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Introduction by
W. JAMES

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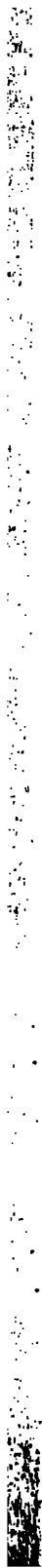


FROM THE GIFT OF

JOHN CRAIG

OF BOSTON

FOR BOOKS RELATING TO THE
THEATRE



Art and the Actor

PUBLICATIONS

of the

Dramatic Museum

OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Second Series

Papers on Acting:

- I. 'THE ILLUSION OF THE FIRST TIME IN ACTING.' By William Gillette. With an introduction by George Arliss.
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PAPERS ON ACTING

II

Art and the Actor

BY

CONSTANT COQUELIN

TRANSLATED BY

ABBY LANGDON ALGER

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

HENRY JAMES



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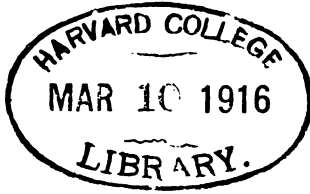
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C O N T E N T S

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I N T R O D U C T I O N *

IT was nearly seventeen years ago and the first time that the writer of these remarks had taken his seat in that temple of the drama in which he was destined afterwards to spend so many delightful evenings, feel the solicitation of so many interesting questions and welcome so many fine impressions, these last crowned by the conviction that the Théâtre Français was such a school of taste as was not elsewhere to be found in the world. The spectator of whom I speak felt the education of his theatric sense fairly begin on the evening M. Coquelin was revealed to him in 'Lions et Renards'—and revealed in spite of a part of rather limited opportunity. Many parts since have continued the revelation, these more important, more marked for success (Émile Augier's comedy to which I allude was, not undeservedly, a failure;) but I have retained in its vividness my image of the hour, and of all that this

* *The substance of this paper appeared in the CENTURY MAGAZINE for January, 1887.*

actor in especial contributed, because it was the first step of an initiation. It opened a door thru which I was in future to pass as often as possible into a world of delightful, fruitful art. M. Coquelin has quitted the Comédie, his long connection with that august institution has come to an end, and he is to present himself in America not as a representative of the richest theatrical tradition in the world, but as an independent and enterprising genius who has felt the need of the margin and elbow-room, the lighter, fresher air of a stage of his own. He will find this stage in the United States as long as he looks for it, and an old admirer may hope that he will look for it often and make it the scene of new experiments and new triumphs. His visit is in fact itself a new experiment, the result of which can scarce fail of interest for those who watch with attention the evolution of taste in our great and lively land. If it should be largely and strikingly successful that sacred cause will quite of necessity, I think, have scored heavily.

It is nevertheless to be noted that foreign performers, lyric and dramatic, descending

upon our shores by the thousand, have encountered a various, by no means always an assured, fortune. Many have failed, and of those who have succeeded it is safe to say that they have done so for reasons lying pretty well on the surface. They have addressed us in tongues that were alien and to most of us incomprehensible, but there was usually something in them that operated as a bribe to favor. The peculiarity of M. Coquelin's position and the cause of the curiosity with which we shall have regarded the public's attitude toward him are in the fact that he offers no bribe whatever, none of the lures of youth or beauty or sex or of an insinuating aspect, and none of those that reside in a familiar domestic repertory. The question is simply of appreciating or not appreciating his admirable talent and his not less admirable method. Great singers speak, or rather sing, for themselves; music hath charms, and the savage breast is soothed even when the "words" require a handy translation. Distinguisht foreign actresses have the resource of a womanhood which a chivalrous people is much more willing than not to take for lovely. Madame Sarah-

Bernhardt was helpt to relieve the burden of the French tongue to the promiscuous public by being able to add to her extraordinary cleverness her singular beauty, and then to add ever so many wonderful dresses and draperies to that. M. Coquelin will have had to please with nothing like the same assistance; he is not beautiful, he is not pictorial, and his clothes scarcely matter. The great Salvini has successfully beguiled us in Italian, but has had the advantage of the bravest address to the eye of which a man can be well capable, and of representing with his romantic type characters that have on our stage a consecration, a presumption in their favor. M. Coquelin's type is not romantic, and whatever in him is most immediately visible would seem to have been formed for the broadest comedy. By a miracle of talent and industry he has forced his physical means to serve him also, and with equal felicity, in comedy that is not broad, but surpassingly delicate, and even in the finest pathetic and tragic effects. To enjoy the refinement of his acting, however, the ear must be as open as the eye, must even be beforehand with it; and if that of the

American spectator in general learns, or even shows an aptitude for learning, the lesson conveyed in his finest creations, the lesson that acting is an art, and that the application of an art is style, and that style is expression and that expression is the salt of life, the gain will have been something more than the sensation of the moment—it will be a new wisdom.

In M. Augier's comedy which I have mentioned and which was speedily withdrawn, there was frequent reference to the "robe of innocence" of the young Vicomte Adhémar, an interesting pupil of the Jesuits, or at least of the clerical party, who, remarkable for his infant piety and the care taken to fence him in from the corruptions of the town, goes sadly astray on coming up to Paris and inflicts grievous rents and stains on that precious garment. I well remember the tone of humbugging juvenile contrition in which Coquelin, representing the misguided youth, confest that it was no longer in a state to be worn. He had a little curly flaxen wig, parted in the middle, a round and rosy face and a costume resembling the supposed uniform in New York to-day, of

that illusive animal the dude; yet he was not a figure of farce, but a social product, so lightly touched in as he was definitely specified. I thought his companions as delightful as himself, and my friendliness extended even to the horrible stalls in which at that time one was condemned to sit, and to the thick hot atmosphere of the house. I suspect the atmosphere has never been cleared since then—that the place has never had a thoro airing; but certain mitigations have been wrought, new chairs and wider passages supplied, with frescoes on the ceilings and fresh upholstery in box and balcony. It is still however of the dingy and stuffy old theater I think, haunted as it then more sensibly was by the ghosts of the great players of the past, the mighty presences of Talma and Mars and Rachel. It has seemed to me ever since that the “improvements” have frightened these sacred shades away; the ancient lack of ease was a part of the tradition—a word which represents the very soul of the Comédie and which, under the great dim roof that has echoed to so many matchless sounds, one pronounces with bated breath. The tradition was at that time in

the keeping of MM. Régnier, Bressant, Delaunay and Got, of Mesdames Plessy, Natalie and Favart, to say nothing of the subject of this sketch, the latest comer in the great generation of which these were some of the principal figures. Much has been changed with the lapse of the years, and M. Coquelin, though still in the happy prime, was the other day almost a senior. Régnier, Bressant, Delaunay had disappeared, and from the boards of the Français the most robust depositary of the tradition in the younger line—for to this title our visitor has certainly a right—has also vanished. Gone is the brilliant, artificial, incomparable Plessy; gone is that rich and wise *comédienne*, the admirable, elderly, discreet, the amusing and touching Natalie; gone is poor Madame Favart, whose utterance I remember I couldn't understand the first time I saw her (she was still playing quite young persons and represented, in a very tight dress, the aristocratic heroine of 'Lions et Renards',) but whom I afterwards grew to admire as an actress of high courage and a great tragic range.

It took a certain time for a new spectator

to discriminate and compare, to see things, or rather to see persons, in the right proportion and perspective. I remember that the first evenings I spent in the Rue de Richelieu I thought everyone equally good, I was dazzled by the general finish, by the harmony unbroken, a regulated tone and observed propriety which at that time affected me as an almost celestial order. Everyone *was* good—I don't say it of everyone to-day; even if afterwards the new spectator perceived differences. He was to discover indeed that, such is the grossness intermixed with the noblest human institutions, there could be sometimes a failure of taste behind that stately *rampe*. And now he has heard common voices, has had the shock of the imperfect illusion there, has seen the dead letter of the famous tradition uninformed by a free spirit. He has seen gentlemen put down their hats with great accuracy on the first chair on the right of the door as they come in, but, even when the further convincing grace might be much required of them, achieve very little more than that. He has seen actresses for whom all the arts of the toilet, all the facility of the Frenchwoman

and all the interest they had in producing the right impression could not conduce to the representation of a lady. These little roughnesses, however, inherent, as I say, in every mundane enterprise, were not frequent enough for the general glamor to suffer from them. I nevertheless rejoice to-day in a certain confidence of having even at the very first dimly discerned the essence of the matter, the purest portions of the actor's art, to abide in young Coquelin—he was then young—with unsurpassable intensity. It concerns his history that he was born at Boulogne-sur-Mer in 1841, and was christened Benôit-Constant; that his vocation defined itself at the earliest age, and that he became a pupil of the Conservatory in 1859. From this nursery of histrionic hopes he entered the Théâtre Français, where he at once drew attention to his presence. At the age of twenty-three he was a *sociétaire* of the great house. His features, his cast of countenance, the remarkable play and penetration of his voice, which combines the highest metallic ring with every conceivable human note, markt him out for parts of extreme comic freedom as well as for the finer shades of

what is called character. Much before I had seen him I was to retain the impression of the liveliest, received from a friend's account of him in Théodore de Banville's touching little poetic piece 'Gringoire,' where, in the part of a medieval Bohemian of letters condemned to hanging by Louis XI and reprieved when the halter is already round his neck—I have not seen the piece for a long time and rather forget the argument—he showed a mastery of that mixture of the appeal to the pity of things with the appeal to their absurdity which always so succeeds with the French. 'Gringoire' is an exquisite example of that range, and has taken its place in M. Coquelin's regular repertory, where he has matcht it, in comparatively recent times, with M. Coppée's 'Luthier de Crémone'; a like sensitive and slightly morbid personage this last, represented by the actor with wondrous discretion, delicacy and fancy, and dear to the French public from the fact that he may be introduced to families and young ladies. The pathetic, the "interesting"—including, where need be, the romantic and even the heroic, these and the extravagantly droll

mark the opposite terms of our performer's large gamut. He turns from end to end of this scale, he ranges between his extremes, with incomparable freedom and ease. Into the *emploi* of the impudent extravagant serving-men of the old comedies, the Mascarilles, the Scapins, the Frontins, the Crispins, he stepped from the first with the assurance of a conqueror; from hand to foot, in face, in manner, in accent, in genius, he was cut out for them, and it is with his most shining successes under that star that his name has become synonymous for the public at large. If his portrait is painted for the *foyer* of the Comédie—which was doubtless long since the case—it should perhaps be in particular as the Mascarille of Molière's 'Étourdi.'

This must have been, I think, the second part in which I gaped at him, when Delaunay, with but little less nature and art and effect of his own delightful kind, was the incorrigibly scatter-brained hero. I see Mascarille, I hear him, the incarnation of humorous effrontery and agility, launch again his prodigious voice over the footlights, fairly trumpet his "points" to the dome and give

an unparalleled impression of life and joy. I have acclaimed him in the character many times since then, and found it, save for his astonishing image of the false marquis in the 'Précieuses Ridicules', the most exuberant in his repertory. Of this fantastic exuberance, the special chartered license of the whole family, he is a master whom one watches very much as one watches some supreme dancer or trickster on the vertiginous tense wire feeling him as certain to pile danger high as not to risk his neck by excess. This safe playing with the danger of excess—which is a defiance of the loss of balance under exhilaration—connects itself with the actor's command of the effects that lie entirely in self-possession, effects of low tone, indications of inward things. The representative of Don Annibal in the 'Aventurière,' of Don César de Bazan in 'Ruy Blas', under both of which names this master is superb, is also the representative of various prose-talking and concentrated gentleman of to-day (the Duc de Septmonts in the 'Étrangère' of the younger Dumas, the argumentative, didactic Thouvenin in the same author's 'Denise') caught in various tight places, or

suspicious of them, as gentlemen must be in a play, but with no accessories *à la* Goya to help them out. The interpreter of the tragic passion which is the subject of 'Jean Dacier', a piece I have not seen for many years, lurks in the stupendously droll and dreadful evocation of M. Loyal, the canting little pettifogger or *clerc d'huissier*, who appears in a single brief scene of the last act of 'Tartuffe' and into whom M. Coquelin, taking up the part for the first time in the autumn of 1885, injected an individuality of grotesqueness and baseness which gave him, all in the space of five minutes, one of his greatest triumphs.

The art of composition is in the various cases I have mentioned the same, but the subjects to which it is applied have nothing in common. I have heard members of the public say with complacency: "Coquelin has great talent, he does ever so many different things, but somehow is always the same Coquelin." He is indeed always the same Coquelin, which truth to himself crowns our comfort, considering the damage that in so gallant a genius any breach of his identity might have wrought. It is exactly by being

fixt so firm at his center that he is able to reach out, reach ever so far, to the perfect Jean Dacier one night and to the perfect Don Annibal another. If it be meant by the remark that he makes Don Annibal resemble Jean Dacier, or gives the two personages something in common that they could not really have possest, no criticism could well be less just. What it really points to, I suppose, is the infallibility and punctuality of the great artist's method, the fact of its *always* reporting his observation and his experience, just as the postman always delivers the letters he starts out on his round with. The letters are various, but the postman remains the postman. It is, however, above all by his voice that M. Coquelin is (in the degree denounced, I suppose) exposed and betrayed, that voice which no art of composing a particular character or adopting a particular tone can well render a less astounding organ at one moment than at another. Don César is Coquelin and M. Thouvenin is Coquelin, because on the lips alike of Don César and of M. Thouvenin sit a range and a use of tone, a directed application of it, which are peculiar to the artist who com-

mands them and are surely the most wondrous in their kind that the stage has ever known. It may be said that his voice does fairly give him away, that he cannot escape from it, and that whatever he does with it he still pays the penalty of reminding us that only he can command such service.

This idiosyncrasy it is in short that, by so intimately connecting him with his characters, connects them inevitably with each other and shuts them up together as prisoners of war, so to speak, are shut up in their ring fence. Its life and force are such that we seem at times to hear it run away with him, take a "day off" and engage in antics and exercises on its own account. The only reproach it would occur to me to make to a *diseur* so endowed is that he may perhaps at moments show as the victim rather more than as the master of his gift, may occasionally lose the idea while he listens to the form. That beguilement is doubtless not to be grudged, however, as a reward to so much toilsome forging and polishing of the vocal arm; the result gives us something unsurpassably address to the stage, where the prime necessity of the least thing done, as well as of

the greatest, is that it shall "tell" for every creature in the house. When this master speaks the sound is not sweet and caressing, though it adapts itself beautifully, as I have hinted, to the most human effects; it has no analogy with the famous romantic murmur of Delaunay, a thing of ineffable quavers and enchanting cadences, dying falls and semi-tones calculated to a hair's breadth. It is not primarily the voice of a lover, or rather—for I hold that any actor, given the indulgence of the public to this particular easy appeal, may be a lover with any voice—it is not primarily, like that of M. Delaunay, the voice of love. There was no urgent reason why it should be, for the passion of love is not what M. Coquelin was cut out to represent or has usually been concerned with.

He has usually had to represent the passion of impudence, and it is, I think, not too much to say that in this portrayal he has won his greatest victories. His inimitable force of accent enables him to place supremely before us the social quality which, beyond question, leads straightest to social success. The valets of Molière and Regnard are nothing if not impudent; impudent are Don César

and Don Annibal; impudent, as I remember him, M. Adolphe de Beaubourg in 'Paul Forestier'; impudent the Duc de Septmonts; impudent even—or at least decidedly impertinent—the copious moralist M. Thouvenin. I select thus but a handful of instances from our actor's immense repertory; there are doubtless others at least as much to the point in parts in which I have not seen him. He is believed moreover—and nothing could be more natural—to have aspirations of the liveliest character in respect to Tartuffe, and it may be predicted that on the day he embraces that fine opportunity he will give a supreme sign of his power to depict the unblushing. It need hardly be remarked that the Mephistopheles which he is at the moment I write rumored to have his eye on in an arrangement of Goethe's drama will abound in the same sense. If M. Coquelin's art of tone meanwhile is not the art of sweetness it is in an extraordinary degree that of firmness and distinctness, that of penetration, of the power to "carry" sound and sense. I hear it as I write ascend again like a rocket to the great hushed dome of the old theater, under which, vibrating and

lashing the air, it seems to have sprung from some mechanism of still greater science even than the human throat. In the great cumulative tirades of the old comedy, which grow and grow as they proceed, but the difficulties of which are pure sport for our artist's virtuosity, it flings down the words and the verses as a gamester precipitated by a run of luck flings *louis d'or* upon the table. I am not sure that the most perfect piece of acting I have seen him achieve, in the sense of the exhibition of things intensely felt and re-acted upon, is not a prose character, but to appreciate to the full his mastery of form, his authority, as they say, we must listen to and enjoy his delivery of verse; since it represents all the breadth of the difference, of the abyss, one may indeed say, between the French dramatic manner and any claim to a manner open to ourselves in the same connection, that verse has remained among M. Coquelin's countrymen, till within recent years, the supposedly most congruous language of comedy—a distinction from any familiarity with which our theater was long ago to fall away, save in so far as parts of the Shakspearean comedy saved it. That

armor-plated assurance, that perfection of confidence which is but the product of the most determined study, shines forth in the example before us, at any rate, in proportion as the problem is complicated. The problem does not indeed as a general thing become so in the old rimed parts psychologically speaking; but in these parts the question of elocution, of delivery, of *diction*, or even simply the question of breath, bristles both with opportunities and with dangers. It is true as a rule that wherever M. Coquelin has a very long and composite speech to utter, be it verse or prose, there one gets the cream of his talent, or at least of his virtuosity. There one perhaps even sees why it is sometimes critically declared of him that he is not an actor in anything like the same sense in which he is a *diseur*; the criticism with which the genius of his country so restlessly invites the artist ever to reckon dealing thus in a discrimination not familiar from any act of frequency among ourselves.

Our distinctions in that order are between smaller things, things too, I think, in every way less apprehended; so that we never have for instance such a matter to consider as

the wondrous length of some of the speeches in French plays, and of the detailed responsibility laid thereby on exponents. The longest continuous aggregation of lines that has had to face French footlights, not excepting the famous soliloquy of Figaro in the second comedy of Beaumarchais, and that of Charles the Fifth in 'Hernani', is, I should suppose, the discourse placed in the mouth of our above-mentioned M. Thouvenin in the last act of 'Denise.' It occupies nearly four close pages in the octavo edition of the play—oh those delightful octavo editions, with their projection into literature of the dignity of the theater, unless indeed one says their projection upon the theater of the dignity of literature!—and if it is not in strictness a soliloquy, being the product of an age posterior to that innocence and enjoying an audience on the stage as well as in the house, it is a delivered address, an uttered homily, a series of insistent remarks on many things. English or American spectators would have sunk into settled gloom by the time the long rhythm of the thing had declared itself, and even at the Théâtre Français the presumption was against the actor's ability to take

safely into port a vessel drawing such a prodigious depth of water. M. Coquelin gave the affair life, light, color, natural movement and that variety any absence of which would have wreckt it—gave it in short an interest that made it a triumph. We held our breath not altogether perhaps to hear what Thouvenin would say—it didn't quite come to that, but certainly to hear how Coquelin would bring Thouvenin thru. Such a success as this case represents the actor's art at its highest and serenest, because built up straight from the humanity and all the moral facts that underlie it.

“Saying” things is on our own stage quite out of fashion—if for no other reason than that we must first have them to say. To *do* them, with a great reinforcement of chairs and tables and articles of clothing, of traps and panoramas and other massive carpentry, is the most that ever occurs to our Anglo-Saxon start of either sex. The ear of the public, that field of the auditive intelligence which is two-thirds of the comedian's battlefield, has simply ceased to respond for want of use; for where in very fact is the unfortunate comedian to learn to

speak? Is it the unfortunate public, sitting on all this side in deepest darkness, that is to teach him? From what sources shall the light of usage, of taste, of tact, the breath of harmony and the tone of civilisation, the perception in a word of anything approaching to a standard, have descended upon the society itself out of which the actor springs? Gone at any rate are the days—if they ever really were with us—when any situation not grossly obvious, any interest *latent* in anything and thereby involving for its issue our finer attention and our nobler curiosity, could look for help from the play of tone, *the* great vehicle of communication. What this comes to is that histrionic lips have ceased—so far as they ever began!—to be able to tell a story worth telling or to gratify a taste worth gratifying. The brilliant stage-carpenter, that master of supreme illusion the scene-painter, that mistress of inordinate variety, or of the only variety we may look to, the dressmaker, have taken over the whole question.

One September night ten years ago, a frequent haunter of Paris, though returning to it but after a considerable absence, was

drawn to the Comédie by M. Lomond's 'Jean Dacier,' four acts in verse and of a highly tragic cast. When this spectator came out he was too excited to go home, to go to bed, to do anything but live the piece over and walk off his agitation. He made several times the circuit of the Place de la Concorde, he patrolled the streets till night was far gone and his emotion had somewhat subsided. It had been produced by Coquelin's representation of the hero of the piece, and no tribute to the actor's power could have been more hearty and unrestricted. Many years have passed since then; the play, for reasons social and political, I think, rather than artistic, has not been repeated, and the visitor of whom I relate this harmless anecdote has consequently had no chance of renewing his impression of it. He has often wondered whether his recollection is to be trusted, whether some shade of a mistake, of extraneous fortuitous felicity doesn't hang about it. That evening abides with him none the less as well-nigh the most memorable ever spent by him in a theater. Was there something in his inward condition that happened exceptionally to help the case,

or was the whole thing really as fine, and was Coquelin's acting in particular as splendid, as his subsequent estatic perambulation would have proved? Why on the one hand should Coquelin's acting not have been splendid, and why on the other, if it was as splendid as I have ever since ventured to suppose, has it not been more celebrated, more commemorated, more of a household word? I fail to have noted any general awareness of this eminent triumph, and in fact to remember anywhere catching so much as a reference to it. Inexcusably, I admit, I have retained no memory of the action on its fate of the overwhelming attention of M. Sarcey, who must have had at such a crisis in our artist's career innumerable remarks to make. Why, at any rate, social and political reasons to the contrary notwithstanding, has the play never again been brought forward, allowing its effect to have been even but half as great as I thus fondly suppose it? Whatever the answer to this question my own impression must warrant me—Jean Dacier is a part which, now that he is his own master and may claim his property where he finds it, M. Coquelin will consult

the interests of his highest reputation by taking up again at an early day.

As the beauty of this creation comes back to me I am almost ashamed to have described his strong point just now as the representation of impudence. There is not a touch of that excess in the portrait of the young republican captain who has sprung from the ranks and who finds himself, by one of the strange complications of circumstances that occur in great revolutions, married before he can turn round to the daughter of his former seigneur, the lord of the manor, now ruined and proscribed, under whom he grew up in his Breton village. The young man, naturally, of old, before being swept into the ranks, has adored in secret, and in secret only, the daughter of the noble house, divided as he is from her by the impassable gulf which in the novel and the drama, still more than in real life, separates the countess and the serf. The young woman has been reprieved from the scaffold on condition of her marrying a republican soldier—cases are on record in which this clemency was extended to royalist victims—and the husband whom chance reserves for

her is a person who was in the days of her grandeur and his own obscurity as dust beneath her feet. I speak of chance, but as I recover the situation it was not purely fortuitous, inasmuch as Jean has already recognised the object of his passion—he naturally escapes recognition himself—as she passes the windows of the guard-house at Nantes in the horrible cart of the condemned. A “republican marriage,” with the drumhead for the registrar’s table, has just been celebrated before the spectator’s eyes and those of the appalled young man; a stout Breton damsel (not in this case a royalist martyr) has cheerfully allowed herself to be conjoined by a rite not even civil, and of scarce more military grace than if performed by a court-martial, with one of her country’s defenders. This strikes the note of Jean’s being able to save his former mistress—the idea flashing upon him as he sees her—if she will accept a release at such a price. But how can she herself know whether or not she accepts it?—she is too dazed, too bewildered and overwhelmed. The revulsion is too great and the situation too shocking to leave her for the moment her reason; and

an extraordinarily striking passage, as well as one of the most consummately performed things I remember to have seen, was the entrance of Madame Favart as the heroine at this stage of the piece. She has at a moment's notice been pulled down from the tumbril, and with her hands just untied, her hair disordered, her senses confounded, and the bloody vision of the guillotine still in her eyes, she is precipitated into the roomful of soldiers with the announcement of the inconceivable terms of her pardon in her ears. The night I saw the play the manner in which Madame Favart, in this part, rendered in face and step all the amazement of the situation, drew forth a long burst of applause even while she still remained dumb.

The ceremony is concluded before this party to it regains her senses, and it is not till afterwards that she discovers the identity of her accomplice. I recall as a scene to which the actress's talent gave almost as much effect as Coquelin's own the third act of 'Jean Dacier,' the episode of the poor room that sees the young republican captain introduce her as his bride—where the waiting *éclaircissement* takes place of course be-

tween the couple so portentously brought together. As I thus refer to it a certain analogy with the celebrated cottage-scene in the 'Lady of Lyons' occurs to me; but I was not struck with this in watching the play. The step the young man has taken has, it appears, been only to save the life of his unwitting mistress; this service rendered, he wishes but to efface himself, worship her tho he does, without insisting on the rights of a husband. The situation is of course foredoomed to still richer romance and still sharper tragedy; by the time Marie, whose noble surname I forget, apprehends in her companion the moral beauty of this effort of sacrifice, by the time a new passion on her side begins to supplant her first impression of his plan to take a base advantage of her, by this time it is inevitably too late and we are close up against the catastrophe. I forget how the climax occurs; I roughly recover it as determined by Jean's taking or appearing to take part in a secret movement for putting the life of the girl's father, his old feudal superior, so to speak, in safety as against his own colleags, the republican chiefs. The attempt, the virtual treachery to *them*, comes

to light after it has succeeded, and the young man's life, either by his own hand or by military justice, is the terrible forfeit. What I am most distinct about is that while the curtain falls the once proud Marie, who has fathomed the depths of his heroism, flings herself upon his inanimate form. All this is of the finest high pitch—the interest of M. Lomond's play, you see, must have been intense; and my theory would be that M. Coquelin's rendering of his part was a marvel. Not formed by nature for depicting romantic love, he triumphed over every obstacle superficially presented to his zeal, and gave signal support to the interesting truth that if a player have in him the active imagination of his opportunity, which is the root of the matter, with a superiority in two or three of the arts of suggestion, his mere outward facts needn't at all interfere with the consistency of the figure he desires to impose.

Without the root of the matter, as in every other art, nothing else, however it may disconnectedly pretend, has any contributive virtue—whereas that inward force may occasionally cause the physical desert itself to

flower, or to seem to for the hour, which comes to the same thing. The impression of the ear, it can scarce be too often repeated, may always at the worst charm away the objections raised by the eye; tho I have never known the impression of the eye to charm away a protest strongly made by the ear. In proof of the former of which propositions, one may ask, who does not recall from experience some case of the happy process so exhibited? The immediate alarm, after the rise of the curtain or on the entrance of the apparently ill-starred figure, has been dispelled, genius taking its time to intervene; the omens have been boldly reinterpreted and the claim to interest and convince us made good. Vivid for me to this day my disconcertment, long years ago, by the prime aspect of that sincerest of artists and most attaching of heroines Aimée Desclée, who "came on" in 'Froufrou,' the part she was to launch on its prodigious career, only to surround herself at once with the cloud of doubts that she was within the next ten minutes so triumphantly to sweep away that no one of them lifted its head again during the whole of the piece. I cherish that

memory for its supremely exquisite support of the truth most precious in all this connection, the truth that expression and persuasion so depend on the actor's intelligence, on its being of the finest possible order for the particular application, and so take effect in proportion as it *is* of such an order, that other measurements and tests cease in comparison to be urgent. I see some of these indeed claiming an importance on behalf of the pantomimist, the *mime* pure and simple; but even then what are his motions, what is his play of face, but so many tones and syllables, so many signified mute words, all making sentences and with the sole difference of their being address to the mental instead of the physical ear. Language is not the less in question for its but *appearing* to be uttered; when the art is consummate we fail to distinguish between appearance and sound. All of which brings me round again without inconsequence to my point, on behalf of Coquelin's Jean Dacier, that youth, passion, patriotism, tenderness, renunciation, everything gallant and touching and that causes the sense to thrill and melt, are embodied for me, without attenuation by the

years, in the little republican officer with the meager material presence, the weather-worn uniform, the *retroussé* nose and that far-ranging, nerve-stirring voice which in certain of the patriotic couplets of the first act played through the place like a clarion. I note moreover that the part is tragic without a moment's look-in, as the phrase goes, of that apology for truth when truth becomes difficult which is known in the theater as the "relief" of an altered pitch. The strings of the lyre are individual, and when the tune and the harmony are all in the graver ones I hate to find the others irrelevantly twanged.

It comes over me further, to revert, that if that admirable old Alsatian country schoolmaster in the 'Ami Fritz,' of whom our intending visitor makes so inimitable a figure is not tragic, neither is he in any degree impudent. I recall this character as a finished image of quaint old-world geniality and morality, of patriarchal and peaceful *bonhomie*. Wondrously elaborated, yet never exaggerated, it reproduces the individual in his minutest peculiarities, and yet keeps him closely related to the medium, the

sheltered social scene, in which he moves— keeps him perfect in tone, perfect above all in taste. The taste in which MM. Erckmann-Chatrian's schoolmaster is embalmed I judge it would be impossible to M. Coquelin under any betrayal of opportunity whatever to depart from. It bears him company as a classic temperance—not less in the grotesque unctuousness of M. Loyal above-mentioned than in the extravagance of the grimacing, chanting, capering footman of the 'Précieuses.' Which comes back, as I have already hinted, to his letting go of the treasure of style as little in his lowest comedy as in his highest. His presentment of the Duc de Septmonts in the 'Étrangère', to which I have already alluded, is an instance of his highest and of the conditions in which he draws upon the treasure most considerately and quietly. I have left myself no space to devote to this consummate creation, which I had in mind in speaking just now of his Jean Dacier as surpassed for "importance" but by one other case in his repertory. (I can only answer of course for those I have seen, and there are several I have unluckily missed. Among these are three or

four characters of the last few years, such as the chief in the 'Député de Bombignac', and the chief in Octave Féuillet's 'Chamil-lac', figures, I believe, with nothing whatever in common save an intimate actability, of which he appears to have taken with equal ease an extraordinary advantage. Such light studies of the infinitely modern as the former of the things just named, and as the hero of 'Un Parisien', happily within my ken, are a new extension of his range, and help to represent in him that liveliest of the self-respecting actor's ideals, and the greatest honor of the craft, I think, the placing at the two ends of his scale the most different images conceivable.) It is not on our artist's lighter efforts, however, that I should waste words—his marvellous virtuosity just *finds* ease in material out of which his weaker brethren have to extract it by the sweat of their brow; and it is more to the purpose that if Jean Dacier is his highest flight in the line of rimed parts the Duc de Septmonts is his finest stroke in the field of a closer realism. Fine indeed the esthetic sense and the applied means that can invite, that can insidiously encourage, a conception so to mature and materialise, and

that can yet so keep it in the tone of life as we commonly know life, keep it above all "in the picture" in which it is concerned and in relation to the other forms of truth that surround it, forms it may not barbarously sacrifice. M. Coquelin's progress thru this long and elaborate part, all of fine shades and pointed particulars, all resting on the keenest observation as well as appealing to it, resembles the method of the "psychological" novelist who (when he is in as complete possession of his form as M. Coquelin of *his*) builds up a character, in his supposedly uncanny process, by touch added to touch, line to line, illustration to illustration, and with a vision of his personage breathing steadily before him. It wouldn't take much more than my remembrance of the Duc de Septmonts at the Français to make me pronounce his exponent really the Balzac of actors. The fact that his farewell to the great theater (taken in conjunction with some other recent commotions, some other rifts within the lute, now indeed a goodly number,) will have upon the classic scene itself belongs to a range of considerations which, tho seductive, are not open to us here. But it is impossible

not to follow with interest, in fact with a lively suspense, the future of the distinguished seceder; his endowment, his capacity, his fortune up to this time, with the remaining possibilities of such an ambition, have so the weight of assurance, the exploring, conquering air. He is an image of success as well as of resolution, and with so much of the booty of his general quest appropriated, we look to see where the rest of it may be stored. If he draws it forth, as well he may, in forms as yet unsuspected and undiscovered, his career must still have a scope, and our attention a thrill, at least proportionate to what the past has done for us. The defect of his activity, if I may "drag in" again that note—no very assured one at the best—is a certain technical hardness, an almost inhuman perfection of surface; but the compensation of this on the other hand is that it suggests durability and resistance, resistance I mean to the great corrupting contact with the public. May that virtue in him not break down under such a test as our American conditions have in their dread power to apply!

HENRY JAMES.

(1886-1915.)

Art and the Actor.

Art and the Actor

FOR some time past, much attention has been devoted to the members of our profession; the actor and the theater have been discust again and again; an attempt has been made to prove that we are a race of beings set apart from the rest of the world, whether viewed from a social or an artistic point; some have even gone so far as to call us mere parrots. I shall now try to prove that the actor is an artist, and has the same title to a place in the state as any other citizen.

In the first place, what is *art*, and what do we understand by it, if not the interpretation of nature and of truth, more or less tinged by a peculiar light, which does not alter the proportions, but yet marks the salient features, heightens their colors, displays their fidelity to nature, so that our minds are more deeply and forcibly affected by them?

Is it not the actor's duty to cast this light?

The poet has for his material, words; the sculptor, marble or bronze; the painter,

colors and canvas; the musician, sounds; but the actor is his own material. To exhibit a thought, an image, a human portrait, he works upon himself. He is his own piano, he strikes his own strings, he molds himself like wet clay, he paints himself!

But you may say this is not work for an artist, because the idea that he embodies is not his own, and the characteristic feature of art is creation. Creation, indeed! Common-sense answers this objection at once, since the very word *creation* is the one which we use to express the first performance of a part; and the term is strictly correct. If you do not believe me, believe Victor Hugo, who says of Mlle. George, in 'Marie Tudor,' "In the poet's own creation, she creates something which surprises and enchants the author himself."

I also find in the Memoirs of Marmontel:

[Mlle. Clairon] was yet more sublime in the character of Electra. This part, which Voltaire himself required to be declaimed like one long lamentation, acquired a beauty hitherto unknown even to him; for when he saw her play it in his theater at Ferney, he exclaimed, "This is not my work, but hers; she has created her part!"

Here we have the opinion of both Marmontel and Voltaire. Is not the poet's surprise significant? If he felt it, how much more must others experience it! Nor have they failed to do so; in proof, read their prefaces, postscripts, and dedications.

Victor Hugo also wrote, on the day after the first performance of the 'Burgraves,' this opinion of Geffroy:

M. Geffroy, who, as painter and actor, is twice an artist, and a great artist, gave to the personality of Otbert the predestinating physiognomy which such poets as Shakespere know how to conceive, and such actors as Geffroy to embody.

A curious extract from the elder Dumas, in regard to 'Henri III,' follows:

Michelot has been reproached by many for his conception of the part. I am the one to be blamed. I, in some measure, forced M. Michelot to play the part in accordance with documents which critics consider incorrect. Since then, he has taken another view of the part,—that which he first chose,—and has been much applauded: the case has been tried. . . . I was wrong.

Speaking of Firmin:

He finds in his part, not only delicate distinctions unperceived by the author, but those expressions of the soul which seize and shake the soul.

The dedication of 'Angèle' is:

To the actors who played in 'Angèle': My friends, we have had a family triumph; let us accept and share it.

I also find in Halévy's memoirs:

In 1835, Nourrit played the part of the Jew, Eleazar. In the account given me by M. Scribe of the plot of 'Jewess,' and of the way in which he intended to treat the subject, the part of Leopold, the Christian, lover of the Jewess Rachel, was meant for Nourrit; the father was to fall to the share of Levasseur, and the cardinal to Dabadie. But when I examined the score, I was struck by the new meaning, which a tenor voice would impart to the music, Nourrit's voice to the part of the father. This also gave me the voice and talent of Levasseur, as the Cardinal, who is a father also.

M. Scribe agreed with me, and with one accord we gave the poem to Nourrit to read, leaving him free to choose his own part. A few days later, he said, "My choice is made; I feel the instincts of a father." Nourrit, in thus falling into our plan, was moved by a sincere love of his art. The tenor usually clings to his prerogatives as a *lover*; he dreads lest he should lose the fascination of youth forever, should he make himself up as an old man,—fears to leave with his audience, especially the feminine portion of it, a lasting memory of an ugly mask, and the premature marks of that fatal age which the actor's art is so skilful in concealing: but Nourrit was young enough, and felt himself strong enough to confront this danger, and he generously sacrificed

himself for the common interest. He also gave us excellent advice. There was a *finale* in the fourth act, for which he begged us to substitute an aria. I wrote the appropriate music, and Nourrit asked M. Scribe's permission to write the words himself. He desired to choose the most sonorous syllables, as well as those most favorable to his voice. M. Scribe, generous because he was rich, readily consented to the singer's request, and Nourrit shortly after brought us the words of the air, 'Rachel, quand du seigneur la grâce tutélaire.'

You see that Nourrit also was both commentator and creator.

And of Frédéric Lemaître, Lamartine wrote in his preface to 'Toussaint l'Overture,' "That a great actor had veiled the imperfections of the work beneath the splendors of his genius."

I do not deny that these dedications may contain a spice of exaggeration, caused by the friendly feeling resulting from long labors in common, and by a certain benevolent impulse arising from a joyful success—we are most amiable when we are happiest; but I feel sure that the portion of truth is large enough to make them an important testimony from those best calculated to give it.

Yes, the actor creates, even when interpreting the dreams of a genius like Racine,

Corneille, or Hugo; even, stranger yet, when the character is one conceived and executed by one of those rare masters who were themselves actors, like Shakspeare and Molière.

This is because there is always a considerable distance between the type dreamed of and the type actually living and breathing; because it is not enough to create a soul—a body must be provided for it as well; and not only must this body be its complete and living expression, but it must have its peculiar manner of coming and going, of laughing, crying, walking, breathing, talking, and moving; and all these modes of being, doing, and suffering must fit together—form a real individuality, such a person as we meet every day, recognize, love, and greet affectionately: and this habit which the character needs is furnished by the actor, and the actor alone.

This outer shell which the actor provides for a character, even for one of Shakspeare's conception, ends by becoming so thoroly its own that there are certain bits of stage action, certain make-ups, invented by Garrick or by Kean, which are now appropriated by every Hamlet and Othello; there are certain traditions at the Théâtre Français, unmen-

tioned by Molière, without which Molière is never played, and which the spectator, becoming a reader, mentally supplies as he sits by his fireside, as one supplies omissions in an incomplete copy.

Further yet, there are certain masterpieces—somewhat antiquated, it is true—which are greatly admired when read, but which all agree in pronouncing impossible of representation—let us be bold; which all would call stupid if performed, and which would be so if intrusted to ordinary actors. But let a man of talent come forward; let him take possession of the work buried beneath the dust of indifference—or respect, which sometimes produces the same results as indifference; let this man step in, lavish his powers and his genius upon it, and behold the mummy bursts its cerements, is once more fresh and blooming, and the mob rushes to gaze and goes wild with enthusiasm, and the forgotten masterpiece draws crowded houses! In this case, art is not content with creating, it brings the dead to life!

Let us add that there are but few masterpieces so perfect that the actor cannot find something to add to them, if so willed.

Much more frequent are the parts wherein an author of second, third, or any rank leaves his interpreter everything or almost everything to do. What remains to us of all the classicist dramas of the Empire or the Restoration—'Leonidas,' 'Marius,' 'Charles VI,' etc.? Nothing but the memory of Talma. Only try to read them thru. You come to the passages where you know that Talma was sublime, and you puzzle your brains with the question, "But how the mischief did he do it?" The answer is simple: he turned creator. You read the scene—you find naught save the words of Arnault or Pichat, and it is meaningless; he put the spirit of Talma into it—it was vivid, it was great, it was sublime! And you tell me that this is not art? Pray tell me what it is, then.

I hold that acting is an art; analogous to that of the portrait-painter, for instance. The type which the actor must reproduce (and this is a difficulty unknown to the painter) is not always set before him; he must begin, as we may say, by conjuring it out of empty air like the magician. The author, if he have talent and genius, holds

up a perfect image before the mirror of his mind; in other cases—most frequently, as I said before—the actor has but a sketch, a rough model to work from; yet again, he is forced to borrow from the common fund,—that is, human nature,—and to paint in imagination, by dint of observation and reflection, the figure to be realized later on.

Very great actors sometimes have the splendid good luck to create out of whole cloth, almost in spite of their authors; to invent types which will live side by side with the offspring of Molière's brain. Every one must know that I refer especially to Frédéric Lemaître and his immortal creation, Robert Macaire.

I will let Frédéric speak for himself, quoting his account of the first performance of the 'Auberge des Adrets':—

The story of this gloomy melodrama, transformed into a burlesque, after being written in all due earnest, has been so falsified that it may not prove uninteresting to give the true origin of this odd fancy, which proved to be but the prolog to a comedy destined ten years later to wound to the quick the susceptibility of more than one office-holding Robert Macaire, or order-wearing Bertrand.

When the reading, which took place at the theater, ended, I went away deeply discouraged at the

thought that this part of Macaire was to be my first creation.

How could I make the public accept this mysterious and melancholy plot, which was wrought out in a style in no wise academic? Without appearing ridiculous, how could I portray a character so grossly cynical? a highway assassin, frightful as the ogre of any fairy tale, and carrying his impudence to the extent of curling his whiskers with a dagger, while eating a bit of Gruyère cheese!

I really did not know which way to turn; when one evening, as I sat poring over the pages of my manuscript, I began to see how excessively farcical all the situations and speeches of Robert Macaire and Bertrand might appear, if taken jocosely and acted accordingly.

I at once shared with Firmin—a clever fellow, who, like me, felt ill at ease with a serious Bertrand—the wild, crazy idea which had crossed my brain. He thought it superb! But we had to beware of suggesting this change of base to the authors, who were convinced that they had produced another 'Cid.'

Firmin and I firmly resolved to execute our plan, let it cost what it might; we arranged all our stage-effects together, without breathing a word of our secret to any one; and on the night of the first performance we made an entrance at which we had not even hinted at the rehearsals.

When the audience saw the two bandits take their positions near the footlights, in the attitude so often copied since, muffled in costumes which have become traditional,—Bertrand in his huge gray coat, with its inordinately long pockets, both hands crossed over the handle of his umbrella, erect, motionless,

face to face with Macaire, who measured him with a swaggering stare, his crownless hat on one side of his head, his green coat flung back, his red trousers covered with patches and darns, his black bandage over one eye, his lace cravat and dancing shoes,—the effect was overwhelming.

Nothing escaped the eager shrewdness of a public excited to the utmost by so new and unforeseen a spectacle. The kicks lavished upon Bertrand, Macaire's squeaky snuff-box,—every allusion was seized with the more hilarity, from the fact that the rest of the piece was played by the other actors with all the gravity and earnestness which their parts required.

Audinot and Sénépart, our managers, attained a success which they were far from expecting; for they frankly confest, some time after, that they had had but little confidence in the piece.

The authors, Benjamin Antier and St. Amand, who were later to become my collaborators in 'Robert Macaire,' resigned themselves to their fate like sensible men, and were easily consoled for their failure to melt their audience to tears as they had dreamed, without shedding any on their own account, when they saw the nightly receipts mount up to a figure hitherto unknown in the annals of the theater.

But their third *accomplice*, a certain Dr. Poly-anthe,—a dramatic author thru the force of circumstances, who, if he had not most fortunately stopped short, might have managed to murder as many melodramas as he did patients,—vowed eternal vengeance against me. He went about everywhere, declaring that I had slaughtered his play! He, at least, had paternal instincts.

And again, how much help did Frédéric Lemaître have from the authors of 'Paille-asse' or of the 'Old Corporal' (in which he played the part of a deaf-mute), or of countless other parts? We must remember that the same man who invented Robert Macaire was also the marvellous interpreter of Ruy Blas; we can then comprehend the full force of the expression used by Victor Hugo in giving an account of the evening of Nov. 9, 1838, on which he says Frédéric made the part, not a performance, but a *transfiguration*. This is the right word; this is the supreme effort of the actor's art.

And may we not apply this fitting title, transfiguration, to Regnier, when he played in 'La Joie fait peur,' 'Gabrielle,' the 'Aventurière,' or 'Romulus'; to Samson, as the peer of France in the 'Camaraderie,' the Marquis de la Seiglière, Bertrand de Rantzau, or Sganarelle (in 'Don Juan'); to Delaunay, when he plays Fortunio, Perdican, or the enchanting Horace of the 'School for Wives'; to Got, whether he be Duke Job, Giboyer, or his incredible priest in 'Il faut jurer de rien'; to Dumaine, in 'Patrie!'; to St. Germain, in 'Baby'?

The memories which I have evoked recall another of the arguments often used against us. The actor does not create, it is said, because he leaves nothing of himself behind after death. This is indeed the great misfortune of our art. Talma deplored it on his dying bed. And yet it is not an absolute truth, since Frédéric, as we have just seen, left behind him a type which is still vigorous and strong. But even were it rigorously true, why should we hesitate to exercise an art because the creations of that art are perishable? Is the actor the only sufferer from a similar cause? What is left to us of Apelles, and all the great painters of antiquity? A memory, as of the actor Callipides, the contemporary of Phidias. How long do the creations of art usually endure? Alas! that is a question of more or less. How many sublime works of poets, painters, and sculptors have vanished forever! Creation is one thing; durability another. Marble is more lasting than canvas, verses more enduring than marble, but time devours them all. Suppose that, as the result of a natural and fatal law, at the moment that Michael Angelo died, by the same stroke of an invisible

hammer, death had reduced to powder all his works, from the Moses to the Last Judgment: because the work and the workman perished at the same instant, should you say, "Michael Angelo was no artist; he did not create"?

The actor is in a similar predicament. His statues perish with him. Nothing remains of them, as of those of Praxiteles, but memories,—sometimes too flattering, but more often not sufficiently so. I repeat it, this is the misfortune of our art: it cheats us of that supreme consolation of unappreciated genius, the appeal to posterity. However, misfortune tho it be, it is no degradation. We are to be pitied for it, that is all. Love us the more for it, dear charitable public, since you are at once our present and our future, and our immortality dies with the echo of your applause!

I have used the word *memories*. It is thru this, in fact, that we survive, as well as by the occasional shock which some one of us, more powerful than the rest,—a sort of artistic leader,—imparts to a whole era. A great actor calls forth plays. Witness Burbage in the time of Shakspeare; witness

Frédéric or Bocage. Others may create a school, revolutionize the traditional costume, delivery, and the general rendition of the masterpieces of the age, and thus apparently renovate and renew them.

“The actor is an artist, then? And now tell us his aim.”

Well,—we might say, in a very general way, that it is the same as that of all women,—to please.

Only, with an actor ambitious for himself and his art, it is to please by satisfying the nobler or more delicate instincts of the public; by charming with a display of the beautiful; by transporting with the spectacle of grandeur; by rousing healthy laughter or reflection thru the representation of the truth.

If we come to the question whether actors are really useful,—that is, whether the pleasure which they provide, and which I have just defined, is profitable to mankind,—this is plainly a question of the utility of the theater itself; and I would refer my reader to what has been written on the subject by masters interested therein, like Corneille, Molière, Shakspeare, and in antiquity, Aristotle, —in his chapter on this question.

To me, I must own that it seems puerile to question the utility of an institution which responds to so manifest a want on the part of humanity.

In the age of stone, rough or polisht, this want generated savage pantomimes, mock-challenges, and combats. After the deluge,—let the reader observe that I pass directly on to this point,—we find it once more among religious orders, inspiring those mystery-plays which were veritable dramas, such as the 'Death and Resurrection of Adonis.' Every primitive race has had similar performances. Wherever society exists, there we find the theater; and it is always at the moment that the nation leaves barbarism triumphantly behind, that the theater assumes its complete and final form, and wings its flight proudly upward. It is pre-eminently a peaceful and super-civilized art; and it is among races especially amiable and social, like the Greeks and the French, that it attains its highest degree of splendor, and from among whom it sends its most brilliant rays to gild the ancient or modern world.

What does the theater actually do? It sets man face to face with himself. It paints

his destinies for his own inspection. For, the theater being a thing of many sides, its utility is of diverse kinds, and extends from mere amusement and simple physical relaxation to the highest lessons of morality. A pleasant comedy by Labiche, which makes us as cheery as its author for the time being, is profitable in quite another way from 'Cinna' or the 'Horaces.' And as I have mentioned the works of Corneille, let me say that it seems to me difficult to deny that they contain as much that may be usefully applied, as the finest treatise on duty, and that these plays must ever be a national reserve of patriotism and dignity in moments of trouble or of danger. But, finally, if the utility of the theater is not always so great,—if it does not correct our vices, as it claims to do, by showing us our common weaknesses and infirmities, by making us laugh or cry over them,—it at least teaches us to bear with one another, to forgive one another; in a word, it makes us more sociable, it makes us more human.

The theatrical world is divided into two opposing camps in regard to the question whether the actor should partake of the pas-

sions of his part,—weep himself in order to draw tears,—or whether he should remain master of himself thruout the most impassioned and violent action on the part of the character which he represents; in a word, remain unmoved himself, the more surely to move others, which forms the famous paradox of Diderot.

Well, I hold this paradox to be literal truth; and I am convinced that one can only be a great actor on condition of complete self-mastery and ability to express feelings which are not experienced, which may never be experienced, which from the very nature of things never can be experienced.

And this is the reason that our trade is an art, and this is the cause of our ability to create!

The same faculty which permits the dramatic poet to bring forth from his brain a Tartuffe, or a Macbeth armed and equipt, altho he, the poet, be a thoroly upright and honest man, permits the actor to assimilate this character, to dissect and analyze it at will, without ceasing to be for an instant distinctly himself, as separate a thing as the painter and his canvas.

The actor is within his creation, that is all. It is from within that he moves the springs which make his character express the whole gamut of human consciousness; and all these springs, which are his nerves, he must hold in his hand, and play upon as best he can. I do not say that this can be done without difficulty and fatigue; it may be carried to utter exhaustion; that is a mere matter of temperament. But each must regulate his own expenditure of force.

The actor makes up his personage. He borrows from his author, he borrows from stage tradition, he borrows from nature, he draws on his own stock of knowledge of men and things, on his own experience and imagination; in short, he sets himself a task. His task once set, he has his part; he sees it, grasps it,—it does not belong to him, but he inhabits its body, is fairly it!

This is why the true actor is always ready for action. He can take up his part, no matter when, and instantly excite the desired effect. He commands us to laugh, to weep, to shiver with fear. He needs not to wait until he experiences these emotions himself, or for grace from above to enlighten him.

Talma was playing Hamlet one night. While waiting for his cue he was talking in the wings with a friend; the call-boy, seeing him smiling and apparently thinking of anything but his lines, came up: "M. Talma, your entrance comes directly!"—"All right, all right, I am waiting for my cue." His scene, the scene with the Ghost, began off the stage, the spectators hearing Talma before they saw him. He went on with his conversation very gayly; the cue came, he pressed his friend's hand, and—a smile still on his lips, that kindly hand in his—he exclaimed:—

Angels and ministers of grace, defend us!

and his terrified friend started back, and a shudder ran thru the audience.

Did this prevent him from being natural? By no means. But the artist's brain must remain free, and all emotions, even his own, must expire on the threshold of his thought. These are two very different regions. Is the actor the only person in whom these phenomena occur? Allow me to quote a fact, although it may seem foreign to my subject.

A friend of M. Victor Massé assured me

very recently of the truth of a story which I had frequently heard: it was at the bedside of his mother, whom he adored, of his mother suffering from the disease destined to be fatal, all hope of recovery being lost,—it was then and there that the master, inspired, despite the most poignant grief, composed—what music do you think? The lively, gay, and tripping airs of the 'Noces de Jeanette!'

And examples abound of this mutual independence of head and heart in the artist. One more shall suffice me. Talma is again my hero. It is said that when he learned of the death of his father, he uttered a piercing cry; so piercing, so heartfelt, that the artist always on the alert in the man, instantly took note of it, and decided to make use of it upon the stage, later on. This characteristic trait shows us the artist looking down upon his own emotions and studying them, as it were from a superior plane, yielding to them that he might store them up for future use and reference. And just as their sorrows often serve great poets as the inspiration of their best verses, so ours may serve us in the creation of great parts.

We find the same trait in this man when on his death-bed: regretting not life but art, which was the interest and the honor of his life, he studied with an artist's eye his poor, emaciated body, and said to a friend, plucking at his withered neck, "That would have been fine in Tiberius!" The fact of the matter is, that had he been able, he would have dragged his perishing frame to the theater to incarnate the tyrant. There he would have used just that amount of sickness and suffering required by his part, and would have commanded the remainder to cease to exist. In the same way,—to go back,—in repeating his cry of orphaned woe upon the boards, he would have ruled his own emotion: what do I say? he would have experienced none! In both cases he would have been the actor, and nothing but the actor, master and monarch of all of humanity within him; a sufficiently great actor to imitate, without the aid of disease, the sharpened features and withered neck of Tiberius, as well as to discover for himself, by the sole light of his genius, without the loss of a father, the cry which nature wrested perforce from his lips.

Therefore the actor needs not to be actu-

ally moved. It is as unnecessary as it is for a pianist to be in the depths of despair to play the Funeral March of Chopin or of Beethoven aright. He knows it; he opens his instrument, and your soul is harrowed. I would lay a heavy wager, on the contrary, that if he should give way to any personal emotion, he would play but ill; and by analogy, that an actor who regarded his own emotions otherwise than as material to be utilized, or made the passions of his part absolutely his own, would be likely to fare badly; emotion sobs and stammers, alters and breaks the voice. He would cease to make himself audible. The natural effect of passion is to destroy all self-government; we lose our heads, and how can we be expected to do well rather than ill, when we cease to know what we are doing?

A certain degree of excitement may not be injurious, but I should never place great value on the wit or the affection of a man who only displayed those qualities after partaking of champagne or of truffles.

I do not intend to deny the existence of what are called strokes of genius, but I think that genius is displayed far better by an en-

tire and enduring mastery of self than by intermittent flashes,—sublime, if you will, but incoherent and incomprehensible; a trump only turned up by mere chance. And then, nothing is more likely to produce inspiration than good hard preparatory work, the fertilizing of the brain by meditation, and constant rehearsing of the character.

The opinion which I maintain has been upheld by all truly great actors: Talma, Rachel, Samson, Regnier, and even Mme. Dorval. The opposite opinion is a prejudice of the crowd. It is in virtue of this prejudice, that this same crowd which will not suffer—with great show of reason, indeed—that the actor should reveal so much as a glimpse of his own feelings, his household cares, thru his assumed character, and which permits, nay, commands us to play side-splitting farces when we feel more like crying our eyes out,—it is in virtue, I say, of this simple prejudice, that this same crowd waits at the theater door for the villain of the piece, to greet him with a warm reception. When M. Provost played the character of Sir Hudson Lowe, at the Porte Saint Martin, he was

obliged to have a strong body-guard to escort him from the theater every night.

This brings us to the hotly contested question of stage-convention, as opposed to realism,—to naturalism, as it is now called.

To my mind, nothing is great, nothing is beautiful, which is unnatural; but here again I feel obliged to repeat, acting is an art, and consequently nature can be reproduced by it only with that species of luster and relief without which there can be no art.

I may say further, that nature pure and simple would produce but a slight effect upon the stage.

And this is very easily understood. Multiply your scenic devices, produce marvellous effects, ruin yourself in absurdly accurate details, in costumes fitted to drive a Benedictine or a collector mad with delight, and you cannot make the scene upon which the stage action occurs, a real one.

You are at the theater, and not in the street or at home. If you suppose the scene to occur in the street, or in a private house, the effect is somewhat similar to that produced by setting a life-sized figure up on a high column; it no longer appears life-size.

You have a special and peculiar medium; you must use it in an appropriate manner.

Let us take an example,—the voice. Should I speak on the stage as I do in a parlor, in the same friendly tone with which I inquire for your health, I should not be understood, nor even heard. Your room, which I can cross in a few strides, is quite a different thing from the vast space where from fifteen to eighteen hundred people are hanging on my words, each having an equal right to hear me. To produce an effect equal in value to that produced within the four walls of your room if I were talking alone with you I must raise my voice, accent my words more strongly; and to be clearly understood, I must introduce tones and expressions which in private I should not require to use, because in private you would be thoroly conversant with my character.

This is a necessary convention. It entails similar concessions in regard to gesture; and these, taken as a whole, are the result of optical laws. Given this background, the stage,—isolated, elevated, brightly lighted,—and that collection of conventional properties, the footlights, wings, scenery, the actors

themselves,—for an actor is himself a convention,—we must absolutely modify the conditions of real life to suit this background, if we would produce the illusion of real life upon the spectators.

I can scarcely enter into the details of these important conventions; their study would be too special, too technical; but I must note one essential point, and this is, that as a life-like effect is to be produced on these fifteen or eighteen hundred people assembled together, whom we call the public, we must take into account their intellectual status and their degree of culture. The Parisian public is not to be deceived by the same illusions which would suit an audience of savages. A crowd of children is content with the very rude apparatus required by a Punch and Judy show, nor was much more skill required to amuse an audience in the time of Shakspeare; we are far more difficult to please nowadays. In a word, the law of enhancement, of setting things in relief, is eternal, because it is an artistic law; but stage-effects change with the progress of time and civilization.

The ruder manners of our ancestors pos-

sibly made fierce rollings of the eyes and of the *r's* a theatrical necessity. The gentler manners of the present day render this kind of exaggeration superfluous. The pitch has been lowered.

I am not in favor of the sing-song style, and I detest bombast; but if, for example, a general intellectual disturbance should occur to-morrow, as it did in 1830; if the nation, being overwrought, became passionate, violent, and unreasonable,—I think it probable that a similar revolution would follow in the theatrical world, and we should be obliged to raise the pitch to keep ourselves in tune.

In treating this question thus passingly, I assume, as is evident, the peculiar point of view of the actor. If I were to examine the matter more closely, I should refer to the very beautiful preface which the younger Dumas has just added to his play of the 'Étrangère.' I have the satisfaction of holding the same opinion as that master, son of another master mind, from whom he has inherited so much,—I mean in a theatrical way. M. Alexandre Dumas, it seems to me, gives us an admirable definition of our art, and a clear explanation of the reasons which

render an absolute fidelity to truth and nature impossible upon the stage.

To sum up my assertions: we must not destroy all truth in the theater by too frequent use of conventions; but neither must we destroy the theatrical illusion by too great fidelity to fact. And by theatrical illusion I mean the pleasure in search of which people go to the theater,—that theatrical pleasure, partly composed indeed of the illusion that they are seeing a reality, but mingled with a feeling of personal safety and a sincere conviction that they are assisting only at an illusion.

This sense of security must never be destroyed. If by dint of realism or artifice you succeed in making your spectator forget absolutely that he is witnessing a mere spectacle, he ceases to be amused; he becomes an actor instead of a spectator, and what is worse, a well-gulled actor, for he is the only sincere one.

Theatrical joys are analogous to the pleasure of the wise Lucretius, who loved to watch a storm at sea from the shore. If this philosopher had been forced to embark, his pleasure would have speedily vanished.

Therefore, try to produce an apparent truth; but let it be true only in seeming. There is a whole class of sentiments and sensations which it is never well to excite at the theater, for the irrefutable reason that they would prevent people from frequenting it. What are they? That is for you, actors or authors as the case may be, to discover; for it is generally a matter of delicate shades and distinctions. But I will name an example of an opposite kind: Paulin Menier, in the 'Lyons Mail.'

Here we have a creation worthy of a master hand. With what supreme art this knavish figure was drawn! The gestures! the facial expression! and the inimitably vulgar accent! Do you remember?

Wasn't that nature itself? It was real, but it was not repulsive; it was alarming, but not frightful. This was art, and excellent art, too. There was the stroke of genius, the little touch which makes a picture by Teniers or Jan Steen a masterpiece. The spectator, amused or terrified, was never disgusted; he never felt impelled to rise and leave the hall. Mark that, I beg; we must never make our audience feel anxious to

leave. What I say may be commonplace; but I, for my part, fail to see how a theater can be maintained without an audience.

But, cry the purists, is that the only object of the theater—amusement? Then make it an exhibition of women!

I do not say so. Not that I am opposed to exhibiting women, if art is to find a profit in it; that is to say, if, by exhibiting them, we excite a purely theatrical pleasure in the spectator's breast, and not a pleasure of a lower, I might say, more shameful kind. But I do not forget the maxim, *Castigat ridendo mores*; only I would not omit one jot or tittle of it.

Yes, the theater corrects our morals, but by ridicule and laughter. Suppress that tiny gerund *ridendo*, and you suppress the theater; you change it to a penitentiary. Now a stage-box, even a closed box, is not a confessional: if the theater were such, are you very sure that we should find eighteen hundred people ready to go there every night? Rigid moralists assure us that men, and women too, sometimes seek the pleasures of the play-house at church; but I never heard

them say that men, or women either, ever sought for ecclesiastic instruction at the play-house.

And let it be thoroly understood that I use the word *ridendo* in its broadest sense. It means not only laughter, but in a more general sense, pleasure,—that which I call theatrical pleasure: a kind of gratification, I repeat, compounded of truth and deception, blended in unequal proportions, according to the nature of the play; a pleasure, in fine, which is but one variety, a very special and lively variety, of that delight always produced by art of whatever kind.

I have tried to establish the fact that the actor pursues an art; that this art has its difficulties, its utility, and its grandeur. Let me close by an attempt to establish the actor's proper position in modern society.

Among the Greeks, the true forefathers of the stage, the actor was held in very great esteem. We recall Callipides, who commanded the fleets of Athens, without therefore being obliged to renounce the buskin and the lyre.

This was partly because theatrical representations then partook of a religious and

patriotic character. They were the results of Bacchic worship, and the priest of the god always presided over them.

At those splendid competitions, where Æschylus and Sophocles vied with each other, all Greece eagerly hastened to gather and applaud in the vast amphiheater, and it was like the national anniversaries of the present day,—at least, like those held in France on the first of May and the thirtieth of June.

The Chorus in these ancient tragedies was composed to a certain degree of the people themselves; and thru the mouth of their leader, in the parabases of Aristophanes, they deliberated upon affairs of state, in language worthy of Athens,—that Athens which was formerly what our Paris now is, the admiration of philosophers and the distraction of all men.

In the Middle Ages, the drama still retained somewhat of these characteristics, without the same poetic worth.

In the church, too, the drama was born with mystery-plays and miracle-plays; and our Brotherhood the Passion is the direct ancestor of the Théâtre Français.

In the immense length of the dramatic performances, which sometimes lasted for weeks at a time, in the public stages erected in the market-place, in the vast crowds of people which thronged thither, we discover a rude resemblance to the dramatic festivals of Athens; as we also find the coarse witticisms of Aristophanes, with cruder, I was about to say more realistic tints, in the loose language of these old compositions, licentious in form and often audacious in thought as they are.

In those days, church and theater fraternized. How does it happen, then, that the church, so maternally inclined toward mystery-plays and miracle-plays, has pickt so bitter a quarrel with us since?

I greatly fear that the quarrel dates back only to the time of the old farce; to the days of that dear Jack Pudding, with whom I must have been hail-fellow-well-met in some previous state of existence.

Yes, I fear me that the quarrel began then with the daring dramatic satires of that excellent but unfortunate fellow who, as we all know, ventured to put upon the stage our Mother-Church herself in the guise of a

foolish parent, and his Holiness the Pope under the transparent title of the Obstinate Man.

The trouble began then; but it was not until later on, in Molière's time, that all reconciliation became impossible; and in the antipathy lavished upon us, it is not difficult to distinguish a rankling resentment against 'Tartuffe.' We share in the proscription of Molière. Nor would I complain of that.

There, methinks, in the rancor aroused by that immortal work, lurks the explanation of the long road traversed from the days of the actor Genest, whom the church canonized, to the actor Molière, whom she refused to bury in consecrated ground.

Still we must acknowledge that Mother-Church has become somewhat appeased since then. She sometimes allows us to enter her precincts; she consents to bury us,—perhaps with pleasure. But there still exist traces of the excommunication pronounced against us in days of yore; that stigma of inferiority which has so long weighed down the actor still remains an article of faith to many people, even among the most enlightened classes. In a word, the prejudice

exists, it prevails, softened only and subdued by the progress of civilization in France since the Revolution.

And in fact, it is natural enough that a form of thought so vivid and of such wide circulation as that employed by the theater should be regarded with anxiety and suspicion by all those old constitutional bodies, easily alarmed by an increasing degree of intellectual life and animation. Even now, nearly one hundred years after its first performance, I doubt if the magistracy would leave a representation of the 'Marriage of Figaro' in any very indulgent mood.

But how happens it that this prejudice has still such weight with even a liberal public? for many receive us in their homes—nay, invite us thither—who are yet vaguely disturbed and distressed by any suggestion of perfect equality. We are petted, we are admired,—I speak of actresses now; but if we pass certain limits, if we let fall the slightest claim to certain rights, lo and behold! the prejudice rears its snaky head, and darts forth as fierce and forked a tongue as in the good old times.

I have no desire to refer to the rights

which the public considers that it holds over us. I shall not inveigh against the hiss, which is assuredly the most odious of all noises, but which is a means of showing its displeasure to which the audience certainly has a right,—a right placed under the sacrosaintly guard of one of Boileau's verses.

Nor against the throwing of onions and eggs, that waste of good victuals being now of rare occurrence, even in rural districts.

Nor against the apologies which an audience, sometimes more despotic than the laws of Christian charity or even simple justice would allow, occasionally exacts from some ill-fated actor, or what is still worse, from some nervous, suffering actress who may perhaps have lost her lines or her patience.

Nor against cabals. And here I pause; but what does all this prove, if not the species of subjection under which the public, often unwittingly, still desires to hold the actor, the more or less favored slave of its good pleasure? a subjection more apparent in the provinces, where the old customs are kept up, prejudices included; where, furthermore, the actors, being but birds of passage, can scarcely have those regular relations with

the public which a little talent on the one hand, and good-will on the other, so readily transform into friendly intercourse.

And finally, let us suppose Molière to be born again among us. Undoubtedly, in consideration of the masterpieces which he would give you, you would forgive him for appearing on the stage. Assuredly the president of the Republic, no prouder in this particular than Louis XIV., would be charmed to add a leaf to his dinner-table for him, were it merely as an elector, and would hand him a chicken's wing with the same engaging gesture as the sun of royalty did formerly; but would there not be many among the most fervent admirers of his genius, among those who most warmly applauded the actor and author in the character of *Alceste*, who would deem it a great mistake ever to allow the man with the green ribbons to become the man with the red ribbon?

It may be said that in our days Molière would never play in comedy. How can we tell? Who can say, and why might not the same fate which made him a comic actor before it made him an author, play him the same romantic trick to-day? For we know

the strength of his passion for our art, and his noble reply to Boileau, who urged him from respect for his own play, the 'Misanthrope,' to throw off the sack of Scapin and abandon the stage: "What are you thinking of? I am honored by remaining." Honored! think of that! Molière honored! This phrase is worth pondering. Men like Molière are not to be numbered by legions!

It is a strange thing,—painful, indeed, to my vanity as a Frenchman, a vanity which does not exceed decent bounds with me, altho an actor's vanity is usually represented as overweening,—it is a painful thing, I say, to know that this prejudice, strong as it is in France, is already abolisht in other countries.

There is no trace of it in England, where—not to mention Shakspeare, because comparisons are odious—Garrick's name is graven in Westminster Abbey side by side with those of the most illustrious men. It does not exist in Germany, nor in Italy, nor in Russia, nor in Belgium, where actors receive the honorable distinctions denied them in France; nor in Sweden, where Mme. Ristori experienced as royal honors as if she had been a Rosa Bonheur; nor even in Aus-

tria, where I know a certain old actor in retirement, who occasionally returns to tread the boards with his wonted fire despite his eighty years, and who has received a patent of nobility; nor does Austria stop there, for she has recently sent the order of Francis Joseph to two French artists, one of whom is the dean himself of the Comédie-Française.

Thus monarchies, even those whose aristocratic traditions are world-renowned, have ceased to consider actors as a class set apart in the social world: and France—what do I say! the French Republic persists in regarding them as such; and it is in this classic land of liberty, equality, and fraternity that this Heaven-crying inequality is carefully embalmed in the most pious arguments.

Add to this a yet stranger fact: namely, that our repertory is universal; that the theaters of foreign countries feed and flourish upon it; that their actors may be made members of various orders, simply for the way in which they interpret our works, and this, while the French actor, the creator of those very works, is declared in France *non dignus entrare!*

Another reason constantly alleged has always struck me as utterly absurd, altho it is most frequently employed,—probably because, like Figaro's precepts, it sounds like a profound piece of thought. It is impossible, it is said, to confer on an actor the red ribbon in question, because he would be obliged to lay it aside at the very time that he exercised the art by which he gained it. Oh! ho! But can we yield to logic which would force a man who rescues another from drowning, to retain his cross of honor in taking the heroic plunge? And not to make another odious comparison, altho the servants of the house of Molière are sometimes reproached with executing their office with a shade too much solemnity, do not priests of the gospel, who have been decorated, remove their orders and decorations before they kneel at the altar?

Then what are the real reasons for the supposed inferiority with which certain people desire to brand the actor?

The blows across the shoulders, the kicks and cuffs? But this is a mere question of his line of business; and why put under the ban of excommunication a knight like Delaunay,

a commander like Maubant, an emperor like Ligier?

Is it because these artists discharge their duty in person, and expose themselves to hisses and hoots as well as to applause?

But are they the only ones who do this? I spoke of volleys of onions and eggs just now; but learned professors have felt the same ere now, and M. Rénan was once assailed with copper pennies.

And do not orators address themselves directly to the public as well, and do they not employ in their marvellous art—Heaven forgive me, but I was going to say tricks, very nearly akin to our own? I speak not only of political orators, for the pulpit has also its tribunes!

Is it because the actor, in fulfilling the duties of his profession, altho exempted from the antique mask, is nevertheless forced by age and long use of paint (forgive the word!) to make a mask of his face? What, such a show of wrath for the red and white, and the little pots in which our ladies keep such pretty pomades! Where will you draw the line, if you so sternly proscribe cosmetics and dyes; and are there not a few wigs which

will tremble on the heads of our grave judges?

In reality, all the objections, whether serious, specious, or simply ingenious, which have been made to the social elevation of the actor, to his enjoyment of the mere rights of citizenship,—all these reasons, I say, may be reduced to a single one, which is purely instinctive, and which I will now attempt to solve.

It is due to the fact that the renunciation by the actor of his own personality, to assume the character of one, ten, or twenty other people, is apparently a renunciation of his own dignity, and a denial of the dignity of mankind.

My words are high-sounding; but if you refuse to assent to them, what charge can you bring against a Talma, or a Lekain? It is not because the actor may assume the guise of a Jocrisse that you refuse to yield him the same consideration which you would accord any other artist, for in that case, you should, you ought to yield it to him who puts on the imperial purple of Augustus, or the soul of the antique Horatius. No, it is merely because he assumes a character which

is not his own, and because in ceasing to be himself, you feel that he ceases to be a man.

To this objection—the only serious one, in my opinion—I have two answers to make: first, that it is false; second, that were it true, the actor is not responsible for it, and consequently ought not to suffer for it.

Yes, even were it true, the actor would not be responsible for this abdication of his dignity, since it is commanded by his poet-author; and if there be a degradation in the fact, it is not he who should be blamed, but the form itself of the art which necessitates the degradation, and the whole theater; and you should exempt from your excommunication neither the dramatic author who exposes us poor minors to such corruption, nor the manager who lends us his house in which to give ourselves over to vice,—in your company, gentlemen.

But I deny that there is degradation, since there is no true abdication of personal dignity. The actor may indeed assume a disguise,—I have said so too often to refuse to repeat it now,—and it is this assumed character, not his own, which receives the blows and mockery, if need be: but this disguise,

which he will doff ere long, he enters into with heart and soul, with all his mind, with all his courage,—for on the night of a first performance, he is like a soldier under fire; he enters into the character with his personal individuality, directive and creative. It is with this individual *self* that he makes you by turns shiver, weep, or smile, the noblest shudders, the most melting tears, the humanest smiles. He does not abdicate the throne: he reigns supreme. He may surrender to a certain point: he does not resign!

Consequently, his dignity is intact; he is no less a man, and he is an artist.

It seems to me that it would be a worthy action nowadays to lift from the actor, once and for all, the ban pronounced against him by monarchical society, which affected to consider him as a mere instrument of pleasure.

I see only advantages for every one in permitting the actor to resume the position in the French Republic which he held in the Athenian Republic.

And what may that be? Lord high admiral, like Callipides? Well! I don't say that; and whatever may be the inclination of modern artists and men of letters to invest

themselves on every occasion with the rights and privileges of the priestly office, I, for one, will never lay claim to a pontificate.

Yet it seems to me that the actor might be profitably employed in matters of education,—by means of essays like the present, for instance, by which he might render a real service to art,—and that at the periodical festivals held to commemorate our national anniversaries, there would be a place which he might worthily occupy.

The public recitation of a fine ode or an epic poem could not fail to produce, on a people so gifted as the French, an impression as invigorating and as wholesome as the performance of any choir or orchestra, however melodious.

Let my readers recall to mind the success achieved by Rachel with the 'Marseillaise,' and they will better appreciate my meaning.

A movement in this direction is already on foot, and I sincerely hope that it may strengthen and increase in extent as time goes on.

When a common emotion unites men,—be it patriotic, artistic, or a feeling of religious recognition of some past glory,—how effec-

tive would be the recitation of some fine poem filled with living thoughts, to rouse the best that there is in humanity, and what profit might not a nation derive from similar solemnities, devoted to the nurture of its native genius!

In rendering to the actor the honor due him, in setting him on an equal footing with his fellows in the eye of the law, we should but spur him on to such noble efforts; we should thus contribute to that elevation of art so often discussed in recent times, and to be effected simultaneously with the elevation of morals and manners.

I can hear the reader jestingly exclaim, "You are in the trade, M. Josse!" Yes, I am, and I am pleading for my house; but what else has been the custom of the world for these many ages past? And could I be expected to underrate the importance—I may say the necessity—of what some may call accomplishments, and many might call useless?

Ah, me! The body requires the necessities of life, but it is the superfluous for which the spirit cries aloud.

I recall a charming poem by that excellent, delicate, and profound author, Sully-

Prudhomme. The subject is the revolt of the flowers. They are seized with a fit of the spleen. Man, the world, the frightful monotony of fate, sadden and annoy them, and they decide to give over blossoming. All the roses disappear. There are no more lilies, to the grief of the young girls who love them; no more violets,—such an injury to the month of May! no more poppies,—and how forlorn the wheat-fields look! In short, there is an end of the spring. But what is the use of having any flowers? say the philosophers. 'Tis but another bit of frivolity; that's all. Yes, but in this frivolity lies the grace of the year, the charm of life. All has faded; color and perfume, delicacy and beauty, are gone! Then what will become of the women? and of love? and consequently of pleasure and joy? It's of no use to talk about it, every one feels bored; envy and malice spread abroad; evil passions spring into life once more. Give us back the flowers; we must have flowers! And I fairly believe there would have been a regular revolution, barricades and all, if the tender heart of the rose had not been melted by the universal distress.

Well, without pushing the comparison too far, just fancy all the actors and actresses striking work, like Sully-Prudhomme's flowers!

I ask you on your word of honor, can you deny that there would be a somewhat similar reversal of the order of nature? Would it be long before Paris, the Paris now so bright and so gay, become utterly uninhabitable? Why, people would drop dead in the streets from sheer *ennui*! If it lasted for any length of time there would certainly be a general return to a savage state of existence.

Ah! it was once said that if there were a dearth of strawberries, Paris would rise in revolt. Gentlemen, during the Siege there was a terrible dearth, not only of strawberries, but of a great many other good things, and Paris did not rise in revolt in consequence. Her citizens waged a holy warfare, suffered bravely; but there were actors who took the place of strawberries.

Was it a trifling thing, then, during those days of gloom and depression, to keep up those performances by the Comédie-Française and elsewhere, when the inspired words of the poets dropped warm from our hearts

into the public heart? And those recitations from Victor Hugo's 'Chatiments,' of moving and consoling memory, what of them? and of so many others, whither your actors, for lack of other laurels, brought you the laurel leaves of art, which never fade upon the radiant brow of France? Ah! how every bosom beat! What transports! What unity! Were it but for the memory of those hours, I assure you, I fail to see how any one can say that the actor is a useless and inferior being. And here let me pause; for nothing can be better fitted to impress me with the conviction—a proud one, perhaps, but correct, I think—that we actors are entitled to hold honorable rank, not only in the art whose soldiers and followers we are, but also in the annals of our country.

NOTES

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THE introduction, the substance of which appeared in the *Century* for January, 1887, has been prepared especially for this series; and for Mr. James's kindness in preparing it the committee in charge of the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University desires here to express its sincere thanks.

Constant Coquelin (1841-1909) was the most versatile and accomplished comedian of his time. At the conservatory in Paris he was the favorite pupil of Regnier; and he was also a close student of the methods of Samson. He won the first prize for comedy at the Conservatory; and he made his first appearance at the Théâtre Français in 1859. He was only twenty-three when he was elected an associate of the Comédie-Française. He early distinguished himself especially in the series of brilliant parts which Molière had composed for his own acting; and he displayed his extraordinary range of characterization in a host of plays by the leading French dramatists of the day. He went to England with the Comédie-Française in 1879; he played later in all the chief countries of Europe; and in 1888 he paid the first of several visits to the United States.

In 1892 he resigned from the Comédie-Française, and not long thereafter he became the manager of the Porte Saint-Martin theater. Here he produced 'Cyrano de Bergerac' in 1907, a poetic play written for him and so to speak, around him, specially devised to set off the manifold facets of his histrionic genius. He did not survive to appear in the 'Chantecler,' which Rostand had also composed expressly for him.

He was a prominent figure in Parisian life, being an intimate friend of many of the chief politicians, painters and poets. He was an appreciative collector of works of art; and he was also an acute critic of literature. He delivered lectures on several of the plays of Molière and on several of the contemporary French poets with whom he was intimate; and these addresses were published one after another as they were delivered. In New York he read before the Nineteenth Century Club a brilliant essay on 'Molière and Shakspeare.'

Three times Coquelin discussed his own calling, twice in lectures, 'L'Art et le Comédien,' published in 1880 and 'L'Art du Comédien,' published in 1886; and once in a pamphlet, 'Le Comédien,' published in 1882, in which he repelled a bitter attack made on his profession by M. Octave Mirbeau.

The first of his two lectures was translated

by Miss Abby Langdon Alger and published in 1881 by Roberts Brothers; and it is here reprinted by permission of Messrs. Little, Brown and Co., who control the copyright, a permission for which the committee in charge of the Dramatic Museum takes pleasure in expressing its gratitude. Miss Alger's rendering has been carefully revised for the present reprint; and it has been slightly condensed by the omission of a few quotations.

Coquelin begins his plea for his profession by a declaration of the importance and the dignity of the art which he adorned. He claims that the actor is not a copyist, but truly a creator. This contention may be supported by citing part of a letter, written by Coleridge to the elder Charles Mathews (and quoted by H. B. Irving in his paper on the 'Calling of the Actor') :—

“A great actor, comic or tragic, is not to be a mere copy, a facsimile, but an imitation of nature; now an imitation differs from a copy in this, that it of necessity implies and demands a difference, whereas a copy aims at identity; and what a marble peach on the mantelpiece, that you take up deluded and put down with a pettish disgust, is compared with a fruit-piece of Van Nuysen's, even such is a mere copy of nature, with a true histrionic imitation. A good actor is Pygmalion's statue, a work of exquisite art, ani-

mated and gifted with motion; but still art, still a species of poetry."

Equally illuminating is a passage in the brief but stimulating essay 'On the Stage,' prefixed to Fanny Kemble's 'Notes upon Some of Shakspeare's Plays,' published in 1882. The actress-authoress declared that the art of acting "has neither fixed rules, specific principles, indispensable rudiments, nor fundamental laws; it has no basis in positive science, as music, painting, sculpture and architecture have; and differs from them all, in that the mere appearance of spontaneity, which is an acknowledged assumption, is its chief merit. And yet—

This younger of the sister arts
There all their charms combine.

requires in its professors the imagination of the poet, the ear of the musician, the eye of the painter and sculptor, and over and above these, a faculty peculiar to itself, inasmuch as the actor personally fulfills and embodies his conception; his own voice is his cunningly modulated instrument; his own face the canvas whereon he portrays the various expressions of his passion; his own frame the mold in which he casts the images of beauty and majesty that fill his brain; and where as the painter and sculptor may select, of all possible attitudes, occupations and expressions,

the most favorable to the beautiful effect they desire to produce and fix, and bid it so remain fixt forever, the actor must have and more than a temporary existence of poetry and passion, and preserve thruout its duration that ideal grace and dignity, of which the canvas and the marble give but a silent and motionless image" (pp. 15-16).

In the course of this lecture Coquelin asserts his own conviction that Diderot is absolutely in the right in maintaining that the actor must never allow himself to be carried away by his emotion while he is engaged in portraying it. Diderot's 'Paradoxe sur le Comédien' was not published until 1830; it is a one-sided dialog between a man of straw and the speaker who presents Diderot's own uncompromising opinions. Mr. Walter Herries Pollock made a careful translation issued in 1883 with a preface by Sir Henry Irving, in which the English actor ardently combated the French philosopher's theory. More than once, after the publication of this translation, Irving and Coquelin debated the next question in various periodicals British and American, notably in *Harper's Weekly*, for November 12, 1889.

Mr. Francis Wilson, in his 'Joseph Jefferson; Reminiscences of a Fellow-Player,' records that the American comedian held both contestants to be in the right, each from his

own experience:—"I have no doubt that the Englishman could not act if he did not feel, and that the Frenchman would be very inferior if he did feel. You remember Shakspeare's advice to the players in 'Hamlet.' I understand he means by that that no matter how you are overcome by your emotions you must take care and maintain coolness and clearness. For my part, I like to have the heart warm and the head cool," (p. 141).

Yet there is significance in the account,—cited by Mr. Wilson (pp. 330-1) from Mr. Henry Watterson's tribute to Jefferson,—of a performance which was marred by the actor's failure to abide by his own rule:—"He was playing Caleb Plummer, and in the scene between the old toy-maker and his blind daughter, when the father discovers the dreadful result of his dissemulation—at the very crucial moment there was an awkward twitch and, the climax quite thwarted, the curtain came down. 'Did you see that?' he said, as he brushed by me, going to his dressing-room. 'No,' said I, following him. 'What was it?' He turned, his eyes still wet, and his voice choked. 'I broke down,' said he, 'completely broke down. I turned away from the audience to recover myself. But I could not, and had the curtain rung.' The scene had been spoilt because the actor had been overcome by a sudden flood of real feel-

ing, whereas he was to render by his art the feeling of a fictitious character and so communicate this to his audience.”

It may be noted also that in a review of the American translation of Coquelin's first lecture contributed to the *New York Times* for January 16, 1881, Lawrence Barrett adduced an example of the perfect self-control of Junius Brutus Booth in one of the most moving episodes of 'King Lear.' Barrett derived the anecdote from William Warren who was playing Kent to Booth's Lear. "At the close of one of Booth's tenderest speeches, when the whole house was in tears, he leaned upon his companion's shoulder and whispered in his own natural voice, 'William, you ought to have been out fishing with us to-day'; and then resumed his part with all his old power.

The widespread interest aroused by the publication of Mr. Pollock's translation of Diderot's 'Paradox,' led Mr. William Archer to collect all the evidence scattered thru theatrical biography and dramatic criticism and also to send a questionnaire to a host of living British and American actors and actresses. As a result of this indefatigable investigation Mr. Archer was enabled to prepare 'Masks or Faces? A Study in the Psychology of Acting' (London and New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1888)—to which

every student of the stage may be referred for a judicious weighing of the testimony on one side and the other, and for an acute analysis of the underlying principles.

Toward the end of his lecture Coquelin asked that the art of the actor should be as adequately rewarded as the other arts and that the tragedian and the comedian should be admitted to the Legion of Honor as freely as the author, the painter or the sculptor. When this plea was made no actor had been decorated with the coveted cross, altho this honor had been conferred upon Regnier after he had left the stage to devote himself to his work as a teacher in the Conservatory. It is pleasant to be able to record that the prejudice against which Coquelin protested gave way at last; and that in 1882 the dean of the Comédie-Française, Got, also a professor in the Conservatory, but still in the active exercise of his profession as an actor, was admitted to the Legion of Honor. Since then this coveted distinction has been conferred on a score of other actors—altho Coquelin always refused to accept it, in order that it might not be supposed that he had made his appeal on his own behalf.

B. M.

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