away."

In December the Martinettis gave the theatre its one taste of fortune during that year, appearing in their usual pantomimes with their usual success. Thus ended a great decade, ten years of feud and fortune; and now, for the Metropolitan, began the period of fatigue and finish.



#### FEUD AND REVIVAL

The new decade began dully enough. Even the California was forced to remain dark at times, though the melodeons and burlesque houses were popular. At the beginning of the year Cooke's Circus was in the Metropolitan and the house seems to have been closed most of the spring and summer. Then, on August 13, suddenly flamed up one of those Maguire-Metropolitan feuds that had delighted the town all through the sixties. There was no reason for it but tradition; it was like one of those sudden bursts of energy that briefly possess an old man and leave him spent and gasping.

It centered around Sardou's play Fernande. The California was occupied by the minstrels. Sallie Hinckley had obtained a translation of the French drama. So she moved the California stock company into the Metropolitan and opened with Fernande on August 13, supported by Caroline Chapman, Frank Mayo, Ed Buckley and others. But on the same night Maguire offered the same play, in a translation by Augustin Daly, with a cast including Lizzie Price, J. F. Cathcart, Minnie Walton, and Mrs. Saunders.

Both Sallie Hinckley and Maguire, of course, claimed that the other had no right to the script. And for a week the two houses around the corner continued their grotesque and senile defiance, lights on, doors open as of old, but seats empty. At the end of the week, on August 20, the Metropolitan gave up the ghost and closed, but Maguire characteristically hung on till the 27th. It was the only sign of life in the Metropolitan that year.

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#### AN IMPRESARIO ISSUES A STATEMENT

The spring of 1871 brought an equally disastrous season to the Metropolitan, this time the engagement of the Smecchia Opera Bouffe Company. The opening piece was La Grande Duchesse. The only memorable event of the season was the first production in the West of Offenbach's Orpheus, on April 21. On May 4 the manager of the company issued this statement:

"A Card -- The season of French Opera Bouffe not having proved pecuniarily successful, the management, in order to avoid further loss, have concluded to abandon the attempt to introduce this style of entertainment in this city.

A. P. C. De Smecchia, Prop. "\*

Here evidently was a dissenter who failed completely to appreciate San Francisco's theatrical tradition. But a man in such a mood is likely to be prejudiced. He should have studied the history of opera production in San Francisco, or consulted Maguire.

# JOE MURPHY

It was not until July that the Metropolitan offered any real competition to the California Theatre. At that time J. H. Vinson, stage-manager, presented Joe Murphy -- later called the "richest actor in America," in <u>Help</u>. In the cast were Mrs. Bates, Sallie Hinckley, Jennie Mandeville, and David Belasco, who had a minor part.

<sup>\*</sup> Figaro, May 3, 1871.



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#### THRILLS AND CHILLS

Then in August, Vinson offered Mrs. Bates as featured player in Pigeon, Under the Gaslight and other favorites. Under the Gaslight once more, as in the days of Wheatleigh at the Metropolitan, brought the house down. Another success came on October 2, when Johnny Allen and Alice Harrison appeared in Schneider, or Dot House von der Rhine. The piece ran through October 22. It was almost like old times again at the Metropolitan. Then came Robert McWade and James Ward and at the end of the year Henrietta Osborn in Bertha, the Sewing Machine Girl; or, Death at the Wheel.

The Metropolitan continued its melodramatic spree through the early months of 1872. E. T. Stetson appeared in Neck and Neck at the beginning of January. This was described by the Bulletin as:

"...well calculated to amuse audiences such as crave thrilling scenes and exceedingly melodra-matic situations, all rendered to music pianis-simo."

And since the audiences did crave thrilling scenes, Stetson gave them Richard III. What better thriller than Shakespeare? He followed this with The Marble Heart and The Red Pocket-Book. The latter opened on January 15 and ran for two weeks. The Bulletin of January 16 says that it was

"intended only for the admirers of the bluelight ultra-sensational school, and seems well adapted in all respects to the tastes of that numerous class of playgoers—there being in it enough diluted sentiment, startling and wonderfully incongruous incident, blackest villainy and melodramatic virtue which ultimately is duly rewarded to stock a dozen ordinary plays of the sort."



But whether the critics liked it or not, these thrillers were drawing money and the Metropolitan management was determined to work the mine till it was exhausted. It lasted all through February. Among the pieces offered -- starring T. E. Jackson and Joie Langley -- were Gossamer, the Fairy Queen; Miriam's Crime, and Jessie Brown, or The Relief of Lucknow. But the most successful of all these was a new drama by a local writer, William Bausman. Early California, it was called, and it ran from February 14 to 25.

### LOTTA CRABTREE

The public at last tired of blood and thunder, but the Metropolitan had something better in store for its patrons. After a week's engagement of the Royal Tycoon Troupe of Japanese Jugglers, Lotta Crabtree returned to San Francisco after a ten years' absence, opening a season at the Metropolitan on April 8. Her first offering was her old favorite, The Little Detective, in which she was supported by Robert Craig. And the city paid to see her, as it always did to see one of its sentimental favorites. There followed a string of Lotta's old stock pieces: Little Nell, Heart's Ease, Uncle Tom's Cabin, Firefly, and The Ticket-of-Leave Man. Said the Bulletin of her:

"She is the same capricious, lawless, tantalizing bewitching little elf that she was ten years ago--only 'more so.' She is a sort of dramatic Topsy, defying all laws of taste, setting all the properties at defiance, treading on the perilous edge of the melodeon--yet captivating everybody."

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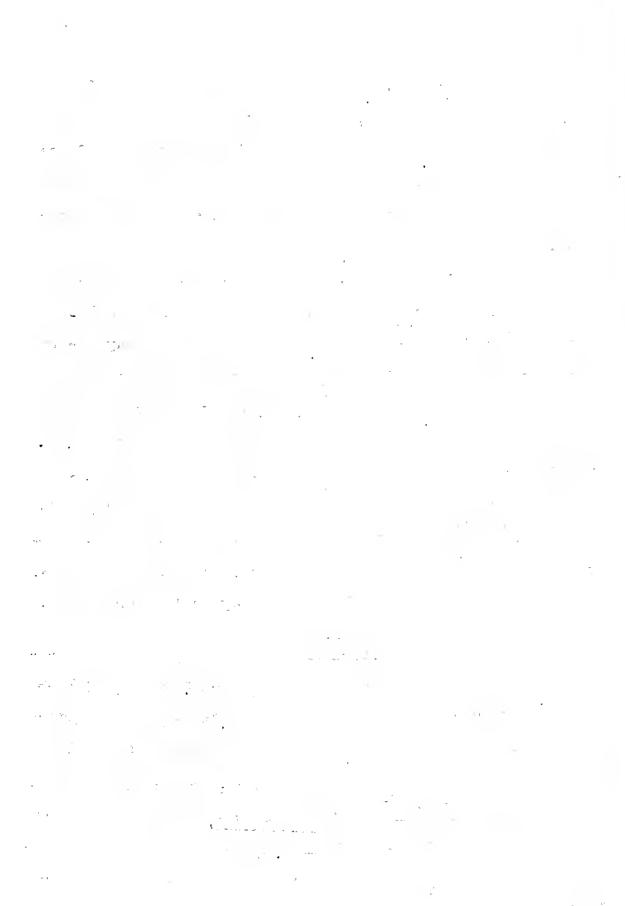
This hoydenish, uncapturable appeal of Lotta's was to puzzle critics for years, but it never failed to draw the public and her appearance was a godsend to the managers of the failing Metropolitan. Lotta and her mother had the Midas touch and the Metropolitan was sorely in need of such a possession.

Good luck continued. After Lotta came the Zavistow-ski Sisters in a popular engagement and they were followed by Charles Wheatleigh -- Wheatleigh of the palmy days -- by Maggie Mitchell, and by Ada Gray. One notable production was that of the pantomime, <u>Humpty Dumpty</u>, by the Tony Denier Troupe from New York. The theatre did not close until September 29, again offering at the end of its season E. T. Stetson in more of his lamentable but popular thrillers.

The Bianchis had one more try at opera in the Metropolitan that fall but soon retired, yielding to the success of the Fabbri Operatic Company at Maguire's Opera House.

#### DENOUEMENT

But opera was not to end the career of the Metropolitan. In December it reopened with Mrs. Bates, Blanche
Clifton, Sallie Hinckley, James Bartlett, Frank Hussey and an
Australian dramatic company. Harry Eytinge and Hudson Liston
presented <u>Guy Mannering</u> on December 23; but this soon gave
way to a spectacle play, <u>The Yellow Hat</u>, with a March of
Amazons and a transformation scene. This ran successfully until January 19, 1873.



It was 1873, the last year in the life of the Metropolitan. Yet it made one final coup, bringing out in February a new favorite, Augusta Dargon, who took the play away from the California Theatre. Both critics and the public followed her with great enthusiasm in such plays as Camille, Deborah, and Unmasked. But it was not long before she too went to the California and was poorly succeeded by Marion Mordaunt and the Chapman Sisters, Ella and Blanche, in a mediocre repertory of dramatic and comic pieces. During March and April the Chapmans attempted to revive the spectacle play, but with no better luck. The only thing worth noting -- and that merely historically and biographically -- during this humiliating engagement was the appearance of the twenty-year old David Belasco as Emperor Norton in The Gold Demon. Belasco, says William Winter, his biographer, served in this company as prompter, assistant stage-manager, copyist, and bit actor.

# THE LAST DAYS

The days of the Metropolitan were over. Before summer both it and Maguire's Opera House were torn down to make way for the opening of Montgomery Ave. (now Columbus Ave.) into Montgomery Street. It was time. For several years they had been out of the way, now they were in the way and must go. Great, unforgettable careers lay behind them; before them there was nothing. It was the beginning of a new era; and they were the remains of an older and perhaps more glorious one, but that one was dead forever.

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#### HAIL AND FAREWELL

Yet one more night of glory remained to the Metropolitan -- its last. It was one of those sentimental occasions which were like champagne to the palates of San Franciscans, and they did not pass it by. Years later Edward A.
Morphy, writing in the Chronicle of May 11, 1919, describes
it thus:

"The last performance at the Metropolitan just prior to its demolition to make way for the new avenue was the most glorious of its entire career, as far as popular enthusiasm went. Ixion; or The Man at The Wheel was the piece performed. All the old first-nighters and other steady patrons of the drama were present, and everybody cheered everything all through the programme and everybody wanted to weep when each favorite bade farewell. As a grand finale everybody rose, in stalls and galleries, and ripped the whole place to bits for souvenirs. One man took away a cushion, another a gas globe, another the back of a chair, another a curtain from a box. Each lady and gentleman tore off his own piece of loot to cherish in memory of a great occasion.

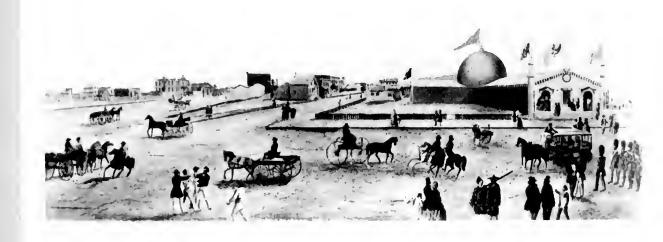
"Next day the real wreckers got to work and the old Metropolitan passed into the limbo of things that were."

No doubt these people were sentimentalists, but under their sentimentalism must have been the poignant sense of a reality -- that they were not merely saying goodbye to a theatre nor even to a landmark, but to an epoch and a city that would never be the same again.

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## THE FIRST MECHANICS' INSTITUTE PAVILION



ENGRAVING FROM J. H. WOODS, "SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS OF HISTORY OF THE MECHANICS! INSTITUTE OF SAN FRANCISCO"

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#### Chapter 8

#### RISE OF MELODEONS AND VARIETY HALLS

Minerva Hall, Apollo Hall, Concert Hall, The Melodeon, Lyceum Theatre, Mechanics Pavilion, Gilbert's Melodeon, The Gaieties

#### EARLY MELODEONS

he Lyceum is the only "legitimate" theatre in this chapter. Indeed, outside of Maguire's Opera House, it was the only conventional house built during the latter half of the fifties. (And even Maguire's was built on the foundations of an earlier theatre). This later period

was mainly one of melodeons, music, and variety halls which in the years to follow were to give San Francisco its one true claim to originality in the realm of the theatre. It was in these despised, but crowded, melodeons that criticism first lifted its face in the city; and lo, the face was painted black. The minstrels had arrived.

## THE "BIT THEATRES"

After 1855, the year of the first bank panic, a jolted citizenry suddenly began to look at their once rosy



world with the vitreous eyes of a Lucifer thrown out of heaven. The swelling periods of "classic" drama no longer lifted them into dreams of grandeur. Heaven was heaven, but Kearny Street was a muddy hole and there was no Jacob's ladder between them. They had been deceived -- they were not sure by whom -- and they wanted to be told about it; but they did not want to be bored in the bargain. And so came the melodeons to give them what they wanted. An excellent picture of the city at this time is given by T. S. Kenderdine in his book A California Tramp, published in 1859:

"San Francisco is a city of theatres. With but a sixth part of the population (1858) of Philadelphia, it can boast of almost as many places of amusement. From Maguire's Opera House down through intermediate grades to the lowest cafe chantant, are a series of entertainments from which fastidious to lax can select a place of evening resort. Occupying a middle rank among these are the 'Bit Theatres,' so termed from the price of admission—a 'bit' or shilling. These are usually conducted by broken—down professionals and their assistants are amateurs; their patrons being a medley of those who cannot afford higher priced places of diversion, or who go out of curiosity.

"In my walks about the city my attention had often been drawn toward those abodes of minor drama through the medium of glaring posters. These, after describing the features of coming entertainment, short dramas, acrobatic feats, singing and dancing conspicuously remarked that the best liquors could be had for twelve and a half cents; thus putting the professions of the stage and bar on an equal footing.

"One day in my sauntering over...the city I came across one of these places of amusement ... It was of no greater pretensions than scores of the rickety buildings surrounding it, except that it was two stories. The bar-room was as

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prominent a part of the premises as the liquor announcement was of the posters, as the audience was forced to pass through it to get to the lauditorium. The manager was Miss Rowena Granice, whether an assumed or real name, I do not know...."

This particular place, from the description of it and the name of the manager, was evidently The Gaicties on Long Wharf, but what Kenderdine had to say of it -- leaving out the superior attitude of the "cultured" Easterner -- applied equally to all the melodeons and variety halls. It has been recounted how the Bella Union, the best of these, was put out of business through an ordinance in 1893 forbidding the sale of liquor in San Francisco theatres. The intimate nature of the entertainment offered probably made liquor necessary for the proper response and appreciation, not to speak of the necessary profits to the house. And during the late fifties people were out to be entertained, not to be stultified by the solemn parade of nineteenth century mummery: therefore the rise of the minstrel and variety show and the temporary decline of the "legitimate" stage.

# MINERVA HALL

Minerva Hall was opened on September 11, 1856 on the Northeast corner of Bush and Kearny Streets with a "grand ball" conducted by a Mrs. Leslie, later the proprietor of a dancing academy in the city. No doubt occasional concerts, balls, and lectures were given there, as in so many

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other small places of the kind, but there is no definite record of entertainments offered there nor of its end; and Minerva Hall must be allowed to die as it lived, in modest and no doubt genteel obscurity.

### APOLLO HALL

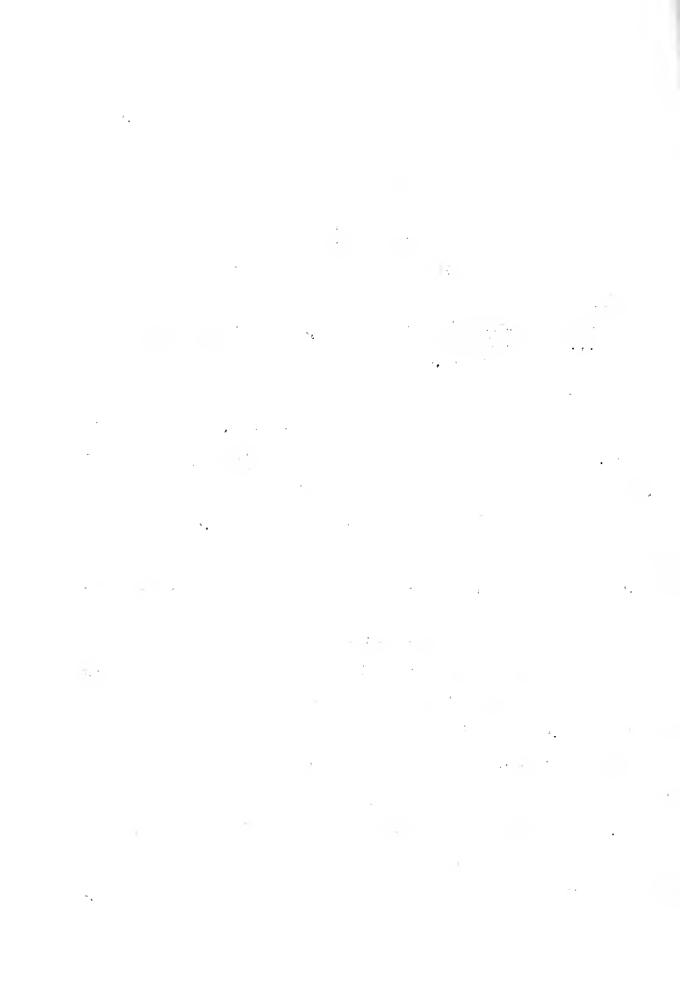
On January 31, 1857 an advertisement appeared in the Bulletin:

"Apollo Hall--Pacific Street, above Stockton ... The hall can be rented from Miss Emma Baker at her residence."

Apollo Hall at least had the honor of appearing in the city directory for three years: 1856-57-58. The rest is silence, save for an announcement in the <u>Bulletin</u> of January 28, 1862 of a benefit given by a group of "colored artists" at Apollo Hall for flood sufferers in Sacramento. This Apollo Hall should not be confused with the later Apollo Variety Hall, which was on Market Street and was not opened till 1860.

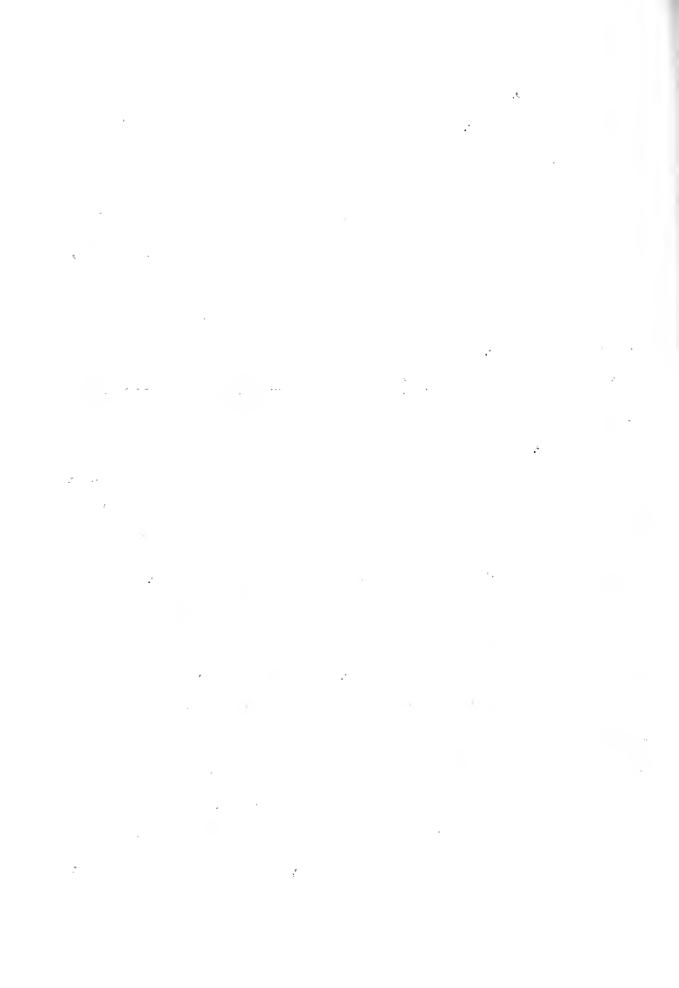
## TEATRO APOLLO

But Apollo Hall was yet to have its day in the sun, though nearly fifty years were to pass in obscurity before the day came. In 1905 it was being used as a meeting hall for Italian clubs; then on April 9 of that year an unusual event took place in Apollo Hall, now rechristened the Teatro Apollo. On that date, a Sunday evening, the first performance of the Italian Theatre in San Francisco was given to a house jammed to the rafters with indefatigable Italians.



An astute lady, a singer and actress who had but recently arrived in the city, one Signora Antonietta Pisanelli (later Alessandro) had discovered that there were sixty-thousand Italians in San Francisco and not one theatre where they could hear the language of their country. So she hired Apollo Hall for a night, corralled every available amateur actor in sight, told each of them what he had to do, and scattered bills around the city announcing a program of songs and drama at the Teatro Apollo. The Italians responded eagerly and the two dramas Cavalleria Rusticana and Prestami Tua Moglie Per Dieci Minuti were happily punctuated with the "Ahs" and "Benes" of the audience.

It is not likely that the troupe was good, but Signora Pisanelli had determination and she was dealing with a public starved for the sound of its own tongue and who would suffer anything as long as it was done in Italian. These performances went on for some time at Apollo Hall until the signora was certain that there was a permanent place for an Italian Theatre in San Francisco. Feeling this, she promptly moved out of her Teatro Apollo and leased the larger Bersaglieri Hall on the corner of Stockton and Union Streets for ten years. And Apollo Hall went back once more to its proper obscurity whence it was never again disturbed. Nevertheless it cannot be forgotten as the place of origin of the only permanent Teatro Italiano in America, as the Teatro Apollo.



### PATRIOTISM AT CONCERT HALL

directory for 1858 lists Concert Hall among places of amusement in San Francisco, placing it on the southwest corner of Clay and Sansome Streets. Patriotism and civic pride were the chief marks of its short career, the opening feature (January 16, 1857) being a diorama of Bunker Hill and the Burning of Charleston, followed shortly afterward by a panorama of main events in the crusade of the vigilantes. Evidently the treatment of this theme affronted some, for the panorama of the heroes was twice fired by incendiaries, the second time on May 11 with devastating success. career of Concert Hall was over. It has some claim to have been a minstrel hall, however, for according to Harry Gates (in The Morning Call, March 31, 1901) the diorama of Bunker Hill "was consolidated subsequently with a minstrel com-Further information on Concert Hall is even vaguer than its stated connection with "a minstrel company." It is not mentioned in any city directory after 1858.

## THE MELODEON

The Melodeon, though it never justified its exclusive name, was the first real melodeon, after the Bella Union, to be opened in San Francisco. On December 14, 1857 the following advertisement appeared in the <u>Bulletin</u>:

THE MELODEON
182 Montgomery St.
Opposite Metropolitan Theatre

Business Manager J. A. Mordo Director of Amusements J. E. Johnson



The Proprietors beg to announce to the citizens of San Francisco that this new and elegant Temple of Amusement will open on Tuesday evening, December 15, 1857. An engagement has been effected with the Pennsylvanians, whose professional career throughout the state has been a series of Triumphant Successes!

Price of Admission .... 25¢

### NO PLACE FOR LADIES

The following day, however, an unworldly gentleman calling himself "Wide-Awake" wrote (or was supposed to have written) to the editor of the Bulletin in this manner:

"Editor, Bulletin: I accidentally happened into the 'Melodeon' rooms last evening, and was much surprised to find that, instead of its being a concert-room for ladies and gentlemen, it is simply a place of resort for the latter. The entrance to the audience hall is through a barroom, and to the back of each seat in the hall is attached a little shelf to hold the glasses containing the various beverages ordered by the audience during the performance. It is evidently no place for ladies; no special provision being made for their accommodation..."

# POPULARITY OF THE MELODEON

However the letter writer felt about the absence of ladies, the customers of The Melodeon seem to have had a very comfortable time without them, for on December 20 The Wide West reported:

"There has been a great rush during the week to this democratic place of amusement. The audiences appeared to be highly gratified with the singing of the Misses Mandeville, and the comicalities of Johnson."

The Mandevilles were later joined by the Worrell Sisters and this group together with the Pennsylvanians

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continued to make things hum at The Melodeon. The entertainment seems to have been of a modest enough character for the eyes and ears of any "lady," but before a month was gone the management evidently decided to remove whatever sting was left in the pen-hand of the chivalrous gentleman. Says The Wide West of January 27, 1858:

"This place of popular entertainment continues to prove attractive. We understand that it is in contemplation to get up a series of entertainments by another company here, under circumstances which will render them a proper resort for ladies and still maintain the advantage of low prices. At present the Melodeon has matters all its own way."

And so it continued to have, or the critic of the Wide West was over enthusiastic. To quote him again:

"The unvarying popularity of this establishment renders any notices of doings within its walls necessarily similar. It is nightly crowded.... (February 21, 1858)

"The Melodeon holds its own, it can no more, for it is crowded as at first, and the indefatigable Mordo knows no wearying in well doing. He is of that order of caterers for the public who wisely adapt entertainment to the universal love of novelty ... The Misses Mandeville have their admirers by thousands all over California, and in the city their presence appears to have become indispensable. Nothing in the line of infant-ry exercise can excel the grace, precision and genuine talent evinced by those charming little creatures, the Worrell Children. ... Lew Rattler's comic scene of the French Dancing Master is enormously diverting, Johnson reigns supreme in his humorous aggravation. On Saturday afternoons the convention is regularly held at Musical Hall, sisters Agatha and Jennie presiding and doing the honors." (March 21, 1858)

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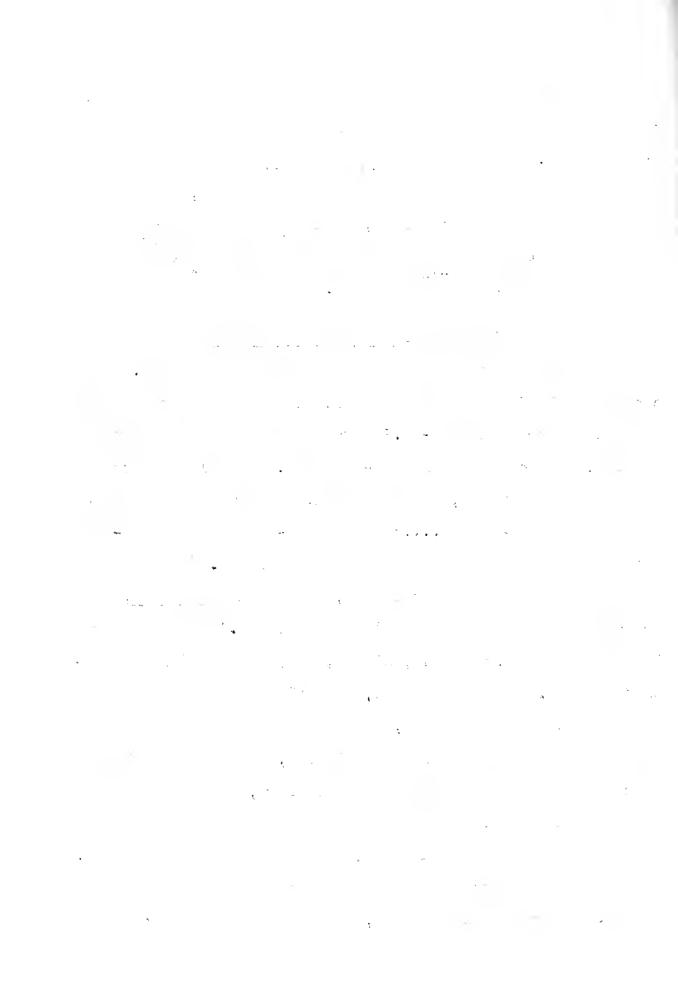
The Melodeon continued at this almost dizzy pace, a pace that but for pioneer optimism should have seemed too good to last. On April 4 The Wide West in the midst of its encomiums seems to have had an inkling of this, noting that

"For four months or so, this house has almost suffered from a continued plethora of support, and it is a great relief occasionally for the later droppers-in to have a show of a seat or a comfortable standing place."

## CHILD PRODIGIES AT THE MELODEON

But still there was no letdown in attendance. craze for child prodigies continued and was answered by the arrival of more 'infant-ry.' The precocious little Master Johnson, son of the comedian-director, nightly mounted "a pyramid of decanters, a dozen high, without a particle of faltering or indecision ... " This five-year-old "Bottle-Imp" even donned blackface and went into minstrelsy. "The youngest Negro minstrel we have ever seen," said The Wide West, "and he makes a deal of fun in 'Old Bob Ridley.'" The steamer brought another Mandeville, Alicia, to join her "indispensable" sisters. Lotta Crabtree, then "Little Lotta" the princess of all child prodigies, skipped daintily and with impish grace across the stage of The Melodeon, while her hawk-eyed mother watched critically from the wings, waiting for the rain of gold that never failed and was to make Lotta Crabtree the richest actress in America, and perhaps the loneliest.

But children were not the only features at The Me-lodeon. There came John Kelly, "the noted violinist"; Edward



Berry, an Irish singer and comedian; the Chinese Jugglers; and the popular Mart Taylor. In April came Frank Hussey, later to operate Maguire's Opera House as The Varieties for a summer, and his minstrel band, composed of Johnson Senior, Lew Rattler, Faxon, the Hamiltons, and Bernard, the last described by the enthusiastic Wide West as "the best middle man that has yet been seen in that position."

### BARTENDER PRAISED

awake nights thinking up yet nicer things to say of The Melodeon. And indeed it must have been a comfortable place in which to while away the evening hours, provided one arrived early enough to obtain a scat. The entertainment was good, there were few "ladies" present to put a man "on his manners," and good liquor was plentiful. What more could a man ask for two-bits? Even the bartender, one Hancy, "that proficient in the dispensation of the best beverages" came in for his share of Wide Western renown.

Early in May the Melodeon Troupe went on tour and the house was closed temporarily, but on May 29 it reopened with the old troupe and seemingly the old popularity. Said the Wide West on May 30, 1858:

"The interior of the Melodeon has been beautifully decorated during the recess. The seats have put on their summer raiment of neat brown linen, and the stage and proscenium are entirely rearranged. The fresh scenery is extremely rich and elegant."

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### END OF THE MELODEON

Suddenly it ended. On June 6 the house was reported to be enjoying "an unfailing popularity." (Wide West again). The entertainment was still as sparkling, the liquor still as good, the price still as low; and it seemed that The Melodeon was destined to become a permanent spot in the night-scene of San Francisco. Then on June 13 the same journal states that the entire Melodeon Troupe had joined the San Francisco Minstrels at the new Lyceum Theatre. Suddenly, mysteriously The Melodeon drops completely from the record, "summer raiment" and all.

Perhaps it was that the house was too small, that too many people had to be turned away from the crowded doors. This would account for the switch of this particular troupe to the Lyceum, but not for the permanent closure of The Melodeon. The house had a good name, financially speaking at least; its location was good; yet there was no more mention of The Melodeon, either in the city directories or in the journals of the time. Its run was like that of a racehorse lengths shead of its field, coasting to what seems an easy win and then unaccountably stopping dead in its tracks as the pack goes by. But theatrical history is replete with such tales.

### BUILDING STILL STANDS

The building still stands (1939), now numbered 724 Montgomery Street, between Washington and Jackson. Upstairs

are studios, supposedly for artists; downstairs is a Chinese storeroom. A wooden archway frames the padlocked door. It is evening. You pause and gaze at the boarded windows trying to picture The Melodeon as it was. From the saloon nearby come the sounds of mechanical music and clashing voices, punctuated with occasional laughter, just as they must have echoed from The Melodeon eighty years ago. You gaze.

### THE LYCEUM THEATRE

The main event of the year 1858 was the opening of the Lyceum Theatre on March 13 at the northwest corner of Washington and Montgomery Streets. It was large enough to accommodate from 900 to 1000 persons yet small enough to give an impression of intimacy, a rare quality in the "legitimate" houses of early San Francisco. The theatre had a frontage of 48 feet, a length of about 30 feet and a depth of 127 feet. The stage situated at the north end of the hall, was large in proportion to the hall and the floor of the auditorium sloped gradually back to the rear of the building, where there was a gallery with boxes.

## LYCEUM FIT FOR LADIES

Evidently, as in the case of The Melodeon, gentlemen of the "Wide-Awake" school were once more concerned over the prospective absence of "ladies" from the halls of the Lyceum, for on March 10 the <u>Bulletin</u> issued this reassuring statement:

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"It will make an elegant place of amusement. An impression has gone abroad that it will be a house of drinking and smoking and altogether unfitted for ladies. This is a mistake. The house is intended as a similar one to Burton's in New York, and is meant as a place of cheap amusement, the prices being fixed at 25 cents, and 'reserved seats' only 50 cents."

Ladies or no ladies, the Lyceum in the early months of its career crowded as many patrons through its doors as it could hold. John Wilson, the lessee, was a shrewd and experienced showman, and he chose an excellent stage-manager in A. R. Phelps.

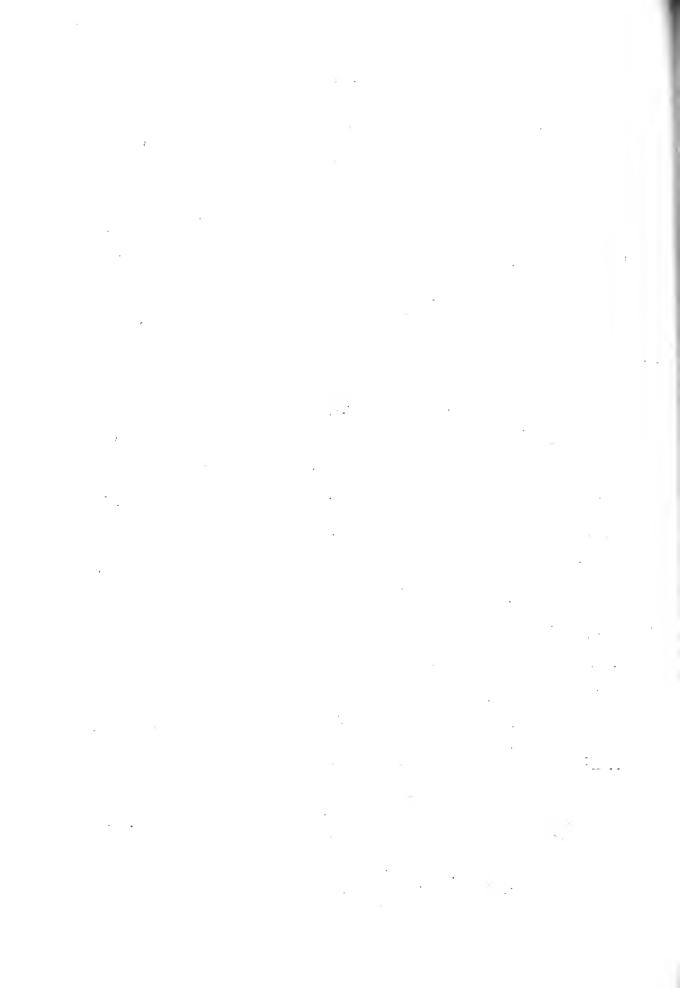
### BEGINS AS A MELODEON

The Lyceum began as a molodeon and as such could not fail to equip itself with a bar, two bars in this case described as "superior saloons." An old favorite, Miss Albertine, was the star of the opening company which included the "little native Australian nugget" Julia Leonard, a Mr. Glover, and Mile. Therese and Monsieur Schmidt. Then came Mme. Céleste, the Chinese Jugglers, Caroline Chapman, and Frank Mayo, who began his career at the Lyceum and was offered a benefit on June 3.

In June the Melodeon Troupe moved into the Lyceum.

The Wide West reported on June 13:

"When it was published that the Melodeon Troupe was to open at this house, on Monday evening, in conjunction with the San Francisco Minstrels, every one knew that there would be a tremendous rush to greet so rare a combination. Johnson, Backus, and Hussey, a rich trio of humorists, the Mandeville sisters in their choicest songs and duets, the fairy-like Worrell Children, and



a minstrel band complete in its vocal and instrumental arrangement-all these on the same night, and at the same low prices, could not fall to prove irresistible. It was music and fun for the million, and no mistake.

In other words the Lyceum was taking up where The Melodeon left off, with the same popularity and with more room to accommodate the eager. Says the Wide West again on July 4, 1858:

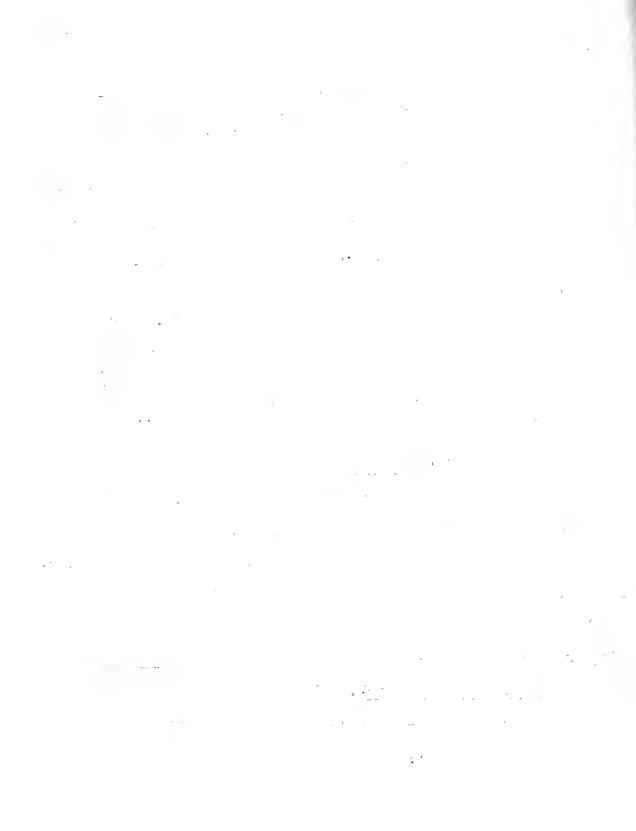
"The Lyceum enjoys an abundant patronage. There is rarely a spare seat in this spacious Hall since the Melodeon troupe and the San Francisco Minstrels combined their forces upon its boards. They conclude every evening with a farce of the most mirth-provoking order, in which Backus, Johnson, and Miss Jennie Mandeville appear."

### LYCEUM TURNS LEGITIMATE

But Wilson was out to rival Maguire, who had just remodeled and reopened his Opera House, and so the Lyceum could not be content with variety shows, however popular. Twice already during May there had occurred the old familiar conflict between the two houses when both offered the same play on the same night. On May 9 it was The Brigands and on May 15 The Poor of New York. The latter production brought about another Maguire-against-the-world dispute concerning the rights to the play, these being the first showings of the play in San Francisco.

# LYCEUM VERSUS MAGUIRE

Maguire was enjoying an opulent summer, but Wilson scored a counter-hit in the fall with the engagement of James



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and Sarah Stark in a repertory of old and new pieces, among which the most important was Napoleon I; or, The Fortunes of St. Albyn, which ran for ten days. Then came the Gougenheim Sisters who had just finished an engagement at the Opera House; and again, on November 29 and December 17, the inevitable dispute and twin production of the same play on the same night. Both plays were by Boucicault, Maguire's old bone of contention, the first being Pauvrette and the other a play called Po-Ca-Hon-Tas; or, The Genteel Savage.

### JOHN DREW THE ELDER

At the beginning of 1859 three stars appeared in San Francisco: John Drew, (father of the famous John Drew), and John Collins (both specializing in Irish comedy parts); and Eph Horn, a famous minstrel of the time. Horn opened at the Lyceum on January 3, while the other two were beginning engagements at the Opera House and the American Theatre. With Horn was the Lyceum Minstrel and Burlesque Opera Troupe, "the only band in the state, and the largest and most talented in the world." Later in the month, January 26, Drew went over to the Lyceum, after a brief sojourn in Sacramento, bringing with him Georgina Kinlock, Agatha States, and Alicia Mandeville. Scottish and Irish dances to the brawl of bagpipes completed whatever was authentic in Drew's Gaelic repertoire.

## HARRY COURTAINE BECOMES STAGE-MANAGER

In March the Lyceum went "dramatic" again with an excellent company including Harry Courtaine, J. B. Booth,

Frank Mayo, James Anderson, Fanny Morant, and George Ryer. Courtaine, who was probably just out of jail again, was stage-manager. The faith of impresarios in this irresponsible bacchanal of the stage was evidently inexhaustible, and it was justified. Drunk or sober, Harry was worth his salt and every theatregoer in San Francisco knew it. Opening play of the season was Hamlet, with James Anderson as the prince and Fanny Morant as Ophelia. In the following month Annette Ince joined the Lyceum company, appearing at the theatre from April 6 through the 16th.

Stars and companies seem to have been limited in San Francisco for the rest of that year and divided their time among the three theatres of the city: the Opera House, the American, and the Lyceum. The Lyceum, like its rivals, offered a confused round of variety shows, popular melodrama, and Shakespeare. Wilson himself took over the American Theatre for a while that summer presenting James Stark in a Shakespearean repertory; then brought Stark and his company back to his own Lyceum.

## DULL TIMES AT THE LYCEUM

The fall and winter of 1859 were dull seasons for the hitherto lively Lyceum. Maguire was scattering gold on another operatic spree at the Opera House, while the American Theatre was enjoying a revival under Lewis Baker, and the Lyceum was neglected. Manager succeeded manager -- first

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James Dowling; then an Australian, A. Torning; and finally T. Tonque, with the Juvenile Dramatic Troupe -- all with equally bad fortune. It was a bad end to a fine year but the Lyceum was still to enjoy a final period of triumph before the ultimate flames of November 1860.

California into national politics, into war and the bitter wake of war, which was to sober this hectic city for a time and then lift her high again with the completion of the transcontinental railroad and the outpour of silver from the Comstock Lode in Nevada. But the Lyceum Theatre was to burn out of the picture before the first year was over.

### JUNIUS BOOTH TAKES OVER

In February Junius Booth and George Ryer leased the Lyceum for a company which had performed with great success at the American Theatre in January, under the managership of Lewis Baker, and starring James Hackett. Later, at the Lyceum, Henry Perry appeared in Hackett's place. This troupe remained until April when the house was turned over to the Marsh Juvenile Comedians. Among performances given by the Baker company were two dramas by local authors, Gamecock of the Wilderness by John S. Robb and Last Days of Robespierre by an unnamed "lady of this city."

# THE MARSH JUVENILES

The Marsh Juveniles, advertised as being from six to sixteen years of age, (most of them were between twelve and

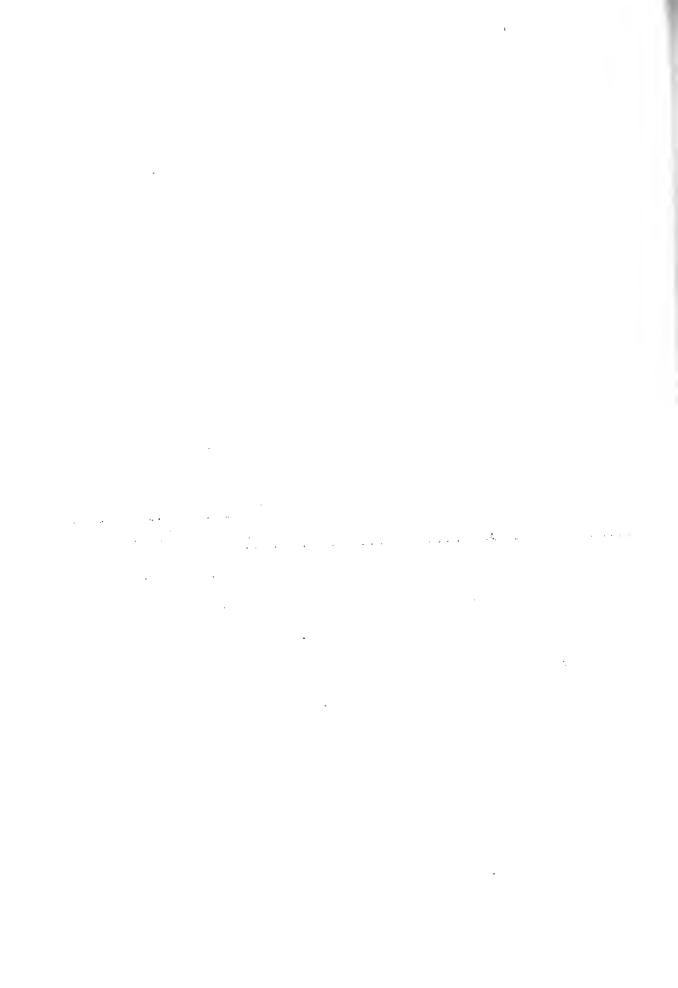
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fourteen), exploited the city's current craze for child prodigies until May 1. They were mostly girls, there being only four boys out of a troupe of thirty, and none of them, according to Eutton in Curiosities of the American Stage, were Marshes. The troupe took its name from its manager, R. G. Marsh, and as the children grew up or died they were replaced by new members. They employed an adult reportory, even including tragedy, and their imitations of their elders had already won the enthusiasm of New York audiences five years before. It is interesting to compare the child worship of this period with that of the 1930s, as though through these prodigies people hoped to escape from their troubled world into a perennial and sentimentalized childhood.

On May 2 Booth and Ryer returned to the Lyceum with their old company in a local piece called Three Fast Men of San Francisco; or, The Female Robinson Crusoe, which had been running at the American Theatre since April 12. W. W. Allen, the Yankee Comedian, was the star of the show, sharing honors with a group of female minstrels, Mrs. Baker who played eight characters, and Jennie Mandeville who played seven. This ran for three more nights at the Lyceum, though in a revised version and without some of the bolder features of the original play, which probably accounted for its shorter run.

# LYCEUM IS UMRIVALLED

During the early summer Maguire was concentrating on opera again and, the American Theatre being closed, the



Lyceum was the only theatre in the city where drama could be witnessed. The main attraction of the season was the engagement of Jean Davenmort who opened at this theatre on May 21 in Camille. Supporting her were Mrs. Woodward, Henry Perry, and Sophie Edwin. After her departure in June, along with Perry, an all-star cast continued successfully until the end of the month when Harriet Gordon joined the company as featured player. Included in this troupe, which had a prosperous run until the middle of July were: Harry Brown, George Waldron, W. W. Allen and Mrs. W. C. Forbes.

### FIRE DESTROYS THE LYCEUM

It was the beginning of the end for the Lyceum. The company was disbanded in July, most of its members going over to Maguire's Opera House, and from that time on until its burning in November there is small evidence of activity at the Lyceum, save for the re-engagement of the Marsh Juveniles and a brief season of Chinese drama in August and September.

In the <u>Bulletin</u> of November 27, 1860 appeared the following report:

"After half after seven this morning fire was discovered to be issuing from the windows of the Lyceum building, the large two story house on the corner of Montgomery and Washington Streets. There was a watchman on the place, but he did not give the alarm; indeed at 8 o'clock he was aroused from his morning nap by the firemen shaking his door. The flames when first discovered were feeding on the light inflammable material of the theatre, and in a few minutes it was evident that nothing could be saved above the lower floor.

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"The whole of the upper part of the building was occupied by the theatre. Below there were stores. The walls were of thick brick and outwardly had a substantial look. They formed, however, merely a wall builded around a right angle; its principal stability lay in its brick foundation upon brick partitions between the stores on the ground floor. The roof soon tumbled in. The stage, the galleries, the boxes of the theatre were early consumed. The iron pillars still support the bar and the mere outlines of the dress circle, but all is charred—utterly ruined."

And so the history of another theatre in San Francisco ends in fire, an old story but one that was never to weary of repetition. Indeed, it was fortunate that only one theatre burned, for the Athenaeum next door on the north side was separated only by a partition wall. But the latter escaped with a few broken windows and a slight drenching from the firehose. More damaged were the stores below, all of which suffered loss of property and goods from the overflow of water. The total loss to the owner of the building, Thomas Adams, was estimated at about \$12,000 there being no insurance. John Wilson, who was either clairvoyant or plain lucky, had turned the building over to Adams a short time before the fire. The usual rumors of incendiarism were raised but there were evidently no grounds for the charge and there was no official investigation.

# MECHANICS PAVILION

The Mechanics Institute, according to the city directory of 1868, was first organized on March 29, 1855, but

Mechanics Pavilion was not opened until September 8, 1857 when the Institute's first annual fair was held there. The first Pavilion was located on the site of the old Lick House on the corner of Montgomery and Sutter Streets. According to the same directory (1868):

"The objects of the Institute are the establishment of a library, reading-room, collection of a cabinet, scientific apparatus, works of art, and other literary and scientific purposes. The society has a reading-room well supplied with the leading scientific and literary periodicals of the day, and a valuable library, containing over 10,000 volumes. During the years 1858, 1860, 1864, 1865, and 1868, this Institute presented to the attention of the people of California their second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth annual exhibitions, each of which was attended with the most complete success."

# ANNUAL MECHANICS FAIR

It may be seen that these Mechanics Fairs were not held every year, probably for financial and social reasons; nevertheless they went on for nearly forty years during which time they became an event toward which people from all over the state looked forward from year to year. This fair was not so much a type of the immemorial country fair, based on sound economic and social reasons; it was rather a miniature of those World Fairs so dear to the nineteenth century and protracted into the twentieth (more by momentum than by natural demand), in which people assemble to admire themselves and their mechanical and material progress as opposed to the ignorance and backwardness of their loss fortunate

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forefathers. Thus, since they were natural to their times and evidently did not overreach themselves in expenditure, they were assured of success.

# FAIRS, FUNERALS, FIGHTS, AND CONVENTIONS

In the latter part of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth these fairs were succeeded by the modern "conventions," which are the same thing under a different name except that they usually concentrate on the exhibition of progress in one particular profession or branch of business. Mechanics Pavilion was always the popular gathering place for these "educational" assemblies. Says Anna E. Pratt in the Chronicle, February 23, 1902:

"More local history has been made in the Mechanics Pavilion than in any possible aggregation of churches and halls in this city, and for that matter, much general history, because San Francisco has become a popular national convention place. This city seldom extends an invitation that is not accepted."

For those who believe that history is made in convention halls this may be accepted as true.

But more than conventions and state fairs were held in the five different Mechanics Pavilions. The famous female impersonator Omar Kingsley, then known as Ella Zoyara, did "her" daring feats on horseback here as thousands gaped; bicycle races, tug of war games, memorial services for presidents and queens and generals, horse shows, dog shows were held here in bewildering succession. Among those who were mourned here were Ulysses S. Grant, President Hayes (they must have strained their souls a little in this case),



Benjamin Harrison, Queen Victoria, President Carnot of France, and President McKinley. Only a few months before the funereal tribute to McKinley there had been a wild mass demonstration in Mechanics Pavilion in honor of his election.

There was an Irish Fair, a Goethe-Schiller Fair, a Golden Jubilee for the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, a Golden Jubilee Mining Fair in 1899, and an Industrial Arts Exhibition. Also a Klondike Outfitting Fair during the Alaska gold rush, which sounds suspiciously as though the clothing merchants had a hand in it. Sometimes the Pavilion became a "Hippotheatron," sometimes a skating rink (ice or roller); once it was transformed into the Roman Colosseum -- the Circus Maximus. There were wrestling matches --Muldoon himself, "The Iron Man," appeared; and all the great prize fighters of the age fought here. Here in 1884 John L. Sullivan roared and clouted the little local boy, Robinson, into unconsciousness; Bob Fitzsimmons, "Ruby Robert," broke his hands and heart on the giant Jeffries before being knocked out of his world championship in 1902; "Gentleman Jim" Corbett danced swiftly around the same patient Jeffries for ten rounds on August 14, 1903 in a gallant attempt to regain lost title until that careless moment when his glove dropped and the huge fist of Jeffries shot to his chin and plumped him permanently to the floor. There was another title fight here on August 27, 1904 again featuring Jim Jeffries, this time against the weaker Jack Monroe whom he

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quickly subdued in the second round. Others to fight here were Gus Ruhlin and Tom Sharkey.

# THE FIRST PAVILION

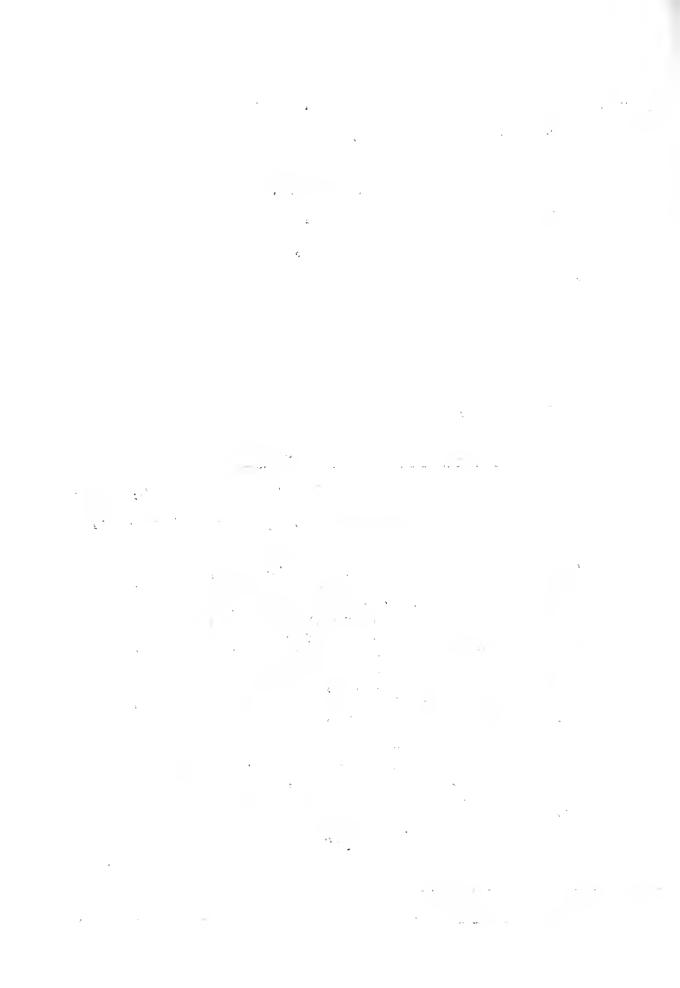
The first of the Pavilions, on Montgomery and Sutter Streets, occupied a space of 20,000 square feet. But before the Fair of 1858 the demand of the exhibitors for more space was so urgent that it was enlarged by 5000 square feet. Even this was not accounted enough and by the time of the third fair the Pavilion extended another 5000 square feet, making a total of 30,000 square feet -- no mean area.

# TWO PAVILIONS IN UNION SQUARE

There was no fair in the Pavilion until 1864, probably due to the turmoil of the Civil War, but in the meantime

"It was not long before business crowded the first Pavilion out. This was in 1863, and in 1864 the trustees of the institute bought another structure, 'far out of town,' on Union Square, the block bounded by Stockton, Geary, Powell and Post. Then everyone was quite sure that the Pavilion was settled for a lifetime at least. As the trustees thought they had found a permanent location, they built a structure presumably large enough for every demand, 55,000 square feet in area. The very next year they had to add an annex of 6000 feet. arrangement lasted until 1868 when the building of 1864 was torn down and another erected on the same site. This time \$50,000 was expended in the construction of the Pavilion, which had 65,000 square feet in the main floor and 8000 more in the galleries; this was possible with dimensions of 277 by 180. "\*

<sup>\*</sup> San Francisco Chronicle, Article by Anna E. Pratt, Feb. 23, 1902.



#### PAVILION NUMBER FOUR

But the trustees had not taken into account the growth of the city. Land was growing too expensive for such a vast structure only occasionally used; and the third Pavilion was torn down in the fall of 1871. Once more the Pavilion moved west, clear "out of the world" as it was considered then, on the block bounded by Eighth, Seventh, Market, and Mission Streets, just above where the present Post Office stands (1939). This building in accordance with Mechanics policy, was even larger than the previous Pavilion, covering an area measuring 541 by 200 feet but, with an added conservatory garden on the west side, 300 feet long.

# THE FIFTH AND LAST

This building lasted ten years until 1881 when the growth of the city once more caught up with the Pavilion and pushed it out to its last site which included the whole block of Hayes, Grove, Larkin, and Polk, exactly where its successor, the Civic Auditorium now stands. This Pavilion was erected in 1882 at a cost of \$95,000 and was to prove an excellent investment, enduring until the fire of 1906, though there was talk of its being demolished in 1902. There was an annex to this one, the Pavilion proper covering 412-1/2 by 222-1/2 feet and the annex, on Hayes Street, 186 by 52-1/2.

"Each 'Pavilion' of the five constructed by the Mechanics Institute has had its history of importance but it has remained for the latest to deserve the banner. Without, the place has a

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substantial appearance, hopelessly plain and without anything to make its character except for the plaster statues beneath the gables. They are large enough to be effective from the street and when they have had a fresh coat in semblance of bronze they even look imposing. If one stops to read them he will soon know that the great barn structure had affiliations with the industrial arts."

# ANYTHING GOES

Sixteen of the regular Mechanics Fairs, of which there were thirty-one in all, were held at the fifth Pavilion. Here, at the last location, were held most of the sensational events that have been recorded, including prize fights, horse shows, dog shows, golden jubilees, church socials, bicycle races, circuses, memorials, and a meeting for the Young People's Christian Endeavor societies, for the last of which a convention hall to seat 10,000 people was built within the Pavilion. Anything went at the Mechanics Pavilion and usually it "went over."

# THE PHONOGRAPH! THE PHONOGRAPH!

Before taking leave of the five Mechanics Pavilions it is interesting to hark back to May 23,1878 when the building was on the Eighth and Mission site. On this date an adappeared in Figaro:

Chorus of 200 Voices! Immense
Orchestra, Electricity, Artillery and
Telephone. May 28, 29, 30th!
The Phonograph! The Phonograph:

<sup>\*</sup> Ibid.

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# Phonograph for the May Festival

A telegram has been received by Mr. Samuel W. Bugbee, the director of the May Musical Festival, to the effect that a large-sized phonograph has been shipped to his order. It will arrive the day before the opening of the Festival, and Mr. Samuel Hubbard, the agent of the Bell Telephone Company, will use every endeavor to have it in working order for the occasion. Mr. Bugbee has the sole right of exhibiting this new invention, and as it is exceptionally large, will be plainly heard at the Pavilion.

which should make any man nostalgic for the good old days when noise was a treat and his neighbors lived at home.

# DAN O'LEARY WALKS

One other event, this time of a sporting nature, should be chronicled as a further glory in the history of great athletic matches at the Mechanics Pavilion. On March 2, 1880 this notice, along with an advertisement, appeared in Figaro:

"We call the attention of our readers to the announcement elsewhere, regarding the coming match between the two great rivals of the pedestrian world, O'Leary and Weston. The record of both these men places them in the very foremost rank of their profession, and their chief object in the coming match, apart from the large amount of money at stake, will be to beat all previous performances—to do which it will be necessary to cover 553 miles, the distance covered by Blower Brown, in London, within the last month."

The prize for the winner, tremendous for the time, was announced at \$10,000. It was to be a six-day race, "go-as-you-please," beginning March 8 at 1 a.m. (a queer hour to begin a walk) and ending March 13 at 11 p. m. The winner is

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not recorded in Figaro, but the fame of Dan O'Leary has come down to our own time, he having walked from Boston to Philadelphia in the 1920s at the age of ninety. There was evidently a passion for walking-matches at that time, for Figaro on the 13th announced the beginning of another match on the 15th, this time between ladies and gentlemen, the ladies being spotted a hundred and twenty-five mile start. This must seem a strange passion to a generation whose humblest member will purchase an automobile long before he even hopes to own a home.

# GILBERT'S MELODEON

Gilbert's Melodeon, later the New Olympic Theatre, was opened to the public on December 5, 1859 by Ferdinand Gilbert on the northeast corner of Clay and Kearny Streets.

Gilbert's (which later changed its name to Worrell's Olympic, then to the Olympic Melodeon, and finally to the New Olympic Theatre), was one of the earliest and brightest of the San Francisco melodeons which were to change the nature of theatrical entertainment so much during the sixties and seventies. Says Harry Gates in the Morning Call of March 31, 1901:

"The opening of Gilbert's Melodeon...was a notable event, since it was at this house that Joe Murphy, then a Sacramento fisherman, and Ned Harrigan, a journeyman ship calker, made their first bids for public favor as variety actors and it was on the same stage that Maggie Moore became a prime favorite in vaude-ville."

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It must be confessed that Ned Harrigan made a pretty weak bid at Gilbert's Melodeon, as he was discharged after a three-day stand. Nevertheless it did give him a start, for he obtained a job under Ned Buckley at the Bella Union the day after his release and immediately, with the help of supporters from the Vallejo shipyards, began one of the longest and most successful careers in American variety. Others, beside Harrigan, Murphy, and Miss Moore, to appear at Gilbert's included Lotta Crabtree, the Worrell Sisters, Jake Wallace, Hattie Thorne, Charley Backus, John Woodward, Emelie Melville, and Harry Courtaine.

# AN UPSTAIRS HALL

Gilbert's was an upstairs hall; and in the same building, on the northeast corner of Clay and Kearny, was the Pacific Museum where during May of 1858 the sporting blood of San Franciscans had been pleasingly stirred by the nightly spectacle of a nine-year-old child called "La Petite Cerita" entering a cage with a panther. After the "performance" (its nature is not revealed in the advertisements), she was supposed to dance and sing for the delectation of her audiences, "if she lived."

# RIVALS THE BELLA UNION

Gilbert's Melodeon, like its rival the Bella Union, was both a variety and minstrel hall, featuring occasional concert programs and dramatic shows. For several years under

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Ferdinand Gilbert, an enterprising and restless showman, it competed successfully with the Bella Union, its only real rival at that time. It has been mentioned that the melodeons in early years did not advertise in the newspapers but by means of handbills scattered about the streets, so it is impossible to give any detailed list of performances at Gilbert's.

# GILBERT'S BECOMES WORRELL'S OLYMPIC

According to Figaro, September 23, 1868 (reporting the death of Ferdinand Gilbert), Gilbert's Melodeon was in the California Exchange Building, which had been torn down and rebuilt on the same site by Abel Guy who leased the upper part as a minstrel hall. The building was 100 feet long by 75 feet wide and also, as has been mentioned, housed the The melodeon was Gilbert's first venture Pacific Museum. into the theatrical business, a trade so profitable to him that he was able to leave an estate of more than \$400,000 at the time of his comparatively early death. Gilbert was evidently not satisfied with his melodeon alone, for he later leased Hayes Park and the Willows. In 1865 he sold out Gilbert's Melodeon, which opened as Worrell's Olympic on February 3 of that year with the Camilla Burlesque Troupe.

# BECOMES THE NEW OLYMPIC

The Worrell name was dropped on May 1, 1865 and the house was henceforth known as the Olympic Melodeon until June 29 when it was reopened as the New Olympic Theatre.

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Gilbert in the meantime had bought back into his original house, but after a short time he sold out his interest to his partner E.G.Bert. Gilbert died on September 21,1868 of Panama fever, on shipboard two days out from New York.

Of the New Olympic Theatre, Figaro, June 20, 1868, says:

"This popular place of resort, after thorough renovation and redecoration, and the addition of an improved, and enlarged entrance will be opened this evening with a perfect shower of stars, including the beautiful and talented sisters, Emily and Lizzie Dashwood, Master Raphael De Solla, Miss Minnie Loder, Miss Maggie Moore, and a company of really first class artists.

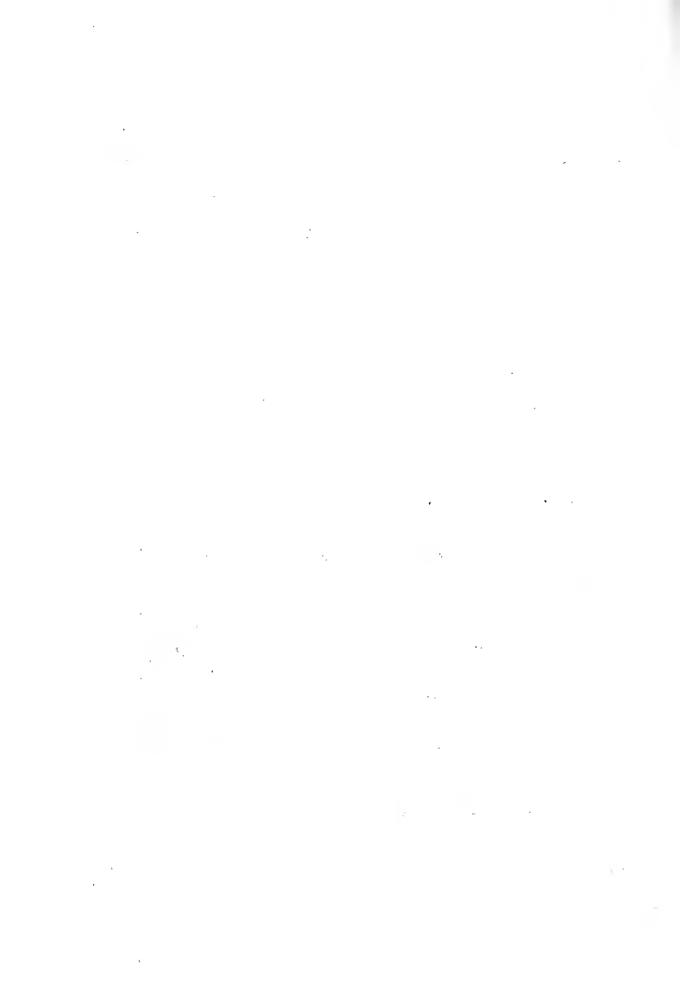
"These will inaugurate a series of select and refined entertainments in Operetta, Comedy, Farce and Burlesque, under the management of E. G. Bert & Co., who will revive a style of recherche amusements such as characterized Mr. Bert's Management during the engagement of the Worrell Sisters, Miss Lotta, Joe Murphy, Charley Backus and other leading artists now at the head of the profession.

"This company will shortly be augmented by celebrated stars from Europe, including Mile. Henrietta Bahn, première danseuse from Berlin, and a ballet troupe, to intercept which Mr. Rogers went East some weeks since, and the ever popular comedian Mr. Joe Murphy who will shortly arrive and appear at this establishment. The new Olympic is destined to become the great concert, ballet, and burlesque theatre of the West."

# BURLESQUE, MINSTRELS, THE CAN-CAN

On the opening bill was included Master Raphael de Solla, described as the "infant Sims Reeves," Lew Rattler,

<sup>\*</sup> Yellow Fever. It was prevalent in those days.



"the most characteristic Ethiopian comedian on the Pacific Coast," and the Dashwood Sisters in "the capital extravaganza" A Love of a Prince. First Stackhouse and then John Woodward were managers in that year (1868), and the theatre seemed to be justifying the confident opening-night prediction of Figaro. Among performances given were a burlesque of Antony and Cleopatra on August 10, Streets of San Francisco on October 12, and Rip Van Burkel on November 2. The Kelly and Holly Minstrels appeared and were given a benefit on October 12; also Grace Darley and W. E. Rogers; the managers, Stackhouse and Woodward were benefited, Woodward being presented with a set of diamonds.

On January 2, 1869 the theatre was closed for renovation, a comedian Barry Carter, appearing on closing night. Bert announced a "grand reopening" for January 28, with Three Fast Women of San Francisco as the feature. Performers were Barry Carter, "Joe Murphy, the great, and Miss Maggie Moore and our monster constellation." But business was sporadic in the early months of the year, and the house was again closed, opening on April 10 under the stage managership of Woodward again. The bill included a minstrel show with Jake Wallace as "Bones" and an extravaganza Trip to the Moon, starring Nellie Hosmer, Molly Bramford, and Woodward. Also on the bill was the "Original Olympic Can-Can, by our invincible ballet."

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#### COURTAINE AGAIN

Woodward continued as manager until May 3 when he was succeeded by none other than the unbelievable Harry Courtaine, who had evidently once more succeeded in talking his way back into the theatrical picture. Courtaine himself was billed as the dramatic star, appearing in "the Petite Comedy," Alarming Sacrifice, and supported by E. T. Melville, Miss Tillie Price, and J. N. Taylor. Also billed were Hattie Thorne, Jake Wallace, Frank Sparrow, and one Campbell.

#### NO MORE OLYMPIC

Courtaine must have surprised everybody by behaving himself and tending to his duties as manager and star attraction until June 3, when he was followed as manager by Stackhouse. It had been a great summer and it seemed that the Olympic would go on successfully for a long time. But suddenly on October 3, 1869 this notice appeared in the Morning Call:

"The Old Olympic has ceased to be a place of amusement and is now in the hands of the carpenters and masons for conversion into offices."

And thus ends the story of Gilbert's Melodeon, alias Worrell's, alias the Olympic. As in the case of The Melodeon, it seems to have dropped out of the picture just when it was thriving most. But apparent success in the theatrical world can be very deceiving and without knowing the financial facts it is useless to conjecture why the Olympic should have suddenly ceased to be. It is enough, historically at least, to

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But in a city as thick with melodeons as San Francisco was, one house was hardly to be missed very long. There were the Bella Union, the Adelphi, the Alhambra, the Pacific, Buckley's, and divers others (not to speak of the "legitimate" houses which were also featuring variety and minstrel shows at that time); and none could complain of lack of entertainment facilities.

#### THE GAIETIES: A SHORT STORY

Brief mention must also be made of The Gaieties, a ramshackle, two-story hall at 77 Commercial Street on Long Wharf, which has already been described in a quotation from T. S. Kenderdine's A California Tramp at the beginning of this chapter. It was an unimportant place, similar to many of the earlier melodeons and operated by Rowena Granice. Just when it was opened is not definite, but Lotta Crabtree is supposed to have appeared there in 1856. Three years later she again appeared there as Topsy in a benefit for Miss Granice on December 23, 1859. The place was then known as the Varieties and had changed to that name on August 13, 1859 when a stock company had appeared there including: Lizzie Gordon, danseuse and actress; Annette Irving, danseuse; Louise George, songstress; J.H. Wilder, manager; W.S. Gale, P. Earl, J. Barry, J. T. Collins, and F. Deron.

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#### A BIT OF A ROW

But leave cannot be taken of The Gaieties without quoting an interesting incident from an issue of the <u>Daily</u>

<u>Evening Bulletin</u> on August 10, 1859:

"A 'scene' occurred at the Gaieties Theatre today. Miss Rowena Granice, the sole lessee and
proprietor, was in peaceable possession. Mr.
Thomas Claughley last night closed and nailed
it up. Miss Rowena Granice this morning opened
it. Mr. Claughley closed it a second time and
Miss Rowena Granice opened it a second time, and
kept it open, and declares that she will keep
it open. During the above play of 'dead open
and shut,' Mr. Claughley and Miss Granice were
arrested, at each other's complaint, for malicious mischief; and the chorus was performed
by the crowd, who shouted: Hurra for crinoline!'
Miss Granice seems to be persecuted by Claughley;
but if she be left alone, she will soon get the
better of him."

From which it appears that Mr. Claughley, being a mere husband, was as helpless as the authorities to keep the melodeons closed. Attempts were to be made for many years to close them, but Mr. Claughley could have told the objectors that they were wasting their time. The melodeons were here to stay.

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# Chapter 9

#### MUSIC HALLS OF 1860

# Tucker's Academy Of Music, Platt's Music Hall, Apollo Variety Hall

#### UNEQUAL CAREERS

latt's and Tucker's though designed the same type of entertainment and built succession, had very unequal in close Tucker's, which came first, was careers. intended to take the place of Meiggs' Musical Hall which had been very popular as a hall for concerts, lectures, and public balls. As such. Tucker's in turn had become equally popular but it was soon eclipsed by the building of the more sumptuous Platt's Hall. Platt's endured until 1890 when it was destroyed to make way for the Mills Building, which still stands, while Tucker's was sold to the Independent Order of Odd Fellows in 1863 and altered into a lodge building.

# APOLLO VARIETY HALL

Apollo Variety Hall can be treated in a paragraph and though it came later in the year than the other two halls

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its meagre history might as well be placed at the beginning of the chapter. Like many melodeons and variety halls of the fifties -- the What Cheer Melodeon at 123 Sacramento Street; Vernon Hall at 186 Montgomery, and others already treated -- there is no available information on it beyond a brief mention; and its career was probably as brief. It is not even listed in the city directories. McCabe's Journal places it on the south side of Market between Third and Fourth Streets, nearly opposite Kearny, and gives the opening date as November 14, 1860. John and Mary Woodward were the managers. The last advertisement was on November 23, 1860.

The only other mention of the Apollo is by Harry Gates in the Morning Call, April 21, 1901, who states that in 1860 it "was a strong bidder for public favor, although it appears to have been located 'too far out of town,' as they said in those days," which is an almost certain indication of a brief career.

# TUCKER'S ACADEMY OF MUSIC

Messrs. Clark and Kenitzer, architects, had completed a new hotel (Stevenson's) in the fall of 1859. Where-upon J. W. Tucker, a jeweler, commissioned them to build for him a new music hall, the front of which should be the exact replica of the admired hotel building next to which it was to stand. Said the <u>Bulletin</u> of October 25, 1859 upon hearing of the project:

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"This will make the block extending from California and Summer Streets one of the most beautiful in the city."

And so people thought when Tucker's Academy of Music was opened on February 15, 1860. The building, standing on the west side of Montgomery Street just south of California, had a frontage of 65 feet on Montgomery Street and a depth of 94-1/2 feet. Like its twin, the Stevenson Hotel, it had four tiers of windows; the side walls were paved with diamondshaped slabs of marble on a stucco background. On the first floor were three stores, with large plate glass windows, each store measuring 20 feet wide by 80 feet deep. One of these was Tucker's Jewelry Store. The second floor contained a reception room, a banquet room, and several smaller apartments tended for bachelor quarters and business offices. From this floor two wide staircases led to the music hall which occupied the third and fourth stories of the building.

There was an ample stage in the hall, 38 feet wide by 15 feet deep, with dressing rooms on each side. The audience portion of the hall was nearly 65 feet wide and 70 feet long and was provided with well-spaced cushioned chairs. The idea of these was to

"... memedy a defect experienced in every theatre and hall in the city where a visitor's legs are invariably cramped enough to give him the rheumatism. Here the seats will be wide apart, like those in a well-planned church, where the comfort of the physical man is cared for as well as the spiritual, in accordance with the enlightened ideas of modern times."\*

<sup>\*</sup> Bulletin, Oct. 25, 1859.

## A GREAT FUTURE PREDICTED

The notion that no age had ever had any regard for physical comfort before the nineteenth century is of course ridiculous, but the complacency is typical of the times. Nevertheless it was a sensible idea and Tucker's must have been a very comfortable place to pass a few hours. The main floor was capable of seating about 800 persons; the gallery, which continued in unbroken line around and behind the stage to provide for spectators at the numerous balls, from 300 to 400. Since the hall was only 26 feet high the gallery must have been very close to the main floor. During these balls this allowed for greater intimacy between the spectators and the dancers; or so thought the <u>Bulletin</u>. This same paper was evidently very impressed with Tucker's new Academy and optimistic of its future. In the issue already quoted it said:

"From every portion of the house, every other portion will look well, and particularly the gallery behind the stage, which will be constructed of a tasteful arched work, of a new and beautiful pattern...As it will be situated in the center of the city, on the main and most fashionable street, on the omnibus route, it will doubtless be a popular place of resort and become the center of first-class amusements."

# OFF ON THE WRONG FOOT

The first concert evidently did not bear out the probability of this prediction. It was given as a benefit for the Black Hussars and featured that old favorite of San Francisco audiences, Eliza Biscaccianti, assisted by Mrs. Georgiana Loach, Madame E. Kammerer Schwegerle, Stephen Leach,

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Charles Schultz, violinist, and George T. Evans, pianist. The orchestra in accompaniment was conducted by R. Herold and was joined by the San Francisco Harmonic Society. The price of admission was only a dollar, the singers were excellent; yet says the <u>Bulletin</u> of February 15, 1860 after a tribute to the beauty of the hall:

"Notwithstanding the full orchestra and some of the best singers in the city, the entertainment was somewhat heavy. The music appeared to fall flat and dull upon the audience. There was not the full resonance which was always felt in the old Musical Hall. It may be that the plaster on the roof and walls of the new hall being still, in places, soft and damp, prevents the proper reflection of sound, or, possibly the sides of the hall being covered with galleries, doors and windows, while the fourth side (behind the orchestra) is cut up by arched recesses, the sound is so entangled, so to speak, that no proper reverberation can be obtained, and thus, musical tones, the gentlest and loudest alike, fall somewhat dead on the ears of the audience.

"Probably when the plaster becomes dry and hard its natural elasticity in reflecting sound will remedy the evil alluded to. It will be a great pity if any permanent defective acoustic principles observed in constructing the building should spoil the finest effect of music, for the hall is certainly a commodious and beautiful apartment. One thing may be observed, however, in regard to the passages—those leading directly from the hall to the floor immediately beneath are inconveniently narrow and steep, and they may therefore produce at times hereafter, some confusion and perhaps a little danger."

There is no record of any accident to anybody from these dangerous steps, nor is it mentioned whether the drying of the plaster produced the desired improvement in acoustic effect. Tucker's, after a second vocal and instrumental

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concert for the benefit of the Episcopal Mission Sunday School Library Fund, became a place quite in demand for concerts, lectures, and balls (perhaps in appreciation of its missionary zeal); but it never became as popular a house as its predecessor, Meiggs' Musical Hall, had been. And the building of Platt's Music Hall in August definitely placed it back in the second rank of such, at the best, unexciting places.

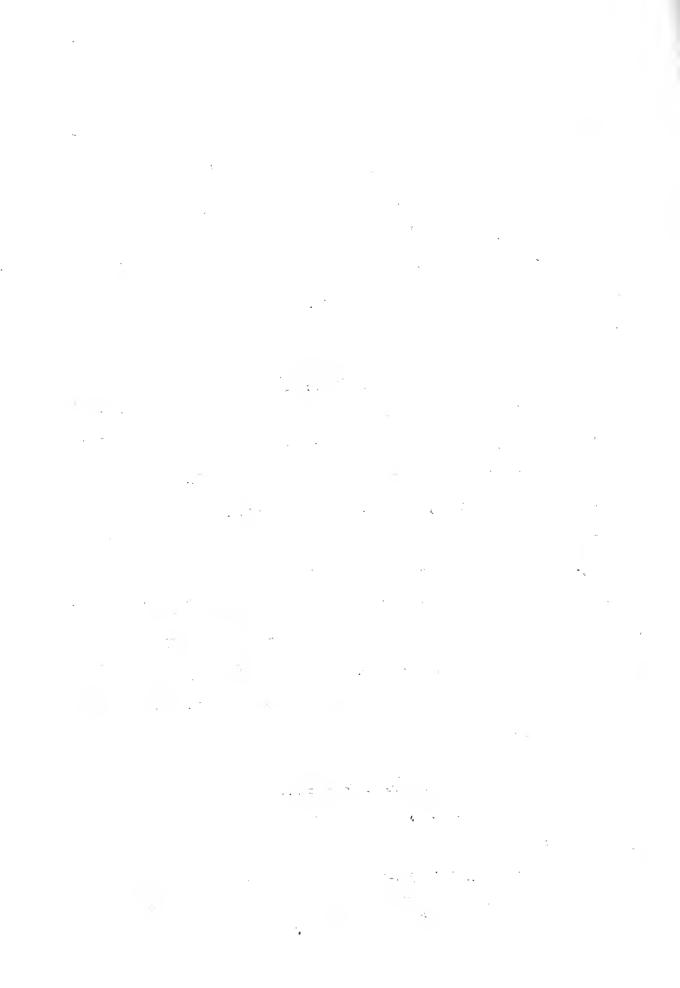
## A GENTEEL HOUSE

Very few entertainments are definitely recorded at Tucker's Academy, from which it may be assumed that the balance of its career continued as it had begun -- with a genteel round of concerts, balls, and lectures. In other words it attempted to be just what its title suggested -- an academy. But there were two or three lively moments in its life. In June 1860 the definitely uninstructive, unethical, unacademic minstrels appeared there in the persons of Billy Birch's Ethiopian Opera Troupe. This was on the occasion of Billy Birch's farewell week in San Francisco before sailing for Valparaiso.

# NORTON THE FIRST

On September 18, 1861 this notice appeared in a local paper:

"NORTON THE FIRST -- The new operatta burletta under this name has made an immense hit at the Academy of Music, being received on its first night with shouts of applause."



The self-styled Emperor Norton, parading the streets of early San Francisco in uniform and sword, issuing proclamations and orders on his private treasury, was one of the familiar sights of the city and was of course ripe for stage caricature. This burlesque was one of the first attempts to capitalize on his oddities.

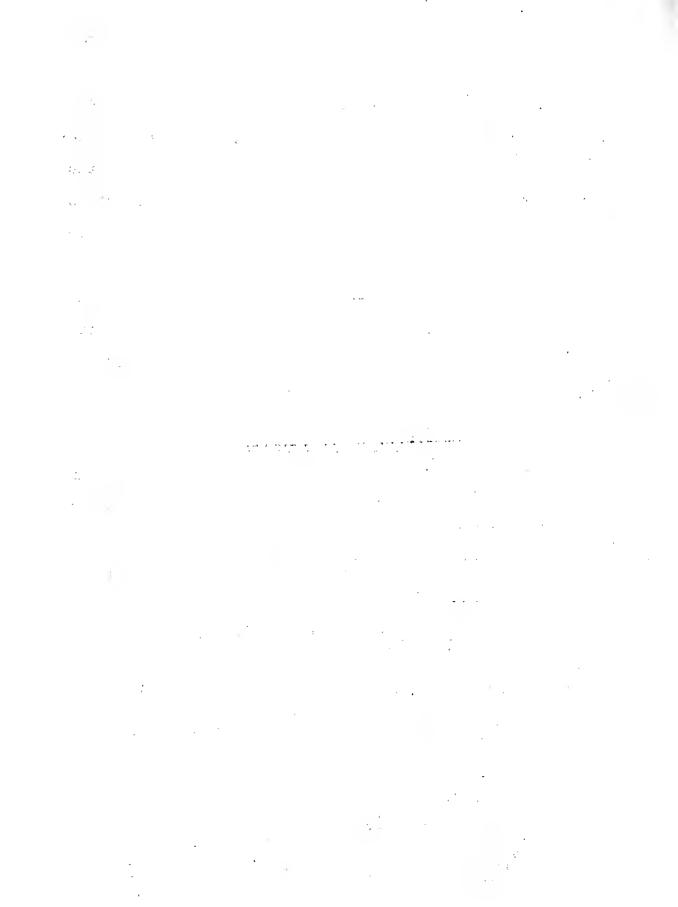
A few nights later -- along with the conventional concert featuring Mmes. Biscaccianti and Schwegerle -- Lotta Crabtree, "Little Lotta" as she was then known, appeared at Tucker's Academy in a variety program.

## BECOMES ODD FELLOWS HALL

There must have been other heartening moments in the life of Tucker's Academy, though these are all that are recorded; but for the most part it continued its lofty policy until the end, which came early in 1863. On January 12 of that year the <u>Bulletin</u> issued this announcement:

"The Independent Order of Odd Fellows -- It Purchases Tucker's Hall.

"The building known as the 'Academy of Music,' or Tucker's Hall, having a frontage of 65 feet on Montgomery Street, has been purchased by the benevolent order of Odd Fellows for \$95,000. The following alterations will be made in the building: The first story will remain as it is at present, being rented for stores. In the second story, there will be a reading room fronting on Summer Street, 24 by 32 feet; a library room 33 by  $56\frac{1}{2}$ , also fronting on Summer Street; and the Grand Secretary's office, 29 by 18 feet, fronting on Montgomery St. The stairway communicating with the third story will be on the right or north side of the main hall.



In the second story will be two large lodge rooms, with various antercoms and storercoms for the purpose of the Order. The Lodge room fronting on Summer street will be 27 by  $56\frac{1}{2}$  feet in dimensions and the Lodge room fronting on Montgomery and Summer street will be 40 by 62 feet. Between these two rooms are the antercoms. The Lodge rooms will be elegantly furnished with drapery, furniture etc., appropriate to the Order and painted in Fresco. The rooms now used by the Board of Education in this building will continue in their charge."

Mr. Tucker had evidently grown weary of carrying the expensive torch of culture amidst this city of odd fellows who loved not Athena but Tambo more; and so saw fitness in resigning his temple of the gods to the order that bore the name of man.

## PLATT'S MUSIC HALL

From the uniformly lofty but brief career of Tucker's Academy we turn to the spotted but lengthy story of Platt's Music Hall. The Music Hall which commenced with the same noble ideas as its predecessor was to house many contrasting sights before its thirty-year existence was over, including a Russian ball, political conventions, a Dickens Carnival, a prize fight, a forty-day fast, a circus, and countless concerts including those by the world-famous violinist and pianist respectively, Ole Bull and Ignace Paderewski.

# LARGEST ON PACIFIC COAST

Platt's Music Hall at the time of its building was the largest and most elaborate concert hall on the Pacific

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Coast. It seated 1800 persons, was 100 feet long, 76 feet wide, 33 feet in height, and cost an estimated \$30,000 to build. It was built by Henry B. Platt and was situated on the east side of Montgomery street between Bush and Pine, across the street from Henry Meiggs' old Musical Hall. On August 7, 1860, the day after its opening, the <u>Bulletin</u> issued this description of the hall:

"The genuine effect of the hall when lighted up is very imposing....The lights are placed outside of the hall, over the roof, and are reflected through twenty-five large openings to the body of the apartment beneath. These openings are covered by glass panels, the surfaces of which are ground and on which different designs are tastefully cut. This arrangement diffuses a soft, subdued light throughout the place, which is agreeable to the sight and sufficiently illuminates the body of the apartment.

"The stage, however, on which the performers appear receives little of this reflected light and is in comparative darkness. There are a few naked gas jets at each end of the platform, which are not brilliant enough to bring it into prominent light, while they serve materially to spoil the general grand effect of the concealed lights reflected from the roof. If the glaring naked jets referred to were disposed with, and a row of footlights covered from the direct vision of the spectators were extended along the front edge of the platform, as in the case of ordinary theatres, a great improvement would be made in the illumination of the apartment.

"It is unnecessary to say much more of this fine hall. The dome-shaped extremity that covers in the stage is architecturally very beautiful, and serves better than a plain surface to reflect sound to the audience. The music appears to be distinctly heard in all parts of the hall. Some ornaments to the galleries are still wanting, and the seats have not yet their proposed fancy cloth coverings. In a short time, however, all that is still defective about the place will be completed. At present there is

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a dampness pervading the hall, which is extremely disagreeable, and must be productive of many rheumatic aches. By and by this unpleasantness will also entirely disappear. The ventilation of the lower part of the house seems to be excellent."

From which left-handed compliment it appears that "this fine Hall" set out to blind its customers and send them home with the rheumatism. Even the hardiest pioneer could hardly have loved music that dearly. However these unpleasantnesses must have been remedied, as the <u>Bulletin</u> predicted, else Platt's Music Hall could scarcely have remained one of the landmarks of San Francisco for thirty years.

The inaugural concert on August 6 differed very little from that at Tucker's Academy, again offering Eliza Biscaccianti in a song recital, assisted by Agatha States, Mme. Jenny Feret, The Pacific Musical Society, the German "Harmonic," The Harmonic Society, and an orchestra under the direction of R. Herold.

# PLATT'S HALL SHELTERS FLOOD VICTIMS

It has been mentioned that Platt's Music Hall was used for every conceivable purpose beside its original one as a concert and lecture hall, ballroom, and banquet hall. In January of 1862 it was used as a shelter for the victims of the recent flood which had devastated the Sacramento Valley and its vicinity. In the previous year there had been a floral procession and patriotic exercises on the Fourth of July. During the Civil War the Union Party used Platt's Hall

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as a place of meeting and in 1864 ratified the renomination of Abraham Lincoln for president.

## THE CIRCUS COMES TO PLATT'S HALL

In that same year, 1864, a notice appeared in the Alta California for November 5:

"Cirque Magique--Platt's Hall will be opened on Monday evening next (November 7) as a Hippotheatron, having been fitted up with a Magic Circle, and all the appurtenances of the circus, in a style of elegance and lavish expense never before witnessed on this Coast. Zoyara, Ross, the Carlo family, and a host of talent are engaged. The Hall, and the comforts introduced, cannot fail to attract the public."

# "BANK NITES"

Even "Bank Nites" were foreshadowed at Platt's Hall. The Daily Alta California for January 7, 1862 announced the following:

"We are indebted to the managers for invitations to the anniversary ball of the Battle of New Orleans, which will take place at Platt's Music Hall on Wednesday evening. A sewing machine, worth \$200, will be given away during the evening, says the card."

# MUSIC FESTIVALS. OLE BULL

One important event, more in the true line of Platt's Hall, occurred in 1870. This was the February Music Festival Week, under the direction of a celebrated violinist of the time, Madame Camilla Urso. Delegations from as far away as Virginia City, Nevada, combined to make up the tremendous chorus which took part in a succession of concerts

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throughout the week; there was also a children's concert in which 2000 children participated. The entire proceeds, amounting to an estimated \$45,400.70 was turned over to the Mercantile Library. These festivals, which had been introduced by the German societies, had become an integral part of San Francisco and went far to give it that cosmopolitanism of which its citizens have long boasted.

It was during this year that Ole Bull appeared at Platt's Hall. Madame Urso had already made her initial appearance there on November 23 of the previous year. But it was hard sledding for a mere violinist at this time, for Rose Massey's British Blondes were matching hips with the Lydia Thompson Troupe that season, and the ears of the public were inclined as always to follow its eyes.

# FAILURE OF DRAMA AT MUSIC HALL

The only two sustained theatrical ventures (legitimate) at Platt's Hall must unfortunately be reported as complete failures. The first was in 1873. On November 3 a good company leased the house, starring such favorites as James A. Herne, Alice Vance, and Fay Templeton. They started with Rip Van Winkle and ended nineteen days later on November 22 with the "sensation" drama Lighthouse Cliffs. Fay Templeton also contributed her popular specialty, an imitation of the cigar-smoking, money-counting prima donna, Parepa-Rosa. But it was no use. Feople attended Platt's Hall for many reasons, but not to see dramatic productions.

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# AUGUSTIN DALY "FLOPS"

The famous New York playwright and actor, Augustin Daly, was also to discover this fact in July of 1875 when he opened at Platt's Hall in London Assurance. It was true that this was a hackneyed piece, but Daly's reputation and the presence of two beautiful and talented actresses, Jeffreys Lewis and Fanny Davenport, should have ensured attendance for some days at least. But alas, they were playing in Platt's Hall and nine days later, on July 19, the disillusioned great man moved his company to the Grand Opera House. But it should be added in extenuation that Daly's entire visit in San Francisco was a failure. Yet even this might be attributed to his initial mistake of opening at Platt's Hall.

# THIRTY YEARS LATER

The last years of Platt's Hall are uneventful as far as theatre history goes, though it continued to be hired out for conventions, concerts, balls, six-day walking races, forty-day fasts and whatever freak idea came into the head of a promoter with his own or somebody else's money to burn. Yet even in these affairs it was overshadowed by the larger, more commodious Mechanics Pavilion. Finally in the fall of 1890, thirty years after its construction, it was decided to pull it down to make way for the Mills Building which still stands on the same site, the east side of Montgomery Street between Bush and Pine.

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• The Morning Call for September 6, 1890 sums up its career thus:

"Platt's Hall, which people had grown to regard as an historical landmark, has been almost demolished to make room for the city structure of D. O. Mills on Montgomery and Bush Streets.

"The old hall has a host of pleasant memories for many San Franciscans, and yet it has undergone vicissitudes in its career of thirty years. Its walls often echoed to the eloquence of prominent divines and famous orators, wore the gay decorations of merry parties and was the scene of bright carnivals, balls and social events. It has done its part in the cause of charity, for many a fancy fair or church bazaar was held under its hospitable roof while thousands of persons passed through the doors....

"In 1866 the hall was used for the Dickens Carnival and Tableaux Vivants for the benefit of the Clay Street Female Hospital, under the auspices of the Episcopal Church.

"In later years six-days' walking matches, dime museums and Dr. Tanner's forty-days' fast added to the attractions, and there were several successful series of society balls. Jim McClellan and Mike Donovan fought in a ring upon the stage with small gloves, but their fight ended in a draw at 4 o'clock in the morning. From Platt's Hall stage Schuyler Colfax, Vice-President of the United States, addressed thousands; so did ex-Governor Bross, Newton Booth, the silvertongued Tom Fitch and many others. Soon a trace of the old place will not be left for the wreckers."

# THE PASSING OF AN AGE

So with the passing of Platt's Hall passes the last house of entertainment built before the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. With the declaration of war the new decade really begins; the era of forty-nine and the fifties is really over. Not only had a decade ended but the whole face of a

nation was to change irrecognizably. The building of theatres is certainly not the most important aspect of a nation's or even a city's life; yet in many ways it is the most revealing. The buildings treated in this section of the monograph all belong to the earlier period, though many of them survived into the next age and took on its aspects, either through destruction and rebuilding or alteration. And it was so with the life represented within their walls, which is after all the important aspect in the life of a theatre. buildings to be treated in the next section belong wholly to the next age, as does the form of entertainment for which they were designed. This extends, as far as San Francisco is concerned, to the earthquake and fire of 1906, with which the bonanza age of the nineteenth century ends. This is an arbitrary division perhaps, but a necessary one, since it is only by death-dealing catastrophes that ages can be divided. This is hard on human beings, but correspondingly convenient for that lamentable race called historians.

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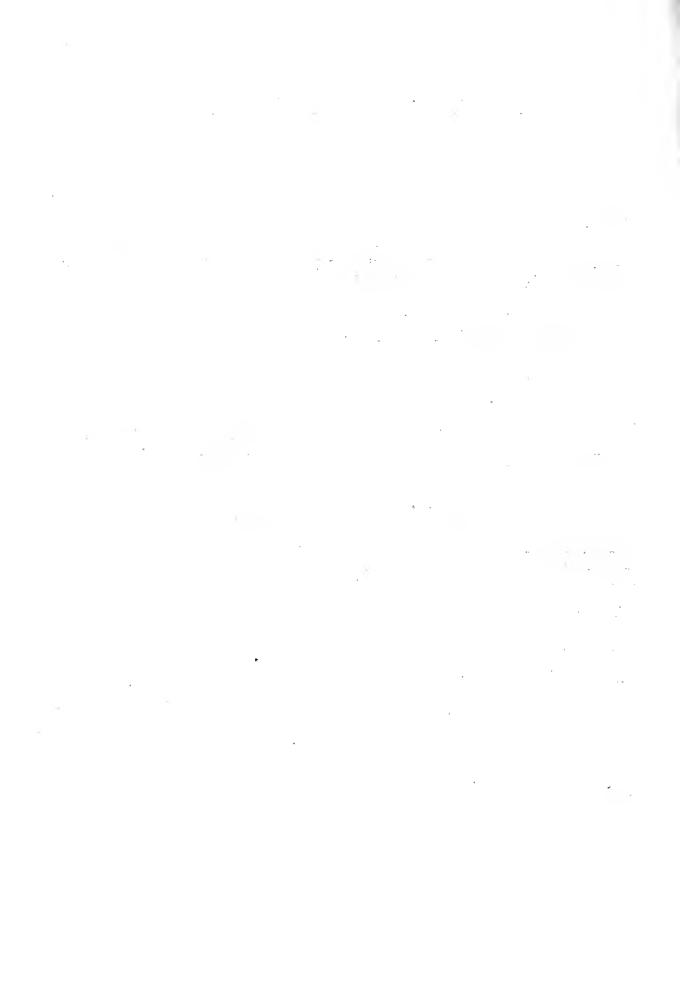
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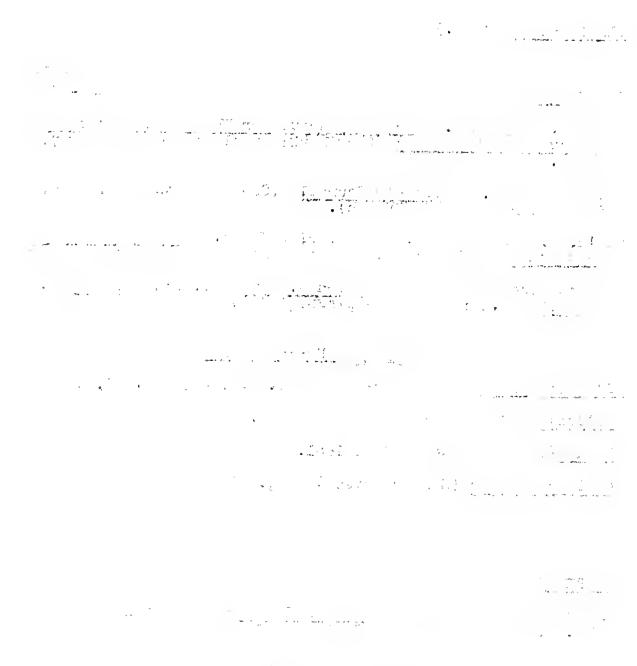
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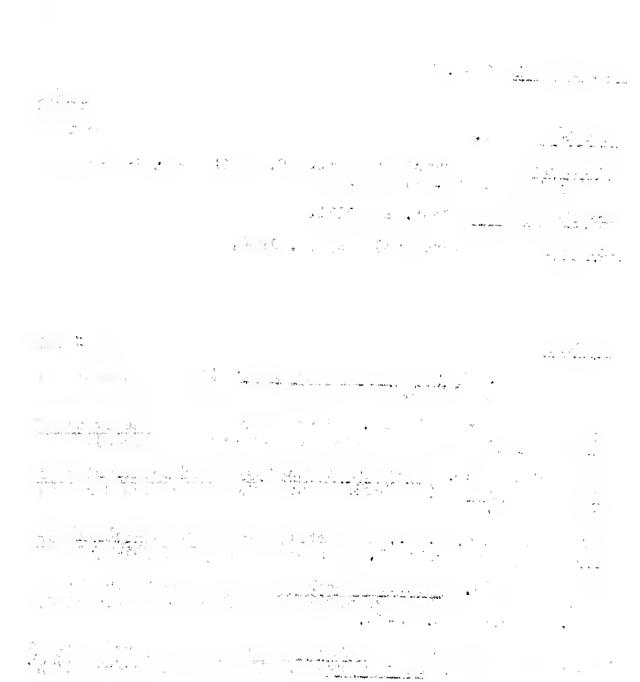
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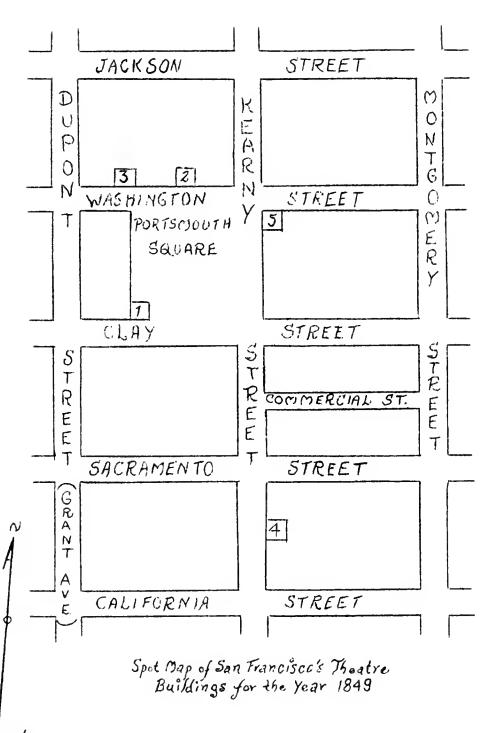
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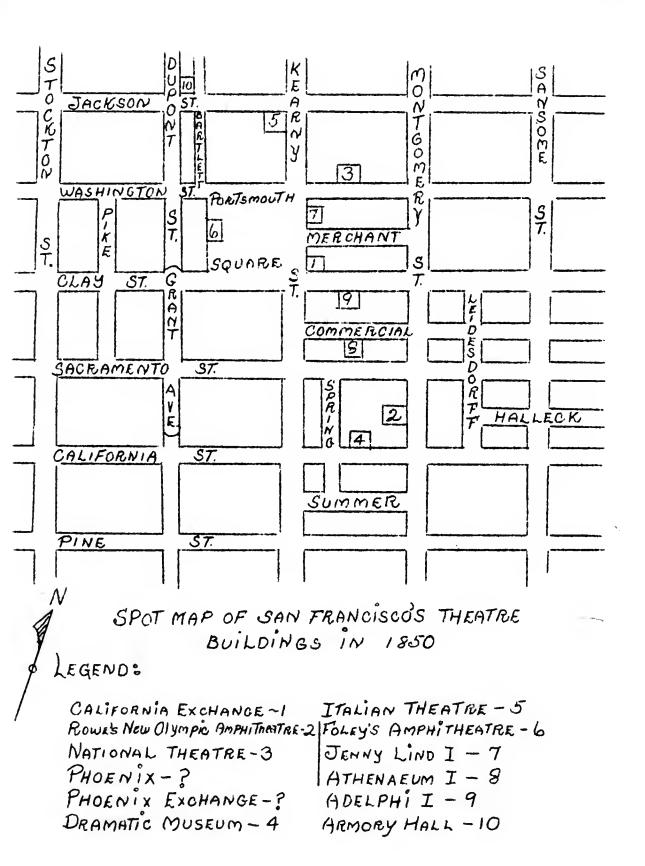
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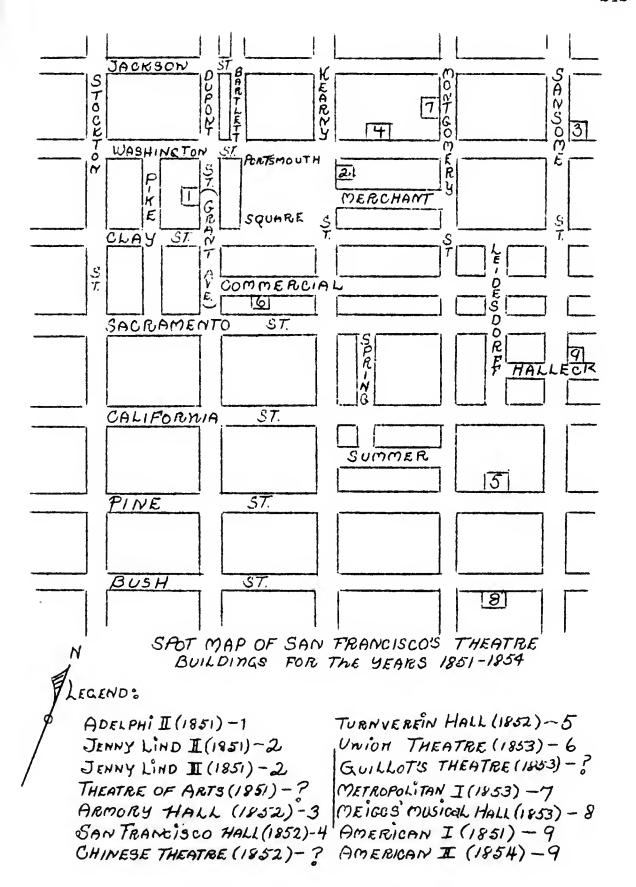
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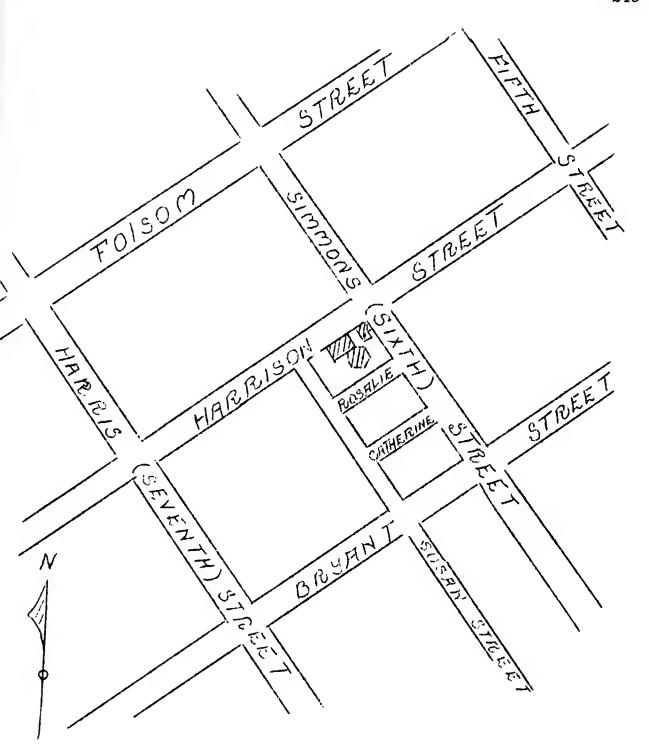
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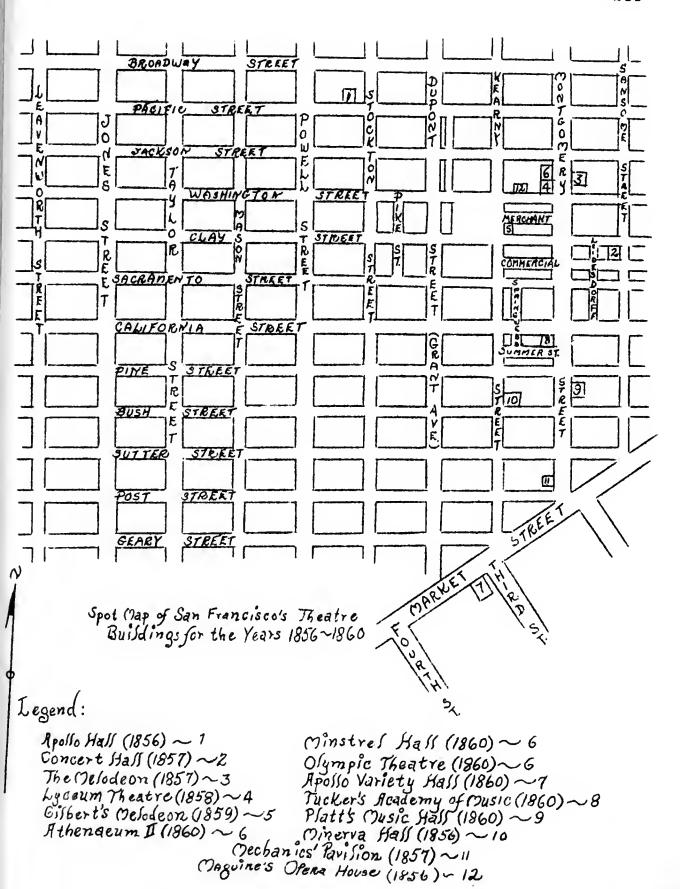


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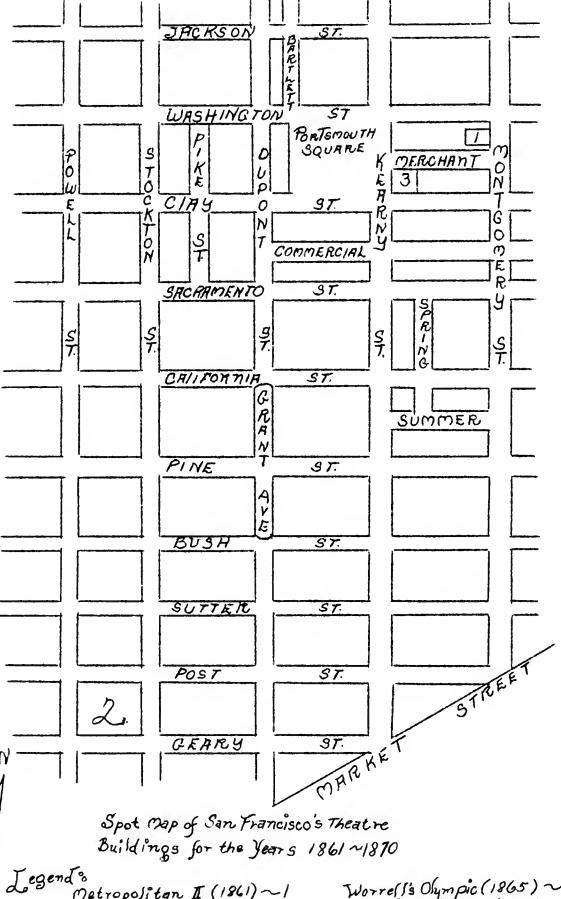


PLUSS GARDENS (1853-1863?)
S. W. GOR HARRISON AND SIXTH STS.
FROM IS F. GUTLER'S MAP OF SAN FRANCISCO (1854)
SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY COLLECTION





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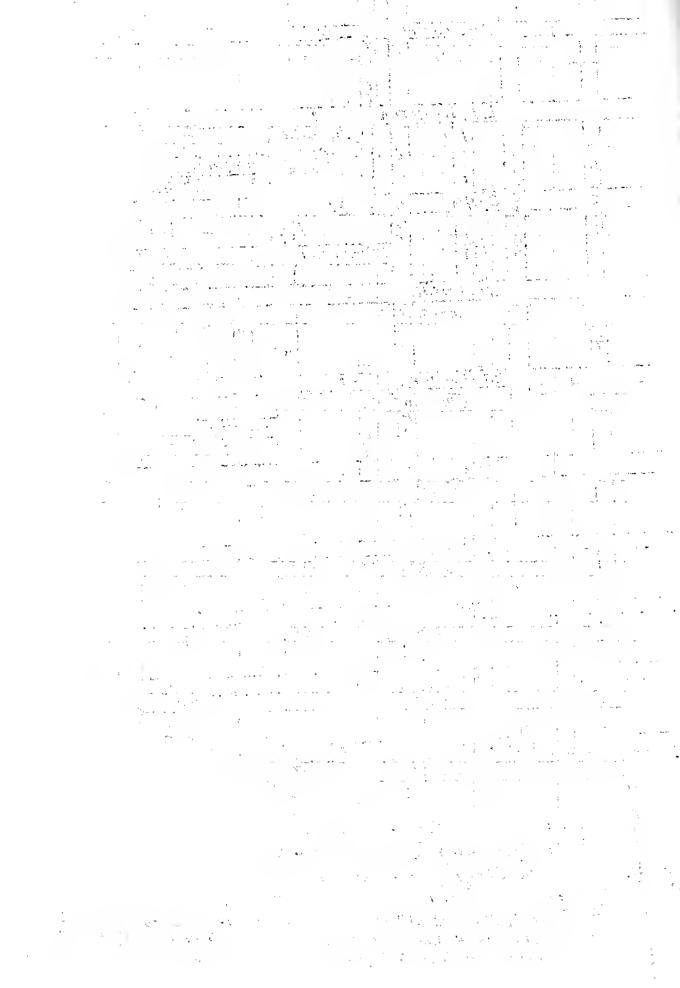


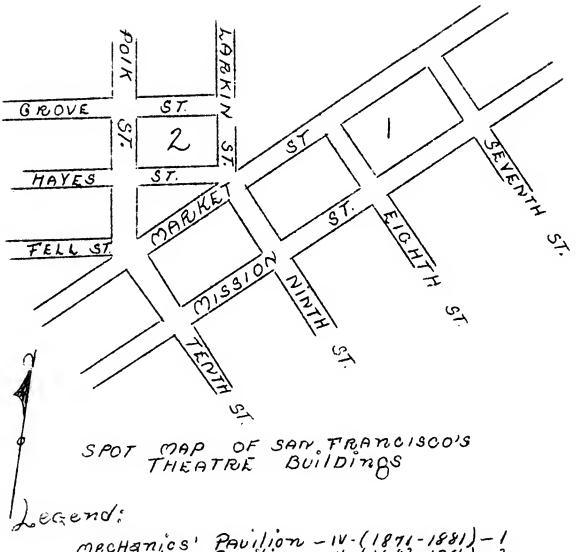
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mecHanics' Pavilion - IV-(1871-1881)-1 mecHanics' Pavilion - V-(1882-1906)-2



### THEATRES IN SAN FRANCISCO

### INCLUDING HALLS, MELODEONS, BEER GARDENS.

### THE GOLD RUSH DECADE

(1849 - 1861)

THEATRE	LOCATION*	DURATION
Adelphi I	S. side Clay bet. Montgomery & Kearny	Oct. 16, 1850 - May 4, 1851 (burnt)
Adelphi II (French Theatre)	W. side Dupont (Grant Ave.) bet. Clay & Washington	Aug. 1, 1851 - June 2,1858 (burnt)
American I	N.E. cor. Sansome & Halleck	Oct. 20, 1851 - July 1854 (razed)
American II	Built on site of American I	Dec. 4, 1854 - Feb.16,1868 (burnt)
Apollo Hall	252 Pacific (old numbering) above Stockton	1856 - 1871
Became: Teatro Apollo	810 Pacific (new numbering) above Stockton	April 9, 1905
Apollo Variety Hall	S. side Market bet. 3rd & 4th	November 14, 1860. Last advertisement Nov. 23, 1860

<sup>\*</sup> Avenues are mentioned as they occur; the rest are streets.

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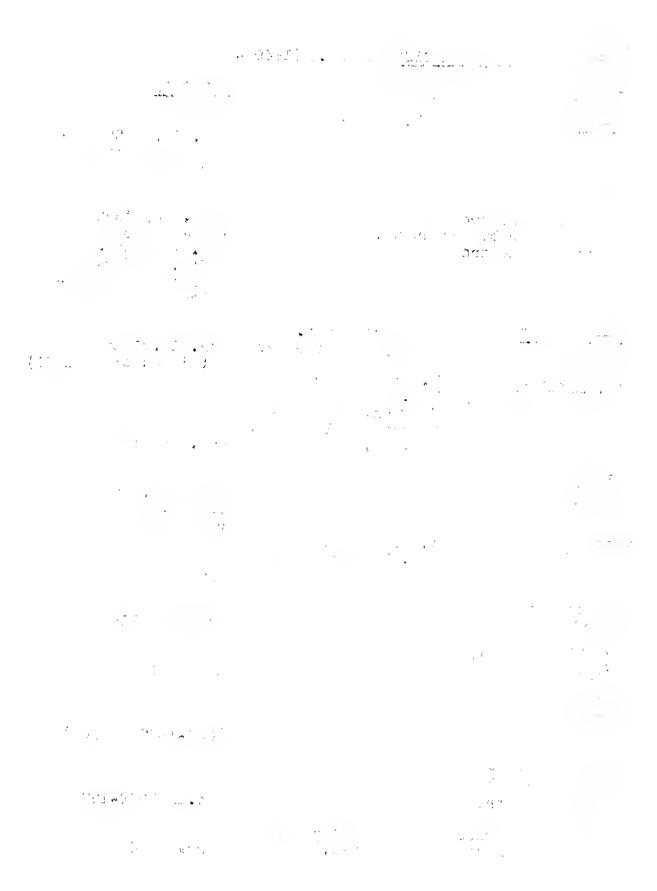
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### THEATRES IN SAN FRANCISCO (Cont.) (1849 - 1861)

THEATRE DURATION LOCATION cor. Washington & Armory Hall Dec. 16, 1850 Con-Sansome cert by Mme. von Gulpen Became: Regular Theatre Sept. 13, 1852 May 15, 1853 Oct. 1, 1853 -Taken over by German Co. Olympic Theatre Oct. 30, 1853 (closed as theatre) Commercial bet. Athenaeum I Kearny & Montgomery Aug. 13, 1850 (closed circa 1851) Athenaeum II W. side Montgomery (Also called New bet. Washington & Jackson. (Over en-Concert Hall) trance to old Metropolitan) Jan. 28, 1860 Became: April 22, 1860 Minstrel Hall July 9, 1860 (closed - ?) Olympic Theatre Bella Union N. side Washington bet. Kearny & Dupont (Grant Ave.) Opened in 1849 First theatrical Oct. 22, 1349 performance (burnt, rebuilt May 4, 1850 immediately) Became: Bella Union Me-1856-1868 (razed) lodeon Rebuilt, reopened and became Bella Dec.12,1868-1873 Union Theatre 805 Kearny Opened and closed sporadically until

Bella Union name disappeared.

Circa 1896



THEATRES IN SAN FRANCISCO (Cont.) (1849 - 1861)

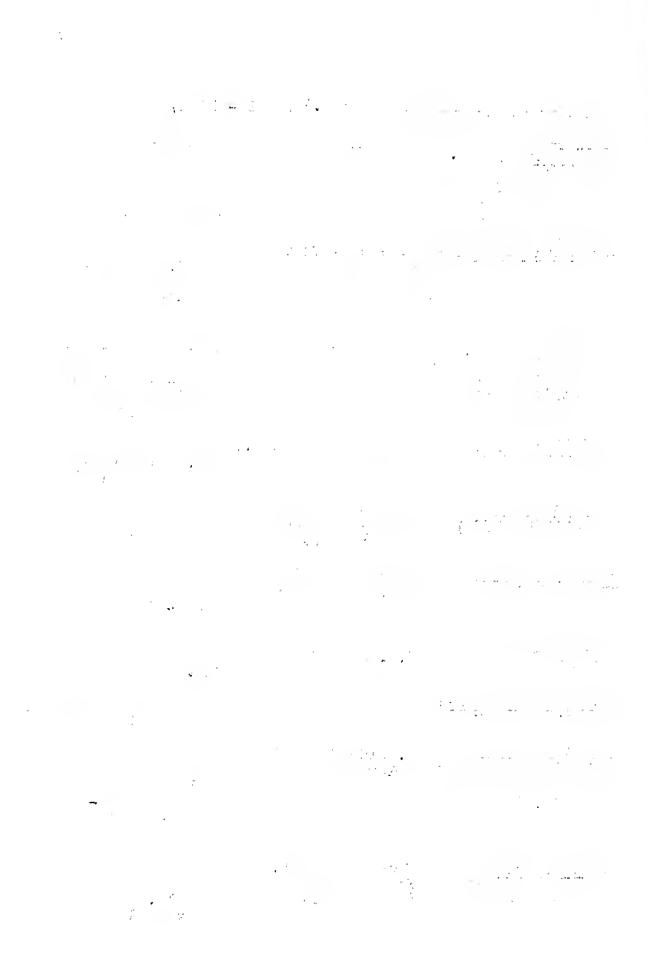
THEATRE LOCATION DURATION Bella Union (Cont.) Became: Haymarket Theatre Imperial Concert Hall Eden Musee Wax Works 1906 (burnt) California Exchange N.E. cor. Clay & Kearny Jan.5, 1850-1860 Underneath was Pacific Museum 1856-1859 Became: Gilbert's Melodeon (upstairs hall) Dec. 5, 1859-1860 (razed for new building) 1860 - 1865 (sold) Gilbert's Melodeon Worrell's Olympic May 1, 1865 New Olympic Theatre June 29, 1865 Chinese Theatre Dupont (Grant Ave.) near Green Dec. 23, 1852 -March 23, 1853 Chinese Theatre Commercial bet. (formerly Union) Kearny & Dupont (Grant Ave.) 1860 - 1861 E. side Dupont Chinese Theatre bet. Clay & Washington 1856 - 1868 Concert Hall S.W. cor. Clay & Jan. 16, 1857 Sansome circa 1858 Dr. Robinson's Hall Summer of 1849 -May 4, 1850 (burnt) Dramatic Museum N. side California Robinson & Eyrard's below Kearny 1850-June 14.1850 (burnt) July 4, 1850 - May 4, 1851 Rebuilt, and opened (burnt) Eagle Theatre Washington bet. (formerly Wash-Kearny & Dupont

(Grant Ave.)

ington Hall)

Jan. 16, 1850 -

May 4, 1850



THEATRES	IN	SAN	FRANCISCO	(Cont.)	(1849 -	- 1861)

THEATRE	LOCATION	DURATION
El Dorado Tent (big) Rebuilt	S.E. cor. Kearny & Washington	1849-Dec. 24, 1849 (burnt) Jan. 1850-June 4, 1850 (burnt)
Foley's Olympic Amphitheatre (formerly Rowe's)	Kearny bet. California & Sacramento	May 7, 1850 - June 14, 1850 (burnt)
Foley's Amphitheatre	W. side Portsmouth Square	Sept. 30, 1850 - Jan. 12, 1851
Became California Circus		Jan. 18, 1851
French Theatre (see Adelphi II)	W. side Dupont (Grant Ave.) bet. Clay & Washington	Aug. 1, 1851 - June 2, 1858 (burnt)
Gaieties, The	77 Commercial (Long Wharf)	1856
Became Varieties		Aug. 13, 1859
German Stadt (formerly Union) (renamed Union) Gilbert's Melodeon (see California Exchange)	Commercial bet. Kearny & Dupont (Grant Ave.)  N.E. cor. Clay & Kearny	April 24, 1862 July 28, 1862 Dec.5, 1859-1865
Guillot's Theatre	Pacific bet. Stock ton & Dupont (Gran Ave.)	
Italian Theatre	S.W. cor. Jackson & Kearny Located in upper portion of building	Sept. 12, 1850 - Sept. 16, 1850

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### THEATRES IN SAN FRANCISCO (Cont.)(1849 - 1861)

LOCATION DURATION THEATRE E. side Kearny nr. Jenny Lind I Washington Upper floor Parker House facing Ports-Oct. 30, 1850 mouth Square May 4, 1851 (burnt) Jenny Lind II Same site as June 13, 1851 -Jenny Lind I June 22, 1851 (burnt) Same site as Jenny Lind III Oct. 4, 1851 -Jenny Lind II June 4, 1852 Sold for City Hall (destroyed by fire) 1906 N.W. cor. Washington Lyceum Theatre March 13, 1858 -& Montgomery Nov. 27, 1860 (burnt) Maguire's Opera 618 Washington Nov. 29, 1856 House (formerly San Francisco Hall) Became: March 10, 1862 Varieties Oct. 13, 1862 Opera House again Razed to make way for Montgomery Ave. later Columbus Ave. 1873

Mechanics Pavilion I

W. side Montgomery bet.Post & Sutter Sept. 8, 1857 - 1863

(razed)

Mechanics
Pavilion II U

Union Square (Stockton, Powell, Geary & Post) 1864 - 1868

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### THEATRES IN SAN FRANCISCO (Cont.)

THEATRE	LOCATION	DURATION
Mechanics Pavilion III	Same site as Mechanics Pavilion III	1868 - 1871 (razed)
Mechanics Pavilion IV	E. side 8th, from Market to Mission	1874 - 1881 (razed)
Mechanics Pavilion V	Block bounded by Larkin, Grove, Poll and Hayes	k 1882 - April 18, 1906 (burnt)
Melodeon, The (also called Johnson's Melodeon)	182 Montgomery opp old Metropolitan (old numbering) 724 Montgomery (new numbering)	Dec. 15, 1857 - June 1858
Metropolitan I	W. side Montgomery bet. Washington & Jackson	Dec. 24, 1853 - Aug. 15, 1857 (burnt)
Metropolitan II	Rebuilt on same sias Metropolitan I	
Minerva Hall  Minstrel Hall  (formerly Athenaeum II)	W. side Montgomery bet. Washington & Jackson. (Over entrance to old Metropolitan)	Sept. 11, 1856 (closed ?)
Became Olympic		July 9, 1860
Musical Hall (Meiggs)	S. side Bush bet. Montgomery & San- some	July 26, 1853 - Jan. 23, 1860 (burnt)

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Samuel Carlos and Samuel Carlo

### THEATRES IN SAN FRANCISCO (Cont.)

THEATRE Musical Hall (Meiggs) Rebuilt and moved	LOCATION (Cont.) S.W. cor. Montgomery & Bush	DURATION
National Theatre	N. side Washington bet. Montgomery & Kearny	Aug. 6, 1860  Feb. 19, 1850 -  May 4, 1850 (burnt)
New Idea  (formerly Union)  Became Chinese Thea New National Theatre (formerly Union)  Became Jenny Lind M Olympic (formerly Armory Hall)	Commercial bet. Kearny & Dupont (Grant Ave.) Gelodeon cor. Washington	Jan. 18, 1868-1870 1870 - 1871 1861 - 1862 Mar. 24, 1862 Oct. 1, 1853 - Oct. 30, 1853 (closed)
Olympic (formerly Union)	Commercial bet. Kearny & Dupont (Grant Ave.)	May 30, 1857 - 1859
Olympic (formerly Athenaeum II)	W. side Montgomery bet. Washington & Jackson. (Over en- trance to old Metropolitan)	July 9, 1860 (Closed ?)
Olympic Melodeon (formerly Gil- bert's Melodeon) Became New Olympic New Olympic Theatre (formerly Gil- bert's Melodeon)	N.E. cor. Clay & Kearny N.E. cor. Clay & Kearny	May 1, 1865 - June 29, 1865 June 20, 1868 June 29, 1868
Pacific Museum	N.E. cor. Clay & Kearny. (Underneath California Exchange)	1856 - 1859
People's Theatre (formerly Union)	Commercial bet. Kearny & Dupont (Grant Ave.)	Aug. 5, 1854 -

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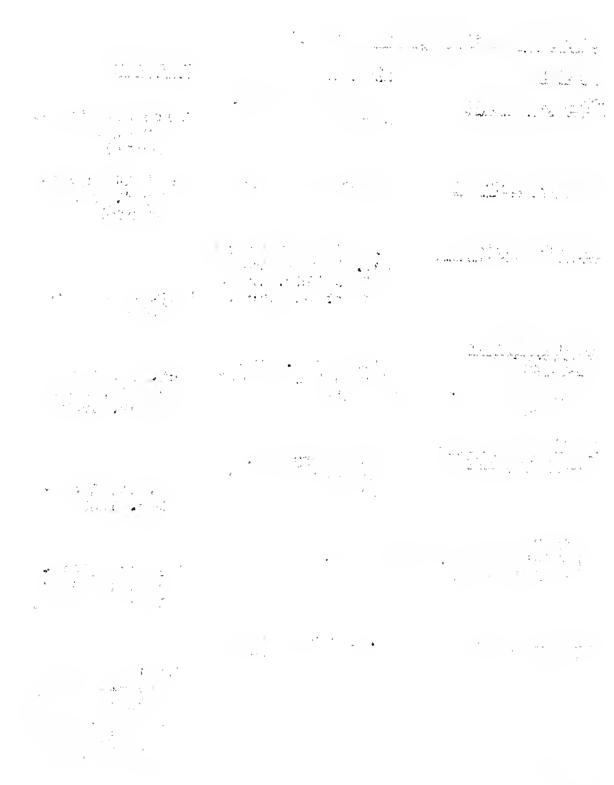
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### THEATRES IN SAN FRANCISCO (Cont.)

THEATRE	LOCATION	DURATION
Phoenix Theatre	Pacific nr. Mont- gomery	March 23, 1850 - May 4, 1850 (burnt)
Phoenix Exchange	Portsmouth Plaza	March 24, 1850 - May 4, 1850 (burnt)
Platt's Music Hall	E. side Montgomery bet. Bush & Pine (Mills Bldg. is at present on same site	)Aug. 6, 1860 - 1890
Rowe's Olympic Circus  Became: Foley's Ampl Burnt	Kearny bet. Cali- fornia & Sacramento hitheatre	Oct. 29, 1849 April 30, 1850 June 14, 1850
Rowe's New Olympic Amphitheatre	Montgomery bet. Sacramento & Cali- fornia	Aug. 14, 1850 - Dec. 1850
Became: Hubbel, Brewer, Moo: Olympic Circus	re & Co.	July 14, 1851 - Aug. 11, 1851 Last mentioned
Russ Gardens* (Mostly German patronage)	S.W. cor. Harrison & 6th (formerly Harrison & Simmons)	First recorded eventMay Day celebration, May 1, 1853. First advertised event: Oct. 2, 1853 Circa 1863.
	Phoenix Theatre  Phoenix Exchange  Platt's Music Hall  Rowe's Olympic Circus  Became: Foley's Ample Burnt  Rowe's New Olympic Amphitheatre  Became: Hubbel, Brewer, Moor Olympic Circus  Russ Gardons* (Mostly German patronage)	Phoenix Theatre Pacific nr. Montgomery  Phoenix Exchange  Portsmouth Plaza  Platt's Music Hall E. side Montgomery bet. Bush & Pine (Mills Bldg. is at present on same site  Rowe's Olympic Circus Became: Foley's Amphitheatre Burnt  Rowe's New Olympic Amphitheatre Montgomery bet. Sacramento & California  Became: Hubbel, Brewer, Moore & Co. Olympic Circus  Russ Gardens* (Mostly German patronage)  S.W. cor. Harrison & 6th (formerly Harrison & Simmons)

<sup>\*</sup> Eldredge, Zoeth Skinner, in his Beginnings of San Francisco, gives 1856 as the opening year of Russ Gardens (probably the year when it first became a permanent public resort). However, Soule's Annals of San Francisco reports public events at Russ Gardens as early as May 1, 1853.



# THEATRES IN SAN ERANCISCO (Cont.)

Chinese

THEATRES IN SAN FRANCISCO (Cont.)			
THEATRE	LOCATION	DURATION	
San Francisco Hall (also called San Francisco Theatre)	618 Washington	Nov. 22, 1852 - summer of 1856 (razed)	
Became site of Maguin	re's Opera House	Nov. 29, 1856	
Theatre of Arts	Jackson nr. Dupont (Grant Ave.)	May 19, 1851 - June 22, 1851 (burnt)	
Tucker's Academy of Music	87-1/2 Montgomery (old numbering) 325 Montgomery (new numbering)	Feb. 14, 1860	
Purchased by Independed Fellows		Jan. 12, 1863	
Turnverein Hall	Pine bet. Mont- gomery & Sansome Moved to Vallejo below Stockton N. side Bush bet. Stockton & Powell N. side O'Farrell bet. Mason & Taylor 347 Turk bet. Leaven- worth & Hyde 2450 Sutter (near Divisadero) Present headquarters at California Hall, Turk & Polk	185 <b>2</b> 1853 1856 1873	
Union Theatre	Commercial bet. Kearny & Dupont (Grant Ave.)	May 22, 1853 French performance, one night only. Sept. 13,1853 Next performance	
Became: People's Union again Olympic Union again Chinese		Aug. 5, 1854 Aug. 1855 - 1856 May 30,1857 - 1859 1859 1860	

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### THEATRES IN SAN FRANCISCO (Concluded)

THEATRE LOCATION DURATION

Union Theatre (cont.)

Became: (cont.) New National German Stadt Union again New Idea Chinese

Last mentioned in Directory

1861

April 24, 1862 July 28, 1862 • 1866 March 1868 - 1870

1870 - 1871 Sept. 12, 1871

(razed)

Varieties

77 Commercial (formerly Gaieties) (Long Wharf)

Aug. 13, 1859 (Closed - ?)

Vernon Hall

186 Montgomery (old numbering Over Genella's crockery store opp. Metropolitan

Circa 1858

Washington Hall (became Eagle

Washington bet. Kearny & Dupont (Grant Ave.) Theatre)

Jan. 16, 1850

May 4, 1850 (burnt)

What Cheer Melodeon

123 Sacramento

Circa 1850

Wilson Amphitheatre

New Montgomery & Mission

Oct. 30, 1860 -Dec. 26, 1864

Became:

Thorne's Palace (also known as

Palace Amphitheatre) Palace Opera House

1876

Worrell's Olympic

N.E. cor. Clay &

Kearny

Feb. 3, 1865

Became Melodeon

May 1, 1865

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#### SAN FRANCISCO THEATRE RESEARCH

#### THEATRE BUILDINGS

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NOTE: Considerable difficulty was encountered in indexing these volumes due to the custom of naming an actor by his surname only; and occasionally these names do not indicate the same person. Every effort has been made, however, to establish identities, and an attempt has been made to supply full names wherever possible.

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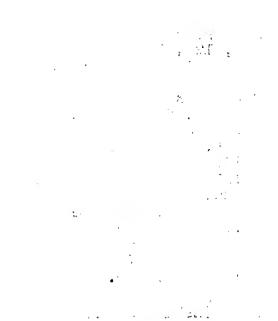
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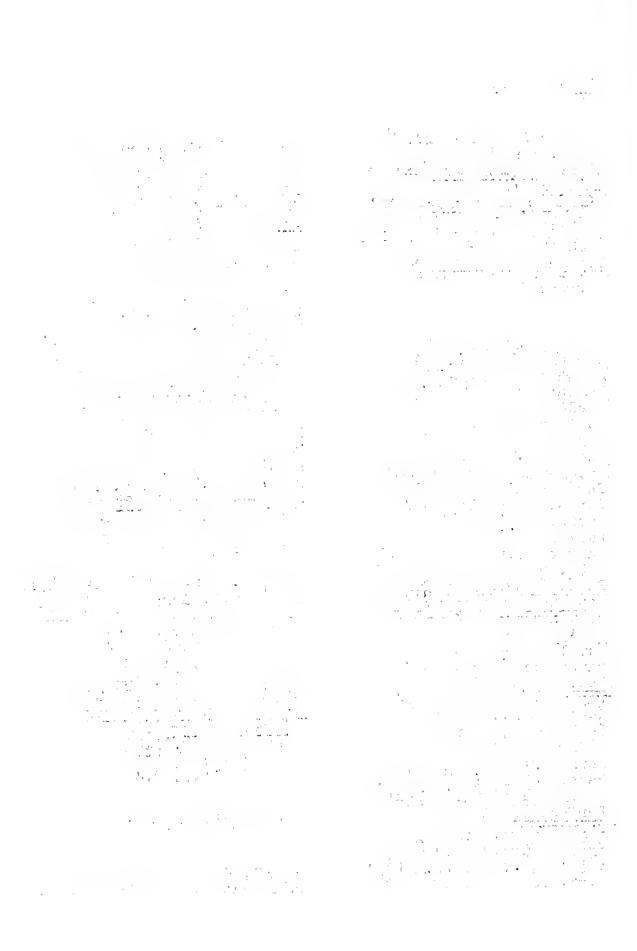
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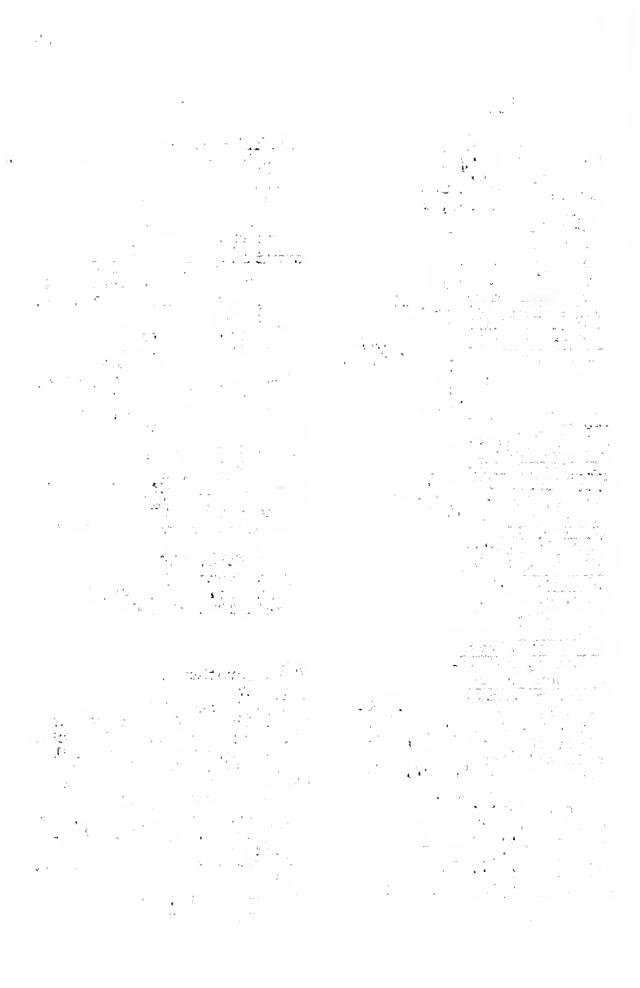
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