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SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS:

A

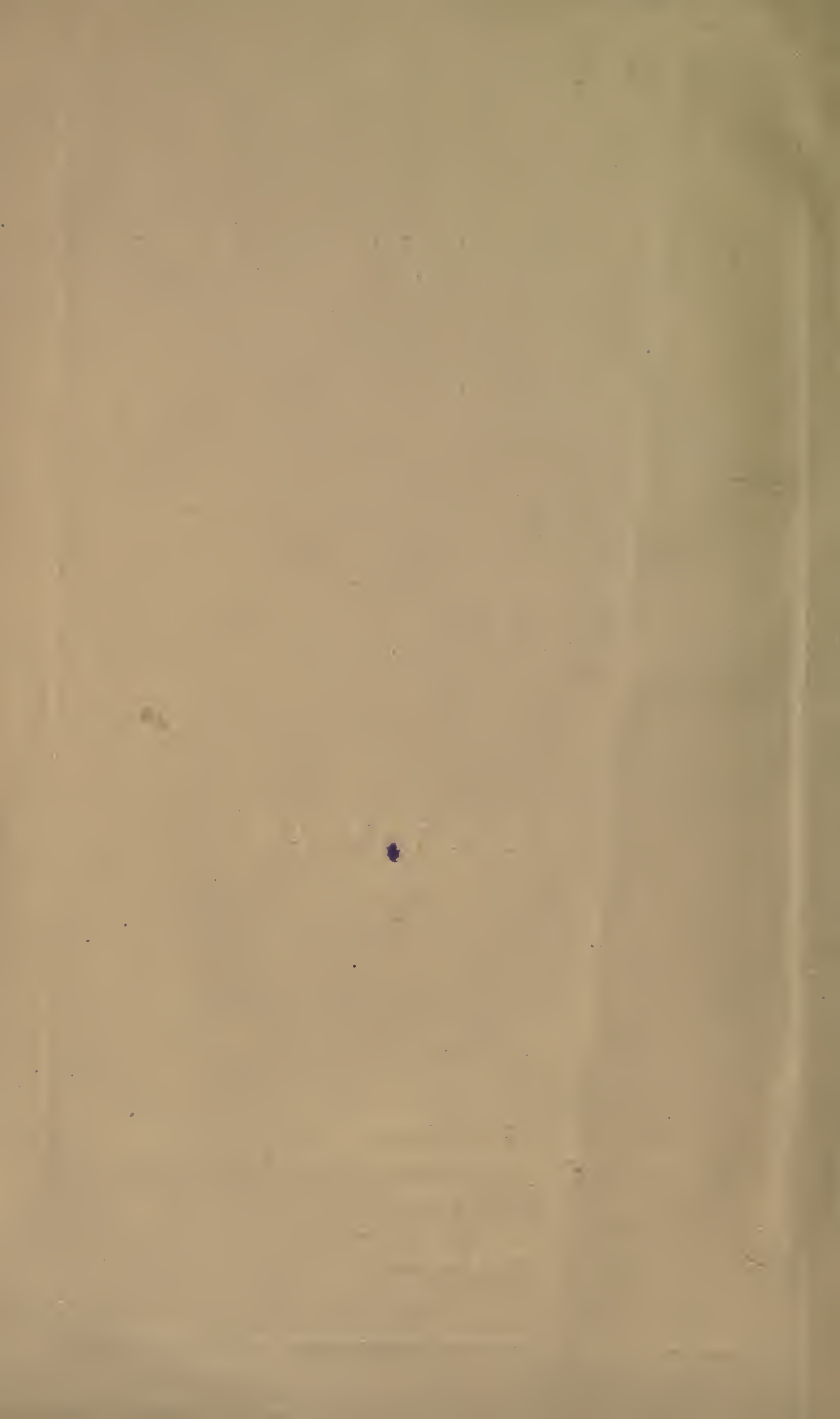
CHAPTER OF STAGE HISTORY.

AN ESSAY ON THE SHAKESPERIAN DRAMA.

By A. H. PAGET.

LONDON:
JOHN WILSON, 12, KING WILLIAM STREET, STRAND.
1875.

Price One Shilling.



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PREFACE.

THE following pages were originally prepared as a paper to be read before the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society, early in the present year; and, at the time of its delivery, I had no intention of their appearing in print. Since then, however, suggestions kindly made by Mr. J. O. Halliwell, Mr. C. Roach Smith, and other gentlemen qualified to advise, have led me to venture upon publication; and I now lay my essay, in a slightly enlarged form, before such of the general public as take interest in tracing the connection of Shakespeare's works with the English stage.

A. H. P.

April, 1875.

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SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS:

A CHAPTER OF STAGE HISTORY.

The title of this paper, I trust, fairly indicates the subject proposed. It does not treat of Shakespeare personally; nor of his plays, described simply with reference to himself. There is no attempt to show how the plays became what they are; I simply take them as they stand, and try to show what has been done with them since they came from the mind of the poet. I want to tell something of the conditions under which they have been presented during a long series of years; for although Shakespeare is so much more to us than a mere writer of stage plays, I dare assert that now, as in his own day, the theatre is his proper and most natural home. He may be studied and dearly prized in all places; but to know Shakespeare in his fulness, without the agency of the stage, is, to my mind, as impossible as to taste the magical charm of snowy peaks and glaciers only from poring over books of science at home.

Our concern, then, is less with the great Original than with those men through whom, for better or

worse, he has been made known; the dramatists who have handled his plays, and the actors who have been the living embodiments of his creations. It is a wide field of research, and a lecture can only point out a few of its features. The temptation to pile up great names, and say a little about everything, must be resisted. And, so, looking to the real drift of the matter, and trying to find for this paper the most exact description, I have ventured to call it 'A Chapter of Stage History.'

It would seem best to begin with an account of the Elizabethan theatres, in order to explain how Shakespeare's plays were first acted, and that we might call to mind under what outer conditions he wrote as he did. But this of itself is ample subject for a lecture, and, awaiting further instalments from Mr. Halliwell of his 'Illustrations of the Life of Shakespeare,' the task would be somewhat hazardous. The company of players to which the poet belonged travelled about, performing in noblemen's mansions, inn-yards, and civic halls; in our own Townhall, Mr. Kelly has told us.* But they were chiefly engaged at two theatres in London, the Blackfriars, and a large circular or polygonal playhouse, the Globe, on the Bankside. The buildings were simple in form; in the larger theatres only the stage, the 'tiring rooms, and galleries were roofed over, the central space, or yard, being open to the sky. There must have been plenty of shouting and

* 'Notices illustrative of the Drama and other Amusements at Leicester,' by William Kelly.

bluster on the stage, and rough manners among the audience. There was no scenery; the walls were draped with tapestry or curtains, and other curtains placed between the front of the stage and the back, called traverses, increased or lessened the visible area, according as they were drawn together or thrown apart. There was then nothing of the stage illusion that forms so large a part of modern theatrical displays. The actors were left on a naked platform, to tell the poet's story by their own unaided efforts.

Now, we may well believe that there were real advantages in this simplicity and freedom from the restraints that the attempt to produce scenery would have imposed. There was then nothing to distract the mind: old tapestry and traverses suggest no comparison with the outer world of real life. *We* are not always so fortunate: for ill-painted landscapes and bad architecture do. And more than that; when he desired, Shakespeare drew in his own words the background of his plays. Had less been asked of the imagination of others, Shakespeare would have given fewer hints to guide their fancy, and much exquisite description of nature might never have been penned. In writing the History of King Henry the Fifth, he seems to have keenly felt this inability to do more than suggest, and he boldly challenges the good-will of his audience assembled at the Globe. Perhaps nowhere, in the whole range of the drama, could be found so powerful an appeal of the kind, as the noble speech at the

opening of this play. The poet calls upon his hearers to take their part in the illusion; for without their lively sympathy he can do nothing for them.

"O for a muse of fire, that would ascend
The brighest heaven of invention!
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
Assume the port of Mars; and, at his heels,
Leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword, and fire
Crouch for employment. But, pardon, gentles all,
The flat, unraisèd spirit that hath dared
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
So great an object: can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France? or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?
O, pardon! since a crooked figure may
Attest, in little place, a million;
And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,
On your imaginary forces work.
Suppose, within the girdle of these walls
Are now confined two mighty monarchies,
Whose high upreared and abutting fronts
The perilous, narrow ocean parts asunder.
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts,
Into a thousand parts divide one man,
And make imaginary puissance.
Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth:
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times,
Turning the accomplishment of many years
Into an hour-glass; for the which supply,
Admit me, Chorus to this history;
Who, prologue-like, your humble patience pray,
Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play."

On what, then, did Shakespeare rely, for the

working out of his conceptions? On good acting, and that only. The age that produced great dramatists produced great actors also; the two were cast in the same mould, and, in several cases, the same individual was at once actor and dramatist. The mighty lines of the poet called forth the actor's genius; and the poet himself, hearing his words sent back to him with the added force of impassioned utterance, wrote in confidence that his thoughts would be understood and realized. This held good with every portion of a play; for we read that leading actors did not then disdain to undertake small parts besides their chief character. And thus servants and messengers were presented by men of the highest stamp; a thing not often seen on the modern stage.

It is a common regret that it is so hard to judge of actors of a former age. We wish to know how actors whom we are used to see, would compare with the great men of past days. We can read descriptions of their playing, collect scraps of anecdote that prove their genius, study their portraits; but we come away, after all, very little satisfied, and with a mighty hunger for more exact information. The further back we go, the greater this uncertainty becomes: in the infancy of an art the standards of comparison are indefinite, and the data for exact analysis are wanting.

This applies in a high degree to our knowledge of the original acting of Shakespeare's plays. We have, indeed, the names of the chief performers of

the day; but we cannot do with them, as we might with the painters of former times, set side by side works by Raphael and Rembrandt, or of Holbein and Gainsborough, and nicely weigh the manner of each master. We cannot thus set the art of Burbage by that of Betterton, nor feel on sure ground in balancing the merits of Garrick's tragedy and Kean's.

But there is no doubt whatever that the greatest actor of Shakespeare's day was Richard Burbage. He played Shylock, Richard III., Prince Henry, Romeo, Henry V., Brutus, Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Macbeth, Pericles, and Coriolanus. Probably, in every case too, Burbage was the original performer of these parts; and it is amazing to think of the good fortune of an actor to whom it fell, to be the creator on the stage of such a wondrous round of characters.

Burbage lived long before the days of professional critics; and except from mention of his name in legal documents relating to various theatres, and from a few poems, we know but little about him. The list of his characters is taken from a manuscript epitaph in the British Museum, which, though not a brilliant poem, has a few expressions that convey real ideas.

> "Tyrant Macbeth, with unwasht, bloody hand,
> We vainly now may *hope to understand.*"

Without Burbage, the written character would be an insoluble riddle.

> "Thy stature small, but every thought and mood
> Might throughly *from thy face* be understood;
> And his whole action he could change with ease,
> From ancient Lear to youthful Pericles."

Truly Burbage had taught this man something worth knowing. Here is clear insight into the whole art of acting; a piece of sound dramatic criticism from one who had thought the matter out for himself, and had received his impressions direct. This was probably written soon after Burbage died, in 1619. Another poem, dated 1672, by Richard Flecknoe, tells that, he "ne'er went off the stage but with applause;" and, with a finer artistic discernment, that he was "beauty to the eye, and music to the ear." But we must accept this eulogium with caution. Fifty years had passed since Burbage died, and the lines must have been the embodiment of tradition rather than, as in the last case, the outcome of the writer's own vivid recollection.

Bishop Corbett in his "Iter Boreale," written about 1620, gives trifling, but genuine, evidence of the place this actor filled in the popular mind. He tells that when an innkeeper at Bosworth was describing the fight there, he let slip the name of Burbage for that of King Richard.

> "And when he should have said, King Richard died,
> And called—a horse! a horse!—he, Burbage, cried."

Touching and very brief is another well-known epitaph—exit Burbage.

But Comedy bears equal rank with Tragedy in

Shakespeare's plays. A race of professional jesters had long existed; and at this time the stage took to itself these free wits, and their talents became public property, instead of, as till then, the sole possession of persons of rank. Tarleton died somewhat early in Shakespeare's career; but his successor, William Kempe, was the favourite low comedian of his day. He was the original Dogberry, and probably played Launce, Launcelot Gobbo, the Gravedigger, Touchstone, and Justice Shallow. Shakespeare wrote his low-comedy parts more fully than had been usual before that time, and as he meant them to be played. He hated gag:—"Let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them."

One broad distinction divides this period from our own. There were then no women on the stage, and women's parts were filled by boys or young men. This usage, I fancy, has had its bearing upon the plays themselves. In the induction to The Taming of the Shrew, a page is dressed to personate the wife of the supposed lord, and the whole thing seems perfectly natural. Coriolanus is said to have gained an oaken chaplet, when "he might act the woman in the scene;" that is, "ere his youth attained a beard." The performer of Rosalind, in 'As you like it,' after allowing that it is "not the fashion to see the lady the epilogue," goes on with the words, "*if I were a woman.*" Hamlet thus greets one of the players who come to Elsinore: "What! my young lady and mistress! By'r lady,

your ladyship is nearer to heaven than when I saw you last, by the altitude of a chopine. Pray God, your voice, like a piece of uncurrent gold, be not cracked within the ring." Surely, this is not the language of the prince to a woman, but to a growing boy, whom he was used to see *as a woman.* Now, it would seem that Shakespeare turned this condition of his own times to a real, dramatic purpose. How many of his heroines put on man's attire! Imogen wanders in Wales as a boy; Julia follows her faithless swain, and becomes his page; Viola, in the guise of Cesario, attracts the love of the Countess Olivia; Rosalind carries on a mock courtship with her lover in the forest; Portia conducts a case before the Doge of Venice. Shakespeare knew that his boys were best *as boys*, and so let his fancy run in this channel. The old custom of actors of repute taking apprentices to study under them, provided boys for these parts. Nathaniel Field was one of the most famous of these "woman-actors;" he was a contemporary of Shakespeare's, and may have played some of his heroines. At a later date, Kynaston was noted in the same line: both were fine tragedians in after life.*

The history of any subject will naturally divide itself into sections, or groups of facts, according as

* In 1629 some French actresses appeared at several London theatres in succession, but met with small encouragement. We may hear more of women on the stage at an early date, but there is abundant evidence that the commonly accepted view as to their absence is, in the main, correct.

certain agencies come into play, are expended, and give place to new. The foregoing depicts one portion of our dramatic history, more clearly defined, indeed, than any later period. When the Civil Wars broke out the theatres were suppressed, and, with the restoration of Charles the Second, begins a fresh chapter of the history of the English stage.

The circumstances that produced the altered aspect of this second dramatic epoch, and gave its distinctive tone, were in part social, and in part purely literary. In the days of Elizabeth the nation was instinct with patriotism and love of liberty. Those were the days of high hopes and mighty aspirations. Upon the vigorous stock of mediævalism was engrafted the restless spirit of enterprise and inquiry; and the result to letters was a sudden meridian of poetry. But the day of romance was soon gone: the best intellect of the land had been absorbed in a fierce domestic struggle, and the issue of twenty years of strife was such as to bring feelings of doubt and shame to honest men of all parties. And thus the keen spirit of the last age had given place to a prosaic temperament, little apt to produce a noble race of poets.

While, in our country, literature had been brought almost to a stand by the Civil Wars, its development had been rapid in France. The French nature has more love for finish and exactness of form in writing than the English, and an eagerness for rules that shall fence off exuberant growth from the pale of perfect refinement and propriety. In

1636 was founded the French Academy, and in 1659, Corneille, having elaborated certain ideas, faintly suggested by Aristotle, and, to some extent, carried out in the practice of the Greek dramatists, published his famous essay on the Unities of the Drama; of time, namely, of place, and of action. Here, then, was established a new code of dramatic laws, and a memorable instance given of a man's ingenuity misapplied.

Charles, and the immediate friends, who afterwards formed his Court, and who set the fashion in literary taste, from their residence abroad, were acquainted with these new rules of writing; and French modes soon prevailed in this country.

The primary concern of the stage of any period is, of course, the plays written for it by its own authors; they deal most with the interests of the day, and reflect the passing tone of thought and feeling. We have hitherto seen Shakespeare as a contemporary writer, the master-mind of the existing school. But the few years of the suppression had snapped the thread of continuity, till then the sole tradition of the stage. A fresh era had been ushered in, and Shakespeare and his brother poets were now the men of a bygone age, who were set in competition with the new writers of the day.

But these elder poets still held their ground, and it is noteworthy that Beaumont and Fletcher's plays were more acted than Shakespeare's; and it seems to have been a debated point whether Shakespeare or Fletcher was the greater dramatist. Langbaine, in

his account of the English dramatic poets,* enumerates twenty-three plays by Beaumont and Fletcher, from a total of fifty-two, as having been acted since the re-opening of the theatres; whereas only about fifteen of Shakespeare's are distinctly mentioned in a similar list. The four grandest tragedies—Macbeth, Hamlet, Lear, and Othello—were then, we learn, stock plays; the classic pieces were Julius Cæsar, Antony and Cleopatra, Timon, Troilus and Cressida, and Coriolanus. From the English Histories were played Richard II., Henry IV., and Henry VIII., and among the more purely imaginative poems were Cymbeline and The Tempest. But the statement that these plays were acted is only partially true; they were acted, but with a difference.

For we now enter upon a novel phase of our subject. According to the new French rules, the grand poetic freedom of Shakespeare, his power of moving about in time and space in defiance of the unities, was licentious irregularity. He was, indeed, a striking writer, but he lived in a barbarous age, and sadly wanted form. His plays, therefore, were taken in hand by men who corrected their faults, and improved them for those more critical and enlightened times. Incidents and characters were struck out,

* "An Account of the English Dramatick Poets. Or some Observations and Remarks on the Lives and Writings, of all those that have publish'd either Comedies, Tragedies, Tragi-Comedies, Pastorals, Masques, Interludes, Farces, or Opera's in the English Tongue. By Gerard Langbaine. Oxford. Printed by L. L. for George West and Henry Clements. An. Dom. 1691." A scarce volume in the possession of the writer.

and new were inserted; the language was reformed; music and show were introduced; and thus Shakespeare's plays, as presented on the boards, took the impress of the shallow and vicious tastes of that day.

For example, what was *called* The Tempest, or *The Enchanted Island*, was a piece arranged by Dryden and Davenant, with music by Henry Purcell. The Cymbeline was by Durfey, and was styled the *Injured Princess,* or *The Fatal Wager*, and, no doubt, the change was more than skin-deep. Richard II. was rechristened the *Sicilian Usurper*, and Coriolanus *The Ingratitude of a Commonwealth*, both being the work of Nahum Tate, one of the compilers of the New Version of the Psalms. In King Lear, also, Tate adopted a singularly bold treatment of the text, introducing love-passages between Edgar and Cordelia, giving the old King victory over his foes, and a happy ending to the piece. Timon was an alteration by Shadwell, afterwards poet-laureate. Troilus and Cressida, or *Truth found out too late*, was again by Dryden, and he, too, turned Antony and Cleopatra into *All for Love*, or *The World well lost.* Sir William Davenant, laureate to Charles I. and Charles II., combined materials from Measure for Measure and Much Ado into his *Law against Lovers*: but Davenant's masterpiece was Macbeth.

If all these productions had been merely ephemeral little importance would attach to them, and they would hardly be mentioned here. But this is not the case. In some instances these and similar

adaptations held the stage for years and years, nay, still hold it; and one of my chief objects is to show that what for generations was played and accepted as Shakespeare was not Shakespeare, but some dilution of him prepared within the last two centuries. Davenant's Macbeth is a case in point. This tragedy, as we see it performed, contains a great deal more than we can find in our books, and we wonder where the supernumerary witches come from, and what is the meaning of "Locke's celebrated music," paraded in the bills. We notice that whereas Shakespeare employs his witches most sparingly, just so far as needed to pitch the key of the drama, and no more, in the acted play the stage swarms with witches, and witches of another species from the three weird and ghastly beings for whom Shakespeare has imagined a new dialect and a new nature scarce half human. But the intellectual standpoint of Shakespeare was above Davenant and those for whom he catered. The Italian custom of blending music with action had been naturalized in France, and came over here with other French fashions. Accordingly he turned Macbeth into a sort of melodrama, with interpolated songs and choruses set by Matthew Locke. After seventy years, indeed, Davenant's version was laid aside; but scarcely a manager has yet ventured to present Macbeth without these clumsy musical scenes, which cling like brambles to the skirts of the tragedy, delay its progress, and are utterly foreign to the true spirit of the poem.

Samuel Pepys, an inveterate play-goer, saw Mac-

beth more than once acted in this form, and no doubt his words express the general opinion of his day upon the merits of the piece. We must remember that Pepys was no critic, and never troubled himself as to whether dramas were original or adapted, and probably knew very little of Shakespeare from books.

He enters as follows in his Diary under the date of January 6th, 1666-7:—"To the Duke's house, and saw 'Macbeth,' which, though I saw it lately, yet appears a most excellent play in all respects, but especially in divertissement, though it be a deep tragedy; which is a strange perfection in a tragedy, it being most proper here, and suitable." In November of the same year he witnessed another of these adaptations. It was The Tempest, "an old play of Shakespeare's." He says it was "the most innocent play" that he ever saw, and describes a curious trick in the music for managing an echo. He considers that "the play has no great wit, but yet (is) good above ordinary plays."

Some of Pepys's theatrical notes are too amusing to be passed over, while considering the debased state of the Shakesperian drama in his day. On March 1st, 1662, he saw Romeo and Juliet "the first time it was ever acted, but it is a play of itself the worst that ever I heard." The next year he went to see King Henry VIII. at the Duke's theatre. He calls it "made up of patches, nothing but show." "The Merry Wives," he says, "did not please me at all in no part of it." The Taming of the Shrew, in spite of "some very good pieces in it," he considered

"but a mean play." It is clear that Pepys did not much care for Shakespeare, at least as his dramas were then presented. For one play his contempt was without measure. He writes for September 29th, 1662, "To the King's Theatre, where we saw 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' which I had never seen before, nor shall ever again, for it is the most insipid, ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life."

The number of theatres in London was far less at this time than formerly. It is not easy to give an exact list of the houses open at any one date, but there must have been a dozen or fifteen in existence in the reign of James I. A few are lost sight of before the suppression; and on the re-establishment of the stage two grand companies were licensed by the King, one styled His Majesty's Servants, and the other taking their title from the Duke of York, afterwards James II. The King's Servants were soon settled in Drury Lane under a patent granted to Thomas Killigrew. The Duke's Company had several removals, sometimes acting in theatres in or about Lincoln's Inn Fields, and sometimes in Dorset Gardens, below Fleet Street, and were under the direction of Sir William Davenant. The lists of standard plays to be acted by these two companies were fixed by the Court and their own alternate choice; the dramas of Shakespeare, Fletcher, and Jonson were divided between them, and neither was suffered to invade the repertory of the other. In 1684, owing to the decay of some of the elder actors, it was found mutually advantageous to unite the

companies, and for ten years the King's House was the one theatre open, with Betterton as the leading tragedian.

Among actors, Thomas Betterton is the central figure of this era, as Burbage was of the last. He began his career just before the Restoration, and continued on the stage till his death, in 1710. He was the greatest actor of the day in Shakespeare's tragedies, and we know him by the descriptions of Pepys, Steele, Aston, and best of all, as judged by a fellow player, Colley Cibber. Pepys enters the following in his Dairy for August 24, 1661:

"To the Opera (that is, Davenant's Theatre,) and there saw 'Hamlet, Prince of Denmark,' done with scenes, very well, but, above all, Betterton did the Prince's part beyond imagination." Seven years later, after seeing the same play, he writes that he was "mightily pleased with it, but, above all, with Betterton, the best part, I believe, that ever man acted."

Steele saw him buried in Westminster Cloisters, and, with a full heart, writes of his excellencies, and tells in what high estimation a nation should hold such an artist.*

These are sincere and valuable testimonies to the greatness of Betterton: but Cibber's practical knowledge of the art of acting gives special value to his evidence.

"Betterton was an actor," he writes, "as Shake-

* 'Tatler,' May 4th, 1710.

spear was an author, both without competitors! formed for the mutual assistance and illustration of each other's genius!" * * *

"Could how Betterton spoke be as easily known as what he spoke, then might you see the Muse of Shakespear in her triumph, with all her beauties in their best array, rising into real life, and charming her beholders. But, alas! since all this is so far out of the reach of description, how shall I show you Betterton? Should I therefore tell you that all the Othellos, Hamlets, Hotspurs, Mackbeths, and Brutus's whom you may have seen since his time, have fallen far short of him; this still should give you no idea of his particular excellence. Let us see, then, what a particular comparison may do, whether that may yet draw him nearer to you."

He then describes his Hamlet, in the first scene with the Ghost. He began, he says, "with a pause of mute amazement; then, rising slowly to a solemn trembling voice, he made the Ghost equally terrible to the spectator as to himself." Betterton had a fine sense of individuality in the portrayal of character. The wild starts and flashing fire of Hotspur were distinct from the occasional irritation of Brutus. To the alternation of rage and tenderness in Othello he gave a force and beauty long remembered. His style seems to have combined the boundless freedom and variety of nature, with the highest dignity of an ideal school of acting; the latter an element inherited by immediate followers, while the former essential was almost lost sight of,

until revived by Garrick. In person he had little natural grace: for his figure was thick-set and rather clumsy, nor had his voice much sweetness or beauty of tone. But, in spite of all defects, Betterton's aspect was majestic and venerable, and when he entered the scene the eyes of all were fixed upon him.

Of his sound understanding and correct ear, Cibber writes,—"I never heard a line from Betterton in tragedy, wherein my judgment, my ear, and my imagination were not fully satisfied." He heard this great actor say "that he never thought any kind of (applause) equal to an attentive silence: that there were many ways of deceiving an audience into a loud one, but to keep them husht and quiet was an applause that only truth and merit could arrive at." These words show the true artist: would that others had power to hold their hearers like Betterton, and wisdom to know where their strength should lie!

Colley Cibber, here mentioned as a critic, was an important man in his day; he was actor, play-writer, manager, adapter of Shakespeare, and afterwards poet-laureate. Cibber's version of Richard III. is still the Richard of the stage; and from the mere fact of its vitality, apart from its obvious merits, his play demands notice almost above any similar production. The purport of this adaptation is to concentrate attention on Richard, by still further blackening his portrait, and by withdrawing lateral interests: by striking off the wings of the story. Cibber produced a work excellently fitted for the stage,

but at the loss of much that is grand in the original. Cibber's is an effective, but a coarse, play.

As Shakespeare wrote it, this is one of a series of historical dramas: closely connected with it are the three plays bearing the name of King Henry VI., in the last of which the future King Richard bears an important part. Now, as these were not then acting plays, Cibber took from them some fine speeches, in which Richard's character is carefully drawn, and the scene in which he murders the King in the Tower. That is utilization of waste material, and pardonable where the principle of wide deviation from an acknowledged work of art is once allowed. So, also, the total omission of the Duke of Clarence, with his famous dream, is well judged. For stage effect his part is not only over-weighted, considering the small figure he makes in this portion of the story, but, by its elaboration, is actually detrimental to a more important scene in the drama.

But the inherent vulgarity of the play, as revised, is shown by an interpolated passage, in which Richard deliberately sets himself to kill his wife by neglect and cruelty. Equally commonplace and morbid is a scene in which we are brought to the very threshold of the chamber where the children are smothered, and there see Richard prowling about and moralizing on his wickedness. The language of the piece is a compound of Shakespeare and Cibber, curiously interlaced; for, besides the omissions and interpolations, he habitually debases the poetry to his own standard of dulness. Impassioned ejaculations of

grief and horror seemed profane when the stage had become a mere amusement, and were set aside. The glorious blank verse of the Elizabethan writers was then out of date; its rhythm was not understood. The accented *ed*, for instance, in the verb and participle jarred on Cibber's sensitive ear, and he would always change a line to avoid it. Thus, when Norfolk gives the King the paper, found in his tent :—

> "Jockey of Norfolk, be not too bold,
> For Dickon thy master is bought and sold,"

Richard boldly declares it—

> "A thing devisèd by the enemy."

That would not do for Cibber; he wrote—

> "A weak invention of the enemy."

Again, recurring words in a line were inartistic. After that awful night on Bosworth Field, with the shades of his victims : (and here Cibber has been at the pains to re-write the vision, and has cut out the agony of remorse and the frenzied self-examination at its close :) when aroused to arms, Richard exclaims—

> "O Ratcliff! I have dreamed a fearful dream."

Cibber has it :—

> "O Catesby, I have had such horrid dreams."

Notice, too, that the crack rants in the part of Richard are Cibber's own invention.

Such are—

> "Off with his head! So much for Buckingham."

A tremendous hit on the stage. So again—

> "Richmond, I say, come forth and singly face me,
> Richard is hoarse with daring thee to arms."

And, lastly—

> "Hence babbling dreams, you threaten here in vain;
> Conscience, avaunt! Richard's himself again."

Perhaps these time-honoured points tell as much in favour of Cibber's version as its general practicability.

Immediately after the Restoration, women began to appear on the English stage, and it is pleasant to remember that Mrs. Betterton was the best actress in Shakespeare's plays. We have Cibber's word for this, and Pepys also sounds her praise. Mrs. Betterton first appeared as "Ianthe," in a play by Davenant, and Pepys habitually calls her by this name. One day he saw the Duchess of Malfi "well performed, but Betterton and Ianthe to admiration." Another time it was the Bondman, and he writes, "Betterton and my poor Ianthe outdo all the world."

After Betterton came Barton Booth, a man of the highest culture, and of the most imposing dignity and grace of manner; but who was apt to become dull, being without the highest inspiration of his master.

Booth is remembered as the Cato of Addison's tragedy, and his best Shakesperian part was Othello. His contemporary Wilks was a fine Shakesperian actor, and played Hamlet well. By nature he must have been a light comedian; his was an easier, more natural style than Booth's; but in tragedy at times he wanted repose and weight. Cibber, the partner of these two men in the management of Drury Lane, in spite of grave defects of voice and person, acted a few of Shakespere's tragic parts; giving them, no doubt, strongly marked individuality, or, as we might say, playing them as "character" rather than as tragedy. He acted his own Richard, Iago, and also Cardinal Wolsey. This last is interesting. Till that time the leading part in Henry VIII. had been the King himself. In Shakespeare's day the stage treatment of Henry was a delicate matter; it would not do to assign this part to an inferior actor, and set the King at a disadvantage beside the Cardinal. Hence arose a tradition: Booth played King Henry, and thus it was that an actor who allowed himself to be scarcely fit for tragedy, ventured to enact a character out of which Kemble afterwards made a striking stage-figure, if not an accurately historical portrait.

It is here convenient to pass over a few years, and come at once to the time when Shakespeare's plays, after a dull epoch, again held the foremost place on the stage. In 1741, David Garrick, an unknown man, played Richard III. at an out-of-the-way theatre in London, and at once sprang into fame. In 1747

he became joint patentee of Drury Lane, and set about the renovation of the Shakesperian drama. Now begins, though in an uncertain, tentative fashion, the restoration of the genuine text of the plays. Garrick announced Macbeth to be performed "as written by Shakespeare." What could this mean? The age was uncritical, and had long accepted a spurious Shakespeare in perfect good faith. The great actor, Quin, knew no more than the public. He was startled at the vigorous, uncouth words of the original, and asked Garrick where on earth he had got such strange language. Locke's music, I believe, he retained; no doubt, it lightens the play, and helps to make it go. But Garrick relied on his acting; he carefully taught Mrs. Pritchard, his best actress, and by them the parts of Macbeth and the Lady were created anew. Garrick got together a grand company of players, and trained them in the study of Shakespeare; and during nearly thirty years of management he placed a considerable number of Shakespeare's plays upon his stage. But in speaking of Garrick as a reformer, and he was one in many ways, we must remember the general taste of his day. The bearing of modern poetical thought is towards ideality; it strives to reach above and below the visible, and to deal with subtleties and the inner significance of things. But this depth and refinement of fancy lay beyond the concerns of the shrewd, bustling manager, eager to draw the town by an effective representation. Garrick cast aside base traditions, but he fashioned new.

That the plays should be acted literally "as written by Shakespeare" was then, as it now is, out of the question; but as one who took unwarrantable liberties with the plots, characters and language, Garrick, like Falstaff, might count himself "little better than one of the wicked." Probably every play he brought out was disfigured, more or less, by interpolations and injurious omissions. But his adaptation of Hamlet is a curiosity of bad taste, and he candidly confessed that his producing this play with alterations, was "the most impudent thing he ever did." In Hamlet the story advances steadily to a certain point; but, in the latter scenes, the action is slow. The King is so very delicate in suggesting that Laertes should assassinate his nephew; Hamlet has so much to explain to Horatio about what has happened since they parted, and Osric is so very profuse, that we are a long time in getting over the ground. And in the fifth act of a tragedy it is a bold thing to bring on fresh characters to make us laugh while waiting for the funeral of a gentle girl. Hamlet's death is not glorious, it is simply very sad; and the close of the play is singularly melancholy, and, in a way, untheatrical. To write a showy drama was the last thing in Shakespeare's mind; events fall out in Hamlet just as they might in real life. But a play that is without ostentatious poetic justice is apt to seem tame and unsatisfactory to minds trained to look for it at every turn. Garrick felt these difficulties with growing force; and at last he declared that he would not leave the stage till he had

"rescued this noble play from the rubbish of the fifth act." Very near the end of his career, he prepared a stage version without the gravediggers; he made the King, when attacked, defend himself manfully, and brought down the curtain with plenty of bustle and effect. This arrangement of the plot served the remainder of Garrick's time; but, soon after his death, was happily laid by and forgotten.

Many years before, Garrick had produced Romeo and Juliet, re-written by himself, and, sad to say, his version still holds the stage. It is the same story over again as Cibber's Richard, and every old adaptation of Shakespeare; all must be plain, and lie on the surface. The poem, as it stands, was complicated, he thought, wanting in clearness and point. What business had Romeo with a previous suit? The answer is that in this lies half the meaning and beauty of the story. In Romeo, Shakespeare shows an unreal, sentimental affection shrivelled up to nothing before the fire of true love. But Garrick failed to see this; at one stroke his early passion is swept away, and Juliet's name is brought prematurely forward, to hold the place of that of the scornful Rosaline. Again, in the last act: how weak, he thought, for the lovers to die, and not exchange a word, when so much might be made of the scene! And so, by a happy thought, he lets Juliet wake in her tomb, before the poison which Romeo has drunk has taken effect, and there was a fine situation! He carries her in his arms down to the footlights, and the two talk pure Garrick verse,

till the potion does its work, and Romeo expires in torture before the eyes of Juliet. All this is excellent good sense, and has been much admired as a capital sermon preached by Shakespeare. But what has become of the poem? Whenever this play, still called Shakespeare's tragedy, is acted, we have before us, not the "pair of star-crossed lovers," the enthronement of ideal devotion and purity amid bitter surroundings, but a dismal warning against imprudent attachments and the follies of youth.

But we cannot understand what Garrick did for Shakespeare, unless we know what he was as an actor. When he appeared, Quin was the foremost man on the stage; he was a sterling comedian, but in his hands tragedy had moved far away from nature, and was little more than stiff, conventional declamation. We read of Quin's pomposity, his "sawing" and "grinding" delivery, his "pumping" and "paving" gestures. Tragedy was then spoken in a monotonous chanting tone, without pause or variety. Garrick was of a quick and fervid nature, and this made his acting what it was. He broke up the measured declamation by startling pauses and striking gestures; he was all spirit and life; his voice was animated, his figure graceful, and his brilliant eyes darted fire in all directions. Quin and his colleagues of the formal, solemn school felt their empire vanish like smoke before the daring innovator. "If this young fellow is right," he said, "then we have all been wrong." Pedants alleged that Garrick played in defiance of the rules of

grammar; that he paused when he ought to go on, and went on when he ought to pause: that his acting was affectation—mere clap-trap. But the world knew better, and the public verdict followed the summing-up of the author of the Rosciad:

> "When in the features all the soul's portray'd,
> And passions, such as Garrick's, are display'd,
> To me they seem from quickest feelings caught;
> Each start is nature, and each pause is thought."

Garrick's most formidable rival was Barry, the finest stage lover of the day. He was tall, which Garrick was not, and had a voice of the utmost tenderness and beauty. One season the town was thrown into excitement by these two tragedians playing Romeo against each other; and though superiority in specific scenes was claimed for each, we may well believe that Barry's rare personal gifts gave him the advantage. But when, some years later, Garrick and Barry were acting Lear at the same time, the public voice was less divided. We may picture Garrick as the graceful, dashing hero of high comedy, and the clever actor of eccentric character; but we can clearly see that beyond and above all this were heights of poetic inspiration, and the simple pathos of nature.

> "The town has found out different ways
> To praise the different Lears;
> To Barry they give loud huzzas;
> To Garrick only tears."

And again,

"A king, nay, every inch a king,
Such as Barry doth appear;
But Garrick's quite a different thing,
He's every inch King Lear."

Before leaving this part of the subject, it would be unfair to pass over the name of Charles Macklin. He is chiefly remembered now as the writer of The Man of the World; but, in his day, he did good Shakesperian work, and, in respect of two plays, the Merchant of Venice and Macbeth, he deserves to rank high as a reformer. In their early days, Macklin and Garrick were close friends: they dearly loved their profession, and were bent on breaking down the false style of acting then in vogue. And in this, Macklin got the start. A few months before Garrick came to the front, he acted Shylock in a new fashion. At that time the received play was a modification of Shakespeare's, by Lord Lansdowne, and the Jew was a ludicrous character played by low comedians. Macklin changed all that: he went to the true text, and gave to Shylock his proper dignity and passion and pathos. When quite an old man, Macklin made an equally startling innovation in playing Macbeth in kilt and tartan. Garrick never ventured on this; he feared the ridicule of the public; for they were used to see stage personages either dressed as ordinary ladies and gentlemen, or in wonderful garments, meant to be correct, but revealing a strong undercurrent of the attire of that day. No doubt, Macklin's Macbeth was a very incomplete portrait, and would seem now, as, for

reasons directly opposite, it seemed a century ago, little better than a snuff-shop Scotchman. But as a bold onward step towards the reproduction of historical costume for stage purposes, Macklin's experiment should be gratefully recorded.

I have dealt rather largely, and severely too, with the debased stage versions of Shakespeare's plays; and it might naturally be supposed that I would have the plays acted precisely after the stage directions given in the ordinary text. But it is time to take up the other side, and show this to be an impossibility. There are such things in dramatic workmanship as neatness of construction and skill in developing a plot. It is easier to put down several short scenes, as many as may be wanted, each dealing with a single group of characters, than so to marshal events that a few comprehensive scenes shall advance the story in various departments with smoothness and regard to probability. But how different the pleasure of an audience in the two cases! Consider the fulness and harmony and *sense of delusion* in such a scene as the fourth of the second act of King Henry IV., Part I. In a single picture we have Prince Henry's jest with Francis, Falstaff's account of the adventure on Gadshill, which is truly marvellous every way; and after all that is done, we get the acted interview between the king and his son, and wind up with the visitation of the sheriff, and the searching of Falstaff's pockets as he lies asleep behind the arras. A grander comic scene was never imagined; and our being enabled to see so much of

the characters at one view gives an air of reality to the whole that cannot be overrated.

As a contrast to this, compare the last act of Macbeth. How broken up and fidgetty it is! What harassing recollections we have of pieces of painted woods and fortifications clapping together and sliding apart; of little stage armies marching across, with drums and trumpets sounding from behind; of a few words being spoken, and then—a fresh scene! A room in the castle at Dunsinane, the country near Dunsinane, another room in the castle, the open country again, a place within the castle, a plain before it, and another part of the same plain, pass before the eye during this one act. Now, I am not a stage-manager, and do not propose how this is to be remedied; but I do say that no one would dare to write in this fashion now. The writer would so arrange his materials as to carry on the story without these rapid and wearisome changes of scene, which require a constant agility of mind to follow their movements, and never let us forget that we are in a theatre.

Of course we must take into account the altered condition of the stage in a period of three centuries. In Shakespeare's day, as before stated, the appointments of the London playhouses were very simple. In King Henry VIII. some unusual pageantry is indicated by the stage directions. The Queen's trial at Blackfriars, the coronation procession of Anne Boleyn, the vision of the spirits and the christening of the Princess Elizabeth, were clearly meant as

gorgeous spectacles. The stage must have been crowded with splendid figures, attired and arranged with the greatest care; but there is no corresponding description of scenery; and the records of that time show that only the rudest attempts were made to realize the localities of the various parts of the plays.

In this, at all events, we have improved since the sixteenth century; and it stands to reason that the noblest works should be presented with all possible aids to comprehension and enjoyment, that they may not be at a disadvantage compared with pieces written for the stage as it now is. In producing Shakespeare's plays, therefore, regard must be had to the effective management of the scenery. It is always an evil to shift the scenes before the eyes of the spectators, that is, during the progress of an act; consequently, other things being equal, the fewer the (dramatic) scenes are in number in excess of the number of acts, the smoother and more delightful will be the performance. And more than that; the fewer (painted) scenes there are to provide, the more care and expense can be bestowed on each. And thus we have ample motives for striking out superfluous matter, for occasionally altering the sequence of incidents *as told*, and even for joining together different passages in the same play, where the fusion tends to true dramatic effect. Of course, manipulation of this sort may be done well or ill: to do it well requires both tact and poetic feeling, as well as strict reverence for the meaning of the

writer. But treatment such as this is very different from the method of the old adapters; they retained just so much of the original as suited their purpose, and then seasoned what was left, according to taste, with whatever they chose to consider wanting to make their dish complete.

Again, the change in social manners since the days of Elizabeth and James the First furnishes another reason for departing from literal exactness. We do not now, either in real life or in our literature, tolerate the grossness of ideas and language that is so common with the old dramatists. This freedom of speech is matter of historic interest to avowed students; but the mass of those who go to see plays are neither students nor philosophers, but simply an abstract of the world at large. A heavy responsibility rests with those who, except for grave and unanswerable reasons, suggest base thoughts to audiences composed of men and women of all ages, ranks and degrees of culture, or accustom them to associate debasing sights and coarse words with the pleasures of the theatre. I am aware that this trenches upon the whole question of the action of the stage upon public morals,—a topic I have no wish to handle. But, writing as a regular play-goer, one who has faith in the stage, and would willingly do it a service, I fairly say that I sometimes wonder at what seems to me a professional blindness to impropriety. It is, no doubt, the result of tradition, and a survival of former times. But we must look to it; for this is the bar

that shuts out from our theatres many who should be there to lend their influence in raising an institution that has in it the elements of the highest good, and that no amount of censure can ever destroy; but which must be a blessing, or a public curse, in proportion as it finds its chief support among persons of character or the dregs of society.

But, to return to purely artistic questions. Many of the plays are too long to be acted as they stand, if judged by our modern ways of life; and it is easy to find passages, just a few lines here and there, or even whole scenes, that may well be excused upon the stage. Till lately, audiences in London lived within a comparatively short distance of the theatres. Now it is far otherwise. Many persons travel a long way to reach their homes; some must catch the last omnibuses or local trains, or the night trains into the country. This makes them impatient of anything like prosiness, for they are afraid of not getting away in time. It is sad to see half the spectators rising to their feet and moving off, while the players are still speaking on the stage; but managers learn to accept this discourtesy, and cut short the endings of plays as far as can be done. And, after all, taste in certain matters will differ from one age to another. We fancy we have a nicer sense of the value of time than our fathers, and in everything study condensation and brevity. In imaginative writing a line of thought may be worked out or simply be indicated. Much modern poetry aims at suggestion rather than elaboration;

many things are left to inference, which we must trace for ourselves. Judged from our present standpoint, Shakespeare is apt to be wordy in closing his tragedies. Take Romeo and Juliet: the lovers are dead; the tale is told, and we know what we ought to think about it. How wearisome would all that follows be, if played to the end! The watch enter the churchyard, and are active in the discharge of their duties; the prince and the heads of the rival houses are summoned, and grieve for what has happened; and Friar Laurence, while disclaiming all desire to be tedious, recapitulates most of the action of the story. We should not be interested to see Montague and Capulet shake hands, nor care much for the quaint tag set down for the prince.

> "For never was a story of more woe
> Than this of Juliet and her Romeo."

There is undoubted pleasure in feeling that something is withheld from our eyes and ears, which the poet entrusts to our inner sense; and I more than half believe that this formal closing of an account is best omitted. The effect of the last scene in Hamlet would be less striking were the curtain not lowered as the prince dies in the arms of Horatio. Or in Othello, if anything were said after the Moor, first throwing off their guard, with the cunning of a suicide, those standing by, has stabbed himself and fallen dead. So, too, in Macbeth, if instead of the death of the tyrant upon the stage, and the final rush

and cheer of the soldiers; his head were brought in stuck on a pole, and the play ended with a speech from the new King, in which he promises promotion to all his friends, and invites them to see him crowned at Scone. It is, I believe, most impressive and dramatic to bring down the curtain close upon the catastrophe, and, at all risk, to avoid an anticlimax. Nothing tends to destroy effect like hanging fire at the last. Modern writers know this well, and, in the words of Benvolio,

> "The date is out of such prolixity."

It is not my plan to give more than a brief outline of the course of the Shakesperian drama onwards to our own day. Much has been written upon the great players since Garrick; and what they did may easily be learned from books. When Garrick died, Henderson was the first Shakesperian actor; he was short-lived, but in spite of great personal disadvantages, made his mark both in tragedy and comedy. Then came Mrs. Siddons, whose celebrity has almost blinded us to the fame of Mrs. Cibber, Mrs. Pritchard, and the tragedy-queens of the last century. With the Kembles, with John Philip Kemble especially, a more studied elocution came into vogue; perhaps in the grandeur of his person and the dignity of his style, this actor more resembled Barton Booth than any one else before or since his time. Then, once more, came the reaction. Cooke appeared, who was the Shylock, Iago, and Richard of his day. It has been said that he represented

"the slang and bravura of tragedy," and he declared that he would "make Black Jack (*i. e.* Kemble) tremble in his shoes." The daring nature of Cooke's acting reached a still higher development in the hands of the elder Kean, who professed a great admiration for Cooke. Kean had many points of resemblance to Garrick. Both were small and elastic in figure, were rapid and graceful in motion, had marvellously piercing eyes, and took their time with the words of a part in defiance of established rules. They were both men of quick and nervous temperament, and both destroyed and created schools of acting. Kean had not great versatility; he did little in comedy, was not a writer, nor even a manager, and never influenced public opinion except through one channel. But as a tragedian we are tempted to believe that he surpassed Garrick; that is, where bursts of overwhelming fury and deadly hate could avail. His Macbeth and Hamlet and Romeo were good only in parts; his Richard III. must have equalled Garrick's, and his Othello was grander beyond all comparison, for Garrick could make nothing of the character. Edmund Kean's is not a happy name in dramatic records; the story of his life is very melancholy. But, viewing him simply as a tragic artist, we can only wonder at his mighty genius.

Kemble's management was marked by the increased attention given to the Roman plays. Such characters as Brutus and Coriolanus specially suited his distinguished appearance and manner; and as

the plays were then getting to be acted with rather more correctness of costume and scenery than before, these pictures of classical life became very popular. Kean seems to have troubled himself little about the text of the plays, and generally acted them as they came to hand. An adaptation of Richard II., after the old fashion, was written for him, but it soon fell into disuse. One reform we do owe to Kean: he restored the proper ending to King Lear. Macready was a wise and energetic manager, as well as a powerful actor, and worked hard and successfully to make the public appreciate Shakespeare. Under him the plays were produced in greater purity of form, and with a higher degree of artistic completeness, than ever before. We may expect to learn much of interest from the 'Reminiscences of Macready,' as edited by Sir Frederick Pollock.

Since Macready's time there have been two notable managements in London in which Shakespeare's plays have been the chief feature;—that of Charles Kean at the Princess's Theatre, and that of Mr. Phelps, at Sadler's Wells. At the Princess's a long series of plays were ably presented, all put on with the strictest regard to correctness of scenery, costumes, and accessories. Mr. Kean was an excellent antiquary, and spared no pains nor expense to make these "revivals" perfect lessons in archæology. He assumed the position of a public teacher more than any other manager.

Mr. Phelps's course was singularly honourable.

He took a small outlying theatre, then at the very lowest ebb of disrepute. He first set himself to establish decorum in his house, and then, gradually gaining power over the humble audiences of Clerkenwell and Islington, he trained a public to enjoy and understand the poetical drama when truthfully and intelligently set before them. Mr. Phelps enlarged the Shakesperian repertory to an extent altogether beyond precedent; and has himself, probably, played more of Shakespeare's characters, and succeeded in parts of more widely different types, than any actor on record. One example of his tact must suffice. No drama has been more tampered with and distorted in various attempts to fit it for the stage than 'A Midsummer Night's Dream.' What Pepys thought of it when acted has been already shown, and, till lately, no one imagined that it could be performed as written. In dealing with this play, Mr. Phelps, as usual with him, stuck to the original text, and made of it a delightful entertainment, while maintaining throughout the spirit of the poem. And more than that: it has been left to Mr. Phelps to show that the character of Bottom the Weaver is a really fine part for an actor.

A few years ago, Mr. Fechter, then lessee of the Lyceum Theatre, drew considerable attention to the tragedies of Hamlet and Othello, from some novelties in the mode of presentation. His position as a London manager puts him on a different footing from that of several eminent foreign players, who have, from time to time, acted Shakespeare in this

country, and whose names are omitted from this sketch. Since then, Mr. Calvert has conducted a series of Shakesperian performances at the Prince's Theatre, Manchester. His method most nearly resembles that of Charles Kean; and, like him, Mr. Calvert sometimes interpolates scenes, purely for the sake of scenic effect. In this particular, I think the judgment of both has been at fault; but difference of opinion as to matters of detail must not blind us to the good work done.

Lastly, we must look forwards, as well as back on the past. During several years an actor has been preparing himself for the highest walks of his profession; and training us, at the same time, to follow an artist who can display for us the depths of a man's heart. History repeats itself: the interest excited by Mr. Irving is such as that awakened when Garrick, and afterwards Kean, brought new life and fresh individualities to bear on an old theme. After a single attempt in the drama of Shakespeare, we cannot pretend to tell what career may lie before Mr. Irving, nor say to what renown he may attain. But if any should desire to settle his place now in the roll of players, I would turn to the old regret that it is so hard to compare actors of past and present times. How can we set in the same scale the evidence of our own senses and those of other people? To persons who are simply aghast at Mr. Irving's yells and the glare of his eye, I would say that they little know this artist. Let them watch him from his first entry upon the scene till his

departure, and note the grace, the subtlety, the breadth and the repose; the shifting lines of thought mirrored in that wondrous face; the wealth of attitude and gesture, that form an endless series of pictures and suggestions of infinite delight; and their powers of appreciation and sympathy for art will grow by what they feed on. If to rush along on the whirlwind of passion, like Kean, to fascinate by marvellous strokes of nature, like Garrick, to appal by the horrors of a stricken conscience, like no one but himself, and to be, like Burbage, "beauty to the eye, and music to the ear;"—if to succeed in all this is to be a great actor, then, most assuredly, such an one is Irving.

But it will be said that I am romancing, and deluding myself with words. I trust not; but my field of vision is limited, and what we see and hear for ourselves goes for more than description at second-hand. I write only as I feel; that Mr. Irving is one who may show us the glories of the Shakesperian drama, so dear to our forefathers, even in a degraded state. And I further believe that, through men such as he, and by the faithful setting forth of Shakespeare's designs, adorned by every worthy means at our command, we may gradually attain to a fuller knowledge and a deeper understanding of the soul of poetry.

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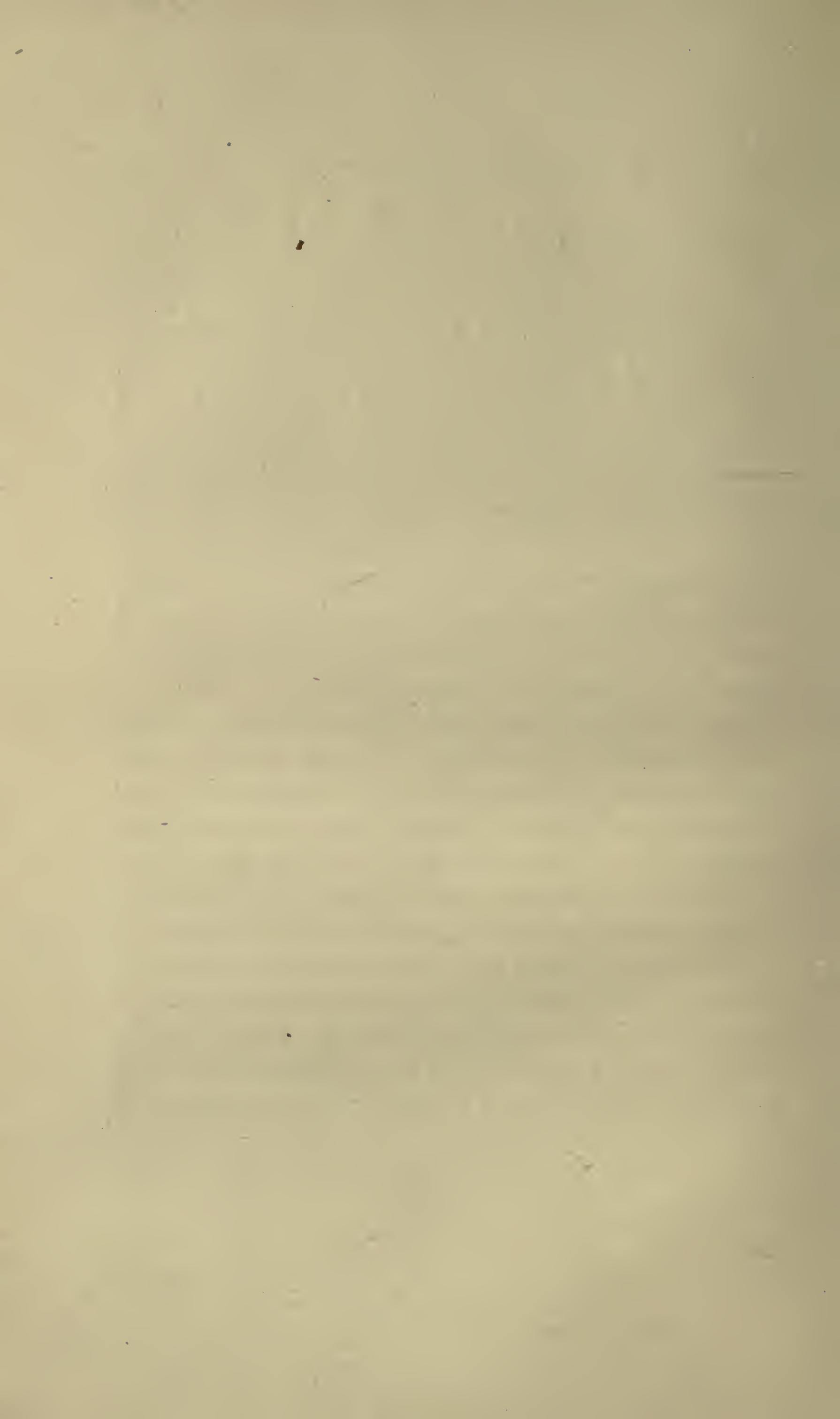

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