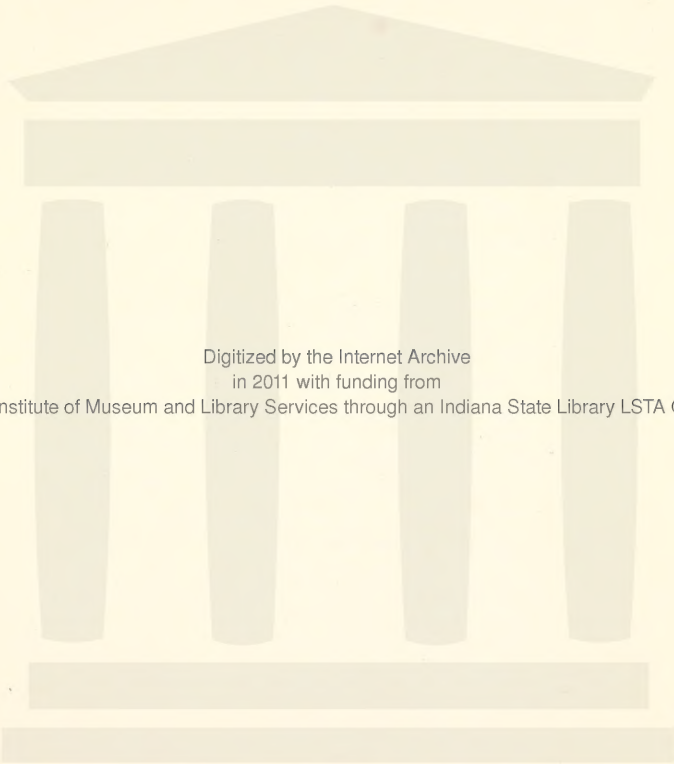


TWELVE
GREAT
ACTORS





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BY
EDWARD ROBINS

Twelve Great Actors

Illustrated. 8°

Twelve Great Actresses

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G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS, NEW YORK & LONDON

TWELVE GREAT ACTORS





1871

1871

1871

1871

William Charles Macready.

From an engraving by C. H. Jeens.

TWELVE GREAT ACTORS

BY

EDWARD ROBINS

AUTHOR OF "ECHOES OF THE PLAYHOUSE"
"BENJAMIN FRANKLIN," ETC.

"The stage I chose—a subject fair and free—
'T is yours, 't is mine, 't is public property."

Churchill

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press

1900

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EDWARD ROBINS

The Knickerbocker Press, New York

To
JULIA STOCKTON ROBINS



PREFACE

WHEN the publishers suggested the preparation of the following sketches, to head their new series of biographical studies, the author felt something besides mere personal pleasure at being called upon to undertake a congenial work. He welcomed the proposition all the more because it showed the growing importance of that dramatic art which Charlotte Cushman placed above the other arts, and which was to be given, in this instance, the honour of precedence. Surely the player has advanced wonderfully in his position before the world since the Elizabethan days—even though those days saw the rise of Shakespeare. Then it was that the pious Archbishop Grindal called the Thespians an “idle sort of people, which have been infamous to all good Commonwealths,” and that they were classed, by act of Parliament, with “bear-

Preface

Preface

wards," "jugglers," and the like, to be treated, if they were not properly licensed, as wandering "rogues and vagabonds." We recall, too, that when the immortal Burbage betook himself to Blackfriars, then without the limits of London, to establish a playhouse, some of the neighbours petitioned the Privy Council, albeit unsuccessfully, to put a stop to a nuisance which would attract to the district "lewed," disreputable persons. The mummer existed but on sufferance; popular as he might be with the multitude, he was too often looked upon as a mountebank whose tricks were tolerated because they filled in an idle afternoon.

How the scene has changed! The actor, when he is worthy of his name, ranks with the best of men in other callings; the theatre, when it be not turned over to rubbish, is a respected institution; and Dramatic Art has been set in the same niche with Poetry, Music, Painting, and Sculpture. And now, to cap the climax, the literature of the stage is receiving the general attention which it always richly deserved. The chronicles of dead players excite an interest far beyond the sphere of the student and the critic. This is fortunate, for it is only through the biographers that the memories of triumphs

once so real, but now shadowy, can be saved from total oblivion.

There may be a place, therefore, for the struggles, the trials, and the successes, of these TWELVE GREAT ACTORS, whose labours dignified either Tragedy or Comedy. They were all philanthropists: while they fretted their hour upon the boards they gave royal pleasure to the public, and carried it into an enchanted region, where the humdrum of every-day existence was forgotten.

PHILADELPHIA, July 1, 1900.

Preface





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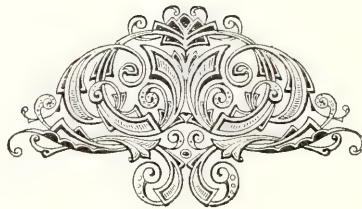


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“ Here lies David Garrick; describe him who
can,
An abridgment of all that was pleasing in
man:
As an actor, confessed without rival to shine;
As a wit, if not first, in the very first line;
Yet with talents like these, and an excellent
heart,
The man had his failings — a dupe to his art,
Like an ill-judging beauty, his colours he
spread,
And be-plastered with rouge his own natural
red.
On the stage he was natural, simple, affecting;
'T was only that when he was off he was
acting.”

—*Oliver Goldsmith.*



DAVID GARRICK

ONE morning, in the early spring of 1736-37, there wandered into London from Lichfield two young men of far different appearance and ambitions, but both alike in the possession of an insatiable wish to succeed in the world which was about to open up before them. The older of the two was heavy, clumsy of gait, and slovenly, with an ugly, intelligent face and a great seamy neck, exactly as if Nature had intended him for a model of John Bull in the latter's least attractive mood. The other tempter of fortune, a mere stripling of twenty, had nearly all the physical beauties denied to his crusty companion. He was not over tall, to be sure, but his figure was elegantly moulded, his full dark eyes, sparkling with the fire of genius, gave the crowning touch to features of exquisite sensibility, and his whole person radiated a sort of

Two
Travellers

“One Mr.
Johnson”

grace and activity that bespoke a scion of the French rather than of the English nation.

The ugly fellow was “one Mr. Johnson,” who would, in later years, develop into the ponderous, oracular Doctor Samuel Johnson, but who had, for the present, neither fame nor a Boswell to chant his praises—nothing, indeed, save a few pennies and a stupid play in his pocket. Misguided Sam! He fondly hoped that he would blossom forth into a successful dramatist, and he might have growled out hard, scornful words could he have realised, as he was obliged to realise afterwards, that all the stage triumphs were to be won by the natty youth at his side. The natty youth was, as we all know, Master David Garrick, who happened to be quite unconscious, at this moment, of his histrionic gifts, and was only intent upon studying mathematics, philosophy, “humane learning,” and the law.

David had already seen a little of life. He had taken a trip to Lisbon, to visit a wine dealing brother of his father, Captain Peter Garrick; he had gone to school to his friend Johnson,* and, more exciting than

* David Garrick was born February 20, 1716, at Hereford, where his father, Captain Garrick, was stationed on recruiting service.



David Garrick.

From a design by N. Dance.



that, he had often posted up to London from his Lichfield home to take sly peeps at the acting of Colley Cibber, the prince of stage fops, the sententious Quin (whose popularity he was destined himself to overshadow), and Charles Macklin, that most perturbed spirit, who was to brave the town by playing Shylock as a human being, instead of as a monstrous, comic impossibility. For the present, however, Davy looked forward to nothing more, or less, than to become a sedate judge, who might drink his Madeira, crack a legal joke before a helpless court, and die in all the odour of sanctity.

The familiar story as to what things befell "one Mr. Johnson" and his friend after their coming up to London has about it the flavour of romance. The future lexicographer started in to wrestle with the world, and to accumulate in the process a vast deal of hard philosophy; while David, soon turned wine merchant, on the strength of a thousand pounds left him by the Lisbon uncle, at once proceeded to neglect his business, quarrel with the brother who had gone into partnership with him, and to spend most of his time hobnobbing with the players at the coffee-houses, or writing dramatic squibs for the newspapers. He was a king of good

The Wine
Merchant

A New
Ambition

fellows, shrewd, merry, and volatile, who drank liquors instead of selling them, and woke up one morning to find that he had plenty of convivial friends but no customers.

It was plain that young Mr. Garrick had suddenly given rein to an ambition which bid fair to scandalise his Lichfield relations, at the same time that it made the players pat him on the back, as they told him so good a mimic and *raconteur*, with so charming a voice and figure, and so subtle a judgment of acting, was surely destined for the sock and buskin. He needed no prompting. Was he not French on his father's side of the house, and had not his mother, just dead, confessed to a bit of Celtic blood in her veins? Was not this a mixture to bring out any hidden dramatic talent? It was, indeed, the mingling of the emotional French with the no less emotional Irish strain, that made the actor in him; while to the English blood which ran through him, less strong and tempestuously, might be ascribed the leaven of prudence that was to distinguish the careful manager with an eye to the shillings in the box-office.

All the while that David was making merry with the actors off the stage, or watching them critically from the scenes of the theatre, he was asking himself a very

heretical question: Why was it that players like Quin went out of their way to tear a passion to rags, and ranted through characters after a fashion that put the latter far beyond the pale of humanity or probability? Surely it must be possible to return once more to better methods, and to represent theatrical heroes as creatures of flesh, bone, and blood, rather than as pompous screech-owls or potato-mouthed prigs. He longed to show the town a glimpse of nature. His pulse beat faster as a score of figures—Lear, Othello, Macbeth, Hamlet, Iago, and more—seemed to crowd into his presence, like so many imprisoned phantoms, and cry out to him: “Let us not be murdered, as we now are, night after night!”

One evening, it chanced that the man who was to play the jacketed Harlequin at the theatre in Goodman’s Fields was ill or missing. Garrick jumped into the breach, or into the jacket, and frisked through the part without revealing name or identity to the audience. Thus was made the *début* of the man who was to strain all heartstrings by the pathos of his Lear, or thrill glad houses by the “beautiful terror” of his Macbeth. Characteristic was it of one who would be equally at home in a country dance, in a low-comedy rôle, or in the

Dramatic
Heresy

“Mr.
Lyddal”

sublime paths of tragedy, and who could, in the space of a minute, make his face the picture of every emotion to which mankind is heir.

A little later than this Harlequin *début*, a certain Mr. Lyddal electrified the quiet people of Ipswich by playing a round of popular parts in a way that almost took away their breath. There were a freshness, an originality, a vigour, and a daring departure from stage traditions that made these impersonations stand out in bold relief. The young unknown, as it was remarked, seemed the actual embodiment of every part he tried. The audiences forgot he was acting; they only saw before them the creation of the author. What nobility of face, grace of motion, and beauty of elocution! What depths of expression in the sparkling eyes! Then, the way in which he could flash out into sudden gusts of feeling, as if his whole soul went forth with every look, tone, and gesture. Here was nature unhampered by the stilted oratory, the artificial strutting, or the hundred and one other defects of the palmy “Old School.”

With one blow of his “magic hammer” the new player had riven the rock of conventionality. Mr. Lyddal, the wielder of the hammer, was, of course, young Garrick.

It is hard for the theatre-goer of to-day, who is used to more or less realism in acting, to understand how much of an idol-breaker was "Mr. Lyddal." At the time that he made his Ipswich appearances, the arbiter of the stage—the infallible actor, whom to criticise must be heresy—was James Quin. Now, it must be confessed, Quin would be looked upon as a barn-stormer, only suited to a one-night circuit in some rough mining district. He had elements of greatness, as well as a fund of genial humour,—he was a perfect Falstaff in real life,—but he was prone to hide his talents under a cover of bombast. To roll out heroics with an "air of dignified indifference," to bellow, whine, or grumble alternately, as he pawed the air with his fat hands, or strode across the boards with stiff, majestic gait, in all the glory of full-bottomed periwig, green-velvet coat, and high-heeled, square-toed shoes, was to delight the groundlings, gallery, and side-boxes, as well as the gallants who walked up and down the stage almost on his feet, crying out "Bravo!" or ogling some fair orange-girl in the front of the house.

Those were the days when theatrical heroes always wore plumes on their heads, and the heroines fretted about in embroidered

The "Old
School"

Reaction

satins, as visible marks of their characters; when realism was at a discount, and when Shakespeare was looked upon as a semi-barbarian whose dramas might be interleaved, cut, or mangled by the meanest hack. No wonder, then, that the poet's advice about holding the mirror up to nature was ignored. The mirror was turned the other way. 'T is only surprising that there were any pleasing actors, or that audiences could detect the natural powers of those who hemmed themselves in by so much flummery.

The time was ripe for reaction. That reaction began in earnest on a night in October, 1741, when Garrick, announced with managerial mendacity as "a gentleman who never appeared on any stage," began his first London engagement at the theatre in Goodman's Fields. *Richard III.*, as adapted by Colley Cibber (an adaptation which survives to the present day) was the play, with Garrick in the title-part. The performance was a revelation. Instead of a Richard who spouted his lines like a talking automaton dressed in royal robes, there was a real schemer, hypocritical, vindictive, subtle, with just enough of the human touch to show how different was the idea of Shakespeare from the transparent, idiotic villain too often made to do duty for the original.

David Garrick

II

Garrick followed up Richard with other characters in quick, dazzling succession, as if to display the infinite variety of his art. Clodio in *The Fop's Fortune*, the ardent Chamont in *The Orphan*, the Ghost in *Hamlet*, and Lord Foppinton, a favourite beau of Cibber's, were among the parts; and on one memorable evening he united April and December by playing Johnny, a lad of fifteen, in *The Schoolboy*, and the senile King Lear. Crowds began to gather in Goodman's Fields; sedan-chairs and cumbersome chariots were soon on their way there, making a merry din gladsome to the managerial heart. In one of the chariots came Alexander Pope, to see a repetition of *Richard III*. The "little poetical hero," who remembered Betterton as the Duke, watched Garrick (himself made desperately nervous by this unexpected honour) from the vantage of a side-box. Dressed all in black, yet the target for all eyes, Pope applauded generously. Once he turned to a friend with the words: "That young man never had his *equal* as an actor, and he will never have a *rival*." He only trusted that the new Roscius would not be ruined by good fortune. So the oracle had spoken. The town was glad to follow where Pope led the praise.

Sudden
Fame

**A Born
Player**

From this season, success dogged Garrick's footsteps with a persistency that lasted, with but few interruptions, until the end. Even his proper brothers and sisters, who had been sadly shocked at Davy for dragging a genteel name through the mire of a play-house, forgot their prejudices in sweet contemplation of his fame. In the coffee-houses, beaux, literary men, statesmen, everybody, argued as to what was his finest character. It was agreed that his comedy had all the freshness of a spring morning, and that his tragedy possessed a truly terrifying quality which twenty Quins could not produce. Some most admired the young man's Richard, for its combination of craftiness and dramatic force; others said that nothing could equal the thrilling effect of the curse in *Lear*, or the pathos which were put into the lines: "O fool, I shall go mad!" "You are a totally different man in *Lear* from that you are in *Richard*," wrote one of Garrick's friends. "There is a sameness about every other actor." In a word, as the wits at the clubs admitted, Garrick had been born a player, and it was plain that Mesdames Thalia and Melpomene must have been hovering near on that interesting occasion.

Only some cynic, like Horace Walpole, or a soured critic, like Colley Cibber (who

October 19th, 1741.

GOODMAN'S FIELDS.

At the late Theatre in Goodman's Fields, this Day will be performed,
A Concert of Vocal and Instrumental Music,
DIVIDED INTO TWO PARTS.

TICKETS AT THREE, TWO, AND ONE SHILLING.

Places for the Boxes to be taken at the Fleece Tavern, near the Theatre.

N. B. Between the Two Parts of the Concert will be presented an Historical Play, called the
LIFE AND DEATH OF

King Richard the Third.

CONTAINING THE DISTRESSES OF K. HENRY VI.

The artful acquisition of the Crown by King Richard,
The Murder of Young King Edward V. and his Brother in the Tower,
THE LANDING OF THE EARL OF RICHMOND,

And the Death of King Richard in the memorable Battle of Bosworth Field, being the last that was fought between the Houses of York and Lancaster; with many other true Historical Passages.

The Part of King Richard by A GENTLEMAN,

(Who never appeared on any Stage).

King Henry, by Mr. GIFFARD,

Richmond, Mr. MARSHALL,

Prince Edward, by Miss HIPPISELY.

Duke of York, Miss NAYLOR,

Duke of Buckingham, Mr. PATERSON,

Duke of Norfolk, Mr. BLAKES,

Lord Stanley, Mr. PAGETT,

Oxford, Mr. VAUGHAN, Tressel, Mr. W. GIFFARD,

Catesby, Mr. MARR,

Ratcliff, Mr. CROFTS,

Blunt, Mr. NAYLOR,

Tyrrel, Mr. PUTTENHAM,

Lord Mayor, Mr. DUNSTALL.

The Queen, Mrs. STEEL,

Duchess of York, Mrs. YATES,

And the Part of Lady Anne, by Mrs. GIFFARD.

WITH

Entertainments of Dancing,

By Mons. FROMET

Madame DUVALT,

and the Two Masters and Miss GRANIER.

To which will be added a Ballad Opera, of One Act, called

The Virgin Unmask'd.

The Part of Lucy, by Miss HIPPISELY.

Both of which will be performed Gratis, by Persons for their Diversion.

The Concert will begin exactly at Six o'Clock.

AN HISTORIC PLAYBILL.

FACSIMILE OF THE PROGRAMME FOR GARRICK'S FIRST LONDON APPEARANCE.

saw in Garrick a fatal rival to his worthless son Theophilus), dared to find fault with the general verdict. "You should see him," snarled Colley, contemptuously. "He is the completest little doll of a figure—the prettiest little creature!" But when the once lovely Mistress Bracegirdle, then retired from the scenes of her dramatic conquests, twitted the old comedian on the new hero's abilities, he was obliged to admit, while he straightened up his decrepit back, and took a tremulous pinch of snuff: "Why, faith, Bracey, I believe you are right; the young fellow *is* clever." Clever!

Soon Garrick is acting in Dublin, where he makes love, on and off the stage, to the inconstant Peg Woffington: pensive of face, squeaky of voice, and plastic as to morals. It is an unhallowed union, this intimacy with the Woffington; unmarked by bell, book, or candle, and destined to run its course, like a turbulent current, into the waters of mutual indifference. But there was no thought, then, of separation; or of household bickerings in London, when the frugal Garrick would scold Peg for wasting the tea by making it "red as blood."

The lover played superbly in Dublin, inspired by Woffington as his heroine, and ventured to try Hamlet, that magic part

Enter
Wof=
fington

Young
Hamlet

which even your low comedian, or the call-boy, aches to attack. The Prince of Garrick must have been an engrossing, but not an ideal, impersonation. It was said that he exhibited a "hot, testy fellow, forever flying into a passion," without showing that "quaintness of temper" or intellectual power characteristic of the Dane. His recital of the soliloquy, "To be, or not to be," was, too, hardly free from the commonplace. But in showing the dramatic side of Hamlet, as well as in the scene with the Ghost, in indicating his love for Ophelia, and in the agonised despair of the final scenes, he proved admirable. His look of horror on seeing the Ghost, and his trembling whisper, "Angels and ministers of grace, defend us!" moved the shuddering spectators as not even Betterton might have done in the palmy days. If we can form a correct idea of a stage impersonation of a century and a half ago or more by contemporary criticism—the one poor reed on which must lean the fame of dead players—this Hamlet was an ardent, impulsive creature of the French kind, like the present-day Prince of Mounet-Sully, and utterly different from the reflective, almost classic, Anglo-Saxon Hamlet made familiar to Americans by Edwin Booth.

David Garrick

15

So numerous were the audiences that came to see the young actor, and so hot was the weather in Dublin, that an epidemic, dignified as the "Garrick Fever," broke out among his admirers. No greater compliment, albeit a grim, accidental one, was ever paid to Thespian. Garrick returned, rich in laurels and purse, to more congenial London. There he renewed his earlier successes, created new parts, among them Macbeth, kept house with Charles Macklin and the Woffington, loved, and finally quarrelled with, that fair lady; was made much of by the nobility (he dearly loved a lord, did Davy), and finally shattered the one-time idol of the English stage in the person of pedantic Quin.

The latter said, in his gruff, sarcastic way, that Garrick was a sort of new religion—a reformer—a Whitfield of the stage—but predicted that the people would soon return "to church again," or to their allegiance to the "Old School." Thereat Garrick, who had always a pretty conceit for the epigrammatic, published some witty verses wherein he replied to "Pope Quin":

"Thou great infallible, forbear to roar;
Thy bulls and errors are revered no more.
When doctrines meet with general approbation
It is not heresy, but Reformation."

More
Laurels

"Pope
Quin"

When at last Quin retired, he did so with good grace. He travelled down to Bath, where he took his wine, venison, and turtle, told many a capital story, and was as natural and unassuming in private life as he had been pompous and artificial in the mimic world. If the old fellow could come back to earth, he would learn that the Quins of the stage did not all die with him. He would laugh, too, if he saw that in our modern desire to be realistic we sometimes raise the scene-painter to the dignity of a "star," and pay unholy honours to the costumer. Old Quin—yes, and Garrick likewise—used to play an ancient Roman, or an early English king, clad in eighteenth-century court dress, and without scenic embellishment worthy of the name. Imagine Sir Henry Irving giving us Macbeth in a dress suit and stovepipe hat!

Now and then the shafts of ridicule were hurled at Quin's conqueror. When Garrick first played Othello he looked so short and unimposing for the Moor that he was likened to a negro boy in a Hogarth picture—a taunt which the actor, ever sensitive to criticism, and greedy of admiration, even from a baby or a butler, could never forget. It takes a man with the physique of a Salvini to give us the ideal Othello. Edwin Booth acted the



JAMES QUIN.
FROM THE PAINTING BY HUDSON.

part, but never looked it. Edwin Forrest looked the part, but, said his enemies, never acted it. Salvini acted and looked Othello.

There was one person, however, who was prepared to find Garrick's Moor as impressive as his Richard, or any other of his characters. She was Mademoiselle Violette, a pretty dancer, lately come to London from Vienna, and much petted by the family of my Lord of Burlington. The Violette had been a protégée of Maria Theresa, the Empress Queen. It was whispered, with a wink, that her sovereign had sent the girl to England, with important letters of introduction, because her husband, the Emperor, suddenly showed an interest in the art of dancing that threatened to become dangerously personal. Be that as it might, Garrick fell in love with Mademoiselle, ogled her prodigiously when he met her at a grand ball at Richmond (where refined Horace Walpole was so horrified to see a mere dancer as a guest of honour), and finally married her. The good lady made as faithful a wife as he did a husband, outlived him for many years, and held on, until the last, to the pardonable belief that the world was a stage particularly created for the display of David Garrick. When she was old, she would relate, as she supped her afternoon tea, looking

The
Violette

An
Ardent
Romeo

very bright and knowing, how "Mr. Garrick" had once disguised himself as a girl that he might throw a letter into her sedan chair. It was something to have been wooed by one of the best of Romeos.

There was one Romeo who excelled the new Roscius. He was silver-voiced Spranger Barry, the most fascinating stage lover of the eighteenth century, who put into his acting a half-tenderness, half-passionate quality, which Garrick never could imitate. There was every chance to compare the two, for, in the season of 1750-51 Garrick, now part patentee of Drury Lane Theatre, played Romeo to the Juliet of the beautiful George Anne Bellamy, while Barry, who had previously given Romeo at Drury Lane under Garrick's management, appeared at the rival theatre in Covent Garden. The Covent Garden Juliet was Mrs. Theophilus Cibber, who had acted many a time with Garrick, and who once wrote to him gaily: "I desire you always to be my lover upon the stage, and my friend off of it."

It was generally conceded that Garrick was more tragic than Barry, but the latter made all the women wish themselves Juliet, so fascinating was his love-making. It was a case of *place aux dames*. The feminine verdict was the true one. Garrick withdrew

his Romeo after the town, now heartily tired of the contest on each side, exclaimed with Mercutio :

“ A plague on both your houses ! ”

Those were halcyon days at Drury Lane, with Garrick playing one night to crowded houses, breakfasting the next day with an earl, or a patronising duke (how did he get time to study and rehearse as he did ?), bickering with his actresses, and producing old plays, new plays of his own and other authors, and even bringing out a spectacle !

Among the new pieces, most of them poor stuff, archaic and stilted according to present standards, was *Irene*, the tragedy which Johnson had been polishing off ever since the day when he brought it up from Lichfield in his threadbare pocket. Nature never designed the Doctor for a dramatist, which may be the reason that the worthy man did not always appreciate Nature. However, he washed himself with more care than usual, put on a scarlet suit, and, with a gold-laced hat in hand, waddled behind the scenes on the opening night of *Irene*, duly proud of his stage first-born, yet afraid that the actresses would tempt him from the path of strict propriety. *Irene* was a failure, not to be saved by fine acting or

Spranger
Barry

**A
Stupid
Play**

elaborate mountings. It proved a dreary jumble of platitudes, wherein impossible Turks discussed morality after the fashion of stupid Englishmen, and left the audiences exhausted at the end of nine performances. Garrick strangled Irene in full view of the house—a sensational innovation for Georgian taste—but the drama itself died a more natural death, for want of inspiration.

Garrick was once the central figure of a performance not strictly according to programme. A “sumptuous” spectacle entitled *The Chinese Festival* was brought out in the year 1755, after all sorts of mysterious preparations, under the direction of one Noverre, a French ballet-master. War had arisen between France and England, and the groundlings, grown suddenly patriotic, refused to be polite to French dancers. During a fierce contest of five nights, in which the *Festival* struggled unsuccessfully for recognition, gentlemen, flourishing their swords, charged the occupants of the pit, who were trying to hoot the piece off the stage, while the women of quality, leaning over their boxes, pointed out the most active of the rioters to their husbands, beaux, or brothers. At last the groundlings cut the scenery, tore up the benches, broke the lustres and girandoles and, as a jolly

climax, smashed the windows of Garrick's residence. It was neither the first time nor the last that Garrick was made to feel that a player, be he ever so great, is at best the slavish servant of the public.

On another occasion, when the price of admission was unpopular, men in the pit hissed Roscius off the stage, demolished the furniture of the house, and finished off their work by robbing the strong-box of the night's receipts. Garrick, diplomatic and sensitive to the least breath of disfavour, yielded the point.

The story of Garrick's second trip to the Continent (1763), when he feared that the fickle Londoners were grown tired of so much genius, and the sequel of his triumphant return, to become the same favourite as of old, have been often told. This going away was a wise move. Garrick, as Burke well said of him, had a deep knowledge of human nature; he realised that a judicious absence will sometimes lend enchantment to an audience. From his return to England until his farewell performances in 1776, the great actor held the hearts of the people with but slight interruption.

Few, indeed, were his fiascoes. The worst of them, and that not in any manner discreditable, was the Shakespeare Jubilee

At the
Jubilee

which he organised at Stratford-on-Avon. There were fireworks, a pageant, a poor ode from Garrick, and a great deal of balderdash, the whole ending in a flood of rain that dampened any latent enthusiasm, and sent some of the participants home in very bad humour. "An ode without poetry, music without melody, dinners without victuals, and lodgings without beds," was the contemptuous criticism of Samuel Foote, mimic, comedian, and brilliant scalawag. But Foote was not always a fair censor. He was ready to abuse Garrick behind his back, and to call him a niggard, at the same time that he was borrowing pounds sterling from the object of his satire. It was admitted that Garrick gave away more money than any other man in England; yet Foote loved to describe, maliciously enough, how the great actor would walk out into the street, filled with the most generous intentions, but become frightened, on turning the first corner, by the ghost of a halfpenny. The truth was that Garrick, who could never banish from his mind the youthful days when his father's family tried to appear genteel on the slim allowance of a half-pay officer, had acquired a habit of saving the pence, at the same time that he gave liberally of the pounds. His detractor remembered

the pence alone, and chose to forget the pounds.

Nor was Foote the only "friend" who spoke sneeringly of the amiable actor. If success brought Garrick his sycophants, it also brought him envious companions. Dr. Johnson, with all his philosophy and rugged honesty, could never quite forgive his Davy, a "mere player," for making the stage so much more profitable than literature. He would snarl out some nasty things on occasion. "What do you think of Garrick?" he sternly asked Davies, the actor-bookseller. "He has refused me an order for the play for Miss Williams, because he knows the house will be full, and that an order would be worth three shillings!" "Oh, sir," put in the trembling Boswell, "I cannot think Mr. Garrick would grudge such a trifle to you!" "Sir!" snorted the Doctor, crushing Boswell with a fierce look; "I have known David Garrick longer than you have done, and I know no right you have to talk to me on the subject." Yet this same Miss Williams had been most generously treated by Garrick, as Johnson well knew.

It was a crusty, contradictory way of the philosopher, who would never allow anyone but himself to abuse his former pupil. When someone attacked Garrick for being vain,

Shafts of
Envy

“Crusty
Samuel”

Johnson replied sternly: “No wonder, sir, that he is vain: a man who is perpetually flattered in every mode that can be conceived. So many bellows have blown the fire, that one wonders he is not by this time become a cinder.” If the Doctor was in good humour, he could do justice to Garrick’s talents; asserting, however, that he liked him better in comedy than in tragedy, and adding that so delightful a host was “less to be envied on the stage than at the head of a table.”

Johnson could never forget or forgive the failure of *Irene*; nor was it hard, therefore, to nurse the contempt which he felt for the players’ art. There was so deep a conviction, down in that gnarled heart of his, that an actor was little more than a tight-rope dancer, or at best “a very good mimic” (as Horace Walpole styled Garrick), that, had he lived in the days of the Tudors, he would have classed him under the head of a bear-leader, a rogue, or a vagabond.

One morning Boswell, invited to breakfast by Garrick, found the little great man in a lively state of complacency. “Pray now, did you—did you meet a little lawyer—a little lawyer, turning the corner—eh?” inquired the host, with the peculiar hemming and hawing that formed so odd a feature of

his off-stage elocution. "No, sir," answered the guest; "pray, what do you mean by the question?" "Why," replied Garrick, in affected indifference, yet visibly excited, "Lord Camden has this moment left me. We have had a long talk together." Roscius was determined that the condescension of a nobleman should not be lost upon Boswell for want of the telling. The latter repeated the story to Johnson. "Well, sir," snapped out the Doctor, "Garrick talked very properly. Lord Camden *was* a *little* lawyer to be associating so familiarly with a player."

Garrick was hardly a snob, however much he bent the knee to riches and power. He, a gentleman by birth, had adopted a profession which was looked upon, by many amiable persons, as unfit for anyone above the social pretensions of a stable-boy. To such bigots a player was no better than a Punch or Judy, capable of giving pleasure by some mechanical process, but utterly without soul, and by no means worthy to associate with respectable citizens. The prejudice is not quite dead, even now. Garrick, yearning to prove his gentility, cultivated the great ones of London, was received at their tables as an equal, and thus indirectly, if not by design, did wonders towards raising the private position of all actors. He was, indeed, more of

Lordly
Patronage

Homage
to
Roscius

a gentleman off the stage than on it ; for it was said he never quite got the necessary air of *savoir-faire* in playing a man of fashion. He has not been singular in that respect. In some instances, the most accomplished aristocrats of the stage are those who boast no family crest save a tailor's goose, or perhaps the maternal wash-tub.

Of Garrick in private life, Miss Hawkins has left us a delightful picture, which has about it the colouring of a real portrait.

“ I see him now,” she writes, “ in a dark blue coat, the button holes bound with gold, a small cocked hat laced with gold, his waistcoat very open, and his countenance never at rest, and, indeed, seldom his person ; for, in the relaxation of the country he gave way to his natural volatility, and with my father was perfectly at ease ; sometimes sitting on a table, and then, if he saw my brother at a distance on the lawn, shooting off like an arrow out of a bow in a spirited chase of him around the garden. I remember when my father, having me by his hand, met him on the common riding his pretty pony, his moving my compassion by lamenting the misery of being summoned to town in hot weather (I think August) to play before the King of Denmark. I thought him sincere, and his case pitiable, till my father assured me that he was in reality very well pleased, and that

what he groaned at as labour was an honour paid to his talents. The natural expression of his countenance was far from placidity. I confess I was afraid of him ; more so than I was of Johnson, whom I knew not to be, nor could suppose he ever would be thought to be, an extraordinary man."

In
Private
Life

It was ever the same story. The bulk of the honours always went to Garrick, and the would-be writer of tragedies had to play a second fiddle.

As the years went on, Garrick bethought himself of retiring. He was well aware that, even in his own case, there was a chance of lagging superfluous on the scene; nay, perhaps of playing to half-empty benches, and causing pitying old men to cry to their sons: "Zounds, boys, you should have seen Garrick in his prime, before all the fire in him was drowned out by age!" So he fixed upon the year 1776 in which to drop the curtain with a series of performances that should give fitting climax to his marvellous career: He decided in the nick of time. He was now in his sixtieth year. Time was beginning to make inroads on the once lithe form and unconquerable spirit. His eyes were, to be sure, as lustrous as ever, but the form had grown portly, gout had come with

The
Last
Season

warning twinge, followed by a more dangerous disease; and the wrinkles, together with a certain slowness of movement in walk and gesture, showed that he had passed the meridian. When he made love, the illusion was no longer perfect; he did not look as if he could take part in a tournament to win a heroine, or adjust his stoutish legs to the requirements of a balcony scramble for a Juliet's window.

Yet there was little sign of age during the farewell season. It seemed as if Garrick had girded himself for one mighty effort, and gained a temporary respite from the crow's feet, the gout, and the other unwelcome attentions of Father Time. People crowded to Drury Lane on the evenings of these performances: some to be turned away, some to beg the keeper of the box-book for places, with all the ardour of paupers asking alms; and many others, more fortunate, to get inside the theatre after a mad scramble that threatened to wrest the clothes from their backs. Never did the little man shine more brilliantly as he played, one by one, a favourite part for the last time.

With all the plaudits and *éclat*, there was an undercurrent of sadness. Hannah More did not overstep the truth when she declared she felt, as others must have felt, that she

was assisting at the funerals of the different authors represented.

The last night but one witnessed a revival of *King Lear*. After the curtain had fallen, and the players were assembled, sorrowfully enough, in the greenroom, Garrick said to Miss Younge (Cordelia), with a mixture of gaiety and tenderness: " Ah, Bessy, this is the last time I shall ever be your father! " And the Younge, in honest tears, bowed her head and implored a farewell blessing. He gave it, very solemnly, while the company looked on in choking silence; then he hurried from the room. It was Garrick's good-bye to tragedy. There was no acting, no tinsel, in that unrehearsed scene; nothing but a touch of nature.

On the eventful evening of June 10, 1776, Garrick played the jealous Don Felix of *The Wonder* with a spirit that took back the veterans, in fancy, to the days when he was all youth and energy. When the last act was over, and a painful hush had succeeded the enthusiasm of the tightly packed audience, he advanced slowly to the front of the stage, to say good-bye. His fellow-players stood near him; behind the scenes friends in scores waited breathlessly for the last word.

" The jingle of rhyme and the language of fiction " would but ill suit his present feel-

Lear's
Blessing

The Final
Night

ings, Garrick said, impressively. It was to him, he added, "a very awful moment." A few more sentences, a placing of his hand to his heart, and some tears, surely real, made up the epilogue. Then, bowing repeatedly, he withdrew for ever. The acting of the great Garrick was but a memory.

"The grace of action—the adopted mien,
Faithful as nature to the varied scene;
The expressive glance—whose subtle comment draws
Entranced attention, and a mute applause;
Gesture that marks, with face and feeling fraught,
A sense in silence, and a will in thought;
Harmonious speech, whose pure and liquid tone
Gives verse a music scarce confessed its own;
Passion's wild break—and frown that awes the sense,
And every charm of gentle eloquence—
ALL PERISHABLE."

Richard Brinsley Sheridan wrote truly. The poet, the painter, the composer, and the sculptor, leave their work unimpaired to posterity; but the most human of all the arts perishes, save for the memoirs of the biographer, on the fall of the green curtain.

After his retirement from Drury Lane

David Garrick

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(where Sheridan was now the manager and part lessee), Garrick passed two happy years of dignified idleness, spending part of his comfortable income, basking in the candle-light of noble dining-rooms, and playing the gentleman's part to perfection. He died January 20, 1779, and was buried, with a pomp that would have pleased him, at the foot of the Shakespeare statue in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey. His death, ponderously said Dr. Johnson, "eclipsed the gaiety of nations" and "diminished the public stock of harmless pleasure."

On February 3d died George Garrick, David's brother. George, who had been the actor's secretary, was in the habit of asking, on entering Drury Lane Theatre after a short absence: "Has my brother wanted me?" When he died, Charles Bannister, wit and singer, said tenderly, humorously: "His brother wanted him."

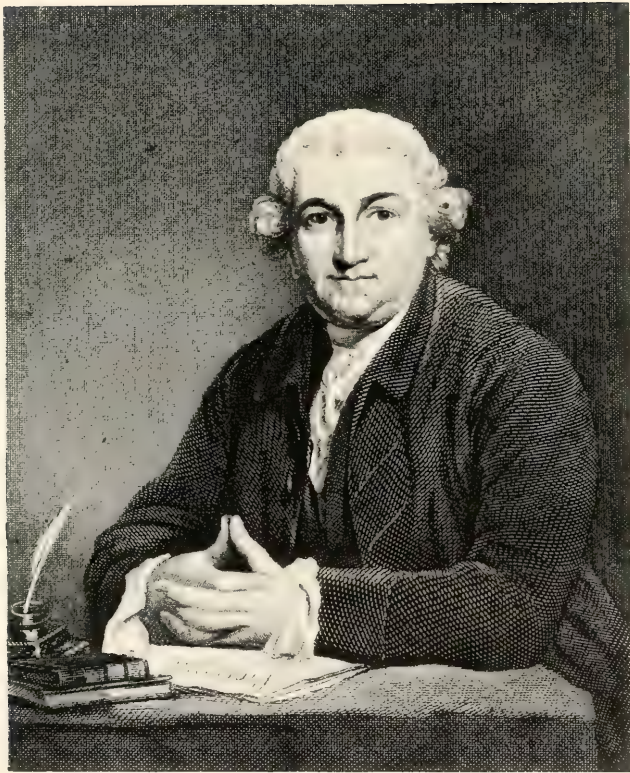
The greatest artistic virtue of Garrick was that he restored Nature to the stage, even though his example has not always been strong enough to keep her there. He pulled the wires, as genius itself must do, but no one ever saw the springs inside his puppets, or felt that all he did was not the result of impulse. The finest test of his power was to be found in the incredible ease with which

Retire-
ment and
Death

**Artistic
Virtues**

he glided from comedy to tragedy, and back again; as if all moods, all emotions, were at his beck and call. Those who remember the delightful Benedick of Edwin Booth, or who have enjoyed the cameo-like bits of pathos which Joseph Jefferson puts into Caleb Plummer, need not be told that the tragedian who can act comedy, or the comedian who can touch the heart, mingling tears with the sunshine, has in him one of the highest gifts of the Thespian. So it was, in more startling degree, with David Garrick. His genius seemed to glow with equal lustre either in the tempestuous whirlwind of passion, in transports of rage, enthusiasm, or despair, in the sparkling walks of light and airy comedy, or in parts of the lowest type of humour. He was a human kaleidoscope, upon whose face, which held no secrets, one might see, within a few seconds, the stupor of senility, the hope of youth, the beam of intelligence, or the dull leer of an idiot. "Damn him!" cried "Pivy," Kitty Clive, that queen of stage hoydens, "he can act a gridiron."

From the moment Garrick came on the stage until his exit, he was acting. There was no lapsing into indifference when he had said his lines; when silence was imposed upon his character, he held the scene



DAVID GARRICK.

FROM A PAINTING BY SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS.

by the most adroit by-play. Indeed, some of the "business" which he invented has passed into the sanctity of stage tradition.

As a manager Roscius was enterprising, honourable, and kind to his company; even to the Bellamys, the Clives, and the Abingtons, who made him weary by their airs and exactions. As a playwright, he was entertaining, if little more, with a gift for writing prologues, a ready wit, and a talent for jingle. Of course, he had the prevailing passion for improving Shakespeare—so much so, indeed, that he looked upon some passages in *Hamlet* as rubbish—but it must be remembered that he was only following time-honoured precedent.

The literary remains of Garrick which most appeal to us now are his letters. Nothing in all his plays can compare to a note which he wrote to Powell, the actor. Copies of it might be hung up in the green-room of every theatre of the English-speaking world.

"Study hard, my friend, for seven years, and you may play for the rest of your life. . . . Above all, never let your Shakespeare be out of your hands, or your pocket; keep him about you as a charm; the more you read him, the more you will like him, and the more you will

As
Manager

Good
Advice

act him. . . . Guard against the 'splitting the ears of the groundlings,' who are capable of nothing but dumb show and noise—do not sacrifice your taste and feelings to the applause of the multitude; a true genius will convert an audience to his manner, rather than be converted by them to what is false and unnatural; be not too tame, neither."

When we read sentences like these, we see David Garrick in his finest mood. We forget the man who swallowed flattery by wholesale, who courted peers, and had as many weaknesses as his less gifted neighbours. We need only remember Garrick the magnificent, who, when he played Richard to the Lady Anne of Mrs. Siddons, so terrified that stately young woman that she could hardly follow the orders which he had given her at rehearsal. It was in his stage clothes, not in his street dress, that Roscius was a hero.

Kitty Clive gave noble testimony to his genius in a note which she wrote Garrick on hearing that he proposed to leave the stage.

"In the height of the public admiration for you, when you were never mentioned but as Garrick, the charming man, the fine fellow, the delightful creature, both by men and ladies; when they were admiring everything you did,

and everything you scribbled,—at this very time, I, *the Pivy*, was a living witness that they did not know, nor could they be sensible, of half your perfections. I have seen you, with your magic hammer in your hand, endeavouring to beat your ideas into the heads of creatures who had none of their own. I have seen you, with lamb-like patience, endeavouring to make them comprehend you; and I have seen you, when that could not be done—I have seen your lamb turned into a lion; by this, your great labour and pains, the public was entertained; *they* thought they all acted very fine; they did not see you pull the wires.”

The
“Magic
Hammer”

It has been said that players are poor critics. If that be true, Mistress Clive must be set down as a shining exception to the rule.



“ Fair as some classic dome,
Robust and richly graced,
Your Kemble’s spirit was the home
Of Genius and of Taste—

“ Taste like the silent dial’s power,
That when supernal light is given,
Can measure inspiration’s hour,
And tell its height in heaven.

“ At once ennobled and correct,
His mind surveyed the tragic page,
And what the Actor could effect
The Scholar could presage.”

—*Thomas Campbell.*





JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE

TH**E**RE are curious contrasts in stage history. John Philip Kemble, the actor who fell heir to the dramatic mantle of the natural Garrick, was the very man who consulted Nature less than did any of his contemporaries. He always played, indeed, as if Nature, as Roscius had depicted her, were a rather vulgar mistress who had no place in the exalted atmosphere of the theatre. For the greatness of Kemble came from mind, not inspiration. Stately, formal, cold as a beautiful image carved in ice, with magnificent classic face (resembling that of his gifted sister, Mrs. Siddons), and a tall, manly figure, he suggested one of the noblest of the ancient Romans, rather than a sturdy actor of the English stage. It seemed as if the Forum, not the interior of Drury Lane or Covent Garden Theatre, should have been the place for his dignified eloquence and

Nature
Detroned

The
Stroller

measured, carefully considered movements. The only suggestion about him of foggy England came from an asthmatic cough which would not always down.

All that Kemble did was well and forcefully done. His power, as Leigh Hunt aptly said, was all "studied acquirement," while his appeal to his audiences was always directed to their heads, and never to their emotions; just as if he were saying to them: "See how deeply I have investigated this part! Am I not the scholar of actors?"

A strange theatrical succession, surely. Garrick all fire, and John Philip Kemble with no more warmth in him than that generated by the oil of the midnight lamp. Stranger still is it to recall that the hero of all this studiousness had risen from the ranks of the strolling players: those beings who possessed little more social rights or position than did the merest tramp. What a tragedy—what a compound of fun, misery, and vagabondia—was the life of the strollers in the eighteenth century! Tarrying in a provincial town one night, to play kings and queens and haughty peers before the boorish audience in a barn; and then hurrying on the next day, shabby and poor, to another barn, and to a dirty inn in which to rest their heads.



John Philip Kemble.

From a painting by Sir W. Beachey.

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We read, in amused pity, how one itinerant (perhaps some undiscovered genius with the powers of a Burbage) plays a *Priest of the Sun* with a borrowed bed-curtain for a robe, and a deal box for an altar, with no firmer floor than muddy stubble. We learn, too, how when Elrington, an Irish actor, opens a small theatre at Manchester, he is chased from the town for daring to "insult" a new hospital. He has offered to give the first receipts of his despised company to that institution, and the authorities are scandalised. Or, we listen to the tales of Stephen Kemble, one of John Philip's brothers, as he relates that once, when touring with a troupe of this kind, he kept in bed for two days, without food or farthings, and finally had to satisfy his hunger in an indigestible turnip field.

Such was the Bohemian life which was led by Roger Kemble, the begetter of a great line of players, as he wandered through Staffordshire, Gloucestershire, and other shires, producing Shakespeare for the benefit of the ungrateful inhabitants, and enjoying little more distinction than would the proprietor of a *Punch and Judy* show. Yet he was a conscientious actor, interesting and dignified, with a courtly manner which might strengthen, though it did not prove, his

Country
Barn-
stormers

Twelve Great Actors

A Great Family

claim of descent from an old English family of the Catholic faith. He had been in early youth, so some said, an humble hair-dresser; but aristocracy had been known to degenerate, even before his time.

Roger's wife, like the mother of Garrick, had Irish blood in her veins, but there was little trace of it in her children. What did show in them was her beauty, a correctness of enunciation, and a certain regal air which no amount of strolling could destroy. When she had married Roger, her father, the player Ward, said, sarcastically, that his daughter had obeyed him implicitly. He had forbidden her to marry an actor—and in taking Kemble she had assuredly married *no* actor!

The fruits of this union included Sarah, afterwards Mrs. Siddons, John Philip, fat Stephen, Charles (the future father of Frances Anne Kemble), and many more, who were wont to take part in the performances of their father's company in various capacities, from infant princes in arms upwards. Never was there a more striking proof of heredity in histrionic talent. There are other, if less curious, instances. To mention the American stage alone, one has but to think of the Booths, the Jeffersons, the Drews, the Hollands, and the Davenport.

John Philip Kemble was born February 1, 1757, at Prescot, while Roger's company was on circuit, as the expression goes, in Lancashire. Ten years later, we hear of him playing the young Duke of York, in the tearful *Charles I.*, to eke out the cast in the parental troupe. Then he is sent to a Catholic seminary in Staffordshire, to begin—*mirabile dictu!*—a severe education for the priesthood. For Roger Kemble had "hopes" for this good-looking, thoughtful boy, whom he would, not unnaturally, prefer to see an honoured ecclesiastic than a poor rustic barnstormer.

But John Philip is destined neither for bishop nor barn-player. He studies for several years at the seminary (where, it is gravely recorded, he entered as the happy possessor of "four suits of clothes, twelve shirts, four hats, eight nightcaps," a copy of *Æsop's Fables*, and other paraphernalia), and is then sent to the English Catholic College at Douay. Here he charms the professors by his declamations, becoming a prize pupil in oratory; and on one memorable day amazes his companions by reciting, without a break, some fifteen hundred lines of Homer. From this Douay experience, as Fitzgerald has pointed out, may have come that "semi-ecclesiastical flavour" and

Back to
Thespis

“ measured deliberation ” which gave such austere individuality to his acting.

While John Philip is pleasing the college, and making acquaintance with congenial Latin authors, a revolution is going on within his placidly working brain. He respects the priesthood, but he sees that it is not for him. The spirit of his father, the stroller, is at work; he longs to be an actor, and a distinguished one at that. Just before the Christmas of 1775 he is back in England, tired of Douay, and without hope of cassock or tonsure. But his father, furious at this defection, refuses absolutely to see him. John Philip is disappointed, penniless; nor is it until the members of Roger’s company give him a few hard-won shillings—to which his father reluctantly adds a guinea—that the son can get away to try his fortune in a rival band of mummers.

On Christmas Day he finds himself cheek-by-jowl with an impecunious player, stranded at a country inn, minus credit or serious expectations. The two young fellows strike upon a happy plan to put money in their purses. Kemble writes a letter in Latin to the village clergyman, while his fellow-pauper sends off one in English to a neighbouring lawyer. Both writers ask for alms, as Christmas bounty. The letters have the

desired result, and the now jolly travellers go on their way, proud of their ingenuity. On reaching the sought-for strollers, Kemble is at first refused an engagement. Finally, the manager relents; he is accepted, and appears at Wolverhampton as Theodosius (January 8, 1776).

Next he deserts this shabby troupe, disgusted, heart-sick, and roams about the country, friendless and out-at-elbows. In after years, when Kemble the magnificent held sway at the new Covent Garden Theatre, it became the fashion to tell—who does not love to revive the past of the self-made man?—how he had, in his hunger, filched apples from the orchards of rich squires, and lunched deliciously off hard peas. Once, as it was whispered, his landlady had seized his one shirt for an unpaid board bill. At another time, when he dared not leave a house where he was in debt for his keep, he whipped a top around his room, over the head of his sick landlord, and was thereupon, much to his delight, thrown out into the street.

So went the unkind world with the youth until he joined the famous York company, under the management of Tate Wilkinson, the versatile Bohemian, who had begun his successes by mimicking Sam Foote to the

Not for
Thalia

appreciative Garrick. Under Wilkinson, John Philip appeared as Macbeth and other personages, and brought out two now-forgotten plays of his own composition. One was a comedy styled *The Female Officer!* The union of Kemble and Comedy seems incongruous, despite the kindly criticism which Charles Lamb bestows upon this actor's lighter vein. We hear strange, weird stories about John Philip and his sister, Mrs. Siddons, singing a comic song; but who ventures to believe them? Thalia cherished no love for these two great ones of the stage. What the provincial critics already observed in the brother was the carefulness and thoughtful stamp of his tragic impersonations, with a certain sameness of spirit that would, long afterwards, give rise to the epigram:

“ John Kemble, see in all the parts you will,—
Lear, Romeo, Richard,—’t is John Kemble
still.”

As Macready could say of him, referring to a later period:

“ In all he did the study was apparent. The *ars celare artem* (the art of concealing art), with all his talents, he did not reach; but he

John Philip Kemble

47

compelled respect and admiration where he did, not excite the sympathies of his audience."

Personal
Pluck

But the spark of fire denied him in the mimic scene was not always absent in his personal feelings. There was in his breast, at least, a proud spirit which made even him, the itinerant, the equal of any man. He brooked no insult, and he was brought, more than once, on the old-fashioned field of honour.

An incident proves his pluck. During his stay at York, a certain Mistress Mason played Zenobia for her benefit, to the Teribazus of Kemble. A woman of fashion, who used to make a public nuisance of herself by talking loudly in her side-box, and commenting audibly on the merits or demerits of the actors, took it upon herself to shriek with laughter at the tragic efforts of the Mason. She screamed, too, at Kemble, whose style she affected to despise; and the poor joke was taken up by some officers who were near her in the box. Kemble, looking like an outraged gladiator, darted at them a look of contempt and a flash from the bird-like eyes. More laughter from the box, with protests from the house at such a clamour. Then John Philip stopped acting. He would go on, he said, when the lady had

“No
Apology”

finished her conversation ; adding, with fine sarcasm, that he feared the tragedy was interrupting her. Thereupon the woman was hissed out of the theatre.

The next morning her military friends demanded Kemble's dismissal from the company. The modest request was, very properly, refused point-blank. At the theatre that night the army officers, who disgraced the uniform they wore, called loudly on Kemble for an apology ; but the loyal audience, proud of his bravery, answered with cries of “ No apology ! ” John Philip, walking forward to the front of the stage, tried to make an explanation. But how dared a poor player bandy words with the gentlemen of His Majesty's service ? The aforesaid gentlemen felt as indignant as did a dead-and-gone duke when he heard that Garrick was receiving more salary than officers who might be called upon to die for their country. Finally Kemble shouted, in withering scorn : “ Ask pardon ? Never ! ” and walked majestically off the stage. He was the actor who always had respect for himself and his art, and whose example would always tend towards the dignity of his craft. In the end he secured a complete vindication.

During this theatrical apprenticeship,

Kemble wrote prologues diligently (the prologue was then in the blossom that precedes decay), studied Shakespeare, as he continued to do almost to the day of his death, and so far yielded to the temptations of the time as to alter the unalterable *Comedy of Errors*. He actually turned the two Dromios, poor unfortunates, into negroes. When a rural critic, pleased by the forceful intelligence of his acting, called him "a phenomenon in the theatrical world," John Philip's fame was beginning to grow wings.

In the autumn of 1781 Kemble was giving a round of characters in Dublin, at the historic Theatre Royal, in Smock Alley, to the then princely salary of £5 per week. The Irish treated him, as they were prone to treat real artists, with respect. He was, however, neither a Garrick or the beloved Spranger Barry; nor was there much within him to appeal to the Celtic temperament. One critic dubbed him "natural"—heaven knows why,—while another, more discerning, wrote to England that his tones were not adapted to the expression of extreme tenderness or violent grief. To Shakespeare, it was observed, he imparted a new and emphatic grace. He could not lose his identity in the heroes of the poet, or make them stand out in bold relief as *men*; but he

Stirring
Scenes

showed such an understanding of their literary qualities, and trod the boards with such unmistakable reverence for the Bard of Avon, that to see and hear him was an intellectual pleasure. Garrick used to send home the Dublinites thrilling with a dozen different emotions. Kemble made them feel that they had been improving their excitable brains.

Several stirring adventures befell the young actor during his stay in Ireland. Not the least of these was a bloodless duel which he fought with the manager of the Smock Alley house. On one luckless night Kemble acted Sir George Touchwood in *The Belle's Stratagem*, a comedy which has descended to us of the present generation through the delightful badinage of Ellen Terry. He did it, one may be sure, in dreary, stilted fashion. No part less suited to him could be imagined. The manager found fault with him for the want of life in his Touchwood; Kemble, resenting the criticism with all the strength of his pride, called out his censor and fought him on true French principles—without serious accident to either side. He lived to see the wisdom of dropping the *Belle's Stratagem* from his repertoire, just as he would live to see the badness of his Charles Surface in the *School for Scandal*.

Through the influence of Mrs. Siddons, that *Ultima Thule* of the provincial actor's hopes, a London appearance, was secured by Kemble in September, 1783, at Drury Lane Theatre. *Hamlet* was the play. Only a few days previously his fat brother, Stephen, had failed dismally as Othello, at Covent Garden, and it was now remarked wittily that the manager of the latter house had engaged the *big*, not the *great*, Mr. Kemble. The Hamlet of John Philip led to a furious discussion that helped to bring the actor into all the bolder prominence. It proved to be a monotonous performance, but reflective, poetically beautiful, and so finely balanced that there was no disguising the ability of the new light in the line of Shakespearian creation. He played "like a man in armour, with a determined inveteracy of purpose," and a wonderfully lucid delivery of the soliloquies.

During his life, Kemble wrote out the part of Hamlet many times; he was always trying to improve upon his idea of the Dane, and was never wholly satisfied with it. He was an ideal actor in this respect. No amount of his success could ever abate one jot of his energy, or make him think that he had no more to learn. He was quite unlike some modern Thespians, who are placidly

In London

Making
headway

willing to go on playing one part in one way for as long a time as audiences will tolerate them.

This season at Drury Lane was marked by other performances from Kemble. Among them was Richard III., who must have been almost too malevolent for so calm and noble an interpreter. When Mrs. Siddons played Constance to Kemble's King John, the audience noted eagerly the great physical resemblance between the two, at the same time that they found in Siddons a certain something—call it tragic depths, or what you will—not possessed by her brother. From now on Kemble begins to make headway, as he adds Lear, one of his finest characters, Othello, and more creations to his expanding list, and comes at last to the proud position of an enthroned London favourite.

In 1787 he married an actress, Mrs. Brereton, who, as Miss Hopkins, acted Maria in the original production of Sheridan's *School for Scandal*. It turned out to be a happy marriage, but free from the slightest tinge of romance. Even the pre-nuptial season was as unemotional as a novel of the Howells and James school. Kemble's proposal might have come from an iceberg; it certainly gave promise of neither billing nor cooing. "Pop, you may shortly learn



JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE AS "BAJAZET."

FROM THE PAINTING BY DE WILDE.

something to your advantage," he said to the widow one evening, as he came off the stage. She, puzzled by the words, asked her mother what they meant. That astute lady told "Pop" that Kemble had chosen this very unchivalrous way of proposing to her. Mrs. Hopkins was right. One morning Kemble and the Brereton were quietly married. The impetuous groom became so engrossed in some theatrical business during the afternoon that he nearly forgot an engagement to dine with the bride at kind-hearted Mrs. Bannister's lodgings.

In October, 1788, Kemble became stage-manager of Drury Lane, under the direction of Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Thenceforward some very unpleasant experiences were mingled with those of a more agreeable and artistic nature. Sheridan was a delightful, intoxicating companion, sparkling as champagne, and a genius into the bargain, but, like other "good fellows" of the same nature, he was not a satisfactory person with whom to have any business dealings. He may be described as a glorified mixture of Mr. Micawber and Harold Skimpole, upon whose shoulders debts sat as lightly as butterflies, save at such times as they pressed upon him too persistently for personal comfort. It is hard to think of the

Sparkling
Sheridan

man who wrote *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal* as impecunious, but if Sheridan had written twenty more equally successful comedies, and had lived unto the present day to reap royalties from them, he would still be dodging bills and bailiffs.

The combination of the careless, witty Richard Brinsley and the correct, stately Kemble looked paradoxical enough. The only wonder is that it lasted as long as it did. The author-politician constantly forgot to pay the debts incurred for the theatre; he allowed the scenery to degenerate into disgraceful shabbiness; there were many times when the performers refused to go upon the stage unless they received their overdue salaries. The ghost of Garrick should have paid him a reproachful visit, to remind him of the business-like arrangements of the old management. Kemble himself had to bear the brunt of this shiftlessness, notably so when he was once arrested through no fault of his own. He loved Sheridan like a brother at the same time that he railed at his methods and suffered a thousand petty martyrdoms in his cause. Now and then he would determine to break away from the shackles, as, for example, when he wrote to his debonair enslaver: "I am an eagle whose wings have been bound down by

frosts and snows; but I now shake my pinions and cleave unto the genial air into which I was born." It required all the glib eloquence of Sheridan to make John Philip withdraw his picturesque declaration of independence.

Yet it was during this uneasy reign that Kemble instituted one of the greatest of stage reforms, by giving to the several Shakespearian revivals in which he appeared an historic correctness of costume never before attempted. We know, indeed, how the older actors had defied all the canons of taste and plausibility by dressing their ancient heroes in the frills and furbelows of the early Georgian period. A Julius Cæsar in knee-breeches, an unkilted Macbeth, in a long-tailed coat and cocked hat, or a singing Witch with powdered hair, were among the anachronisms which one's forefathers swallowed whole, without an inkling that there was anything absurd in the exhibition. Kemble had himself once acted Othello in a garb that forbade analysis — the scarlet coat of a British army officer, with the trousers and turban of a Turk! But now *Henry VIII.*, *Macbeth*, and other plays were produced with an attention to detail (as the up-to-date bills would call it), and a beauty of scenery that might be appreciated even

A Great
Reform

A Land-
mark

in these exacting times. The scenic art and the dresser began to play star parts.

The year 1791 saw the demolition of Drury Lane Theatre, a building which lovers of the English drama would have done well to preserve, in a state of honourable idleness, as a memento of one of the most glorious epochs of the mimic art. Within its walls overflowing audiences had applauded Barton Booth, Wilks, Garrick, Macklin, Colley Cibber, the Abington, Kitty Clive, the Pritchard, and the rest of that grand galaxy. To look upon its old-fashioned stage was to picture a hundred triumphs never to return. The new Drury Lane, built to hold thirty-six hundred spectators, was opened in 1794. Two years later Kemble retired from the stage management; then he returned to it, and finally withdrew from the house for good. Sheridan had agreed that John Philip was to receive a share in the profits, but the actor found the author evasive; the charm of his personality could no longer keep the eagle from spreading out his pinions, and the rupture, so long threatened and predicted, came in 1802. It had been a wonderful management, rich in the production of old plays and of several new dramas, two of which can still be seen on rare occasions. These two were the gloomy



CATHERINE CLIVE.

REPRODUCED FROM A FRAGMENT OF AN ENGRAVING BY J. FABER.

Iron Chest and a translation of Kotzebue's *Stranger*. The latter was revived in America some seasons ago by Wilson Barrett, an actor whose classic face and deliberate style suggest a dim shadow of the Kemble.

Another new play, heralded as a very old one, was *Vortigern*, which was produced at Drury Lane as a recently discovered tragedy by Shakespeare. It turned out to be nothing but a clever forgery from the enterprising pen of the rascally Ireland. Mrs. Siddons, who evidently had her doubts as to the genuineness of the seemingly time-worn, musty manuscript, did not appear in the play, but Kemble took the title-rôle, and thus gave a sort of endorsement beforehand to that part of the town which was prepared to accept *Vortigern* as an addition to the literature of *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Romeo and Juliet*.

The representation of Ireland's tragedy, says an eye-witness,

" took place on Saturday, April 2, 1796. Being one of those who were fortunate in gaining admittance, and a seat on a second row in the pit, I am anxious, while my life is spared, to state what I saw and heard on this memorable occasion. The crowd and the rush for admittance were almost unprecedented. I do not think that

Ireland's
Forgery

“This
Solemn
Mockery”

twenty females were in the pit, such was the eagerness of gentlemen to gain admittance. Mr. Ireland's father, I remember, sat in the front box on the lower tier, with some friends around him. His son was behind the scenes. There was little or no disapprobation shown by the audience apparently until the commencement of the fifth act, when Mr. Kemble, it was probable, thought the deception had gone on far enough.”

It was then that Vortigern was called upon to deliver a wearisome speech addressed to “Sovereign Death”:

“Who hast for thy domain this world immense:
Churchyards and charnel-houses are thy
haunts—
And hospitals thy sumptuous palaces;
And, when thou wouldst be merry, thou dost
choose
The gaudy chamber of a dying king.
Oh! Then thou dost ope wide thy bony jaws,
And, with rude laughter and fantastic tricks,
Thou clapp'st thy rattling fingers to thy sides:
And *when this solemn mockery is o'er,*
With icy hand thou tak'st him by the feet,
And upward so; till thou dost reach the heart,
And wrap him in the cloak of 'lasting night.”

When Kemble came to the line, “And when this solemn mockery is o'er,” he put

into it such sepulchral emphasis, as if to indicate what a mockery he found *Vortigern* to be, that "the most discordant howl echoed from the pit that ever assailed the organs of hearing." The clamour lasted for ten minutes. Then Kemble, securing a hearing, redelivered the line with more sarcastic weight than before. *Vortigern* was "damned" in a sentence. It is singular that anyone could have been deceived for a moment by a play which, when it was not plagiarising from Shakespeare, was nothing but cloying commonplace. It would be interesting to know whether Kemble was imposed upon at first, or whether he produced *Vortigern* because he thought it good managerial enterprise to put on a tragedy that was reaping the benefit of so much preliminary advertising.

After retiring from Drury Lane, Kemble took a trip to the Continent, in search of well earned rest and that quiet, studious pleasure which was more satisfying to him than it would have been to many of his profession. From Paris he writes some domestic, unemotional letters to his family. "How does my mother do?" he asks his brother Charles. "Is she in the country, or does she prefer staying in town? Tell me everything about her health, and give my duty to

An
Unlucky
Line

In Paris

her, and to my father." He loved his mother in his austere way, and she, fortunate woman, had lived to see her stroller son—the Duke of York of Roger's family troupe—one of the brightest ornaments of the English stage.

"Paris," continues John Philip, "is such a scene of magnificence, filth, pleasure, poverty, gaiety, distress, virtue, and vice, as constitutes a greater miracle than was ever chronicled in history. The plays I have seen are *Iphigénie en Aulide*, by Racine, *Orestes*, by Voltaire, *La Mère Coupable*, by Beaumarchais, and a farce or two. I will not pretend to say anything of the actors, or the theatres, till I have seen a little more of them. Talma and I are grown very well acquainted; he seems an agreeable man."

Kemble was not over-impressed with the French methods of acting tragedy, although one might have supposed that its artificial air of dignity, its habit of walking on stilts, and the reverence paid at the Comédie Française to antique models would please him sincerely. The Parisians whom he met treated him most politely, after their fashion, and remarked to one another how much he resembled Napoleon Bonaparte, then their bright particular idol. Kemble tried on one of the Little Corporal's hats, that his new

friends might judge of the comparative capacity of their two heads, but the actor found nothing interesting or heroic in the modern Cæsar. He saw in him not a re-incarnation of a Roman, like himself, but simply a Corsican adventurer.

When he got to Madrid Kemble discovered a great actress in a melodiously named Señora Rita Luna. The lady seems to have been a female Garrick in the variety of her talents.

“Her countenance, from the amazing flexibility of her features,” wrote Kemble, with more than his usual ardour, “displays everything that passes in her mind. The action of ordinary performers fails simply because they know not how to dispose of their lifeless frames: that of La Rita Luna adds the most speaking graces to a voice so musical, that, in Spanish expression, her mouth might be styled the shell of Apollo. In a word I have only seen one actress [was she Mrs. Siddons?] to whom I think La Rita Luna inferior in the art.”

At another time Kemble is writing home in sorrow at the death of his father.

“How in vain have I delighted myself in thousands of inconvenient occurrences on this journey, with the thought of contemplating my

La Rita
Luna

Roger
Remble

father's cautious incredulity while I related them to him. Millions of things uninteresting, may be, to anybody else, I had treasured up for his surprise and scrutiny."

So had passed away a link between the old dramatic *régime* and the new, and whose talents shone, as it were, by inheritance to his children, rather than through anything he ever did himself. When he was born Anne Oldfield held the stage, as well as the hearts of all who saw her, and Betterton was still a recent, vivid memory; when he died, Edmund Kean was growing into manhood, and William Charles Macready was learning the Rule of Three.

After his return from abroad, in 1803, John Philip bought a sixth part of the interest in Covent Garden Theatre for £23,000, and became its manager. Things went on prosperously here until his supremacy was threatened by—a man of his own powers? No; by a child-actor. How the proud spirit of the finished, middle-aged player must have chafed at thus being thrown into eclipse by the tiny shadow of an infant phenomenon. This phenomenon was, unlike the one possessed by Mr. Vincent Crummies, a boy; none other, of course, but the "wonderful" Master Betty, over

whom staid theatre-goers went half or wholly mad, only to forget him in due course.

Master
Betty

William Henry West Betty supplies one of the most *bizarre* incidents of stage history, in showing to what absurd lengths an audience will sometimes carry its worship of undeveloped talent. He was a healthy, good-natured English lad who, having seen Mrs. Siddons play *Elvira*, was fired with a theatrical ambition which his father, perhaps with an eye to the pounds and shillings, was very careful to foster. In the summer of 1803, when scarcely twelve years old, the boy astonished the people of Belfast by an easy, letter-perfect performance of *Osman* in the tragedy of *Zara*. The spectators went into ecstasies over the "Young *Roscus*," without seeing the idiocy of holding up as a perfect actor the stripling who could not understand, much less feel, the emotions he tried to portray. He followed up *Osman* with *Douglas*, *Rolla*, and finally *Romeo*, which last part the Belfast critics pronounced a triumph of art. It never dawned upon them that there could be anything crude or repulsive in an eleven-year-old boy attempting to show the passionate love of a grown man.

From Belfast Master Betty went to other cities, playing impossible parts (impossible,

Foolish
Flattery

that is to say, for him) with an air of pretty innocence and an infantile assurance that were taken for genius. At Edinburgh he was coddled by learned professors who should have known better; it was even held that he was a more polished actor than John Philip Kemble; Home, the author of *Douglas*, said that Betty's playing of the title-rôle in that play "for the first time adequately realised his own imagining." When he came at last to London, to fill an engagement of twelve nights at Covent Garden, for fifty guineas a night and a clear benefit, the excitement knew no bounds. People forgot that there had been a David Garrick, or that a *few* good players had already graced the English stage. They crowded into the theatre in such numbers that on one evening, when the lad played Selim in *Barbarossa*, it was necessary to call out the military to preserve order. Persons were fatally crushed by the throngs which gathered in front of the theatre. When Betty went over to Drury Lane the gross receipts for twenty-eight nights amounted to over £17,000. During the following season he appeared alternately at both houses.

Phlegmatic King George III. went out of his royal routine to present the boy to his

Queen and their children; the great Pitt adjourned the House of Commons that the members might not have the unutterable sorrow of missing his Hamlet; Charles Fox petted and flattered him without stint, and Opie, the painter, tried to make him immortal on canvas. Not only Hamlet, but Richard III. and Macbeth suffered at the hands of Master Betty before he closed his triumphs, and it was noticed that the more liberties he thus took with the unprotected dramatists the weightier grew his purse, or the purse of his father. It was now gravely said that he was superior to Garrick, while the fact that he "mastered" Hamlet after three or four days of "study" did not appear a bit ludicrous, excepting to actors like Kemble, who never felt, after years of contemplation, that they had thoroughly fathomed the inmost recesses of the character.

An amusing story of "Young Roscius" is told by Macready, who played with him as one boy with another, and found him as full of fun and mischief off the stage as were any of their companions. When Betty stopped at an inn in Dunchurch, to dine and sleep, a lady well known in county society told the landlord she would "give anything" to get a sight of the phenomenon.

Infantile
Tragedy

The Aristocratic
Servant

There was but one way, explained Mine Host, in which she could accomplish this feat. "Mr. and Mrs. Betty and their son were just going to dinner, and if she chose to carry in one of the dishes, she could see him." The lady, very grateful for the hint, carried in the dish, in the guise of a servant, and was able to gaze fondly on the innocent object of her idolatry.

Master Betty was nothing more than a precocious youngster,—a pleasant freak,—with pretty blue eyes, a graceful presence, and the qualities of an intelligent parrot that can learn what speech is taught him. Like others of his kind, he soon sank into an obscurity made luxurious by his earnings, and died as late as 1874, rich and commonplace.

During the Betty delirium Kemble had the good sense not to antagonise the hero of so much popularity. He said little, however much thinking he may have done, played to half-empty benches when the boy was at the rival theatre, and wisely bided his time. When "Young Roscius" had begun to bore the fickle public, John Philip treated the town to his Coriolanus. The part was so admirably suited to his style that it has ever remained associated indelibly with his name. Mrs. Siddons was the truly

regal Volumnia in this sumptuous production. How successful the revival was, and what a grand pair of Romans brother and sister made, stage chronicle is careful to relate. It must have been an awful, sacrilegious moment, that unlucky evening when a presumptuous apple was thrown upon the stage and fell plump between the two of them. We can see the wrath flashing from the eyes of the Siddons, and the angry look of John Philip as he rushes to the front of the stage and offers a reward of many guineas to "any man who will disclose the ruffian who has been guilty of this act." There is a stir among the gallery "gods," who explain that the offending fruit was meant for the heads of some talkative females in the boxes. Kemble accepts the apology in the manner of a real Coriolanus, and the play proceeds. How the scene must have taken him back to the rough insults of strolling days! The strollers, however, would never object to apples. They could always eat them and save a supper.

More serious troubles awaited the actor. Early one September morning of 1808 Covent Garden Theatre was burned to the ground. With it went the costly scenery, the rich wardrobes, the dramatic and musical library attached to the house, and the

An
Offending
Apple

Covent
Garden
Burned

properties of all kinds. Twenty lives, more important still, were lost. As the insurance was inadequate, it seemed as if the result of all Kemble's work had gone up in the great column of smoke which hung over the theatre while the firemen were dragging from beneath the fallen walls the charred bodies of the victims. When James Boaden went to condole with him, Mrs. Kemble cried out dismally, "Oh, Mr. Boaden, we are totally ruined, and have the world to begin again!" But the stoical husband was composed enough as he shaved himself before the glass and thought of his losses. At length he broke out, in the tones of an injured emperor: "Yes, it has perished, that magnificent theatre, which, for all the purposes of exhibition or comfort, was the first in Europe!" Then he enumerated, with tragic precision, the principal things destroyed, and added: "Of all this vast treasure nothing now remains but the arms of England over the entrance of the theatre—and the Roman Eagle standing solitary in the market-place."

But the Roman Eagle was not deserted in his need. The Duke of Northumberland came forward with a loan of £10,000. The bond for this sum he generously cancelled when the corner-stone of the new Covent Garden was laid, with much pomp, in the

presence of the "First Gentleman of Europe," his growing-stout Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales. Discord arose on the opening of the house, owing to the advance which the management wished to make in the scale of prices. When Kemble, dressed for Macbeth, advanced to the front of the stage to read a poetic address of welcome, the enormous audience made such an uproar that he could hardly be heard. The performers were roundly hissed, the members of the Kemble family coming in for a particular share of disfavour, in the attempt of the public to show its objection to the new rates. Magistrates from Bow Street read the Riot Act to the remonstrants, and a number of arrests were made, but the excitement continued for sixty-six nights. In vain did Kemble plead the need of higher prices because of the constant increase in theatrical expenses. The "O. P." (Old Price) party went on convulsing the town, and provided a more exciting performance in the handsome new auditorium of Covent Garden than was to be found on the stage. The "O. P." rioter would dress for the theatre with as much care as did any of the actors who tried to speak their lines above the din. Armed with a watchman's rattle or a dustman's bell, a trombone or the horn

"O. P."
Riots

Innocent
Amuse-
ments

of a post-boy, he would take with him a white nightcap, a concealed placard of protest, and a bludgeon for use against such persons in the pit as might be disposed to dispute his own particular views.

“ He had to practise his O. P. dance and rave himself as hoarse as a night coachman in winter—he, at the hazard of his limbs, had to make the central rush from the back of the pit down to the orchestra, which trembled at every nerve of catgut it contained. And, in addition to all this, he became skilled in the most seemingly desperate sham fights, ending with roars of laughter, or real combats, to maintain his position in the field.”

Such scenes, more sensational than modern football, are hard to realise by the *blasé* playgoer of to-day, who seldom shows his disapproval by anything more radical than keeping away from the theatre. Kemble was obliged, at last, to compromise with the “ O. P. ” party by restoring the old prices in the pit and discharging his box-office keeper, who had innocently brought upon himself the anger of the rabble, and had been pelted with sticks and oranges when he tried to “ apologise ” from the stage.

John Philip took his farewell of the theatre in the summer of 1817, at Covent Garden.

John Philip Kemble

71
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Like Garrick, he was none too soon, for the star of Edmund Kean was in the ascendant. He said good-bye as Coriolanus, than which he could have chosen no more appropriate character whereby to be remembered.

Exit of
Coriolanus

“ I can never forget Kemble’s Coriolanus; his *entrée* was the most brilliant I ever witnessed,” wrote John Howard Payne. “ His person derived a majesty from a scarlet robe which he managed with inimitable dignity. The Roman energy of his deportment, the seraphic grace of his gesture, and the movements of his perfect self-possession, displayed the great mind, daring to command, and disdaining to solicit admiration. His form derived an additional elevation of perhaps two inches from his sandals. In every part of the house the audience rose, waved their hats, and huzzaed; and the cheering must have lasted more than five minutes.”

On the night when Kemble came forward to say farewell, a shout like thunder went up from the house, and it was long, on his retiring, before the applause ceased. Four days later he was given a public dinner, at which Talma made an address in English. He now went abroad to rest and die. The end came, peacefully enough, at Lausanne, in February, 1823.

The unceasing energy and integrity of

Gentleman
and
Scholar

Kemble form his own best epitaph. He was a gentleman and a scholar, who honoured the stage which he trod so long. Though the heart that beat under his waistcoat was not overwarm, and his pulse went a little slowly, he showed that brains, well applied, may ennoble a man in whom there is not a spark of genius.

Yet there was in him a leaven of humanity—the rare humanity of one who can appreciate a thrust made at his own armour. We picture him as he tells a dinner company, with an unusual, humorous gleam in the eagle eyes, how he was once called upon to give “satisfaction” to a gentleman with whom, “after a glass too much,” he had been foolish enough to quarrel.

“ ‘Sir,’ said I, ‘when I commit an error I am always ready to atone for it, and if you will only name any reasonable reparation in my power—’ ‘Sir,’ interrupted the gentleman, ‘at once I meet your proposal, and name one. Solemnly promise that you will never play Charles Surface again, and I am perfectly satisfied.’ Well, I did promise, not from *nervosity*, as you may suppose, gentlemen, but because, though Sheridan was pleased to say that he liked me in the part, I certainly did not like myself in it; no, no more than the gentleman who did me the favour to call it *Charles’s Martyrdom*.”

“ Death makes no conquest of this conqueror;
For now he lives in Fame, though not in life.”

Richard III.



EDMUND KEAN

THERE was a much-heralded ballet-spectacle billed for production at the Opera House, in London, during the year 1790. A Cupid being required for the piece, Michael Kelly, the musical director, had a number of children brought before him, that he might pick out a suitable candidate.

“ I struck one,” he relates, “ with a fine pair of black eyes, who seemed, by his looks and little gestures, most anxious to be chosen as the little God of Love. I chose him and little did I then imagine that my little Cupid would eventually become a great actor.”

Cupid was none other than Edmund Kean, who was to strike a hard, welcome blow at the artificial school of John Philip Kemble, restore nature to the stage, and figure as one of the mightiest players of the world.

Dan
Cupid

Mother
Carey

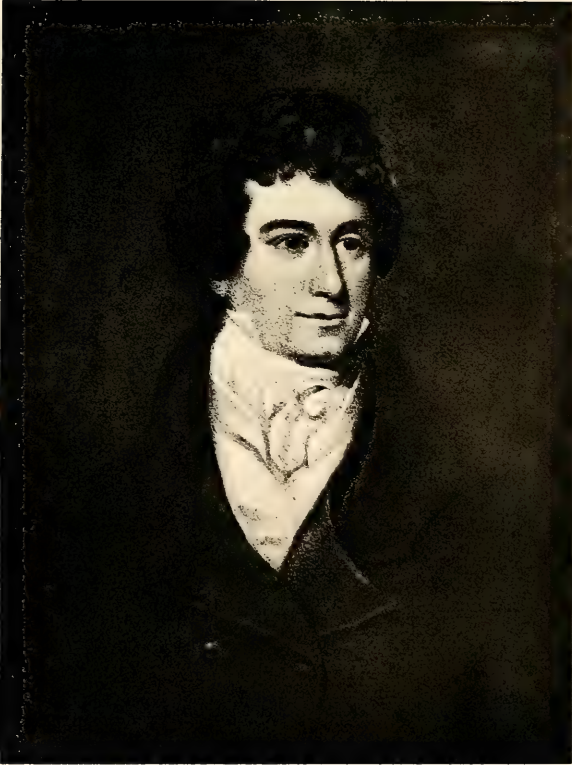
The birth of this strange child of fortune and misfortune is wrapped in a mystery which has never been altogether solved. His reputed mother — the woman, indeed, whom he acknowledged as such, and supported unto the day of his death — was an Anne Carey, the daughter of George Saville Carey, mimic, dramatist, versifier, anatomical lecturer, and impecunious vagabond. Through the latter Anne was wont to trace descent from George Saville, the famous Marquis of Halifax. But if there was aristocratic blood in the family it did not show overmuch in Mistress Carey. At the age of fifteen she ran away from home, turned strolling player and hawker, and then resided for a time under the protection of one Aaron Kean, a builder and stage carpenter. The result of this union was Edmund Kean, who was born November 4, 1787, in mean lodgings in Chancery Lane.

From the very first unkind Fate tried to make the surroundings of the future actor as squalid as possible. When he was but a few months old Anne Carey deserted her offspring, to wander off into the country to act by the roadside, or sell hairbrushes and pomatums, as necessity required. A poor couple in Soho adopted the child, only to have him snatched from them three years



Edmund Kean.

From an old print.



later when his mother returned to claim him. It was then that Anne took him to the Opera House, and that his beauty as Cupid so impressed an old lady in the audience that she asked if he were "really a living child." A few weeks more, and Edmund was enacting a demon in a Drury Lane pantomime.

Not a woman endowed with the maternal instinct is this Mistress Carey: her one idea is to use her son as a source of profit. So she keeps him busy in pantomime or spectacle, and before he is seven years old he is playing one of the goblins in the cauldron scene of *Macbeth*, as gorgeously revived by Kemble. It is then that he trips up some of his fellow-goblins, in boyish mischief, and is sternly rebuked by John Philip, to whom he answers, as apology, that it is "the first time he has ever appeared in tragedy."

He goes to school, in humble fashion, for a time, and then runs off to sea, shipping as cabin-boy in a vessel bound for Madeira. But he is soon disgusted with the life. He turns his stage talents to practical use, pretends to grow deaf and lame, is allowed to go to bed, and escapes all work. At Madeira, as the story goes, the physicians say his case is hopeless, poor fellow! He is

Uncle
Moses

sent back to England, and astonishes his kind-hearted attendants by dancing a horn-pipe when he has landed safely at Portsmouth.

Edmund now drifts back to London, where he is given shelter by his uncle, Moses Kean, a mimic and "general entertainer," who rejoices in a fair popularity and a wooden leg. Under Moses he studies Shakespeare diligently, visits the play, and learns to cultivate a great contempt for the unnatural methods of the formal Kemble. Miss Tidswell, an actress who takes a great interest in him, has a hard task in trying to subdue his wild, ungovernable temper. He runs away, now and again, to dance and do acrobatics at country inns, and to be as often brought back and locked up in his bedroom. In despair, a brass collar is placed around his neck with the legend: "This boy belongs to 9 Lisle Street, Leicester Square: please bring him home." Edmund merely laughs, as he covers the collar with a handkerchief.

When he is engaged to take juvenile parts at Drury Lane he attracts the attention of Mrs. Charles Kemble. One morning, before rehearsal, she hears the sounds of applause coming from the greenroom. "What is that?" she asks. "Only little Kean, acting Richard III.," is the answer. She walks

into the greenroom, where she finds the boy reciting lustily before an improvised, delighted audience. "He was very clever," Mrs. Kemble reports. Already he is father to the man. He has a restless air, with an Italian cast of features, pale, with piercing, "fatal" eyes, and dark, curly hair. When he reaches full growth he will not be more than five feet four inches in height.

Uncle Moses dies, so Miss Tidswell adopts him, and teaches him to spout Richard, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, and Lear. Into all of these parts he puts a vigour that would have been highly displeasing to the complacent Kemble. Next he falls in with a Mrs. Clarke, of Russell Square. "You are the little boy who can act so well?" she asks him. "What can you act?" "Richard III., Speed the Plow, Hamlet, and Harlequin," is the proud answer. "I should very much like to see you perform," urges Mrs. Clarke, and young Kean replies, with a bow: "I should be proud to act to you."

That evening he appears, unusually clean and dandified, in Russell Square. When Mrs. Clarke, not content with his costume, dresses him up with black riding-hat, feathers, and a real sword, he stares at himself in the glass, and vows that he never looked "so fine before." The visitors wax

Dawning
Genius

Glimpses
of Home

enthusiastic over his performance, as they throw him shillings and sixpences, while he pockets the money after some hesitation, and carries it home as a gift to Miss Tidswell. There is a bit of the street arab in him now, as there will be unto the end, but he will always be generous.

Mrs. Clarke now adopted Edmund, gave him a glimpse of the refined home life which he had never known, and took the greatest pains with his education. But a sudden insult destroyed all this happiness. One of her friends made a sneering remark about him, which was enough to wound him to the quick, and send him running away to Bristol, in hopes of getting passage to America. He was not yet to see the United States. In a short time he was back in London, footsore and penniless, under the protection of Miss Tidswell. The Clarkes had cast him off in disgust.

Soured by his experience, and with the vagabond spirit surging through his veins, he turned tumbler at Bartholomew Fair, imitated birds and monkeys, and distinguished himself, in one of his athletic feats, by breaking both his legs. That was an injury from whose effects he never quite recovered. Then he was with the Tidswell again, as she helped him to study Hamlet.

When he came to the line, "Alas! poor Yorick!" she would make him say, "Alas! poor Uncle!" so that he might put due expression into it by thinking of his grief for the lamented Moses Kean. Next he turned his attention to Shylock, a character which had for him, even then, an irresistible attraction. "He's not such a devil as black-looking Mr. Kemble makes us believe," he told the actress. What he saw in the Jew was the human touch which made the money-lender kin to all men.

For a time Edmund leads the life of a poor stroller. He plays in country towns, and wanders about in company with his mother, as that shiftless lady, once more on the scene, hawks about her wares. This maternal partnership does not thrive. Anne Carey disappears, and will not turn up again until her son is in a position to pay her £50 a year. Once he recites at Windsor, to King George III., and great is the scrimmage to procure him clothes fit to appear in before royalty.

In the year 1806 an earnest, white-faced youth was playing fifth-rate rôles at the Haymarket Theatre in London. No one would have given a penny for his chances of fame. "Look at the little man," cried the contemptuous performers; "he is trying to

“Too
Little”

act!” The subject of all this ridicule was Kean. They might jeer at him, but there was that in his haughty spirit (possibly an inheritance from the proud Savilles) which no discouragement could destroy. He went on studying, thinking, working, and—not so wisely—drinking stiff glasses of brandy.

The next year saw him at Belfast, where he played with the formidable Siddons. “Who is that horrid little man?” she asked the manager, pointing to Edmund. But she was pleased with him when he acted Jaffier in *Venice Preserved*. Already his genius was beginning to take form; he showed a power to lift stage characters out of the realm of mere literature, and bring them to life before the curtain. There was dramatic force and freedom from conventionality in all he did. Yet Mrs. Siddons would not admit that he could ever become remarkable. “There is too little of him wherewith to make the great actor,” she explained.

There was no littleness about his pluck. At Sheerness, when Edmund was playing Alexander the Great, a man shouted from the stage-box: “Alexander the Great! It’s Alexander the Little!” “Yes, but with a great soul,” cried the actor, turning his head in the direction of his critic. At another time he disappeared from his company for

three whole days, because he had been asked to play Laertes to the Hamlet of Master Betty. That was a humiliation he would not tolerate. On his return, after having eaten nothing but the turnips and cabbages vouchsafed by a neighbouring field, he said, undauntedly: "I won't play second to any man living, except to John Kemble!" What an odd fellow he must have been, to be sure! His wife used to say of him, in after years: "He would mope about for hours, walking miles and miles alone, with his hands in his pockets, thinking intensely on his characters. No one could get a word from him." That wife had no bed of roses. When he married her (she was a stroller nine or ten years older than himself), the manager of their company turned them adrift on the ground that matrimony had ruined any possible interest that an audience might feel in Kean.

From now on, for a stormy period of six or seven years, the actor and his wife led the life of two dogs. Nay, 't was worse than that, for there were times when they almost starved. Hot-headed, disillusioned by disappointments, impatient of the slightest reproof, Kean was always quarrelling with managers, travelling from company to company, and never quite sure where the

A Proud
Spirit

Grinding
Poverty

money for the next day's dinner, or the next night's bed, was to be procured. It was all very well to say that art should be its own reward. This was not art; it was destitution. No posting from town to town in well-appointed stage-coaches; no putting up at luxurious inns; no acting in sumptuous theatres, to the noble accompaniment of fine support, picturesque scenery, and cultured, crowded audiences.

One instance shows in what fashion the Keans were obliged, too often, to make their progress. At Birmingham Kean was in debt to his landlord, and before he could leave the town for Swansea, where he was to play next, he had to borrow a couple of sovereigns. Then, with but a few shillings in the family purse, he set out with his poor wife to tramp the whole distance. "Dressed in blue from head to foot, with his dark, sharp, resolute face, a black stock, and four swords over his shoulder suspending the family bundle of clothes," the tragedian looked like "a poor little navy lieutenant whom the wars had left on half-pay and penniless." Kean was penniless, with a vengeance, when he reached Bristol; he could not move on until he wrote to Swansea and got his new manager to send him some money to pay for his keep in the

former place. From Bristol husband and wife, with their first-born, a boy, took passage for Newport on an ill-smelling tar barge, while from Newport they trudged along, weary and footsore, to Swansea. Unfortunate Mary Kean! A little later, on her arrival at Waterford, another son, to become famous afterwards as Charles Kean, was brought into the world.

There was a thin rift in the clouds of despair after the birth of Charles. The Kears were well and favourably known in Waterford, where the wife had once been governess to the children of a woman of fortune. This lady warmly interested herself in Kean's benefit, with the result that a large audience applauded his playing of the hero in a stilted tragedy by Hannah More. The house refrained, too, from showing any disapproval of the atrocious acting of Mrs. Kean, now recovered from her confinement, and ready to murder any unfortunate heroine for a few shillings. It paid tribute to the worth of the wife and mother by clapping her as vociferously as it did her husband. She deserved every bit of the enthusiasm, poor woman, for if she were not an artist herself, she bore a great deal from art in the person of her turbulent spouse. Following the play, Kean enlivened things by dancing on

A Family
Benefit

The
Tragic
Monkey

the tight-rope and sparring with a pugilist, after which he acted Chimpanzee, the monkey, in the melodramatic pantomime of *La Pérouse*. In the pantomime he showed himself the born actor by giving to the death of Chimpanzee a tragic intensity that moved the house to tears. A monkey is a source of laughter, not of pathos: to invest his grotesque gestures with the spirit of tragedy seems no easier than to extract eloquence from a Chinese idol.

At Dumfries Kean gives an entertainment in an inn for sixpence a head admission. The forty pounds that he got from the Waterford benefit has vanished into thin air, or gone for cognac and the support of his family. In another town he sends out a bellman to cry his performance, and when he reaches the quaint city of York he is so poor, so battered by misfortune, that he tries to enlist in the army as a private soldier. Fortunately, he is dissuaded from such rashness. Yet life is almost hopeless, nor does the sight of his wan wife and the two half-starved babies help to cheer him. These days sink into his soul, and leave there bitter recollections that no amount of future success will wipe out. Through it all there is that indomitable pride which always makes a poor man, or an ill-used man, a furnace of

discontent. How Kean's sensitive heart rebels as he asks for a glass of wine at a public-house, and is refused it until he puts the money in the waiter's outstretched palm! The wound of that rebuff never heals. Years later, when, rich and famous, he chances to be at the same inn, he recognises the landlord who had suspected him for a knave, and who now fawns upon him; with a torrent of invective the actor rushes off to another hostelry. Kean resented, to the last, the indignities put upon him in his youth, nor had he enough philosophy to reflect that the world will always treat people according to their outward condition. Because he felt himself to be a genius, he thought that his shabby clothes should receive the same respect as would the rich raiment of a nobleman. But the world, very naturally, saw only a sharp-eyed, unkempt little tramp, with a hungry wife and two half-clad children.

When he wished to view things through rosy spectacles he would have recourse to alcohol. There would be forgetfulness of poverty, with visions of wealth and grandeur, as he saw himself the rival of a Kemble, or the successor of David Garrick. Then would come the inevitable disillusion; when the brandy was gone down, would fall the castles of the air. He disappeared from

Brutal
Criticism

Exeter for three days on one occasion, that he might build a whole town of such castles. When he returned, and was questioned about his absence, he replied magnificently: " I have been doing a noble action: I have been drinking these three days with a brother actor, who is leaving Exeter, to keep up his spirits! "

That must have been a stirring time in the island of Guernsey, where Kean encountered an unkind local critic whose strictures well-nigh ruined the poor player. It was one of your " slashing " sort of critiques, and is well worth reproducing, if only to show how easy it is to be clever, and unjust, at the expense of the talent which the writer is too stupid, or too prejudiced, to see.

This was the awful " roast " that Kean read in the Guernsey paper:

" Last night a young man, whose name, the bills said, was Kean, made his first appearance as Hamlet, and truly his performance of the character made us wish that we had been indulged with the country system of excluding it and playing all the other characters. This person has, we understand, a high character in several parts of England, and his vanity has repeatedly prompted him to endeavour to procure an engagement at one of the theatres in the Metropolis; the difficulties he has met with

have, however, proved insurmountable, and the managers of Drury Lane and Covent Garden have saved themselves the disgrace to which they would be subject by countenancing such impudence and incompetency. Even his performance of the inferior characters of the drama would be objectionable, if there was nothing to render him ridiculous by one of the vilest figures that has been seen either on or off the stage; and if his mind was half so qualified for the representation of Richard III., which he is shortly to appear in, as his person is suited to the deformities with which the tyrant is supposed to have been distinguished from his fellows, his success would be most unequivocal. As to his Hamlet, it is one of the most terrible misrepresentations to which Shakespeare has ever been subjected."

There was one place in which this cutting critic showed his own ignorance by complaining that the "young man" billed as Kean manifested an entire

"unconsciousness that anyone is before him, and is often so forgetful of the respect due an audience, that he turns his back upon them in some of those scenes in which contemplation is to be indulged in, as if for the purpose of showing his abstractedness from all ordinary subjects."

Guernsey
Wit

“ Unman-
nered
Dogs ”

Here the critic was censuring the actor for doing exactly the right thing. But the rustics thought the writer a mighty clever fellow, and determined that the subject of so much brilliant satire must be a barn-stormer. The next evening, when Kean came on the stage to play Richard, the audience hissed him and jeered in a way that made him set his teeth in rage. But he controlled himself for a time. Perhaps his acting of the Duke would appease the house. The hope was vain; the merriment and hissing went on as gaily as ever; the “ young man ” billed as Kean was to be made the butt, not the hero, of the performance. With that Kean, his eyes flashing, his face sardonic enough to picture Richard in his worst mood, advanced to the front of the stage with the furious cry:

“ Unmannered dogs! stand ye when I command!”

“ Apology! Apology!” screamed a yokel from the pit, in the midst of the silence which Kean’s sudden rebuke had caused. “ Apology!” scornfully re-echoed the actor; “ apology, indeed!” Here a second’s pause. “ Then take your apology from this remark—that the only proof of intelligence you have yet given is in the proper application of the words I have just uttered!”

The result may be imagined. Kean was hurried away from the indignant audience by the nervous manager, and had it not been for the Governor of the island, who befriended him, a bruised head might have followed his damaged reputation.

When Kean got safely away from Guernsey, and once more trod English provincial boards, affairs seemed to go from bad to worse. But deliverance was at hand. Elliston engaged him to play in melodrama at the London Olympic for a salary of £3 a week. That sum meant comparative luxury to Kean; he accepted the offer, although he had vague hopes that through the influence of a certain kind patron he might secure the dream of his life—a *début* at Drury Lane. On his way to London he filled several minor engagements, to put a little money in his purse, and he gave out, in order to increase his importance with the managers, that he was going not to the Olympic, but to Drury Lane Theatre. He only sighed that he was not telling the truth. At Weymouth he encountered the provoking Master Betty, who was always his *bête noir*, and in whose acting he saw, very naturally, nothing but the prattle of an automaton who was now grown into manhood, and losing both the looks and popularity of his boyish days.

Rays of
Hope

Fortune
Relents

The manager asked Kean to support Betty. With an Olympian scowl the little man refused, and stayed away from the theatre for two days, in actual terror that he might be found, and made to play with the now fattening prodigy. He would walk from town to town, and receive a hundred cuffs from unkind Fortune—but play second to Master Betty? Never!

It was the last time Kean had ever to worry about infant phenomenons. The real turn in fortune came a few days later, when he was playing at Dorchester. One evening he left his wife and boys in their humble quarters, and trudged off to the theatre to do Octavian in *The Mountaineers* and Kan Kou, a savage, in a pantomime. In a few hours more he was home again, flushed with a sudden hope and tingling with excitement. "My fortune 's made!" he cried. Then, in answer to Mrs. Kean's startled look of enquiry, he told his story:

"When the curtain drew up I saw a wretched house; a few people in the pit and gallery, and three persons in the boxes, showed the quality of attraction we possessed. In the stage-box, however, there was a gentleman who appeared to understand acting—he was very attentive to the performance. I, seeing this, was determined

to play my best. The strange man did not applaud, but his looks told me that he was pleased. After the play I went to my dressing-room under the stage to change my dress for the Savage, so that I could hear every word that was said overhead. I heard the gentleman of the stage-box ask Lee [the manager] the name of the performer who played Octavian. 'Oh,' answered Lee, 'his name is Kean — a wonderful clever fellow! He 's going to London — a great man, sir!' 'Indeed!' said the gentleman. 'He 's certainly very clever, but he is very small.' 'His mind is large; no matter for his heighth,' said Lee. By this time I was dressed for the Savage, and I therefore mounted the stage. The gentleman bowed to me, and complimented me slightly upon my playing, observing: 'Your manager says you are engaged in London.' 'I am offered a trial,' said I, 'and if I succeed, I understand I am to be engaged.' 'Well,' said the gentleman, 'will you breakfast with me to-morrow? I shall be glad to have some conversation with you. My name is Arnold; I am the stage-manager of Drury Lane Theatre.' I staggered as if I had been shot."

Manager
Arnold

Kean breakfasted the next day with Arnold, when he agreed to a three-years' engagement at Drury Lane, beginning with a salary of £8 a week. "Let but Howard live," he cried to his wife (speaking of his

Trying
Days

elder boy, who was lying very ill), "and we shall be happy yet." Howard died a few days later, and such happiness as Kean was to have—it was not so plentiful or healthy even in the most dazzling days of his glory—must be taken without this early companion of his privations.

Fortune seemed bound to try Kean's spirit once again. It was more than two months after his arrival in London before he could secure the coveted *début*. His contract with Elliston arose, like Banquo's ghost, to trouble him; Arnold was furious when he heard about it; Kean protested that Elliston had tried to get out of the agreement; the manager of the Olympic denied this, and the war of recrimination went on until a compromise was effected, leaving Kean free to play at Drury Lane. During this time he was receiving no salary, and living in a garret on nothing much more substantial than bread, water, and hope, with an occasional pull at the inevitable flask. He haunted the office of the theatre while the committee of management deferred his appearance and haggled among themselves over the dying fortunes of the house.

At last it was suggested that he should appear as Richard III. But Kean was immovable as a rock on this point. "It's

to be Shylock, or nothing!" he said, for he feared that his Richard was not the best character, however well he acted it, in which to seek first the favour of the town. Everyone in and about the theatre cherished for him the most profound contempt. They saw no signs of genius—nothing, indeed, save a shabby, unheroic stroller. "Who is the little man in the capes?" they asked, as they laughed at his strange garb. The "little man in the capes" kept open his eyes and ears, and never forgot those who had gibed at him. But the worry was driving him almost mad; once he thought of killing himself, as the most comfortable way out of his misfortunes.

The eventful night did arrive, at last, on January 26, 1814. As he hurried away from his squalid room, with a parting kiss to his wife and his son Charles, he said gloomily: "I wish I was going to be shot!" Few cared if he succeeded or not; the players at the theatre hoped that the presumption which he displayed would meet with rebuke.

When Kean came out of his dressing-room and walked into the greenroom, the company gave him one horrified glance. Could their eyes tell the truth? Yes! He had on a *black wig!* The idea was awful,

**Darkness
Before
Dawn**

Sheer
Audacity

even sacrilegious. How could a fool play Shylock in black hair when time-honoured tradition called for an aggressive red wig? The average actor is like the average man in every other profession, in that he fears innovation.

Imagine poor Kean's feelings as he stepped on the stage for his first scene and gazed at the wretchedly small audience. That night was to make or ruin him, and all the signs pointed to ruin. No enthusiastic interest to spur him on; nothing but sneering companions and a half-empty pit. Yet he never faltered. There was something in his mien that riveted the attention of the spectators from the first moment of his entrance. In a few minutes they were absorbed; as the play progressed they were charmed, delighted; after the trial scene, with the humiliation of the Jew, they fairly rose at the actor and acclaimed him great. Kean had won, and all the misery of the past seemed a troublous, impossible nightmare. Never, in after years, had he half so sweet a triumph, or half so fine revenge upon his enemies.

He deserved all the praise that the house bestowed, for he had given a new, original Shylock, throbbing with emotion, sometimes pathetic, with the pathos of an Israelite cast out from among the Gentiles, and

sometimes terribly vindictive. 'T was not the wicked, melodramatic Jew over which the gallery had been wont to grow virtuously indignant, but a character of which it might be said, as Pope did of Macklin's Shylock :

“ This is the Jew that Shakespeare drew.”

Kean's alternations of rage, sorrow, and scorn, of love for his daughter Jessica, and of hate for the Christian dogs who spat upon him were given with such effect that the audience seemed to be reading Shakespeare, as Coleridge would put it, “ by flashes of lightning.” In short, it was a human, flexible Shylock, with “ an indefinite outline about it, like a figure with a landscape background.”

When the performance had ended, Kean found a sudden change in the humour of his fellow-players. Jeers had given place to fawning, as they crowded round the “ little man in the capes ” with proffers of oranges, negus, and polite criticisms. But he of the capes rushed out of Drury Lane, only bent on telling the glad news to the wife awaiting him in the garret. “ You shall ride in your coach yet,” he shouted as he entered the room; “ and you, Charlie,” —to his son,—“ shall go to Eton!” “ Oh,

A Human
Shylock

Lord
Byron's
Praise

that Howard had lived to see it!" he added sadly. Mary Kean, poor lady, would ride in her coach, as he promised, and cry in it, too, before she had done with it.

One of the first to pay a sincere homage to the actor was Lord Byron. "You have got a great genius amongst you, and you don't know it," he said to the members of the Drury Lane committee, who hardly had time to realise the value of the prize upon which they had so accidentally stumbled. Soon the critics were turning out in large numbers to see the wonder, and one of them declared that his appearance was "the first gleam of genius breaking athwart the gloom of the stage." Crowded houses, flattery, the attention of the nobility, and the many other tributes that await the popular English actor now greeted Edmund Kean. Of all these tokens of success he cared the least for the company of men of rank. He felt ill at ease in their society, as if he feared that he was being patronised for his talents at the same time that he was looked down upon for his lowly origin. A favourite tavern, with a few congenial spirits, suited him better than the dinner-table of a prince. When he was asked, later on, to play at a private house, before the Duke of Wellington, he refused with a rudeness almost brutal. He



EDMUND KEAN AS "SHYLOCK."

FROM A SKETCH BY JOHN NEAGLE.

was not invited to appear before the Duke as a gentleman, he growled, but as "a wild beast, to be stared at."

Shylock was followed by Richard III., which may be considered as the greatest of all Kean's parts. He gave to the character a picturesqueness and human touch which had not been known since the days of Garrick, making Richard stand out as a crafty, plausible hypocrite, and excelling in the death-scene, where he fought madly, like one "drunk with wounds." When he at last stood helpless, with hands outstretched and the sword taken from him, he made an impression that could never be effaced from the mind of the spectator. "By Jove!" cried Byron, after seeing the new Richard, "he's a soul. Life—nature—truth, without diminution or exaggeration!"

In one sentence the author of *Don Juan* summed up the secret of Kean's power. Kean made the very most of his characters without overstepping, save on rare occasions, the domain of nature. He put on his colours boldly, brilliantly, with a thick brush, but no one saw anything garish or improbable in the picture. Great in scenes of passion and of tragic intensity, impetuous in declamation, and striking in all the "business" of the play, he carried his audience with

King
Richard

Force and
Intellect

him, from the rising to the lowering of the green curtain, in a manner worthy of Garrick. Some critics have, indeed, held that Kean was a finer tragedian than Garrick, and among these seems to have been Edwin Booth, who thought that the latter must have been at his best in comedy, rather than in the domain of Melpomene. Be that as it may, there is no denying the wondrous genius of Kean, or the success with which, as a rule, he could triumph over such physical defects as insignificant stature and marked harshness of voice in the upper register.

He was an intellectual actor, too, if not exactly a subtle one, although it became the fashion to say that all that he did was careless, unpremeditated, and the pure offspring of inspiration. No one scoffed at this inspiration fallacy more than did Kean himself. When he complained to Mrs. Garrick, "David's" widow, that the critics said he did not study his characters, the dear old lady replied ingenuously: "You should write your own criticisms; David always did."

Mrs. Garrick had a warm admiration for Kean, and called him "David's successor." It must have been a pretty scene when the venerable lady coaxed him to dinner and,

Edmund Kean

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with a show of tenderness for the departed, and of courtesy for the living, tragedian, made him sit down in Garrick's favourite chair. Kean was the only one, she said gracefully, who was worthy to fill such a place. It was not so delightful, however, when she tried to instruct Kean in one of his parts, and to make him introduce certain "business" because "David" had used it in the same scene. There is another entertaining tradition about the intimacy of these two curiously matched friends. When Kean tried the low-comedy part of Abel Drugger, wherein Garrick had been so admirable, the widow wrote him this laconic note:

In
Garrick's
Chair

"DEAR SIR,—You can't play Abel Drugger.

"Yours, etc.,

"EVA GARRICK."

To which the new Abel replied:

"DEAR MADAME,—I know it.

"Yours,

"EDMUND KEAN."

Mrs. Garrick was right. Edmund Kean could not act Abel, nor did he ever shine in comedy with half the rare meteoric brilliance that illumined his tragedy. In that respect he was inferior to the versatile

Dazzling
Success

“ David ”—and the loyal Eva Garrick was not blind to the fact.

For some seasons there was nothing but a whirl of success for the “ little man in the capes.” The money came piling in on him so fast that he could afford to dress in anything he wanted, be it velvet or cloth of gold. During the season of 1814 Kean played sixty-eight nights at Drury Lane, to gross receipts of £32,642, and the number of persons who visited the house was 166,742. It need hardly be added that the original contract, by which Kean was to play for £8 per week, was soon cancelled.

Meanwhile the fame of the new star spread to Covent Garden and threatened the throne of honest Kemble. “ I must go see him,” said John Philip, generously, and when someone said, “ Oh, Kean ’s only a croaker,” he answered: “ Perhaps his croaking is preferable to some people’s acting.” The advent of Kean was, indeed, a blow to the Kemble style of acting, which hastened, no doubt, the retirement of the imposing Coriolanus.

The Richard of Kean was followed, during his first season, by Hamlet, Othello, and Iago. While all three impersonations drew forth liberal praise, it is fair to suppose that the best of them was the Iago, which he played with naturalness and force. It was

an Iago of the dangerous, hale-fellow order, who might well deceive an Othello, instead of a villain of a Bowery cast of countenance. His Othello was acted right royally, but one element of grandeur, and a necessary one, must have been sadly missing. Kean was too small to look the Moor. As seasons went on he essayed many more parts, sometimes with fine results, and at others with only fair success. One of his worst creations was Romeo, in which he was dreadfully unloverlike (so much so as to make one feel like pitying the ardent Juliet for her misplaced affection), while one of his best proved to be that consummate scoundrel, Sir Giles Overreach, in Massinger's *New Way to Pay Old Debts*. The effect of his first performance of Sir Giles was so astounding that one might doubt the anecdotes about it, were they not matters of sober record. The whole character was superbly done, but the last act, in which Sir Giles bursts into a torrent of malevolence at the foiling of all his plots, furnished such a vivid exhibition of human passion, at once terrible and magnificent, that each individual hair on the head of each spectator stood up in awe. Lord Byron, as much a bag of nerves as Kean himself, had a convulsive fit; women went into hysterics, and one of the actresses

Sham
Wounds

fainted on the stage. When Kean reached home, to give his wife the news of his triumph, she asked him what Lord Essex thought of the performance. "Damn Lord Essex!" exclaimed the actor; "the *pit* rose at me!" It was to the pit that he always played, for there, he said, were the best critics. For the aristocrats in the boxes, or for the occupants of the gallery, he cared little or nothing.

There was one occasion when he disappointed an audience. He went a few miles out of London to dine with some theatrical cronies, yielded to the temptations of the flowing bowl, and was soon quite unconscious that there was to be a play at Drury Lane that evening, or that he was to be the hero. The house waited in vain for the rising of the curtain, but no Kean came, and indignant protests began to be heard in different parts of the house. Finally the manager appeared, to tell a cock-and-bull story to the effect that the actor had been thrown from his carriage and dislocated his shoulder. The people went home full of sympathy. When Kean came to his senses the next morning he was mortified at what had happened, and no less chagrined when he found that the enterprising manager had made the most minute arrangements to

corroborate the fiction of the dislocated shoulder. But there was nothing to be done but put his arm in a sling, and play the invalid with as much fidelity to nature as he had shown in Shylock or Iago. Such is the tale, and while it has never been accompanied by a sworn affidavit, it bears on its face the stamp of plausibility.

There are so many incidents in the fitful career of our faulty hero — his trips to the Continent, his contest with Junius Brutus Booth, and his rivalry with Young, etc.—that to describe a tenth of them would be impossible in the small compass of these studies. One feature of the Kean-Booth controversy must, however, be chronicled, in the words of Barry Cornwall. Booth had been secured for Drury Lane to match his prowess, as Iago, against the Othello of his adversary.

“ Booth at first seemed to shrink from the combat. He eventually, however, overcame his fear, and went through the part of Iago manfully. But Kean!—no sooner did the interest of the story begin, and the passion of the part justify his fervour, than he seemed to expand from the small, quick, resolute figure which had previously been moving about the stage, and to assume the vigour and dimensions of a giant. He glared down upon the now diminutive Iago; he seized

A Faulty
Hero

Poor Iago

and tossed him aside, with frightful and irresistible vehemence. Till then we had seen Othello and Iago, as it were, together: now the Moor seemed to occupy the stage alone. Up and down, to and fro, he went, pacing about like the chased lion who has received his fatal hurt, but whose strength is still undiminished. The fury and whirlwind of the passions seemed to have endowed him with supernatural strength. His eye was glittering and bloodshot, his veins were swollen, and his whole figure restless and violent. It seemed dangerous to cross his path, and death to assault him. There is no doubt but that Kean was excited on this occasion in a most extraordinary degree, as much as though he had been maddened by wine. . . . One comedian, a veteran of forty years' standing, told us that when Kean rushed off the stage in the third act, he (our narrator) felt all his face deluged with tears—'a thing, I give you my word, sir, that has never happened to me since I was a crack, thus high.' "

It is not strange that Booth would not act with Kean the next night. The latter never could brook a rival.

Kean paid two visits to America. On his first appearance in New York, in November, 1820, crowded houses welcomed him; tickets for his performances were sold by auction, and his *début* in the new world assumed

the air of a national event. Other cities were equally appreciative. It was only on his return to Boston, for a supplementary season, that anything unpleasant occurred. It was now approaching summer; many Bostonians had gone into the country—and, what was no less to the point, the novelty of Kean had been exhausted by his first engagement. When he went to the theatre one evening he found but twenty people in front to see his Richard, and, furious at the slight (forgetful, too, of the days when he had played to empty benches in the English provinces), he refused to appear on the stage. Nor did the American atmosphere prove soothing to his irritable nerves; on the contrary, he showed actual symptoms of insanity during his visit, as when he visited Bloomingdale Asylum, and threatened to commit suicide. When asked by the superintendent to walk up on the roof of the institution to see the fine view, he said excitedly: "Yes, I'll walk on the ridge of the roof and take a leap. It's the best end I can make to my life!" But his friends kept tight hold of him until the fit had passed. He was more sane when he had an urned monument placed over the remains of George Frederick Cooke, in St. Paul's churchyard, New York. We hear strange

American
Incidents

Twelve Great Actors

Enter
Madame
Eve

stories of his growing suddenly sentimental as he views the remains of the dead actor, of his taking a finger of the corpse away with him, and of his singing *Those Evening Bells* in the twilight of a summer evening, as he walks up the street, listening to the chimes of Trinity Church.

Had Kean had the good fortune to die, or the good luck to seek retirement on his return to England, it would have been far better for his fame. For he came back to meet his Nemesis in the guise of a woman. It was another case of a weak man in the Garden of Eden. Eve, represented by the wife of an alderman, tempted him, and he fell. In 1825 he was made the unenviable hero of a criminal suit, whereby the alderman, as the plaintiff, was awarded damages in compensation for the injury done his honour and affections. While there were cynical persons who said that there was a tinge of blackmailing in the proceedings, and that the plaintiff had fostered the affair, the guilt of Kean was never questioned.

At once a storm burst over the actor's head. Press and public seemed determined to show how utterly they could dethrone the man who had trod the London stage as a king, to whom groundlings, peers, statesmen, authors, and even royalty had alike

paid court. The case of "*Cox versus Kean*" assumed the proportions of a state issue, and theatre-goers resolved, with a zeal that had about it the stamp of the Pharisee, that the sinner should be sternly rebuked if he appeared again at Drury Lane. Kean, like the defiant rebel that he always showed himself, accepted the challenge, instead of retiring for a year and giving all this popular virtue time to cool. Disdaining to hear the mutterings of the coming tempest, he boldly returned to Drury Lane, only to be the central figure of an exhibition disgraceful alike to himself and to his audiences. Hisses and howls from those in pit and gallery; missiles of all sorts falling thick and fast upon the stage; Kean running forward, glaring at his tormentors, and yelling words of vengeance that could not be heard above the frightful din—such was the wretched programme.

The sudden fall could not quell his undaunted spirit, but it almost unhinged his mind. His wife left him; he became estranged from his son Charles; friends fell away like the proverbial rats scuttling from the sinking ship. Barry Cornwall, who visited him at this trying time, tells us that Kean had all the air of desperation about him. The change in the man was ghastly.

"Cox
versus
Kean"

A Gbastly
Change

“ He looked bloated with rage and brandy; his nose was red, his cheeks blotched, his eyes bloodshot; I really pitied him. He had lodgings in Regent Street; but I believe very few of his former friends, of any respectability, now noticed him. The day I saw him he sat down to the piano, notwithstanding the agitated state of his mind, and sang for me *Lord Ullin's Daughter*, with a depth, and power, and sweetness that quite electrified me. I could not repress a deep sentiment of sorrow at the wreck he presented of genius, fame, and wealth.”

Of all the great fortune he had made Kean had left, at the time of this visit, not more than a hundred pounds. He could never save a penny, whether as a stroller or a Roscius.

After his battle at Drury Lane, where he struggled in vain to stem the tide of censure, Kean tried the provinces. His reception varied, from the favourable to the turbulent; in Dublin, where his past generosity in behalf of some starving peasantry was lovingly remembered, he was cordially treated. Finally, he sailed for the United States, in the hopes that there, at least, the action of “ *Cox versus Kean* ” would not rise again in his path. As he departed he hurled scornful defiance at his enemies, announcing that he was being driven from England “ by the machination of scoundrels.”

But it at first seemed as if the Americans, not to be outdone in morality by their kin across the sea, were anxious to prove that an artist could not separate his private from his professional life, and that the public had as much right to criticise the one as the other. On his opening night in New York there was such an uproar that Kean could not make a speech in his own defence. He disarmed the New Yorkers, however, by a sudden, unexpected humility, which, we may be sure, came from managerial tact, rather than from his own inner consciousness. He issued an appeal asking that he be allowed to act, and die, in the new world; all that he wanted, he pleaded, was "a shelter in which to close his professional and mortal career." On the second night he was loudly applauded. In Boston he met with a greeting that would have been unkind even if given to the most abandoned criminal within the whole of New England. When he tried to act he was assailed by a veritable rain of brass balls, apples, gingerbread, and bottles filled with that most seductive of all drugs—assafœtida. It seemed as if the Bostonians were endeavouring to brand the SCARLET LETTER on his breast at the same time that they showed how well they remembered his refusal to

More
Tempests

Savage
Honours

play before an empty house. So great, indeed, was the indignation that Kean had to be hurried out of the theatre, and then quietly smuggled away from the Athens of America.

He met better audiences in other cities, and enjoyed himself in Canada, particularly when some Huron chiefs made him a member of their tribe. There was something about an Indian that fascinated Kean, as if the wildness of his own nature found kindred feeling in the redskin. This attention from the Hurons well-nigh turned his unsettled brain, so that he who had played so many parts pictured himself as a young buck, or a sachem, as he arrayed himself in a garb that made him look like a half-breed lunatic. Certain is it that Kean was not always sane during his travels.

When the wanderer returned to England, and reappeared at Drury Lane in January, 1827, the public chose to forgive the Lothario, and to give him a welcome that must have put some warmth into his embittered heart. But the old Kean had fled. In his place was a man, old, worn out, and disappointed at forty; thin, morose, prone to sudden gusts of anger and fearful fits of depression. His acting became uneven; he could not always recall his lines; at times

his Richard, once so full of life and sardonic power, seemed but the empty phantom of past glory. Remorse, worry, and dissipation had done their work on his sensitive constitution before the hand of Time had been able to touch his raven hair. We see him, as one of his friends found him one day, sitting up in bed with a buffalo skin wrapped around him, gay feathers on his head, a tomahawk in his hand, and we detect sadness, not merriment, in the portrait. Again we hear of him as he sits in his dressing-room, weak and panting, as someone holds a toddy to his lips, to brace him up for the part he is to act that evening. He walks on the stage, plays a scene with some of the old fire; makes his exit, half-fainting, takes more toddy, and so on until he has managed to hobble through the tragedy.

Thus things went on drearily, as audiences pitied, and forgot the alderman's wife, until the last performance of all. His appearances had been fitful; he had suffered from illness; he had even thought of returning to America. Now, on the 25th of March, 1833, he is playing Othello, at Covent Garden, with Charles Kean (to whom he is now reconciled) as Iago, and Ellen Tree as Desdemona.

"I am very ill," says Kean, as he is assisted from his carriage to the dressing-room of the

A Shadow

Dying
Othello

theatre; "I am afraid I won't be able to go on." Charles brings him some brandy and water; it exerts the old power, and he steps out before an audience which greets him with tumultuous applause, as if dimly conscious that this may be the last chance to pay him honour. For a time all goes well, but between the second and third acts Kean warns his son: "Mind, Charlie, that you keep before me; I don't know that I shall be able to kneel; but, if I do, be sure that you lift me up." As he comes off from one of the scenes, he says to Ellen Tree, in all the pride of a happy father: "Charles is getting on to-night; he is acting very well." Yet his feebleness increases as the tragedy moves on, and when he comes to the lines beginning "Villain, be sure—" he falls suddenly into Iago's arms with the words: "I am dying—speak to them for me."

Kind hands bear home the insensible tragedian, and a little later he is taken to Richmond. From there he writes a pitiful letter to his wife: "Dear Mary," he pleads, "let us be no longer fools. Come home—forget and forgive. If I have erred it was my head, not my heart, and most severely have I suffered for it." She comes to him, forgetting everything but the strolling days when a guinea and a good dinner were

enough to make them happy. As the dying man lingers on he thinks of the old times of hardship, dreams of that first appearance at Drury Lane, and mutters lines from some of his familiar parts. On May 15, 1833, he passes peacefully away, burned out before his time, in the forty-sixth year of his age. They bury him in Richmond, and, as he has died penniless, Charles Kean comes forward to support the wife. Eight days later dies Anne Carey, that vagabond mother who turned up to claim a son in the days of his prosperity.

Great as was the fall of Edmund Kean, the memory of it only serves to throw in bolder relief the strange contrasts of his career. One may call him by a hundred titles—marvellous actor, drunkard, splendid barbarian, rebellious spirit, or what not?—and all of them but prove the more that he is the most picturesque figure in the annals of the English drama. In the lightning flashes of his genius, and in the brilliancy of his achievements, he stands out as the Napoleon of the stage.

Burned
Out
Genius



“ What ’s thine is thine, by honest means alone;
Blame, praise, have never made thee more
nor less;
An eagle is an eagle on his throne,
Or at the archer’s feet in last distress.
And whose the mind, howe’er sublime or
crude,
But feels the truth to Nature of thy Soul,
In all that ’s fiery, subtle, calm, or rude,
From the great labour’s opening to the
goal? ”

—*Lines to Junius Brutus Booth, by W. O. Eaton.*



JUNIUS BRUTUS BOOTH

THREE times has the name of Booth added imperishable lustre to the stage. Barton Booth, Junius Brutus Booth, Edwin Booth—what a wealth of dramatic suggestion is to be found in such a combination! There is probably no evidence existing to prove that the first-mentioned Booth belonged to the stock of Junius Brutus and his son, yet it is pleasant to fancy that the great actor of the days of Addison and Pope may have been a scion of the same ancestral line. It is a pardonable theory. The influence of heredity, which counts for so little in other professions, is, as we have seen, curiously potent in the theatre.

Barton Booth was one of the most attractive figures of early eighteenth-century life. He it was who “shook the stage, and made the people stare,” when, in all the bold anachronism of long wig and flowered gown,

A Great
Name

Barton
Booth

he enacted the title-rôle of Addison's sententious *Cato* — that virtuous Cato whose lines are now forgotten, save in such platitudes as

“ The woman who deliberates is lost,”

or that Socratic sentiment :

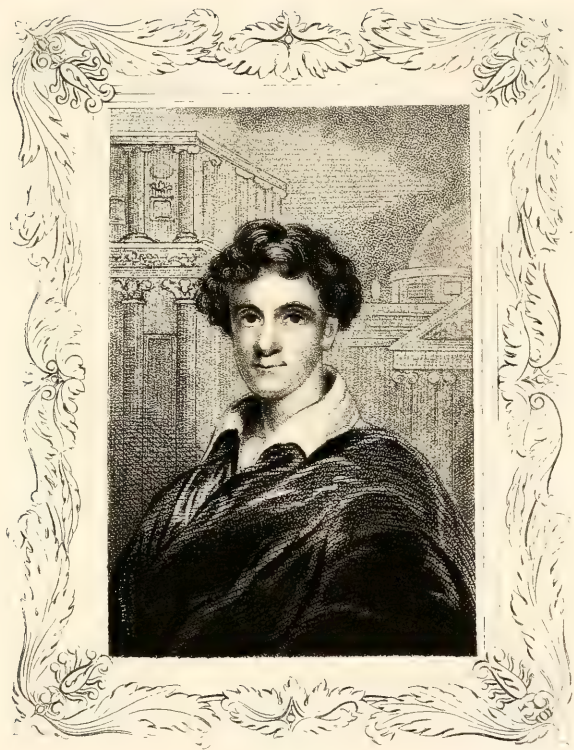
“ 'T is not in mortals to command success;
We 'll do more, Sempronius, we 'll deserve it.”

An actor of genius, of scholarly attainment, of personal charm, with expressive face and melody of voice, was Barton Booth. In all his attributes he seems a foreshadowing of both our own Booths, while in his talent for discovering what passions could be extracted from a part, he is the prototype of Junius Brutus.

Whatever may be said of the possible ties of blood between Barton and Junius Brutus Booth, it is at least certain that there was one theatrical person in the latter's family. John Wilkes, the “ Upholder of English Liberty,” was not an actor, but if ever a man played a melodramatic part on the political stage, with the art of the Thespian who disguises his real self; it was that lucky adventurer. Now it happened that John had a relative, Elizabeth Wilkes, who became the grandmother of Junius Brutus, and

Junius Brutus Booth as "Brutus."

From a design by Wageman.



Junius Brutus Booth

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gave to her descendants that love of republicanism which was to degenerate into such an awful tragedy when her great-grandson, madly believing himself a friend of liberty, would assassinate Abraham Lincoln, the greatest republican of his age.

Richard Booth, the father of Junius Brutus, was a cultured lawyer, with a profound admiration for the country in which his son was to win so much of his fame. During the Revolutionary War he embarked for America, intending to fight for the colonists, but as he had the misfortune to be taken prisoner, and brought back to England, he was obliged to content himself with hanging a portrait of George Washington in his drawing-room. Whenever a visitor entered the house he insisted that an obeisance should be made to the picture—an anecdotal straw which shows us whence came that wild, erratic streak in the nature of Junius Brutus. The latter was born in the parish of St. Pancras, London, on May 1, 1796, and was designed by his parents, if not by Providence, for a legal career. But the boy was no more fitted for the wig of a barrister than Garrick had been; he thought much more of a visit to Covent Garden Theatre, to see Mr. Kemble resuscitate Shakespeare with stately grandeur. A cold evening of December,

Richard
Booth

Early
Ambitions

1813, found him at Deptford, playing Camillo in *The Honeymoon*, quite against the wishes of his father, whose love of republicanism was not so fervent that he wished Junius Brutus to give up all claims to social distinction. For there was still a blind prejudice against the stage in the minds of middle-class Englishmen. They would often enjoy a play, or applaud the players, but the idea of having a son or daughter in the "profession" struck terror to their conventional hearts.

Yet it did not take Richard Booth a long time to get reconciled to his son's choice of a career; he soon became one of the most ardent admirers of the young fellow. Meanwhile Junius Brutus played an engagement of several months in Europe, as a member of an English strolling company, and then returned home to act in the provinces. He was not a particularly prepossessing actor then, so far as looks were concerned. He had brilliant blue-grey eyes, an abundance of brown hair, and an expressive face which would acquire, later on, a certain classic mould that one sees so often in the features of actor and priest alike; but now all these advantages seemed lost in the smallness of the man. He was hardly any taller than Edmund Kean or Garrick. Yet, when he

was given a part that called for tragic power, it was noticed that his defect in this respect was lost sight of completely; he appeared to expand with the character and grow larger as the passions within his breast found vent.

When it came to ambition, the little man had enough of it to do for a giant. What he longed for was a London opening. It arrived in the shape of an offer to appear at Covent Garden Theatre. "Here 's my chance," thought Junius Brutus; so he accepted the engagement, as he pictured how he would enchant the audience by his Richard III. But when he was billed to make his *début* as Silvius, in *As You Like It*, all his visions of glory faded away, and he was soon playing a round of minor *rôles* for the luxurious wages of £2 a week. "I wish you 'd put an *e* at the end of your name," said Miss Sally Booth, one of the actresses in the company, to her timid namesake. "Why so?" he asked. "Ah, then no one could think I was related to you," sweetly replied the lady. Junius Brutus did not adopt the suggested *e*, and, what is more to the purpose, he lived to have his revenge. When he made a stir in the mimic world Miss Sally began to wonder whether he might not be a relative, after all.

Early
Ambitions

Booth
versus
Kean

A real opportunity for distinction did come when Booth was given a trial night at Covent Garden (February 12, 1817), to show the Londoners what there was in his Richard. It proved a virile performance, full of colour, and very strong in the more dramatic scenes (perhaps a trifle too boisterous at times), so the house admired and applauded. But alas! Several of the critics pretended to discover in Booth a servile imitator of the mighty Kean, now in the full tide of his tempestuous prosperity. The new actor, sarcastically said one of them,

“is one of nature’s duplicates; if he be not Mr. Kean himself, he is as ingenious a facsimile as we ever beheld.” “If Mr. Booth has made Mr. Kean’s acting a study,” added this gentleman of the press, “and has merely given an imitation of what is in itself but an imitation, then we utterly give him up, and consider him no better than the shadow of a shade. But if nature has, by way of a joke, made two bodies alike, and given them similar conception and sounds, then Mr. Booth must not be rudely cast aside, because his better half happened to be seen first.”

The average theatregoer seems willing to be led like the most stupid sheep. Put an erroneous idea into his head, if you be a critic, and ten to one he will go on believing

it long after you have discovered your mistake and changed your own opinion accordingly. The dramatic writers who worshipped at the shrine of Kean (some of them were the first to howl him down when troubles caught up to him) affected to treat Junius Brutus as a boy who was trying to steal the thunder of their own little theatrical god; whereupon hundreds of worthy persons rubbed their eyes, and cried: "By Jove! What a likeness! What a copy! What plagiarism!"

Nothing more cruel can be imagined than this pitting of an established genius against a young, inexperienced actor who was quite ready to admit his inferiority. Think of the effect of such a comparison if employed against a talented aspirant of to-day. Let Mr. So-and-So appear as Hamlet, with no thought of comparison, and we say: "Very good for so young an actor." But if we are told that Mr. So-and-So is only trying to give us an imitation of Edwin Booth's Hamlet, we cry: "What presumption!" and look upon the new man as a rich subject for a snub.

The resemblance between Booth and Kean seems to have been one of personal appearance rather than of method. Both had wondrous theatric force, but Kean, by far

Unfair
Criticism

At Drury
Lane

the more commanding actor of the two, was a daring innovator who threw tradition to the winds, if he felt so inclined. Booth, on the other hand, followed the orthodox school of playing, and was great in spite of, not because of, that antique model.

But the mischief started by the "Keanites" had only begun; there were breakers ahead for Junius Brutus. At first Kean was disposed to take a patronising interest in the young fellow, and when he heard that Booth had quarrelled with the managers of Covent Garden on a question of salary, out he drove in his chariot to visit Junius in his humble lodgings. "Jump in!" cried Kean to the astonished rival; "I've an engagement for you!" With that Booth clambered into the carriage and drove off to Drury Lane, where he quickly signed an agreement to play at that theatre. The whole business was done in a whirl of enthusiasm and emotional disregard of practical considerations, as is often the way with actors. Both Kean and Booth behaved like unsophisticated children. The former forgot that he was about to elevate his so-called imitator to the position of a competitor; the latter forgot that he was breaking a contract into which he had recently entered with the managers of Covent Garden.

We have seen, in another chapter, how Kean tried to crush Booth on the memorable night when they appeared in *Othello*, at Drury Lane. So Utopian a partnership could not last for a week. While the "Boothites" and the "Keanites" were wildly discussing the respective merits of their favourites, with as much zest as if the fate of the British Empire depended upon the result, the favourites themselves fell out. Booth was notified that he would not be allowed to play any of Kean's parts; he rose up in arms at once, and disregarding his new contract, threw himself into the arms of the gentlemen of Covent Garden.

When a crowded house assembled at Drury Lane to enjoy a repetition of *Othello*, expecting to see Kean fairly sweep the stage with the body of the new Iago, there was no Junius Brutus Booth. The audience was angry, much as would be men deprived of a looked-for dog-fight, and a wordy war now ensued between the contending factions. The manager of Drury Lane issued a statement which accused Booth of violating his contract. To this Booth replied that he had been practically driven away from Drury Lane. "I have found to my cost," he said, "that every character which I was ever desirous or capable of playing was

The Break

Theatrical
Disputes

already in possession, and that there was no chance of my appearing in the same." He made, too, an appeal to the Drury Lane management that might be taken in a Pickwickian sense:

"I only request that you will not seek to persecute or molest a young man just entering into life, and who cannot afford either to be shelved, or to be put into such characters as must infallibly mar all his future prospects."

Kean had no intention of ruining Booth; he was only suffering from an unnecessary attack of that "professional" jealousy which is more trying to the nerves than the jealousy of the most devoted lover for truant woman.

The "Keanites" now planned to show Junius Brutus the august power of an English audience. They vowed that Booth had behaved in the most dishonourable way by quitting Drury Lane, and they waited to give him proof of their bad opinion. The chance came on February 25th, when Booth, as Richard, reappeared at Covent Garden. An excited house, packed to the doors, eagerly listened for the cue that was to bring on the Duke. When he entered, unconcerned, there was a momentary hush.

"His appearance was highly prepossessing"—as a newspaper described it the next day—

“ and promised for a minute, from the fervent plaudits heard, to gain favour. But the voice of partial resentment soon burst forth from several persons, chiefly in the pit, and the marks of kindness which he received from the majority of the audience were encountered by a noise sufficient to frustrate all his efforts; every appeal to their humanity to be allowed a hearing, if only for a moment, was in vain. Inflexibly fixed to punish, they would not allow of explanation or apology.”

Unruly
Critics

After Richard had been loudly hissed for some minutes, as he bowed respectfully to all parts of the house, he walked off the stage with as much grace as he could command. Mr. Fawcett, the stage-manager, now came forward, only to be met by a fresh outburst of hisses and cat-calls, mingled with a faint murmur of applause that vainly strove to rise above the din of disapproval. A note was thrown on the stage; Fawcett stooped down, and tried to read it; a second missive fell at his feet; he managed to decipher the scrawl, whatever it was, and nodded assent. Then came a perfect shower of letters, which dazed the manager; at last he retired ignominiously from the public view.

The actors next began to play, but as not a word of their lines could be heard, the

Unruly
Critics

effect was that of *Richard III.* being acted by a company of pantomimists. Soon Richard, not yet "himself again," returned to the scene, followed by a standard-bearer, who carried a placard asking "Silence to explain." The malcontents would listen to no explanation; they drove Booth off the stage once more, and the play now proceeded for a short time in dumb show. Fights occurred in the pit; Booth returned and acted Richard valiantly, but one could only see his lips move. More placards were borne aloft with such legends as "Mr. Booth wishes to apologise," or "Can Englishmen condemn unheard?" Still the *inferno* went on merrily, nor would the rioters listen when Mr. Barrymore, one of the players, took Booth by the hand and led him to the front.

At the end of the tragedy, or rather of the pantomime, Fawcett brought out the Richard (who looked as if he would give twenty kingdoms for a horse on which to escape), and begged for silence. The house shrieked with disdain. Then the farce began. It was called *Killing No Murder*, as if its title unconsciously reflected the tender feelings of the "Keanites." A man in one of the boxes rose to address the audience; a fight in the pit followed, and the stage-manager



JUNIUS BRUTUS BOOTH AS "RICHARD III."

AFTER A DRAWING BY C. SHOOSMITH.

had to appear and make a speech before the piece was allowed to proceed.

A
Frightened
Richard

“ I have been desired,” he said, “ to remove the person complained of [alluding to the would-be orator of the box]. This, while I am manager of this theatre, is what I cannot do. If the person has offended, it is in your own breasts to turn him out.”

Having thus acknowledged his inability to keep order in his own establishment, Fawcett retired, and the farce was brought to an orthodox conclusion. Meanwhile, poor Booth fled from the theatre, like a miserable criminal who seeks to hide from an infuriated mob that threatens to lynch him. Fawcett now returned, wearing an amusing expression of humility. The house waited to hear what he had to say, as he nervously advanced to the proscenium. “ Disappointed and overwhelmed by affliction at having incurred your displeasure,” he explained, “ Mr. Booth has gone home, and is now in bed ! ”

“ Then bring him here, out of bed ! ” cried some of the rioters. “ That would be cruelty,” pleaded the manager, and as it was quite impossible to get hold of Booth, the audience finally dispersed towards midnight.

Another
Trial

One might have thought that Booth would have gone away from London, or even from England. But he was made of sterner stuff, as if he had in him a bit of that obstinacy once shown by his relative, John Wilkes. Four nights later he had the bravery to appear again at Covent Garden. His return was the signal for another rush to the theatre, during which several persons were badly hurt in trying to enter, and hundreds were turned away for want of room to accommodate them. The "Keanites" and the "Boothites" were evenly distributed, as were likewise the hisses and applause. When Booth came on the stage wreaths of laurel and bouquets were thrown at him, while his enemies groaned loudly as they beheld this sudden ovation. There were cries of "Booth for ever!" and "No Booth," at the same time that variously worded placards were raised in the pit. "No persecution!"—"We pardon him!"—"No playing in London for three years!"—these were among the sentiments displayed. Booth was finally allowed to make some sort of an apology for daring to offend a British audience, and the play went on to the end amid cheers and groans.

The storm gradually blew over. Booth went on playing at Covent Garden, and made

Junius Brutus Booth

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a powerful appeal to unprejudiced critics when he acted Posthumus, in *Cymbeline*. It was remarked that in spite of an occasional coarseness in the impersonation—he was often tempted in later years to “overdo” a character—the new Posthumus gave to the stage a distinct work of art. His voice, except when he strained it unwittingly, was never heard to better advantage. He had many sympathetic spectators, and among them was William Godwin, who wrote the young actor, warning him not to be cast down if he were driven from the London boards. “The whole British dominions will be before you,” he added.

Kind
Words

But the fury of the “Keanites” can no longer harm Junius Brutus, who keeps himself busy, either in London or in neighbouring towns, increasing his reputation and improving in his studies. On one well-filled day he plays in three different places, beginning with Cirencester at 11 A.M., doing Gloucester at 4 P.M., and ending up with a night performance at Cheltenham. For this piece of travelling he receives £30, or more. Then we hear of him in Scotland; later, he astonishes Londoners by playing Shylock in Hebrew, as a proof of his wonderful talent for languages; and again he is doing Lear at Covent Garden, and delighting the audience

feeling
his
way

(or harrowing it, which means the same thing) by the "terrific grandeur" of the scene where the King is turned out to endure the pitiless storm. There was a gentle melancholy about Booth that must have made Lear unusually attractive to him; and as that other mad King, George III., had just died, there was now no objection to his giving the tragedy. During the last days of the real lunatic, the revival of the mimic one had been forbidden.

Next, wonderful to relate, Booth plays with Kean for several nights prior to the latter's departure for America. One of the younger actor's parts is Iago, which he gives, let us hope, before a less irate Othello than Kean made him on a previous occasion. But we should not have cared to be Iago when Kean had discovered his perfidy, and was glaring at him with those "fatal" eyes.

Early in 1821, Booth marries Mary Anne Holmes, buys himself a piebald pony, and with wife and pony sails off on a pleasure trip to Madeira. He is devoted to animals, be they dogs, horses, birds, or bugs; as he gets older, this noble trait will verge on insanity, and there will be queer stories as to his refusing to eat any form of animal meat, or trying to bury in a graveyard a lot of wild pigeons ruthlessly slaughtered by some

no less idiotic "sportsman." At present he has confined his efforts to feeding the horses of the London cabmen on apples, or earnestly exhorting their owners to be kind to the poor beasts. For the rest, he is an odd, kind-hearted genius, honest, diffident save to those who know him well, and a deep thinker, through whose highly impressionable mind runs a curiously morbid streak.

In the summer of this nuptial year, a tired little man presents himself to the manager of the theatre in Richmond, Virginia, and asks for an engagement. It is Junius Brutus Booth, who has left Madeira, and come over to America accompanied by his wife and the piebald pony. "Can this be the real Booth," the Richmond manager asks himself, "or is he a humbug who wants to trade on another's reputation?" Finally he takes pity on the stranger, gives him a trial as Richard, and from that moment there is no question as to identity. Later he is billed to appear as Richard at Petersburg, where the actors of the local company wait eagerly to catch the first glimpse of "the great Mr. Booth." Rehearsal is called, but the "great Mr. Booth" — who is generally late for everything — has not appeared. After a time someone who looks like a well-grown boy of sixteen, dressed in roundabout jacket

"The
Real
Booth"

No
Impostor

and breeches and a faded straw hat, comes running on the stage. High is the surprise of the company when they learn that this is Junius Brutus Booth. He has missed the stage-coach, he explains, and has walked twenty-five miles in order to reach Petersburg before the evening. He seems at home on the stage, volunteers a few directions, and goes through the rehearsal in a perfunctory fashion.

At night he gives the early scenes of his Richard so tamely that one of the actors cries, on coming off into the greenroom: "I tell you, he *is* an impostor." The soliloquy beginning, "Now is the winter of our discontent" is delivered with as much expression as a schoolboy would give to it; not a great deal better is he where Richard interrupts the funeral procession of King Henry VI. But when Booth comes to later scenes he electrifies the house by the vigour and brilliancy of his acting, and after the death of Richard, audience and actors join in a tempest of applause. There is no more conjecture as to who is "the great Mr. Booth."

On a return engagement which he played in Petersburg, Booth gave another and more startling proof of his powers. So realistic was his portrayal of Sir Edward Mortimer,

the gloomy hero of *The Iron Chest*, that the actor who was doing Wilford, secretary to Sir Edward, was completely unnerved, and only recovered his self-possession when Booth said to him, in an undertone: "Go on! Go on!"

Sir Edward Mortimer, like Sir Giles Overreach, was one of those full-blooded characters admirably suited to the massive style of the newcomer. James E. Murdoch has left us, in his reminiscences, a graphic picture of the effect which this particular Sir Edward Mortimer had on him in after years. Murdoch was called upon, when quite a lad, to play Wilford to Booth's hero. He had never seen Booth act, and, as he had not himself played Wilford before, he took pains to get minute instructions on the morning of rehearsal. He found the great man pleasant and communicative, with gentle manners, beautiful face, and a benignant air quite out of keeping with the idea of tragic rage or unbridled passion. Little by little Booth explained the "business" of the play, and told the inexperienced Wilford how he was to go through the part.

There is a mystery connected with the iron chest from which the drama takes its name, for it is discovered that Mortimer often pays secret visits to this bit of stage

Sir
Edward
Mortimer

Sir
Edward
Mortimer

property. One day Wilford sees the key in the lock, and is found on his knees before the chest by his furious master. Booth told young Murdoch that when he came to this scene he was to kneel in a certain way, and then, opening the chest, was to turn over the papers as if looking for something beneath. Murdoch was to pay no attention to the entrance of Booth, but, when he felt Sir Edward's hand upon his shoulder, he was to turn abruptly, letting the lid fall with a slam.

At night Murdoch was nervous and ill at ease, but he managed to get through the scenes leading up to the episode of the discovery.

“ At length I found myself in the presence of the mysterious chest. I was almost breathless with excitement and from anxiety consequent on my strong desire to execute Mr. Booth's orders to the very letter. I had proceeded so far as to open the chest, and, stooping over the papers, awaited trembling on my knee the appointed signal for action. The time seemed an eternity, but it came at last. The heavy hand fell on my shoulder. I turned, and there, with the pistol held to my head, stood Booth, glaring like an infuriated demon. Then, for the first time I comprehended the reality of acting. The fury of that passion-flamed face, and the magnetism

of the rigid clutch upon my arm, paralysed my muscles, while the scintillating gleam of the terrible eyes, like the green and red flashes of an enraged serpent, fascinated and fixed me spellbound to the spot. A sudden revulsion of feeling caused me to spring to my feet, but, bewildered by fright and a choking sensation of undefined dread, I fell heavily to the stage, tripping Mr. Booth, who still clutched my shoulder. It brought him down with me, and for a moment we lay prostrate. But suddenly recovering himself, he sprang to his feet, with almost superhuman strength dragging me up, as I clung to his arm in terror.

“Shaking himself free of my grasp, I sank down again, stunned and helpless. I was aroused to consciousness, however, by a voice calling me in suppressed accents to rise, and then I became aware that Mr. Booth was kneeling at my side. He helped me to my feet, whispering in my ear a few encouraging words, and then dexterously managed, in spite of the accident and my total inability to speak, to continue the scene to the close.”

In those days, as this experience with Murdoch shows, the “star” was continually playing with actors whose faces and methods were strange to him; he had no company of his own with which to travel about the country, but had to depend for support on

The
"Star"
System

the stock organisations attached to the various theatres. The present system, under which the "star" carries his own support, — scenery, costumes, and even a press-agent who proclaims the virtues of the play from the house-tops, — is of a comparatively recent growth. The writer, who is not a Methuselah, remembers very well how an actress who is still alive, and not very ancient either, used to be assisted by the company of the Walnut Street Theatre every time she appeared in Philadelphia. So were other "stars" assisted, and the audiences sometimes took as much pleasure in the acting of some favourite member of the "stock" as they did in the work of the visitor. Those decades have gone, never to return. With them went a delightful good-fellowship, a feeling of personal interest, that came from a constant acquaintance with the same players. In place of the old system, we have, on occasion, a more artistic background for the "star," smoother performances, and greater attention paid to petty detail.

From the time that Junius Brutus Booth made his first New York appearance at the Park Theatre, in the autumn of 1821 (when his death scene as Richard was interrupted by loud cries of "Bravo!"), he began to

Junius Brutus Booth

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Pranks
of Genius

show signs of that insanity which more than once threatened to overwhelm him with disaster. Many of the pranks which he played were attributed to his love of drinking, and while there is no doubt that the use of stimulants did not tend to soothe his excitable brain, it is only fair to add that much of what he did was the result, pure and simple, of sheer madness. The anecdotes of his vagaries would fill a volume less amusing than pathetic. The liberties which he took with the American public, and the ease with which he secured pardon, attest his great popularity and the love that the people bore him. Sometimes he would disappear for days, heedless of engagements, but when he returned he always made financial amends to his managers, and was welcomed back by the long-suffering theatregoers.

Once he was asked by Wemyss, his friend and manager, to try Richelieu. "No, sir," he replied; "the Cardinal was tall and gaunt. I can't look him. Nonsense!" Wemyss coaxed, and Booth finally consented, much against his will. When he did appear in the character he stumbled through the lines of Richelieu for a few minutes; then, losing all control of himself, he suddenly seized the Father Joseph by the arm, and waltzed him around the stage,

Pranks
of Genius

to the consternation of the audience. The curtain was suddenly lowered, whereupon Booth coolly asked Wemyss: "Well, my boy, how did you like my Richelieu?" After that escapade he vanished for several days.

One night, when he was to play in Providence as Iago, he was nowhere to be found on the rising of the curtain. He was not at his hotel; the manager became almost frantic. "I'll get him," said a gentleman in one of the boxes. Off started the volunteer to the lowest part of the town, and discovered the actor "drinking deep cups" in a sailors' boarding-house, quite unconscious that a poet named Shakespeare, or a play called *Othello*, had ever existed. He was brought back to the theatre, and gave a magnificent performance of the honest Iago, showing the secret workings of the "ancient's" mind with all his customary skill, and putting a wealth of bitter hate into the familiar lines of the entrapped villain:

"Demand me nothing; what you know, you know;
From this time forth I never will speak word."

It was the crazy notion that he was himself *Othello* which cost Booth the breaking of his nose, and marred the Roman serenity

of his features. After a drunken bout with his friend Tom Flynn, the self-imagined Moor hurled his companion to the floor with the words: "Villain, be sure thou prove my love a wanton." The supposed Iago resented this indignity by hitting Booth over the face with a poker—a punishment that left indelible marks upon Othello's face, and spoiled for a time the delightful resonance of his voice.

A Curious
Ambition

In the very high-tide of his early successes in America this erratic spirit thought of retiring and accepting the position of a lighthouse keeper, on the modest salary of \$300 a year, and he would have done so, too, had it not been for the interference of some of his friends. His nearest approach to rural simplicity was in the purchase of a large tract of land in Maryland, twenty-five miles from Baltimore. Here he would go when he wanted to get away from the glare of the footlights; here his children were born; and here, under the primeval trees, would he fondly imagine himself a farmer, as he petted the famous piebald pony, or read Racine, Dante, Shelley, Shakespeare, Paley's *Theology*, or the Koran. Once he summoned his neighbours to attend a funeral ceremony at the farm. When they arrived, with the cheerful air of people ready for melancholy

Richard
Booth

entertainment, their host prepared to bury a "favourite horse," mayhap the piebald pony. The friends went away in disgust, and poor Booth was not in his right mind for some time afterwards.

Soon Richard Booth, the father of Junius Brutus, came over to the United States, to make his home on this farmland, to play agriculturist when the son was away acting, and to talk over the days of John Wilkes and George Washington. Harmless old gentleman! He wore his hair in a "pig-tail" to the last, and when he died was engaged in translating the *Æneid* of Virgil—for the stage!

His granddaughter, Mrs. Clarke, tells a quaint story about his going to Philadelphia to represent Junius Brutus in a suit which Hamblin, the manager, had brought against the actor for an alleged non-fulfilment of contract. When he arrived at one of the hotels of the Quaker City, accompanied by a giant of a negro who worked on the Maryland farm, the old gentleman was recognised by a guest who introduced himself as a "member of the profession." "Oh," cried Booth, "then you are, perhaps, acquainted with a rascally manager named Hamblin?" "I know him very well," said the stranger, with a humorous gleam in his eye. At that

the proud father entered into a tirade against the manager, at the same time that he outlined the plans which the defence was to make in the lawsuit. The stranger happened to be Hamblin himself, who appreciated the joke, fortunately enough, and compromised the case to the satisfaction of all concerned.

When Junius Brutus was filling engagements through the country, he would write letters to his father, telling him how to run the farm, and mingling the oddest bits of philosophy and moral dissertation with the more practical advice. Here is an example :

“ Let Joe [a slave] sow the timothy in the meadow. Tell Junius [one of his sons] not to go opossum hunting, or setting rabbit traps, but let the poor devils live. Cruelty is the offspring of idleness of mind and beastly ignorance, and, in children, should be repressed and not encouraged, as is too often the case, by unthinking beings who surround them. . . . The ideas of Pythagoras I have adopted; and as respects our accountability to animals hereafter, nothing that man can preach can make me believe to the contrary. ‘ Every death its own avenger breeds.’ Enough of this. I think there is some parsnip-seed hanging in a paper by the looking-glass in the parlour. Let Joe sow some, in small trenches in the garden—say three or four rows.”

Long-
Distance
Farming

**Artistic
Insight**

Booth paid two visits to Europe; the first time in 1825, when he played in England, Holland, and Belgium, and again during the season of 1836-37. It was on his first trip, when acting Brutus at Drury Lane, that he refused to respond to a call at the fall of the green curtain. He maintained, very correctly, that the appearance of an actor at the end of a tragedy only dispelled the illusion, and he was anxious to abolish the custom. He might have saved himself trouble. Players who should know better still come out to grin their thanks after a harrowing death scene, and they will doubtless continue so to do as long as there are audiences to encourage, or hands to applaud.

There was no arrogance or petty jealousy in Booth's nature; he was always kind to his fellow-actors, save when he got one of his moody fits. He never tried to push himself forward at the expense of anyone else. When Charles Kean played Hamlet in Baltimore, Booth, then the manager of the local theatre, contented himself with the Second Actor. He was well rewarded for his modesty, the audience cheering him to the very echo. Yet he was ready to resent any disrespect to himself, as, for example, when he shouted to a rude house at the Arch

Street Theatre, Philadelphia, after he had put an end to himself as the dusky Oroonoko: "I'll serve you as General Jackson did; I'll veto you!"—an allusion which derived effect from the recent controversy over the veto messages of the then President of the United States. Again, when he was acting Brutus to the Titus of his son Edwin, in the most affecting scene of Payne's famous drama, and someone in front had made a flippant remark, Booth, raising his head from the breast of Titus, said impressively, as he shot a lightning glance at the boor: "Beware! I am the headsman!" The effect was thrilling, and the audience burst forth into tumultuous applause.

To his good-nature or generosity there was no end, if he once took an interest in a person. He even went so far, during a visit to Louisville, as to pay for the defence of a notorious horse-thief, named Lovett. It does not appear that the actor had any doubts as to the guilt of the man, but the penalty of the rascal's crime was the noose, and that fact made Booth full of sympathy. No amount of money, no brilliancy of defending counsel, could save Lovett; he swung for his misdeeds, and left his skull to his new benefactor. Booth was directed to use it in *Hamlet*, that he might think,

Traits of
Character

Traits of
Character

“ when he held it in his hands, of the gratitude his kindness had awakened.”

The ghastly relic, having been properly “ cured ” by a physician, was sent to Booth, but in the absence of the beneficiary, Mrs. Booth packed it back to the doctor. She must have had her own troubles, poor woman, with an impracticable genius like her husband to keep in order. In 1857 the skull was given to Edwin Booth, who used it several times in the graveyard scene of *Hamlet*, and then had it buried.

There was, indeed, no reasoning with Junius Brutus Booth when he had the philanthropical bee in his bonnet. Theatrical engagements, private duties, everything, were forgotten. At a benefit performance, given at the Park Theatre, New York, in the spring of 1838, and in which he was to have assisted, no trace of him could be found. Tom Flynn started out to pick him up, and finally discovered the truant attending a fire in William Street. He was working himself red in the face at the pump of an old-fashioned hand-engine, in an endeavour, as he explained, “ to save people’s property from destruction.”

So prone was Booth to give his audience the slip that managers sometimes got nervous about him without necessity. An instance

of this kind occurred at the old Chestnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia, in 1851. *The Merchant of Venice* was underlined for the evening, and Booth reached the theatre unusually early. When the curtain rose on the comedy, the Shylock was nowhere to be seen. He must be somewhere behind the scenes, insisted the stage-manager; had he not entered the theatre several hours ago? Yet the most rigid search failed to bring forth the missing star. The stage-manager was in dismay, as he sent call-boys flying all over the city, while the actors waited anxiously as the time for Shylock's entrance approached. There would be no Jew, and the performance must come to an ignominious end.

The cue for Shylock was given. At that very moment out walked Booth from a dark scene-closet, as he pushed aside the astonished stage-manager and strode out before the audience. He had been studying his part in a quiet place. "He's always an enigma," muttered the relieved manager; "I never can understand him." To Shylock, indeed, Booth always gave such close attention that he fairly lived in the character for hours before he acted. If *The Merchant of Venice* happened to be down for revival in Baltimore, Booth would spend hours with a

Where is
Shylock?

**A Lonely
Death**

distinguished Hebrew of that city, discussing Jewish history and insisting that the Welsh were of Hebraic origin. This wrapping himself, as it were, in the spirit of a part, was not confined to Shylock; he went through the same off-stage prologue with many another character. Edwin Booth tells us that if Othello were the part to be played at night, his father would wear a crescent pin beforehand, or mumble passages from the Koran.

The last time this wayward actor ever trod the stage was on November 19, 1852, at the St. Charles Theatre, New Orleans. He had always been treated as a spoiled child by the emotional Creoles, while he, in turn, was no less appreciative, and had once put his admiration, and his accent, to practical test by venturing to act Orestes for them in the French tongue. After his farewell performance at the St. Charles, Booth took passage for Cincinnati on a Mississippi steamer, never dreaming but that he would have many more days of usefulness. He became very ill when the boat had started up the river; fever and intestinal complaint followed, and he died, November 30, 1852, without one of the dearly loved family near to close those grand eyes, whose sparkle had given such a lustre to his Richard or his

Overreach. When the body was brought home, for burial in Greenmount Cemetery, Baltimore, there was such a happy, life-like expression in the noble face that there arose a suspicion that he might be in a trance. "How often," says his daughter, "had his children found him at rest with this same look upon his face, and had stepped softly, not to disturb him!" But no physician could do anything now. There was, at least, consolation for wife and children in the thought that he had died in peace, and had not perished, as he once tried to do in a fit of madness, by throwing himself from a vessel.

When Rufus Choate heard of Booth's death, he cried: "Then there are no more actors!" Who has not said something to the same effect when his own particular star passes away, only to find, as the years go on, that the stage still exists, and that the art of the player has not vanished? Booth was not a great actor in the sense that Garrick, and Kean, or Betterton, or Talma, were great, but if they were polished diamonds he was a rough diamond, full of a fire which flashed out, now and then, with surpassing brilliancy. He seemed to be a link between the "Old School" of Quin and the modern school of an Eleanora Duse; one saw in him

"No More
Actors!"

A
Grotesque
Story

the ghost of dead-and-gone models, at the same time that one enjoyed the life-like quality, the *feeling*, of his acting. No reverence for the inflated style of the past could hide the inspiration that was in Junius Brutus Booth. Hamlet, to whom he gave an air of intellectual sadness; Richard III., stagey but incisive; Lear, and the favourite Shylock, not to mention a round of other characters, all attested his skill in the delineation of human moods and passions. Only in comedy was he ill at ease; he had no vocation for the cap and bells. Even the comedy of his private life, the crazy pranks that made the unthinking laugh, had about it the air of tragedy; we see not the humour of the escapades so much as the distraught mind which made them possible.

One incident will serve to show how talent, gentleness, and grotesqueness mingled in the man. During the early forties, a young clergyman in a Western city received, one evening, a note from Booth, then acting there, asking that he be given "a place of interment for his friends, in the churchyard." The divine, mistaking the word "friends" for "friend," and thinking that the actor wished to bury some beloved companion, called on Booth at his hotel, to offer help and sympathy.

“ Was the death of your friend sudden ? ” asked the young man.

“ Very, ” briefly replied Booth.

“ Was he a relative ? ”

“ Distant, ” said Booth, who thereupon changed the subject, and asked the visitor if he would like to hear the *Ancient Mariner*. A delighted “ yes ” was given to the suggestion, and Booth was soon reading the weird poem with an expression that banished all thoughts of cemetery lots from the mind of the clergyman. Reader and listener both seemed to forget the realities of life; one was the doomed mariner, who, with glittering eye, unfolded the uncanny legend; the other was the wedding guest, held spell-bound by what he heard. When the poem was ended, and the two had descended from the clouds, Booth began to argue on the sin of eating animal food. After he had spent some time in this way, turning over the leaves of a Bible in a hunt for texts to support his opinions, he took the clergyman into an adjoining room to “ look at the remains. ”¹ But no human corpse met the eye: spread out on a large sheet were a number of dead passenger pigeons! These

A
Grotesque
Story

¹ A long and graphic account of this scene can be found in the files of the *Atlantic Monthly* for 1861.

Poor
Junius

Booth took up tenderly in his arms, as he explained how they had been shot in very wantonness as they were flying over the city, and he railed bitterly at the destruction of such "innocent victims of man's barbarity." There was so much truth in what the actor said, that in spite of the exaggeration of the scene the clergyman could not withhold a feeling of sympathy; if this were insanity, he thought, it was "better than the cold, heartless sanity of most men."

It was only when Booth asked that the pigeons be accorded the honour of a coffin and hearse, with a lot in the churchyard, that the visitor broke away from the spell of the actor's eloquence, and answered by a stern refusal. Nothing daunted, Booth bought a plot of ground in a cemetery near the city, and managed to have his "friends" buried there, by hook or crook. But a dark mood was upon him; he refused to speak to the actors when behind the scenes, and played, when on the stage, with a savage earnestness that terrified them as no counterfeit Richard or Mortimer had ever done in the past. One stormy night Booth disappeared; at neither theatre nor hotel was he to be found. The next morning he was seen wandering through the snow, in some woods several miles from the city; he was

Junius Brutus Booth

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brought home and cared for until the cloud lifted, and reason once more held sway.

Poor
Junius

No wonder that there was little of the comedian in Junius Brutus Booth, or that he walked best in sombre paths.



O art divine! When Forrest brings
His matchless eloquence to bear,
Denouncing treason's poisonous stings,
While for his loved land falls the tear,
The temple of the Muses, filled
With beauty, fashion, youth, and age,
Proves admiration for the skilled
And perfect artist of the stage."

—*G. C. Howard.*



EDWIN FORREST

IN Edwin Forrest the American stage had a gigantic paradox. Thousands of theatregoers acclaimed him a heaven-sent genius, while many others called him a ranting vacuum, a mere mixture of lungs and muscle, or an imposing mass of brainless flesh. There was nothing lukewarm in the criticisms for or against this actor; the vehemence of his friends and enemies shows the commanding position he occupied, at the same time that it makes it hard for those who do not remember him to gauge his talents with accuracy. "He could not have been a mediocrity," says the new generation. "Are we, therefore, to set him down as a very good actor, or a very bad one?"

Chacun à son goût reads the French proverb. It is altogether a matter of taste. To those who like the robustious school, with its arrogance of physique and imperious-

What
was he?

Robustious
Art

ness of voice, Forrest would be a divinity; to lovers of the naturalistic cult of to-day he would suggest a large man filling the stage with the ferocity of a bull in a china shop. One thing is certain: were he to return to life and work, after an absence of nearly thirty years, there would be a warmer welcome for him in a Bowery theatre than elsewhere. That would be nothing criminal against the tragedian; it could only prove that the methods he represented are in eclipse.

The rugged Americanism of Forrest, the want of repose in his art, and the explosive, stormy side of his character—all typified by some mighty mountain current dashing in heedless grandeur over rocks and precipices—can be explained in part by the influences of his early life. The uncurbed boy, playing in the Philadelphia streets, fighting the *gamins*, and spouting Shakespeare in and out of season, on the corners, or in a cellar, was the father of the self-made, impulsive man. Edwin Forrest was born in the old-fashioned district of Southwark, Philadelphia, on March 9, 1806. His father, William Forrest, was a Scotchman, of respectable family, who had emigrated to America to better his fortunes, and who was not able to do much more thereafter than marry a



Edwin Forrest as the "Gladiator."

From an old print.



plucky woman of German parentage, fail in his business of commercial traveller, and finally try to keep his wife and six children in food and clothes, on the slender salary of a clerk in Stephen Girard's Bank. It is curious to recall the mixture of Caledonian and Teutonic blood in Edwin's veins, when we think of the intensity, even the bitterness, of his Americanism, and of his great dislike of foreign traits and institutions.

It was one perpetual attempt, on the part of the Forrest family, to keep the wolf from their humble door. There was no chance to give Edwin a good education; he picked up some of the rudiments at a neighbouring public school (where he amused the other boys by his oratorical flights), and, for the rest, did pretty much as he pleased. Alexander Wilson, the ornithologist, who often visited William Forrest, was so charmed by the son's talent for recitation that he taught him some of the poems of Burns, corrected the faults of his delivery, and gave him, as prizes, illustrations from the *American Ornithology*, then passing through the press. The father, impressed by all this eloquence, saw in Edwin a future minister of the gospel, and he would have given a good orthodox shudder, of the Scotch kind, could he have foreseen in what direction so much vocal

Alien
Blood

Early
Struggles

power was to be used. Soon William Forrest died, worn out by the struggle for bread. The widow, abandoning all hope of a gown and bands for the lad, put him to work in the printing-office of Duane's *Aurora*, while she, not to be outdone in industry, opened a millinery shop in Cedar Street. The two elder boys were already learning trades, and the three daughters were kept at home to assist their mother.

Edwin gave no promise of being a money-winner. He went from the *Aurora* to a cooper shop, and his thirteenth year found him pretending to work in a ship-chandler's store on Race Street. When he should have been sweeping out the place or running errands, he was turning, in rapt forgetfulness, the pages of a play-book. When off duty he was the life of a "Thespian Club," under whose classic auspices he discussed the meanings of Shakespeare or played melodramatic heroes in a woodshed, for an admission rate of five pins, an apple, or some raisins. His favourite haunt was the old South Street Theatre, an historic building in which poor Major André and his gay associates had acted during the British occupancy of Philadelphia, and from whose state-box, in later years, the calm face of President Washington had looked out

pleasantly on the performance of *The Old Soldier*. Much of the scenery in the house had been painted by André, and it was a pathetic coincidence that one of the "drops," a landscape from his brush, should have been used, early in the new century, in a drama representing his own capture and execution.

It was the manager of the old South who met young Forrest on the street, during this ship-chandlery apprenticeship, with the exciting question:

"Can you perform the part of a girl in a play?"

"When?" asked the astonished boy.

"To-night."

"I'll do it," answered Edwin, quite willing to play man, woman, or child, angel, or demon on the boards of a real theatre. The manager gave him a play-book, with the girl's meagre part set forth therein, and hurried off, after making a few suggestions. That evening Forrest appeared as the beautiful(?) Rosalia de Borgia, in the blood-and-thunder drama of *Rudolph, or the Robbers of Calabria*. He had borrowed from a neighbour what he supposed to be a suitable dress, with the addition of a turban to cap the glorious horse-hair ringlets which rippled down his back in elephantine grace. He looked too lean, he thought, so before he

Masculine
Femininity

went on the stage he slyly tore a bit of canvas from a scene and stuffed it into the upper parts of his garment.

But Rosalia made the wrong sort of a "hit." When she advanced to the footlights the audience screamed with laughter; the beauty who should have put all hearts in a flutter found no responsive chord in the public breast. In short, Rosalia's dress was so short that the coarse woollen stockings and thick shoes of Forrest were distinctly in evidence. All illusion was impossible. The would-be girl grew cold, and then hot, as an urchin in the pit shouted out: "Look at the legs and feet!" Losing all self-control, Forrest shook his fist in the direction of his critic, as he answered fiercely: "Wait till the play is done, and then——"

"She swears; by Heavings, the lady swears!" cried the critic. The audience was in an uproar of merriment; the curtain came down in a flash, and the discomfited Rosalia was sent home in disgrace. When Forrest recovered from the shock he fought the boy in the pit, with whom, thereafter, he was fast friends.

The American grit and Scotch canniness of Edwin's nature were not to be daunted. He learned the famous epilogue written by Goldsmith for the Harlequin of Lee Lewes,

and, after requesting the manager of the old South that he be given a chance to repeat it on the stage, as a sort of redemption for the failure of Rosalia, he determined, as the result of a stern refusal, that he would re-appear whether he was on the bills or not. So one memorable evening he dressed himself in the tight breeches and round jacket of Harlequin, stole behind the scenes of the theatre, and waited his opportunity. It came at last. As the curtain was rung down on the play, and the stage-manager left the wings, Forrest emerged from a place of concealment, sprang on the stage, between curtain and footlights, and burst out with:

The "Old South"

" Hold, prompter, hold! a word before your nonsense;

I'd speak a word or two to ease my conscience.
My pride forbids it ever should be said,
My heels eclipsed the honours of my head."

The house saw the point as to the " heels " of the fair Rosalia, applauded vigorously, and encouraged the boy to speak the whole epilogue. He made his exit in all the athletic glory of a " flip-flap," was warmly encored, and finally forced to repeat both epilogue and somersault.

" Dear, dear!" wailed the ship-chandler to Forrest, when he heard of this escapade;

Provincial
Ethics

“ all this theatrical infatuation will be your ruin. The way to thrive is to pay attention to trade. Did you ever know a play-actor to get rich ?” The employer had the good old Philadelphia idea — an idea which went hand-in-hand with Quakerdom, broad-brimmed hats, and provincialism—that art or literature spelled Vagabondism. He forgot that Garrick had amassed a fortune far greater than his own; he only looked around at the actors in his own city. The sight was not inspiring; the shabby-genteel air of the gentlemen who dispensed the drama at the old South, or at the new Walnut Street Theatre, did not suggest bank accounts with Mr. Girard.

A lucky accident now brought Forrest to the attention of John Swift, a liberal-minded Philadelphian. Mr. Swift took an interest in the theatrical ambitions of this handsome, finely formed boy, whose frank, open face and curly mass of dark hair lent him a picturesqueness which was to disappear with the trials and avoirdupois of later life. A “ real *début* ” was what the young fellow wanted, and with that end in view he secured from his patron a letter of introduction to Messrs. Wood and Warren, the managers of the Walnut Street Theatre. Those two cynics were not anxious for a new Master

Edwin Forrest

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Betty, in the person of a fourteen-year-old tragedian, but they yielded to his importunities, and on November 27, 1820, Forrest, billed as a "Young Gentleman of this city," appeared at their house as Young Norval in the play of *Douglas*. The excellence of his elocution, his self-possession, and the quality of his voice, phenomenally trumpet-like for one of his age, made such a favourable impression that Duane gave him the compliment of a critique in his *Aurora*.

"We trust," wrote the editor, "that this young gentleman will find the patronage to which his extraordinary ripeness of faculty and his modest deportment entitle him."

Douglas was repeated a few evenings later, to be followed by the appearance of the "very promising youth" as Frederick in *Lovers' Vows*, and as Octavian in *The Mountaineers*. During the season Master Forrest rented the Prune Street Theatre for one night, engaged a supporting company of his own, induced one of his brothers (then a good printer, but afterwards to become a mediocre actor) to issue the playbills, and sprang *Richard III.* upon an unoffending populace. It must have been a crude performance, but that there was some merit in it must be supposed from the gushing poem

Ripeness
of Faculty

Pleasant
Flattery

which it brought forth from a perfectly sane citizen:

“ Dear child of genius, 'round thy youthful
brow,
Taste, wit, and beauty bind the laurel now.”

That was the strain of the rhapsody. It is easily explained, therefore, why Edwin succumbed to the disease which we now vulgarly term “big-head.” In all the pride of newspaper notoriety and private flattery he called upon Cooper, one of the favourite tragedians of the day, who was then living in Philadelphia. We can picture the interview. Cooper, looking with almost pitying eye at the infant Roscius, and warning him “not to trust to his raw triumphs as an amateur,” while the lad struggles between the feelings of awe and anger. “You must not try to mount the ladder of fame by skips,” says Cooper; “you must be willing to go up slowly, round by round.” With that he gives instances of slow success, and tells how some of the greatest judges in England began by sweeping out their offices. At this Forrest flushes disdainfully; he thinks that Cooper would have him turn call-boy. “When one knows how to read he need not learn his letters,” cries the boy, and at this the veteran, much offended,

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dismisses the "promising youth." Cooper thinks of the time when he was just the age of Master Forrest, and was serving a severe apprenticeship in London, under Stephen Kemble. During a whole season he had made but one appearance, only to be hissed cruelly off the stage for stumbling in his part.

In the meantime Edmund Kean came to the Walnut, and Forrest, who still worked by day in the ship-chandlery, spent his evenings at the theatre, watching the superb acting of this master. The twelve performances of the Englishman were a revelation to the boy, who for the first time appreciated at their true value his own crude efforts. If he could only get a permanent engagement, he sighed, and thus begin to mount the ladder in the way prescribed by Cooper.

The chance came in the autumn of 1822, when Forrest engaged himself to play any part, high or low, in a travelling company organized to fill engagements alternately at Pittsburg, Lexington, and Cincinnati. For this work he was to receive \$8 a week—when he could extract it from the management—and go through a series of hardships compared to which the privations of the "one-night-stand" actor of to-day are so much luxury. Off the lad started, with

Art—and
Trade

Roughing
It

scant apparel, a Bible, a Shakespeare, and some other books, and a vast deal of homesickness, for travelling companions. About the middle of October he was playing in Pittsburg in a theatre so leaky that umbrellas were needed on rainy nights. Hot or cold, fair or stormy, he went through his tasks, which included tragedy, comedy, farce, and ballet. The more he acted, the more he began to see his own inexperience. Those rough-and-tumble days were the most fruitful of Forrest's career, for they taught him lessons never to be forgotten, and made the foundations of his subsequent fame. That he discovered how little he knew is all the more to his credit when we reflect that the average "prodigy" seldom outlives his infantile conceit, and so fails dismally when he can no longer put "Master" before his name.

From Pittsburg the company took passage in a flatboat on the Ohio River, floated along for five days, light-hearted as millionaires, played at Maysville, Ky., and then went on to Lexington. From the latter place they travelled across country to Cincinnati; the men on horseback, the women bringing up the rear in covered waggons. A "circuit" was no joke in that ante-Pullman period. At Cincinnati Forrest acted tragic personages, danced, sang comic songs, tried

Richard III., and once distinguished himself as the daughter of a broken-down soldier, who comes on the stage, to the fiddling of her father, as she wails:

“ Oh, cru-el was my parients as tored my love
from me;
And cru-el was the great big ship as took him
off to sea;
And cru-el was the capitaine, and the bo’sain,
and the men,
As did n’t care a shillin’ if we never met
again.”

That sort of versatility gave an actor a training which he seldom receives nowadays.

The Cincinnati season proved a failure, so the company were sent adrift, penniless and friendless. Forrest and some of his companions turned strollers, travelled from town to town in two ramshackle waggons, each drawn by a superannuated horse, played in barns, anywhere, indeed, and finally came to grief. Later they were again at Cincinnati, where Forrest now played Norval, Sir Edward Mortimer, and other leading parts, and once represented a plantation negro of the type afterwards made so popular by “ Jim Crow ” Rice. Years later it was hard to picture the massive tragedian as one of the pioneers of American minstrelsy.

Roughing
It

Hard
Times

Once more the theatre closed, and Forrest found some difficulty in keeping body and soul together. His favourite food was corn, stolen from a tempting field, and cooked for him by a negro washerwoman. The ears were "as hard as Pharaoh's heart," said the stroller.

So goes the Bohemian world with him for a time. At Lexington we hear of Forrest as he implores Sol Smith, the actor and manager, for an engagement. He has had an offer to play in New Orleans for \$18 a week, but he hates the idea of going so far away from Philadelphia and that little millinery store on Cedar Street. Smith refuses, whereupon the tragedian hires himself out to a circus troupe, and is found in the ring when the former comes to expostulate with him.

"There was Ned," relates Smith, "in all his glory, surrounded by riders, tumblers, and grooms. He was slightly abashed at first, but, putting a good face on the affair, said, as he had been refused an engagement at \$10 a week by his old friend, he had agreed with these boys for \$12 a week."

With that he turned a "flip-flap," merely to show his skill.

But Forrest has the good sense to break

away from the circus, goes to New Orleans, where he opens at the American Theatre, in February, 1824, and makes his first real success. His youth, manly bearing, and handsome figure, as well as the vivid and unusual style of his acting, appeal to the Southerners, who not only applaud him at the theatre, but are anxious to pay him all manner of social honour. It is a gay, luxurious city, with half a dozen contrasting elements—French, Spanish, American, aristocratic, wild, low, good, bad, anything you will—and the new favourite has but to pick out the *strata* which he desires. He chooses the race-course and the gaming-table, with a gentle preference for the society of James Bowie (that playful, kittenish fellow who loved to slash you with the knife that bore his name), not to mention several other sporting gentlemen, and an Indian chief, named Push-ma-ta-ha. With the "society" of New Orleans he will have nothing to do, maintaining, as he will do in after life, to the verge of boorishness, that he "hates sham and hypocrisy." He has a foolish idea that polite manners, polish, and the laws of conventionality are all nonsense.

That Forrest did not leave New Orleans a confirmed gambler and drinker is a fact that speaks well for his strength of character.

In the
South

Boyish
Romance

But his enemies were never able to accuse him, in honesty, of sinning in either of those directions. He seldom lost his equilibrium in the South. He might spend a morning in a cock-pit, or ask of Bowie minute directions for winging a man in a duel, but in another hour he would be studying, in some public place, the actions of old men (in contemplation of a new part), or could be seen walking down to the steamboat landing, to send off some groceries to his mother. Then he fell ill of fever, recovered, and acted through Virginia, and finally came back to New Orleans. Here he tumbled haplessly in love with Jane Placide, the leading woman of the company, and one of the most beautiful actresses of the day. Caldwell, the manager of the theatre, was a rival for her affections; he quarrelled with Forrest, and that hot-headed fellow replied with a challenge. Caldwell only laughed, at which Forrest publicly posted the manager as "a scoundrel and a coward," and then hurried off to spend a month with Push-ma-ta-ha, in the bosom of the Choctaws. The wildness of this Indian life suited the barbaric temper of the actor, at the same time that it did not add anything to his manners. "What a contrast," he cried, speaking of Push-ma-ta-ha; "what a contrast he was to some

fashionable men I have seen, half made up of false teeth, false hair, padding, gloves, and spectacles." So he danced, smoked, and hunted with the Choctaws.

The season of 1825-26 brought Forrest to Albany, N. Y., to play under the management of Charles Gilfert. He was to take the leading parts in the stock company there, and to do second parts for any "stars" that might appear. Great was his delight when Edmund Kean was announced. The tragedian came in due course, while Forrest, quite aglow with anticipation, called upon him at the hotel the morning after his arrival, sending up word that "the young man who was to play Iago to his Othello that evening begged for a brief interview." Kean was in slippers and dressing-gown, red-eyed and sleepy, with all the signs of having made a spirituous night of it, but he received his Iago very politely. In answer to a question about some stage "business," he replied: "My boy, I don't care how you come on or go off, if, while you are on the stage, you always keep in front of me, and let not your attention wander from me." Then he sat down at a rosewood piano (the top of which bore the marks of wine glasses), and with bleary eye, and pale, melancholy face, sang one of Tom Moore's ballads

**Edmund
Kean**

Edmund
Kean

with a fervour that fairly enchanted the visitor.

When *Othello* was given that night, Forrest, who played Iago as a gay, dashing villain who conceals his malice by the very ease of his manner, introduced a new piece of business in the lines :

“ Look to your wife; observe her well with Cassio;

Wear your eyes thus, not jealous,—*nor secure.*”

All these words but the last two were given in a frank, debonair fashion. When Forrest came, however, to the “ *nor secure,*” he sank his voice into such whispered malignity, as if he could no longer hide Iago’s nature, that Kean was startled.

“ Where did you get that from ?” asked Kean, with a good-natured piece of profanity, when the two players were in the dressing-room.

“ It is something of my own.”

“ Well, everybody who speaks the part hereafter must do it like that !”

Forrest never forgot that golden praise. Kean was much impressed by the young man, and predicted that he would “ rise to great eminence.” In the meantime Forrest finished his work in Albany, left his trunk in the care of his landlady as security against a

Edwin Forrest

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little board bill, and was soon in New York waiting for the opening of the new Bowery Theatre. He was a stranger, and penniless, without prospect of making any money until he could begin his engagement at this still unfinished house. While he was sitting in front of a tavern, wondering where his next meal was to come from, Woodhull, an actor in the Park Theatre company, came up to him with the request that he play Othello at a benefit. Forrest refused at first; he was in no mood for charity that did not affect himself; but when he learned that Woodhull, the beneficiary of the intended performance, had a wife and children depending on the success of it, he quickly agreed to do the Moor.

Forrest was often generous with his money in after life, but no charity ever brought him the unexpected return which came from this benefit. Gilfert, who was to be the manager of the Bowery Theatre, waddled off to the Park to see the effect of the new Othello upon a metropolitan audience. He was quite calm when he took a seat in the pit—he happened to be a Dutchman, and, like his race, not given to enthusiasm—but as the tragedy progressed, and Forrest won round after round of applause, the pudgy manager began to be carried away by the

A
Generous
Pauper

"A hit!"

scene. 'T was not so much the force of the Othello, as the exuberance of the house which impressed him. It was never a question of good or bad acting to this shrewd impressario; he saw only the dollars and cents in the impersonation. In this instance the dollars and cents looked very promising, to judge from the reception given Forrest at the close of the performance. "An admirable Othello!" and "Fine!" or "Magnificent!" were the comments on all sides. "By heavens! He has made a hit," shrieked Gilfert, letting his snuff-box fall on the floor of the pit in his excitement.

Running behind the scenes, the little Dutchman brushed into Forrest's dressing-room, pressed his hand, congratulated him, and promised to lend him some money prior to the opening of the engagement at the Bowery Theatre. So Othello posted back to Albany, redeemed his trunk from the landlady, and then played in Washington and Baltimore. With the sum which he made in the two last-named cities he travelled home to Philadelphia, and put \$400 in the hands of his astonished mother. That action, he told her, in his gruff, honest way, was more pleasant to him than all the applause he could ever earn.

What the newspapers call an ovation

awaited Forrest when he began his engagement at the Bowery Theatre in the autumn. Othello was one of the first parts he played, and in it he again made a striking impression. There were defects—some of them glaring—in the portraiture, but the breadth of the performance, combined with its spirit of semi-barbaric grandeur, made generous amends for any shortcomings. It was, perhaps, an almost brutal conception of the Moor, panting with ferocity, yet by virtue of that very quality it enchanted theatregoers who had never before seen the shadows laid on in such tremendous quantities. Here, indeed, was to be found the secret of Forrest's future success in a variety of rôles. Whether one liked or disliked his acting, there was no getting away from it; his heroes dominated the stage, and became interesting by sheer force of virility. Some critics said it was all an exhibition of lung power, quite overlooking that inherent dramatic perception which Forrest, use or misuse it as he might, undoubtedly possessed.

No sooner did the newcomer give his Othello at the Bowery than his salary was raised from \$28 to \$40 a week. He was a fortune to Manager Gilfert, even at the latter price, for the "star" began to draw such

Vociferous
Othello

Financial
Wisdom

crowds that the wily Dutchman "loaned" him several times to rival theatres for \$200 a night! Other managers came to Forrest urging him to leave the Bowery, and offering salaries far in advance of \$40 a week. "You are bound by no paper or legal agreement," they would say; to which the actor would reply, brusquely: "Sir, my word is as good as any written contract!" But Forrest, always a shrewd man in business matters, bided his time. When Gilfert said to him, with an innocent shrug of the shoulders and a nervous fumbling of the snuff-box, "I want to engage you for next season, but I suppose our terms must be somewhat different," the tragedian bowed his head in the affirmative. "What do you expect?" asked the manager. "You have yourself fixed my price," answered Forrest; "you have found me to be worth \$200 a night." He was immediately engaged on those terms for a new season of eighty nights.

Forrest now entered upon a period of dazzling success which fed his egotism and love of self-assertion without turning his head in more serious directions. He realised, as strongly as ever, the defects of his early education, and, to atone for them, he bought and read books energetically, cultivated literary people, dipped into the fine

arts, and set up, in a mild way, for a connoisseur and man of taste. These were the halcyon days of Edwin Forrest, before he was soured by domestic trouble, or was threatened with deposition from the dramatic throne which he sat upon for so long. One thing he did that should earn him undying praise. He made a patriotic attempt to encourage native dramatists. The result may not have been startling—*The Gladiator*, *Metamora*, *The Broker of Bogota*, *Caius*, and *Jack Cade* are not destined to live—but the American plays which he produced served their purpose, by increasing the stock of “harmless pleasure,” and paving the way for such latter-day craftsmen as Bronson Howard, Augustus Thomas, or the versatile Gillette. When Forrest was a boy, the American stage had neither individuality nor nationality; everything theatrical was under English dominion, and a play or player bearing a home trade-mark, instead of a foreign tag, was too often looked upon with suspicion. It was Forrest who showed the possibilities of a national drama. While his patriotism did not always take tactful form or accomplish wonders, it would be ungrateful to overlook the influence which his example has exerted for more than half a century. He was the first American-born

Halcyon
Days

Halcyon
Days

actor who attained world-wide reputation, and the first to preach to the American player an artistic Declaration of Independence.

Of the happy time in Forrest's life, dating from his triumph at the Bowery Theatre, we have entertaining glimpses. Once he acts in Providence, R. I., and is astonished to find a half-empty house awaiting him. He writes to his mother: "I performed for the first time under the immediate patronage of Providence, on Friday evening last. And, to say truth, it was but 'a beggarly account of empty boxes,'—a thing very strange to me nowadays." At another time he takes stage to Philadelphia, pays off the debts of his father's estate, buys a house for his mother and sisters—no more millinery shop now—and finds himself without a dollar. But this is a pleasant penury. All he has to do is to play an engagement in New York or elsewhere, and the money will come running in again.

Later, Forrest swallows his prejudices against the effete foreigner, sails for Europe on a pleasure trip, and enjoys himself like a schoolboy. In Paris he sees the famous Mlle. Georges, and is fascinated by her acting. "It is so different," he says, "from the sickly abortions of the present English

school." A theatrical manager of the French capital asks the tragedian to witness the *début* of a *protégé*—a very promising youth for whom the manager predicts great triumphs. Forrest goes to the performance, is disappointed with the *protégé*, who is a mediocrity, but is irresistibly attracted by a young actress.

Real
Prophecy

"That Jewish-looking girl," he says to the manager, "that little bag of bones, with the marble face and flaming eyes—*there* is demoniacal power. If she lives, and does not burn out too soon, she will become something wonderful."

He is a true prophet. The "little bag of bones" is Rachel.

Hardly had Forrest returned home before he sailed away again, in the autumn of 1836, this time to play in England. It was a bold venture, for there was then no certainty of welcome over there for an American artist, and it was none the less hazardous because an American play, Dr. Bird's *Gladiator*, was to be tried on the new audience. Forrest was not unmindful of the risk, for he said, in a speech delivered in Philadelphia just before his departure:

"I have resolved to present in England an American tragedy, supported by the humble

"The
Gladiator"

efforts of the individual who stands before you. If I fail—I fail. But, whatever may be the result, the approbation of that public which first stamped the native dramatist and actor will ever be my proudest recollection."

When Forrest made his first appearance at Drury Lane, as the lusty Spartacus of *The Gladiator*, he was cheered by an enormous audience, which admired the exuberant power of his acting without finding anything more than bombast in Dr. Bird's drama. After the green curtain had fallen, the visitor was enthusiastically called before the footlights, and saluted with loud cries of, "Let us see you in Shakespeare!" When he tried to commend *The Gladiator*, in his thanks for the verdict of approval, murmurs of dissent and cries of "No!" were heard. Forrest took the hint, dropped Spartacus, and played Othello, Macbeth, Lear, and Damon, to the unmistakable pleasure of a crowded pit, as well as to the satisfaction of many of the critics. "Nature alone seems to have been his only model," said one journalist, with more cordiality than truth, while another noticed that the inflections of his voice pleasantly reminded one of Edmund Kean in the latter's healthiest days.

Forrest wrote home, in fine humour, that

he never had been more successful, "even in his own dear land." He was dined at the Garrick Club, and received the most cordial attention from a man whom he would afterwards hate with all the bitterness of his unforgiving nature — William Charles Macready. "The latter gentleman," he wrote, "has behaved in the handsomest manner to me," with many delicate courtesies, "all showing the native kindness of his heart, and great refinement and good breeding." For a time everything went like a honeymoon.

The visitor, well pleased by most of the newspaper reviews of his acting, commented on the greater dignity and acquirements of English critics, as compared with their American brethren. "Some of *our* critics," he said, "would hardly know, if not for the actors, that Shakespeare ever existed." In one sense Forrest was right as to American theatrical criticism. The home reviewers who might be called worthy of the name—the thoughtful students, of whom there are now so many—were not plentiful; the dramatic department of an American paper showed, in many cases, less brains than one might expect from the office cat. The London critics, on the other hand, were nearly all trained writers and observers, with

Praised
by Critics

English
Amenities

whom Shakespeare was a religion and some favourite actor a feticch. But when it came to vituperation, the Englishmen could outdo the Americans ten to one, for, if they became prejudiced against an actor, nothing could exceed their blind rancour, or hide that vein of coarseness which we find in John Bull when we scratch him the wrong way. "He comes out on the stage," said one critic, speaking of Macready as Othello, "with the air of a gentleman negro rehearsing the part of Hamlet." Of Charles Kean, another remarked: "He stars in country theatres, where his power of exaggerating the faults of his father's acting gives delight to the unwashed of the gallery, who like handsome dresses, noise, stamping, bustle, and splutter." Yet another writer, who would have naught of Forrest, complained of his "awkward ignorance and brutality." One of the harshest criticisms which saw the light was on Junius Brutus Booth. A gentleman who had been given a box for Forrest's performance of Othello found, on reaching the theatre, that the bill had been changed to *Richard III.*, with Booth as the Duke. In his disappointment he composed the following doggerel, which appeared next morning in one of the newspapers:

“ Of Shakespeare in barns we have heard ;
 Yet who has the patience, forsooth,
 To witness *King Richard the Third*
 Enacted to-night in a—Booth ?
 The order to you I have brought,
 Not liking the manager’s trick ;
 For, instead of the *Forrest* I sought,
 He now only offers a *stick*.”

Catharine
 Sinclair

In one direction this English trip had a lifelong, and, in the end, a disastrous bearing on the career of Forrest. For it was in England that he met and married Catharine Norton Sinclair, the daughter of a distinguished vocalist, and a young woman of great beauty and fascination of manner. “ When I first saw Edwin Forrest,” said Mrs. Forrest long afterwards, when he was dead, and her own looks had fled, “ I thought him the handsomest man on whom my eyes had ever fallen.” It was a case of love at first sight, and on each side, with all signs pointing to as happy a wedded existence as couple could secure outside of a novel.

When Forrest brought his wife to America, to make her a home in New York, everybody said that she had turned the untamed lion into a lamb. All the edges of his nature seemed to be smoothed down; he was a new man. He became a model

William
Charles
Macready

citizen, cultivated domesticity, rented a pew in a popular church, and bid fair to live out his life without jar or hindrance. One of the guests welcomed to his house in 1843 was his old friend, Macready, who was now making a second professional tour of America. Nothing could have been more pleasant than this intimacy—for a time. Forrest could be a charming host, as he proved himself on this occasion; Mrs. Forrest, who had known the English actor from her childhood, was every bit as cordial as her husband, and Macready thought the American tragedian a paragon of rugged sincerity.

But that worst of marplots, the enthusiastic friend who dogs the footsteps of a successful man, chanting the latter's praises at inopportune times, began to make trouble. The American admirers of Macready, among whom were most of the "silk-stocking" element, started in to compare their favourite to the disadvantage of Forrest and his robust style of acting. At this the adherents of the American abused Macready, calling him the pet of the Anglomaniacs, and pointing out that he was only capable of winning languid applause from kid gloves, while Forrest could bring tears to all eyes. The newspapers took up the controversy until it assumed the idiotic dignity of a rivalry

between Great Britain and the United States; the matter was discussed in England, and a vast deal of ill-feeling, destined to bear bitter fruit, was thereby engendered, quite without the desire of the two "stars."

In February, 1845, when Forrest began another engagement in London, he was hissed by some of the spectators. It was evident that a powerful clique had arisen to injure him; there was no longer that unanimity of good will which had marked his first English tour. A mighty change took place in the spirit of many of the criticisms. Forrest's Othello, said one writer, was merely a burlesque of Kean's mannerisms, varied by a "Yankee nasal twang." His passion was but "a violent effort of physical vehemence"; his smile was "like the grin of a wolf showing its fangs"; the killing of Desdemona suggested "cold-blooded butchery."

"Our old friend, Mr. Forrest," wrote one distinguished critic, "afforded great amusement to the public by his performance of Macbeth. Indeed, our best comic actors do not often excite so great a quantity of mirth. The change from an inaudible murmur to a thunder of sound was enormous. But the grand feature was the combat, in which he stood scraping his sword against that of Macduff. We were at a loss to know

Change
of View

Coarse
Abuse

what this gesture meant, till an enlightened critic in the gallery shouted out: 'That's right! Sharpen it!''

Here was a critique of Lear:

"Of Mr. Edwin Forrest's coarse caricature of Lear we caught a glimpse that more than sufficed to show that the actor had no conception of the part. His Lear is a roaring pantaloon, with a vigorous totter, a head waving as indefatigably as a china image, and lungs of prodigious power. There only wanted the candlewick moustaches to complete the stage idea of a choleric despot in pantomime."

This was not criticism worthy of the name. It was vulgar abuse of the "smart" type which jaundiced reviewers adopt when they want to kill a man by pen-stabs. Other critics were more generous, and many of the theatre-goers of London still found pleasure in the vigour or the vehemence, of the American actor. But no amount of attention from his friends could soothe Forrest. The hisses and the journalistic billingsgate sank deep into his proud, revengeful nature, and he was foolish enough to attribute them to the personal instigation of Macready. In that belief Forrest was evidently mistaken. Macready was only suffering from the

injudicious admiration of certain of his friends, "more loyal than the King."

After closing his London season, Forrest made a tour of the principal British cities. It is a pity that he ever went to Edinburgh, for here he encountered Macready, and lost his head. The Englishman played Hamlet at the Scotch capital, and his rival sat in front, watching the performance in no friendly mood. In the scene where the court is about to gather to see the play, and Hamlet says to Horatio:

"They are coming to the play; I must be idle.
Get you to a place,"

Macready "galloped" two or three times across the stage, swinging his handkerchief in rapid flourishes above his head." It was a bit of "business" supposed to be in harmony with the affected madness of Hamlet, and may, or may not, have been in good taste. Forrest, disgusted at the innovation, had the indecency to give a loud hiss. Nothing could have been more ungentlemanly or impolitic. The insult seemed so incomprehensible that when Macready heard that the boor in the audience was his rival, he would scarcely credit the statement.

But Forrest made no bones about his rudeness; he even went to the length of

A Jaug
Das

Bad
Taste

justifying his action, in a letter to the *London Times*.

“Mr. Macready,” he said, “thought fit to introduce a fancy dance into his performance of Hamlet, which I thought, and still think, a desecration of the scene, and at which I evinced that disapprobation for which the pseudo-critic [referring to a writer in the *Scotsman* who had criticised his hissing] is pleased to term me an offender; and this was the only time during the performance that I did so, although the writer evidently seeks, in the article alluded to, to convey a different impression. That a man may manifest his pleasure or displeasure after the recognised mode, according to the best of his judgment, actuated by proper motives, and for justifiable ends, is a right which, until now, I have never once heard questioned; and I contend that that right extends equally to an actor, in his capacity of a spectator, as to any other man.”

This letter capped the climax to the bad taste of the whole business. Forrest should have known that he, of all men, was the last who could afford to hiss Macready, even if that gentleman had played Hamlet in the costume of a ballet-dancer. Macready's *pas de mouchoir*, as Forrest contemptuously called the handkerchief incident, was nothing compared with his own *faux pas*.

Edwin Forrest

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Forrest also tried to find the Edinburgh critic who had condemned him, through the columns of the *Scotsman*, for the hissing of his rival. Early one evening he made an elaborate toilet, put on a pair of new kid gloves to increase the effectiveness of his appearance, perfumed himself with cologne, and started out to subdue the offender. Reaching the theatre before the rising of the curtain, he ascended to a box in the upper tier, where he thought the critic usually sat. A man was at that moment in the box, unsuspectingly viewing the house. Forrest, with a glare worthy of his Othello, walked up to the supposed critic with the question, delivered in the accents of a melodramatic villain: "Are you the author of the letter in the *Scotsman*, relative to my hissing Macready?"

"No!" said the man, shrinking back; "No; I am not!"

"Well," shouted the actor, as he stalked majestically out of the box, "it's fortunate for you that you are not, for had you been"—here an oath—"I would have flung you over the balcony into the pit!"

This whole episode puts Forrest in such a childish light that it is more pleasant to have done with it. One instance of his bad temper is less to his discredit. While he

In Mar-
tial Mood

Offended
Majesty

was rehearsing at the theatre in Edinburgh the proprietor, a dapper little man, bustled about the stage, much to the annoyance of the players. Forrest, not recognising him, called out angrily, "Stop that noise!" To this the proprietor squeaked out bravely: "This is my theatre, sir; and I shall make as much noise in it as I please, and when I please!" This was too much for the American. "If you ever dare to interrupt me again," he bellowed, "I'll knock your head off your shoulders!" The little man hurried away, unused as he was to the explosive methods of the tragedian, nor did he come again behind the scenes until the day after the visitor had closed his Edinburgh engagement. Forrest happened, however, to be in the dressing-room, packing up his costumes, and he heard the proprietor say to the treasurer of the theatre: "Has the great American pugilist left town?" The "pugilist" burst out laughing, rushed out before the frightened Scotchman, and made friends with him on the instant.

The tyrannical sway which Forrest held at rehearsal was so well known that many an actor trembled when he appeared on the stage of a morning with watch in hand and a scowl on his face. Great was the consternation one day in New York, when rehearsal

was delayed by the non-arrival of a member of the company who was to play a part which bore an important relationship to the rôle of the star. Forrest walked up and down like a caged lion, looking at his watch and then regarding his companions with the air of one who would willingly devour them, if he thought them a little less tough. The minutes passed, until at last the missing actor hurried in, pale and nervous. "Sir!" roared Forrest; "you have kept these ladies and gentlemen waiting a full half-hour!" There were tears in the truant's eyes. "I—I—could not come sooner," he answered quietly; "my son—my only son—died last night. I hurried here as soon as I could." "Say no more!" said Forrest, who became on the instant a sympathetic human being, sent the man home, and gave him a \$50 bill. There was deep, honest sentiment under the shaggy exterior of the tragedian.

But from the time that Forrest finished his second English engagement, the worst phases of his nature were brought into bold relief. This was particularly the case when Macready returned to the United States, to begin a season which had such a tragic and unexpected finale at the Astor Place Opera House, on May 10, 1849, when the riot occurred which drove Macready from the

Honest
Sentiment

Foolish
Friends

American stage, and resulted in the killing of some of the rioters by the militia. The feeling was bitter on both sides from the moment that Macready arrived; press and public were full of the controversy; it seemed as if some great international issue was under discussion. The masses sided with Forrest, whom they acclaimed the champion of American artistic independence; they were ready to stigmatise a "Macreadyite" as a traitor, a friend of England, or a kid-gloved, cologne-scented idiot. The trouble was not allayed when the Boston *Mail* published a vituperative article whose sensational head-lines read:

"MORE ABOUT McREADY—HIS ABUSE OF MR. FORREST IN EUROPE—ENDEAVOURS TO PUT HIM DOWN IN PARIS, LONDON, AND EDINBURGH—HIS INTRIGUE WITH BULWER TO PREVENT FORREST PLAYING IN BULWER'S PLAYS—HIS ABUSE OF AMERICANS, ETC."

In this tirade Macready was accused of a host of intrigues against Forrest, and was particularly charged with having persuaded Bulwer to refuse Forrest permission to play, while in London, either Richelieu or Claude Melnotte. The article was not worth noticing, but Macready threatened to bring a damage suit against the *Mail*, and was only

deterred from doing so by the excellent advice of two honest lawyers whom he engaged as counsel. He acted foolishly in other ways: paid too much attention to the rough abuse hurled against him, and was childish enough, on several occasions, to refer to the affair in speeches from the foot-lights.

One night, after Macready had been both hissed and applauded at the Arch Street Theatre, in Philadelphia, he was brought before the curtain by an audience which was on the alert for mischief. When a voice called out: "Did you allow Forrest to be heard in England?" the actor replied:

"I never entertained hostile feelings towards any actor in this country, and have never evinced a feeling of opposition to him." "The actor alluded to," he added, "had done that towards him [Macready] which he was sure no English actor would do—he had openly hissed him."

At this there was a great uproar, with hisses, hurrahs, and a collision in the boxes. Forrest, who was then in Philadelphia, came out the next day with a "card" which, for bad taste, quite outdid any indiscretion of his rival.

"I most solemnly aver, and do believe," said

Hisses
and
Applause

H
"Card"

Forrest, over his signature, "that Mr. Macready, instigated by his narrow, envious mind, and his selfish fears, did *secretly*—not *openly*—suborn several writers for the English press to write me down. . . . I assert also, and solemnly believe, that Mr. Macready connived when his friends went to the theatre in London to hiss me, and did hiss me with the purpose of driving me from the stage—and all this happened many months before the affair at Edinburgh, to which Mr. Macready refers, and in retaliation to which he jesuitically remarks that 'until that act he never entertained towards me a feeling of unkindness.' Pah! Mr. Macready has no feeling of kindness for any actor who is likely, by his talent, to stand in his way. His whole course as manager and actor proves this—there is nothing in him but self—self—self—and his own countrymen, the English actors, know this well. Mr. Macready has a very lively imagination, and often draws upon it for his facts. He said, in a speech at New York, that there, also, there was an 'organised opposition' to him, which is likewise false. There was no opposition manifested towards him there—for I was in the city at the time, and was careful to watch every movement with regard to such a matter. Many of my friends called upon me when Mr. Macready was announced to perform, and proposed to drive him from the stage for his conduct towards me in London. My advice was, do

nothing—let the superannuated driveller alone—to oppose him would be but to make him of some importance.”

Forrest
vs.
Macready

The card ended by terming Macready a “poor old man,” of a disturbed and guilty conscience. The English actor answered by publishing a “card” of his own, and so the pitiful warfare went on until the dreadful Astor Place tragedy put an end to the rivalry. The contest proved how two men who start out as friends can be pitted one against the other by the whisperings of mischief-makers and the dangerous zeal of critics. Forrest, as it is but fair to his memory to say, did not connive at the disturbances which drove Macready from the New York stage, but his conduct was gross in the extreme. Macready was not blameless, in that he lacked tact and delicacy. Yet the bulk of the blame was with Forrest. That was something, however, which neither friend or foe dared to tell him in his presence.

By far the most painful episode of Forrest’s career was the wretched divorce suit which almost wrecked his life, lost him many a firm friend, and turned him into a misanthrope, with little faith in the honesty of man or the virtue of woman. It is not a subject to dwell upon long or willingly.

Domestic
Storms

How he accused his wife of infidelity; how they separated; how the scandal got into the courts, where Mrs. Forrest's honour was vindicated; how Forrest appealed the case without success—these were things that gave choice morsels to the gossip-mongers, and dragged from its closet another grinning family skeleton. Public opinion was about equally divided: some persons contended that the wife was guilty; others said that Forrest was tired of matrimony, and only wished to rid himself of a woman who refused to abuse her countryman, Macready. After the separation Mrs. Forrest went on the stage, under the patronage of a number of influential supporters, but she did not shine with surpassing brilliancy, lapsed into obscurity, and died but a few years ago, quite forgotten. When Forrest appeared in New York, February 9, 1852, at the close of the divorce suit so humiliatingly decided against him, he was greeted with cheers and bouquets. In the parquet of the theatre a large flag, bearing the motto, "This is Our Verdict," was conspicuously displayed. "I thought my path was covered with thorns," said the actor in a speech from the stage, "but you have strewn it with roses." The horny-handed still gave him their adulation.

As we now look back at the scandal, after

nearly half a century for cool reflection, it suggests but a tempest in a teapot, or much ado about nothing. Catharine Sinclair Forrest seems but an indiscreet woman, free of actual wrongdoing, and Forrest himself stands out as a hot-headed spouse, fatally prone to jump at unjust conclusions. Mrs. Forrest had been brought up in an artistic atmosphere, in which a certain laxity of forms did not imply anything immoral, while her husband, remembering the quiet life of his mother and sisters in the Cedar Street shop, could not understand how a wife might long for a little gaiety or a champagne supper. An hour of calm discussion, and a few compromises on each side of the house, might have saved the tragedy.

Domestic
Storms

Forrest went on acting for a time, then he retired, and was back on the stage in 1860, before the outbreak of the Civil War. Slowly, but none the less surely, he began to lose his hold on the public, as new players and new methods came to the front. People who used to praise him now found too much virulence in his acting, or they grew tired of him, and stayed away from his performances. He, in turn, did not give forth the same power; he was getting old, perfunctory, and frightfully irascible. When he made his last appearance as an actor in New York, in

Vanished
Greatness

February, 1871, there were no packed houses to greet him, as in the past.

“He gave to his children, the public, all he had,” said one of the critics, “and now they have deserted him. They have crowned a new King [Edwin Booth], before whom they bow, and ‘the old man eloquent’ is cheered by few voices.”

As he bowed to what remained of his admirers, he saw the falling off, and “knew his fate.”

In the spring of 1872 Forrest acted Lear in Boston, for the last time. It was a pathetic performance to those who recalled the Lear of other days, and thought of the tragedian's famous remark: “Play Lear! I play Hamlet, Richard, Shylock, Virginius, if you please; but by God, sir, I *am* Lear!” The next day, Sunday, he caught a bad cold; on Monday and Tuesday he struggled through Richelieu, and then he collapsed. He pulled himself together, later in the year, gave a few readings from Shakespeare, which were failures, and then went back to his house in Philadelphia. On Thursday, December 12, 1872, a servant found him dead on his bed.

“Surrounded by all that wealth and taste could give, deprived of that in his last moments that all the wealth and all the power of the world

could not have given him — a friend to return the last pressures of that stiffening hand.”

No more would the voice which had charmed by its oceanic roar give sonority to Damon or Metamora, Virginius or Spartacus.

In the endowment of the Forrest Home, on the outskirts of Philadelphia, the actor has left a tangible memorial of his art, or of the wealth which that art secured. There players who have served the public not wisely but too well, and who have found themselves none the richer after their work is done, pass their time amid the books and treasures of the dead tragedian, waiting for their own final exit. Edwin Forrest was a gigantic mass of contradictions, and the rising generation asks itself whether he was not a powerful declaimer rather than an inspired actor, but be that as it may, it cannot be denied that any ranting or boorishness of which he was guilty has noble atonement in the retreat at Springbrook.

In
Memoriam



“ A sterling gentleman; great when he played
In England's noble drama, and the still
House wept, or loud applauded, as its heart
He wrought, and with imperious passion
 swayed
The reins of the full theatre at will.”

—*Sir Frederick Pollock.*



WILLIAM CHARLES MACREADY

THE great Duke of Wellington is reported to have said of George IV., that most unheroic of English kings: "He was no gentleman, though an excellent actor of one for ten minutes: like Mr. Macready, he could not support it longer." There is an irony almost cruel in the latter part of the criticism, when we remember that to play the gentleman, and forget the actor, was the dearest wish of William Charles Macready. He was a prince of snobs, who looked down, in rank disloyalty, upon the profession which had made him famous, and found in his retirement therefrom the most comforting episode of his life. He suggested an unfortunate man who had gotten into a prison, and was always explaining to visitors that he was infinitely superior to his surroundings. For it was as a jailer, not as a beloved mistress, that he regarded Melpomene. No wonder,

Prince of
Snobs

Prince of
Snobs

then, that he was unhappy and ill-tempered, with the ignoble discontent of one who is ashamed of the position in life to which it has pleased Providence to call him; no wonder that he bullied actors, fawned on the powerful, and cultivated a morbid respect for public opinion. The curious thing about Macready is that he should have proved as fine an artist as he did, bound down, as his spirit was, by such cowardly fetters. Yet he became one of the most popular actors of the century, through sheer force of will-power, and showed himself possessed of several sterling traits of character. Forrest, who raved in his deep voice against the aristocracy, was his antithesis; Congreve, who affected to despise that literary talent which made the poet great, was his eighteenth-century counterpart.

The very origin of Macready rendered his superciliousness all the more inconsistent; for he was the son of an actor, and the grandson of an Irish upholsterer. Perhaps it was because of the upholstery that he longed, as only a middle-class Englishman can, to soar into more exalted realms. He was born in Tottenham Court Road, London, March 3, 1793, at the time that his father, a respectable performer of the type we faintly praise as conscientious, was



WILLIAM CHARLES MACREADY IN THE CHARACTER OF
"HENRY IV."

FROM MACREADY'S "REMINISCENCES."



playing in the company of Covent Garden Theatre. A little later this industrious parent blossomed out into a provincial manager, and the son was placed in a school at Birmingham, where he showed a talent for recitation, and a decided tendency to drop his *h*'s. The latter habit, "for some time an insuperable obstacle to progress," was finally overcome. But it was not before the boy's mother had nearly despaired, as he persisted in pronouncing a line from the *Alexander's Feast* of Dryden in true Cockney fashion:

"'Appy, 'Appy, 'Appy Pair!"

During the summer holidays, Macready would watch the performances given in his father's theatre in Birmingham, or act compositions of his own, aided by his brothers and sisters. Any spare time that he had in winter was spent in visiting school companions, or lying on the sofa and reading novels. When he went to Rugby he acted in a number of plays which were religiously murdered from time to time by the bigger boys, but he must have done it with the grand air of one who is not to be caught by the tinsel of the stage. Once the Head-Master asked William Charles what profession was designed for him by the elder Macready.

Macready
of Art

" I am intended for the law," replied the pupil.

" Have you not thought of your father's profession ? "

" No, sir. "

" Should you not like it ? "

" No, sir; I should wish to go to the bar. "

" Are you quite certain that you should not wish to go on the stage ? "

" Quite certain, sir; I very much dislike it, and the thought of it. "

" Well," added the Head-Master, in a relieved tone, " I am glad of it. "

Macready tells us this anecdote in his reminiscences, without seeing what a priggish little figure, like the hero of an old-fashioned Sunday-school story, he makes of himself in the dialogue.

But the prig had the manliness to give up his ambition for the law, and take up the art that he despised, in order to help his father. That gentleman had gotten himself into financial difficulties, as other managers of a " Micawber " turn of temperament have done before and since, and the son had no intention of becoming a drag on the family. Mr. Macready, senior, made no violent protest. " My father," says William Charles, " was impressive in his convictions that the stage was a gentlemanly profession," and he

adds (the point is worth recording as showing the younger Macready's confessed attitude about the stage):

Too Sensitive

“ My experience has taught me that whilst the law, the church, the army, and navy, give a man the rank of a gentleman, on the stage that designation must be obtained in society (though the law and the Court decline to recognise it) by the individual bearing. In other callings the profession confers dignity on the initiated; on the stage the player must contribute respect to the exercise of his art.”

Poor, sensitive Macready! He writes of law, the church, the army, and the navy, without the use of capitals, but dignifies Court by a big C. Perhaps it is unkind to criticise him too severely. Players (by players, I mean dignified artists, not the burlesquers or the “ hamfatters ” who pose as such) have much more of social prestige than they had when Macready began life. Then there was still a sting of reality in the story told of old Macklin, anent a liberal contribution which he once made to a charity. What name, he was asked, should be placed on the list, opposite the amount of his subscription? “ Why,” he replied, “ according to law I believe it should be,

True
Grit

‘Charles Macklin, Vagabond,’ but you may enter it, by courtesy, ‘C. Macklin, Esquire.’”

It was a great blow to young Macready, this abandonment of all hopes of the wool-sack, but he had grit in his nature, way down beneath the snobbery. At the age of sixteen he was in Chester, directing one of his father’s companies while, the old manager himself was suffering a temporary imprisonment for debt. The lad found the troupe in a sad state of mutiny and general demoralisation; salaries were in arrears, and the business of the theatre was being carried on in the most slovenly manner. He changed all this, stripling though he was, galvanised the almost defunct theatre, and by his shrewdness managed to secure large audiences, discharge the rent of the house, pay all the salaries, and close the season in triumph. He had been obliged to borrow some money, that he might fully bring matters to this happy issue, but he hoped to make enough during the coming season at his father’s theatre in Newcastle to pay off the new debt. There he was to organise a good provincial troupe, and for that point he immediately set off in a post-chaise, accompanied by three members of the company.

About noon on Christmas Day the tired

quartette reached Brough, a village on the wild borders of Westmoreland, where lunch was demanded. Macready gave a five-pound Bank of England note—the last one he had—to pay the post-boy. But a shock awaited him, for the landlord entered the room where the actors were eating, said that he did not “like the looks” of the bank-note, and refused to help them on their journey.

A
Deadlock

“Here was a deadlock!” relates Macready. “All my cherished hopes endangered, if not ruined, unless I reached Newcastle in good time on the morrow; and how to get there, or send nearly 170 miles, was a perplexity which, in a very distressed state of mind, we had to deliberate upon. My position, if I could not reach Newcastle in time, must have been deplorable. We sent for the landlord; he was not within, having gone up to his farm! Time began to press, for it was already evident we could not under any circumstances reach Newcastle that night; but what means of extrication were there? My watch had been left at Chester to eke out the needful amount for this journey. Those of my three *compagnons de voyage* were laid on the table, and the landlord, who had returned, was once more summoned. I gave him what references of respectability I could, and finding him immovable in his refusal to send us on without four

Off at
Last

horses, we submitted to this extra charge on condition that he would advance three pounds upon the watches, and give change for the five-pound note. After some hesitation he yielded; the post-boy was paid, the four horses were put to, and the postillions charged to instruct the inn-keeper at the next stage to forward us with a pair. The crew with a flowing sheet sailing 'Away from the Bay of Biscay, O!' could scarcely have felt greater relief than we did in finding ourselves in full gallop from what had threatened to be our prison in Brough. We gave three cheers as we cleared the dreary little town, and on reaching Durham late in the evening found our funds just equal to the payment of the chaise that landed us there. Being well known here, there was no stint to the enjoyment of a good supper and good beds, the bill for which I took with me to Newcastle betimes the next morning, obtaining cash from the treasurer of the theatre to remit the full discharge of all to our obliging host of the Wheatsheaf."

The season at Newcastle was such a success that Macready was able to send a regular sum of money each week to his father, and the release from prison of the veteran manager, with a certificate of bankruptcy, was obtained in a short time.

There were humours and Hogarthian touches of nature about those provincial

days which even the haughty soul of Macready relished, as he looked back on them in the light of more prosperous years. He recalls amusingly the experience he had at Newcastle on the first representation of the grand *Ballet of Action*, founded on *Macbeth*. The preparations for the production were very elaborate, depending for effect upon complicated machinery, and it was necessary that the young manager should keep behind the scenes throughout the evening, as he superintended the affair, and "urged on" the performers—a process which doubtless included the hurling at them of such tender epithets as "Beast!" or "Villain!" In the scene after Duncan's murder, there was scarcely three minutes' time for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to wash the blood from their hands. Conway, the Macbeth, rushed behind in an agony of despair, exclaiming, "Oh, my dear sir, my dresser is not here! What shall I do?" There was not a moment for reflection. "Here," cried Macready, "come here"; and with that the manager fairly ran Conway into a dressing-room and plunged his red hands into a jug of water. "But there is no towel!" whined the Macbeth. Macready snatched up the "first semblance of cloth" that he could find, dried Conway's half-washed hands, and

Amusing
Memories

dashed back to the stage. At the foot of the stairs, as he still held the cloth and jug, the manager tumbled across Lady Macbeth. She was likewise looking for water, and welcomed the jug as if it had been filled with so much nectar. After she had rid herself of the mark of guilt, or, in prosaic language, had wiped away the red paint, and dried her hands, Macready deposited jug and cloth in his own room, and returned to the stage to watch the performance. The "barbarous violation of Shakespeare," as he calls it, was loudly applauded, nor did the audience suspect how nearly their enjoyment had been interrupted.

The next morning the acting manager of the theatre met Macready with a tragic story. "Sir," he said, "I am very sorry to tell you there are thieves in the theatre!" "Good heavens!" cried Macready; "is it possible? Let every inquiry be made, that they may be punished or at least turned out of the place. What has been stolen?" "Why, sir, Mr. Simkins's breeches! When he went to dress himself at the end of the evening, his breeches were gone, and he was obliged to walk home to his lodgings, through the snow, without any." The strictest search was made, but neither breeches nor thieves could be found. Suddenly an idea flashed

upon Macready. Yes—there could be no doubt of it—the towel that he had used for the Macbeths turned out to be the nether garment of Simkins. The latter soon received new breeches, and an apology.

The training which Macready secured in this brief managerial career was invaluable, and he made the most of it; even when his father left his debtor's prison, to take charge of the theatre in Newcastle, he continued to attend rehearsals, and to instruct those of the company who played in the lighter forms of entertainment. He was always studying, working, reasoning, as he continued to do until the end of his stage life; no detail was too small for his consideration; he loved to invent new "business" for the actors, and showed a tendency to steer clear of tradition. One morning the youth was showing one of the company how, in making a tiger-spring upon a savage enemy, he was suddenly to lapse into astonishment on seeing his own figure reflected in the polished shield of his antagonist. There was nature and originality of conception in the thing, and it served to brighten a familiar scene by a touch of art, minute but full of effectiveness. "If you can do anything like that on the stage," said old Macready, who was looking on, "there will be few come near you."

Valuable
Training

Plump
Romeo

The first appearance of William Charles, "on any stage," was as Romeo (June 7, 1810), in the elder Macready's theatre at Birmingham. A plump lad of seventeen, with a strong, unsympathetic face, and decked out in all the glory of white satin tunic and knee-breeches, a mighty ruff, white silk stockings, white kid gloves, and leather pumps, seems hardly fitted for the ideal Montague, yet he pleased the large audience mightily, and cried enthusiastically on the fall of the curtain: "I feel as if I should like to act it all over again!" He could not have been an ardent or attractive lover, of the Spranger Barry type, but it may be taken for granted that he never missed a point in text or situation. There was the source of Macready's power from youth onwards. He always did the most with his characters, so far as research and analysis permitted; all he lacked to make of him an unapproachable actor was the inspiration. That sounds like the remark that a certain poet has everything save feeling, yet there have been both versifiers and players who could win fame, albeit of a cold kind, without harbouring a spark of genius. They are artists of the unemotional class.

The young player now added other ambitious parts to his repertoire, and finally found

himself acting at Newcastle with Sarah Siddons. The stateliness of the actress, suggesting one who "dwelt in marble halls" rather than in prosaic, economical lodgings, so terrified him that when he played Young Norval in *Douglas* to her Lady Randolph, he lost his wits and his memory. The Siddons was good enough to prompt him; he regained his presence of mind, and behaved himself so admirably that the awe-producing lady called out "Bravo!" as she stood looking on at the wings. When the drama was ended she said to him: "You are in the right way; but remember what I say: study, study, study, and do not marry till you are thirty." He took her advice.

By the year 1813 Macready had placed on his Shakespearian list the parts of Hamlet (a character, he said, in which a total failure "is of rare occurrence"), Richard II., Richard III., and Mark Antony. His Hamlet, as it developed in later life, must have accorded well with his reflective disposition, while his Richard III., much as it increased his prestige when he came to play it in London, could not have been more than an interesting piece of stage mechanism compared to the fiery Duke of Kean or David Garrick. His Antony was tame, as might be supposed in one who could have had no affinity for

"Study!
Study!"

Queer
Vindication

anyone so unconventional as the lovely Cleopatra. Just before he made his first appearance as the Roman he was accused of having "shamefully misused, and even kicked," the actress who was cast for Cleopatra. He chose a curious mode of vindication. On the evening of the revival, on the first entry of the two lovers, Antony took Cleopatra by the hand, and, as he led her to the front of the stage, put this un-Shakespearian question to her: "Have I ever been guilty of any injustice of any kind to you since you have been in the theatre?"

"No, sir," was the meek reply.

"Have I ever behaved to you in an ungentlemanlike manner?"

"No, sir."

"Have I ever kicked you?"

"Oh, no, sir!" protested the young lady, amid loud applause.

The fame of Macready began to rise steadily in the provinces and in Ireland, as he went on acting and slaving, in his melancholy, energetic way, to perfect himself in the technique of his art and to put as much nature into his performances as he could command. Reports of him penetrated to London, where he was represented to Lord Byron as a young man of great merit — and unimpeachable morality. "Ha, then,"

growled the noble poet, "I suppose he asks five pounds a week more for his morality?" This "morality" of Macready's was something that the theatregoers could never flee from; he might swear at his company, or be insanely jealous of a favourite rival, or beat a manager, as he did on one occasion, but nobody ever questioned his exceeding virtue.

When Macready at last got an entrance at Covent Garden, in the autumn of 1816, under contract to fill a five-years' engagement at a salary ranging from £16 to £18 a week, he had played, since his *début* as Romeo, more than eighty parts. That was an enviable record for so young a man. Edmund Kean was in the zenith of his meteoric career, and as the new aspirant for London favour dared not take any of the master's parts, he chose that of Orestes, in *The Distrest Mother*. It was a sickly sort of character, but he made a "hit," once that he had conquered the nervousness that threatened to undo him in the earlier scenes. He might well have suffered from stage fright, for there was Kean himself looking on from a private box, and—praise be to the Fates—violently applauding. "Well, my boy, you have done capitally," was the criticism of the manager; "and if you can carry a play along with such a cast, I don't know

Much
"Morality"

An Ugly
Fellow

what you can *not* do." The comments of the newspapers were, in the main, pleasantly appreciative, if nothing more. One critic summed up the great merit of Macready by calling him a "man of mind"; another credited him with "a large quantity of vocal and bronchial force"; and still a third reviewer wrote:

"Mr. Macready is one of the plainest and most awkwardly made men that ever trod the stage. His voice is even coarser than his person. And yet . . . he is undoubtedly an actor, . . . and an actor in many points superior to Kean."

"I'm told Macready's a capital actor, but a devilish ugly fellow," said a theatregoer within hearing of the man on whom he was heaping this mixture of praise and abuse. Indeed, no amount of art could conceal the harsh expression or coarse lines of Macready's face; the sensitive spectator sometimes found it a sad source of disillusion in scenes calling for an intense display of tenderness.

But ugly face or not, Macready experienced a joy at his success which even his contempt for the stage could not destroy. How his heart had quailed during the afternoon, a few hours before the performance of

The Distrest Mother; how he had felt, as the hackney coach bore him from his lodgings to the theatre, as if he were going to be executed!

Going to Execution

“The silent process of dressing was only interrupted by the call-boy Parsloe’s voice, ‘Overture on, sir!’ which sent a chill to my heart. The official rap at the door soon followed, and the summons, ‘Mr. Macready,’ made me instantly rally all my energies, and with a firm step I went forward to my trial. But the appearance of resolute composure assumed by the player at this turning-point of his life belies the struggles he endures. These eventful trials, in respect to the state of mind and body in which they are encountered, so resemble each other that one described describes all. The same agitation, and effort to master it, the dazzled vision, the short, quick breath, the dry palate, the throbbing of the heart — all, however painfully felt, must be effectually disguised in the character the actor strives to place before his audience.”

The earlier portion of Macready’s career was not particularly brilliant, for the parts he played were not always happy, or to his own taste. In a new piece styled *The Conquest of Toranto*, he was cast for a despicable villain, but so much was he disgusted at the choice that he offered to pay a forfeiture of £30 if the management would release him

Stage
Villainy

from the character. He was forced to take it, and he put so much brains into his study of the part that he made one of the best villains known to the modern stage. Soon afterward he played another villain, in *The Apostate*, with equal success. But things did not altogether suit Macready, and when he found that his first appearance during his second season at Covent Garden was to be in a melodramatic after-piece, he almost resolved to give up the stage, and study for the Church. He did not follow out this religious purpose; his chances at Covent Garden improved; he played outside of London during the summer recesses, and finally made his first substantial triumph as Richard III. (October 25, 1819).

Actors sometimes make successes of parts which they fear beforehand. Thus it was with Macready. He had grave doubts, and an unpleasant sinking feeling, when he thought of the odious comparisons which might be drawn between his Richard and that of Edmund Kean. But he "studied, studied, studied," as Mrs. Siddons had advised, and the result was that his Duke was saluted with loud shouts of approval and the waving of handkerchiefs. The new Richard was the talk of the town; Macready was regarded as the equal of "the little man

in the capes." To draw points of likeness, or of difference, between the two Richards became the fashion of the day; poems were written about them, and a great deal of ink was used in discussing their respective virtues.

Two
Richards

"Compared with Mr. Kean," wrote Leigh Hunt, "we should say that a division of merits, usual enough with the performance of such comprehensive characters as Shakespeare's, has taken place in the Richards of these two actors. Mr. Kean's Richard is the more sombre, perhaps the deeper part of him; Mr. Macready's the livelier and more animal part, a very considerable one, nevertheless."

Kean's Richard, it appeared, was the king darkened by the shadow of melancholy, while that of Macready was a rather buoyant individual. Who dares to dispute a popular verdict? Audiences should be better judges of a performance than those who have not seen it — but it is hard to understand how Macready could have been put on the same pedestal with Kean.

It is far easier to appreciate the new actor's success as Virginius, in the tragedy of that name written by James Sheridan Knowles. The play is going out of fashion now; ere long it may be put on the shelf of

226	Twelve Great Actors
Classic Virginius	<p>oblivion, and labelled "archaic," but there is about it an air of classic dignity which still faintly pleases. We regard <i>Virginius</i> much as we might regard a noble building of the Roman school which is showing signs of decay; we give it a respectful glance — and then turn away to see something fresher, or more modern.</p> <p>The story of how <i>Virginius</i> was accepted and produced might serve as a sort of salutary lesson whereby to revive the drooping spirits of would-be dramatists who have grown tired of sending plays to managers, only to get them back again in due season. Knowles, popularly known to his friends as "Paddy," was an Irish schoolmaster. He had been a stroller, had played with Kean, for whom he had written a drama which has not been preserved, and had of late employed his spare moments at his school by writing scraps of <i>Virginius</i> on a slate. In the spring of 1820 John Tait, an acquaintance of Macready, wrote to the actor that a most interesting play had been produced recently at Glasgow, and asked him if he would not like to see the manuscript. The author, he said, was one Mr. Knowles, "a man of original genius." Macready sighed when he got this letter. As a penalty of his increasing reputation he was being</p>

pestered by the ubiquitous playwright—everybody of a literary turn thought he could write a tragedy in the days of George III. and of George IV.—and he remembered how, when last at Glasgow, he had been inveigled into reading two very dreary manuscripts. However, Tait was a good friend, so Macready resolved to meet his fate, and wade through the effusion. It was about three o'clock one afternoon, just as he was preparing to go out for a walk, that the ominous parcel arrived from Glasgow.

“After some hesitation,” Macready tells us, “I thought it best to get the business over, to do at once what I had engaged to do, and I sat down determinedly to my work. The freshness and simplicity of the dialogue fixed my attention; I read on and on, and was soon absorbed in the interest of the story and the passion of the scenes, till at its close I found myself in such a state of excitement that for a time I was undecided what step to take. Impulse was in the ascendant, and snatching up my pen I hurriedly wrote, as my agitated feelings prompted, a letter to the author, to me then a perfect stranger.

“I was closing my letter as the postman's bell was sounded up the street, when the thought occurred to me, ‘What have I written? It may seem wild and extravagant; I had better reconsider it.’ I tore the letter, and sallying out,

A
Surprise

hastened directly to my friend Procter's lodgings, wishing to consult him, and test by his the correctness of my own judgment. He was from home, and I left a card, requesting him to breakfast with me next day, having something very remarkable to show him. After dinner, at a coffee-house, I returned home, and in more collected mood again read over the impassioned scenes, in which Knowles has given heart and life to the characters of the old Roman story. My first impressions were confirmed by a careful re-perusal, and in sober certainty of its justness I wrote my opinion of the work to Knowles, pointing out some little oversights, and assuring him of my best exertions to procure its acceptance from the managers, and to obtain the highest payment for it."

The manager of Covent Garden accepted the tragedy, promising to pay the poor Irish schoolmaster what must have been to him a small fortune (£400 for twenty nights), and Macready himself directed the rehearsals and made all the necessary preparations for the production.

"Not one sixpence," he says, "was allowed for its *mise-en-scène*, and to be correct in my costumes I was obliged to purchase my own dresses. But my heart was in the work, so much so that it would seem my zeal ran the risk of outstripping discretion, for it was made a

William Charles Macready

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complaint by Egerton, the Numatorius, that the youngest man in the theatre should take on him to order and direct his elders."

Royal
Interest

Macready apologised for his temerity; the rehearsals went on, and everything promised success, when, at the eleventh hour, or on the night before the date of performance, King George IV. sent an order from Carlton House for the manuscript of the tragedy. There was instant alarm. Could His Majesty have heard of the sentiments of freedom breathed in *Virginius*, and intend to forbid its representation? But the next morning, when the company had assembled anxiously on the stage, the manuscript was returned, untouched save for a few pencil marks drawn over some lines wherein Appius Claudius expatiated on tyranny.

The same evening *Virginius* was produced, with the most brilliant results. Charles Kemble, the elegant brother of John Philip, made an admirable Icilius, despite his hoarseness in the earlier scenes; Miss Foote (afterwards Countess of Harrington) was pronounced a lovely subject for tears as Virginia, and the *Virginius* of Macready was hailed as a noble combination of Roman austerity, paternal tenderness, dramatic force, and pathos. The tone

Sheridan
Knowles

in which *Virginus*, in the judgment scene, cried :

“—— my poor child, here, who clings to me for protection,——”

was considered a marvel of feeling, while the blow aimed at unhappy Virginia was terribly effective, despite the fact that the father had trouble in disentangling the fatal knife from the folds of his robe. Half-stifled screams and cheers burst forth from the startled audience, and the curtain fell amid a whirlwind of applause. In the pit sat one man who did not cheer, yet derived a mighty joy from the performance. He looked more like a sea-captain than the author of the elevated *Virginus*, but it was Sheridan Knowles. “ Ah, James, we shall not want friends now ! ” said his wife, when she heard of the triumph.

Nor would Knowles lack friends thereafter, but he was one of those impossible geniuses who are not versed in the domestic art of making one's expenses accord with one's income. “ Look at them, Maria ; are we not rich in these ? ” he would cry gaily, as he dangled his children on his knee, and tried to soothe the anxious wife when she had visions of a poorhouse or a debtor's prison. Impulsive, affectionate, unworldly,

he seemed the antithesis of Macready, yet the two men became fast friends and contributed importantly to each other's fortune and reputation. But how the unconventionality of Knowles would grate upon the tuft-hunting actor! On the Sunday evening following the production of *Virginus*, Macready was dining with Sir Robert Kemeyes, in Park Lane. "I fancy," says *Virginus* exultantly, "I was the only untitled guest at table." In the course of the dinner a servant whispered to him: "Sir, a person wants to see you." Macready was much embarrassed. To be sitting at a table with titles, and to be told that a "person" wants to see one, is certainly humiliating. "You had better see the person, Mr. Macready," said the host, very good-naturedly; so Macready walked into the hall, where, to his astonishment, he found Sheridan Knowles. "How are you?" said Knowles pleasantly, quite unconscious of the solecism he was committing. "Good heavens, Knowles! What *is* the matter? You should not have come here to me!" was the unflattering welcome from Macready. "Oh, I beg your pardon," replied the playwright, quite abashed and hurt; "I am going out of town in the morning, and I wished to give you this myself. Good-bye!" With that he

Dining
with Titles

Making
Amends

thrust a parcel into the actor's hands and hurried away. In some confusion the disturbed guest put the gift into his pocket without looking at it, and rejoined the titles. When he reached home he found that the packet contained the printed copy of *Virginus*, dedicated to himself, and he received about the same time a note from Knowles, apologising for his intrusion. The author was evidently wounded by the snobbish conduct of Macready, and that gentleman, duly repenting, made such amends that the two were soon supping together at a coffee-house on salmon and boiled mutton — as the actor gravely records. A curious compound was William Charles Macready.

Of many incidents in the life of Macready — of his fights with Charles Kemble, of his secession to Drury Lane, of his enmities, friendships, failures, and successes—there is no space for the chronicling, nor would they be of surpassing interest. We stop for a moment to record his marriage to Miss Atkins (June 24, 1824), a young actress whom he had met in the provinces some years before, and who had once played Virginia for him at the not over-wrinkled age of fourteen. He lived happily with her until she died, more than a quarter of a century later, and found in her devotion a solace for the fact

that he had never wedded the daughter of a coronet.

The period between 1823 and 1837, when Macready was making slow progress at Drury Lane, has been aptly called by William Archer, in his admirable life of the actor, the "doldrums" of his career—"a region of calms, squalls, and light, baffling winds." During that time he managed to make a trip to the United States, where he was well received—(one American critic said he was a "handsome" genius)—and he crossed the Channel to play before the Parisians. After a performance of *Othello* in Paris, a bevy of enthusiastic Frenchmen insisted on lifting him up bodily, and carrying him from his dressing-room to the footlights, a circumstance which shows how the intellectuality of his acting appealed to keen-witted judges.

"I am considerably fatigued," Macready wrote, in characteristic vein, to his wife, "as I play in earnest here, and feel it for some days afterwards; but I am more than repaid in the sort of transport that seems excited among the literary and fashionable."

He was not always such a star. Once he played Macbeth, in an English city, to ten persons in the boxes and a mere handful, microscopically humiliating, in the pit. But

The "Doldrums"

Manager
Bunn

that was an exception. At another time, when he played Iago to the Othello of the then broken-down Edmund Kean, the latter kept the best position on the stage for himself. When the performance ended the enraged Macready bounced into the room of Bunn, the stage-manager, and indulged in a tirade against Kean. "And pray," he continued, "what is the next p—lay you expect me to appear in—with that *low*—man?" Bunn repaired to the dressing-room of Kean, whom he found scraping the paint from his face, and sustaining the ordeal by great draughts of cold brandy and water. On being asked in what play he would next appear with Macready, he growled contemptuously, with recourse to several strong adjectives: "How should I know what the — plays in?"

Bunn is the authority for this story, but it must be remembered that he was not an unprejudiced witness. It was Bunn whom Macready (suffering from a severe attack of egotism, and writhing under certain indignities half real, half fancied, from the manager), assaulted in the most fierce fashion. It was Bunn, too, who came out of the affair with more credit, and with more bruises, than did his antagonist. Macready, indeed, was deeply mortified when he cooled off,

and realised how he had given way to the animal part of his nature. It "made him sick to think of it," as he admitted, nor was he the more pleased at the notoriety of the subsequent lawsuit, when he was mulcted in £150 to appease the lacerated flesh and feelings of Manager Bunn. The plaintiff in the case got little or no sympathy from the public, for he belonged to the order of manager, not yet totally extinct, who looks upon actors as cattle and plays as mere pens wherein to exhibit them at so much profit.

Manager
Bunn

In 1837 Macready assumed the management of Covent Garden, during which there were productions of the *Winter's Tale*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *The Lady of Lyons*, *Coriolanus*, *William Tell*, *Werner*, *Richelieu*, *As You Like It*, and many other plays, that gave to the bills an "infinite variety." When *The Lady of Lyons* was brought out, with Macready as a rather too middle-aged Melnotte, the public was not let into the secret of Bulwer's authorship. The Pauline of Helen Faucit was duly admired, but the drama did not make much of an impression at first. Just as Macready was on the point of withdrawing it—an action which would surely have been the death-blow of the play from the theatrical standpoint—the actor who played Colonel Damas persuaded him

Lady of
Lyons

that if he kept it "on" for a few nights it would be a great popular success. The advice was taken; the result is a matter of history. It is curious to note, in connection with the subsequent prosperity of *The Lady of Lyons*, that the dramatic reviewer of the *London Times* declared its characters to be "gaudy, overdrawn personages of melodrama." He was right. There is in the drama an artificial sentiment, and a straining after effect, which gives us Bulwer in one of his worst moods. Yet there must be life of some kind in a play which has resisted the wear and tear of more than sixty years, and which even yet, in its declining hours, brings placid tears to the rosy faces of matinée-girls.

Of another of Bulwer's plays produced at Covent Garden, in the perennial *Richelieu*, we learn that Macready was originally cast for De Mauprat, but that this scheme had to be abandoned owing to the difficulty of finding a suitable actor to give the titular character. It was well for Macready that he finally played *Richelieu*, for it was a part admirably suited to him, and he painted the old statesman in life-like pose.

During his management of Covent Garden, and, in succeeding seasons, of Drury Lane Theatre, Macready worked like a pack-horse. No other animal would suggest the

constant labour of an actor who has to direct rehearsals, read plays, study his own parts, and attend to a thousand little things that no one else is willing, or able, to bother about. That sort of experience is enough to try the temper of an angel; Macready, not being an angel, was a veritable tyrant at rehearsal, as he told the actors where they were to stand, instructed them in the *minutiæ* of their lines, or issued orders about the scenic effects. In the care which he gave to the mounting, the costuming, and the petty details which go to make up an artistic whole, he was a precursor of Sir Henry Irving, or the late Augustin Daly. But he lacked the generosity of an Irving, or the justice of a Daly; he sacrificed all parts to his own. As one of his company put it, when Macready played Othello, honest Iago was to be nowhere, the latter being turned into "a mere stoker, whose business it was to supply Othello's passion with fuel, and keep up his high-pressure." But 't was another story if Macready played Iago. Then Othello relapsed into a puppet, or a simple foil for the craftiness of the villain.

Hard
Work

From the autumn of 1843 to that of 1844 Macready was making another starring tour of America, at a profit which netted him nearly £6000, and was securing the hearty

In
America

good-will of American audiences. He, in turn, liked the Americans, although he complains bitterly in his diary of the physical discomforts of his Southern tour—transportation facilities and hotels were not then much to boast of south of Mason and Dixon's line—and he could not accustom himself, very naturally, to the institution of slavery. He never could be happy, for the matter of that, even had he acted in Elysium, so we are not surprised to find in his diary an entry like this:

“Charleston, January 16, 1844. — Another day of rain, rain, rain. ‘The heavens do frown upon me for some ill’; but I do not feel as if through my life they would ever smile again. The glimpse of bright hope and comfort which I received in the commencement of my career in this country is now over-gloomed, and I have little prospect onward but of hard labor and indifferant payment. . . . I have no pleasure here, but in thinking I am making means for my family, and when that is scanted I am ‘poor indeed.’ . . . Acted Claude Melnotte in a fractional sort of manner. Cut up repeatedly by the bad taste, etc., of the actors.”

The receipts must have been small that night, or else Macready was suffering from a fit of indigestion. Another entry, made

at Montreal, shows us the more intellectual, subjective side of the man :

“ July 17th.—Acted Hamlet! Lay on my sofa at the hotel, ruminating upon the play of *Hamlet*, upon the divine spirit which God lent to that man, Shakespeare, to create such intellectual realities, full of beauty and of power, inheriting the ordinary wickednesses of humanity, the means of attracting so strongly the affections and wonder of men! It seems to me as if only now, at fifty-one years of age, I thoroughly see and appreciate the artistic power of Shakespeare in this great human phenomenon.”

The third and last tour which Macready made to America, beginning in the autumn of 1848, had tragic ending in New York. We have seen how the Forrest-Macready controversy overleaped the bounds of decency. During a goodly portion of the season the visitor had receptions ranging from boisterousness to enthusiasm; in Philadelphia he was made the recipient of addled eggs; at New Orleans he was given more hospitable food, in the shape of a public dinner, and at Cincinnati the body of a sheep, or a portion thereof, was thrown upon the stage as a muttoney tribute to his Hamlet. Taken in its entirety, the trip was uneventful, and in some places marked by

In
America

Trouble
Brewing

cordiality, until the farewell engagement in New York. Then began the real trouble.

On Monday evening, May 7, 1849, when Macready stepped on the stage of the Astor Place Opera House, to play *Macbeth*, he found himself the central figure of a perfect pandemonium. The friends of Forrest were out in force; groans and howls saluted his ear; eggs, potatoes, apples, and a bottle of assafoetida fell at his feet. "Down with the English hog!" and "Three cheers for the codfish aristocracy!" were sentiments yelled from the parquet, while, to cap the climax of vulgar prejudice, a ruffian in the gallery threw a chair upon the stage. For a time Macready stood quite unmoved, but when a second chair came crashing down from the gallery he gave up the fight, and the curtain dropped.

The victim of this onslaught determined to cancel his engagement, despite the indignation which many of the best class of citizens expressed at his treatment. Forty-eight of these gentlemen, among them Washington Irving, signed a paper in which they begged him to remain, and assured him that steps would be taken to prevent a repetition of such an outrage. Macready now consented to attempt *Macbeth* once more, on the following Thursday evening, May 10th.

The momentous night brought a very large audience to the theatre, with a strong element in favour of Macready; and some determined rowdies, who howled and shook their fists, terrorising those in the parquet. The police charged upon the malcontents, arrested four of the ringleaders (who tried, unsuccessfully, to fire the theatre when imprisoned in a room under the pit), and turned the others into the street. Outside of the house there was a desperate mob, which began to hurl paving-stones at the windows of the building; some of the missiles went crashing inside; many in the audience left the theatre. Meanwhile the play went on: Macready actually finished his Macbeth, and retired to change his dress, amidst the uproar from the street. There was now a veritable riot in front of the theatre. Suddenly Macready and the frightened friends who surrounded him in his dressing-room heard a volley of musketry. "Hark! what's that?" cried the actor. "The soldiers have fired!" Another volley, and then another! The militia had arrived to restore order and, sorely hemmed in as the soldiers were, and unable to quell the ever-increasing tumult, they had fired on the mob. We all know the result of that night's mischief — seventeen lives sacrificed, many wounded, and the

The Fatal
Night

The Fatal
Right

whole city turned topsy-turvy, all because a lot of foolish people, from editors down to street-arabs, chose to take up the cudgels either for an English or for an American actor, as idiotic fancy led.

It became a problem as to how Macready should be saved from his now infuriated enemies. A little strategy was attempted. The actor joined those in the audience who were leaving the theatre, passed out into the street unrecognised, and found refuge in the house of a friend. He was taken secretly, in a carriage and pair, to New Rochelle, where he took the train for Boston, and in that hospitable city found peace and safety for a few days. Then he sailed for England, a sadder, but a much relieved man. Although he had experienced undeserved insults from an American mob (which can be quite as brutal, on occasion, as its English counterpart), he could congratulate himself on one thing: He had gotten away in safety. Had the ill-advised admirers of Edwin Forrest recognised him as he stole out of the Astor Place Opera House it might have been his dead body, not his living self, that finally crossed the Atlantic Ocean.

On his return to England Macready began to long for retirement. The blessed day of his release arrived on the 26th of February,

1851, when he made his farewell as Macbeth, at Drury Lane Theatre. When he awoke in the morning he thought with satisfaction that the end had come. "I meditated on it," he writes in the diary, "and not one feeling of regret mingled with the placid satisfaction accompanying my performance of every act, needfully preparative to the coming event."

The house was crowded; there was emotion of the most affecting character on the part of the spectators. Macready alone was unmoved as he took his leave, without "ostentation of cambric sorrow," at the conclusion of *Macbeth*. He was calm, dignified, unregretful. In the audience were his children, whom he allowed, as a great favour, to see him in this final and despised rôle of a Thespian.

At a farewell dinner, given in his honour a few days later, at which Dickens and Thackeray were among the distinguished guests, John Forster read Tennyson's sonnet, ending with:

"Farewell, Macready; moral, grave, sublime,
Our Shakespeare's bland and universal eye
Dwells pleased, thro' twice a hundred years
on thee."

"Moral" and "grave" Macready may

Blessed
Release

Old Age

have been, but not sublime. He never conquered his unheroic disposition, but he conquered his art as to technique, and became a commanding player by the grace of downright hard work. He never slighted one of the many parts he played, save in one instance. He could not play the actor who is carried away by his profession. Could he have done that there would have been more soul in his performances.

For twenty-two years Macready led the life of a private gentleman, with its quiet joys and sorrows. His wife died; he married again, and finally passed away from his beloved world of titles and conventionality on April 27, 1873. Old age softened the harsh spirit. He even condescended to say, not long before he died, that he remembered the whole play of *Hamlet*. "Yes, every word, every pause; and the very pauses have eloquence."



“——I would applaud thee to the very echo,
That should applaud again.”

—*Macbeth.*



CHARLES JAMES MATHEWS

HOW often do we who are play-lovers give a thought to the private life of a favourite comedian, as we laugh at his whimsicalities or applaud some sally of wit which he may have delivered in a particularly lively manner? How often do we stop to consider that behind all that mask of cheerfulness there may be the anxious face of a worried man, or that when the paint is washed off, at the end of the play, wrinkles will take the place of the mirth of an hour ago? There is sometimes a tragedy mixed with the *vis comica*. The jester has been known to look sour when off duty; the disciple of Thalia does not always grin. We thoughtless persons on the commonplace side of the footlights think that he acts his part in and out of season. Never will the writer forget how, when a boy, he met a great comedian off the stage, only to find

Beneath
the Mask

Under
the Mask

him gloomy in his look, and sententious, almost funereal, in his speech. Possibly the contrast seemed all the more vivid because the "funny" man was in the company of a tragedian who laughed, and skipped about like a child, and suggested a Touchstone, or a Gobbo, rather than a popular Shylock.

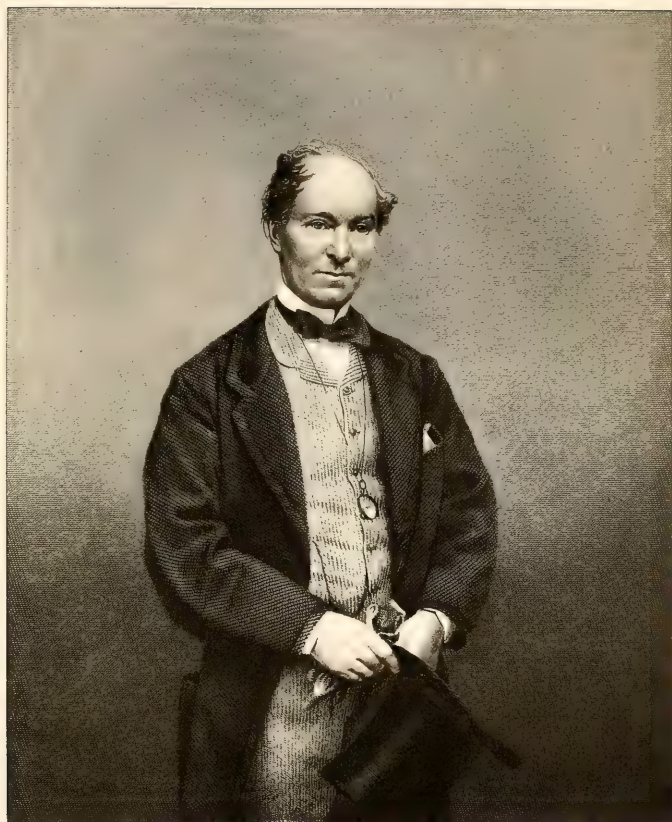
All this is but platitude, says the scornful reader. Yes, but the platitude forces itself on one in recalling the career of that charming stage aristocrat, the sparkling, incisive Charles James Mathews. "How many times," he said, "have I gone upon the stage with a heavy heart to act, with a merry face, the very part in jest that I was playing behind the scenes in earnest!" There was not a soul in front to pity the man. The spectators but saw a delightfully natural fellow, always in imaginary hot water, who skimmed through the comedy with a touch-and-go grace and a genteel *abandon* which kept them clapping; then they went home quite unconscious of the duns or the bailiffs who waited behind the scenes to collect certain little bills, or to serve formidable writs.

As we read the record of Mathews's life we smile over his mishaps in kindly fashion, much as we might do over the ups and downs of the irresistible Mr. Micawber. We are sorry, of course, that he had ugly debts,



Charles James Mathews.

From an engraving by D. J. Poul.



yet he is so volatile, so bubbling over with energy and hope, that we find it hard to take him seriously, however much we are drawn to him by a hundred attractive traits. We can never get rid of the idea, unjust as it must be, that the comedian's troubles were but amusing situations in a play, and that he never gave them more heed than pressing necessity required. Yet the pecuniary difficulties in which he was involved, through no fault of his own (save from his sanguine, Micawberish way of always expecting something to turn up), caused Mathews many a despairing quarter of an hour. Indeed, had he been what he calls a "serious man," of the "highly respectable" order, he would have run willingly into suicide.

The life of the man who struggles through a wretched youth, and achieves fortune in old age, was reversed in the case of Mathews. His early days were as bright as springtime; it was only as he began to see middle age ahead that sheriff's officers came on the scene, with uncomfortable suggestions of bankruptcy courts or debtor's prisons. He first "saw the light," as the old biographers would put it, in the city of Liverpool, on the 26th of December, 1803. It was "Boxing Night," with its holiday fun and pantomime,

Like Mr.
Micawber

The Elder
Mathews

when he arrived, and a very appropriate occasion, therefore, for the birth of one who was to keep the grown-up people of his own generation, and of a succeeding one, in perpetual good-humour while they were with him—all in good-humour, that is to say, with the exception of his creditors. Certainly there was inherited talent from his mother, a clever actress, and, in greater degree, from his father, Charles Mathews, that most entertaining of mimics and polite buffoons. No one ever acted testy old men or officious valets better than did Mathews the senior, as Leigh Hunt tells us, and no one, not even the unconscionable Sam Foote, could inspire, by the realism of his caricatures, so much fear in the breasts of learned judges, statesmen, and others whose mannerisms made them a target for public ridicule. Garrick would have killed himself if he had been obliged to deal with Mathews as well as Foote.

In his fragments of reminiscences, so sympathetically edited by Charles Dickens, Charles James gives us many an amusing incident of his own childish days; as, for instance, how his nose was, at first, nothing but a protuberance of the size and shape of a pea, or how he once called out, in hearing of the portly Duke of Sussex, "Oh, Ma, look at that fat duke!" or how, when he studied



SAMUEL FOOTE AS "MRS. COLE" IN "THE MINOR."

FROM A DRAWING BY DODD.

at a private school kept by the famous Dr. Richardson, he would copy out dry paragraphs for the dictionary which that lovable scholar was preparing for publication. Young Mathews fought, played, and imbibed indigestible doses of the classic languages, like unto other boys, and finally took up architecture as a profession. From the first he had a passionate love for drawing and mathematics, and he made rapid progress under Pugin, the famous architect to whom he was articulated. If the reader can unearth a copy of the elaborate, but now musty work, *The Public Buildings of London*, he will find that one of the elevations, a section of St. Paul's Cathedral, is signed by Charles J. Mathews. When he first gazed rapturously at the plate, with his name in one corner, the pupil grew an inch taller for seeing himself in print. It looked as if he would become an orthodox citizen, hardly less conventional than his paternal grandfather, who had combined the selling of pious books with the duties of a Dissenting local preacher.

But there came a sort of preliminary love for the theatre when the youth took a trip to Paris, in company with Pugin, and saw Leontine Fay, Fleury, Talma, Mlle. Mars, and other shining lights of the French boards. He little dreamed that he would

The Young
Architect

Fine
Mimicry

play in French fifty years later at one of the very houses which he now visited—the Théâtre des Variétés. On his return to London Mathews appeared in private theatricals at the English Opera House (on whose site the Lyceum Theatre was afterwards built), playing the lugubrious Werther, in a parody on *The Sorrows of Werther*, and also mimicking two favourite French actors, Messieurs Perlet and Émile. The counterfeit of the former was so like the original that a French dancer who was in the crowded audience insisted on going behind the scenes to congratulate his “dear friend, M. Perlet,” on the brilliancy of his acting; nor was it until Mathews dragged him into the dressing-room, and divested himself of “make-up,” that the dancer would acknowledge the mistake. “That,” remarked the false Perlet, “was unpurchased criticism.” His success was remarkable, and the house applauded everything, from his song in the character of M. Émile, to the scene in the parody where Charlotte cuts bread for her little brothers and sisters, and Fritz hangs out to dry, on a clothes-line, a dozen of Werther’s tear-stained handkerchiefs. “Why don’t you go on the stage, my boy?” asked old Mathews. But the son still clung to his beloved architecture.

An intimacy which Charles James now formed with Lord Blessington, who is best remembered as the husband of his lovely wife, changed, for a time, the current of his life. He went to Ireland, to draw plans for an imaginary castle projected, but never erected, by the nobleman; he rode, fished, and hunted with his patron, and next accepted an invitation to visit the Blessingtons during their stay in Naples. Here he made of himself a universal favourite in the fashionable and artistic society affected by his hosts. All were charmed by his vivacity, drollery, and gentlemanly bearing, as well as by the wonderful imitations he gave of types of Neapolitan humanity. An eloquent friar, who used to preach on the street corners, so attracted his attention that he had a habit made for himself, and went about the town delivering such a fiery sermon that the simple Italians took him for a real priest. Some years later, when old Jack Bannister heard Mathews give this sermon, he said, solemnly: "Tragedy is your forte, my boy!" But Bannister forgot that some mimics, unlike Garrick, cannot feel the sentiments they affect. For scenes of emotion, excepting those that belonged to his private life, Mathews had no sympathy. As George Henry Lewes said, he sparkled, but never exploded.

The Blessingtons

A Clever
Trick

This episode of the friar was only equalled by the adventures of Mathews's father, who could so change his face, without the aid of paint, that even his most intimate friends would not recognise him. One of his favourite tricks was to represent an intruder who had smuggled himself in behind the scenes of a theatre, and to walk aimlessly about, either pestering the performers, or amusing them by his quaint actions. Then he would suddenly disappear, and when he returned, *in propria persona*, the players hurried to tell "Mr. Mathews" that he had just missed a "very odd creature."

It was his intimacy with persons like the Blessingtons, and his constant meeting, when in England, with such celebrities as Lord Byron, Scott, Tom Moore, Lamb, and Coleridge, that gave Mathews a social distinction quite apart from the popularity he was to win as an actor. How Macready must have envied him! But Mathews was no snob; he was the sought-for, rather than the seeker, in all this whirl of literature and fashion, and he never toadied. When the young Count D'Orsay, then a right handsome fellow of twenty, fell out with him at Naples, over some childish affair, and was caddish enough to remind his former friend of the difference in their two positions,

Charles James did not truckle. He stood his own pluckily, and a duel was only averted by an apology from the Count. Then D'Orsay fell into his antagonist's arms, weeping as only a repentant Frenchman can, and Mathews smiled good-humouredly.

Until 1835 Mathews led a desultory, semi-artistic, semi-fashionable, sort of life which appealed to his mercurial disposition so strongly that it is safe to say he would never have gone upon the stage had not necessity put a stop to his playing the *dilettante*. He travelled through Europe, on an allowance from his father, dabbled pleasantly in his favourite architecture, played in private theatricals, wrote farces for the theatre (their acceptance did not put anything substantial in his purse), composed songs which tickled the fancy of the Londoners, and even exhibited a painting, warmly praised by Sir Edwin Landseer, at the Royal Academy.

But a crisis was coming in the fortunes of the elder Mathews. In the meantime Charles James bethought himself of settling down to make money at architecture. But where were the customers, the clients, who had palaces, or prisons, to build? Some of his friends only laughed in his face. "Oh, pooh!" they said; "you'll never be an

Desultory
Life

Sober
Thoughts

architect; you're too fond of acting; why don't you go on the stage?" Others told him to "write a farce," or to "paint a picture," with that total disregard of practical considerations which our bosom companions sometimes display.

It was finally suggested that Mathews should try to obtain a district-surveyorship.

"What's that?" he asked. "Am I to measure chimney-pots and clean out gulley holes?" He bombarded the city fathers with letters and testimonials, and got the surveyorship and a small salary into the bargain. Then came the crash in the affairs of poor old Charles Mathews. With large debts hanging over him he had gone to America, where he hoped to retrieve his fortune, but the venture was not a success, and he came home, only to die in a short time. The son must now look out for himself and his devoted mother.

He first determined to turn manager. In September, 1835, he opened the Adelphi Theatre, in partnership with Frederick Yates, the actor, but the speculation failed. He retired from the management, and prepared to try his luck as a player. The choice of his line of work was made without hesitation.

"I had no passion," he tells us, "for what

was called the 'regular drama.' The lighter phase of comedy, representing the more natural and less laboured school of modern life, and 'holding the mirror up to nature' without regard to the conventionalities of the theatre, was the aim I had in view."

The only house for such a *début* was the Olympic Theatre, which was then managed by Madame Vestris. The Vestris may be considered the best "singing-actress" of the nineteenth century, so far as the English stage is concerned. She was the granddaughter of an Aix-lah-Capelle dancing-master and the wife of Vestris, a famous *mâitre de ballet*, who deserted her; she had exploited her velvety contralto voice in grand opera, and she proved versatile enough to act Camille, at the Comédie Française, to the Horace of Talma. She possessed "one of the most luscious of low voices," lustrous eyes, an "almost faultless figure," and a *naïve* charm of manner that made her one of the spoiled children of the public. When she played masculine parts, such as Don Giovanni, Macheath, in the *Beggars' Opera*, or Cherubino, her femininity was only the more attractive, while her singing of *Cherry Ripe*, *Meet Me by Moonlight Alone*, *The Light Guitar*, and *Buy a Broom*, made a past generation of theatregoers declare her incomparable.

The
Vestris

The
Vestris

Madame Vestris was just the manager to sympathise with Mathews, who was not so anxious to found a new school of acting as he was to infuse into light comedy—heretofore confined, in most instances, to an artificial exposition of prevailing foppishness—a realistic and more modern touch. This dispensing with tradition was sure to meet with approval at the Olympic, where many scenic reforms, of a radical kind to make the “Old Playgoer” open his dim eyes in astonishment, had already been instituted. The “stock” sets and furniture which had formerly been considered sufficient for the staging of a play—those impossible properties which suggested any period or condition but the one they were supposed to represent—were relegated to the lumber-loft, to give place to a more natural order of things, where a theatrical room bore a fairly close resemblance to a real room.

It was on November 6, 1835, that Mathews made his public entry on the stage, in a farce styled, *The Old and Young Stager*, and in a piece of his own, which he had entitled, paradoxically enough, *The Hump-backed Lover*. His success was brilliant and instantaneous. From that moment the genteel comedian of the Charles Surface school (a school which had outlived its

plausibility and usefulness) began to die hard, to slow music. In place of the conventional light comedian, rich in stilted elegance, and rejoicing in the customary claret-coloured coat, salmon-hued trowsers, and pink-ribbed eye-glass, the great audience found a gentleman who differed very little from those they were in the habit of seeing off the stage, save that he was much more entertaining. He was a delightful *jeune premier*, whimsical, life-like, and effervescing like champagne. If the two characters played that night were very much like Charles James Mathews—why, all the better. There would always be a bit of Mathews in all his best parts, unto the very end, but that was cause for pleasure, not for regret.

“He was in incessant movement,” says George Henry Lewes, speaking of Mathews at a later period, “without ever becoming obtrusive or fidgety; a certain grace tempered his vivacity, an innate sense of elegance rescued him from the sense of animal spirits. He wanted weight, as an old playgoer once reproachfully said of him, but he had the qualities of his defects, and the want of weight became delightful airiness.”

Whether he danced a Tarantella, or snatched up a guitar and sang, he “neither danced like a dancer nor sang like a singer,

**Brilliant
Success**

Couleur
de Rose

but threw the charm of lively nature into both."

After two brilliant seasons in London, and a provincial tour, Mathews sailed for the United States, to play a series of engagements. With him went the lovely Vestris, now Mrs. Mathews. Everything looked, as the husband said, *couleur de rose*; all he had to do was to go on acting for the remainder of his days, persuade his wife, if he could, to give up the management of the Olympic, and a fair field and fortune were assured. But clouds began to gather, and at once. Upon their arrival in America Mr. and Mrs. Mathews travelled to a hotel in the Catskills, for the purpose of securing a little rest and mountain air before they opened their season at the Park Theatre, New York. When they reached the house they found it filled with fashionable people, who were anxious to make a fuss over them; no sooner did the stage-coach bearing them up the mountains reach the piazza than a whisper of "the Mathooses have come!" echoed from room to room. But the Mathooses were very hot, very weary, and very undiplomatic; they insisted on holding aloof from the hotel guests, and drove away from the hotel as soon as possible, much to the disgust of their would-be admirers. The

story of their retreat got into the papers, in garbled form, and it was gravely recorded that they had added to their rudeness by insisting, during a visit to Saratoga, that their servants should eat at the same table with some of the boarders. There was a pathetic scene where the domestics entered the dining-room as the indignant guests jumped from their meal, and scornfully retired. This was a fabrication, of course, but it was not one to appease a very decided clique which was organising in New York against poor Mathews—a clique none the less vindictive because his father had been accused, in other days, of caricaturing his American friends.

Mathews was now warned not to appear in New York, for it was understood that his opening night would be disgraced by a sanguinary riot. But he persevered, and when he stepped forward to make his first bow to an American audience, it was noticed that there was not a woman in all the crowded house. There was no riot; on the contrary, Mathews was, in the main, very cordially greeted. The tour was not successful, however, and the two "stars" were glad to return to England.

But woful tidings made their home-coming a sorry affair. During their absence the

Want of
Tact

Bad
Tidings

Olympic had been run at a frightful loss; the large sums of money which Mathews had sent from America to bolster up its fortunes had been swallowed up, and there were nothing but debts to show as a result. In September, 1839, husband and wife opened Covent Garden Theatre with a gorgeous production of *Love's Labour's Lost*, with so little pecuniary reward that Mathews said, very sadly, that "the labour of love was surely lost." A "great millstone" of debt now began to fasten itself around his unwilling neck, for, while the public kept away from this Shakesperian revival and subsequent productions, the managers were still paying their hosts of employees. Some idea of the cost of running a big metropolitan theatre may be formed from the mere fact that the salary list of the concern comprised 684 persons, from playwrights and players down to mechanics, stage hands, and "supers." "Pay-day," which was every Saturday, was now looked forward to with horror; Mathews was soon busy trying to extract money from the "lenders," or avoiding the duns and sheriff's officers who tried to waylay him, even at the very door of his dressing-room.

At this crisis Mathews was about to wind up the affairs of the theatre when a revival

of the *Beggars' Opera* made such a hit that the sovereigns and shillings were once more pouring into the Covent Garden box-office. Success after success followed, and "all was sunshine to everyone" but the manager. The prosperity of the house proved his ruin, for no sooner was it apparent than creditors began to put in their claims, and writs and executions came down in showers of paper. No amount of present profits could wipe out the debts of the past, which were almost doubled owing to the enormous interest which Mathews had been obliged to give the Shylocks for their previous loans.

New as this wretched business was to Mathews he became, perforce, an adept in the art of escaping his enemies. Once he borrowed money from one bailiff who threatened him with arrest, and promptly turned it over to another officer who was lying in wait for him in an adjoining room. At another time he called on a rich pawnbroker to pay him a little debt of £30, and contrived, instead, to borrow from him a few welcome pounds. One morning a sheriff's deputy caught him at rehearsal. "I've a writ against you for some £100; come, pay the money!" said the visitor. Mathews explained that he could no more pay £100

Prosperity
which
Ruined

Strange
Charity

at that moment than he could pay a thousand times the sum. "Why did n't you get the creditor to renew the bill?" asked the sheriff's deputy. "He would n't do it," sighed Mathews. "Nonsense," replied the man; "accept this bill for the same amount [throwing on the table a bit of paper], and put your own time for payment, and I'll undertake to get you his receipt." Mathews accepted the bill, while the sheriff's officer threw down the receipt, and turned to walk away. "But you said you could not leave me without getting the money from me," cried the debtor; "what does this mean?" "It means," was the reply, "that I have paid your debt, as I knew you could not, and now you owe me instead!" The man had actually taken upon himself to make the £100 good to the creditor. Incidents like these showed the remarkable popularity of Mathews. No doubt his deliverer had laughed many a time over his sprightly acting.

The second season at Covent Garden, which was made historic by the first performance of Dion Boucicault's *London Assurance*, with Mathews as Dazzle, was a triumphant one, in point of audiences, and so, too, was the third year. Then, just as the unfortunate manager began to think that

he would make a real impression on his mountain of liabilities, down came the proprietors of the theatre with a small bill of £14,000, for arrears of rent. It was impossible to pay up so soon; all the properties, scenery, and costumes purchased by Mathews were sold over his head, and he and his wife were turned adrift. All he had left, after three years of herculean work, were a piece of silver, presented to him by his company, and reams of unpaid accounts. He thus summed up the result of his venture:

First year.....	Sowing
Second year.....	Hoeing
Third year.....	Owing

This "owing" represented the regal sum of £30,000, which was quite enough to make even a cheerful man like himself think of a revolver, or plan a dive from some convenient bridge across the river Thames. The disgrace of his predicament filled him with horror. "You must go through the insolvent court," said his amiable friends, and through it he went, after spending a few dark days in Queen's Bench Prison. No sooner was he out of durance than he performed an honourable action in a reckless, unbusiness-like fashion that was eminently characteristic of the man. He made himself

Hoeing and
Owing

Debts
Calore

responsible for all his purely personal debts by giving security for the payment of nearly £4000, under the impression that his friends would keep his paper until he was able to redeem it all. Not a bit of it; the paper was sold to "ravenous discounters," who began to press him, and once more did Mathews find himself in an earthly Purgatory. Had he bound himself by no security, and waited until his acting refilled his purse, he could have easily liquidated these debts, which were now piling up interest as they reposed in the strong-boxes of the discounters.

The new trouble unnerved the comedian. He fled from the Haymarket Theatre, where he was playing a fine engagement, and crossed over to France, only to be pursued by those everlasting notes. Soon he was back in England again, after effecting a compromise with a Committee in Bankruptcy, and for several years he played in London and the provinces with unvarying success. In such parts as Giles in Planché's *Who's Your Friend?* and Sir Charles Coldstream, in *Used Up*, he made hits quite as pronounced as might be credited to him in *A Game of Speculation*, where his Affable Hawk constituted the most irresistible swindler known to the stage. In Hawk, as

Lewes said, he made the "very audacity of deceit a source of pleasurable sympathy," and, for that reason, did not teach a wholesome lesson. But Mathews never posed as a theatrical moralist, nor did he play to what the English call "the Nonconformist Conscience."

In 1847 Mathews and his wife began another managerial speculation, this time at the Lyceum Theatre. For seven years it was the same annual story of large receipts at certain periods of each season, and a constant struggle to keep afloat during the dull weeks. Want of capital hampered the management terribly; the money-lenders came again into constant requisition, and in the end there was another bankruptcy. Friends crowded around Mathews in a way that suggested a prosperous man being lionised rather than a poor fellow receiving aid; a monster benefit was given in his honour, and an attempt was made to keep him at the Lyceum Theatre. But the scheme fell through, and for a season we find the comedian at Drury Lane, where, as he related pathetically, he "danced to the same old tune with duns and bailiffs till his legs ached again." Truly his life reads like that of a broken-down financier rather than like the career of a phenomenally popular actor.

Not a
Moralist

The Old
Tune

On the evening of July 4, 1856, Mathews happened to be at Preston, in Lancashire, where he was to act at the local theatre. He had endured a wearisome rehearsal, and was just preparing to trudge back to the playhouse, when a "smart, cheerful" man entered his room at the inn where he stopped.

"Mr. Mathews, I believe?" murmured the man, quite politely.

"Exactly."

"I am sorry to say, sir, I am a sheriff's officer, and have a writ against you for £400."

Mathews was in dismay. "Why, I'm just going to the theatre," he cried; "can't you wait till the end of the performance?"

"Impossible!" answered the man. "That's the very thing I am instructed not to do. I could have served the writ early this morning, but my orders were peremptory *not* to do so until after the audience was assembled! I must request you to accompany me at once to Lancaster Castle."

"Why, that must be twenty miles off," exclaimed Mathews.

"It is, but the train is just going and we have n't a minute to lose."

It was raining hard, and a packed house awaited the comedian at the theatre, but

that made no matter to the heartless creditor in the background, who had taken such trouble to have the writ served at this worst of moments. Off started Mathews and the sheriff's officer for the railroad station, while the audience was regretfully leaving the theatre. All but a few persons had insisted upon having their money returned, but as there chanced to be one gentleman remaining in the dress-boxes, with £4 10s. represented in pit and gallery, the Preston company had to go through some sort of performance. As for the unfortunate manager, he was ruined.

Old Lancaster Castle was used at this time as a debtor's prison — and a wretched hole it was. It was nearly midnight when Mathews was lodged in the gloomy place. As he looked at the turnkey, who carried a bunch of keys of a size large enough to suggest a stage dungeon rather than a nineteenth century house of detention, the heart within the poor actor sank very low. The man beckoned him to follow, as though he were in charge of the veriest cutthroat, and the two were soon passing through long stone corridors, opened to the stormy sky at the top, and pierced on each side by iron gratings. The faint light from the turnkey's lantern only made the scene the more

Lancaster
Castle

Lancaster
Castle

sepulchral. Up numberless steps they went until a grating in an upper corridor was unlocked, and Mathews was unceremoniously pushed into a room with the stern order: "In with you!"

In he stumbled, to be greeted by some forty or fifty men in night-shirts and night-caps, who danced around him like maniacs, and cried out, in great glee: "A new bird! a new bird!" This was bad enough, but when one of the debtors recognised the comedian, his degradation seemed complete. Witticisms at his expense, and punning allusions to *Used Up* and the *Game of Speculation* were bandied about as he stood there helpless, almost hopeless. Here was a situation which had unlimited possibilities for a play, yet Mathews could extract from it not a bit of comedy. "Am I a felon?" he asked himself; "is it possible that I am living in the nineteenth century?"

For a whole month Mathews languished in this den, while his wife and friends, off in London, were making unavailing efforts to have him liberated on bail. His companions, most of whom were mere blacklegs who liked Lancaster Castle as a convenient refuge from their creditors, spent their days in fencing, boxing, fiddling, and in ghastly attempts at being funny. Each morning

the governor of the prison, the doctor, and the chaplain inspected them, as if they had been so many convicts. Mathews was treated exactly like the rest — all because in his desire to entertain the London public he had proved unfortunate! One day which he spent here marked the anniversary of his wedding, and he wrote to the distracted wife: "Believe me when I swear that my love for you is as true at this moment as it was eighteen years ago."

There was another petition to the bankruptcy courts, as a result of which Mathews emerged from Lancaster Castle, but still owing a couple of thousand pounds. Before he departed, his fellow-prisoners drew up a sympathetic address of farewell, in which they called him "Illustrious Sir," and praised him as "one of the most ingenious among our common manhood." It was one of those testimonials which even an applause-loving actor might have been spared.

As Mathews rattled along in the train, thankful that he had escaped a band of music which had been prowling about to serenade him on his jail-delivery, he took a last, unregretful look at the old Castle. "That 's where Charlie Mathews is confined," said a rosy-cheeked gentleman, who sat in the same compartment with him.

Among
Blacklegs

Poor
"Charlie"

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed a sympathetic female passenger. "'Poor fellow' indeed!" laughed he of the rosy cheeks; "not at all; he revels in it. He's been in every prison in England!" "Charlie" held his tongue.

A few days after his release Mrs. Mathews, the mellow-voiced Vestris of former days, passed away from the reach of bill-collectors. She died after a long illness, worn out by pain and trouble. Less than two years after her death, while Mathews was playing in the United States, he married Mrs. (Lizzie) Davenport, the actress, and wrote home to his mother: "On Tuesday last I again took unto myself a wife—a charming woman and, I trust, one that you will like." The new Mrs. Mathews did not belie his praise.

The rest of Mathews's career was one perpetual round of hard work, varied by a tour around the world, and a trip to India. In the autumn of 1858 he re-appeared at the Haymarket as Dazzle in *London Assurance*, Mrs. Mathews playing Lady Gay Spanker, and followed this up with a succession of popular parts, besides showing a new vein of his humour as Paul Pry. Then came the entertainments styled "Mr. and Mrs. Mathews at Home," with more acting, and a visit to Paris. One night he came forward

before an Edinburgh audience, as he said to them, in that happy, light-hearted way that was so typical of the man :

Ceaseless
Energy

“You are informed, ladies and gentlemen, that I am going to make my last appearance here for a considerable period, and I am now before you to explain why. Can you guess? No! I feel sure you can't. You imagine, perhaps, that I have had a serious quarrel with Mr. and Mrs. Wyndham [the managers of the theatre], and that we can never meet again. Not a bit of it. I have had the pleasure of their acquaintance for upwards of five-and-twenty years, have always been on the most friendly terms, and love them both dearly. So that won't do. Perhaps you think I have to complain of the conduct of the company. Quite the reverse. If anyone has to complain it must be the performers themselves, for I have given them more study during the last fortnight than many people would digest in a month, and yet we are all as cordial together as possible. Can it be the orchestra? No! From the leader to the big drum—nay, even down to the piccolo—we are all in harmony.”

The reason, as the old gentleman told them (it seems paradoxical to apply an aged adjective to Charles James Mathews), was that he expected to go to Australia. And to Australia he went, in all the gay spirits

The Globe=
Trotter

of a boy of fifteen, after his London admirers, who were legion, had given him a rousing benefit and a royal dinner. After visits to Melbourne, and other cities, he dashed nonchalantly across to New Zealand, thence to Honolulu, where he acted one night, and turned up serenely in San Francisco on the 12th of February, 1871. It almost seemed as if he were running a race against the duns of his earlier career. A tour of the United States and Canada followed; in the autumn of 1872 he was acting at the Gaiety Theatre, in London, and three years later we hear of him playing in Calcutta. His last appearance of all was at Stalybridge, England, on June 8, 1878, when he played in a piece of his own, *My Awful Dad*. On the 24th of June he was dead, stretched out peacefully on a bed in the Queen's Hotel, Manchester, looking as if he might rise at any moment from a deep sleep, and cry, "Ring up the curtain!" He died in harness, in the seventy-fifth year of his age, after having given to the stage two hundred and forty characters. His style died with him, for there can never be another Mathews. His art and his personality were so intermingled that it was hard to determine where the one began or the other ended. In the ease of his manner, in the grace of his

movements, and in a certain indescribable humour—the humour of the man of the world—he suggested some clever gentleman who, being found walking in Hyde Park, was thereupon carried bodily to the theatre. But there was something more than this; there was that power, which is comic genius, of making such a person far more interesting on the boards than he would have been in a drawing-room.

“ If ever any man’s life needed an apology,” said Mathews, “ mine is the one.” He was wrong. What were his creditors, a few hundred in all, to his thousands of debtors, in the public that he served so well? The comedian is as useful a member of society as the statesman, or the bishop, and a far more pleasant one, sometimes.

Grace and
Humour



“I have that within which passeth show.”

—*Hamlet.*



EDWIN BOOTH

ONE evening, during the hot August of 1850, there was great excitement in the little village of Belair, Maryland. Some of the negroes asked if "the circus was coming?" but the country lads and lassies, who were hurrying to the Court House, replied that a "Grand Dramatic Festival" was to be given there by two young men. After the audience had assembled, the aforesaid young men (who were very angry to find that the bill-posters announcing their "Festival" had all been placed upside down by an ignorant slave) proceeded to give a series of tragic recitations, which they varied with the singing, in blackened faces, of old-fashioned plantation melodies, to the accompaniment of bones and banjo. One of the performers had a sad, romantic face, with expressive brown eyes and luxuriant black hair, and a figure not above the medium


A "Festival"

A "Festival"

height: the other Thespian was a jolly-looking little piece of humanity, whose twinkling eyes and unheroic features seemed ludicrously inappropriate when he essayed a speech or two in the guise of Shylock. But the crowd in the Court House applauded both young fellows with equal warmth, and found them, no doubt, as entertaining in the garb of minstrels as they were as Richards, or Shylocks. The "Grand Dramatic Festival" was voted quite as good as any circus — and what more praise could greedy actors want?

The romantic, dark-haired spouter was Edwin Booth, who would become the greatest of American tragedians, and the noblest Hamlet, perhaps, of all the overwrought Danes who had fretted their hour upon the stage. The performer with the comic face, who looked for all the world like a rosy crab-apple, was John Sleeper Clarke, a future impersonator of the errant Toodles, and of that most delightful of mimic fools, Dr. Pangloss.

Booth was not yet seventeen years old when he gave this performance. He was born on the 13th of November, 1833, at the Maryland farm of his father, Junius Brutus Booth, on an evening when the sky was lighted up by myriads of falling stars. It



Edwin Booth as "Hamlet."

From a steel print.



Edwin Booth

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seemed as if this meteoric shower was prophetic, and as if the largest star which fell that night must have been typical of Edwin Forrest, who was destined to have his own stellar brightness dimmed by the brilliance of his namesake. For Junius Brutus called his new son Edwin Thomas, in compliment partly to Edwin Forrest, and partly to his friend Tom Flynn, he of the poker and nose-disfiguring episode. But there was no intention of making a player of young Edwin. Junius Brutus had a thorough respect for his art, yet he knew its exactions, and desired that none of his children should go on the stage—a wish in which he lived to be disappointed, without being at all grieved. So he planned for Edwin a comfortable career as a cabinet-maker.

Accident, aided by the genius which came to the boy as a birthright, decreed otherwise. Edwin's early education was not of a profound or systematic character. He went to a primary school of the old-fashioned kind, where the girls sat on one side of the room glaring at the boys on the other side; then he received instructions, first from an old French naval officer, and next from a Mr. Kearney, who encouraged his pupils to recite, in their treble voices, some of the grand

Forrest's
Name=
sake

Schoolboy
Acting

passages from the dramatists. Mrs. Asia Booth Clarke gives us, in her sketch of Edwin, an amusing glimpse of him as he does the quarrel scene from *Julius Cæsar*, with the assistance of John Sleeper Clarke. Brutus (Booth) and Cassius (Clarke) must have appeared very un-Roman in their little black jackets and white linen trousers, but the audience in the schoolroom, including Junius Brutus Booth, found the exhibition full of interest.

As Edwin grew older, he began to accompany his father on some of the latter's professional trips, and to act, young as he was, as a sort of guide and mentor to the eccentric tragedian. It was a pitiful thing to see the boy watching the man, or pleading with him to keep a theatrical engagement or to control a wild, insane desire to ramble off into the woods, perhaps for days. It is not strange that the gentle nature of the son was saddened, or that his inherent melancholy became only the more pronounced. Yet he loved his father devotedly, and exerted, at times, a wonderful influence on the wild, headstrong spirit.

Once, when the two were stopping at a hotel in Boston, the elder Booth came home from the theatre, utterly exhausted by the force which he had put into the performance

of the evening. Instead of going to bed, as a less restless person would have done, he announced his intention of leaving the hotel, to wander about the streets. Edwin knew what this might mean, so he tried to coax his father to stay at home. He would play for him, sing for him, anything. No; Junius Brutus was bent on getting away. Finally, when he found that all entreaties were in vain, the boy said boldly, with a tone of command in the melodious voice: "You shall *not* go out!" At this unexpected assumption of authority Booth stared wildly at Edwin, and then vanished into a dark closet. Time went on, and the boy began to fear that his father would be stifled; but nothing could make the indignant tragedian budge. He had locked himself in, and in the closet he proposed to stay. At last, when Edwin feared that all was over, and that he would have nothing but a corpse to take home to his poor mother, out stalked Junius Brutus, who looked sternly at his jailer, undressed quietly, and went peacefully to sleep.

On another occasion Booth insisted on walking all night from one end of a market-house to another, and Edwin, not daring to leave him in such an insane mood, tramped behind him until daylight. The boy must

A Childish
Mentor

Edwin's
Début

have looked like a very young Hamlet, distraught and "scant of breath," when he finally persuaded the tired parent to seek his empty bed.

It was during one of these uneasy wanderings that Edwin made his first appearance on the regular stage (September 10, 1849). His father was to play Richard III. at the Boston Museum, and Thoman, the prompter, had volunteered to take the small part of Tressel, the messenger. At rehearsal Thoman, becoming irritable because he had so much to do, turned abruptly to Edwin, who was looking on, and said: "I have too much work for one man. *You* ought to play Tressel!" The lad, nothing loath, was induced to accept the part. When the evening of performance arrived Junius Brutus, who was sitting with his feet on his dressing-room table, called Edwin to him.

"Who was Tressel?" he asked brusquely, in a tone which he might have used to a call-boy.

"A messenger from the field of Tewksbury," replied the new Tressel.

"What was his mission?"

"To bear the news of the defeat of the King's party."

"How did he make the journey?"

"On horseback, of course."

“ Then where are your spurs ? ”

Edwin confessed that he had never thought of this very necessary accessory. “ Here, take mine,” said Booth, and with that the boy unbuckled the spurs from his father’s boots and put them on his own. The incident seems trifling enough, but it proves how a real actor must remember the *minutiæ* of his craft. Edwin never forgot the rebuke. When, many years later, he gave such gorgeous Shakespearian revivals at his own theatre, in New York, he showed, by the attention which he paid to detail, that he had taken Tressel’s spurs to heart.

One night, in 1851, Junius Brutus Booth was about to drive off from his hotel in New York to play the favourite Richard III. at the National Theatre. Suddenly, as the carriage was waiting at the door, he said to Edwin: “ I can’t go; I’m too ill to play! ” The son reminded him that he had been particularly well all day, and begged him to “ pull himself together,” even if he did feel badly, and go down to the theatre. But the supposed invalid was obstinate.

“ What can they possibly do without you at the theatre ? ” urged Edwin.

“ Go act Richard yourself! ” curtly cried the father.

Edwin had Shakespeare almost at his

Paternal
Interest

An
Unwilling
Richard

fingers' ends; he was rich in stage lore, and he knew every line of Richard, but he was frightened at the idea of being thus pitchforked into the part, as an amateur substitute for a great tragedian. The more he protested, the more Junius Brutus insisted, until the son finally threw himself into the waiting carriage, to rush down to the theatre to announce his father's illness. Then the latter retired, ostensibly to bed. At the playhouse Edwin was urged, both by the stage-manager and by some of the actors, to try Richard himself. Almost before he realised it he was hurried into his father's dressing-room, costumed in the clothes of the Duke, and then pushed, half bewildered and wholly fearful, upon the stage. It was a terrifying situation. How would the large audience appreciate it? The spectators were waiting to see Junius Brutus Booth—the great Junius Brutus. What did they want with an eighteen-year-old apology?

There was evident surprise, and then an ominous hush, when the younger Booth appeared. But as the tragedy progressed, as it was seen that here was a Richard of much fire and intelligence, despite certain crudities of expression and conception, the silence changed into enthusiastic applause. In answer to repeated calls for the young actor

the manager brought him before the curtain, and introduced him as "the worthy scion of a noble stock." "I'll wager they don't know what that means," he whispered to Booth.

On his return to the hotel, Junius Brutus questioned Edwin, in an off-hand way, as to his success. The son made his report, and that seemed to end the elder's interest. But the laconic manner was all assumed, for there is good reason to believe that Booth not only feigned sickness, in order to test his boy's nerve and talent, but that he actually stole into the theatre that night and watched the play of *Richard III.* from an obscure seat. No better trial could have been devised, under the circumstances. Edwin was one of those quiet, modest geniuses who needed a veritable thump, if he were to be pushed into prominence. After this, Junius Brutus, who had not much longer to live, made no opposition to a theatrical life for his son. Yet he never gave him instruction or encouragement. He resolved that Edwin should make his own way, by virtue of sheer ability, and thus escape the fate of being a "son of his father."

Soon after his appearance as Richard III., Edwin contracted with a Baltimore manager

The
"Worthy
Scion"

General
Utility

to play any part, in any play, for \$6 a week. This was not munificent, nor does the young tragedian seem to have sent many thrills into the hearts of the playgoers. He had undoubted talent, as all could see, but he was callow, unformed, and painfully awkward in some of his parts. His want of suppleness was a great handicap to the actor. We who were wont to praise him for his quiet grace, and the beauty of his gestures, find it hard to realise how stiff he must have been at this formulative period, or how he welcomed comedy as a vehicle for easier stage movement and a less artificial style. There is, indeed, nothing like comedy for infusing naturalness into a player, whatever may be his future line of work. That is why so many of the actors and actresses who began their career in the company of the late Augustin Daly afterwards developed into such experienced artists. Whether they happened to go into tragedy, or farce, or opera, or even vaudeville, they always moved upon the boards as if they felt at home there. The comedy training of Mr. Daly gave a smoothness of bearing, and a confidence, not always to be obtained from intimacy with the sober Muse.

The year 1852 found Junius Brutus Booth and two of his sons, Junius Brutus, Jr., and

Edwin, acting in California. In Sacramento Edwin took a benefit in *Venice Preserved*, playing Jaffier to the Pierre of his father. When Junius Brutus saw him dressed out in black he said, carelessly: "You look like Hamlet. Why don't you act him?" "If I ever have another benefit I may," answered Edwin. When the father returned home, never again to see the son of whom he had become so proud, in his undemonstrative fashion, Edwin remained in the West. He was soon playing in Nevada, where he "roughed it" with a bravery that would have done justice to the most hardy miner. It was winter; snow fell incessantly; and the company of which he was a member was often cut off from civilisation. It is not surprising, therefore, that the drama languished out there. Once a messenger forced his way through the drifts to a town where Edwin was playing, or trying to play. With him he brought a long-delayed mail-bag which contained a letter announcing the death of Junius Brutus Booth. The son was stunned. Friends crowded around him, trying to console, but there was nothing that could stem the tide of grief. He could only lament that he had allowed his father to travel from California without him.

It was almost miraculous that Edwin did

*Roughing
it

Roughing
It

not soon go the way of Junius Brutus Booth. Death, in the shape of wind, and snow, and bitter cold, was always at his elbow. The actors were soon stranded; they could obtain no credit; they were next door to starvation. Once Booth tramped fifty miles across the mountains, to get to a certain town, as the foremost man of the party broke a road through the drifts. Finally, he borrowed a few dollars from a friend, and managed to crawl back to Sacramento, only to find that the place had been devastated by fire and flood. In San Francisco he met a man to whom he had lent \$20 some months before. Booth had forgotten the loan, but the man recalled it, and insisted on paying the money. The actor was delighted when he felt himself possessed of such a fortune. As he planned what he would do with it, he strayed into a gambling "palace," became fascinated in the game of *vingt-et-un*, staked his all, and came away from the den a pauper. He never gambled again.

While in San Francisco Booth played Richard III. for the benefit of a scene-painter; then he tried Sir Edward Mortimer, Shylock, Othello, and other parts, and finally, for his own benefit, he gave Hamlet. It was not the Dane of his later period; it was a rather more impetuous, less subtle

performance, with a theatrical, almost conventional, attention to the purely dramatic features. One must have missed the intellectual attributes of his subsequent readings, but there was no gainsaying the power of the new Hamlet, when he threw the pipes behind the scenes as he cried: "Though you can fret me, yet you cannot play upon me."

Next Booth was playing secondary parts to Mrs. Sinclair, the wife of Edwin Forrest, who had come from the East with the hope of making a fortune; after that he was acting with Laura Keene and learning to hate that "lady in white" as much as his gentle nature would permit. There was antipathy on both sides. Miss Keene was prejudiced enough to complain that all her best effects were spoiled by the "bad acting," as she called it, of this young Mr. Booth. The energetic Laura lived long enough to see her mistake, so that the "bad actor" had a silent revenge—if he cared for it. It was a curious coincidence that she should have been the "star" at Ford's Theatre, Washington, on the night when his brother, John Wilkes Booth, shot President Lincoln.

Meanwhile there came glowing accounts of prosperous times, and of a carnival of

Laura
Keene

To Aus=
tralia

wealth, from far-away Australia. Booth, Laura Keene, and several other players took the hint, and sailed for Sydney. They did not linger long in the colonies, and were soon making a return voyage. On their arrival at Honolulu Booth had exactly \$50 in the world. This sum he paid in advance for a month's rent of the Royal Hawaiian Theatre, where his company, comprising seven members, filled an engagement. They slept in the theatre for poverty's sake, and were so practical in their ideas that they even allowed one of their number, a Dutchman, to play a few female parts, such as the Duchess of York. One night the King of the Sandwich Islands, Kamehameha IV., came behind the scenes to see Booth do Richard III. He proved how small a place the earth is, for he remarked, incidentally, that he had seen Junius Brutus Booth play the same character in the city of New York.

When Edwin Booth got back to California he had a checkered experience. Once he went to Sacramento to play "leading juveniles," but was discharged by the manager, on the score of economy and poor business; at another time he was acting with Mrs. Sinclair in a "shabby little theatre" in a back street, or alley, of Sacramento. It was at this unpretentious house that *The Marble*

Heart had its first American production. Booth and Sedley, one of the company, each wanted to play *Volage*, and to come to an amicable decision they agreed to toss a coin. The lot fell to Sedley, whereupon Booth created the part of Raphael. With his customary generosity, and with that absence of jealousy which denotes the gentleman, Booth said that Sedley made a far better *Volage* than he could have been himself.

As the weeks went on, Edwin was playing through rough mining towns, in a rather fruitless endeavour to make gold and Shakespeare mix. His experiences on the tour suggest the early days of Edwin Forrest. He rode on horseback, while the manager, and wife, and the other hapless members of the troupe, not to mention the scenery and properties, brought up the rear, in a covered waggon. The theatres were often nothing more than small halls on the second floors of rude wooden shops. The audiences were more appreciative than remunerative, nor is it surprising to learn that in one small town Booth was obliged to leave his horse as security against an unpaid bill.

When he returned to Sacramento Booth was penniless in the most literal sense of the word. Friends advised him to go East: his father's place on the stage was still vacant,

The Mar-
ble Heart

Two
Benefits

they said, and Edwin was the man to fill it. "Where was the money for travelling expenses to come from?" In this unpleasant predicament he was given a benefit—that panacea for all theatrical ills—and was thus enabled to pay off his debts for board and incidental expenses. But though he could now claim that he owed no man a cent, what about money for the Eastern home-going? The payment of his liabilities had again exhausted his purse. Upon that he was given a second benefit; a second crowded house bade him "God speed!" and a brass band played merrily on the day he sailed for San Francisco. At the last moment Booth discovered that he had not received the receipts of the second benefit, but just as his steamer was about to push off from the landing on dashed a friend bearing the precious bag of gold. On his arrival at San Francisco he gave his first performance of Lear. He was a very young man to play the mad King; too young, perhaps, yet there were already promises of what was afterwards to prove a magnificent study in senility, tenderness, and infirm flights of passion.

When Edwin reached the East he took a rest on the beloved Maryland farm, where his mother still lived. It was noticed that he looked none the worse for his unluxurious

experiences. He was matured, no doubt, yet he seemed the same dreamy, sensitive, lovable character that he remained until the day of his death. Misfortune would sadden Edwin Booth, without making him hard, or sour, or selfish. Soon he was filling engagements in Washington, and in Richmond, Va. At the theatre in the latter city Joseph Jefferson happened to be stage-manager, and here it was that Booth met Mary Devlin, whom he married several years later. She was an ideal wife for such a man. She loved art almost as dearly as she loved her husband. Her inspiration forced him on to better and better work, so that he must have felt, when she looked on with that critical spirit which comes of affection, as Macklin felt when he acted Shylock before a picked jury of devoted friends.

After other engagements Booth went to Boston, where an actor was then supposed to receive, from the Athenians of America, the scholarly criticism which was either to make or mar him. On one thing he was determined. He would not imitate his father, much as he admired so fine a model. Edwin Booth must rise or fall by his own style. The part selected for his Boston *début* was Sir Giles Overreach. The evening was cold and dreary, as if symbolical of his

Mary
Devlin

Boston's
Verdict

own feelings. He was calm, but inwardly nervous; he knew how much depended on the ordeal. At first he reserved his strength, but as the play approached its terrific climax he waxed more and more dramatic, and in the final scenes he startled the white-haired occupants of the front rows by the diabolic power of Sir Giles. In short, he won one of the greatest triumphs of his life. Press and public hastened to pay homage to the rising "star," in whose realistic methods they found a wonderful contrast to the declamatory heaviness of the favourite Edwin Forrest. From that moment the success of Booth's coming engagement in New York was assured.

"Seats going like hot cakes!" telegraphed the New York manager. That was a very comforting announcement, of course, but Booth groaned when he got to Gotham and found himself billed throughout the city as "The Hope of the Living Drama," and "The Son of the Great Tragedian." He was not blind to the uses of notoriety, but he hated ostentation. However, he had no reason to complain of the cordiality of New Yorkers when he began his engagement (May 4, 1857), with a support including the incomparable John Gilbert, Charles Fisher (who afterwards became the charming "old

man" of Augustin Daly's company), and Lawrence Barrett, his future manager and *fidus Achates*. Thus he went on prospering, and building up a great reputation, until he helped to emphasise his progress by playing a ten nights' season at the Academy of Music, Philadelphia, in company with Charlotte Cushman. The two gave Cardinal Wolsey and Queen Katharine, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, Shylock and Portia, and Katharine and Petruchio. The vigorous Cushman did not altogether approve of her companion's Macbeth. It was a very intellectual idea of the part, she said, but she begged him to recollect that "Macbeth was the grandfather of all the Bowery villains." Booth never took the "Bowery villain" theory of Macbeth. He made him, particularly in the actor's later life, a complex villain, in whom good and evil were continually at war for the mastery. Indeed, the more Macbeth was played the more refined and introspective he became. It was not, however, one of Booth's best parts, despite the magnificent treatment of the banquet scene; it seemed to many as if the Thane were too much idealised. His Shylock, on the other hand, was a superb exhibition of malignity and racial bitterness, casting into the shade certain human traits in the character which

Complex
Macbeth

A
Dramatic
Trinity

Edmund Kean, and, in recent days, Sir Henry Irving did so much to mark.

Edwin Booth was now beginning to display in all their lustre those qualities which would win for him the right to be considered one of the greatest of all English-speaking actors. His genius was a dramatic trinity of mind, poetic feeling, and power of expression. Some players, like Macready, have had the mind without the feeling, while others, Forrest, for example, have lacked the intellectual touch, while they possessed the force. Booth was fortunate in having all three gifts. He was a deep and lucid thinker, to whom Shakespeare was an open book, not a mystery; he had keen sensibility, and a vivid imagination quick to grasp every subtlety and possibility of a part, and he could, by the magic of his look, tone, or gesture, give theatrical form to every idea that was passing through his fertile brain. To those who saw him for the first time Booth was always a source of tremendous surprise. His physique was so slight, and his face (which had about it an Italian, rather than an Anglo-Saxon beauty) suggested such quiet melancholy that it was difficult for the uninitiated to believe that he could do more than picture the gentler emotions. But when his dark eyes flashed

forth the hate of an Iago, the insulted scorn of a Shylock, or the childish frenzy of a Lear — when the melodious, flute-like voice was raised in the strength of passion, and the mobile features quivered in rage, or sorrow, or despair — then the audience forgot the actor of a minute before, forgot, too, to analyse this change of mood, and saw only the character of the play, brought back to life and reality for a brief, delightful hour.

Booth was essentially a finished actor. He knew the value of repose. He exerted himself at the proper time, but he never attempted too much, never over-acted, or did anything obtrusive. He seemed to be an integral part of the scene; no sense of effort was apparent; all was spontaneous, and the bursts of tragic intensity which he would give at intervals proved but the highly coloured parts of a harmonious picture. His reading of the lines of Shakespeare was in itself a work of art. His enunciation was clear and bell-like, and his delivery, neither stilted nor colloquial, lent peculiar grace and dignity to the imagery of the poet, as one listened in pleasure to the music of the actor's voice. In comedy Booth could be very attractive, if he chose; the writer has seen him do Petruchio and Benedick both delightfully, and he has seen him do them

True
Genius

Acting
Abroad

both in a listless manner that was exasperating. Booth was, in fact, a man of moods, who could, on occasion, play as if he were an iceberg, and this unevenness increased in after years.

But there was no unevenness, save in occasional changes in his treatment of a character, when Booth held sway before and after the outbreak of the Civil War. In the autumn of 1861 he went to England, to act at the Haymarket Theatre, under the management of Buckstone. The engagement was not a success, the London theatregoers being either too prejudiced or too dense to appreciate the artistic nature of his acting. The plays in which he appeared were poorly mounted; the audiences were small, and the good effect of the favourable newspaper criticisms was lost by the malicious slaps of a few ungenerous, untruthful reviewers. Some of the Haymarket company, too, went out of their way to be disagreeable, and we have it on the authority of Mrs. Clarke that they fondly hoped the American would be hissed. It is strange that the public which had "discovered" another American player in Charlotte Cushman (who never received proper recognition until she went to England), could see so little in this tragedian.

After playing in the provinces Booth took

a pleasure trip to Paris. Here he was treated far more cordially, all things considered, than he had been in England, and was presented with a sword which Lemaître had worn in *Ruy Blas*. When he arrived in America with his wife there was a new member of the Booth family, Edwina, who became Mrs. Grossmann when she grew up, and edited sympathetically her father's letters.

Domestic
Sorrow

During a very prosperous engagement which Booth played at the Winter Garden Theatre, New York, beginning in the autumn of 1862, his wife died. It was a fearful blow. For several months the husband retired from the stage, to wrap himself up in his sorrow. He had some strange presentiments of her death before he even knew of her illness; he had heard her voice crying to him in the dead of night, and had seen her body, clothed in funeral garments, as he was being hurried on in a railroad train.*

Later on Booth began a managerial career. He took a lease, in company with John S. Clarke and William Stuart, of the Winter Garden Theatre. Here it was that on one memorable occasion *Julius Cæsar* was played with Edwin Booth as Brutus, Junius Brutus

* In a letter to his friend, Adam Badeau, Booth tells of these experiences. *Vide* Mrs. Grossmann's *Recollections*.

The Ideal
Hamlet

Booth, Jr., as Cassius, and John Wilkes Booth as Antony. Mrs. Junius Brutus Booth, Sr., looked on at her three sons from the vantage of a private box, while she recalled, possibly, the time when her family consisted of the eccentric Junius Brutus and the famous piebald pony. It was at the Winter Garden Theatre, too, that Edwin Booth made his historic one-hundred-nights' run of *Hamlet* — a then unheard-of episode for Shakespearian production in America.

It is with *Hamlet*, indeed, that the name of Booth has been most intimately associated. That is natural. Booth seemed, by the very quality of his melancholy, reflective temperament, to have been created for the personation of the Dane. His ideal of Hamlet, as the scholarly William Winter has so well said, was that of "an entirely noble person overwhelmed with a fatal grief, which he endures for the most part with a patient sweetness that is deeply pathetic, but which sometimes drives him into delirium, and must inevitably cause his death." Booth himself gave the keynote to his performance when he wrote that, in his opinion, Hamlet typified an "uneven, or unbalanced genius," of which the Prince was more frequently the slave than the master. Some Hamlets, like the Hamlet of Irving, are full of thought

and intellectuality, and therefore interesting, but there was more than mind, more than dramatic force, in the character as Booth played it. There was the depth of genius. The inspired actor, "saturated with sadness," infused his own inspiration into the dry bones of the part, so that one almost forgot to ponder over the beauty of the lines in following, in rapt attention, the half-morbid, half-human touches of the acting. It seemed as if all the spirituality in the lonely, pensive nature of Edwin Booth found tangible expression within the gloomy precincts of Elsinore. It was difficult to understand, after seeing him play this perturbed hero, how there could be any question as to the ideal treatment of the Dane. Booth was Hamlet. So long as the memory of his performance endures no other Hamlet can take its place; to the American playgoer he seems the greatest exponent of the part, whether we think of the past, with its long list of fine Hamlets, or of the future, when tyros and accomplished actors alike will have their fling at the sabled fatalist.

There was one catastrophe that did much to deepen the settled melancholy of Booth's disposition, and to give a more sombre tinge to his Hamlet. That was the assassination of Lincoln by John Wilkes Booth. Edwin

The Ideal
Hamlet

Death of
Lincoln

was playing in Boston at the time, but he cancelled his engagement on the moment he heard the news, and hurried to New York. No one was more crushed by the tragedy than he; and for a time he thought of retiring permanently from the stage. But he yielded to the advice of staunch friends who stayed with him in this adversity, and reappeared at the Winter Garden Theatre early in 1866. There were unreasoning patriots outside of the theatre who wished to visit the sins of one brother upon the other; there were excitable citizens who loudly threatened to shoot the actor; but in the house a distinguished gathering welcomed him with cheers, bouquets, and the enthusiastic waving of hats and handkerchiefs. Once more he became a popular figure, yet he would never again think of Lincoln, or of Ford's Theatre, without a shudder.

More trials awaited the tragedian. In March, 1867, the Winter Garden Theatre was burned to the ground, in the early hours of the morning. All his costumes, and many priceless relics, including mementos of his father, of Edmund Kean, of John Philip Kemble, and of Mrs. Siddons, were destroyed. He arose, phoenix-like, from the ashes, to be filled by a new hope and even greater energy. He would build a

theatre where the legitimate drama might find a sumptuous home, and in which he could carry out all his ambitious ideas for the giving of performances on an elaborate scale then unknown in the history of the American stage. Plans for Booth's Theatre, as the new house was to be called, were drawn up, and Booth began a tour of the country to fill in the time prior to the opening of the building. The hobby was to cost a million dollars, but he fondly hoped that public encouragement would repay the outlay.

While he was away from New York he played in many cities, and in Chicago acted Romeo to the Juliet of Miss Mary McVicker, whom he afterwards married. The Romeo of Booth was not among his best parts; he lacked the lover-like ardour of a Spranger Barry or the impetuosity of David Garrick. At Baltimore, when he was playing Pescara, in *The Apostate*, the Hemeya of the evening, in making his onslaught on Pescara, stabbed Booth three times in the hand. The dagger had not been blunted, owing to an oversight, and the blows might have been Booth's death had he not raised his hand to parry them. As it was, he fainted from the pain, and was obliged to act the next night with his arm in a sling.

Booth's Theatre was opened under what

Booth's
Theatre

managers call the "most auspicious auspices," in February, 1869. *Romeo and Juliet* was given for sixty-eight nights, with Booth and Miss McVicker in the title parts, after which there were other costly productions—*A Winter's Tale*, *Hamlet*, *Richelieu*, *Macbeth*, *The Lady of Lyons*, and many more. But the expenses of conducting so ambitious an establishment were enormous; the receipts could not compensate for all the outlay, and in the course of a few seasons Booth's Theatre passed out of the hands of its founder. He had made a noble fight, but he had been unsuccessful, and he found himself a bankrupt. All his private property was made over to his creditors; even his beloved books were sacrificed. He now turned manfully around to face his difficulties, and to pay off his debts by starring through the United States. How hard he worked, and how he succeeded, is a matter of record.

Three incidents in the subsequent career of Booth stand out in bold relief. One was his narrow escape from a lunatic's bullet. He was playing *Richard II.* in Chicago on the night of April 23, 1879 (Shakespeare's birthday), when a revolver was fired from the auditorium, as a ball whizzed a few inches above his head, and lodged itself in



MR. AND MRS. SPRANGER BARRY IN "TAMERLANE."

FROM A DRAWING BY ROBERTS.

the scenery. Booth calmly stepped to the footlights, and pointed out the madman, who was on the point of firing a second time. The fellow, whose name was Mark Gray, was seized and finally imprisoned in an insane asylum, while the imperturbable Booth had the bullet extracted from the scene, mounted in gold, and inscribed: "To Edwin Booth, from Mark Gray."

Gray's
Bullet

The second incident was a journey to Europe, begun in the summer of 1880. During his London engagement at the Princess's Theatre, old John Ryder, the friend of Macready, said to Booth, *apropos* to the latter's Richelieu: "You have thrown down my idol!" From one who had considered Macready and Richelieu synonymous that was eloquent praise. It was well deserved, for Booth played the wily Cardinal with such a human touch that an audience felt irresistibly drawn to him, as to some overshadowing personality who still lived to dominate France by his brain and will. At the Lyceum Theatre there were memorable performances of *Othello*, with Booth as the Moor and Irving as Iago, followed by a reversal of these characters, and with Ellen Terry as a sweet, tearful Desdemona. The Iago of Booth must have shown him to even better advantage than did his Othello: one

British
Public

always missed in his impersonation of the latter the imperious physique of a Salvini. His reception in England was better than it had been in 1860, yet it does not appear that he was appreciated according to his deserts. When we hear that one critic complained that he had a tendency to " gobble like a turkey " we hardly feel that the actor was in danger of having his head turned. There were, of course, plenty of generous notices, but one dissenting opinion, if it be unjust, will inevitably stick in the memory. When Booth acted in Germany he was more sincerely admired, notwithstanding that he was no longer in the country of Shakespeare.

The third incident of Booth's later period came on an evening in April, 1889, when he was playing at Rochester, N. Y., during his joint starring tour with Lawrence Barrett. *Othello* was the play; the theatre was crowded, and none of the hundreds who looked upon Booth's face, and followed every movement of his crafty Iago, suspected that he was in anything but the best of health. Othello's friend seemed full of vigour. There was no hesitancy or listlessness in the speaking of his lines. When the curtain went up on the second act Booth was ready, and awaiting his cue. He went through the act until the call for the final

scene; then he reeled and fell. There was great excitement behind the scenes; a physician was summoned, and then Mr. Barrett, in a voice choking with grief, dismissed the audience in a speech from the footlights.

**A False
Alarm**

“I am called upon,” he said, “to perform the most painful duty of my life. My colleague has shown symptoms of breaking down for three or four days past, and his condition is so serious that it is impossible for him to act. We had hoped that he would rally from this attack and that he would be able to play his part to-night, but one of your physicians says that it would be perilous for him to attempt it. Mr. Booth has sustained a partial stroke of paralysis, and we fear that this is the beginning of the end. I cannot express to you the deep sorrow with which I make this sad announcement. The world has probably heard for the last time the greatest actor who speaks the English language. We shall, of course, cancel all engagements, and I hope that we shall be able to remove Mr. Booth to his home. It grieves me to speak these words. I am sorry to disappoint this great audience, but the play cannot go on. It would be presumptuous for me to undertake to fill the place of this great man whom you have come to see and hear, and it would be worse than useless to attempt to proceed further. I know that you will be indulgent, and that you will fully

Peace at
Last

appreciate the sad plight in which we are placed."

But Booth soon recovered from his illness, which was not paralysis, after all, and declaring that he "felt like a boy again," he went on filling engagements. Curious, is it not, that he should have outlived Lawrence Barrett?

Many other events in the life of Booth—the death of his second wife, his appearance with Salvini, his partnership with Lawrence Barrett, that cultured actor and incomparable stage-manager—must be left for the biographer of the future. Such a chronicler will linger lovingly over the tragedian's last appearance in any theatre, at Brooklyn, on the 4th of April, 1891. He will tell of the last days of illness, and of the final one of all, on the 7th of June, 1893. As Booth was dying a little grandson asked him, gently: "How are you, dear Grandpa?" "How are you yourself, old fellow?" came the faint reply. It was characteristic of the man.

Of Edwin Booth's many engaging qualities in private life, of his generosity, simplicity, and hatred of sham, of his sad, affectionate disposition, we have heard through the published tribute of his daughter, and from the

eloquent lips of friends. Of his genius, and of the perpetual debt under which he put American theatregoers, there need be no testimony. We have but to glance over the list of his parts, and recall, if we have that good fortune, how he played them. They make a magnificent array:—Hamlet, Shylock, Macbeth, Lear, Othello, Iago, Richard II., Richard III., Romeo, Benedick, Petruchio, Wolsey, Ruy Blas, Lucius Brutus, Marcus Brutus, Bertuccio, Don Cæsar de Bazan, Cassius, Antony, Claude Melnotte, The Stranger, Sir Giles Overreach, Richelieu, and the rest. There was rare genius in the portrayal of all, though some characters set better upon him than did others. When the future historian of the stage comes to Edwin Booth he must put him in a niche higher than Junius Brutus Booth, or William Charles Macready, John Philip Kemble, or Edwin Forrest. He must place him on a level with Burbage, Betterton, Talma, and Edmund Kean.

A Great
Repertoire

“ These, our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air.”

—*The Tempest.*



CHARLES ALBERT FECHTER

BULWER has written :

“ Genius, the Pythian of the Beautiful,
Leaves her large truths a riddle to the dull ;
From eyes profane a veil the Isis screens,
And fools on fools still ask—what *Hamlet*
means ? ”

Though Edwin Booth seems the ideal Hamlet to us Americans, that fact will not stop the never-ending torrent of discussion as to the nature of the Prince. When the Millennium arrives the controversy may still be raging. But it is a controversy which belongs so inherently, as if by right of birth, to the English-speaking race, that it is strange to think that the Hamlet which excited the wildest criticism, from lavish praise to vindictive blame, should have been the work of a Frenchman. To Charles Albert

Gallic
Romance

An
Artistic
Temper

Fechter, the exponent of all that was impetuously romantic and dazzlingly picturesque in modern drama, belongs this proud distinction. Fechter the restless, the brilliant, the volatile. The man who could play the lover so ardently to the last, when handicapped by fat and the onslaught of middle age! What memories of *The Corsican Brothers*, and *Ruy Blas*, and *La Dame aux Camelias*, does his name conjure up? Surely he deserves a place among our "Twelve Great Actors." Let us make passing mention of his erratic life.

There was French and German and Italian blood in the veins of Charles Albert Fechter. His father, Jean Maria Guillaume Fechter, was an artisan and sculptor who had emigrated, with his pretty wife, from Paris to London, and it was in the latter city, in Hanway Yard, Oxford Street, that Charles was born on the 23d of October, 1824. The boy, like the future man, was a little volcano of emotion, quick of temper, impressionable, nervous, artistic, and full of love for things theatrical. He was always in motion. Whether he imitated a monkey for the delight of his friends, or shut himself up in his room to blacken his nose, put on outlandish costumes, and spout Shakespeare, he ever showed a keen relish of life. At



Charles Albert Fechter.

From a painting by Hollyer.



school he was called "The French Frog," and was outrageously bullied by the English boys, who never dared to attack him one by one; he took a deep interest in the classic languages, counterbalanced by as deep a hatred of mathematics; and he was always ready to talk of some delightfully stolen nights spent in seeing the performances of Macready, or Charles Kemble, or the elder Wallack.

An
Artistic
Temper

By the time that he was twelve years old, young Fechter was in France with his father, who placed him in a school at Boulogne-sur-Seine. Two years later he was in Paris, helping Fechter, *père*, to make both ends meet by pounding at brasses and candelabra, and spending his leisure hours either in reading, or in enjoying the acting at the Comédie Française. Those were palmy days at the Française, yet the youthful enthusiast was not so carried away by the players that he failed to see how stilted and artificial were the standards observed at the House of Molière. Why, he asked himself, must things be done "just so," simply because precedent, the bane of great minds, refused to admit originality? Much as he loved the dramas of Racine, and Corneille, and Molière, it began to dawn upon him that they might be given with more consideration for nature.

Wine and
Anger

Undoubtedly there was chance for a freer, more unconstrained method in presenting the ideas of the last-named playwright, himself a second Shakespeare in the practice of holding the mirror up to humanity.

Once Charles Albert strayed into a military café, in company with an older friend, a captain in the French army. He listened as the officers told of their adventures by flood and field, and when they spoke of duelling he was fired with a new ambition. Why should not *he* fight a duel? With wine in his head, and Dutch courage in his heart, he picked a quarrel with the surprised captain, challenged him, and met him on the field of honour, otherwise the woods of Boulogne. "Coward!" he cried, as he approached his antagonist; "you have chosen rapiers because you know you are master of them. With pistols the chances would have been more even!" The captain might have killed the sixteen-year-old boy, but he only wounded him in the wrist: there were tears, embraces, reconciliation, and vows of eternal friendship. It was all the act of a foolish child, and a foolish child, easily moved to anger, love, or generosity, Charles Albert Fechter remained until the day of his death.

This year of the juvenile duel found the

youth playing in private theatricals at a theatre known as the Salle Molière. He chose the *jeune premier* part in a drama by Dumas, and so great was his success, so much spirit did he display at a time when the professional stage was victimised by Dame Tradition, that he became a regular performer at this house. It was easy enough, to be sure, to strut one's hour upon the boards of the Salle Molière; one had but to pay for the privilege of acting. So many francs were required for the leading characters; a smaller amount sufficed for the minor *rôles*. But the kindly brother-in-law who paid Fechter's fee never regretted the outlay. Did not the powerful Scribe, grand-master of playwrights, say to the young actor, after one of his exhibitions: "If you make the stage your profession, I will give you all my parts."

The Jeune
Premier

Just at this critical period Duvernoir, the singer, was recruiting a dramatic company for a season in Florence, Italy. His "leading juvenile" had disappointed him, and he offered Fechter the chance of playing the lover, at a good salary. Charles Albert accepted on the spot, and travelled down to the Florentines in spite of the protests of his father, who fondly hoped that his boy would become a great sculptor. When the

Love and
Poverty

company settled down to work in the Italian town those salaries, which had looked so large when mentioned in the Parisian cafés, dwindled down to little or nothing. Poor Charles Albert was under the necessity of playing elegant lovers without possessing the purse of these gentlemen, and it became a problem how to supply the handsome clothes which belonged to the parts as much as did the lines. But the heritage of his ingenious artisan ancestors came to his rescue. He made his own clothes, manufactured an entrancing pair of top-boots from a piece of oilcloth and devised a recipe for giving to his battered hat the gloss of youth. He was not portly in those salad days; on the contrary, he looked thin and pale, and the fair Florentines declared that he was the most ravishing of heroes. Yet the season was a failure. Duvernoir was in tears; wages were in arrears; the artists looked glum, as even happy-go-lucky Thespians will look when their stomachs are almost empty. When the time came to disband Charles divided what little money he had among the minor actors, who had nothing, and he thereupon found himself, much to his surprise, without a centime. Light-hearted as ever, he borrowed some funds from a banker, hurried away for Paris, stopped at Marseilles, where

he spent all his new wealth, and finally managed to get home, the most cheerful of paupers to be imagined. His father warned him to have done with the theatres. "I want you to be a sculptor," he said.

So Charles Albert began to study in the Beaux Arts, at the same time that he applied, contrary to paternal advice, for admission to the Conservatoire. "What do you want?" asked one of the professors of the latter institution, when confronted by a gaunt youth of seventeen, with a consumptive look and a dancing, mischievous eye. "I want to be an actor!" was the reply. "An actor, indeed," sniffed the professor. "Permit me to assure you that acting is out of the question. You have no lungs; you are consumptive, Monsieur Fechter, and I advise you to take a great deal of exercise." But the lad only walked away to another instructor, to whom he explained, in answer to a question as to what he could recite, that he was "up" in the character of Séide, the Arabian slave in Voltaire's once popular tragedy of *Mahomet*. The new professor, Michelot, told him to begin, and himself started to beat time, as if he were the leader of an orchestra. The situation was so amusing to Fechter that, losing all control of himself, and forgetting his awe-

At the
Conservatoire

Back to
Modelling

inspiring surroundings, he sang the lines of Séide, in compliment to the operatic gestures of Michelot. The professor could not see the humour of it, but the spectators laughed in their respective sleeves. Then the aspirant quarrelled with another professor over a matter of inflection, while he contrived to recite Séide to a fourth, who was more complacent. "That will do," was the comment of the latter; "you are quite as bad as any of the actors at the Comédie Française!" Three weeks at the Conservatoire was all that the rebellious spirit of Fechter could brook. He returned to the Beaux Arts, with the firm resolve that he would never be an actor.

The indomitable energy of Fechter was now directed to modelling. In the summer of 1844 he was hard at work competing for the *Grand Prix*. His subject was the story of the Good Samaritan, told in bas-relief: could he win the prize he would have five years of study in Rome, at the expense of the French government. Five years in the Eternal City! His heart bounded at the thought.

But the Fates had other aims for him. While he was waiting anxiously to hear whether, by any possible chance, he could have carried off the *Grand Prix*, he was

suddenly summoned to appear at the Comédie Française. What could it mean? He did not learn until later that his brother-in-law, who cherished an abiding faith in Fechter's histrionic talents, had made formal application for a *début* for him at the Française. Under the rules of that institution stage-struck young men and women might ask for a trial rehearsal, and, if they were found satisfactory in that, could demand three public *débuts*, which would decide their fate as to admission into, or rejection from, the ranks of the theatre's *pensionnaires*.

No sooner was the notice received from the Comédie Française than all Fechter's early love of the drama returned with two-fold force. Forgetting the *Grand Prix*, and the bas-relief of the Good Samaritan, he presented himself one morning behind the scenes of the theatre. The stage was almost pitch dark, in melancholy contrast to its brilliancy at night, and *sociétaires* were distributed about in the gloom, like so many executioners. It was a ghastly moment as Charles Albert began to recite the inevitable *Séide*. When he was half through the part a voice called to him, from the darkness, to try a bit of comedy, and so he launched forth into the part of Valere, from the *Tartuffe* of Molière. "That will do; call

The
Comédie
Française

another!" soon said the inscrutable voice. Fechter stopped in the middle of his Valere, and went home to his studio, in happy uncertainty as to whether he had pleased or disappointed his hearers.

The sequel reads like romance, and romance of the impossible, old-fashioned kind at that. Weeks passed drearily, until on one lucky day, the actor-sculptor received two formidable letters which might have been summonses to the guillotine, so ominous looked the envelopes. He tore one open. Magnificent! It was an order for him to appear at the Comédie Française, to make the desired first *début*. He now opened the second envelope. "*Mon Dieu!*" His bas-relief of the Good Samaritan had won the *Grand Prix!*

Here were two primrose paths that led to fame. Which one should he take? Was there ever such a predicament for a mere stripling? Prudence, and his father, whispered: "Accept the *Grand Prix*; go to Rome. Your future is assured!" But there was no prudence in the nature of Charles Albert; he only realised that the Stage, not Sculpture, was his real Mistress. When the elder Fechter pleaded with him to take the prize, he said laughingly: "I will fight you a fencing match. If I win it

shall be the Comédie Française; if you win, then you can have your own way, and I start for Rome." The father wisely refused, for he knew that his supple son could easily tire him out with the foils.

It ended exactly as all of Charles Albert's friends (he had many, though he loved to quarrel with them) predicted that it would. In short, he made his *début* at the Française on an evening in December, 1844, in company with Rebecca Felix, the now forgotten sister of the illustrious Rachel. And what a thrill he gave to the old stagers who frequented the House of Molière either before or behind the footlights! Oh, the sublime audacity of it! He actually had the courage to dress Séide, the slave, as a real Arabian, instead of putting on an impossible French costume of blue and white satin, and giving himself a complexion like a wax doll that had never been exposed to southern sun. "*Mon Dieu!*" cried the stage-manager, horror-stricken, as he saw Fechter standing in the wings. But the *débutant* was not to be frightened by the conservatism which hung, pall-like, over the roof of the Comédie Française. He hid from the stage-manager until the time came for his cue; then he bounded lightly on the scene. For a moment the large audience was breathless.

Battling
with
Prejudice

Battling
with
Prejudice

There was a murmur of astonishment, which soon turned into loud applause and cries of "Bravo!" The daring iconoclast had won, not only by his dress, but by the freshness of his acting. The satin-finished Séide of tradition—the artificial slave who recited his lines with the propriety of a French Academician—had given place to a throbbing, pulsating youth who put a new passion into his situations, and played the Arab as if he were a human creature, and not a mere poetic fancy of Voltaire's. It was this power to give substance to shadows, and plausibility to unreal characters, that had so much to do with the genius of Fechter's acting in later years.

After the performance Rachel came to Fechter with the most sincere of all compliments. "You must act in all my pieces," she cried. Everyone praised the brave player; for a few days the world looked full of roses. But then there came a reaction. Some of the *sociétaires* of the theatre waxed jealous, and asked themselves: "*Par bleu*, who is this presumptuous fellow who takes it upon himself to upset all our precedents? Why should a *gamin* in art dare to treat Voltaire, the classic Voltaire, with sacrilege?" Thus Fechter suddenly found himself given the cold shoulder, during the

rehearsals at the Française. Instead of living down the results of this jealousy, and exercising a bit of diplomacy, he strode away from the theatre in a rage. He never would control himself; his temper became his king, and, in the end, his tyrant. The consequence of this defection was that the two parts which he had chosen for his second appearance (Curiace, in the *Horaces* of Corneille, and Dorante in *Le menteur*) were played by one of the *pensionnaires*. At this, Jules Janin, the dramatic critic, came out with an article pitching into Fechter for his wretched acting of the two characters. "Your criticism is excellent, true in every particular, my dear Janin," wrote the libelled actor to the critic, "except in attributing the acting of Curiace and Dorante to me. I performed in neither part." The mistaken Janin tried to cover up his blunder by saying that he had referred to Fechter's acting at rehearsal; Fechter proved that he had not even rehearsed the parts, and the two became bitter enemies from that time. To ignore the acting of Fechter altogether, or to put his shining name among the list of inferior performers—that unheroic paragraph beginning, "the other members of the cast included Mr. So and So," etc.—was a revenge of which Janin afterwards proved guilty.

A Harsh
Tyrant

Those
"Beau-
jeux"

Finally Charles Albert made peace with the Française, and acted there, to the applause of the spectators, in the *Horaces* and *Le menteur*. He was thereupon made a regular *pensionnaire*, without the formality of a third *début*, and was soon playing lovers to the heroines of Rachel. And such lovers as they were; languorous and passionate by turns, with tender glances from the hazel-brown eyes that made the women declare that his *beaux yeux* were blue, not black. From the first Fechter appealed to all feminine playgoers by virtue of a certain vigorous sentimentality. It was the sentimentality of a Dumasesque hero, fitful and breezy, and not that of the sickly order. As Charles Dickens, his warm friend and adviser, so well said, he combined "a man's insight with a woman's instinct."

The very novelty of Charles Albert's style, and, possibly, that choleric temper that did not sit appropriately on a young *pensionnaire*, could not win him much love among the powers within the walls of the Comédie Française. A clique was formed against him; he was deprived of suitable parts, and after a connection of more than a year he retired from the theatre in disgust. "Never again say theatre to me!" he cried. He would be a sculptor now, without any

more delay. With that he set himself to model a group representing the "Seven Deadly Sins."

But Fechter quickly bade adieu to the "Seven Deadly Sins," excepting in so far as some of them were typified in his own irascible person. He was soon playing a brilliant engagement at the Berlin Theatre, where he did tragedy and comedy, sang in opera, danced in ballets, and even took a wild fling at Richard III. At an entertainment before the Court he so convulsed the King of Prussia that the monarch sent him word: "Be less funny, or I will die." Whereupon Fechter grew all the more amusing, and the poor King was led from the royal box in paroxysms of laughter. When the delighted Queen, who seldom deigned to patronise the theatre, sent the actor busts of Goethe, and Schiller, and Herder, he returned the compliment by modelling for her an exquisite figure of a Sister of Charity.

Fechter was back in Paris in 1847, to begin a three-years' engagement at the Vaudeville. The manager seems to have repented of his bargain, and ousted the "star" by setting a sly trap into which the actor, always deficient in business sense, readily fell. The manager pretended to be so delighted with

Too
Funny

French
Trickery

the performances that he suggested tearing up the original contract between them, and making out a new one to contain a clause for a larger salary. Fechter, who trusted all men until he wrangled with them, allowed the first contract to be destroyed, only to find that no new one was forthcoming. The manager always refused to make out the latter. As Fechter, now without any legal hold on the theatre, discovered that the whole thing was a trick to get rid of him, he threatened to appeal to the courts.

Just at this moment, however, he was asked to accompany a French troupe to the St. James Theatre, London. Here he was well received, without attracting the attention he was to win later from the English. Louis Napoleon, then in exile, became very intimate with Fechter, and on bidding him good-bye, as the actor was returning to Paris, said prophetically: "The next time we meet it will be in the Tuileries." That, at least, is the legend: it is certain that the next meeting of the two was in the palace of the Bourbons.

In the early part of 1848 Fechter appeared at the Ambigu, in a new play, *La Famille Thureau*, wherein he astonished the Parisians by modelling, each evening, a statue of Poetry. Then came the Revolution, with

the closing of the theatres, and in the midst of the excitement we hear of Fechter braving the patriots by acting in a "reactionary" comedy which actually burlesqued their principles. "You are the only man," its author had said to him, "who has the pluck to brave the crowd." That is exactly what Fechter did, drawing packed houses, and coolly addressing the spectators from the stage when they undertook to fight among themselves over the sentiments expressed in the play.

After the Revolution, Fechter rose rapidly to the dignity of an established favourite, for he carried away the Parisians by the *verve* and romantic breadth which he put into each and every part, in comedy or in modern drama. Already he was showing a talent for that picturesque, vivid school of acting which had such striking illustration, at different periods, in *The Corsican Brothers*, *Don Cæsar de Bazan*, and *Monte Cristo*, and which, years afterwards, had virile but less finished presentation, in the work of the lamented Alexander Salvini.

Once he waged a characteristic fight with George Sand, who had come up from her country home to assist at the dress rehearsal of her play of *Claudie*. Not being able to obtain the leading part, owing to the prior

Rare
Pluck

George
Sand

claim of another actor, M. Boccage, Fechter chose the character of a ploughboy. As he always studied a part to its very depths, he had formed a keen idea as to how the ploughboy should be played, and prided himself that he would produce a fine effect. But Madame Sand was disgusted, at the rehearsal, because he made the character too life-like: in brief, she wished it to be played in a genteel, unnatural way, without rusticity or *patois*.

“ I will not permit such an outrage,” she cried to Boccage. “ If you allow that man to act I ’ll withdraw the play!” M. Boccage assured Madame that Fechter was doing her a great honour in taking such an inferior part, and he besought her to be reasonable. But Fechter, who had overheard her contemptuous reference to “ that man,” fired up, and refused to act. There was trouble for a time, until the angry man, apparently yielding the point, put on a suit of clothes worthy of a French dandy and finished the rehearsal by playing the ploughboy in a style to suit the new costume. Whereat George Sand was delighted. But her joy was cut short by an ultimatum from the actor. “ Now,” he declared, with a vindictive gleam in the lover-like eyes, “ if I can’t play that part as I feel I should do

it, I won't appear at all! Madame Sand can write, but she has proved that she does n't know the meaning of acting. She has insulted me. I am done with her!"

More excitement, more expostulation, all ending in Fechter playing the ploughboy that evening with *patois* and ragged clothes. Madame Sand confessed, in rapture, that the actor was right in his interpretation, and begged to be taken into his dressing-room to tender her congratulations. Fechter scowled when her message was brought to him. "I refuse to know Madame Sand!" he thundered—and he kept to his word. It was well that Fechter had genius to help him on in the world. Without genius, and with such a talent for displeasing the powerful of the earth, he would have fallen on evil days far sooner than he did. Yet the genius often brings the irritability as a natural sequence. The wear and tear on the mind of an artist who constantly creates is so enormous that there must be some excuse for "Nerves." But as a dresser once said of his master, a great opera-singer, "a ge—nus is a riling sort of pusson to live with."

Perhaps the most dazzling period of Fechter's career is to be found in the six years, from 1852 to 1858, that he spent as "star" of the Vaudeville Theatre. During that

Armand
Duval

bright *régime* was produced Dumas's *La Dame aux Camelias*, one of the most successful plays in the history of the modern drama. For nearly half a century has Marguerite Gautier been dying of consumption, and the end is not yet. She is no longer as fashionable as of yore, but who shall dare to say that she may not still give intermittent coughs for the pleasure of the rising generation, and drive them into the same old discussion as to whether or not her story teaches a fit lesson to the theatregoer. It was not, however, Mlle. Gautier who was the real "star" on the first performance of the play, or throughout its succeeding run of nearly three hundred nights. Poor Madame Doche was thrown into the shade by the impassioned acting of Fechter, whose tenderness in the earlier scenes, as Armand Duval, gradually deepened into finest pathos, and reached a magnificent climax in the fourth act, where Duval bursts out into scornful denunciation of the heroine.

The house fairly "rose" at him on the first night, after this act, and the chief of the *claqueurs* came running behind the scenes to apologise because he had been unable to keep back the tumultuous applause until the last act. "I could n't help it," he whined; "the people did it." It was not Marguerite

who monopolised the tears that evening, as she does nowadays; all the pity was bestowed on the lover.

Armand
Duval

“Who,” asked the enthusiastic Dumas, “could have given to Armand Duval the convincing poetry, the noble jealousy, the indescribable susceptibilities of feeling—the naturalness, the terror—with which he shaded the first three acts? As for the frenzy of the fourth act, at the end of which the entire audience rose to cheer and to recall him,—him and Madame Doche,—if I were not so satisfied at having written the piece I should wish some one else to have been its author, that I might say of Fechter all that ought to be said.”

Frederic Lemaitre was much impressed with Armand Duval, but he made one singularly inartistic criticism. The performance, he said, was too even; if Armand would only save himself until the fourth act, then he could thrill the audience by the contrast to his previous repose of manner. But Fechter was not the man to save himself in acting, or in anything else. He lived his parts from the second that he stepped before the foot-lights.

Occasionally, of course, Fechter ran against some exception to the adulation of the public. When he went to Lyons, during

No More
Hisses

a provincial tour, to play for six nights, he found that the people of that city resented his appearance, affecting to believe that he was trying to supplant one of their local *jeune premiers*. No sooner did the Parisian come on the stage than there were hisses. He stopped the play, walked to the foot-lights, and said, very coolly: "It makes no possible difference, *messieurs et mesdames*, whether you like me or dislike me; whether I act or do not act. I merely desire to say that if I hear another hiss I shall leave the theatre, and never enter it again!" Fechter remained three months in Lyons, instead of six nights, without hearing another hiss.

The last great achievement of Fechter in Paris was his management of the Odeon Theatre. At this house he produced a number of standard plays according to his own artistic ideas, with historically correct costumes and scenery, and with wonderful regard to realism. Meissonier could be seen at the Odeon making studies of the elaborate appointments, which bore silently conclusive testimony to the taste and skill of the sculptor of the Beaux Arts, while the general public admired the colloquial delivery of the performers as much as it did the colour and harmony of the settings. What Fechter did, in fact, was to galvanise the dying works

of Racine, Corneille, Voltaire, and other heroes of the classic cult, and to make them more natural than the poets themselves could have imagined. Indeed, it is probable that old Corneille would have shivered dismally had he been able to come to life, and walk into the Odeon. To hear his grandiloquent lines recited in so easy, graceful a fashion would have brought the tears to his ghostly eyes. The declamatory style of the school-boy would have come far nearer to his ideal.

This managerial career had an end after the French Chamber of Deputies refused to give Fechter the privilege of performing certain plays whose rights had heretofore belonged to the Comédie Française. He now determined to make a bold move. He would go to England, act in the English language, and — bolder yet — try his genius in Shakespeare! What if it had been said that no Frenchman could act the poet's Hamlet? Was Shakespeare to be monopolised by the Anglo-Saxon race?

Full of these thoughts, Fechter made his arrangements to bid France farewell, and then crossed the Channel, in the comfortable belief that he already possessed a fine English pronunciation. "What?" asked the London cabman, when the actor was trying to give him directions. That "what?"

Welcomes
Nature

Ruy Blas

proved to Fechter that the French accent must be very evident, so he shut himself up to study English at the rate of from sixteen to eighteen hours a day. At the end of four months he spoke the language of his adoption far more naturally and fluently than he had done on his arrival.

On the 27th of October, 1860, came his English-speaking *début*, at the Princess's Theatre, in *Ruy Blas*. The combination of grace, earnestness, and colour which Fechter exhibited as the lackey, and the delightfully sincere air that he imparted to his love for the Queen, astonished all London. *Ruy Blas* was a "hit," in managerial parlance, and the drama ran for a hundred nights. Then the Frenchman played Don Cæsar de Bazan, whose happy-go-lucky chivalry seemed admirably suited to his own nature. Throughout the performance Don Cæsar was always high-bred, in the midst of poverty; even in the drunken scene he never lost his dashing nobility. There was none of the vulgar braggart about the hero: that interpretation has been adopted by less gifted actors.

But what were Ruy Blas and Don Cæsar de Bazan to the production of *Hamlet*, in March, 1861? The idea of a Frenchman playing the Dane, in the very city where so many

English Hamlets had appeared, filled the Londoners with curiosity. So they crowded to see the new creation, talked of it, wrote of it, agreed about it, or quarrelled over it, as their respective inclinations dictated. Some said it was a very bad Hamlet; others declared it was magnificent, fascinating. In reality it was a truly Gallic and highly wrought Hamlet, picturesque, romantic, emotional, and full of charm from beginning to end. With his attractive face and long, flaxen curls, so different from the sable locks of the traditional Hamlet, Fechter looked for all the world like "a pale, woe-begone Norseman," as Dickens said. He appealed irresistibly to the eye, and misled the judgment of many a good critic. After the play had ended, and the spell of the actor had been destroyed, calm reasoning showed that Fechter was as far away from the real Hamlet as if he had been masquerading as Don Felix. The new Dane was a very sympathetic young gentleman, brimming over with intelligence and Parisian sparkle, but he lacked dignity, spirituality, soul. It was impossible not to feel that he was all on the surface, and that he would, if need be, sigh out his woes from the castle-tops, for the benefit of the rabble below. He was not a Prince who could conscientiously say that

Hamlet via
Paris

Hamlet via
Paris

he had "that within which passeth show." He was all show.

The very novelty of Fechter's impersonation was its success. The tragedy ran for 115 nights, and the Frenchman became a veritable lion. Courtesies great and small were showered upon him; intellectual London took him up, and Royalty asked for the favour of presentation. In the autumn Fechter tried a new vein of Shakespeare, with dismal results. His Othello was pronounced one of the weakest performances of the Moor ever seen. It was interesting, in that it contained much original "business," and "French tricks," but it was shallow, insincere. Macready went to criticise, and complained, very justly, that this Othello was too melodramatic. Nor is it food for surprise that Fechter failed in this exacting character. A *jeune premier* is not the man to smother Desdemona, even if he can strike a sensation as Hamlet. In Iago, however, he was far better, without doing anything to displace, even by a hair's breadth, memories of English actors. Pity 't is that he did not play Romeo. How the women of London would have envied Juliet!

The metropolitan experiences of Fechter included his leasing the Lyceum Theatre for several seasons, and his appearances, later

on, at the Adelphi Theatre. He was incessant in his energy, and the plays wherein he figured, from 1861 to the close of 1869, included such successes as *The Duke's Motto*, *The Corsican Brothers*, *The Mountebank* (in which Fechter's seven-year-old son, Paul, took part*), *Monte Cristo*, and *Rouge-et-Noir*. *The Corsican Brothers* is so full of clap-trap that the effectiveness of Fechter in the dual rôle of Fabien and Louis dei Franchi spoke volumes for one who could lend realism and coherence to a mass of impossible situations, and no less impossible sentiment. As Kate Field said, in her well-considered memoir of the actor:

"A picture of the times stood on the stage, and, in the hand-to-hand conflict that closes the drama, the audience beheld a hot-blooded Corsican tiger thirsting for revenge, fighting with all the skill and liveness of a creature brought up among mountains and *vendette*."

As the artificial Claude Melnotte — that prig whom the male theatregoer often feels like kicking — Fechter created a furore. It was not the stiff, stilted Melnotte of Bulwer whom the audiences saw, but in his place, a prince of real lovers, natural, Gallic, and

* Fechter had married, in 1847, Mlle. Roebert, of the Comédie Française, by whom he had two children.

Claude
Melnotte

full of that romance which invariably attached to the personality of this actor, even as he gained in dreaded flesh. Fechter saw the weaknesses of Bulwer and improved upon him, so that all suggestions of literary affectation, and all the ear-marks of a theatrical ass, were temporarily removed from the fellow who played such a boorish trick on Pauline Deschanelles.

Another play in which the Frenchman again wooed fortune was *No Thoroughfare*, a dramatisation from the famous story of that name by Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens. The part of that insinuating villain, Obenreizer, took the greatest hold upon Fechter's vivid imagination, so that he fairly lived the character for days before the production of the piece. The manuscript was in his hands morning, afternoon, and night; he thought, spoke, and ate as Obenreizer. But when he awoke one morning, to realise that *No Thoroughfare* was to be brought out the same evening, at the Adelphi, he was seized by an illness to which the most experienced actors may be heir. In other words, he had a bad attack of "stage-fright." Wilkie Collins found him trying to eat some breakfast, and not succeeding in the attempt. Nothing could be done to comfort him; not even the charms of his favourite garlic (what

a dish for a stage lover !) would restore him to common sense or tranquillity. The mere idea that he must create the new part that night, and perhaps fail in it, filled him with alarm.

As the day went on Fechter became worse. At night, when Collins went to the actor's dressing-room, a few minutes before the ringing-up of the curtain, he was horrified at the scene which met him on opening the door. There was Obenreizer in a state of semi-collapse, suffering agony from nausea, and as nervous as if he were waiting to be led to the guillotine. It looked as if there would be no *Thoroughfare*—no Fechter—no call for "Authors." The moments passed all too swiftly till the call-boy rapped at the door for "Mr. Obenreizer." Then Fechter straightened himself up, walked to the wings, attended by Collins and his dresser, and listened, half fainting, for his cue. It came, and the actor walked briskly on the stage, as a round of applause came from the crowded audience. The plaudits, the lights, the performers, all acted on his nerves like a powerful stimulant; he forgot his fright, and played with a skill that at once raised Obenreizer to a place among his most triumphant parts.

During the run of *Bel Demonio*, at the

"Stage=
Fright"

An
Accident

Lyceum Theatre, Fechter had been the victim of an illness far more serious than anything like "stage-fright." On the 175th night of this piece he caught one of his spurs in the scenery, while making an entrance through a window, tripped, and came down on the boards so violently that a hook on the scabbard of his sword pierced his right hand. In spite of the pain, he finished the performance, and made light of the accident, like the plucky man that he was. The next morning he was placidly shaving himself when the physician arrived to dress the wound, and was much surprised at the question: "How do your jaws feel?" Although lock-jaw did not set in, Fechter became dangerously ill, lying in a stupor for three weeks, and it was some time before he could return to the stage.

One glimpse of the actor, during a brief engagement played at Liverpool, is amusing, if scarcely artistic. The drama selected for presentation was *Black and White*, the work of himself and Wilkie Collins, but as the people of Liverpool were anxious, even clamorous, to see Hamlet, with his magnetism and towy locks, he promised a compromise. *Black and White* must be given, according to programme, and, in addition, one act of *Hamlet* would be played each

evening until the whole tragedy had been seen. This scheme, so strongly suggestive of the performance of a Chinese play on the instalment plan, met with much favour.

There was still another English-speaking nation to conquer. Fechter resolved to subdue America. On January 10, 1870, he appeared, with success, at Niblo's Garden, New York, as Ruy Blas. His breadth of style and the warmth and impulsiveness of his acting, appealed very strongly to many of the theatregoers in all the cities he visited, who discovered in the romantic drama, as he presented it, a new and bracing atmosphere. For a time all went fairly well with the visitor. In Boston he was looked upon as a sort of theatrical Moses, who was to lead audiences and players into a land of promise. The enthusiasm was mutual. Fechter, now determined to give the Bostonians a taste of his managerial talent, opened the Globe Theatre, popularly known as "Fechter's," with a company of remarkable strength, headed by Carlotta Leclercq and James W. Wallack, Jr. It was supposed that a new histrionic era had set in; Sardou was to be engaged to write for the Globe, and everything was to be done in the sacred name of art. But that miserable temper of the Frenchman made mischief.

The Globe
Theatre

Born to
Quarrel

He quarrelled with this person and that; he refused to conciliate anybody, and was desperately intimate with a man one day, only to treat him as a despised enemy on the very next morning.

One of the friends whom he thus antagonised was Wallack. The latter objected to playing Don Salluste, in *Ruy Blas*, and wrote the actor a line to that effect. A few kindly words, or a gentle remonstrance, would have instantly overcome the opposition of Wallack, who was a sincere admirer of Fechter. These words were never said. Instead of a slap on the back, with a cordial hint—"Do take the part, my boy; you'll like it when you've gotten into it,"—Wallack received this note from Fechter:

"MY DEAR WALLACK,—I sent you the part of Don Salluste to study, not to judge. I should as soon think of asking your permission to cast you as Joseph Surface as Don Salluste. I beg of you to reconsider your note, or your services will be useless here, and your engagement at an end this very week. I consider Don Salluste the best part in the play, and would much rather act it than Ruy Blas. If you say so, we will alternate the part."

Of course Fechter had a right to insist that Wallack should play Don Salluste, but he

had seen enough of the world, real and mimic, to know that actors are high-strung, sensitive men who hate to have authority thrown into their faces. They must be handled with care, like glass in transit. Now Wallack, not to be deceived by a specious offer of alternating parts, was just brittle enough to have his own temper shivered by this letter. So he at once wrote back to Fechter, whom he addressed as "Sir," telling him that he did not recognise his right to interfere, that he (Wallack) only held himself accountable to the manager who had engaged him, etc. With these perpetual wrangles it is not strange that Fechter made unwilling enemies, or that he finally withdrew from the Globe Theatre. The fault was all his own. But the Bostonians remembered him affectionately, and would always have a rousing welcome for him on his return to play the ardent heroes of the past.

In 1872 Fechter played in London once more, but he was soon back in the United States. Now, alas, his popularity began to wane. His once picturesque figure had grown heavy; his health was failing; he spent his money like water, as he always had done; his choleric disposition became worse, and there were curious stories, many

Born to
Quarrel

Descend-
ing Life's
Ladder

of them exaggerated, no doubt, about his dissipation. 'T was another instance of the fiery, uncontrollable youth degenerating into the testy man of middle age. Sometimes he disappointed his audiences by not appearing, and the audiences took their revenge by saying that "Fechter was at it again." They were wrong, often, at least, for the actor used to suffer agonies from the disease of the digestive organs which eventually caused his death. Once he fell on the ice and broke his leg, and for a time he retired to the farm in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, which he had bought several years previously. It was at this farm that he passed many pleasant days, between the engagements that he played in different cities. He would have been very happy there, with his gun, and fishing-rod, and the five devoted dogs who shared his meals, had he not thought of wasted opportunities, of money squandered and friends thrown away. As his malady increased, Fechter was confined to his house; then he sank into a stupor, and died on the morning of August 5, 1879. It was a sadly commonplace exit for the prince of melodramatic lovers, for it suggested nothing but the death of a broken-down farmer. It seemed as if Fechter should have died to slow music, surrounded by

richly costumed sympathisers, and with the lime-light shining on his expressive features, as he softly muttered a farewell speech from Victor Hugo or Dumas.

The body of the actor was placed in the receiving vault of Mount Vernon Cemetery, Philadelphia. The remains were afterwards interred, and over the grave was erected a monument bearing a bust of Fechter, with the inscription: "Genius has taken its flight to God."

Three nations learned of Fechter's death with sorrow. France, England, and America each claimed a share of his fame, as each forgot his follies in recalling what was good in the man and brilliant in the actor. Even his enemies spoke tenderly of him, while they asked themselves: "Why did he ever fight us?" All bitterness left by those childish quarrels soon vanished. We think now of Charles Albert Fechter as the wizard who led us into a land of romance where everything seemed real. It was only the world outside that looked dull and unnatural as we trudged back to it after the fall of the final curtain on *Ruy Blas*, or *Don Cæsar*, or *Monte Cristo*.

Past
Enchant-
ment



“More merry tears
The passion of loud laughter never shed.”
—*Midsummer Night's Dream.*



WILLIAM E. BURTON

THERE is a vein of pathos underlying the biography of William Evans Burton, "the funniest man in the world." It is the pathos of the comedian who never becomes quite reconciled to the fact that he has not played the tragedian. Burton was the incarnation of irresistible humour—on the stage. Off the stage he was thoughtful, very serious at times, and more drawn to the pathos of an Othello or a Lear, than to the idiosyncrasies of briny Captain Cuttle, of Mr. Micawber, or good-hearted, inflated Nick Bottom. But what was the actor to do? The fun fairly oozed from his every pore, so that there was nothing for it but to make the world laugh. He seemed like a comical-faced Hamlet, whom the Danes, thinking him a very merry fellow, forced to wear the cap and bells of a jester, instead of allowing him to go about his customary business of being "introspective."

Real
Humour

Tragic
Ambitions

There have been many other instances where comedians felt a sneaking affection for Madame Melpomene. Through some strange perversity of human nature, they would rather make us weep than grin. They forget that comedy is an art, no less than tragedy; they only regret that they have not produced more tears than smiles.

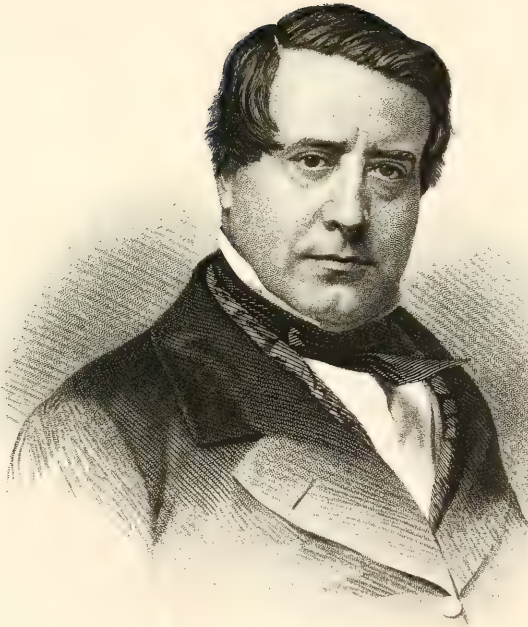
Curiously enough, John Liston, that fine old English comedian to whom Burton was so often compared for richness of humour and farcical power, had begun in a mild way as a tragedian. So, too, had the unctuous Joseph Munden, another comedian who has been likened to Burton. The list could readily be extended. William Lewis, the Mercutio of the eighteenth century, and most whimsical of shoe-buckled fops; Elliston, the wondrous Falstaff; Dowton, the testy Sir Peter Teazle of a past *régime* — these and many more first courted tragedy.

The serious streak in the composition of Burton must have been inherited from his father, William George Burton, an English printer who published the works of classical authors, and pleaded guilty to having written some *Biblical Researches*. The very title of the book would not be remembered were it not that the author, in becoming the father of one of the greatest comedians of the age,



William E. Burton.

From a steel print.



was saved from total oblivion. When William Evans Burton was born in London, on the 24th of September, 1804, the printer fondly pictured him as a future clergyman. Perhaps there would be more *Researches* in the family; perhaps "Billy" would become a second Jeremy Taylor, or a Protestant edition of the pious Thomas à Kempis. The vision was so alluring that William George sent his boy, so soon as the time arrived, to St. Paul's School, in London, where a good classical education was secured. Had he been a superstitious parent he might have been worried at the thought that several former pupils of that institution had left it only to grow distinguished in the wicked region of the theatre.

But this ministerial scheme had an end when the father died, and the son, now a lively lad of seventeen or eighteen years of age, found himself thrown on the world with a mother to support. With that energy which followed him through life young Burton started in to manage the printing office. He had already obtained some experience in the business, by reading proofs of the books issued from his father's press, and he was possessed of a great love for literature. The smell of printer's ink, and the beauties of a newly made "form," would always

The
Editor

have for Burton the same fascination that they had, in earlier days, for another young typographer, Benjamin Franklin.

Not content with merely carrying on the paternal trade, the lad began to edit a literary review—the *Cambridge Quarterly*. This venture was not successful, but it brought him in contact with some theatrical persons, and turned his mind to forbidden thoughts of the stage. The acting of the best of the London players, and the example of his new associates, fired him with an ambition which the elder Burton, had he been alive, must have looked upon as the work of Belial. He dreamed of the tragic heroes of Shakespeare; he saw himself a second Kean, or Kemble, or perhaps a Garrick. The result is easily foreseen. He dropped into amateur theatricals, gave up the printing office, which may not have proved very prosperous, and was playing, at twenty-one, in a provincial company that murdered the old-time drama on the circuit of Norwich, Sussex, and Kent. Tradition has it that he still cherished his love for Shakespearian tragedy, even to the point of attempting Hamlet, and that he once acted at Windsor, before King George IV. But the natural humour in Burton was continually coming to the surface: it could no more be disguised than his laughing eyes,

or the broadly comic expression of his full face. The manager of the company, noticing all this with the keen intuition of an actor, offered him the position of leading comedian. Burton accepted the place, quite convinced, no doubt, that he was making great sacrifices in coming down from his tragic stilts. In reality, he was doing the most sensible thing in the world. With all his power to understand, and to feel, the passions of a Shylock, or an Iago, a Macbeth, or a Richard III., he lacked the ability to give sombre expression to his ideas, save in certain scenes of rough pathos, where the tears were soon dried by the sunshine of his comedy.

Burton, tiring of unsubstantial provincial triumphs, came to London, where he made his first appearance at the Pavillion Theatre (1831), as Wormwood, in *The Lottery Ticket*. In the course of a few months the favourite Liston retired from the Haymarket Theatre, as the result of pique or disagreement of some sort, and the younger comedian suddenly found himself put forward as his successor or theatrical legatee. He essayed many of Liston's parts, and already showed signs of the talent, afterwards so highly developed, of extracting all the possibilities of a character, and endowing it, furthermore,

On the
Stage

Old Liston

with certain happy qualities never even imagined by its creator. This was, indeed, one of the virtues of Liston. If you gave him the ghost of a part, as Boaden says, "he invested its thinness in corporeal substance"; or, "an outline of figure was all that was wanting to his art; he infused into it the richness of his own comic imagination, in aid of irresistible features, and completed the work designed by another hand."

But Burton was not able to supplant Liston in the hearts of the Londoners, and, when the latter deigned to return to the Haymarket, the "successor" withdrew from the theatre, to tour the provinces. There was one incident of his engagement that made his sturdy figure swell with pride at the memory. He recalled how he had been cast for Marall, to the Sir Giles Overreach of Edmund Kean, and how, when the exacting Mrs. Glover had objected to the young actor's assumption of the part, the waning genius had opposed her fiercely. "Then either Mr. Burton or I leave the theatre!" snapped the Glover. A bit of the old fire came into the eyes of Kean, as he intimated that the lady might prepare to go—for on Burton, as Marall, he must insist. Mrs. Glover descended from her high horse, and meekly appeared with Burton, whose

acting was applauded by an overflowing house.

Turning
American

There were other things of which Burton might be proud. Was he not a playwright as well as a player? His *Ellen Wareham* had been given at five London theatres on the same evening. But he saw little chance of ever accomplishing much on the metropolitan stage, so long as he had to contend with the shadow of Liston's fame. As for "starring" in the country, that was but semi-respectable oblivion. So he determined to try the freer air of America, where the drama, once a languishing infant, was now developing into a lusty child that cried out for plenty of entertainment bearing the English trade-mark.

Thus the Philadelphians who strolled into the Arch Street Theatre on a warm evening of September, 1834, were pleasantly surprised by the acting of a Mr. Burton, "from the Pavillion Theatre, London," who played his favourite part of Wormwood, and likewise put a new meaning and spirit of fun into the loquacious Dr. Ollapod, in Colman's comedy, *The Poor Gentleman*. Something peculiarly spontaneous appeared in the work — if work it might be called — of the newcomer. A sudden change in the muscles of the face, a wink, a mere inflection of the

A Rev= lation

voice, or a quick gesture, sent a ripple of merriment over the pit, and into gallery and boxes. There was, too, an indescribable comic charm in the mere personality of the man, quite apart from what he achieved by his art. With his rotund body, broad shoulders, fat neck, and reddish face that looked, when animated, like a laughing full moon, Burton brought a racy airiness into his chosen field, and cast into the shade certain local favourites whose ideas of comedy were not much above the standard of negro minstrelsy.

It was not easy, however, to displace memories of the accomplished Joseph Jefferson, Sr., who had only been dead for a short time, and whose name was still held in reverence in Philadelphia. Yet the living actor always has the advantage over his dead brother. Memory alone cannot supply us with stage entertainment, and there comes a time, unless we are old and obstinate, when we stop sighing about past favourites, and rush in to worship at new shrines. Our melancholy remark, that "there will *never* again be an actor like John Blank," is changed into the enthusiastic question: "Have you seen So and So? He has never had an equal."

So it was with Burton. He was so de-

lightful a reality that the ghost of Jefferson soon ceased to trouble him. During a period of two years he played alternately at the Arch and Chestnut Street Theatres, putting new life into the world of farce, and shining in comedy parts, such as Bob Acres, Sir Peter Teazle, Dr. Pangloss, Sir Oliver Surface, and Tony Lumpkin. His benefits, as Mr. Keese tells us in his attractive biography of this comedian, were always "bumpers," and he, in turn, was ever ready to assist in the performances of his brethren. Off the stage he was popular, but too thoughtful and dignified to suggest the *farceur*, and he spent a great portion of his leisure in contributing articles to American newspapers and magazines.

This literary occupation led to an important move: In 1837 Burton established the *Gentleman's Magazine*, of which he was himself the editor for about two years. Then, in an evil moment, he engaged for associate editor that wild, weird child of genius, Edgar Allan Poe. For Poe was in many respects a mere infant, and his genius was almost as unbalanced as was that of Hamlet. Indeed, one has but to look at Poe's portrait, and consider his disposition, to ask if he would not have looked and played the Dane to perfection. Yet Hamlet was a gentleman

Edgar
Allan Poe

of unimpeachable habit until his father's ghost put unconventional ideas into his head; while the author of *The Raven*, poor fellow, made more than one pathetic break from the paths of temperance. A single glass of whiskey would, it is said, play havoc with his sensitive brain.

When Poe was given this new position under Burton, everything looked *couleur de rose* to the poet, who wrote to one of his friends that he was becoming "a model of temperance and other virtues." But his guardian angel was a very lax spirit, who had a bad way of disappearing for a week now and then, and during his absence the poet would have lamentable relapses. On one occasion Burton, who had been away from Philadelphia, returned to the editorial sanctum to find that the current number of the magazine, already overdue for publication, had not been issued, and that Poe was quite beyond anything so mundane as the reading of proof. The unfortunate associate editor was, in short, in a condition where he could not have mastered a child's primer.

Burton rushed to the rescue, read the proofs, and got out the magazine, after which, it may be inferred, he gave a gentle reminder to his assistant. Then came a letter from Poe, who evidently had not yet

recovered his mental equilibrium. Most men would have discharged so rebellious an editor on the spot. But Burton, too kind-hearted and too appreciative of Poe's finer side to take such drastic measures, wrote to him in this wise:

· "I am sorry you have thought it necessary to send me such a letter. Your troubles have given a morbid tone to your feelings, which it is your duty to discourage. I myself have been as severely handled by the world as you can possibly have been, but my sufferings have not tinged my mind with melancholy, nor jaundiced my views of society. You must rouse your energies, and, if care assail you, conquer it. I will gladly overlook the past. I hope you will as easily fulfill your pledges for the future. We shall agree very well, though I cannot permit the magazine to be made the vehicle for that sort of severity which you think is so 'successful with the mob.' I am truly much less anxious about making a monthly 'sensation,' than I am upon the point of fairness. You must, my dear sir, get rid of your avowed ill-feeling toward your brother-authors. You see I speak plainly; I cannot do otherwise upon such a subject. You say that the people love havoc; I think they love justice. . . . Let us meet as if we had never exchanged letters. Use more exercise, write when feeling prompts,

Kindness
of Heart

**A Hope-
less Task**

and be assured of my friendship. You will soon regain a healthy activity of mind, and laugh at your past vagaries."

In reading this letter we forget the comedian, and Momus, and the footlights; we see only the high-minded editor-in-chief, who would conduct his magazine on ideal lines, and the kindly employer, who knows what it is to have to do with poets. The habits of Poe were not, however, to be cured by all the correspondence from a dozen "Ready Letter-Writers." He fell again from grace, under circumstances so flagrant that Burton was obliged, in self-defence, to let him go. Soon after that the comedian sold the *Gentleman's Magazine*, which was afterwards merged, with the *Casket*, into *Graham's Magazine*.

During these preliminary years, as they might be called, Burton made several "starring" ventures. He met, as a rule, with generous appreciation, if we make a very glaring exception to the town of Napoleon, on the Mississippi River. Here he was to have a benefit, but, as the Napoleonites showed no violent desire to crowd into the theatre, the comedian deposited a large number of tickets with the hotel bar-tender. This spirituous person was brought in con-

stant contact, by virtue of his "profession," with the "best citizens," and he was asked by Burton to sell to the latter as many of the benefit seats as he possibly could. The performance was given before a packed house. Burton, delighted at the success, and thinking of the money which the bartender would turn over to him, walked in to see that gentleman, to suggest a settlement.

The ticket-seller looked at the comedian with an expression of the most contemptuous surprise.

"Look here, Mr. Billy Burton," he cried savagely; "none of your Northern tricks here. It won't do, no way! You told me to get rid of them tickets, and as I had promised, I had to go straight through with it—and, by thunder, I was obliged to stand drinks to every man to take one!"

Burton must have had so many odd experiences during his long theatrical career that it is a thousand pities he never wrote his own memoirs. Once, some time later than the Napoleonic episode, he determined to rebuke those selfish theatregoers who begin to pick up their umbrellas and goloshes about a minute before the close of the last act—just as the tangles in the plot are being straightened, and lover and sweetheart are

Napole-
onic
"Benef-
its"

“Infernal
Trash”

clasping hands, to the edification of all the romantic women in the audience. A man in the gallery rose noisily from his seat, at this critical moment, and began to disturb the house by his preparations for departure. Burton stepped promptly to the front of the stage. “Excuse me, sir,” he said, pointing to the delinquent, “but the play is not finished, and you disturb the audience. Have the goodness to sit down.”

“I can’t help it,” shouted the man in the gallery, buttoning his overcoat; “I’ve listened to your infernal trash long enough, and now I’m going!”

The comedian was too dumfounded to say a word.

At another time, when the *Antigone* of Sophocles had been performed under Burton’s direction, there were loud calls for “Author!” The actor thereupon came forth, very seriously, and explained that he would take great pleasure in introducing the author of the play, but that, “unfortunately he had been dead for more than twenty centuries. I shall therefore,” he added, “have to throw myself upon your indulgence.”

Burton made his first appearance in New York in October, 1837, at the old National Theatre, in Leonard Street, and this was

followed by other appearances, as a full, shining "star," in 1839. For a time he tried management in Philadelphia, where he turned "Cooke's Circus" building into a theatre, gathered around him a fine comedy company, including Henry and Thomas Placide, and made a good deal of money, much of which he was to lose in the crash of the old United States Bank.

In 1841 Burton leased the new theatre in Leonard Street. The building wherein he had made his first appearance in New York had been burned down. There was no thought, now, of more fire, and so the comedian, with true Thespian disregard of business caution, neglected to insure his own property for even a dollar. He was having a prosperous time of it here, with the company which he had brought over from Philadelphia, when the flames paid the new house a disastrous visit. The building was burned to the ground, and Burton lost all his costumes, effects, books, and relics. At this his New York admirers, who were already legion, gave him a rousing benefit, from which he secured a very comfortable bank check. Now came a brief "starring" season, with an ambitious scheme of management for theatres in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, and then, in the

Loss by
fire

Burton's
Theatre

summer of 1848, the opening of Burton's Theatre in Chambers Street, New York. The building had been known as Palmo's Opera House, and was erected by Ferdinand Palmo for the presentation of Italian opera. The muse of Music did not always thrive as lustily in Gotham during the forties as she does now: hence the radical change of attractions.

Without seeking to disparage Italian opera, it may be said that the loss to poor Palmo proved a distinct gain to New York. For eight years Burton's Theatre was one of the institutions not of the city alone, but of the whole country. Here were produced, in dazzling succession, lively farces, comedies (even the comedies of Shakespeare), and burlesques that convulsed the town. It was a *menu* which displayed the creative genius of Burton, deposed William Mitchell, who had made travesty popular in New York, brought into prominence some of the finest comedians of the day, and gave to theatrical art of the lighter vein a healthy impetus that made its influence felt far away from the metropolis.

"At Burton's," says Lawrence Hutton, "to play a comedy well was not enough. Everything was so well done, so perfect in every respect,

mere excellence was so much a matter of course, was so positive, on the Chambers Street boards, that there was but little room for the comparative, and the superlative itself was necessary to create a sensation."

Burton's
Theatre

A stranger in New York went to Burton's as dutifully as one in Philadelphia would go down to the old State House to see the room in which the Declaration of Independence was signed. Once in the theatre, he would forget all care; neither his enemies, nor his creditors, if he were so unfortunate as to have any of the latter, troubled his mind while he was going into peals of merriment at the comical visage of Burton, or enjoying the sparkling acting of his associates.

What associates they were, to be sure ! There was no foolish jealousy about Burton. He wanted the best company that could be gotten together, and the more applause they received the better he liked it. As a manager he appreciated the value of finished performances, where even the minor parts were taken by talented players, while as an actor he knew very well that were his company ever so brilliant, they could never deprive him of the public's affection.

We who did not see that memorable

A Memorable List

galaxy can only regret our (comparative) youthfulness, and feel like the woman who said she would willingly be twenty years older than she really was, that she might have had the privilege of seeing a famous "star" who is now dead. At Burton's, at various times, were John Brougham, and Henry Placide, a beloved comedian of the old school, whom Edwin Forrest had called the "best general actor on the American boards"; William Rufus Blake, Lester Wallack, Lawrence Barrett, John Dyott, Lysander Thompson, George Holland, Sr., the courtly Charles Fisher, Mrs. Hughes, whose funny flat face was almost as jocund to look at as was that of Burton himself; Mrs. Russell (afterwards Mrs. Hoey), Miss Weston (later Mrs. Davenport, and then Mrs. Charles James Mathews), Miss Caroline Chapman, Miss Agnes Robertson (afterwards Mrs. Dion Boucicault), and many more, not forgetting Mary Devlin.

When Burton and Brougham played together the treat was a double one, if that were possible. They seemed created to set off the genius of each other, and it became the thing to wait for Burton to make a sally not down in the lines, and to hear Brougham fire a witty response. And how the audience laughed on one festive occasion when

William E. Burton

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Burton, in a speech from the stage, paid so eloquent a compliment to Mrs. Hughes.

Stage Diplomacy

“I have been her father, her son, her uncle, her first husband, her second husband, and her third husband, her friend, and her disconsolate widower, and I have liked her better and better in each relation.”

No wonder that he became so popular on both sides of the curtain.

He understood humanity so well, and had such an exquisite sense of humour in all the relations of private life, despite his occasional gravity of manner, that he could manage his company with the diplomacy of a Richelieu. Poor Fechter should have taken lessons from him. Here is an example, in the conciliation of an indignant actor. W. H. Norton, an Englishman, was the actor, and very angry he became when Burton cast him for what he considered an unworthy part. So he straightway wrote a note of protest to his chief, in which he said, among other things:

“It was not necessity which drove me to America. I wished to travel, to see the country, and after having satisfied myself as to whether it pleased me professionally, or otherwise, to arrange either to remain in it, or to return to England.”

Stage Diplomacy

Mr. Norton waited impatiently for the answer. It arrived in due time; he opened the envelope, read the contents—and burst into laughter. This was what Burton had written :

“MY DEAR MR. NORTON,—When I engaged you I thought you were merely an actor. I find that you are a gentleman on your travels, and I have to apologise for detaining you. If you proceed, let me advise you to visit Niagara about this time. Take a tour through Canada. After that take your way through the country generally, not forgetting the caves of Kentucky, and in mid-winter return to Niagara, a splendid sight. But, should you feel inclined to defer your travels, W. E. Burton will be happy to retain your services until the close of the season.”

The more Norton sought to wax indignant, the more he laughed. That evening, when he went back to the theatre, Burton said to him: “Ah, Norton, I received a letter from you.” “Yes,” replied the actor, trying to appear dignified. “You got my letter?” asked Burton. “Yes,” answered Norton. “Which was the best?” laughed the manager, and with that, taking the malcontent by the arm, he led him to a neighbouring café, where their differences were soon adjusted.

The plays which were produced during the Burton Theatre *régime* ranged all the way from roaring farce to elaborate revivals of Shakespeare. "No good actor," said Burton, "has a right to die until he has done something good for his art." Surely the comedian earned his passport for the Great Beyond when he gave such attractive productions of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, the *Tempest*, the *Winter's Tale*, and the *Merry Wives of Windsor*. His Nick Bottom was exquisitely treated, and proved neither a buffoon nor a low comedian, but a compound of ignorance and conceit, tempered, as Richard Grant White pointed out, by "good-nature, decision of character, and some mother-wit." His Sir Toby Belch, delightful but never vulgar, his wildly grotesque Caliban, his Autolycus, and, perhaps best of all, his Falstaff, lecherous, plausible, oily, showed the intellectual powers of Burton, and his ability to rise above the surface of travesty or bouncing fun. His Launcelot Gobbo, Touchstone, and Dogberry, as given elsewhere, were other richly conceived Shakespearian personations. Burton demonstrated, indeed, by his revivals, what a versatile company of comedians can do, just as Augustin Daly proved, in later years, that Ada Rehan,

Plays of
Shake-
speare

In
"Dickens
Land"

John Drew, the lovable Mrs. Gilbert, and all the rest of his merry mummers might act in a flimsy farce one night and figure the very next evening in the halls or gardens of Shakespeare's folk.

If the Bard was well received, what must be said of the popularity of the less ambitious productions? There is a wealth of suggestion to the oldest playgoers in the very titles of *Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Pickwickians*, *The Serious Family*, *Toodles*, and the rest of that famous list. Their presentations marked an epoch in the history of the American stage. How airy and sublimely sanguine must have been the Mr. Micawber of the manager, wherein one got not only Charles Dickens, but many delicate touches of Burton's individuality. His Squeers was an irresistible creation, fascinating in its very element of "cussedness," while his Captain Cuttle was acknowledged as the best of all his sketches from Dickens. It seemed as if the old salt had just walked out from the bound covers of *Dombey and Son*, hook, tarpaulin hat, and all; the only difference being—so, at least, audiences thought—that the stage Cuttle was even more real and entrancing than the one in the book. Then there was the irrepressible Toodles, who always got

so amusingly tipsy that no one would have tolerated him otherwise; and that very different person, Mr. Sleek, the hypocrite of *The Serious Family*; and Sudden, in *Breach of Promise* — and many more parts, some of which died with Burton. In all of them the comedian showed something far more remarkable than the intelligence of the clever actor who knows the ins and outs of stagecraft. He displayed that real genius which establishes such a union between a character and the man who plays it that it is hard to disassociate the one from the other. When Burton acted Toodles, for example, it seemed impossible that there could be any other Toodles on the stage, or that the comedian himself could be aught else in real life but the husband of the lady who bought a door-plate labelled “Thompson,” because it was just possible that one of her family might marry a Thompson who spelt his name “with a P.”

Burton exerted the same sort of realism in the rôle of Sleek, where he was so sanctimonious a fellow that the playgoer almost believed the actor must live in an atmosphere of Chadbands, or Uriah Heeps. One night he dispelled this illusion in a way that only accentuated the more the wonderful magnetism of his art. *The Serious Family* was to be

Poor
Toodles

Realistic
Hypocrisy

the after-piece, with Burton, who had not appeared in the regular play of the evening, as Sleek. The time came for the ringing up of the curtain on *The Serious Family*, but the orchestra went on playing, and the audience, which cared more for Burton than for incidental music, became impatient. Applause and stamping of feet only brought more instrumentation. Then the house began to get angry. At last, after what seemed an interminable wait, the curtain rose on Sleek and two other characters of the piece, who were occupying their customary stage positions at a table. A few hisses greeted Burton, who suddenly arose from the table and addressed the audience in his own natural voice, a very pleasant one, and made some apology for the delay. His excuse was willingly accepted. Then, dropping his honest manner as Burton, the comedian, he returned to the table, and became, in the twinkling of an eye, the smooth hypocrite. The transition was so startling that it seemed impossible to realise that Burton and Sleek were one and the same man.

Paul Pry was one of the best of Burton's characters. Mr. Keese has left for posterity as graphic an idea of this performance as anyone, save those who recall the original,

could possibly possess. How inimitable the comedian must have been as he fired question after question at Doubledot, the innkeeper, and then withdrew, only to return to look for one of his gloves, as he said, swelling like a peacock: "I want my property; I want my property, sir! When I came in here I had two gloves, and now—ah, that 's very odd—I 've got it in my hand all this time!" "The air of anxiety on returning, and the eye-glass brought into play; the look of injured innocence, the indignant assertion, and then the sudden collapse, cannot be reproduced in words."

Another scene in which the comedian rose—or rather sat—supreme, perhaps as no other Paul Pry has done before or since, was at the end of the second act. Here the two pistols went off in his hands as he was exclaiming heroically: "I never fought a duel—but if I was called out—I say, if I was called out—" The curtain would go down with Burton writhing on the floor, the picture of despair, while his voice, as he shrieked, "Murder! murder!" was almost drowned by the laughter of the audience.

Paul Pry, and *Toodles*, and plays of their type, are dead enough nowadays, as are also *The Heir at Law*, *The Poor Gentleman*, and a hundred other old-fashioned comedies.

Paul Pry

Old
Comedies

Perhaps they would not satisfy the present generation; possibly, on the other hand, they only await the coming of a second Burton, to bring them back to life. Why not? If the *School for Scandal*, *The Rivals*, and *She Stoops to Conquer* can still please the bustling play-lover of to-day, there may be hope for lesser works. There is one thing, however, that must be considered in any discussion as to the resurrection of buried plays. The American playwright has started in to keep managers supplied with a variety of comedy material, and to displace him will be no easy matter. Much that he writes may not be equal to Colman or Morton, Poole or Barnet, but it has the stamp of novelty, which is the magic talisman now so dear to players and public.

It must not be forgotten that an added attraction in the performances at Burton's Theatre was to be found in the intimacy that existed between actors and audience. The latter had an affection for Burton and his company that was quite personal, and eagerly welcomed any good-natured gossip as to their sayings and doings in private life. Once the town worried itself greatly because Brougham, no longer a member of the Chambers Street company, was not on good terms with Burton. When it was learned, therefore,

that the two were to meet at a benefit, to play in Colman's drama of *John Bull*, the interest became intense. How would the two favourites bear themselves towards one another? The question was answered, quite by accident, during the fourth act of the play, where Job Thornberry (Burton) thanked Dennis, the host of the "Red Cow" (John Brougham), for befriending his daughter, Mary Thornberry. The lines were as follows:

Rivals
Reconciled

"JOB.—Landlord!

"DENNIS.—Coming, your honour.

"JOB [*coming forward*].—Hush! don't bawl; Mary has fallen asleep. You have behaved like an Emperor to her, she says. Give me your hand, Landlord!

"DENNIS.—Behaved! Arrah, now, get away with your blarney. [*Refusing his hand.*]

"JOB.—Well, let it alone. I'm an old fool, perhaps, but as you comforted my poor girl in her trouble, I thought a squeeze from her father's hand—as much as to say, 'thank you, for my child'—might not have come amiss to you."

According to the stage directions, Dennis must refuse to shake hands with Thornberry. But Brougham paused as Burton held out his hand, and then, as if yielding

On the
Wallace

to an irresistible impulse, grasped it warmly in his own. The reconciliation was complete, and the house thundered its applause.*

Burton gave his farewell performance at the Chambers Street house on the 6th of September, 1856. He then opened "Burton's New Theatre," once known as Tripler Hall, with a production of *The Rivals*, and prepared for another series of triumphs. After a time John Brougham, who had been playing under the Wallack management, rejoined the company, acted in many farcical characters, and furnished some capital skits, among them his soon famous burlesque of *Columbus*. But the spell had dissolved. The new house was too large for the exhibition of Burton's delicate methods (for there was nothing acrobatic or stupidly noisy in his comedy, even in roaring farce); not a few of the old favourites had retired from his ranks; the move uptown seemed to have interfered with the run of luck. In short, the "New Theatre" did not prosper as the old theatre had done, and Burton, abandoning management, in 1858, took to "starring."

* It was Brougham who dramatised *Dombey and Son* for Burton, and received \$10 for each performance of the play. Some years later, when he adapted a French piece for Fechter, then in London, Brougham's royalty consisted of a box of cigars.

We hear of the comedian in Richmond, shortly before his fatal illness, in a way that shows us how thoroughly he resembled many other great players, by attaching importance to the minutest details of his art. Benjamin G. Rogers, who was supporting him at the time, told the story a quarter of a century later. The play was *Breach of Promise*, in which Burton was, of course, Sudden, while Rogers had an eccentric character that called for particular "business" in some of the scenes with Sudden. One point depended upon a wink. In his anxiety, Rogers was about to speak his lines, on reaching this situation, when Burton whispered: "Wait for the wink, my boy!" Rogers stopped, as directed, and the comedian gave the premeditated wink. Then such a shout went up from the audience that the younger actor realised, as he had never done before, how a great comic effect might be produced by so insignificant a means as the contraction of an eyelid.

Early in December, 1859, Burton began a Canadian trip, although he was then far from being a well man. From Hamilton, where he made his last appearance in a theatre (December 16th), he wrote to his daughters an amusing account of his experiences with a Canadian customs officer, who

On the
Wink

The Final
Curtain

betrayed no intelligence when he heard the name of William E. Burton. "Oh, my loves! Oh, my darling children—what is fame?" wrote Burton. "*He had never heard of Mr. Burton, the comedian!* Of course, after that, you agree with me that he ought to be killed, at once, 'without remorse or dread.' And he had such an aggravating smell of hot steak and brandy and water!"

Burton soon came home again to New York, only to be taken very ill, and to linger on painfully, suffering from enlargement of the heart, until death came to his relief on February 10, 1860. When he was buried in Greenwood Cemetery it seemed as if many of the characters which he had played so well were being interred with him in his coffin.

Burton may be classed as one of the best comedians of the nineteenth century. In addition to his marvellous inventive faculty, by means of which he could often raise a part above its own level, giving it a new birth, he possessed amazing versatility. While he did not attempt to play every line of comedy, yet it was evident that no phase of humour eluded him. Whether he kept his audience in a roar by the racy, innocent fun of an up-to-date burlesque, or charmed

them by a choice bit of Shakespearian high comedy, he was always "to the manner born." Imagination, feeling, mimetic power, a keen sense of the ludicrous, and a rare intelligence! These were the qualities of his art. When we think of the brain that must represent such a combination of gifts, we can readily understand why he was a student of the drama, a man of literary taste, an author, and the collector of one of the most interesting private libraries in the country.

No wonder that the veteran theatregoer sighs for a second Burton when he looks upon the stage of to-day and sees, here and there, some semi-clown, who should be more at home under a circus tent than in a green-room, posing as a real comedian. Uproarious might wax the farce, furious might be the fun, but William Evans Burton never o'erleaped the bounds of discretion or pranced about the stage like an inane elephant. He was only the funnier, in consequence of his moderation.

"A merrier man,
Within the limit of becoming mirth,
I never spent an hour's talk withal."

The Final
Curtain

“ Fair laughs the morn, and soft the zephyr
blows,
While proudly riding o'er the azure realm
In gallant trim the gilded vessel goes,
Youth on the prow, and Pleasure at the
helm ;
Regardless of the sweeping whirlwind's sway,
That, hushed in grim repose, expects his even-
ing prey.”

—*Thomas Gray.*



EDWARD A. SOTHERN

LORD DUNDREARY was never a moralist, but he has taught us, in the experience of Edward Askew Sothern, a very plain lesson. It is the lesson of the actor who knows that he possesses talent, if it can only be brought out properly, and who perseveres, amid all sorts of discouragement, until Fate gives him the long-expected opportunity. "If I could only make one hit," says the struggling player, "I should have no more trouble." Sometimes the "hit" never comes; he gives up in disgust, or finds himself, when he is old and white-haired, playing fifty-line parts at \$20 a week—and again—Presto! he tumbles headlong into a congenial character, and wakes up the next morning to find that the dramatic critics have made him famous.

If Sothern practically created Lord Dundreary, who was a mere shadow as Tom

**A Plain
Lesson**

Not Encouraged

Taylor made him, it may also be said that His Lordship created Sothern, by providing him with that lucky chance for which the actor had sighed until hope seemed to him nothing but a mockery.

Before Laura Keene produced *Our American Cousin*, Sothern's career on the stage resembled the efforts of a plucky man who constantly climbs a steep mountain, only to roll down again before he can reach the summit. He certainly received no encouragement at home. He was born in Liverpool on the 1st of April, 1826, and his father, a man of wealth and standing in the business world, designed him, from the first, for a professional life, either as a barrister or a clergyman. But the boy loved the glare of the footlights from the moment that he could steal, unobserved, into a theatre. He organised amateur performances among his schoolmates; next he joined a "Sheridan Amateur Dramatic Society," where he acted, besides other tragedies, in *Othello*, and he finally began to yearn for a *début* on the real stage. The senior Sothern remonstrated, but he might as well have tried to turn away the water from the docks of his beloved Liverpool. Edward Askew sternly refused to don a surplice, or a lawyer's gown, or

Edward A. Sothorn as "Lord Dundreary."

From an old print.



even to settle down to work in his father's office.

It was not surprising, therefore, to hear that during a visit paid to friends in the island of Jersey, the young enthusiast, now twenty-three years old, had appeared at the Theatre Royal in St. Helier as the mawkish Claude Melnotte. The experiment must have been more satisfying to the actor himself than to the *cognoscenti* of Jersey, for Edgar Pemberton (who has placed in his debt, by his chatty memoir, all admirers and future biographers of Sothorn) tells us that the manager of the theatre was not deeply impressed by this expedition into the unnatural domain of Bulwer. But the damp smell of the professional playhouse was as incense to the nostrils of the new Melnotte. He sniffed fame from afar, determined that nothing should ever divert him from his purpose, and continued to play for some time in St. Helier under the name of "Douglas Stuart."

Although appearing in Jersey was not calculated to bring Sothorn to the attention of any London manager, it gave him just the discipline he needed, and kept him from displaying his "greenness" in places where he might have been ridiculed. When he actually essayed Hamlet, as he did on one

"Douglas
Stuart"

Farewell
to Luxury

occasion, if not oftener (think of Dundreary as the Dane!), it mattered little if he made a mess of it. Who shall say that he was altogether bad in the part? There was frequently a serious vein in the earlier art of Sothorn, and he was able to prove, years afterwards, when he put pathetic touches into his David Garrick, that he could soar above the stutter, the lisp, and captivating "skip" of his perennial hero.

At Weymouth, after his rough-and-tumble encounters with the drama at the Theatre Royal, the ex-Hamlet next appeared. Here it was that he happened to repeat his Melnotte when Charles Kean, the accomplished son of the great Edmund, was in the audience. Kean thought the young man's idea of the caddish Frenchman was too "preachy," but he styled his Sir Charles Coldstream, in *Used Up*, as "very good indeed." It is easy to believe that Sothorn must have been far more at home in the shoes of Charles James Mathews, as Sir Charles, than he was in *The Lady of Lyons*.

From playing odd engagements at small salaries Sothorn drifted to the Theatre Royal, Birmingham, where he became a favourite performer—at thirty shillings a week! It was all hard work then, with so many privations that he rejoiced at having taken the name

of "Douglas Stuart." Mr. "Stuart" could "pinch," and try to live on a few shillings, with more ease of mind that could Mr. Sothorn, the son of the rich shipowner. He was determined, indeed, that the preliminary poverty through which he must pass should not be flaunted in the faces of those who had known him under more luxurious auspices. For there was good Anglo-Saxon pluck about this struggling Thespian. He foresaw hardship, as the keen-eyed mariner spies bad weather, but the blacker things looked, the more he resolved to reach his haven.

Too impatient to wait for an opening which he might have obtained, later on, in Charles Kean's company, Sothorn now sailed off to the United States. His American *début* was made at the National Theatre, Boston, under circumstances provoking enough to try the patience of aspirants even braver than himself, if such were to be found. Dr. Pangloss was the *rôle* which he chose for the first evening (in addition to a less important part in a farce), but so poorly did he impress the critics that they treated him to one of those "roasts" that make an actor wish, as he reads the papers, that he had never been born. These reviews killed Sothorn's chances at the National Theatre,

Farewell
to Luxury

hoping
against
hope

for the manager dismissed him for "incapacity."

However, up rose the discomfited comedian, with a hopeful smile on his handsome face, and secured himself a place in the company of the Howard Athenæum, to do the "juveniles." He was an ideal-looking fellow for such work, with his graceful figure, blue eyes, and wavy, brown hair, and he soon found himself well liked on both sides of the curtain. Though he could not forget his disaster at the other theatre, it may have been some comfort to reflect that it was due less to his own fault than to the fatal inaccuracy of advance notices. He had been heralded, for some mysterious reason, as a great actor who was to make a sensation, and as he was too young, with his art too undeveloped, to produce the required effect, the Bostonians were disappointed. It is a pity that several enterprising press-agents of to-day won't take warning by this bit of stage history. The public cannot always be deceived, and it has a bad habit of expecting just as much excellence as managers promise. Frequently, too, as was the case with Sothorn, actors are quite unconscious of the extravagant claims which are being put forward in their behalf, and would be the first to put a stop to wild

statements, if they knew of them. But why grumble? This is the age of horn-blowing, when even a country parson has, in more than one instance, maintained a "department of publicity."

From Boston Sothern went to New York, to play at the Museum of the bustling Barnum. Then followed appearances in Washington and other cities, and, at last, an engagement in the Wallack company. During his "provincial" touring, as a New York critic might be uncharitable enough to call it, he had played all manner of parts, and gained all kinds of invaluable experience. And now, once comfortably settled under the Wallack banner, he had the right to hope that his advancement would be rapid.

But alas! Until Fortune finally condescended to smile on Sothern she seemed determined to try his spirit by every art within her power. He soon found that he was cast for small parts with the regularity of clockwork; disgusted at this want of recognition, he began to think of abandoning the stage for ever. But the dawn was about to break. In the darkest hour of his disappointment he was asked to act Armand Duval to the Marguerite Gautier (Anglicised as Camille) of Miss Matilda Heron. There

Cruel
Fortune

Monsieur
Duval

were only three days for preparation, but as Sothern had cultivated a lucky habit of studying a variety of "leading juveniles," with the hope that he might some day have a chance to play them in New York, he was able to appear letter perfect at the dress rehearsal. What was better, he made an attractive Armand on the night of performance, so that the audience warmed his heart by a generous tonic of applause. It may be questioned whether any triumph of the future proved more welcome than this tribute to M. Duval. It exhilarated, as a glass of champagne might revivify a thirsty wanderer in the deserts of Sahara.

After a stay of nearly four years with the Wallack company Sothern transferred his allegiance to Laura Keene, who was then a reigning sovereign of the New York stage. Even yet Fortune was a very fickle jade, for when he tried a managerial venture during an off season, he scored a failure. Yet he contrived to keep a merry front to the world at large, and never missed the humour of any curious situation into which he might be thrown. Many were the amusing episodes of these hard-working days which he related, in after years, to Mr. Pemberton. Nothing, in its way, is better than the story of the young woman who always insisted

on singing whenever she figured in a play. She had a beautiful voice, which she wanted to exploit, be the surroundings ever so inappropriate. Once, when engaged to appear in a melodrama, she stipulated that she should give the inevitable song, to her own piano accompaniment. She accomplished her fell purpose by coming on the stage in a scene where she represented an innocent maiden pursued by brigands, and crying out exultingly: "Ah, I see that the brigands have left their piano in the woods, which reminds me of the song my brother taught me long ago." Then down she sat at the piano, out in the depths of the verdant forest, and warbled *Home, Sweet Home*. This was on a par with some of the dramatic solecisms committed by the Crummies family, and quite as bad as the story of the opera-singer who always introduced a well-known hymn when she sang Marguerite, in *Faust*.

At Laura Keene's theatre Sothorn went on gleaning stage experience, without doing anything to eclipse his Armand. His repertoire now included Charles Surface, Bob Acres, Dr. Pangloss, Young Marlow, and Benedick, not to mention many more parts which he had played from the time he belonged to the "Sheridan Amateur Dramatic Society."

The
Inevitable
Song

Lord Dun-
dreary

The ordinary theatregoers supposed that he would continue to be an excellent stock actor, of local reputation, and nothing more. It was agreed that Mr. Sothern (for he had dropped the "Douglas Stuart" several years before) was "a very agreeable actor." There were plenty of such actors in the country.

One day, in the spring of 1858, Sothern was much disgusted when Miss Keene, or her stage-manager, handed him his part for a new play. The piece was *Our American Cousin*, by Tom Taylor, and the character assigned the actor, that of Lord Dundreary, contained but forty-seven lines. Joseph Jefferson, who was cast for Asa Trenchard, writes in his *Autobiography*:

"The reading [of *Our American Cousin*] took place in the greenroom, at which the ladies and gentlemen of the company were assembled, and many furtive glances were cast at Mr. Couldock and me as the strength of Abel Murcott and Asa Trenchard was revealed. Poor Sothern sat in the corner, looking quite disconsolate, fearing that there was nothing in the play that would suit him; and as the dismal lines of Dundreary were read he glanced over at me, with a forlorn expression, as much as to say, 'I am cast for the dreadful part,' little dreaming that the character of the imbecile lord would turn out to

be the stepping-stone of his fortune. The success of the play proved the turning-point in the career of three persons—Laura Keene, Sothern, and myself. . . . Sothern was much dejected at being compelled to play the part. He said he could do nothing with it, and certainly for the first two weeks it was a dull effort, and produced but little effect. So, in despair, he began to introduce extravagant business into his character, skipping about the stage, stammering and sneezing, and, in short, doing all he could to attract, and distract, the attention of the audience. . . . Before the first month was over he stood side by side with any other character in the play; and at the end of the run he was, in my opinion, considerably in advance of us all.”

Lord Dundreary

Sothern had, in fact, become the “ star ” of the performance. He gradually invested Dundreary with a hundred little touches, and many delightfully idiotic sayings, of which Taylor never dreamed. He had made his “ hit,” at last.

The famous “ skip ” appears to have been the result of mere accident. During one of the rehearsals, as Sothern was prancing about the stage, trying to keep himself warm by the motion, Laura Keene cried out, laughingly: “ Are you going to introduce that hop in Dundreary, Mr. Sothern ? ”

Clever
"fooling"

The actor replied gravely that he intended to do so, although, in truth, he had not the slightest thought of using it up to that moment.

As one looks back on this exquisitely funny creation, it seems almost impossible to describe it adequately to those who never saw it. There is so much in the sound of an actor's voice, in a glance, or in the simplest gesture, that no written record can mirror. A thousand criticisms cannot do full justice to the fire of a Garrick, the regal calm of a Kemble, the charm of an Oldfield, or the intensity of a Ristori. Thus, a portion of Dundreary's attraction depended on the inimitable stutter, the lisp, the play of the vacuous features, and the elastic hop, none of which can be reproduced. They all seemed a part of the man. Those who had not seen Sothern off the stage could hardly imagine that he had ever been anything but a Dundreary from his very birth. There was no suggestion of acting, or disguise, or "make-up."

Yet there was a cleverness in the part, aside from the mere strength of the actor's personality. Dundreary was not such a fool as he looked; wit lurked in his lines; his very inanity only proved that his creator, in the person of Sothern, had a genius for

captivating prattle. Take, for instance, the reading of the famous letter from Brother Sam. As Dundreary opened the missive, with a perfectly blank expression on his face, he would say :

“ Brother
Sam ”

“ I don't know any fella in America except Sam : of course I know Sam, because Sam 's my brother. Every fella knows his own brother. Sam and I used to be boys when we were lads, both of us. We were always together. People used to say, ‘ Birds of a feather ’—what is it birds of a feather do?—oh, ‘ Birds of a feather gather no moss ! ’ That 's ridiculous, that is. The idea of a lot of birds picking up moss ! Oh, no ; ‘ It 's the early bird that knows its own father. ’ That 's worse than the other. No bird can know its own father. If he told the truth, he 'd say he was even in a fog about his own mother. I 've got it—‘ It 's the wise child that gets the worms ! ’ Oh, that 's worse than any of them. No parent would allow his child to get a lot of worms like that. Besides, the whole proverb 's nonsense from beginning to end. ‘ Birds of a feather flock together ’ ; yes, that 's it. As if a whole flock of birds would have only one feather. They 'd all catch cold ! Besides, there 's only one of those birds could have that feather, and that fella would fly all on one side ! That 's one of those things no fella can find out. Besides, fancy any bird being such a — fool

“Brother
Sam”

as to go into a corner and flock all by himself ! Ah, that 's one of those things no fella can find out. [*Looks at letter.*] Whoever it 's from, he 's written it upside down. Oh, no, I 've got it upside down ! I knew some fella was upside down. Yes, this *is* from Sam ; I always know Sam's handwriting when I see his name on the other side. 'America.' Well, I 'm glad he 's sent me his address. 'My dear brother.' Sam always calls me brother, because neither of us have got any sisters.

“‘My dear brother,—I am afraid that my last letter miscarried, as I was in such a hurry for the post that I forgot to put any direction on the envelope.’

“Then I suppose that 's the reason I never got it. But who could have got it ? The only fella that could have got that letter is some fella without a name. And how on earth could he get it ? The postman could n't go about asking every fella he met if he 'd got no name.

“Sam 's an ass ! ‘I find out now’ (I wonder what he 's found out now ?) ‘that I was changed at my birth.’ Now what nonsense that is ! Why did n't he find it out before ? ‘My old nurse turns out to be my mother.’ What rubbish ! Then, if that 's true, all I can say is, Sam 's not my brother, and if he 's not my brother, who the devil am I ? Let 's see now. Stop a minute [*pointing to forefinger of left hand*]. That 's Sam's mother, and that 's [*the thumb*] Sam's

nurse. Sam's nurse is only half the size of his mother. Well, that 's my mother! [*Points to second finger on left hand. He finds he can't get that finger to stand up like the rest—the thumb and forefinger—as he closes the third and little finger.*] I can't get my mother to stand up. Well, that 's my mother! [*Holds up forefinger of right hand; in the meantime he has opened all the fingers of the left hand.*] Hullo! Here 's a lot of other fellows' mothers! Well, as near as I can make out, Sam has left me no mother at all! Then the point is, who 's my father? Oh, that 's a thing no fella can find out.

“Oh, here 's a P.S. ‘By the bye, what do you think of the following riddle? If fourteen dogs with three legs each catch forty-eight rabbits with seventy-six legs in twenty-five minutes, how many legs must twenty-four rabbits have to get away from ninety-three dogs with two legs each, in half an hour?’”

Possibly those who never had the honour of Dundreary's acquaintance may call this “letter scene” nothing but “trash,” yet it belongs to that order of “trash” which it takes brains to evolve. It may be easy for an actor to make an audience laugh by the baldest device—a somersault, a tumble on the stage, or a misstep—but if his lines are to amuse there must be real fun in them. What *reads* better, however, than the let-

This Lord-
ship's
Story

ter, and is ludicrous of itself, without the aid of an interpreter, is the story which Dundreary tells Georgina:

“When Sam was a lad he was merely a baby—born, and everything like that, of course. He had a bald head, too, and was greatly annoyed about it—I don’t mean annoyed about being bald, but about being born at all. What I mean is,—he put it this way,—there he was, and of course it was too late to alter the position. There was another fellow,—an old chum of Sam’s,—and he was born, too—and he had a bald head, too. There was a good deal of jealousy about that. This fellow was a baby about Sam’s age. There was a good deal of bother about that. His mother asked my opinion about it, but I told her I did n’t want to get mixed up in family matters. Well, that fellow died, and made himself very comfortable in that sort of way,—and his cousin by another fellow’s god-mother married a girl that I was going to marry,—only I did n’t get up, or something like that,—my man did n’t call me,—or something of that sort,—so she married this other fellow,—a very nice fellow he was, and I wanted to do him a good turn, and there it was. They were very happy, and all that,—splendid mother-in-law, and a large family,—about fourteen children,—made things very pleasant like that,—nearly all of them twins,—and they made me god-father to about a dozen of them. The wife was a very

nice woman, with her nose a little on one side—a lovely girl, though. *His* nose was a little on one side, too, so it made everything pleasant like that. All the children's noses were on one side, too. They were what you might call south-south-west noses. Fourteen noses looked very pleasant like that. Whenever I met them in the Park it always struck me that if my fool of a man had only called me that morning, and I had married their mother,—I mean if I'd been their father,—it was quite on the cards that their noses might have been a little— But that's nothing to do with the anecdote. Well, one day he went to stroll with his mother-in-law,—a woman he hated like poison,—and they got shipwrecked,—had a very jolly time of it,—lived on a raft for about a fortnight,—lived on anything they could pick up,—oysters, sardines,—I don't exactly know what,—until at last they had to eat each other. They used to toss up who should eat first,—and he was a very lucky fellow : and when he was left alone with his mother-in-law he tied her to the raft,—legs dangling in the water, and everything pleasant like that. Then he stuck a pen-knife in his mother-in-law, and cut her up in slices, and ate her. He told me that he enjoyed the old woman very much. He was a splendid fellow,—full of humour,—and full of mother-in-law, too."

Then there was Dundreary's proposal to

The
Proposal

Georgina, which was always punctuated by peals of merriment from the audience.

“ I ’ve been a bachelor ever since I ’ve been so high, and I ’ve got rather tired of that sort of thing, and it struck me if you ’ll be kind enough to marry me, I shall be very much obliged to you. Of course, if you don’t see the matter in the same light, and fancy you ’d rather not,—why, I don’t care a rap about it. . . . You ’ll find me a very nice fellow,—at least I think so,—that is, what I mean is, that most fellows think me a nice fellow,—two fellows out of three would think me a nice fellow, and the other fellow,—the third fellow,—well, that fellow would be an ass. I ’m very good tempered, too ; that ’s a great point, is n’t it ? You look as if you ’d got a good temper ; but then, of course, we know that many a girl looks as if she ’d got a good temper before she ’s married,—but after she ’s married sometimes a fellow finds out her temper ’s not exactly what he fancied. I ’m making a devil of a mess of it ! I really think we should be very happy. I ’m a very domesticated fellow,—fond of tea, smoking in bed,—and all that sort of thing. I merely name that because it gives you an insight into a fellow’s character. You ’ll find me a very easy fellow to get along with, and after we ’ve been married two or three weeks, if you don’t like me you can go back again to your mother.”

Although Sothorn is said to have based the absurdities of Dundreary on peculiarities which he had observed in many real persons, the character as a whole could not be called natural—if one stopped to analyse it. No such combination of idiocy and cleverness could be found in the world outside the theatre. But here was the proof of Sothorn's genius. Nobody cared to analyse Dundreary. As the actor played him, he seemed as natural as one of the fops created by Charles James Mathews.

From the time that the New Yorkers awoke to the comic powers of their former Armand Duval, Sothorn was, for a large section of the public, Lord Dundreary, and Dundreary alone. He made tremendous efforts at times to get relief from the monotony of playing this character, and showed that he was by no means a narrow actor, but it was with Dundreary that his fame became most intimately and affectionately associated. After he had played the part nearly eight hundred times in America Sothorn sailed for England, in some trepidation of mind, to face his own countrymen. In November, 1861, he appeared at the Haymarket Theatre, London, with the pleasing knowledge that many of his theatrical associates had predicted his failure in

**Proof of
Genius**

Home
Again

Dundreary. At one of the rehearsals an actress had very plainly intimated to him, while he was arranging the "letter scene" so that she should not "come on" until the applause had subsided, that the aforesaid applause might not be in evidence. It was true that Dundreary might have pleased the wild and woolly Americans, but was that fact to be made a criterion for the English public?

Sothorn had somewhat the same experience at the Haymarket that he had gone through at Laura Keene's theatre. Dundreary did not attract at first, so arrangements were quickly made for the withdrawal of *Our American Cousin*, and the substitution of an old comedy. But the tide began to turn; in a few weeks Dundreary was the fashion among all classes of theatregoers, and he remained at the Haymarket during a long season of nearly five hundred nights. Londoners are not emotional as a rule, but they grew as enthusiastic over Sothorn as the most volatile American had done. The town was "Dundrearyised."

When Sothorn took Dundreary to Paris several years later, his acting was neither understood nor admired by the Frenchmen. That was not strange: the nobleman was entirely too English to find appreciation

from Parisians, nor could his humour have anything in common with the pyrotechnical wit of the Gallic order. So the experiment would have proved rather funereal, had it not been for a little *impromptu* given one night behind the scenes by the "star" and one of his supporters — none other than the late John T. Raymond, who endeared himself to so many Americans by the dry drolleries of Colonel Mulberry Sellers.

Both actors, as everybody knows, were great wags, and with Sothorn, at least, a practical joke became a work of art to which he was always ready to devote his inventive brain. On this occasion Raymond was talking in the greenroom of the theatre to a famous "bill-poster," and when the latter repeated some harmless remark which Dundreary had made about Raymond, a tragic scene ensued. Raymond, pretending to take the criticism as a gross insult, dashed into Sothorn's dressing-room, as he demanded, in loud tones that could be heard far and near, "Instant satisfaction or your life!" At the same time he whispered to Sothorn to keep up the deception. Nothing could have been more to Dundreary's liking. In another minute the frightened players in the greenroom were horrified to see Raymond come bouncing back, forced thereto

Practical
Jokes

by a realistic kick from the irate Sothern. Raymond, roaring like a bull, ran off to get a knife, as his associates crowded around and tried in vain to hold him. Nothing, he cried, but "Sothern's life-blood" would wipe out the insult.

It was necessary for the two combatants to drop their warfare long enough to go on the stage, to continue *Our American Cousin*. At the end of the act they disappeared into a dressing-room, from which soon issued the most horrible groans, moans, and cries of rage, with, now and again, the sound of a knife sticking into what seemed to be a human body. The members of the company were in a frenzy; *gendarmes* were sent for, and an effort made to open the door of the dressing-room, but without avail. A low groan was the only response. Either Sothern or Raymond—nay, perhaps both—must be dying! The excitement was intense.

Finally the *gendarmes* burst open the door. "A gruesome sight"—in the language of the police reporter—"met their eyes." Sothern and Raymond were prostrate on the floor, with a large bowie-knife lying near them; their faces were red with "stage blood," and the apartment bore evidences of a terrific struggle. "What awful fighters

these Americans are!" cried one of the spectators, while another ordered one of the *gendarmes* to procure a stretcher. In the midst of the confusion poor Sothorn raised his head. It was plain that he had but a few minutes to live. "A glass of champagne—quick!" he whispered. Then Raymond tried to rise, as he feebly muttered: "Some wine, too!" The champagne was brought by one of the horror-stricken sympathisers. Both victims drank of it with remarkable avidity, and at last they jumped to their feet, laughed, and invited the company to join them in a bumper. One of the troupe—who played Abel Murcott that night—was Henry Irving.

The pranks and practical jokes perpetrated by Sothorn seemed to be part of his life; he would plan them, very often, with the precision of a scientist and the madcap spirit of a boy. He bubbled over with fun; it was necessary that his active mind and flow of humour should have a safety-valve. It was not, to be sure, a high form of relaxation, this constant playing at mischief, but there was wit, and ingenuity, and naught of malice, though occasional discomfort to others, in what he did. Whether he was mystifying the postal authorities by some deep scheme of a long-delayed letter, or

"Awful
Fighters"

**Funereal
Humour**

frightening a nervous correspondent by sending him an envelope marked "Southwell Smallpox Hospital," or "Curious Specimen of Contagious Bedding," he seldom failed, or had the tables turned upon himself. In short, he was a past grandmaster of the gentle art of "selling" his neighbour.

Who can forget, who has ever heard it, the story of Sothern's visit to an undertaker? He walked into the sanctum of one of those cheerless gentlemen, and gravely gave an order for "everything necessary for a funeral." Money was to be no object; the preparations were to be on a scale worthy of a deceased royal prince. The undertaker was as delighted, no doubt, as business decorum permitted him to be, for he went ahead right willingly with his ghostly arrangements. Sothern dropped in several times, just to find out how things were progressing, and on his last visit he asked: "When can I have the body?" "The body?" cried the undertaker. "Of course you provide the body?" said Sothern. The undertaker opened his mouth in astonishment. The actor solemnly produced a shop-card, which he flourished in the latter's face. "Why, do you not say here—'All things necessary for funerals promptly

supplied' ? Is not a body the very first necessity ? ”

To ask at a post-office for “ some nice fresh stamps, suitable for an invalid,” and to refuse them, on inspection, because they were “ not quite fresh enough,” was a trick that gave him eminent satisfaction, and made the bewildered clerks wonder whether they were suffering from nightmare, or had encountered a dangerous lunatic.

One of the simplest, yet most successful of his jokes, was that of the ironmonger-shop. He entered the place and asked for the second edition of Macaulay's *History of England*. The boy in the shop advised him to go to a bookseller's stall. “ Oh, it does n't matter whether it is bound in calf, or not,” replied Sothern. Whereupon the boy suggested that Macaulay was not to be found at an ironmonger's. The actor only said: “ It does n't matter how you wrap it up; a piece of brown paper will do—the sort of thing you would select for your own mother.” The boy, now quite angry, again cried: “ This is an ironmonger's shop!” “ I see the binding differs,” answered Sothern, “ but so long as the proper fly-leaf is in, I'm not particular. I'm in no hurry, and I'll wait while you reach it down.”

The boy began to think that he had to

At the
Iron-
monger's

At the
Iron-
monger's

deal with a crazy man, so he hurried off to fetch the proprietor of the shop. The ironmonger soon walked in, quite ready, if need be, to eject forcibly the lunatic who was demanding a history of England. "What is it you require, sir?" he asked. "I want a small, ordinary file, about six inches in length," said the actor, appearing as sensible and matter-of-fact as though he had never thought of demanding a book from a dealer in hardware. The ironmonger gave Sothern the file, scowling all the while upon the boy, whom he evidently regarded as the real lunatic in the case.

New York was the scene of one of the most gigantic of all Sothern's pranks. An English friend, who had just arrived in America, was invited to dine with the actor, to meet ten "eminent" New Yorkers. The affair was quite formal at first, and the Englishman was introduced, with due ceremony, to men who, as he supposed, represented what was best in American society. Before the meal had progressed very far, however, he was horrified to see a guest pull out a revolver and place it on the table. The others followed his example; dirks, a battle-axe, and kindred deadly weapons soon graced the groaning board. The Englishman asked Sothern what it all meant. The

host implored him to keep quiet, "if he wanted to escape with his life." The gentlemen, he said, had been quarrelling over the claims of a great literary genius, a Mr. Wemyss Jobson, and he only trusted that no harm would come of it. But they had been drinking — and Americans had a fashion of settling their disputes at a dinner party.

The Englishman scented murder, and wanted to warn the police. That, said Sothorn, would be impossible. If the gentlemen even suspected his guest of a desire to leave the room they would shoot him like a dog. "Such was the country," added Sothorn. In a short time high words arose among the gentlemen as to the merits of Mr. Wemyss Jobson, and so fierce grew the contest that they jumped from the table, engaged in hand-to-hand tussles, and finally started in to fire their six-shooters.

Sothorn gave the Englishman a deadly knife, with the injunction to "keep cool and don't get shot," as he calmly surveyed the scene. His unfortunate friend looked upon the fight as some real butchery, typical of the refined social customs of the Americans. He would have felt far more comfortable had he known, as he did later, that the distinguished gentlemen who quarrelled over the mythical Wemyss Jobson were some

American
"Society"

Ellen
Terry

minstrels whom Sothern had hired to depict, for the Englishman, the delights of life in the United States. Many another joke, though none so elaborate as this, had its birth in New York.

But to return to Sothern's London engagements. He had no intention of depending for perennial success on *Our American Cousin*. He knew how fickle was the public, and — what concerned him just as much — he cherished a passion to win distinction in a serious part. The chance came to him, quite accidentally, after he had varied his success as Dundreary by appearing, at the Haymarket, in *Aunt's Advice* (a piece which he had adapted from the French), and in *The Little Treasure*, a play wherein he had the assistance, as Gertrude, of a very sweet girlish creature named Ellen Terry. It is curious to recall, by the way, that Irving and Miss Terry, who were afterwards to form so charming a dramatic association, should have played in different companies with Sothern at a time when neither of the two had achieved distinction.

T. W. Robertson had written a drama entitled *David Garrick* (founded on the French original of *Sullivan*), in which, as need hardly be added, "Roscius" figured as the hero of an imaginary love affair. The plot is familiar

enough now; we all picture Ida Ingot, the romantic daughter of the city merchant, who falls desperately in love with Garrick, and is rudely awakened from the spell cast over her by his acting, when he pretends intoxication. But *David Garrick* had been shelved in an office for eight years, after being sold to a dramatic publisher for £10, and it only saw the light after Sothorn, hearing of it through a conversation with Robertson, determined to play Garrick himself.

“David
Garrick”

As the writer of these studies looks back at this play he almost regrets that Sothorn could not have gone down to posterity as an emotional *jeune premier* rather than as an eccentric comedian. There was a subdued air of romance about his Garrick that dispelled, for the nonce, all ideas of the convulsing Dundreary, and showed the presence of real feeling in the actor. Uproariously funny as he was in the drunken scene (where he remained always the gentleman who is merely playing a part within a part), yet some theatregoers liked him best in the pathetic passages. The writer was but a boy, but an imaginative boy, and he always saw, or fancied that he saw, a certain extra pathos which Robertson had never provided. It seemed as if Sothorn were always saying, in dumb show:

“David
Garrick”

“ See! I can act the intelligent lover. Look at me! I am not a stage fool. Forget my Lord Dundreary! ”

There were those in England and America who failed to be impressed by Garrick. Sothern had these carpers in mind when he once said, in a speech before the curtain :

“ The local critics have declared unanimously that, unfortunately for my career as an actor, my voice is wholly unsuited to love-making. With some compunction, and with my hand appropriately placed on my heart, I should like to inform those gentlemen that, following in private life that most agreeable of pursuits, I find that I get on as well as most people.”

A trifle personal, perhaps, but no less true.

In June, 1861, *Lord Dundreary Married and Done For*, by Henry J. Byron, was produced at the Haymarket, with Sothern as the new Benedick. Then came *The Woman in Mauve*, by Watts Phillips (Sothern as Frank Jocelyn), and *Brother Sam*, by John Oxenford. In the last-named piece Sothern played Dundreary's famous brother—he who sent the letter from America—and astonished the town by his versatility. Succeeding characters included Claude Melnotte, in which he never could shine; Frank Annerly, a mixture of romance and cynicism,

in *The Favourite of Fortune*; Harry Vivian, in Tom Taylor's *Lesson for Life*, and Robert Devlin, in *A Wild Goose*.

When Sothorn figured at the Haymarket (March 14, 1868) as the Marquis Victor de Tourville, in an adaptation of Octave Feuillet's *Romance of a Poor Young Man*, he became the hero of a vast deal of harmless clap-trap, and won the heart of every sentimental young person who saw the drama. The Marquis was an impecunious nobleman who found himself obliged to work, like every-day humanity, and so deigned to accept the position of steward in a family named Dumont. Of course he at once fell in love, as an aristocratic steward should, with that haughty of haughties, the fair, or the dark (which was it?), Mlle. Dumont. That young lady had an unpleasant, *bourgeoise* way of commanding him to call her carriage, and the Marquis, who never would forget, proud man, that he was a marquis (though he drew a salary for being something else), would immediately order a servant to call the desired vehicle. As the plot curdled and thickened, the Marquis and Mlle. Dumont got locked up together in a ruined tower, over which played a refulgent theatrical moon, and Mademoiselle accused him of being a base, designing adventurer.

Marquis
and Mad

Cupid in
Sealskin

But the pride of the French *noblesse* asserted itself. The Marquis, exquisitely attired, threw himself from the tower into the ocean below (or were they mere rocks?), and the audience went wild with enthusiasm. Then the Marquis, having recovered his breath, and allowed the orchestra to play popular airs during an *entre-acte*, further distinguished himself by burning a will which, had it been kept, would have proved him to be the rightful owner of the Dumont estates.

To perform this sacrifice Sothern put on a gorgeous sealskin coat, and the London tailors declared that his costumes were faultless. The play and the part were alike unworthy of the genius of Sothern, but players are perverse persons, and there is good reason to believe that he was far from being displeased at his triumph. As for the audiences, they were thrilled with delight when he finally won the white hand of the haughty Mlle. Dumont.

Sothern now tried other plays—he was always trying other plays—and among them a two-act comedy styled *Barwise's Book*, in which he personated a comic villain. He made an admirable adventurer of the gay, pleasantly unprincipled type, but the creation soon sank into the oblivion which overtook so many of his parts. It was the same

old story. Everyone waited for a second Dundreary. When he produced, during a new American engagement, the celebrated *Crushed Tragedian*, a comedy adapted from *The Prompter's Box* by Henry J. Byron, in which the author had himself appeared in London, Sothorn thought he had at last stumbled on the right successor. He portrayed a very indifferent tragedian, of great egotism and no genius, who enlists the sympathies of the audience by his sincere self-appreciation, and he did it with many an artistic touch. There was a human quality about Fitzaltamont which Dundreary never possessed: for that very reason not a few intelligent spectators preferred the new character. It was, of course, a caricature, yet it belonged to the exaggerations that one might almost see in real life.

“From the very crown of his head to the sole of his foot,” as one critic has said, “there stood the very ideal of what a crushed tragedian should be. He was husky of voice, as became an actor who in one night was wont to play Richard III. and the Stranger, and William in *Black-Eyed Susan* to wind up with; he was melancholy of countenance, as became the poor devil condemned to study nineteen parts a week; the sepulchral tones, the glaring eyeballs, the long hair, the wonderful ‘stage walk,’ and the

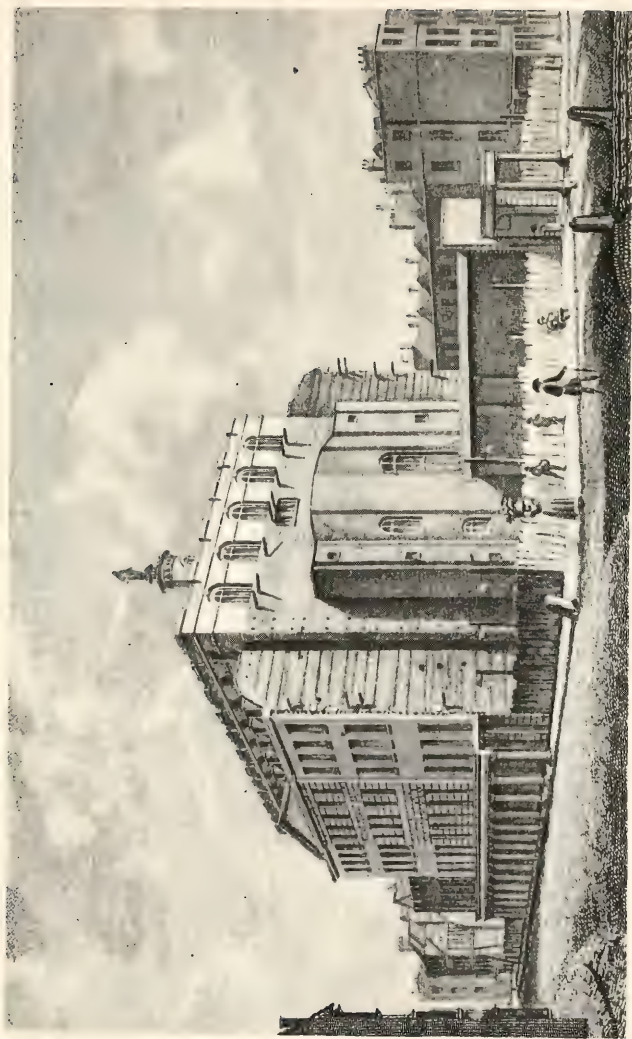
“The
Crushed
Trag=
edian”

"The
Crushed
Trag-
edean"

melodramatic attitudes—all made this character stand prominently forward, to tickle the fancy of the audience, and to elicit repeated shouts of laughter."

"The *Crushed Tragedian* is literally a tremendous hit," Sothern wrote home. "Not even standing room; and next Saturday will be our fiftieth night. . . . It has neatly walked over Dundreary's head, and will go a good year in London. I have greatly altered the piece, and rewritten my part to a very great extent. I have gently satirised the old school of acting, without burlesquing it. In short, without egotism, I may truly tell you that I have once more 'struck oil,' as they say in America."

So much attention did Sothern create as Fitzaltamont that he became the hero of a lawsuit brought against him by Count Johannes, who insisted that his own personality and manner of acting were caricatured in the *Crushed Tragedian*. This contest, which had no result save to bring the names of the Count and Sothern into the newspapers every day, was a theatrical sensation. Sothern took the affair in a light and humorous fashion—he was shrewd enough to see its advertising value—submitted to innumerable interviews, and quizzed the reporters to his heart's content. When asked if he



NEW DRURY LANE THEATRE.

(OPENED IN 1794 AND DESTROYED BY FIRE IN 1809.) FROM A DRAWING BY J. CAPON.

would fight, if challenged by his adversary, he said he certainly intended to, and that he should insist on cannons for the weapons.

“ Yes, on reflection, I am sure I shall insist upon those new cannon that discharge one hundred and seventy shots a minute.”

But the stamp of a London success, which Sothorn so ardently hoped for, was not to be the fate of the *Crushed Tragedian*. It was almost a case of the *crushed comedian*, for the play was hissed at the Haymarket Theatre. Thus it came to pass that Dunderreary's successor never appeared. London would have none of Fitzaltamont, nor could his success in America elevate him in this country to the position occupied by the semi-idiotic lord. Yet the actor was always groping around for the new part — waiting, reading manuscripts, and hoping to the last. Once he played Othello in New York, at a benefit performance, with Mrs. John Drew as Emilia, William J. Florence as Iago, and the nimble Lotta as a highly cheerful Desdemona. Sothorn gave the Moor very seriously; if there was anything of burlesque in the acting, 't was unintentional. In his heart he had always a very tender feeling for the muse of Tragedy.

As the months wore on, Sothorn's health, on which he had once prided himself so

The Count
Johannes

Vanished
Youth

much, began to break down. He found that he could no longer lead the active, nervous life of the past; he could no longer play all the parts of his stronger days — the actor, practical joker, man of the world, hunter, fisherman, the boon companion beloved for his many qualities of head and heart, the generous gentleman, and the affectionate father. He seemed to age suddenly, prematurely, as if Father Time was determined to leave a mark on him before it was fair to make it. The youthful, almost jaunty figure, became less erect; the hair whitened; the blue eyes lost their lustre. "I know that I have as many lives as a cat," said Sothern, in sadly jocose fashion, "but possibly this may be my ninth." It was his ninth life, too, for he died at his residence in Cavendish Square, London, on the 21st of January, 1881. "Poor Sothern is dead!" said many an American as he read the newspaper the next morning, and he had a feeling of personal loss, as though an intimate friend had been taken away.

With Sothern departed Lord Dundreary, whom no actor has been able to resurrect, excepting to give us a very unsatisfactory ghost of the original. But if the comedian, by dying, deprived the stage of one of its most delightful figures, he has left us a

welcome inheritance in the person of his son, Edward H. Sothorn. When one watches the latter making such capital stage love, or playing the picturesque heroes of the D'Artagnan type, one thinks how the elder Sothorn would have revelled in such parts, had he dared to turn his back on eccentric comedy.

Edward Askew Sothorn will be judged, at the bar of criticism, by his Garrick and his Dundreary. The former proved that he was not a one-part actor; the latter gave him the right to call himself, if he chose, a great comedian. It is only to be regretted that he did not have wider scope for his talents. His range, complained the critics, was limited, but if the desired playwright had appeared, to measure the abilities and grasp the genius of his subject, Sothorn might have given more than one new aspect to his art. His clothes always fitted him, but seldom did his plays.

An In-
heritance



“What e'er he did, was done with so much ease,
In him alone 't was natural to please.”

—*Dryden.*



JOHN LESTER WALLACK

MANY of us who enjoy the *insouciance* of the light comedian, as he dashes through the play like a true man of the world, or who admire him if he perchance infuses into his acting a bit of the gracefully melodramatic, fail to appreciate the amount of patience and hard work that lies behind all this apparent spontaneity and freshness. We speak of "inspiration," or "talent," or "gifts," as though those words explained the secret of his success. Yet John Lester Wallack, the most popular player of this type that America ever possessed, could have told a story of perpetual training, incessant rehearsals, and constant energy, which would have given the real key to all his triumphs. The very sprightliness of his comedy was but the thought, or deliberation, of one who had been cuffed into the thoroughness of the "Old School" before

More than
Talent

**The
Wallack
Family**

he sparkled so brilliantly in the modern school.

Not that Lester Wallack was a mere monument of industry. Far from that. He was perhaps without actual genius, but he had the theatrical ability that ran rampant in his family. There were, as instances of this ability, his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. William Wallack (the latter a one-time actress in Garrick's company), his uncle Henry Wallack, his cousins, James W. Wallack, Jr., Julia and Fanny Wallack, and his father, James William Wallack. Lester also received dramatic temptation from the other side of the house, for his mother was the daughter of John Johnstone, a genial Irish comedian who delighted all London when poor George III. was ending his days in blindness and insanity.

James William Wallack, having already shown his mettle at Drury Lane, came to the United States with his wife in 1818; and it was just as the bells were about to ring in the new year of 1820 that John Johnstone Wallack, otherwise John Lester Wallack, was born, in the city of New York. In a few weeks the baby was taken to England by his parents, on board one of the packet ships of the day. At ten years of age he was already fired with an incipient



John Lester Wallack as "Benedick."

From a steel print.



John Lester Wallack

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love for the stage, for he gave a speech from *Douglas* (attired in a red tunic, white trousers, and red shoes, and rendered formidable by a wooden sword painted a bright blue), to the great pleasure of his companions in a Surrey private school. At the maturer age of fifteen he performed *Rolla* in a juvenile revival of *Pizarro*, at Brighton, where he insisted on falling dead just on the line where the curtain was to descend, and had to be dragged ignominiously to the back of the stage by two of the boys, each holding one of his legs.

Juvenile
Acting

The elder Wallack expected that his son would go into the British army. While the latter was still trying to decide whether he should do so or not, he joined his father, who was making a "starring" tour of the provinces, and appeared first as Angelo, in *Tortosa, the Usurer*, by N. P. Willis, and afterwards as Macduff and Richmond. It was a long time, as Lester Wallack tells us in his *Memories of Fifty Years*, before he could choose between the sword and the sock and buskin. Finally he determined to go on the stage. There was no false sentiment or boyish romance in his resolve. He was at home in the wings; he knew the hardships he had to face, and cherished no illusions. He would learn his profession

“Mr.
Lester”

“ from beginning to end ”; he would depend on it solely for his support, and—a truly Spartan act—he forthwith refused to augment his salary of twenty shillings a week by any little gifts of money which his fond mother tried to send him.*

The early experiences of young Wallack (who assumed the stage name of Lester, because he was too independent to depend for recognition upon his father's fame) included appearances in Rochester, Liverpool, and Manchester, and two seasons of constant work at the Theatre Royal, Dublin. It was during this probationary period—at a time, too, when the country actor who earned three or four sovereigns a week thought himself a great man—that “ Mr. Lester ” acquired that versatility, ease, and commendable self-assurance which afterwards stood him in good stead. He played such a variety of parts that it is to be suspected he was pretty amateurish in some of them, but any loss to the audience was a distinct gain to the young actor, as he became more and more at home in comedy and drama.

For some little time Lester's associates

* It has been stated more than once that Lester Wallack's first appearance on the stage was made in Dublin, but this assertion is not borne out in the actor's reminiscences.

played at Winchester and Southampton, on alternate nights. These portrayers of kings, queens, and other heroic persons appeared in three pieces at each performance, travelled between the two towns in a beggarly little omnibus, and had to study their parts as they were being jolted over the highroads. How would the modern actor (who often goes from city to city in luxurious parlor-cars, puts up at fine hotels, and occasionally figures in only two or three plays for the whole season) like to follow his trade under those circumstances? Yet it was work of that kind which created "stars" who could do anything from Julius Cæsar to Harlequin, and do it well.

At Manchester Lester had the honour of playing Benedick to the Beatrice of Helen Faucit. He never forgot the encouragement she gave him, or the patient care with which she instructed him in the scenes of *Much Ado About Nothing*. There was no condescension in her interest; she felt real, womanly sympathy for the ambitions of a beginner. It was a rare opportunity for Lester, and an unexpected one, for Miss Faucit had for her regular leading man Gustavus V. Brooke, he of the powerful lungs, who afterwards went down to the bottom of the ocean in the vessel that was

Not
Lugury

The
Cushmans

bearing him to his many admirers in Australia. It was Brooke, by-the-by, whose voice could out-Forrest Forrest, and who once played Iago, to the Othello of the American tragedian, with a stentorian impressiveness that raised the luxuriant hair of the latter, and caused him to feel for his laurels.

Manchester had, indeed, many charms for young Wallack. Here he became very friendly with the irrepressible Charles James Mathews, who was going through the world "as a grasshopper does," hopping "when he found the ground a little rough"; here, too, on one occasion, in the year 1845, he had a memorable meeting with the Cushman sisters. Charlotte, who was to play Romeo to the Juliet of Susan Cushman, asked of the manager of the theatre who would be the Mercutio. It was explained that a very promising fellow, "young Mr. Wallack," who acted under the name of Lester, but who happened to be the son of James W. Wallack, was cast for the part. "He is very inexperienced, I am afraid!" remarked Miss Cushman. At the rehearsals of the tragedy, however, the actress was much pleased with the acting of this striking-looking youth, whose graceful figure, melodious voice, which he could attune to many moods,

and Byronic face, gave him quite the air of a *beau chevalier*. There was a great future before him, she said to her new Mercutio, placing her hand on his shoulder, if he would not let his vanity run away with his discretion. At this Lester was delighted, naturally enough, nor did he regret that he had so often seen his father do Mercutio.

When Charlotte Cushman was playing at the Haymarket Theatre, London, after this incident, she spoke of him in very glowing terms to Webster, the manager. Wallack, she asserted, was "the coming young man." Now it happened that Mathews had just left Webster to go to the Lyceum Theatre; the manager wanted someone to do light comedy parts, and so he engaged "Mr. Lester," on the recommendation of Miss Cushman. The engagement proved a fiasco. The cause was not far to seek. The play chosen for the newcomer's entry on the Haymarket stage was *The Little Devil*, a two-act farce in which Mathews and his wife had already won a triumph, and it had been Wallack's idea to revive the piece according to his own version, with his own peculiar "business." Webster insisted, very foolishly, that *The Little Devil* should be given exactly as Mathews had played it, thereby submitting Wallack to an inevitably unfair comparison,

A Fiasco

A Fiasco

and practically discounting in advance the merits of Charles James's successor. What was more, Wallack had to introduce several songs into the farce, and, as he had never sung on the stage before, his heart sank at the thought. "It will kill my *début*!" he asserted.

It was after eleven o'clock at night, at the end of a five-act comedy, when *The Little Devil* was brought on at the Haymarket. Many in the audience were tired out, and thinking there might be more of the bore than of Mephistopheles about the farce, they moved towards the doors. Those who remained were scarcely less worn out; they had recent memories of Mathews—in short, "Mr. Lester" fell very flat.

After a few nights Wallack dropped out of the evening's cast. When he next appeared, it was to play *Dazzle*, in *London Assurance*. Here he invited, quite against his will, a second comparison with the light-some Mathews. It was agreed that "Mr. Lester" did not scintillate: he found that his usefulness at the Haymarket was over, thanks to the want of tact, or the indifference, of his manager. So when an American impressario came upon the scene, and asked him to join a company which was being formed to play at the Broadway

Theatre, then in course of construction in New York, the disappointed comedian was glad to accept an offer of £8 a week, and to sail for Boston. The impresario had been shrewd enough to detect the rapidly developing talent of the young man. "England does n't know how good an actor this Wallack really is," he remarked to a friend.

The first thing that Wallack did when he appeared at the Broadway Theatre on the night of September 27, 1847, was to distinguish himself by falling through a trap-door. He was playing Sir Charles Coldstream, before a crowded house which had heard a great deal about the talents of Mr. "John Wallack Lester," when, in the scene where Sir Charles stamps upon the stage at the sight of the supposed phantom, a trap on which he happened to be standing suddenly gave way. A thrill of excitement went through the audience as he fell, and many were the expressions of relief when he caught himself up by the elbows and thus avoided a more serious accident. No sooner had Wallack extricated himself from his painful position than *Used Up* proceeded, and although Sir Charles felt unpleasantly like the title of the farce, he went through his part with such *éclat* that he received a tremendous ovation from the New Yorkers.

Off to
New York

The
Broadway
Theatre

“What grace,” they said; “what life, what polish!” Surely here was a man who had not been overrated by his manager, and who seemed to be a gentleman who could act—or an actor who could play the gentleman.

The fortunes of the Broadway varied like the weathercock, as new managers rose and fell. After a period of depression the production of *Old Heads and Young Hearts* brought up the receipts of the box-office, as did also the appearance of Edwin Forrest. While Forrest was at the theatre Wallack played Cassio to the tragedian’s Othello, and supported him, in a serious part, in *The Broker of Bogata*. It seems to have been his success in the latter play that first suggested to the young Englishman that he might be able to accomplish something in the line of what can be called, for want of a better title, light melodrama.

Then the fortunes of the Broadway took a downward turn until William Rufus Blake, who was at that time the stage-manager, came to Wallack with the startling announcement that he must play the title-rôle in a dramatisation of Dumas’s novel, *The Count of Monte Cristo*. “Good Heavens!” cried the actor; “I never took a melodramatic part in my life.” “You *must* do it,”

insisted Blake, "or the theatre will close. We have no one else who can do it." The idea was enough to give Wallack an attack of "stage-fright," for he knew that the backbone of the play would depend upon the picturesque impersonation of the Count. He finally said: "Very well; I will try it. If I fail, it will not be my fault."

But Wallack did not fail. His Edmund Dantes proved to be full of colour, with just enough dramatic force to make it plausible, and with a freshness and naturalness that deprived the character of any bombastic absurdity. His *Monte Cristo* not only saved the theatre from bankruptcy, but it likewise led to later melodramatic successes which Wallack made in such pieces as *Rosedale*, *The Romance of a Poor Young Man*, *Jessie Brown*, and *The Streets of New York*. *Monte Cristo* ran for many nights; New York talked and thought of the play, and "John W. Lester" rose at once to the dignity of a stage hero whose photographs acquired a distinct market value. His *aplomb* and his good looks were applauded by all classes, from the gallery "gods" to the fashionable occupants of the boxes.

Thereupon William Rufus Blake became one of the most pleased men in town. He

Edmund
Dantes

H Sad
Wag

was a fine actor, who possessed a ready wit which he could, on provocation, use unsparingly against a malcontent. He was once rubbed the wrong way by a conceited player, who wished to introduce *The Star Spangled Banner* in a patriotic piece to be produced in honour of Washington's Birthday. This player, who was to take a certain part, said that he had always sung the national anthem in the aforesaid drama, and should like to do it again. He declared sententiously, when Blake objected to this bit of music as highly inappropriate: "I wish it to be recorded, Mr. Blake, that I insist upon being billed as singing *The Star Spangled Banner*." When the piece was produced Blake, who had refused sternly to permit the introduction of the song, caused to be inserted in the programme an announcement that the character in question would be taken by Mr. —, "who insists upon singing *The Star Spangled Banner*." The feelings of Mr. — may be imagined.

During these early days the characters played by Wallack included, among others, Captain Absolute; Osric, in *Hamlet*; Mercurio; Sir Frederick Blount, in *Bulwer's Money*; Major Murray, in *The Jacobite*; Dazzle, and (at the Chatham Theatre, during the summer of 1848) Don Cæsar de

John Lester Wallack

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Bazan, and Robert Macaire. At the Bowery Theatre, where he later became a leading member of the company, with John Gilbert, James W. Wallack, Jr., and others, he produced his dramatisation of *The Three Guardsmen* (November 12, 1849), wherein he appeared most successfully as D'Artagnan, to the Athos of his cousin, the Porthos of Gilbert, and the Aramis of John Dunn. The autumn of the year 1850 found Wallack a shining light in Burton's company, at the Chambers Street Theatre, where he played Charles Surface, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and other rôles. It was at this period that Wallack took a trip to England, persuaded his father to return to America, and sailed back himself to New York to finish his engagement with Burton.

The coming to New York of James William Wallack had momentous dramatic results. John Brougham had been having an uphill time of it at his little Lyceum Theatre on Broadway, near Broome Street, and Major Rogers, the owner of the building, found at last that he must secure a new lessee. So he offered the theatre to the elder Wallack. There were innumerable conferences, in which Wallack refused to pay the rent demanded, as exorbitant, while Rogers was equally firm on his side. Finally

In Many
Parts

True
Eloquence

the two met in the vacant theatre one afternoon, with no one to keep them company but the janitor. The actor said that there was no use in any further parleying; he would not give the rent required; the matter might as well be declared off. Then he went down to the front of the darkened stage, in a jocose way, and addressed an imaginary audience, telling it how he regretted that he was unable to secure the house, and thus give to the New York public the stock company and the plays on which he had set his heart. There must have been a great deal of histrionic eloquence in the mock speech, for Rogers suddenly shouted, "That's enough; I consent to everything." Wallack was given the theatre at his own price.

When the Lyceum, rechristened as Wallack's Theatre, was opened in September, 1852, it was seen that the elder Wallack was determined to keep his promise of making the house a true home of the drama. For nearly nine years the theatre prospered exceedingly, as new plays and old had elaborate presentation by a company in which, at various times, were John Brougham, Laura Keene, William Rufus Blake, E. A. Sothorn, Henry Placide, Georgina Hodson, and many more. One of the most active of

the players was "John W. Lester," who appeared in a succession of characters, comic and dramatic, acted as stage-manager, and tried his hand at authorship. The range of his powers may be seen from the fact that he played almost anything not of a "heavy" cast, from Orlando and Bassanio to Leon Delmar in his own drama of *The Veteran*. In *The Veteran*, which was founded on a novel entitled *The Queen's Own*, the parts of father and son were taken by the elder and the younger Wallack respectively. At the end of the play there were enthusiastic cries for "Author," and the father, both real and mimic, led his son to the footlights to receive the applause. It was a touch of nature, mixed in with the tinsel of the stage.

One of the comic successes of Wallack's Theatre is still fondly remembered by the old guard of playgoers. Even the youngsters have heard of Brougham's burlesque of *Pocahontas*, and will often ask their grandfathers what it was, and whether it was "really as funny" as history records. Perhaps there was never a piece produced in New York, unless it was one of Burton's travesties, that caused more laughter than *Pocahontas*. It is well worth a place in Lawrence Hutton's delightful *Curiosities of the American Stage*, where a few of its once

Wallack's
Theatre

Wallack's
Theatre

famous lines, such as the following apostrophe to tobacco, have been reproduced :

“ While other joys one sense alone can measure,
This to all senses gives ecstatic pleasure.
You *feel* the radiance of the glowing bowl,
Hear the soft murmurs of the kindling coal,
Smell the sweet fragrance of the honey-dew,
Taste its strong pungency the palate through,
See the blue cloudlets circling to the dome,
Imprisoned skies up-floating to their home—
I like a dhudeen myself.”

Perhaps *Pocahontas* might seem very tame to the up-to-date lovers of burlesque, many of whom want a few *doubles entendres*, and other fleshly accompaniments, in entertainments of this kind. But it is hardly possible that the most popular extravaganza of to-day could furnish a handsomer heroine than Georgina Hodson, who played the Indian maiden, or funnier creations than the Pow-ha-tan of John Brougham, or the John Smith of Charles Walcot.

Miss Hodson walked into Lester Wallack's office one day, looking very radiant, yet demure, and introduced herself as an actress who had appeared in Boston and was now in search of a New York engagement. Wallack was charmed by her attractiveness, and his father secured her for *Pocahontas*.

For a time everything went brilliantly; New Yorkers voted her a most fascinating woman, who was essential to the run of the burlesque. But one evening, as the curtain was about to rise on *Pocahontas*, the prompter came to the younger Wallack with the perturbed announcement that the Hodson had not reached the theatre. There must be a mistake, declared Wallack; Miss Hodson was, no doubt, finishing her toilet, in her dressing-room. "She has *not* arrived," replied the prompter, in decided tones. He was quite right. It was learned in a few minutes that the actress had packed up her trunks and left New York; there were rumours that she had gone away to try her fortune in California.

What was to be done? Wallack rushed into the dressing-room of Brougham and Walcot, to whom he told the sad news, as he suggested that *Pocahontas* should be played that night without Pocahontas herself. Brougham made an exclamation of surprise. "Yes," insisted Wallack, "you and Walcot will have to improvise what is required to make up for her absence." Then he walked out before the curtain, told the audience of his predicament, and offered to return the spectators' money to them, or to give, in lieu of the absent Hodson, a

Fair Poca=
bontas

Fair Pocahontas

“ charming novelty.” When he explained that the novelty would be “ *Pocahontas* without Pocahontas,” a shout went up from the house. The disappointed persons who had started to leave the theatre came back to their seats, and right glad they soon were that they had done so, for Brougham and Walcot improvised so cleverly, and in verse, too, to supply the part of the missing actress, that the evening passed in a perfect whirl of merriment. The next night Pocahontas was again in the burlesque, but it was Miss Gannon, not Miss Hodson, who appeared as the pretty savage.

One experience of Lester Wallack during his career at this theatre shows that the rejection of a play does not always bring bad luck. Bancroft Davis came to the elder Wallack one day, and asked him to read a play which Tom Taylor had sent over to America, for a possible production in New York. Mr. Davis was particularly anxious that it should be brought out at Wallack's, where the piece was sure to have ample justice done to it by the company. So the manuscript was given to Lester to read. He examined it very carefully, was much struck by its “ taking ” title of *Our American Cousin*, but concluded, notwithstanding, that it was hardly suited to the requirements

of his father's house. He told Mr. Davis that the play needed the services, in the title part, of a "great Yankee character actor," and that the very man for it was Joseph Jefferson, who then belonged to Laura Keene's company. Mr. Davis took the manuscript to Miss Keene, and we know how its acceptance in that quarter affected the fortunes of herself, Jefferson, and E. A. Sothern.

Just before the outbreak of the Civil War the elder Wallack determined to build a new theatre. Some of his friends said cheerful things about "Folly" and "Sure ruin," and the like, yet he persisted in what was looked upon, in some circles, as a reckless undertaking. On the 29th of September, 1861, when the country was in the throes of the Rebellion, the second Wallack's Theatre, at the northeast corner of Broadway and Thirteenth Street, was opened, before an immense audience, with the production of *The New President*—in which its author, Tom Taylor, in nowise treated of Abraham Lincoln. From now onward the proprietor's son, who was the real manager of the new house and assumed full control on the death of his father in 1864, dropped the "John W. Lester," and appeared as Lester Wallack. Under the latter name he figured for a quarter of a century or more as the most popular

A New
House

The
Actor-
Manager

of local theatrical favourites. Other players, other managers, exacted their meed of adulation, even of enthusiasm, but the public, as if to show that it could be constant on occasion, was always kind, and usually generous, to Wallack. Possibly that was because Wallack always proved kind to the public.

For Lester Wallack was, according to his lights, an ideal actor-manager. He does not seem to have considered the American playwright to any unusual degree, or to have bothered himself about building up the national drama, but he was a tactful amusement purveyor of artistic temperament, who knew what the best theatregoers wanted, and gave it to them in a more than worthy fashion. Unless a manager can afford to ignore the box-office, we can expect nothing more from him than that: if we would have him a philanthropist, who is expected to thrust plays down our throats whether we care for them or not—if he is to produce pieces without regard to the probable size of the audiences—then we must endow his house. It is very fine sentiment to talk of art for the sake of art, but the manager, unless he be ten or twenty times a millionaire, has to think of his bank account.

To mention the new plays or the old comedies which had production at the second

John Lester Wallack

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Wallack's Theatre, or the brilliant players who joined the company at various times, would be but to wander off into a volume, not a chapter, of reminiscences. If we spoke of E. L. Davenport, James W. Wallack, Jr., Charles J. Mathews (who abrogated his title of "star" to appear there one season), John Gilbert, H. J. Montague, Mrs. Hoey, Madeleine Henriques, Rose Eyttinge, and Mark Smith, Sr., or if we called up memories of *My Noble Son-in-Law*, *Ours*, *School*, *Home*, *Married in Haste*, *My Awful Dad*, *Diplomacy*, *A Scrap of Paper*, not to mention that great revival of *The School for Scandal*, with Rose Coghlan as Lady Teazle—the record would only be begun. Nor could we give adequate idea, in one brief study, of the energy of Lester Wallack, both as manager and actor. Many were the parts he played, ancient and modern, and critics and public noted with keen satisfaction his easy assumption of the romantic in melodrama (which he never exaggerated more than necessity required), and his extreme lightness of touch and vivacity in all sorts of comedy, from Charles Surface to Adonis Evergreen. To look at him was a source of pleasure, and to hear him sing was to bring away from the theatre a charming recollection of simple, unoperatic

Brilliant
Players

Elliott
Grey

melody, of the kind which one might expect to have exploited in the drawing-room of a friend. If the spectator happened to know Lester Wallack in private life, as well as upon the stage, so much the better. He was an entertaining companion, loyal, honest, and a cultured man of the world, who graced any gathering into which he came, and who could find a warm welcome awaiting him in all quarters of New York society.

Two new plays, *Rosedale* and *The Shaughraun*, stand out brilliantly from the background of Wallackian triumphs. The former showed Lester Wallack in the dual rôle of author and actor, and his impersonation of Elliott Grey, the Byronic (albeit sufficiently virtuous) hero, was looked upon by all of the women, and many of his own sex, as the beau ideal of manly spirit. There is a tradition to the effect that *Rosedale* was written as the result of a conversation at a dinner party given in New York by Thackeray, during his last visit to this country. Lester Wallack, who had become bosom friends with the English satirist (whom he once thought pompous and supercilious), opposed an assertion that the lovers in a popular play must be very young persons. He determined to put his own theory to the test, and eventually did so by writing *Rosedale*, in

which Elliott Grey is a man who has passed the first blush of youth, and Rosa Lee proves to be a young lady who has outlived, by some years, the candy-eating period of girlish sixteen. Nowadays, many years after the production of this drama, audiences will tolerate older lovers than Grey or Rosa Lee; the age of hero or heroine has been advanced in a play, just as it has been advanced in the latter-day novel. We seem to have reached the point where we can find interest in the romances of our aunts or our uncles. Who shall say when it will be the turn of our grand-relations?

Elliott
Grey

Rosedale is poor dramatic fare as viewed from present standards, but it was constructed with sufficient adroitness to please the dramatic mood of the passing generation, and it made a small fortune for the management. A better play of a later period, which had a great run at Wallack's, was Dion Boucicault's Irish drama of *The Shaughraun*. There is no difficulty in explaining the very natural attraction which the fortunes of Con, that most ingenuous and ingenious of stage Hibernians, had for New Yorkers, and afterwards (when Boucicault toured in the piece) for all conditions of Americans. The story possessed mother-wit, freshness, and theatric interest; the

Irish
Drama

sentiment was healthy and unforced; one irresistibly forgot one's environment in the playhouse, and fancied that Ireland—not the real Ireland, but a more delightful one—had been towed across the ocean for the particular benefit of the American amusement-seeker. There is but one thing that can be said against *The Shaughraun*. It gave rise to a flood of poor imitations. The stage has been crowded for years with Irish heroes who bang their hard sticks over the heads of villainous Englishmen; innumerable Irish farms, carrying the inevitable mortgages, have been rescued from confiscation by the cleverness of these heroes; and innumerable young "colleens," in short skirts, have insisted on rewarding their virtue by leading them to the altar. Some critics would have preferred that they be led to the halter—but that is sacrilegious. The Celtic hero, like the Dutch comedian, is still very much alive, but when he dies—for he is only mortal, despite his excessive longevity—there will be few mourners.

It is said that the production of *The Shaughraun* at Wallack's Theatre was the result of mere accident. Lester Wallack complained one day that he found it hard work to keep the public provided with good plays. "Well," spoke up Boucicault, who

was sitting in Wallack's office, "do you want to continue the success of your theatre? Of course you do. I want to show a crowd of croakers that I can do as well now as I ever did in my life. Let me produce an Irish drama in your house." Wallack thought over this startling proposition for several minutes. Then he said, decidedly: "Boucicault, I'll do it!"

Irish
Drama

One of the most pleasant qualities of Lester Wallack was his considerate treatment of those who played under his management. No actor bore more cheerful testimony to his generosity than did Charles J. Mathews, who served at Wallack's as a regular member of the company during the season of 1872-73, at a salary of \$500 a week. When Wallack suggested that Mathews name his own terms, the latter wrote him an emphatic "No! No! No!" but the manager's subsequent offer of \$500 brought back a note with a grateful "Yes! Yes! Yes!" At the end of the season, for Mathew's benefit, Wallack played in *The Captain of the Watch*, and was afterwards the recipient of some glowing praise from the beneficiary, in a speech before the footlights.

"Years ago, when Mr. Wallack first entered the profession," said Mathews, "it appears that

A Tribute

I chanced to offer him some encouragement, and it shows that kind words are never thrown away, for he has been gracious enough to remember them ; and if I cheered him a little at the commencement of his career he has more than returned the obligation by throwing flowers over the close of mine. I shall bear away with me the liveliest remembrance of his many kindnesses."

Another incident, of a far different kind, shows us the cool-headed Wallack, who could act in dead earnest the self-possessed, dashing heroes whom he simulated so perfectly in the mimic world. During a performance of *Home*, just after he had appeared in the disguise of Colonel White, only to be ordered from the house of his stage father, several persons in the audience called out to him in alarm, "Look behind you!" As he turned, he saw that the candle on a mantelpiece had burned down to the socket, and that the paper wrapped around it was catching fire, to the imminent danger of a curtain which, in another second, would be ablaze. As cool as if he were Elliott Grey, Wallack drew the candlestick away from the curtain, holding it while the hot wax fell fast upon his hand, and repeating his lines as if nothing had happened. The slightest nervousness, had he shown it,

might have caused one of those panics in which the spectators lose their wits like a lot of foolish sheep. As soon as the house, reassured by his manner and the extinguishing of the lighted paper, burst out into a round of applause, Wallack repeated the lines: "Well, the 'Governor' has turned me out of the house,"—and added, by way of an *impromptu*,—"but I at least have the satisfaction of knowing that I have been instrumental in saving the establishment from destruction by fire."

Presence
of Mind

Early in 1882, the third Wallack's Theatre, and, unfortunately, the last to be conducted under the Wallack standard, was thrown open to the public, at the northeast corner of Thirtieth Street and Broadway. But the new Wallack's could never equal the old; it was impossible, in spite of admirable players and interesting productions, to eclipse the records of the past. But Wallack, who occasionally appeared at his own theatre, besides playing "star" engagements in other cities, never lost the affections and respect of the public he had served so well. When he gave up the management of the new house, in the autumn of 1887, many were the expressions of sincere regret, for it seemed as if New York had lost not merely an actor and the head of a famous company, but had likewise

Young
Marlow

lost an institution. What progress the drama had made in America since he first played Sir Charles Coldstream, at the old Broadway Theatre, forty odd years before! What an increase in the power and wealth and artistic demands of the American people had taken place within that period!

Wallack's last appearance on any stage, as an actor, had been at the Grand Opera House, New York, on May 29, 1886. *She Stoops to Conquer* was the play, with the veteran as Young Marlow, John Gilbert as Hardcastle, and the youthful-hearted Madáme Ponisi, who gave such old-fashioned grace to comedy, as Mistress Hardcastle. Even then there was much to enjoy in Wallack's Marlow. His delightful embarrassment in the first scene with the two ladies, his airy love-making with the supposed barmaid, and the show of "sentiment"—as Goldsmith might have called it—in later scenes, had about it that eighteenth-century flavour which he, one of the most modern-spirited of actors, could yet put into the classics of the stage.

But one more public appearance, not as a player, but as the hero of a benefit such as New York had never before seen, was still to be made. It was on the night of May 21, 1888, that the most remarkable performance

of *Hamlet* known to the chroniclers of the stage took place, in the great auditorium of the Metropolitan Opera House, in honour of Lester Wallack. The public, the press, and the dramatic profession, led by Edwin Booth, Augustin Daly, A. M. Palmer, Joseph Jefferson, and Lawrence Barrett, had resolved to give their old friend a greeting of which a king might have been proud; and they brilliantly succeeded. The house was crowded with enthusiastic admirers, and the revival, while it lacked the delicate air of unity that less distinguished players might have given it, as a result of more constant association with one another in their respective parts, was a magnificent histrionic festival. Booth, with more fire than he had been wont to show of late as the Dane, was the Hamlet, with Lawrence Barrett, Madame Modjeska, Joseph Jefferson, Rose Coghlan, W. J. Florence, and other "stars" in the support, while the auxiliaries numbered more than a hundred Thespians of distinction, including Minnie Maddern Fiske, Madame Ponisi, Ada Dyas, Rosina Vokes, Felix Morris, and C. W. Couldock. This was the cast:

A Memorable Benefit

Hamlet EDWIN BOOTH
Ghost of Hamlet's Father LAWRENCE BARRETT

Twelve Great Actors

An Historic Cast

<i>King Claudius</i>	. . .	FRANK MAYO
<i>Polonius</i>	. . .	JOHN GILBERT
<i>Laertes</i>	. . .	EBEN PLYMPTON
<i>Horatio</i>	. . .	JOHN A. LANE
<i>Rosencranz</i>	. . .	CHARLES HANFORD
<i>Guildestern</i>	. . .	LAWRENCE HANLEY
<i>Osric</i>	. . .	CHARLES KOEHLER
<i>Marcellus</i>	. . .	EDWIN H. VANDERFELT
<i>Bernardo</i>	. . .	HERBERT KELCEY
<i>Francisco</i>	. . .	FRANK MORDAUNT
<i>First Actor</i>	. . .	JOSEPH WHEELOCK
<i>Second Actor</i>	. . .	MILNES LEVICK
<i>First Gravedigger</i>	. . .	JOSEPH JEFFERSON
<i>Second Gravedigger</i>	. . .	W. J. FLORENCE
<i>Priest</i>	. . .	HARRY EDWARDS
<i>Ophelia</i>	. . .	HELENA MODJESKA
<i>The Queen</i>	. . .	GERTRUDE KELLOGG
<i>The Player Queen</i>	. . .	ROSE COGHLAN

When the second act of the tragedy ended, there were loud calls for "Lester Wallack." The curtain was rung up, and he was discovered standing by a table, on which was a large basket of flowers. At once nearly everyone in the great house, men and women alike, rose to their feet, as they applauded and waved handkerchiefs. Then, after three cheers for the actor were given with loving enthusiasm, he came forward to speak what proved to be, little as he knew it, his own epilogue. In thanking all

those who had honoured him, he aptly quoted a remark of Charlotte Cushman: "Art is a most exacting mistress, but she repays with royal munificence,"—and he must have recalled, as he stood there, the struggling days when Cushman had stretched out a strong hand to him as he trudged onwards to the success of which this benefit was the climax. There was something pathetic, as it was afterwards recalled, in the final words of his address:

"And now to all, and everyone, to the great public, the journalists, the actors, the musicians, the mechanics—I except no one—I stretch forth my hand in thanks and gratitude. I wish I could take you all by the hand, but I cannot. I have done a great variety of things in my active career, but I cannot do that. I devoutly and truly thank you again for this stupendous tribute. I bid you all 'Good-Night.' But mind; this is no farewell, for if it please God to once more give me control over this rebellious limb [referring to a sciatic trouble] I may trouble you again."*

* During the evening a cabled message was received by Mr. Palmer from Augustin Daly, then in Europe. "Please add my voice," he said, "to the thousands who will honour Wallack to-night. I shake hands with you across the Atlantic over the unparalleled success you have built upon our mutual imagination." As a result of this benefit Mr. Palmer sent to Mrs. Wallack a check for \$20,000 or more.

“Good=
Right”

But there would be no more comedy or melodrama for Lester Wallack. His “Good-Night” to the public was a real one: He died on September 6th of this same year, at his country house near Stamford, Connecticut, and was buried in Woodlawn Cemetery.

The key to Wallack’s achievements may be found in his application of the advice which Mrs. Siddons gave to Macready: “Study! Study! Study!” He never trusted to hereditary talent, or attempted to make the magic name of Wallack take the place of earnest, conscientious effort. He studied a play scene by scene, in order to get the full meaning of his author, and studied, more than that, every part in the cast. When it came to his own character, he went over it with the care of an artisan who labours at a piece of mosaic, attending to the most minute detail, and gradually evolving an effective picture, full of colour and perspective. When his admirers saw him as a Surface, or as Henry Beauclerc in *Diplomacy*, or as Prosper Couramont in *A Scrap of Paper*, they forgot the hours of preparation, and saw only the artistic finish.

In his *Memories* Wallack tells us that after having discarded the part of Don Cæsar de Bazan for fourteen or fifteen years, he thought of assuming it again, and for this

purpose asked his wife to take up the book of the play to see if he recalled any of the lines. At last she put down the book in perfect astonishment, for he was actually letter-perfect in the character. That was the sort of thoroughness which he had acquired under the tuition of his father. He reminds one of the artistic completeness of William Farren, whose sphere might be limited, but who was so well-grounded a comedian that nothing within that sphere could conquer him. When Farren was cast for the then modern part of Sir Harcourt Courtly in *London Assurance*, many of his kind friends predicted that he would be a dismal failure. He had become so accustomed, they said, to characters of the shoe-buckled, knee-breeches, silk-stockinged order, that he could never adapt himself to new clothes and new manners. But he went to the most fashionable tailor in London, ordered the very latest style of costume, and when he appeared as Courtly, everyone declared that he moved about the stage as if he had never done anything but play elderly beaux in frock coats and gaiter pantaloons. It was the stagecraft in him coming out and triumphing over that bugbear of even the greatest actors—a change of habit and haberdashery.

Fine
Stage=
craft

Noble
Work

It was Work, with a capital "W," and constant rehearsal that won for Lester Wallack fame and honour. It was work, too, that made of Augustin Daly, who spent all the day and half the night in his theatre, one of the best-known managers in the world. When we look at the career of men of this calibre, it is impossible not to feel that the art which they have dignified by their pains must be noble and worth the devotion it inspires. The only pity is that 't is so evanescent. Where, asks Mr. Henley, are the passions, and the tears, and the wild humours, with which dead-and-gone players were wont to sway their audiences ?

"Othello's wrath, and Juliet's woe?
Sir Peter's whims, and Timon's gall?
And Millamant and Romeo?
Into the night go one and all."

True; but the stage-chronicler still endures, and to him remains the duty of resurrecting the memories of past theatrical heroes and heroines. They may return to us as shades, not as creatures of the flesh, yet they are welcome shades, more pleasant to encounter than many realities.





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