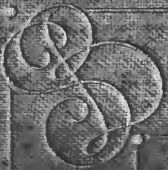


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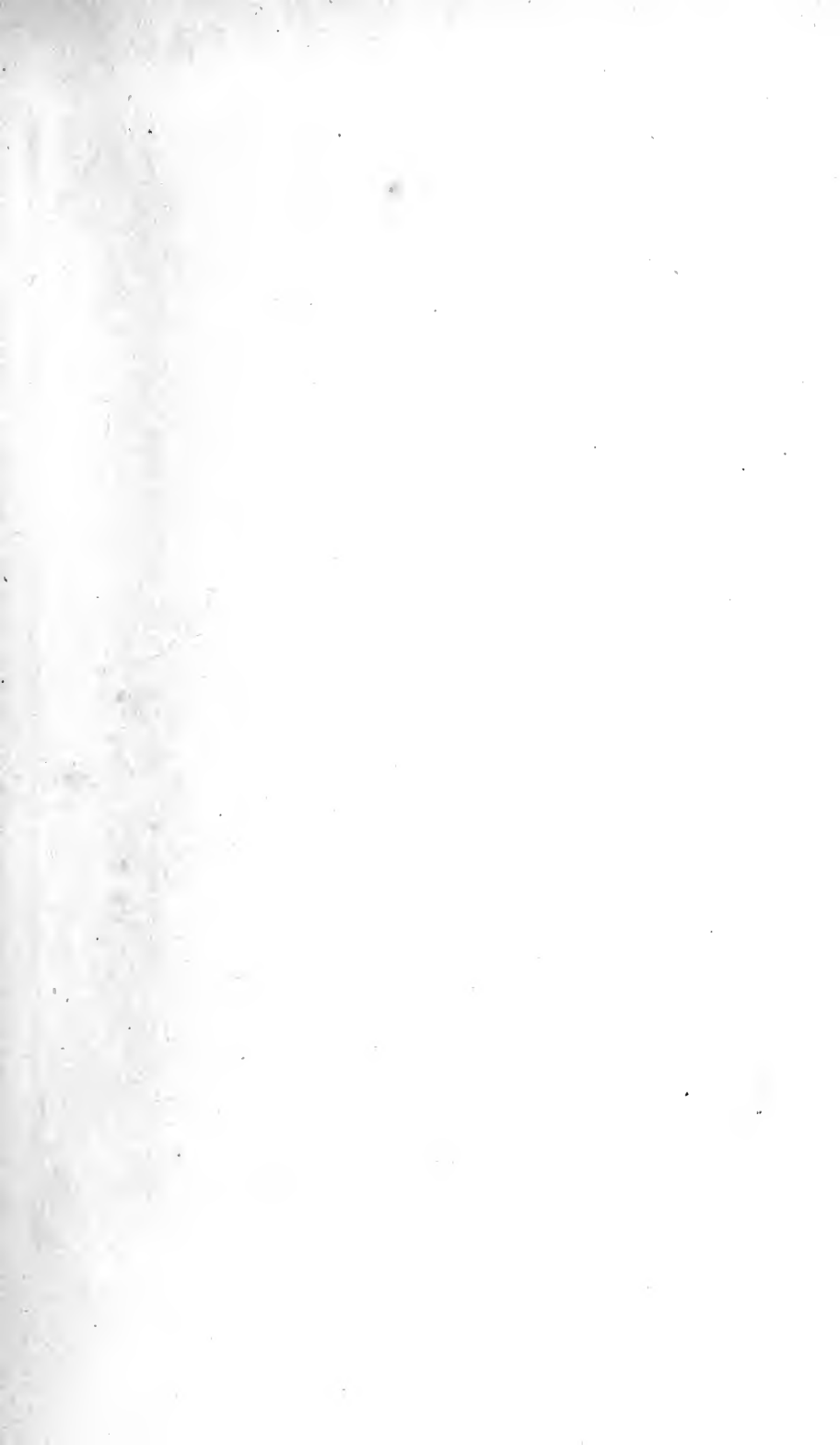


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**THE BANCROFTS**

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO





*Marie Bancroft,  
from a drawing by Beatrice Ward.*

Bancroft, Marie Effie (Wilton) Lady  
"

# THE BANCROFTS

RECOLLECTIONS OF  
SIXTY YEARS

*Marie Bancroft*

---

*Squire Bancroft*

---

"SHADOWS OF THE THINGS THAT HAVE BEEN"

WITH PORTRAITS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON  
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1909

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I DEDICATE  
MY SHARE IN THIS BOOK  
TO A COMRADE AND FRIEND  
MY WIFE  
BUT FOR WHOSE NAME AND FAME  
THERE WOULD BE SMALL NEED FOR IT.

S. B.





## P R E F A C E

SHORTLY after the close of our twenty years of management, in 1885, we devoted two volumes to an account of our careers both "On and Off the Stage." That work, after running through seven editions—a success as gratifying as it was surprising to two authors unused to the pen—was allowed to go out of print. Since then we have both been asked so often whether we had written, or why we did not write, our reminiscences, that the idea occurred to us of comprising within a single book the whole of our memories of sixty years. This is our apology for re-telling in a different way, and with that greater freedom which is born of the lapse of time, things which happened in the first half of that long period.

In my task of compiling these memoirs I have been greatly aided by the words of my wife, which I have used wherever able to do so, and by the fact that every page has had the benefit of her help and counsel. For the egotism displayed in the following story I offer no excuse. Egotism is inseparable from autobiography.

S. B.

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# THE BANCROFTS

## PRELUDE

“Stooping to your clemency,  
We beg your hearing patiently.”

*A Duet with an Occasional Chorus* is the title of a story written by our friend Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: it seems, in a way, to describe this book. In a duet one voice is sometimes silent, then again the two are heard together, the listener caring but little which of the two voices supports the other. So it will be with this book. The Chorus, in our case, being the occasional words of others, we shall use them courageously to strengthen and enforce our own; their sweet voices, in fact, will sing our praises. They are, to us, cherished flowers of speech, which for so long a time were strewn upon a hard-worked path from many gardens. This is the overture. The curtain rises on a female solo.

## CHAPTER I

### GIRLHOOD

“Hear the truth of it.”

FIRST I will write about days of early struggle, long before my husband and I came to be known as “The Bancrofts,” and will tell my story in my own simple way.

Many years ago, when I began to earn fame as

a young actress, I was told of two stories, then current, as to my birth and parentage: one that I was a child of Thomas Egerton, Earl of Wilton; the other that I was a daughter of a Mr. Wilton, who kept an oyster-shop somewhere in St. James's. Both reports were as untrue as many others.

My father was Robert Pleydell Wilton. My mother's name before she married him was Georgiana Jane Faulkner. I am one of six children born to them, all of whom were girls. It came to pass that I had ability as an actress, although neither of my parents was brought up to the stage.

My father, who belonged to a well-known old Gloucestershire family, was really intended for the Church; but developed an early passion for the drama and eventually left his home to become an actor, and so laid the foundation-stone of my own stage-life. At that time theatres were looked upon by the narrow-minded with little less than horror: to become an actor meant exile from home, family, and friends. Indeed, one of my father's relatives once said, "Whenever I see a person on stilts, I dread lest it should be Robert, who would say to me, 'How do you do, Aunt Ann?'"

My paternal grandmother was a Miss Wise, daughter of the Rev. William Wise, who was a Fellow of St. John's College, Oxford, and afterwards for seventeen years Rector of St. James's, Liverpool; and sister to the Rev. William Wise, D.D., also a Fellow of St. John's, and for twenty-one years Rector of St. Laurence, Reading.

My maternal grandmother was a Miss Watts Browne, daughter of General Browne. She married Mr. Samuel Faulkner, who was the proprietor of *The Morning Chronicle* (then a leading London newspaper) and a highly gifted man. "Gentleman Faulkner" he was called, as a tribute to his courtly manner and high character.

My father, who was much older than my mother, eloped with her when he was a travelling actor. His



rashness cost them dear ; their lot for many years was little more than toil, anxiety, and care. Dazzled by the eternal glitter of the stage, my father went his way, building castles in the air and living in dreamland. Having been brought up in luxury and refinement, they felt their changed condition keenly, and often in later life have recalled to me stories of my childhood and events in our early days, which have carried me painfully back to the past.

My mother died in 1866, in her forty-eighth year ; my father survived her seven years, and lived to be seventy-three.

Having shown, when very young, ability beyond my years, I was brought out as a child-actress, before I was able to speak plainly. It was thought a great achievement then to stand alone on a stage and recite. I can remember only work and responsibility from a very tender age. No games, no romps, no toys. I can recollect a doll, but not the time to play with it, for we only met at night, when it shared my pillow ; and as I looked into its face, before I fell asleep after my work, I wished that I could play with it sometimes.

My dear mother drilled the words into my young head, for, although she never herself held a position of importance on the stage, her talent for teaching elocution was remarkable ; and to this I owed the power of making every word heard, even in a whisper, in any building, however large.

I have never forgotten a lecture which my mother gave me in order to impress upon me the necessity of making myself heard by the entire audience. She said, "There is a poor man who is the last to get into the gallery, and has therefore only a corner in the back row of all, where he sees and hears with difficulty ; he has been working hard and has saved his sixpence to give himself a treat. How dreadful, then, it would be to find that he cannot hear what the actors are talking about ! how he must envy those more fortunate than himself ! and how unhappy he

must be! Think of him when you are acting; direct your voice to that poor man who is sitting at the very back of the gallery; if he hears, all the rest will." Some of the counsel of those years gone by I repeated, almost word for word, in our old friend Sir Francis Burnand's little play, *A Lesson*, during our management of the Haymarket Theatre.

Presently we found ourselves at the Theatre Royal, Manchester, where I appeared in the pantomime of *Gulliver's Travels* as the little "Emperor of Lilliput"—a very tiny monarch.

I can just remember Macready playing his farewell engagement in the provinces, before retiring from the stage for which he had done so much. In *Macbeth* I acted the part of the boy Fleance, and also appeared as the apparition of the crowned child who rises from the cauldron, when summoned by the witches, to warn the guilty Thane. At the end of the play the great tragedian sent for me, and I was taken by my mother to his room. I was terribly nervous, fearing I was summoned to be scolded. My mother knocked at the door, and her frequent repetition of the following scene impressed it on my mind. A tragic "Come in!" sent my little heart into my boots. There was the great actor, seated, and looking, as I thought, very tired and cross; the room was dimly lighted. We hesitated, not knowing quite what to do, when a voice said in measured tones, "Who is it?" I felt awe-stricken, as though still in the presence of a king. The dresser said, "It's the little girl you sent for, sir." Macready answered, "Oh yes; turn up the light," much in the same tone in which he had said, "Duncan comes here to-night!" But he looked at me kindly, and said gently, "Come here, child." I went to him; he patted me on the head and kissed me, then said, "Well, I suppose you hope to be a great actress some day?" I replied quickly, "Yes, sir." "And what do you intend to play?" "Lady Macbeth, sir"; upon which he laughed loudly, and said, "Oh, is that all?"

Well, I like your ambition. You are a strange little thing, and have such curious eyes; but you must change them before you play Lady Macbeth, or you will make your audience laugh instead of cry. I am sure you will make a fine actress; I can see genius through those little windows," placing his hands over my eyes. "But do not play Lady Macbeth too soon."

It was at Manchester also that Miss Glyn, a prominent tragic actress in my youthful days, came to the theatre as a "star," accompanied by Charles Kemble, whose pupil she was. Although the great Charles was then quite old, I remember well the impression he made upon me at a rehearsal when I crept into the wings and saw them both go through the sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth*. Not a word or gesture escaped me. I was much impressed, and I determined that I *must* some day play Lady Macbeth. That day never came, but I have taught the part, as a pleasure, to a clever young actress.

*King John* was also produced for Miss Glyn, and I played Prince Arthur. Charles Kemble was in a private box at night, watching the play. In the scene where the little prince is trying to escape from his prison, and falls from the battlements, I suddenly heard the sound of some one talking out loud, and then a laugh somewhere in the theatre. I dared not move, for fear of causing more laughter, and there I lay, in terrible suspense, until carried off by Hubert. I was then told that Mr. Kemble had suddenly become very excited, had stood up and shouted out something quite loudly. No one could tell me what he had said; but an account of it appeared afterwards in the Manchester newspapers, one of which I have by me now, headed, "The Veteran and the Child":

"Charles Kemble sat anxiously watching the progress of the play of *King John*. He seldom applauded, and, for the most part, seemed saddened, perhaps by the memories of those halcyon days when his great brother was the King and he the

gallant Faulconbridge ; but the scene between Hubert and Prince Arthur awoke his approving smiles. More than once he clapped his hands, and when the little prince fell from the battlements, and the young actress exclaimed, with exquisite pathos :

‘ Oh me, my uncle’s spirit’s in these stones ;  
Heaven take my soul, and England keep my bones ! ’

the old actor was so carried away by his enthusiasm as to rise in the box where he was sitting, and exclaim, ‘ That child will be a great actress.’ That child was Marie Wilton.”

After further wanderings—like poor “ Jo ” in *Bleak House*, we seemed to be always “ moving on ”—we joined the company of the Bristol Theatre, of which Mr. James Henry Chute was manager, and where his son now reigns so ably in his stead. My first appearance there was in the opening to a pantomime as “ No-Wun-No-Zoo, the Spirit of the Silver Star.” The sky opened, and I was discovered high up in the clouds. As I was lowered by machinery, which every now and then gave an uncomfortable jerk, I was conscious of an anxious look upon my face instead of a happy smile ; indeed, my expression must have resembled the fixed stare one used to see in long-sitting photographs.

I became a great favourite, and was happy in Bristol, where there was an excellent company, and the theatre was admirably conducted. It will always be remembered by me as my stepping-stone to London. Mr. Chute was a severe disciplinarian, but a tender-hearted and just man. His wife, who was related to Macready, was a most kindly lady, and I remember her goodness to me with gratitude. The work was hard, but some of our best artists have left the old King Street Theatre to fill leading positions in London. Names that come at once to my mind are Kate and Ellen Terry, Madge Robertson (Mrs. Kendal), Henrietta Hodson, George Rignold, and Charles Coghlan.

It was during my stay at Bristol that Charles Dillon, a well-known leading actor of those days, came to play Belphegor, in which he was renowned. I was chosen to act the boy Henri, Belphegor's son. While I rehearsed the part, I was so fortunate as to move the manager to tears. When the night came, the applause was tremendous and the success assured. Let me here add an opinion on emotional acting which I expressed many years afterwards in a magazine article:

“The performance of a moving situation, without the true ring of sensibility in the actor, must fail to affect any one. A break in the voice must be brought about naturally, and by a true appreciation of the sentiment, or what does it become? I can only compare it to a bell with a wooden tongue—it makes a sound, but there it ends. I cannot simulate suffering without an honest sympathy with it. I hold that without great nervous sensibility no one can act pathos. It would be a casket with the jewel absent. The voice in emotion must be prompted by the heart; and if that is ‘out of tune and harsh,’ why then, indeed, the voice is ‘like sweet bells jangled.’ I was once much impressed by a small child’s criticism. He watched for a long time, silently and attentively, a scene of great emotion between two people. When asked what he thought of it, he answered, ‘I like that one best.’ ‘Why?’ ‘She speaks like telling the truth, the other speaks like telling lies.’ What criticism can be finer? One was acting straight from the heart, the other from not even next door but one to it.”

Charles Dillon’s Belphegor was a truly fine performance, and he said to me, “Good girl! If ever I have a London theatre, I shall give you an engagement.” He became manager of the Lyceum soon afterwards, and kept his word, sending me an offer to play my old part. So frightened was I at the bare thought of appearing in London, that I told Mr. Chute if he would only give me ever so

little more salary, I would remain at Bristol. But he, knowing that it was important for me to make a successful *début* in London, and believing also that I should take a step up the ladder of fame, out of kindness refused.

How big London looked! I felt as if the houses were going to fall on us; and in the vast city, with its turmoil, there seemed to be no room for me. A restless, crowded, get-one-before-the-other city—I felt it an impertinence to try for a place in its rushing stream of humanity. My salary was very modest, but things were cheaper then than they are now. When I went to rehearsal, everything around me looked so grand that I felt ashamed of my poor country clothes. I had never before seen so many people together upon a stage, and felt as solitary and chilled as a fireless room in winter. At rehearsal I gradually became more accustomed to the large theatre. The stage-manager—an able actor of those days, but a disagreeable man—was always harsh to me, calling me to account, in the roughest way, for every small mistake. As a set-off to his unkindness, let me recall a happier memory. It was then that I first became acquainted with Mr. J. L. Toole, since which time our long and affectionate friendship continued until he was released from what might for ten years have been called a living death. Although he had acted before in London, he still had his fame to make, and was engaged for the comic part in *Belphegor*. During the rehearsals he would often cheer me with some kindly joke, and at the end of the principal scene would whisper, with a merry smile, “Twenty pounds a week insisted upon, I think, after your first appearance.”

It was entirely through an accident—how often they determine the chief events in life!—that I first acted in London in burlesque. One morning during a rehearsal, news came that the lady who was cast for Perdita, the little “Royal Milkmaid” in William Brough’s extravaganza of *A Winter’s Tale*, had been

taken ill. Mrs. Dillon came hurriedly to me with the part, saying, "My dear child, we are in a dreadful fix. I know the notice is short, but you must do it."

I had to learn both words and music in a few days. Knowing something of music, I found little difficulty so far; but my voice was then weak, and I was terribly nervous, and feared that a failure would destroy any favourable effect I might produce in *Belphegor*. My troubles were not lessened when I was told that I must provide my own dress. I went home with the dreadful news to my mother, who said in her comforting way, "I can manage something out of material which I have by me. Study your part, think only of that, and I will make your dress myself."

Next morning I trotted to rehearsal with a light heart, feeling even strong enough to brave the stage-manager! I sang the music correctly, but my small voice could scarcely be heard with a large band. My enemy stopped me. "Come, come, this won't do! If you don't sing better than this, you must be taken out of the part." Upon which the conductor, who saw my troubled face, stopped the band, and said to my *bête noire*, "Are you the musical director here, sir, as well as the stage-manager? Allow me to know whether Miss Wilton is right or wrong. Her voice is not strong, but it is true to time and tune; and I wish I could say the same for every one concerned in the piece" (a movement of approval from the orchestra). "Now, Miss Wilton, you are too much distressed to sing again this morning, so we will miss your duets, and try them again to-morrow. When your part of the music comes, the band shall be more *piano*, and then you will be heard beautifully. We'll astonish them yet." The tears rolled down my cheeks, and my heart was too full to speak. My kind friend! how I looked for a smile from him whenever I came upon the stage!

At last the opening night arrived. When Mr. Dillon as Belphegor, Mrs. Dillon as Madeline, his

wife, with a little girl in the cart, Mr. Toole at the back of it, beating a drum, and I seated like a boy on the horse, came on to the stage, there was a tremendous reception—of course for Mr. Dillon, the rest of us being more or less unknown. At the end of the act, where my best scene occurred with Mr. Dillon, the applause was very prolonged, and there was a great call. I waited, hoping and expecting to be taken before the curtain by Mr. Dillon; but my friend the stage-manager turned round to me sharply, saying, "Now then, Miss Wilton, go to your room." I walked slowly away towards the dressing-rooms; Mr. Dillon came off. I listened. Another loud call; he went on again alone. I reached my room, where my mother was anxiously waiting to know how I had succeeded; and, determined not to let her see how distressed I was, I laughed and said, "All right, mother; it has gone beautifully." Then the call-boy came running along the corridor, shouting, "Miss Wilton!—Miss Wilton!—make haste! Mr. Dillon says you must go on before the curtain." Away I went, almost on wings, in case I should be too late, and heard the welcome sound from the public: "Miss Wilton!—Miss Wilton!" I went on *alone*—my little figure on that big stage, with no one by my side, and no one's hand to help me. When I ran back to the dressing-room and threw my arms round my mother's neck, I felt I had made a success.

As Perdita, a faded photograph tells me, I looked very nice, with my hair hanging loose over my shoulders, a pretty wreath of blush roses, a charming little dress of white cashmere, and a bunch of roses at my waist. My warm reception was confirmed when I reappeared; at the end I was again called before the curtain, and had flowers enough thrown to me to fill my little green and silver milkpail. The following encouraging words from *The Morning Post*, it may be guessed, were highly valued, and as welcome as many elaborate criticisms of my later work were to be in the future:



“Miss M. Wilton is a young (*very* young) lady quite new to us, but her natural and pathetic acting as the boy Henri showed her to possess powers of no ordinary character, which fully entitled her to the recalls she obtained. She appeared also as Perdita, the ‘Royal Milkmaid,’ and made still further inroads into the favour of the audience; indeed, anything more dangerous to throw in the way of a juvenile prince it were difficult to imagine. She is a charming *débutante*, sings prettily, acts archly, dances gracefully, and is withal of a most bewitching presence.”

That fine actor of the past, Benjamin Webster, who was then lessee of the old Adelphi Theatre, offered me an engagement in the following season, which I readily accepted; but, as this was not to commence for three months, it allowed me to go for a little time to Mr. Buckstone at the Haymarket. There I met with every consideration and encouragement from the distinguished company, which included, I remember, Mr. Buckstone, Mr. Chippendale, Mr. Howe, Mr. William Farren, Mr. Compton, and Miss Reynolds. The last became in after-years the wife of the great criminal lawyer, Sir Henry Hawkins, afterwards Lord Brampton.

I made my appearance as Cupid in an extravaganza written by the accomplished and delightful Frank Talfourd. I made a decided hit in my part, and was very happy. My share in the music, too, was successful, my voice, I fancy, growing stronger as my heart grew lighter.

Frank Talfourd, the son of Judge Talfourd, the author of *Ion*, was a man of delicate constitution, and was constantly upbraided by his friends for not taking more care of himself. One bleak, cold, wintry day he was met in the Strand by his brother author, Robert Brough, who was so distressed at seeing Talfourd not wrapped up that he told him in strong terms how wrong it was to himself, and how unkind to his friends. Brough insisted that he must wear thick woollen undervests, and, to make

sure of his doing so, took him into a neighbouring shop, and asked for some to be shown to them. The man produced samples, some of which were of a light grey colour, others brown. Talfourd ordered some light ones, whereupon the assistant shook his head. "I should prefer the brown, sir, if I were you." "Why?" asked Talfourd, "are they better made, or of finer material?" "No, sir," was the answer; "they are all equal in quality." "Then why do you so strongly recommend the brown ones?" "Well, sir," said the man, indicating the grey vests, "*those* will want washing sometimes"; then, pointing earnestly to the brown vests, he exclaimed, "but *these*——!" Frank Talfourd loved to tell this story.

I regretfully left the Haymarket, where I had been so happy; and all the more when I found out that I had little to do at the Adelphi, there being many established favourites of the public in the company. Benjamin Webster (a host in himself), the celebrated comedians Edward Wright and Paul Bedford, Miss Woolgar, Madame Celeste (whom I had not met since I acted the child in *Green Bushes* with her in a country theatre), and Mary Keeley (afterwards the wife of Albert Smith, the brilliant entertainer, and who inherited a share of her mother's genius) are the principal names I recall. I once was one of a party which paid a visit to Mr. Wright at his model farm near Surbiton, the most complete and interesting thing of the kind I ever saw, and remember how he imposed on my over-credulous nature by telling me, with a serious face, that all his guinea-pigs had, during the previous night, eaten off their own tails.

Wright and Paul Bedford were always closely associated in pieces written especially to bring them together, the latter being the butt of the former, as in later years he was of Toole. Only quite old playgoers will recall Bedford's enormous body surmounted by a face very like a kitchen clock, and his perpetual "I believe you, my boy!" In a

little amateur manuscript magazine, written by mutual friends for my amusement, and which I laugh at now sometimes, the contributors happily numbering H. J. Byron, are some remarks he wrote about Paul Bedford, among other comic "Answers to (imaginary) Correspondents":

"We beg to state that we never give any information about actors; but as you say you have taken us in ever since we came out, we will, for once in a way, gratify your curiosity by giving a concise history of Mr. Paul Bedford. His father was an undertaker in a large way, and his mother was, of course, a *pall*-bearer. In early life he mixed much with mutes, and later on he mixed a good deal with liquids. He was so very sheepish when young that his parents thought of bringing him up to the 'baa,' but he always preferred the stage to the *pen*. He was very young as a child, but as he advanced in years he grew older. He grew so exceedingly fat, that his figure has been frequently known to fill the house. He had one severe illness, when he got up thin, but eventually came down plump. He has lost four double teeth, and is marked with a door-key in the small of his back—not that at first sight it is very easy to determine where the small is. He parts his hair from ear to ear, and takes his annual cold in the head every twelfth of October. He has several children, who take after their parent; but as the parent generally finishes his glass, it is needless to say that they take very little after him. He is partial to dumb animals, and keeps two hedgehogs and a highly trained tortoise in his hind pocket. He is of a mechanical turn of mind, and once invented a machine for extracting the winkle from its tortuous shell. He offered it for four thousand pounds to the Government, who, however, preferred a pin and rejected the invention. He may be seen between the hours of seven and eleven every evening, except Sundays, when he goes out of town to visit an aged grandson. He eats heartily when in spirits, and is

seldom empty when in full health. He takes snuff, and sneezes twice regularly every birthday. He will be fourteen next April, if not thrown back by illness. *Paulo post future. Verb. sap. Jam satis. Whack row de row; such is life.*"

As I have little else to tell of these early days at the Adelphi Theatre, it may be amusing to relate something of a then well-known member of the company—Robert (always known as "Bob") Romer. He belonged to a good family and was a connection of Lord Justice Romer. Although not an important actor, he was such an oddity that everybody had an affection for him. The management rarely entrusted him with more than a few lines, and when a new play was about to be produced, some friend would delight in asking him what his part would be in it. His reply was always the same: "A—what have I got to do? Oh—a—nothing—a—at all—in the first and second acts—and—a—next to nothing—in the last." He spoke in quaint, rapid jerks, and, after a slight pause, his words would seem to try to get one before the other. I remember meeting him one morning when he had just left the theatre after rehearsing in a new piece. As I saw his portly figure, I could not resist asking the well-worn question, "What have you got to do in the new play, Mr. Romer?" "A—a—what—have I—got to do? Oh—a—the old story—a few—idiotic lines—and exit. In the last—piece but one—I—a—was—a magistrate—nothing to do but—wear a wig—and—a—take it off again. In the next—I was—a—a—rustic—nothing to do—but—to drink the health of the Squire—in an empty jug—shout out 'Hurray'—laugh 'Ha! ha!'"—and go off—with a noisy crowd. A—in this piece—I play—an Alligator." "A what, Mr. Romer?" "An Alligator—curious—line of business. I'm discovered—a—at the beginning in a tank. All I have to say is 'Tan—ter—ran—tan—tan!'" I don't appear again till the last scene, when I say, 'Whack—fal-la!' It won't—a—tax the brain much!"

One more story of this quaint old gentleman will not, I hope, bore the reader. I remember an amusing scene occurring one morning as I arrived at the stage-door to attend a rehearsal, when I heard Mr. Romer questioning the hall-porter with a mysterious and puzzled expression on his face. I must first explain that on the previous day a little dinner had been given to him by a few friends which was kept up until ten o'clock, for Bob had not to appear on the stage before eleven, just to act one of his celebrated "next to nothing" parts. He had partaken rather freely of the wine, and was somewhat unsteady. When he awoke on the following morning, he had a vague recollection of the dinner, but, for the life of him, could not remember anything that happened afterwards. As I arrived at the stage-door, a conversation to this effect was going on between the old actor and the hall-porter: "A—good house—last night, Richardson?" "Yes, sir, *very* good house." "A—nothing—went wrong at all?" "Nothing, sir." "A—how did the farce go?" "Not so well as usual, I was told, sir." "Not so well, how's that?" "I did hear, sir, that it were 'issed." "Bless my soul! Was Mr.—a—Webster in the theatre?" "He had gone 'ome, sir." "Is he here this morning?" "Yes, sir, just arrived." "A—did he—ask for me?" "No, sir." "About last night,—a—*was I here?*"

It was decided to pull the old Adelphi down, and build what was the foundation of the present handsome theatre in its place. This set me free, and I signed an engagement with Miss Swanborough to act under her management at the Strand Theatre. I had played the God of Love again in an extravaganza, *Cupid and Psyche*, and then resigned his quiver. When I lost the name of Cupid, the epithet "Little" for a long while took its place, for I was in turn the *Little* Milkmaid, the *Little* Fairy, the *Little* Treasure, the *Little* Savage, the *Little* Sentinel, the *Little* Devil, and the *Little* Don Giovanni. My

acceptance of this offer was an important step in my career, as from its commencement until I became a manager I was chiefly associated with the Strand Theatre, and was doomed to appear in a long line of "burlesque boys"—which, in the words of the immortal Mr. Eccles, "was none o' my choosing." My circumstances, however, would not permit me to pick and choose, and I was thankful. Miss Swanborough, who had held a leading comedy position at the Haymarket Theatre, and whose friendship I still enjoy, never failed to make the members of her company happy; to her reign of management I always look back with bright recollections.

It was then that I made the acquaintance, which soon ripened into friendship, of Henry James Byron, the celebrated author of the brilliant series of Strand burlesques. He was quite a young man then, with a marked inheritance of the beauty of his gifted kinsman—for it may not be generally known that he was a lineal descendant of the illustrious poet's family, as reference to "Burke" will show. He, as one may imagine his great relative to have been, was a Bohemian to the core. Talking one day at dinner on this subject, when eating heartily of turkey, he said, "I'm quite ashamed, but I must have some more of that bird." Mrs. Byron, as he was helped, remarked, "My dear Harry, really you'll be ill! How greedy you are!" He laughed and replied, "It's all in honour of the family motto, '*Greedy (crede) Byron!*'"

My first part at the Strand Theatre was Pippo, in his burlesque *The Maid and the Magpie*, which proved an immense success, and I established myself as a leading favourite. It was not until the *Life of Charles Dickens* was published that I knew his opinion of this performance. Dickens had written years before, in a letter to John Forster, these words:

"I went to the Strand Theatre, having taken a stall beforehand, for it is always crammed. I really

wish you would go to see *The Maid and the Magpie* burlesque there. There is the strangest thing in it that ever I have seen on the stage—the boy Pippo, by Miss Wilton. While it is astonishingly impudent (must be, or it couldn't be done at all), it is so stupendously like a boy, and unlike a woman, that it is perfectly free from offence. I never have seen such a thing. She does an imitation of the dancing of the Christy Minstrels—wonderfully clever—which, in the audacity of its thorough-going, is surprising. A thing that you *cannot* imagine a woman's doing at all; and yet the manner, the appearance, the levity, impulse, and spirits of it are so exactly like a boy, that you cannot think of anything like her sex in association with it. I never have seen such a curious thing, and the girl's talent is unchallengeable. I call her the cleverest girl I have ever seen on the stage in my time, and the most singularly original."

Charles Dickens's being impressed with my likeness to a boy reminds me that on the first night I acted in *The Middy Ashore*, one of the staff came up to me at the wings and said, "Beg pardon, young sir, you must go back to your seat; no strangers are allowed behind the scenes."

The company included a fine actor of the old school, James Bland—"Papa Bland," as he was familiarly called in the theatre—who had been so long associated with Planché's extravaganzas in the days of Madame Vestris, and played monarchs in so many of them as to be named the "King of Burlesque." When he played Fernando Villabella he was old and ailing. One night, on arriving at the theatre, he was observed to be very ill, and to stagger on getting out of his cab. He was led into the porter's hall, and within half an hour he was dead. His sad end cast a gloom over us all, for we were fond of the kindly old gentleman. There was no one prepared to take his place, and what was done that evening I can't remember; but Mr. Byron generously came to the rescue and played the part

himself the next night, when he introduced a couplet in the scene with his daughter, played by Miss Oliver, whose name, it must be remembered, was *Martha*, although by her intimate friends she was always called *Patty*.

The burlesque was so popular that it seemed as if the audience, night after night, had never moved from their seats, so many faces were familiar. It will be understood by this that many frequenters of the theatre, these *revenants*, as they call them in Paris, knew the piece practically by heart, as a modern audience at the Gaiety or Daly's Theatre knows a "musical comedy" now, and, whenever a new sentence was introduced, detected it immediately. The effect can be imagined when, on this particular night, Mr. Byron added the following lines in the scene with Miss Oliver, where, as her long-lost father, he is trying to bring himself back to her recollection :

"Jujubes, oranges, and cakes I too did give her,  
*Pâté de foie gras*, which means *Patty O'liver*."

Before I tell you what else I have to say about the old Strand days, let me recall names of prominent actresses who have played with success in burlesque, for that sometimes abused side of stage-life has its power and value as a training. Since those days, however, although burlesque may not have fallen off, perhaps some of the dresses have; many of which might be described as beginning too late and ending too soon. I remember at once the names of Mrs. Keeley, Miss Herbert, Miss Woolgar, Mrs. Charles Mathews, Kate and Ellen Terry, Madge Robertson, Ada Cavendish, Fanny Josephs, Henrietta Hodson, Ellen Farren, and Mrs. John Wood, while among our foreign friends I can at least mention Helena Modjeska and Jane Hading.

So far as I can tax a memory as imperfect about dates as my husband's is accurate, it was after I had been a season at the Strand Theatre that I had the good fortune to attract the notice of a lady who was



once, as Miss Foote, a distinguished actress, but whom I knew only as the Dowager Countess of Harrington. She wrote to me to say that she had been several times to see me act, and that she felt obliged to tell me of the impression I had made upon her, asking "to be allowed to call on me." I was, of course, delighted.

My father had known her slightly when she was at her zenith, and would often speak of her as one of the loveliest and most amiable of women. To me she became a true friend, and as time went on seemed more and more endeared to me. She must have been very beautiful when young, being still extremely handsome as an old lady. She was as good, too, as she was handsome; and I can never forget her kindness to me. When I was once very ill with an attack of bronchitis, she would, day after day, sit by my bedside reading to me, and would bring with her all the delicacies she could think of; and when I had sufficiently recovered, she sent me to the seaside to recruit my health. For all the kindness she bestowed on me and mine my gratitude is indelibly written on my heart. She gave me a pretty portrait of herself, and by it one can see how lovely she must have been. Among her other gifts was a beautiful old-fashioned diamond and ruby ring, which she told me was given to her by the Earl (who was then Lord Petersham) when he was engaged to be married to her. She always called me by my second name, "Effie," and all her letters to me were so addressed. She rarely failed to be present on the first night of a new piece in which I acted, and if by chance prevented, would send old Payne, her butler, who had been her faithful servant for many years, and he, in the morning, was expected to go to his mistress with a full account of my performance. I recall many a happy visit to Richmond Terrace, and until her last illness I had no better friend than Lady Harrington.

I will not weary the reader with a long account of all the burlesque parts I played, but in running

through the list will pause to say something of somebody else.

The next "boy" was Sir Walter Raleigh in *Kenilworth*, in which Mrs. Selby was our "Good Queen Bess." She made her first entrance on board a "penny steamer." Being a very tall, large woman, as she stood on the paddle-box, looking bigger than the steamer, she caused great laughter; when she prepared to land, I took off my cloak and (repeating history, or legend) placed it on the ground for the Queen to stand upon.

"Because, your Majesty, should I e'er wish to pawn it I'll tell my uncle I've had a sovereign on (awn) it!"

The leading comedians were John Clarke and the inimitable James Rogers—always known as "Jimmy" by his playmates. They were great friends and favourites, but "little Clarke" suffered torments from the pangs of jealousy which Rogers took a fiendish delight in rousing. I could tell many stories about them in those far-off days, but now they would have little value. Clarke's heavy voice and manner were altogether different from Jimmy's, whose voice was light and thin. Clarke had a slow and ponderous way of speaking, with a kind of gruff drawl, while his rival's delivery was rapid and comically jerky. They differed, too, in features. Clarke's face was long, with a large nose, while Rogers had a small, round face, with a decided *nez retroussé*. They were really attached to each other, and, as happens with barristers after a "keen encounter of their tongues," often walked from the theatre arm in arm.

The next burlesque was *William Tell*, in which I played Albert. There were also parodies of *Esmeralda*, the *Colleen Bawn*, and *Orpheus and Eurydice*—with those admirable actors, George Honey and David James; also of the old melodrama, *The Miller and his Men*, described by its joint authors, Talfourd and Byron, as a burlesque *mealy-drama*. This time I was relegated to the stables,

as I had to play a groom, Karl, or, in the words of the authors, "An English Tiger, from the wild jungles of Belgravia." Grindoff, the miller, "and the leader of a very brass band of most unpopular performers, with a thorough base accompaniment of at least fifty vices," was played by Charlotte Saunders, who, had she been taller and gifted with a stronger voice, might have shone as a leading actress in comedy and drama.

The rival comedians, Clarke as a virtuous peasant, Rogers as a forlorn old woman, of course had their little troubles during the run, especially on the last night of it. Rogers slipped off the stage towards the end, and as Clarke was speaking his final lines, just before the general chorus, a ripple of laughter ran through the house. Clarke mistook this for a tribute to himself, and was beaming with smiles, when suddenly a loud thunder-clap, and then a slow, tremulous, and rumbling noise was heard, followed by a roar of laughter. Clarke turned round, wondering what on earth was the matter, and saw Jimmy dressed as the ghost of Ravina, in a long white robe, a cap with an enormous frill, a pale, sad face, and carrying a lighted bedroom candle, rising through the clouds to the "ghost melody" from *The Corsican Brothers*. I need not say that not another word of the play or a note of the finale was heard. When the curtain fell, Jimmy quietly remarked that he had arranged with the conductor of the orchestra and the carpenters a little surprise for the last night, feeling sure that it would greatly amuse the audience, and, above all, delight Clarke!

In *Aladdin, or the Wonderful Scamp*, the personation of that promising young gentleman—who was both a "lively youth" and a "sad boy"—fell to me. All the Strand favourites were engaged in it. Night after night there sat in the front row of the pit a stout, bald-headed man, who appeared to be a warm admirer of "little Clarke," to whom he

was a great comfort. Whenever Clarke said or did anything, the stout man would applaud and laugh louder than any one else, and call out vigorously "Bravo, Clarke!"

This happened so often that we began to tease Clarke about it. He dearly loved praise; but when he found his bald-headed admirer a little injudicious in his approval, he became uneasy. One night the owner of the hairless head waited at the stage-door to see Clarke leave the theatre. The comedian recognised his friend the moment he raised his hat and revealed the familiar head shining under a gas-light. This was a moment not to be lost. "I appreciate more than I can say," said Clarke, "your kind attention, and it is, I assure you, a welcome sound to me to hear your friendly voice. But, unfortunately, there are people who are ever ready to ridicule over-favouritism. Do you think you could arrange to say 'Bravo, Clarke!' less frequently and not in so marked a manner? Let it on no account cease altogether, only give it with more judgment." The man replied, "Certainly, sir, of course I will." The next evening the bald head was again the centre-piece of beauty in the pit. All through the first scene the well-known voice was silent; one could see an anxious look gradually becoming more and more fixed upon Clarke's face. At last, when Rogers, Clarke, and myself sang a trio which ended the scene, the familiar voice shouted repeatedly, to Clarke's horror, "Bravo, Rogers!" Clarke's expression caught the eye of Jimmy, who laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks, and it was with difficulty we managed to get through the scene. Throughout the evening this man, at unexpected moments, would cry out, "Bravo, Rogers!" giving, of course, fresh impetus to our laughter.

During these merry, early days it became manifest that James Rogers was fast failing in health. He suffered so much at times that it was painful to see him waiting for his cue to go on the stage; but the

welcome which always greeted him would be such a stimulant that, after a while, he would act as if nothing were amiss. How little does an audience know what actors fight against in the exercise of duty—what pain they suffer bodily and mentally in order to go through their work! A true artist will never break faith with the public while able to stand or speak. There is something in the atmosphere of a theatre which seems to give one, for the time, almost superhuman strength. I have been taken from a sick-bed wrapped in blankets, and have known acute pain to disappear; and the mere fact of one's thoughts running through another channel for some hours has frequently helped a speedy recovery. I have seen dear Jimmy Rogers rally in a way that made us wonder; he would be so quaintly funny, so sadly comic, that we could not resist smiling, forgetting for the moment how ill he was. There was a complete unconsciousness of his own power to make one laugh, which was more droll than I can describe. It was irresistible: a sad face with a curious undercurrent of humour—an odd, quiet look of surprise when the audience roared at him; the more sadly surprised he appeared, the more they laughed. He was the strangest mixture of combined fun and suffering I can remember. When the end came, his last words were, "The farce is over—drop the curtain." Poor Jimmy! No one regretted his death more than his old friend and rival, John Clarke.

During my Strand days I also had the advantage of appearing in Planché's charming comedy, *Court Favour*, in *Unlimited Confidence*, and *The Little Treasure*, as well as a favourite character, Nan, in *Good for Nothing*; nor must I omit a brief reference to the Shakespearian Tercentenary. When that great event was celebrated, the theatres united in honouring the poet's memory, either complete plays or selections from them being acted throughout the country.

The Strand Theatre contribution was scenes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the balcony scene

from *Romeo and Juliet*, in which I appeared as Juliet. The latter created quite a sensation, and was so successful that it was repeated for eight nights. I received such praise and so many complimentary letters from good judges that it will be understood how more than ever anxious I became to slip out of burlesque as quickly as possible. Some thought me wise, others mad; and, while they were deciding between the two, I determined to follow my own instincts and the urgent appeal to Mrs. Dombey "to make an effort." Some time afterwards I heard with pride that among those warmest in their praise of my acting as Juliet was Mr. (now Sir) William S. Gilbert.

In the summer the Strand company paid a brief visit to Liverpool, where I first met my husband, who now shall relate his own early struggles, before we tell the story of our management.

In these days of large salaries, of which we were the pioneers, it will be interesting if I end this chapter by telling that my first salary in London was three pounds a week; that at the Strand Theatre, where, without undue vanity, I may claim to have been the chief attraction, it never exceeded nine pounds; and that the highest salary paid me in those far-off times was fifteen pounds, when I played *The Little Treasure* for a few weeks at the Adelphi Theatre.

"What do you think of that, my cat?  
What do you think of that, my dog?"



BOYHOOD



GIRLHOOD





## CHAPTER II

### BOYHOOD

“ I ran it through, even from my boyish days.”

AN onlooker now in the field where for many years I was a diligent toiler—both a sower and a reaper—I often ponder on the work in which the happiest part of my life was spent, and will try to utter some random thoughts. I will tell something of my boyhood and my early experiences as a country actor, before proceeding to matters of more consequence, dating from the time Marie Wilton and I first met, and linked our lives and fortunes.

I owe much to the gift of memory, which is perhaps remarkable in regard to dates and things theatrical; for even after so long a lapse of time it would be but little trouble to me to answer, arming my questioner with a file of *The Times*, what part I was playing in any month of any year between the summers of 1865 and 1885, which made up jointly our twenty years of management of a theatre. In what I write I will follow the words of the brightest mind that has illumined England, whose wondrous works have made the stage eternal:

“ Nothing extenuate,  
Nor set down aught in malice.”

If I disobey this injunction, let it be rather in the first than in the second behest. I will try not to give way to egotism, for my self-esteem may be

fairly expressed in the words of Captain Hawtree, in *Caste* (the part, perhaps, which first made me known to London playgoers of those days): "I don't pretend to be a particularly good sort of fellow, nor a particularly bad sort of fellow; I suppose I am about the average standard sort of thing."

I was born on Friday, May 14, 1841, in the same year as the King and other distinguished men well known to His Majesty, some of whom have honoured me with their friendship. In diplomacy I may name Lord Cromer, Sir Frank Lascelles, Sir Edwin Eger-ton, and Sir Wilfrid Laurier; in the Navy, Admiral of the Fleet Sir John Fisher; in the Army, Field-Marshal Lord Grenfell and Sir Frederick Maurice; in the Church, the Bishop of Ripon (Dr. Boyd-Carpenter) and Archdeacon Wilberforce; in the law, Sir Edward Clarke; in sport, Lord Dunraven, Sir Frederick Johnstone, and Mr. Gordon Bennett; in agriculture, Lord Blyth; in literature, Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace; in painting, Sir George Reid; in music, Sir Walter Parratt; in the drama, my late friend Coquelin and M. Mounet-Sully; while I may add the names of President Fallières, M. Clemenceau, Lord Meath, Lord Gosford, Lord Greville, Lord Erskine, Sir Samuel Hoare, Sir Cuthbert Quilter, Sir James Pender, Sir George Paget, Sir Reginald Talbot, and Sir Courtenay Ilbert to the list. Altogether, I think I am justified in describing 1841 as a good vintage year. The weeks of my age I can count every Wednesday by the number recorded on the cover of *Punch*, which publication almost immediately followed me into the world. I have known all its editors: Mark Lemon, Shirley Brooks, Tom Taylor, Francis Burnand, and Owen Seaman.

I was very nearly christened Julian (my mother's name being Julia); the wish was only abandoned, I afterwards learnt, in the church, when I was given the odd name of "Squire," after my paternal grandfather, whose first name it also was. He was a Yorkshireman, and had been tutor to the then heir

to the dukedom of Devonshire; he was a profound Latin scholar, even airing his learning at the font, for although he allowed his eldest son (who, after serving King George III. as a midshipman in the Royal Navy, was ordained as a clergyman, and, many years later, officiated at my marriage at the little church in the Avenue Road dedicated to St. Stephen) to escape with the simple name of John, he called my father Secundus and his next son Tertius.

I was surrounded by comfort and plenty in my childhood, and have remembrances now of my father, on his horse, and wearing a blue coat with gilt buttons, and can recall early morning visits to a greenhouse, my little hand held lovingly in his, and many a romp round a big mulberry tree. But such pleasant days—chastened by one dreadful recollection of a big clock in the hall, past which I always hurried, in the fear that some one was hidden inside its roomy case—were not my fate for long. My father was stricken with a painful malady which ended in his death, and with him died nearly all his income. The dreams of public school and college, which my mother shared, were never to be realised; I was moderately educated at private schools in England and France. I can remember, during my holidays, going to the Exhibition of 1851, and being sent for home to see the funeral of the great Duke of Wellington, part of the wreck of my father's property being a small house in Fleet Street, near Temple Bar which on that solemn day was draped in black and bore big urns of burning incense. The house I speak of was long ago pulled down and absorbed in the palatial premises of an insurance office; but at that time my mother's tenant was a tailor, who offered her seats in his shop window to see a procession which stirred the English people in a way that they but seldom experience. While abroad I recollect the birth of the ill-starred Prince Imperial; and, returning to England soon afterwards, I saw the general illuminations in celebration of peace

after the Crimean War. This I mention because, strange to say, I remember well being blocked for some very long time just in front of the house I occupied twenty years afterwards in Cavendish Square.

I will try to call to mind what I have seen in early days. The "twopenny" and "general" postmen, with their royal-blue or scarlet coats, looking indeed very like the guards of the stage-coaches, I remember quite clearly; as I do the policemen in their blue tail-coats, their hats with shiny tops, their duck trousers, and white gloves. The foot-guards, clad in swallow-tails, with epaulettes and cross-belts, white trousers, and giant bear-skins, I picture readily in Hyde Park, where then, at the keepers' lodges, boys and girls invested pennies in curds-and-whey or hardbake. The Quakers in their quaint clothing I also recollect; and I remember, too, the boys who swarmed the chimneys and wore brass badges on their caps. The sweep's street-cry, the dustman's bell, the old-clothes man's husky call, as he tramped along under the burden of his bag and pyramid of hats, the song of the "buy-a-broom" girls, all formed part of the music of my childhood. I can just recall the statue of the Iron Duke at Hyde Park Corner when it was placed there, and being shown the Thames Tunnel soon after its completion. And I remember going to Blackwall by the Rope Railway, the Colonnade in Regent Street, the pens in Old Smithfield Market, the piling and strapping of luggage on the roofs of the railway carriages when we travelled by train, and the Chartist Riots of 1848, while the talk about the great criminal trials of Rush and the Mannings taught me what murder meant.

Before I end this reference to early memories, let me tell how first I knew myself to be short-sighted. One day at home, when I was a small boy, a lady who wore spectacles placed them on a table near my hand. Of course I clutched them, and at once adorned

my nose. I almost screamed, and I really cried out loud ; for the lady, like me, was very short-sighted, and I, for the first time in my life, could see ! Instead of clambering up on chairs and other furniture to find out what the pictures had to tell, they were all made clear to me, as if by magic. Remarks which had so often puzzled me about minute and distant things became, with a sort of instinct, plain to my understanding. From that time I have worn an eyeglass—and have never seen a new moon except through glass !

I had to be taken from school when still young, to cast about for a way to earn a living. I had been always “stage-struck”—my toys were little theatres, in which *The Red Rover* and *The Miller and his Men* enjoyed long runs ; while, later on, I would for years read a tragedy in preference to a novel, until I learnt from my mother a great love for the works of Dickens, the first of them to entrance me being *Nicholas Nickleby*, in which the stage episodes naturally and fiercely fanned the dramatic flame. All my pocket-money was spent at the play, but the thought of my ever being an actor was looked upon with ridicule.

The earliest glimmer of recollection I retain of amusements is of the circus at Astley’s, and of pantomimes both there and at the old Surrey Theatre. I recall, but only with a child’s remembrance, being taken to the Lyceum to see Madame Vestris, and living in the fairyland of William Beverley’s gorgeous scenery in Planché’s extravaganza *The King of the Peacocks* ; also to the Strand Theatre (then called Punch’s Playhouse) to see the waning elder Farren before he left the stage. The play was *The Vicar of Wakefield* ; Mrs. Stirling was Olivia, and Leigh Murray also acted in it. Macready I never saw ; but I do not forget as a small boy reading, with a longing to be present, the playbill of his farewell performance. I was taken to see Jullien—a wonderful-looking creature, all shirt-front and pomatum—

conduct his band at the Surrey Gardens. At the same age I can just remember seeing old Madame Tussaud seated at the inner door of the famous Waxwork Exhibition, then in Baker Street, and comparing the reality with the effigy, which I believe is still on view in its newer home in the Marylebone Road. Later, I was often at Sadler's Wells Theatre, and saw many of the simple but scholarly productions by Samuel Phelps, and witnessed most of Charles Kean's splendid revivals at the Princess's. At the Adelphi I saw Benjamin Webster, Leigh Murray, Paul Bedford, Miss Woolgar, and Madame Celeste.

My memory grows brighter at thoughts of the Olympic, where I was enthralled by an actor whom I shall never forget—Frederick Robson. I saw him often, and vividly recall his pathos in *The Porter's Knot*, his avarice as the old miser, Daddy Hardacre, his intensity as Desmarests in *Plot and Passion*, and his wonderful acting in *Payable on Demand*. To have once seen him in the last-named play is never to forget him as the distracted financier, whose fortunes are saved by the news of Waterloo, brought to him by a carrier pigeon, which he ran round the room embracing and covering with kisses in a way that provoked no smiles but only loud applause. The power of Robson on the stage was contagious, like a fever, and, take him all in all, I think he was the most remarkable actor of those days, and perhaps one of the most remarkable of any days.

At the Lyceum I saw Charles Dillon, an actor of powerful sensibility, in *Belphegor*—a fine performance. I sat that evening by my mother's side, and in the touching scene between the mountebank and his son, we little thought that the pretty girl who made us cry by her pathetic acting as the boy Henri, the part in which she first appeared in London, would one day be my wife. I still have the playbill of that performance. At the same theatre I recollect seeing Helen Faucit (Lady Martin) act Lady Macbeth,

and Pauline in *The Lady of Lyons*; and, also, Ira Aldridge, the black tragedian, play Othello. Those were the days when young theatre-goers had little ambition beyond a front seat in the pit; the days when one's toes were trodden on between the acts by horrible women who sold "apples, oranges, and ginger-beer"; the days when the bill of the play was little better than a greasy mass of printer's ink on paper two feet long.

Soon afterwards I went for a short visit to New York, partly with a dream of seeking a fortune there—a dream which I did not realise. I was thirteen days at sea, at that time an average passage, when the Cunard fleet was composed of paddle-steamers.

My brief stay was during "the fall," so I came in for the Indian summer, a far more beautiful and much longer autumnal visitation than the French *l'été de la St. Martin*, or the short gleam we sometimes get in England of St. Luke's little summer.

My stage recollections of New York include the production of a play destined to attain celebrity as *Our American Cousin*, in which I saw Sothern act Lord Dundreary for the very first time in his life. Jefferson, world-famous afterwards as Rip Van Winkle, was the Asa Trenchard. The whole performance was a very different one from that presented later at the Haymarket; but it was Dundreary who made the play—a very bad one, although through Sothern it enjoyed the greatest run then on record. Sothern, at the reading of the piece, refused his part, and only on being given *carte blanche* to "write it up" and do with it what he pleased, consented to appear in it. The odd stammer and eccentric walk which he introduced he had previously tried with success, its inspiration being really due to some antics of a troupe of nigger minstrels. The most dramatic remembrance I brought away with me was that of a sermon preached by Henry Ward Beecher at Brooklyn.

On my return to England I was present at the

Princess's Theatre when Charles Kean retired from management. *Henry VIII.* was played, with Kean as Wolsey and Mrs. Kean as Queen Catherine. There was also a farce, written by Edmund Yates, in which Ellen Terry, then a child, appeared as a little groom. The night indeed was one to remember well. Kean delivered a farewell managerial address, in which he said how he had been blamed for mounting this or that play too sumptuously, while on the other hand he was recently scolded for the simplicity of the goblets he had used in Macbeth's banqueting hall, adding in his own quaint manner, "it was the first time he ever heard that Macbeth had an eye to King Duncan's plate."

I will here mention my going to the Strand Theatre, where I again saw Marie Wilton as the hero of one of H. J. Byron's burlesques, when she was the idol of the day—at the time when Alfred Austin, now Poet Laureate, in some humorous verses, wrote of her :

"While saucy Wilton winks her wicked way,  
And says the more, the less she has to say."

I did not see the then "Young Queen of Burlesque" again until we met upon the stage when I was an actor at Liverpool.

Remembrances at the Adelphi Theatre of that fine actor Benjamin Webster still linger in my mind, as also of standard comedies at the Haymarket, played by Charles Mathews and Buckstone, Compton and Chippendale, Howe and Farren, Mrs. Charles Mathews, Mrs. Wilkins, and Miss Reynolds (afterwards Lady Brampton). I remember my rapture at *The Colleen Bawn* on one of the early nights of its brilliant career. How well I recall the acting of Dion Boucicault and his wife ("sweet Agnes," as she then was called) as Myles-na-Coppaleen and Eily O'Connor, of Miss Woolgar as Anne Chute, Mrs. Billington as Mrs. Cregan, and Edmund Falconer as Danny Mann. The three ladies named still survive.



Without dwelling longer on these recollections, I will mention an important night when I was among those who greeted a famous actor, the charm and originality of whose natural style certainly had its influence for good, I mean the romantic, but not bombastic, Charles Fechter. I saw him play *Ruy Blas* for the first time in English; this was followed soon by a revival of *The Corsican Brothers*, which I also saw produced. The first and second acts, I recollect, were then transposed, as they had been previously played by Fechter in France; the scenes in Paris, where Louis meets Château Renaud and is killed, preceding those at Fabian's home in Corsica, where he sees a vision of his brother's death.

With those two delightful evenings my early, never-to-be-forgotten visits to the play—nights that were the balm for many sad and weary days—came for ever to an end. The charm, the mystery, which had hung for years around the playhouse, and chiefly made my dreams, were soon to be dispelled. "The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces" were now to be revealed to me in all the barrenness of painted canvas; for, although in a few days I was again in a theatre, I this time entered it by the stage-door.

Often as I went to the play, dearly as I loved the theatre, until I tried to become an actor I had never known one, and very rarely had even seen one off the stage. And so it has been with many of my comrades, Henry Irving, John Hare, Charles Wyndham, W. H. Kendal, Charles Coghlan, John Clayton, Arthur Cecil, Johnston Forbes-Robertson, William Terriss, and E. S. Willard, as also with some of a later generation, a few of whose names pass at once through my mind, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, George Alexander, Cyril Maude, Arthur Bouchier, Lewis Waller, and Charles Hawtrey—all of whom, I believe were as unconnected with the theatre as I was. The law of compensation has in this way often served the stage: many men whose gifts and talents have wooed the Cinderella of the arts might, but for their lack of

means, have embarked in other callings. On the other hand, Marie Bancroft, Madge Kendal, Ellen Terry, Winifred Emery, Ellen Farren, and Mrs. John Wood were all, so to speak, brought up in theatre-land.

I got my own engagement when I was a boy of nineteen, but looking older. After I had addressed a shoal of letters to the lessees of country theatres, to most of which I received no answer, Mercer Simpson, of Birmingham, found something in my appeal, I suppose, a little removed from the ruck of such effusions, for he sent me an encouraging reply, and expressed a wish to see me. I left my home—with a heart as heavy as my purse was light—at daybreak on New Year's Day, 1861, travelling by early train to Birmingham. It was cold and bleak when I walked up New Street to the Theatre Royal, and sent in my name to the manager. I remember well my impressions of the dimly lighted theatre as I stood close to the footlights and talked my stage-struck project over, when, after kind advice, it was arranged that I might regard myself as a member of the company, with a salary of one guinea a week.

A few nights later I made my first appearance in a drama called *St. Mary's Eve*. A copy of the first playbill in which my name was printed I still possess; and I have a list of all the parts I played while in the provinces, and of the theatres in which I acted them. The plays were varied two or three times a week; a special "blood-and-thunder" *répertoire*, comprising such works as *The Bottle*, *The Lonely Man of the Ocean*, *Sweeny Todd*, *the Barber of Fleet Street*, and *Thirty Years of a Gambler's Life*, being drawn upon for Saturdays, in which I appeared as the perpetrator or victim of a wide range of the vilest crimes. The prompter was a delightful crippled old gentleman, once known as "Bath Montague," whose daughter Compton married. I was told that a brilliant career had been ruined by

the lamentable accident which caused his lameness.

The first "star" in the theatrical firmament round whom I humbly twinkled was Madame Celeste. I remember she was then spoken of as "quite an old woman," but as she died full twenty years later, before she was seventy, I thought it a good instance of the rubbish so often circulated with regard to the ages of public characters. With this accomplished actress and charming woman I played in the old Adelphi dramas—*Green Bushes* and *The Flowers of the Forest*. I next met Walter Montgomery, to my thinking an unappreciated actor, and one perhaps a little before his time.

I went for a summer season to the Cork Theatre, during the Birmingham vacation, at an advanced salary. When I arrived I found myself "billed" on the walls with the Christian name "Sydney," my unusual first name, or my way of writing it, having puzzled the theatre printer, with the result I mention. The "nickname" stuck to me for years, although its use was discontinued in 1867. On the opening night the play was *Hamlet*, in which I figured as Marcellus, Rosencrantz, the Second Player, a Priest, and Osric; strange to say, in the very same year that Charles Dickens used the following words in *Great Expectations*, when Pip describes the appearance of Mr. Wopsle as Hamlet, and speaks of a "young gentleman in the company as inconsistent, representing himself, as it were in one breath, as an able seaman, a strolling actor, a gravedigger, a clergyman, and a person of the utmost importance at a court fencing-match, on the authority of whose practised eye and nice discrimination the finest strokes were judged."

I had little time for anything but work, long hours of the night being often devoted to copying out my part from a well-thumbed book which had to be passed on to another member of the little company; while the days were spent in study and rehearsal,

for the performance was changed, or partly so, nearly every evening. It was reward enough, however, to know that the varied nature of the parts entrusted to me, and the incessant practice, did me great good; for I felt already that I might some day be an actor, and so went back to Birmingham full of hope and high spirits.

It was at this time that I first met Mr. Kendal, who was then a fair, handsome young fellow of about nineteen or twenty. I dare say he will remember, as well as I do, a certain "tea-fight" at my humble lodgings, when my guests far exceeded the number of my chairs.

I then first acted with Charles Kean, of whom I will say more later on; this led to distinct advancement and an increase of salary. I also played with that idol of my youth, Samuel Phelps. When he arrived at the theatre for rehearsal I gazed at him, I remember, with the awe which might be inspired in the most nervous of curates by the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury. His name reminds me of an anecdote connected with his brilliant services to the stage. It happened on a night when he was playing *Virginius* that the "super-master," who acts as the leader of crowds, had met with an accident, and could not fulfil his duties as First Citizen in the Forum scene, where Appius Claudius claims Virginia from her father. So the little part which leads the chorus of voices was given to the man who was second in command, who, as the time drew near, became very anxious and nervous. The words in the tragedy where *Virginius* appeals to the crowd for support against the demand of the tyrant Appius Claudius are as follows:

VIRGINIUS: Friends and citizens, your hands—  
your hands——

CROWD: They are yours, *Virginius*—they are yours.

VIRGINIUS: If ye have wives, if ye have children——

CROWD : We have—we have.

The poor nervous man, in his fright, put the cart before the horse, and the dialogue ran thus :

VIRGINIUS : Your hands—your hands.

CITIZEN : We have, Virginius—we have !

VIRGINIUS : If ye have wives, if ye have children——

CITIZEN : They are yours, Virginius—they are yours !

I remember, too, being called upon to play the Counsel for the Defence in Dion Boucicault's drama, *The Trial of Effie Deans*. The part, although appearing only in the trial scene, was very important, being played in London by the author of the *Colleen Bawn* himself, who came down for the final rehearsal. The Dion Boucicault I am alluding to is not, of course, my dear friend the present bearer of the name, but his father. When I was half-way through the scene, Boucicault, whom I then met for the first time, came quietly to me and said, "You are all wrong about this part, my dear fellow ; let me rehearse the rest of the scene for you. I can see your intelligence, and I fancy you will grasp my view of it directly." I thanked him for his kindness, and after rehearsal went away to model my performance entirely upon his, for I saw at once how right he was, and how wrong I had been. The result was a considerable success on my part, the credit of which was due to one half-hour with Boucicault.

I had arranged to go for the summer weeks to Devonport and Plymouth ; and having a few spare days, I spent them in London to see the Exhibition of that year, 1862, and so renewed my acquaintance with Dundreary, a performance which was then rapidly making Sothern's English reputation. How little I thought, as I sat then in the Haymarket Theatre, that seventeen years later I should become its lessee and rebuild it internally ! "We know what we are, but know not what we may be." I was also presented to the great-little Frederick Robson, to

whose son, a recent recruit to the Birmingham company, I had been able to show some trifling kindness. The health of that remarkable actor was already broken, for Robson died not long afterwards, when only little over forty years of age. No words of mine could do justice to my remembrance of this strange little genius, who is said to have resembled Edmund Kean in his bursts of passion, while in his comic moments he recalled memories of the greatest comedians of the past.

Young Robson and I journeyed down to Devonshire together, and during the pleasant weeks we passed there I acted all sorts of parts in every kind of play. It was at this time that I became acquainted with James Doel, who was full of anecdotes about Edmund Kean (with whom he had acted), and who lived to be the oldest actor in the world. I last saw the old man shortly before his death, when I went to Plymouth to give a reading of the *Christmas Carol* for the hospital there. At Plymouth I also met an amusing creature who might have sat to Dickens for his portrait of Mr. Lenville. His festive temperament made him a little unreliable in the text of the dramas which were a feature on Saturday nights, although very often, I dare say, his words were as good as the author's. Sometimes, however, he could remember none, and then, with amazing effrontery, he would take refuge in a stock speech, which he delivered with great solemnity to whoever might be on the stage with him at the time, no matter what the circumstances, the period or the costume of the play. Whether prince or peasant, virtuous or vicious, whether clad in sumptuous raiment or shivering in rags, it was all the same to him, and at the end of his harangue he stalked off the stage, leaving his unhappy comrades to get out of the difficulty as best they could. These were the never-changing words: "Go to; thou weariest me. Take this well-filled purse, furnish thyself with richer habiliments, and join me at my mansion straight!"

The fame of Lord Dundreary was then at its height, owing to Sothern's great success. From my early remembrance of this "creation" in New York, and having recently renewed my appreciation of its humour, I was able to imitate Sothern so closely in the character as to be thought quite remarkable. I was showing off this trick one night in Plymouth, when my manager, who was present, prevailed on me to give the imitation at the theatre. I had the satisfaction, at least, of adding greatly to the receipts, for, until it closed, the house was nightly crammed, through my impertinence, of which the chief local journal remarked :

"The principal attraction of the week has been the appearance of Lord Dundreary, who made his acquaintance with Plymouth and Devonport audiences under the most favourable circumstances. The lessee could, indeed, hardly have done better if he had engaged the original impersonator of his lordship, Mr. Sothern, for Mr. Bancroft has contrived to reproduce the character in facsimile, and his Lord Dundreary is as much like the original as it possibly could be, and has shown not only a wonderful amount of imitative talent, but an appreciation of character without which imitation would be mere mimicry, and which stamps him as an able actor."

Soon afterwards I first met Madge Robertson, then a young girl, in her early teens, but already foreshadowing the splendid career and position she has enjoyed as Mrs. Kendal. I acted in many plays with her.

How happy one was in those days !—or how happy we now think we were ! for the pleasures of life, I take it, are chiefly retrospective or anticipative. Anyway, I remember very hard, but pleasant work, leaping, perhaps on alternate nights, from John Mildmay in *Still Waters run Deep* to Fernando Villabella in the burlesque of *The Maid and the Magpie*, or from Murphy Maguire in *The Serious Family* to Beppo in *Fra Diavolo*,

While at Devonport, I received an offer from John Harris, of the Dublin Theatre Royal, to join his company in a higher position: after a severe and prolonged struggle, I succeeded in obtaining the then large salary of three pounds a week.

The Dublin company was headed by dear old Granby, an admirable actor and stage-manager, by whose help and guidance I learnt much, especially in performances of the old comedies. Early in the season we were made happy by a visit from one of the great comedians of his day, Charles Mathews, in whose brilliant company I acted for a month in a round of plays—an experience, added to unvarying help and kindness, which could not fail to have influence for good on the efforts of an ambitious young actor. I felt deeply sorry when the curtain finally fell upon his stay. The mere mention of Charles Mathews fills the memory with a store of anecdotes about him. One little one I remember, which was told me at that time by Granby, who had been a member of his company when Mathews managed Covent Garden Theatre with Madame Vestris.

At the height of his troubles, when things were going very badly, the expenses of the vast theatre being ruinous, Mathews one morning saw a ballet-girl in a dark corner of the stage crying bitterly, and evidently in pain. The ever-gay comedian at once jauntily approached her (for nothing seemingly could dash his spirits), and said cheerily, "What's the matter, my dear?" The girl sobbed in reply, "Oh, Mr. Mathews, I am in such pain! I have got such a dreadful toothache!" "Toothache," said he; "poor thing! I am so sorry. I'll let you off rehearsal; go and have the tooth out." "I can't, Mr. Mathews." "Can't?—why not?" said he. "I c-a-n't—a-f-f-o-r-d it," blubbered the girl. "Can't afford it! Nonsense!" answered Mathews. "Run round to St. Martin's Lane, where you will get rid of it for a shilling." "But I haven't got a shilling, Mr. Mathews." "Not got a shilling?" he replied



at once ; “neither have I. But come into the green-room, and I will take your tooth out myself!”

We then went from gay to grave, the Charles Mathews month being followed by four weeks with Charles Kean.

I hope my vanity will be pardoned if I relate an incident I remember after acting with him in *Much Ado about Nothing*. On the following evening I was seated in the green-room, when Kean entered dressed as Othello. He sat down, and, after staring at me some time in a way which rather frightened me, beckoned me to go near him. I advanced, fearing I might have, innocently, distressed him on the stage. To my surprise he said, “Sir, I was at the wing last night waiting to go on, and heard you give Borachio’s difficult speech in the last act. I can only say that, if I were still the lessee of a London theatre, it would be your own fault if you were not a member of my company.” The exact words were stamped upon my memory. I stammered out my thanks for this unexpected compliment, which was paid to me before a full green-room ; fortunately I was “called” almost directly for the stage, and so was able to beat a blushing retreat.

Kean, although at this time not quite fifty-two, had the appearance and manner of a much older man, and his memory was growing treacherous, especially in long soliloquies. But in spite of his failing health, there were moments of impetuous passion and wondrously effective rapid change of manner in his acting always to be remembered—notably in his scene with Tubal when he acted Shylock (said to be a reproduction of his father’s method), in the third act of *Othello*, the close of *Richard III.*, and throughout *Louis XI.* As a comedian he was superb ; witness his acting as Benedick, as Mr. Oakley in *The Jealous Wife*, and as Mephistopheles. In venturing to give this opinion, it may be worth while to recall Garrick’s advice to Jack Bannister : “You may humbug the

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town as a tragedian, but comedy is a serious thing, so don't try that just yet."

Many are the stories of Charles Kean; most of them doubtless have been often told, but perhaps one or two have escaped record. He was easily upset, when acting, by even a trifling noise. Years ago, in a seaport town he visited, a habit prevailed among the occupants of the gallery of cracking nuts throughout the performance. This played havoc with Kean when he acted there. On the following morning he called those who travelled with him together, and, after loudly bewailing his sufferings and anathematising the gallery boys, gave instructions to his followers to go into the town and buy up every nut within its walls, either in the shops or on the quays. This was done. The result for the two following evenings was perfect success, crowned by the chuckles of the tragedian.

But oh, the third night! The fruiterers, perplexed by the sudden and unaccountable demand for nuts, had sent to Covent Garden and other sources for a plentiful supply to meet its hoped-for continuance; the demand fell off, there was a glut in the local market, the nuts so deluged the town that they were sold more abundantly and cheaper than ever. Crack!—crack!—crack! was the running fire throughout the succeeding performances, and the rest of Kean's engagement was fulfilled in torment.

The carpenters of country theatres always dreaded Charles Kean's advent among them, for, in his earlier days on the stage, when he rehearsed, he would steadily go through his own scenes just as at night. During this time silence was strictly ordered to be observed all over the theatre; a creaking boot, a cough, a sneeze, the knocking of a hammer, would distress the tragedian beyond measure. It was on pain of dismissal that any carpenter or other servant caused the smallest interruption during Mr. Kean's scenes. This naturally caused much ill-humour

amongst the men, and when it became known by the carpenters that "Kean was coming," there would be various expressions of discontent. At the commencement of one particular engagement these men formed a conspiracy amongst themselves. The opening play was *Hamlet*, and they conceived a plot by which the Royal Dane might be induced to "cut short" his long soliloquies. One particular man was to place himself at the back of the gallery, being quite hidden from sight, and just as Kean began his great soliloquy was to call out in a muffled voice to an imaginary fellow-workman. This was the result:

KEAN (in slow, measured tones): To be or *not* to be (long pause)—that is the question.

VOICE (far-off in front of house, calling): Jo Attwood!

KEAN (stopping and looking in the direction, then commencing again): To be—or *not*—to—be—that is the question.

VOICE: Jo Attwood!

KEAN (bewildered and annoyed): Will somebody find Mr. Attwood? (A pause.) To be or *not* to be—that is the question.

VOICE: Jo Attwood!

KEAN: Until Mr. Attwood is found I cannot go on!

"Mr. Attwood" could *not* be found, and the voice did not cease interrupting Kean, who, at last, gave up his attempt to rehearse and went home; upon which the carpenters rejoiced in a sort of triumphant war-dance.

Charles Kean shared with England's greatest actor, David Garrick, an inordinate love of praise, even from his humblest worshippers. During his management of the Princess's Theatre one of the ballet-girls, who sometimes was given a few lines to speak, and who knew her manager's failing, used to haunt the wings and go into audible raptures over his acting; and when Kean was playing a pathetic part, tears flowed down the cheeks of the cunning girl,

who eventually attracted personal notice from the actor. Soon she found herself promoted to a superior position. Her advancement, of course, was noted by her companions, and to her greatest friend among them she told her secret, advising the girl to follow her example. Nothing loth, number two appeared at the wings, and almost howled with grief through Kean's chief scenes, when, to her amazement, he strode angrily by her, then, pointing her out, exclaimed, "Who is that idiot?" *She* did not improve her position, for, since the advice of her knowing friend, the bill had been changed, and her manager was appearing in one of his most successful *comic* parts.

Kean was a wonderful instance of the effect of resolute courage. For years he was laughed at and ridiculed by a large section of the press, and treated with undignified cruelty by the withering pen of Douglas Jerrold. Through indomitable pluck he outlived it all, and heard himself publicly spoken of, when his great services to the stage were acknowledged at a public banquet—Mr. Gladstone, who was at Eton with him, being among the speakers—as having "made the theatre into a gigantic instrument of education for the instruction of the young, and edification, as well as instruction, of those of maturer years."

The last time I saw Charles Kean I was on my way to pay a professional visit to Sir William Fergusson, when, close to Hanover Square, I had to stand aside while the figure of an evidently dying man was lifted from a carriage and carried into an adjoining house. Among the idlers and the passers-by who stopped to stare at him, I alone recognised all that was left of the once famous actor. I already knew him to be ill; but this glance showed him to be stricken with mortal sickness. He looked, indeed, very like his own powerful realisation of death in the closing scene of *Louis XI.*

Shortly afterwards he was laid to rest in the

little churchyard at Catherington, in Hampshire, where he had made his mother's grave, having left instructions that he should be placed with her to whom, in her lifetime, he had been so devoted a son.

I recall the feeling of pride and importance when my first offer to join a London company reached me—it came from the St. James's Theatre. After carefully thinking it over, I decided on having the advantage of more country practice, and declined the flattering proposal. Many good parts continued to fall to my lot, both in dramas and in old comedies. On a command night, given by the then Lord-Lieutenant, Lord Carlisle, we played *A Cure for the Heart-ache* and *To Parents and Guardians*. As Alfred Wigan's celebrated character of the old French usher was, to my amazement, entrusted to my youthful care, I could not complain of neglect in the way of variety.

G. V. Brooke, to my delight, also visited Dublin during my stay. Though he was but a wreck of his former greatness, I was proud to have the privilege of supporting him in a range of second parts in the plays and tragedies he acted. I wonder what a young actor nowadays would say if called upon to study and play, within a fortnight, the following parts: Cassio in *Othello*, Gratiano in *The Merchant of Venice*, Wellborn in *A New Way to pay Old Debts*, De Mauprat in *Richelieu*, Leonardo Gonzago in *The Wife*, and Icilius in *Virginius*. I remember well using my best powers of cajolery to induce old Freeman, the wardrobe-keeper, to let me wear certain dandy garments which rarely saw the light. I recollect also fondling the sword Brooke used, which had belonged to Edmund Kean; also his production of *Coriolanus*, and his telling me an anecdote of days gone by, concerning the pronunciation of the word. Two theatre-goers were arguing in one of the old coffee-houses whether the hero should be called *Coriolanus* or *Co-ri-olanus*. Each failed to convince the other, when some one in the room

informed them that he chanced to know the tragedy would be acted at Covent Garden one evening during the following week. The disputants laid a wager, and decided to settle it by going to the theatre the night before its production, and accepting as final the pronunciation adopted by the actor who would, as was the custom in those days, "give out" the performance for the following evening. News of the bet somehow reached the ears of John Kemble, and he himself came before the curtain and made the following speech: "Ladies and gentlemen, to-morrow evening will be acted by his Majesty's servants, Shakespeare's tragedy, *Co-ri-olanus*, in which your humble servant will have the honour to perform the part of *Coriolanus*."

The memory of being then brought so closely in association with poor Brooke, who was a courteous, charming gentleman, is saddened by the thought that we never met again. Not long afterwards came the death he met so nobly. Bound for a farewell visit to Australia, he went down in the Bay of Biscay on board the *London*.

Gustavus Vaughan Brooke might justly be compared with Salvini: the Irishman, like the Italian, was gifted with a noble voice and a natural dignity of bearing. His death in *Othello* always seemed to me as poetic in conception as it was pathetic in execution. Acting, although not speaking, the closing words, "Killing myself, to die upon a kiss," he staggered towards the end of the bed, dying as he clutched the heavy curtains of it, which, giving way, fell upon his prostrate body as a kind of pall, disclosing, at the same time, the dead form of *Desdemona*.

It was in Dublin also that I had the pleasure of first meeting Sothern, when I gave him the bill of his earliest appearance as Lord Dundreary, which I had treasured since its performance in New York, and which had now naturally grown to be of some importance to him. Sothern, who, I suppose, must

have believed his true vocation to be that of a serious actor, revived a powerful but gloomy drama called *Retribution*, which was originally acted by Alfred Wigan, George Vining, and the beautiful Miss Herbert, in the prosperous days of the old Olympic Theatre. I, by this time, had grown to the position of a local favourite, and achieved considerable success as Oscar de Beaupré, quite as good a part to act as the Count Priuli, which was taken by Sothern. The performance was the means of Sothern's interesting himself on my behalf, and being always my good friend. Presuming that I wanted eventually to get to London, he thought Dublin was too far off, across the "streak of silver sea," and advised me to get to Liverpool, as the best stepping-stone; adding that he knew a vacancy would shortly occur in the leading theatre there. I wrote at once to the manager, who communicated with Sothern on the matter, and then telegraphed an acceptance of my proposal to join him. Before leaving I took part in an elaborate production of *The Ticket-of-Leave Man*. It was as great a surprise then to me as it may be to elderly readers now to be told that my part was that of Bob Brierly, the Lancashire hero. Strange as it all may seem, I can truly say that no performance added so much to my Dublin reputation.

Lord Carlisle selected this year *The Heir at Law* for his command night, and as Dick Dowlas, before an audience adorned with all the show and glitter of uniforms and levée dress, I saw the curtain fall upon my career in the handsome old theatre since destroyed by fire. To the two long seasons of hard work I passed there I owe a large share of my success as an actor.

When I first went to Liverpool I severely felt the contrast between the great Dublin theatre and the little house in Clayton Square, which, however, proved a fine field for practice. I soon found myself at home, being heartily welcomed by Lionel Brough,

who himself had but recently gone regularly upon the stage, and whose friendship I have ever since enjoyed. We were now on the eve of the Shakespearian Tercentenary, when the poet's memory was honoured by performances of his plays in nearly every English-speaking theatre. Alfred Wigan was specially engaged to appear as Shylock and Hamlet. These performances, I feel bound to say, added nothing to the reputation of the accomplished comedian, which is best proved, perhaps, by their never having been repeated. My own share in the production was a revival of Irish memories in the characters of Gratiano and Laertes.

I made many friends at Liverpool, and passed a happy time there. Among other frolics, which one, perhaps two, surviving companions will remember as well as myself, I recall frequent midnight drives, after acting in Liverpool, in a dog-cart from Birkenhead to Chester, a distance, if I remember rightly, of hard on twenty miles. How we risked our young necks! and what a life we led the toll-keepers and the slumbering villagers! Well may one sigh and say with Robertson, "O youth, youth! inestimable, priceless treasure!"

The Pyne and Harrison Company being engaged to give a series of English opera in Liverpool, it was arranged that the theatre company should go over to Dublin for a month, and so I unexpectedly renewed my acquaintance with many old friends. The remembrance of my services was shown by the warmth of the reception I received from the audience directly I stepped upon the stage—a reception so prolonged as to bring the actors to the wings to see who could be the object of such an ovation. I look back with keen pleasure to that month, when, few rehearsals only being necessary, I saw for the first time the beauties of County Wicklow. Just as a dweller in Westminster, living almost in the shadow of its towers, rarely enters the Abbey, until, perhaps, some country cousin comes to town to be shown the



sights, so I, during nearly two years' residence, saw scarcely anything, while in a month—being, so to speak, a visitor—I went everywhere. At the close of our stay *The Serious Family* was played, when I had the impertinence to act Murphy Maguire, with an attempt at a brogue, before an Irish audience.

During the summer the celebrated burlesque company from the Strand Theatre delighted Liverpool by acting for a short time there; it was then that Marie Wilton and I first met. It was here also that I commenced a friendship with one whose career has lent lustre to the stage, and who can claim me as his oldest professional comrade, John Hare. He was then a young fellow of twenty, and had come to Liverpool accompanied by that once brilliant actor Leigh Murray, whose pupil he had been, to make his first appearance on the stage. The friendship between Hare and myself soon became close, and there are few remembrances keener in my mind than frequent visits to his lodgings, where Leigh Murray stayed with him for a time. Murray, although suffering severely from asthma and terribly crippled by rheumatism, was one of the most delightful companions I have known. His fund of anecdote and the graphic relation of his own experiences were almost lessons in the art of acting, not likely to be forgotten by an enthusiast. Some three or four of us, afterwards well known to theatre-goers, were listening to his pleasant talk one night, when he said, "And what may not you boys yet do upon the stage! You remind me of my own early days, when four young fellows in Edinburgh used to chat over their future prospects, as you have been doing now. They were all youngsters then, much of an age and quite unknown; their names being Barry Sullivan, Lester Wallack, Leigh Murray, and Sims Reeves."

When Murray returned to London he and I kept up a correspondence. From a bundle of his interesting letters I select the following answer to a request

that he would add his signature to a photograph which I forwarded for the purpose :

29, NEW BRIDGE STREET, BLACKFRIARS.  
December 22, 1864.

DEAR BANCROFT,—

I have been, and am still, very ill indeed, and confined to my bed ; but I hastily scratch a few lines to thank you very much for the budget of news, which, I assure you, alleviated the horrors of a particularly bad day. I cannot now attempt to reply beyond briefly reciprocating the good wishes usual at this “festive season.” I hope I *may* have a “happy new year,” but a “merry Christmas” I cannot expect, for I fear I shall pass *the* day, as I have for the last four years, in bed ! I sincerely hope you will enjoy yourself, as all good fellows should.

I return the photograph of the faded comedian with the rheumatic autograph attached. I have passed the blotting-paper over the signature that the caligraphy may be as faint as the “counterfeit presentment” itself—too prophetic a significance of the fame and memory of him who now subscribes himself,

Very faithfully yours,

LEIGH MURRAY.

We gave a strange performance next of a production which had attracted some attention in London at the Princess’s Theatre—Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors*, with the Brothers Webb as the two Dromios. I played Antipholus of Syracuse, and Hare presented a quaint figure as Dr. Pinch, a schoolmaster. The Webbs also acted in a play made famous by Charles Kean, *The Courier of Lyons*, and afterwards by Irving as *The Lyons Mail*—Henry Webb appearing as Dubosc, the villain, and Charles Webb as Lesurques, who is innocently accused of the other’s crime, instead of the two characters being “doubled” by one actor. To my mind, the change introduced by the Webbs

robbed the drama of its value. I made some success in the part of Courriol, and Hare in a small part gave the first sign of his power in the art of making up as a very old man.

Then came what was always pleasant to me, another meeting with Sothern, who appeared first in *David Garrick*. William Blakeley (a most amusing actor, afterwards so well known at the Criterion Theatre) played, I recollect, old Ingot; Lionel Brough, Squire Chevy; and John Hare, the stuttering Mr. Jones. Sothern also acted Sir Charles Coldstream in *Used Up*, when Lydia Thompson was the Mary, and I was cast for Ironbrace, the blacksmith. I also supported Sothern in a new farce called *My Own Victim*, a stupid affair, although written by Maddison Morton, and never revived. I faintly remember Sothern, with a padded wig which gave him a "water-on-the-brain" appearance, offering everybody in the piece shrimps from a bag, and Hare darting in and out of doors as a comic waiter.

Let me recall Sothern's merry nature in those happy days, and give an instance of his well-known love of practical joking—a love best proved by the keen enjoyment he derived, even when but a momentary success could crown his unstinted expenditure of either time or money. The odd things he would constantly do are difficult to write about, but I will try to relate an instance of a joke, quite harmless in its results, of a kind he thoroughly enjoyed. After acting in Liverpool, he had a spare week, which he passed with a friend (as fond of fun as himself) in North Wales. The two put up at a well-known old inn near Bangor, greatly frequented by anglers, where it was the custom for the oldest resident among the guests for the time being to preside at the little *table d'hôte*, over which they talked out their day's sport, and where it was the rule for the chairman always to say grace. Sothern learnt, not long before the dinner-hour, that the visitor who had for some

days presided had received a telegram which compelled a hurried departure. The spirit of mischief prompted Sothern to send a little note in the name of the landlord to the other guests, some dozen or fifteen—of course privately and separately—couched in these words: "Our esteemed president will not be at dinner this evening. May I venture to request you to have the kindness to say grace in his absence? The signal for the same will be two sharp knocks upon the sideboard." The signal, at the proper moment, was of course given by Sothern, who was more than repaid by the glee with which he saw all the guests rise to a man, as at a word of command, each commencing to pronounce his favourite form of grace; and then, with all sorts of blundering apologies to each other, resuming their seats.

It was at this time that I first met one who is now an old friend of many years' standing—Charles Wyndham, who had recently served as an army-surgeon in the American Civil War, before going definitely upon the stage.

A visit to Liverpool followed soon afterwards which was destined greatly to influence my future life, and renewed my acquaintance with Marie Wilton, who arrived to play a short engagement prior to becoming the manager of a London theatre, rumours to this effect having recently been theatrical gossip. Miss Wilton appeared in some of the famous Strand Theatre burlesques, also in Planché's comedy, *Court Favour*, in which she and I acted together for the first time, she as Lucy Morton, I as the Duke of Albemarle. My performance of this and of other parts—which Miss Wilton had seen as a spectator—led to the offer of an engagement, which I accepted. Having resisted several temptations to appear in London, including a proposal to join Fechter at the Lyceum, I may be thought unwise in settling to go to an obscure theatre, which was to be opened in a speculative way with burlesque—at least until success in comedy should justify its abandonment—

My dear Mr. Bancroft  
Thank you  
for your kindness  
about my father's  
with my  
kind regards &  
best wishes  
Believe me  
very sincerely yours  
Marie Wilton

FACSIMILE OF THE FIRST LETTER FROM MARIE WILTON TO SQUIRE BANCROFT



as the attraction. All of this, I own, may seem strange; but the most prosaic of my readers will forgive some apparent want of sense if I acknowledge a secret that I then did not dare confess even to myself. I was already a victim to an emotion which will be sung of by poets for ever, but which may be told in four very simple English words—*love at first sight*.

The last stars with whom I acted in Liverpool were the Wigans, who appeared in Lord Lytton's comedy *Money*, Captain Dudley Smooth being my farewell part as a country actor. Part of the cast, I think, deserves recording. Alfred Evelyn was acted for the first time by Alfred Wigan; Sir John Vesey was played by William Blakeley; Dudley Smooth, as I have said, by myself; Edward Saker was the Graves; Lionel Brough, Mr. Stout; and the irascible old member of the club, whose time is passed in calling for the snuff-box, was given to John Hare, Lady Franklin being played by Mrs. Alfred Wigan. For my share in this performance, as for other early efforts in Liverpool, I was warmly praised and greatly encouraged in the Liverpool *Daily Post* by Sir Edward Russell.

I owe to Liverpool an early acquaintance with Charles Russell (afterwards Lord Russell of Killowen and Lord Chief Justice of England), with Lord Justice Holker ("Jack" Holker or "Sleepy Jack," in those days on the Northern Circuit), with Samuel Pope, with Leofric Temple, and with W. R. McConnell (late Chairman of the Middlesex Quarter Sessions, affectionately known as "Mac"), all of whom have gone to the Silent Land, and also with one whose brilliant wit and splendid labours have earned the admiration and the gratitude of the English-speaking world, Sir William S. Gilbert.

During this apprenticeship of four years and as many months I attempted three hundred and forty-six parts. The repetition of many of those in standard plays, and some of them often, not only

in different theatres, but with different actors, was alone of the greatest service and practice which no young actor can any more obtain. The country theatres, nowadays, are chiefly occupied by a succession of travelling companies, in which the art of acting is too often a mere parrot copy of an original performance. The brightest exception to what is almost a rule is the company so long conducted throughout the land with honour and credit by F. R. Benson. Its value is well known and proved by the able recruits it has constantly given to the London stage. Names which spring at once to my mind include Henry Ainley, Oscar Asche and Lily Brayton, Lilian Braithwaite, Graham Browne, O. B. Clarence, Matheson Lang, William Mollison, Nancy Price, Lyall Swete, and Harcourt Williams.

My pleasant drudgery, which was, in fact, a happy gypsy life, took place during a time which, as I afterwards learned from an oft-repeated fable, was widely supposed to have been passed by me as a young cavalry officer in India and at home.

My engagement being over, on the following day I went to London; to be succeeded in Liverpool, strange as it may now seem—although he was between three and four years my senior—by Henry Irving.



## CHAPTER III

### THE OLD PRINCE OF WALES'S THEATRE

“The true beginning of our end.”

THIS chapter shall open with the words of Lady Bancroft, as no one else can record the facts with knowledge and authority equal to hers.

Let me tell how it came about that I was ever the manager of a London theatre. Greatly exercised in my mind with regard to the future, anxious to better my prospects, and always desiring to act in comedy rather than burlesque, I had written without success to the leading managers for an engagement to play comedy parts. Mr. Buckstone, I remember, replied that he could only associate me with “the merry sauciness of the wicked little boy Cupid.” I was in despair and did not know what to do, when one morning I called upon my sister, Mrs. Francis Drake. In the course of our talk her husband said, “How would it be if you had a theatre of your own?” A dead silence ensued. I looked at my sister and she looked at me. My heart seemed to stop beating. The mere thought of such a thing was bewildering. How could I take a theatre without money?—and I had not a penny in the world. My brother-in-law then said, “I will lend you a thousand pounds if you can find a small theatre to let for a time. Should you succeed, you will return the money; if you fail, I lose it. You are very lucky for others, why not for yourself?”

Of course a thousand pounds in those days went very much further than such a sum would now, and seemed to me so large a fortune that all the theatres in London might be taken with it. Among other friends, I told my news to Mr. Byron, and proposed a partnership, if a theatre could be found; he to give me his exclusive services as an author. He agreed, but as he was not in a position to provide money, he stipulated to be indemnified from sharing any losses that might occur. I felt that his collaboration would greatly strengthen my position, his popularity being considerable, and he was willing to write comedies as well as burlesques. Then arose the question—where to find a suitable theatre; and we learnt that the little Queen's Theatre, as it was then called, in Tottenham Street, might be treated for.

This theatre had gone through strange and varied fortunes and had been known by many names since it was built by Signor Pasquale, the father of the once celebrated singer, as "The King's Concert Rooms." Among its former lessees was Mr. Brunton, whose daughter became Mrs. Yates, and the mother of Edmund Yates. Here, too, the beautiful Mrs. Nisbett once held the reins, while Madame Vestris and Madame Celeste frequently acted there. It was also the English home of French plays, and there the great Frédéric Lemaître first appeared in London. In spite of such attractions, however, it knew little of prosperity, and many years before had passed into obscurity.

I was implored by friends to reflect before embarking upon such an enterprise. "The neighbourhood was awful," "the distance too great from the fashionable world," and "nothing would ever make it a high-class theatre." People shrugged their shoulders, and failure was foretold in every feature of their faces. So I stood alone, without one word of encouragement. Mr. Byron grew less sanguine, and—wisely, I think—entreated me to appear in burlesque, at least at the start, and not to risk



MARIE WILTON



losing that following of the public which had been accustomed to see me in that class of play ; adding that he would soon complete a comedy he had begun, to give me the opportunity I sought, and that, if successful, I could gradually abandon burlesque altogether.

I followed this advice, and an arrangement was entered into to take the theatre for a period of two years at a weekly rental of twenty pounds. Mr. Byron and myself were each to draw a salary of ten pounds, and I was to receive an additional ten pounds a week towards the repayment of the borrowed thousand pounds. After these deductions we were to share all profits. Mr. Drake introduced me to his bankers, the London and Westminster Bank in St. James's Square, on January 21, 1865, when an account was opened in my name with the sum he had agreed to advance. The formal receipt for the thousand pounds (which was returned to me when, later on, the money was repaid) bears the same date.

I signed a document indemnifying Mr. Byron from pecuniary risk in these words :

“ In consideration of one thousand pounds advanced by me for expenses attending the decorating, advertising, payment of salaries, etc., I am to receive ten pounds a week for two years, in addition to a salary which will be equal to yours. By this arrangement the thousand pounds will be paid back by the end of the second year ; this sum of ten pounds to come out of the profits of the theatre ; should the weekly receipts fall below the expenses, the ten pounds to be paid out of the previous profits, so long as there are any to be drawn upon. At the end of our tenancy, should the thousand pounds be lost, or any portion thereof, I am not to have any claim on you for said sum, as the venturing of the money is voluntary on my part. Your salary is to be the same as mine in consideration of your joint management and writing of pieces. All money

taken at the theatre is to be banked in our joint names, and to be our joint property."

We had possession of the theatre for a month before opening it, during which brief time it had to be taken very much to pieces, cleaned, painted, re-seated, redecorated, and refurnished. The poor thousand pounds was becoming "small by degrees and beautifully less," and by the time the theatre opened I had about one hundred and fifty pounds left.

How strange this simple statement of simple facts seems in these days of wealthy "syndicates" and huge "profit rentals," when seven, ten thousand a year, and even larger sums are paid for well-placed theatres! Stranger still to know that, when Mr. Byron had retired and the "Bancroft management" had begun, we were offered what was practically the freehold of the property at (I think it is so called) a peppercorn rent, for ten thousand pounds. We had not so much money at the time, and my husband decided that he would never borrow.

Agreeing with my wish that the theatre, which in its long career had borne so many titles, should once more be re-christened before we opened it, Mr. Byron applied for permission to call it by the name which I had chosen; and in due course he received the following reply from Sir Spencer Ponsonby-Fane, whose acquaintance I made soon afterwards, and whose friendship my husband and I have for many years enjoyed.

LORD CHAMBERLAIN'S OFFICE, ST. JAMES'S PALACE,  
*February 3, 1865.*

SIR,—

I am desired by the Lord Chamberlain to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 26th ult., requesting jointly with Miss Marie Wilton, as lessee of the Queen's Theatre, in Tottenham Street, that the name of that building may in future be the Prince of Wales's Theatre, and I am to inform

you in reply, that his lordship accedes with pleasure to your request, his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales having signified his consent to the proposed change.

I am, sir, your obedient servant,

SPENCER PONSONBY.

HENRY J. BYRON, Esq.

Some readers may very likely imagine that the title refers to the handsome theatre which now is known by it in Coventry Street, but which was first called the Prince's Theatre. Not so: the little old theatre, destined so soon to grow famous under its new name, stood upon ground now occupied by the beautiful Scala Theatre, which I had the pleasure, by the wish of its owner, Dr. Distin Maddick, to open formally with a golden key. On that occasion there was a great gathering of friends and journalists, to whom I made a little speech, wishing good luck to the new building. Sir William Gilbert came to me afterwards, full of compliments, and said how charmed he had been to listen to my voice again, how every word fell like a bell upon his ear; and ended by assuring me that if I continued to work hard I should have *a great career behind me!*

All that remains of the former building is the old portico, which is now used as the stage entrance. I owe a valued souvenir which I possess to the kindness of our friend Sir Charles Howard, in whose presence I had said how much I should like to have a brick from my old home before it was pulled down. Sir Charles, who had not then retired from his high position in the police, laughingly said that he would get a constable to steal one for me. Soon afterwards I received the brick enclosed in a case made from a plank of the historic stage, and inscribed, "A Souvenir of the old Prince of Wales's Theatre, the brick from its walls, the wood from its stage. To Sir Squire and Lady Bancroft, from Sir Charles Howard, 1898."

I was naturally very proud of the new title granted to us, and with the enthusiasm of a young manager thought the newspaper paragraphs which had mentioned the change would suffice to make it generally known. Bitter was my disappointment when I hailed a hansom and directed the cabman to go to the "Prince of Wales's." My thoughts at the time were much occupied, and I hardly noticed the route the cabman took, when suddenly he pulled up in Pall Mall. On being asked in an impatient manner why he did so, he replied, "Didn't you want to be drove to the Prince of Wales's? Well, here you are!" I found he had stopped at the gates of Marlborough House!

I will now tell a companion story of thirty years later. Long after we had left the little theatre, and when it was empty, desolate, and forlorn, I had occasion to make some purchases at Maple's in Tottenham Court Road. When I left I called a hansom, and after directing the driver, added, "Would you, please, drive through Tottenham Street on the way?" The cabman touched his hat and, with quite a pensive smile, said, "To have a look at the old house, ma'am?" I returned his kind smile; he whipped up his horse, but when we reached the sad little building, passed it at funeral pace. I think that cabman deserved a good fare.

When the speculation was resolved upon, among the first of my friends to whom I wrote was Lady Harrington, who had shown such interest in my welfare. As one, at least, of her many letters to me should have a place in this book, I select her reference to my important undertaking, and may repeat that she always addressed me by my second name.

RICHMOND TERRACE, WHITEHALL,  
February, 18, 1865.

MY DEAR EFFIE,

I was told of a little paragraph in the newspapers about your having taken a theatre, but not



having heard of it from *you*, I did not believe the report. I need scarcely assure you of my good wishes for your success, and I am delighted to hear that you are to have the kind and friendly support of your sister's husband in your undertaking.

I remember the little Queen's Theatre years and years ago, when I resided near Russell Square. It is a great card having secured Mr. Byron; I have just read his clever and entertaining novel with much enjoyment.

Since the last week of November when I saw you, I have not been to a theatre, except to one morning performance of the Covent Garden pantomime to take my dear grandchildren, as after my attack of bronchitis I am obliged to be very careful about going out in the evening. I shall hope soon to be able to take a peep at you, dear wee manageress, when you are on the throne at your royal domain; till when and ever,

I am, your very affectionate friend,

MARIA HARRINGTON.

A little comedy called *All's Fair in Love and War* was submitted to us. Mr. Byron and I agreed to accept it, but suggested changing the title, which we thought too long, Byron remarking that "it would take two play-bills to show it"! The author re-christened his piece *A Winning Hazard*; the strangeness of the coincidence did not at the time strike any of us, but afterwards, when success seemed assured, we laughingly remarked that it was, to say the least, a curious coincidence that the curtain should rise on my venture with those words.

We had an excellent working company — all content with modest salaries—the most prominent being my future husband, who almost from those early days gave me the advantage of his help and counsel; my old friends and playmates, John Clarke and Fanny Josephs; Mrs. Saville, an aunt of Helen Faucit; Frederick Dewar, H. W. Montgomery, and,

soon afterwards, a new recruit, John Hare, whose talents had at once appealed to me when I saw him act small parts in Liverpool.

A strange incident, which occurred on the afternoon before the opening night, may interest the superstitious and amuse the sceptic. My mother, who was almost prostrate with nervousness, would not go to the theatre on the first night; so my sister, Mrs. Drake, proposed to take her for a country drive to distract her thoughts, and they went to Willesden. My sister talked about all sorts of things, but to no purpose; my mother's thoughts were with me in Tottenham Street. "Mary has always been fortunate," she said (although I was christened Marie Effie, she loved the name of Mary, and always called me by it), "but her luck may desert her in this enterprise. What would I not give to know the end of this undertaking!"

She raised her eyes, and there, on a stone, as they turned a corner in the road, she saw, "Mary's Place, Fortune Gate." It was to my mother like an answer, and impressed her so much that she often spoke of it. Curiosity took me to the neighbourhood later on, where I saw and read the kindly and prophetic words. The sequel to this coincidence is that, when the story was first told in print, the little houses so named were about to be demolished, and Mr. Bennett, their purchaser, most kindly made me a present of the stone, which since has had its resting-place in our present home.

The hour for launching the little ship arrived; of course there was a great crowd outside the theatre, and the inhabitants of Tottenham Street had never seen such a display of carriages before. The house looked very pretty, and, although everything was done inexpensively, had a bright and bonnie appearance, and I felt proud of it. The curtains and carpets were of a cheap kind, but in good taste. The stalls were light blue, with lace antimacassars over them; this was the first time such things had ever been

seen in a theatre. The pampered audiences of the present day, accustomed to the modern luxurious playhouses, little know of how much my modest undertaking was the pioneer, and would hardly credit that a carpet in the stalls was, until then, unknown.

The first programme I offered to the public in my new capacity was dated Saturday, April 15, 1865, and comprised *A Winning Hazard*, and an operatic burlesque extravaganza, entitled *La Sonnambula!* "being a passage in the life of a famous 'Woman in White'; a passage leading to a tip-top story, told in this instance by Henry J. Byron."

When I began to dress I was almost too tired to stand, for I had been all day looking after everything and everybody. However, as the moment approached for my first appearance as a manager, the excitement roused me; and when my cue came, I went on to my own little stage without any sign of fatigue. It would be affectation to pretend that I did not know that I was a great favourite with the public; but the warm welcome I received almost overpowered me.

Mr. Byron, true to his word, soon finished his comedy, *War to the Knife*, in which I had a good part. It was clever and had a distinct success. During the evening I remember his asking me if I would suggest to Mr. Montgomery, who was a very tall man with a very long neck, not to wear a "turn-down" collar, adding in his quaint way, "Any neck after eight inches becomes monotonous."

My dressing-room was close to the stage door, and I could hear all that went on there. The hall-keeper was an eccentric character, named Kirby. The carpenters were often neglectful in wiping their boots as they passed through the hall to the stage, and as there was a large mat placed for that purpose, Kirby was instructed to insist upon their doing so. He had a habit of singing to himself, and would often intersperse his dialogue with the words of some favourite song. One night I overheard the following

scraps of conversation, Kirby speaking always in a sleepy, drawling voice:

1st CARPENTER: Cold night, Kirby, ain't it?

KIRBY: Hawful cold. ("I'm sitting on the stile, Maree.") Wipe your feet.

2nd CARPENTER: 'Ow are yer, Kirby?

KIRBY: All right, George. ("Where we sat side by side.") Wipe your feet, George.

3rd CARPENTER: 'Ave you got change for six-pence, Kirby?

KIRBY: No, I ain't. ("The night you promised long ago.") Wipe your feet.

4th CARPENTER: Wet night, Kirby; kind o' weather wot will bring up the vegetables and every-think.

KIRBY: I 'ope it won't bring up my three wives. ("You said you'd be my bride.") Wipe your feet, 'Arry.

So commenced my management. I have tried to tell *why* I became a manager, and *how*. In the following year the thousand pounds, so generously advanced to me, were returned, and, let me add, not one shilling further was ever borrowed by me from, or given to me by, any one now living or dead in connection with this enterprise. I was successful in a modest way from the start; gradually but surely my lucky star led me on to fortune; and the little house in Tottenham Street, after all its vicissitudes, in spite of its situation, became for fifteen years "the most fashionable and prosperous theatre in London."

During that time it was twice sumptuously re-decorated and refurnished, and my pet project of abolishing the orchestra from sight was carried out. Frederic Leighton (our friend years before he was elected President of the Royal Academy), in a charming note to me, said, "I think your theatre quite the dandiest thing I ever saw." This innovation did not last long; its prettiness was all destroyed, to be prosaically and profitably replaced by extra stalls. Adjoining property was bought, which added com-

fort both before and behind the curtain ; a new Royal entrance was built, as well as a direct opening to the stalls ; the old green-room—associated with delightful recollections, including the reading of the Robertson comedies—was destroyed, as was my dressing-room, and with it vanished the melodies of the musical stage-door-keeper.

In a few years all again was changed, when the general tone of decoration chosen was deep amber satin and dark red, in place of the former light blue ; the tiers of box fronts were decorated with allegorical paintings typical of the plays we had by then produced, and, to harmonise with a splendidly painted peacock frieze over the proscenium, handsome fans made of peacocks' feathers were attached to each of the private boxes by gilt chains.

There is an old superstition that these beautiful plumes bring sickness with them. On the night this scheme of decoration was first shown, it so befell that an occupant of one of the front stalls was seized with a fit, and a lady in a private box had to be taken home through sudden illness. Only a single audience saw the fans, for I was always superstitious ; and this strange assertion, as it were, that there might be truth in the old saying ended in their summary banishment, their brief engagement being for "one night only !"

To my wife's story of the opening of the Prince of Wales's Theatre, and how its several transformations came about, I first will add some personal experiences, and then tell more of what was done there.

On the day of my first rehearsal I walked from one end of Tottenham Court Road to the other, but could neither find nor hear of any such building as the Prince of Wales's Theatre. At last it struck me that in its own neighbourhood the little playhouse would still be better known by its old name, the "Queen's," if not by its unsavoury nickname, "The

Dusthole," destined in a short time to be changed to the "Gold-dust Hole." I had no more difficulty, and reached my destination then quite easily. All was in confusion, the front of the house being still in the hands of its decorators and furnishers. However, after I had been warmly welcomed, we got to work.

On the night before the theatre opened I was taken by John Clarke to a supper-party, where I met for the first time Tom Hood, Artemus Ward, the brilliant American humorist, Leicester Buckingham and Joseph Knight, the dramatic critics, Arthur Sketchley, the entertainer, Andrew Halliday, writer and playwright, William Belford, an actor then well known—and one who very soon was to influence my career, Thomas William Robertson. Boon companions, all: giants they seemed to me, for I was then not quite twenty-four, and my introduction to such men opened, as it were, the doors to a companionship with the stars that then illumined that delightful land, Bohemia. They have all long since, many of them in early manhood, gone to the Shadowed Valley; but memories of their wit, their charm, their humour, live with me still.

I had my first London chance in Byron's comedy. The character was a scheming man about town, and to it I certainly was indebted for the opportunity of gaining favourable notice from the critics and the public, with the hope of my later efforts being watched.

As an illustration of the danger of prophecy, I will quote the words of an able writer, written years before, when the beautiful Mrs. Nisbett—then the Queen of Comedy—was manager of the little house, and d'Orsay, Vincent Cotton, and "Dolly" Fitzclarence were among the audience on her opening night. The future emperor, Napoleon, was also a visitor, to be replaced in our day by his luckless son. What words could seem wiser than these looked on paper?

"No theatre in the kingdom has undergone so many changes, both in management and title, in a

few years, as the Queen's. *The effort to make it attractive under female management, apparently sparing no exertion or expense, cannot succeed.* It has been called as follows: King's Concert Rooms, Regency, Tottenham Street Theatre, West London Theatre, Fitzroy Theatre, and Queen's Theatre. 'Fools and their money,' they say, 'are soon parted'; and when we look to the expenses incurred, and the nature of the entertainments, we cannot discover a more expeditious method of relieving them of it. *This theatre can never be a fashionable one.* We must not have small-talk, but plenty of blue fire and mysterious disappearances, which can alone draw anything like a paying audience."

A little later, I remember, the former lessee of the theatre, who received the rent, paid my wife a visit during the rehearsal of a difficult scene, and said to her, "Dear, dear, what trouble you give yourselves! In my tin-pot days we were less particular. When in doubt as to how to end an act, I sent two men on in a boat, dressed as sailors, with a couple of flags. They waved their Union Jacks, I lit a pan of blue fire at the wings, the band played 'Rule, Britannia,' and down came the curtain!"

Looking back after a lapse of years, it is strange to reflect on the brilliant career of almost unbroken success which the little theatre enjoyed.

In the year of our marriage the partnership with Byron came to an end. Soon after its commencement he became entangled with the management of two theatres in Liverpool, where he went to live. His work for the Prince of Wales's suffered greatly in consequence, and it must be added that he had always rebelled against my wife's decision to abandon burlesque. Although business relations ceased so soon, friendship lasted until his death.

During his career as a dramatic author Byron wrote more than a hundred plays and burlesques, in not one of which can be found a single line that the purest-minded person might not have listened to.

In his very early days he had also been an actor. Later in his life he went upon the stage again, but only to play characters written by himself for himself.

How clever he was! How the hours seemed to fly in his company! Perhaps no writer ever had a greater power of twisting his language into puns, while his intense appreciation of another's wit was delightful to see. It would be easy to fill pages with his impromptu jokes.

It was at the little Prince of Wales's Theatre that he first suggested his Shakespearian motto for the box-book keeper, "So much for Booking-em!"

When his play *Dearer than Life* was produced at another theatre, in which both Irving and Toole had parts, all had gone well until the end of the second act, after which there was a long delay. The audience grew more and more impatient, the band played waltz after waltz, still the curtain was not taken up. Byron was walking uneasily up and down the corridor at the back of the dress circle, chafing over the mishap, and tugging, as he always did when agitated, at one side of his moustache, when a friendly critic asked, "What, in the name of goodness, are they doing?" "I don't know," moaned Byron. At that moment the sound of a saw, hard at work behind the scenes, was heard above the uproar—saw-saw-saw! "I think they must be cutting out the last act," he said.

After a terrible experience on arriving late at lodgings in a country town, he complained to the landlady in the morning that he had been attacked by fleas. The woman retorted indignantly, "Fleas, sir! No, sir, I am sure there is not a single flea in my house!" Byron replied, "I'm sure of it too; they are all married and have large families."

At the time of his disastrous management of the theatres in Liverpool, an intimate friend, who met him in the street, was much struck with his altered appearance, and asked sympathetically, "What's the matter, old fellow—*liver*?" "Yes," said Byron



languidly, "Liver—pool." The friend could not help laughing, but went on, "Really now, do take some advice; you've grown so thin. Have you tried cod-liver oil?" Byron said, "No, but I've tried the Theatre Royal." I remember once remarking to him in the hall of the Garrick Club that we very seldom saw him there. "Quite true," he replied; "my visits are so rare as to be extremely expensive. Five guineas a wash!"

Two of his jokes, which must have been among the last he ever uttered, have no doubt found their way into print. One day he received a letter from his coachman, who was at his master's London house, about a sick horse. Byron told a friend of the circumstance in this way: "They won't let me alone, even down here. This morning my fool of a coachman writes to tell me that a horse is ill, and wants to know if he may *give him a ball*. I've answered, 'Oh, yes, if you like, give him a ball; but don't *ask too many people!*'"

Still later, at the time, it must be remembered, that Hare and Kendal were joint managers of the St. James's Theatre, he said, "People are very kind to me. I had no idea so many friends remembered me. I thought myself much more forgotten. Lovely flowers and delicious fruits are brought so often; and game, and other things. Last week a dear old friend sent me a hare. I never saw such an animal; surely the biggest *hare* that ever ran. I thought *Kendal* must be inside it!"

Of all the changes which were inaugurated by my wife and myself at the little Prince of Wales's Theatre, I, personally, was proudest of, perhaps, the simplest of them. I had endured much mortification in my early days upon the stage from the old method which then prevailed of paying the actors engaged in the theatre. Every one then had to assemble on Saturday mornings outside the treasury at a certain hour—carpenters, ballet girls, cleaners, players, dressers, musicians, mixed up together. I found, to

my profound surprise, that things were just the same in London, and claim the privilege of having been the first to alter the obnoxious custom. It was, in fact, the initial reform made by me when I came into authority, to order that all members of our company should henceforth be waited upon by the treasurer instead of their having to wait upon him. I record the fact because actors of the present day can have no idea who made the change, or of the former habit.

Allusion to this obsolete custom reminds me of a story of my boyhood's days. A well-known, and afterwards prosperous, north-country manager was having a hard time of it to make both ends meet. His wife, a woman of ability and resource, acted as treasurer. One day in dismay she and her husband discovered that they could not pay some of the salaries until night, by which time they would have the advantage of the Saturday evening's receipts. Such a blow to their credit had never happened before. On the eventful morning, shortly before the customary hour for payment, the little motley crowd slowly assembled round the treasury door, and the remarks they interchanged could be heard by the anxious woman on the other side of it. The clock ticked on remorselessly until five minutes, two minutes, before the fatal hour. Suddenly a brilliant and Napoleonic idea flashed across the lady's mind, and saved the situation. She mounted upon a chair, opened the clock, put the hands to seven minutes past one, and then, flinging open the door with a tragic air, pointed angrily to the time, and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I have waited for you nearly ten minutes; you will now wait for me until this evening." So saying, she locked the treasury door, and, with her nose in the air, sailed triumphantly through the dumbfounded, penniless assembly, which included no less a person, then in the days of his early struggle, than Henry Irving.

● A brief history of the commencement of morning

performances may have some interest to-day. In the early days of our management they were things unknown, except for pantomimes and occasional big charity entertainments. We first tried one of *School*, in the height of its great success, with only a moderate and not sufficiently encouraging result. Five or six years passed before we repeated the experiment, and then with the sole object of gratifying an earnest wish expressed by Sothern to see my wife act in *Sweethearts*. To complete a short programme, Ellen Terry, who was then a member of our company, appeared with me in a charming one-act play, called *A Happy Pair*, which we studied for this solitary occasion. The theatre was crowded. In the following year we acted *Peril* a considerable number of times on afternoons; but it was not until we produced *Diplomacy*, in 1878, that what are now called *matinées*—afternoon representations of the regular evening performance—were really established. At the beginning they were much more costly than now, frequent and separate advertisements and announcements being necessary to make them known. Moreover, it was our custom, and one we maintained throughout our management, to pay full salaries to every one concerned in these afternoon performances—a rule which applied not only to actors but to business managers, booking-clerks, hall-keeper, firemen, in fact to all to whom the performance practically involved the equivalent of an evening's labour. These afternoon performances have long since become a large source of income to the managers; but I am told that in most of the theatres other systems of payment now prevail. It seems to me hard that the actor should not be given his full share, and harder still upon the ballet-girls and poorer members of a company, who can ill afford the least deduction from their pay, and who are not in a position to protest.

In what were called "the palmy days" of the drama—days, in my remembrance, of much slovenli-

ness and dingy solemnity, as well as of most useful and hard work—salaries were lamentably small, and the rewards to which even eminent actors could aspire in former times were pitiful indeed. I know no more plaintive story than the desperate struggles made by so great a man as Macready to secure for his retirement an income of a thousand a year to support and educate a large family, even that fortune involving banishment from London for the remainder of his life. We may claim without arrogance to have been the first to effect a reform which should secure a proper reward for the laborious life and special gifts demanded of the actor, and make the stage a worthy career for refined and talented people. The pay was small enough, and on the old lines, when we began; in a few years things were very different. As an instance, John Hare's first salary, when he was but an unknown youth, was only two pounds weekly, nor did he ever reach with us the high figures subsequently paid, as it never exceeded twenty pounds—a large sum then. The advance came soon by leaps and bounds: four years afterwards we gave George Honey sixty pounds a week to take the part in *Caste* which he had previously acted for eighteen, while Mrs. Stirling, when she played the Marquise in our final revival of that comedy, received eight times the salary we had paid to the original representative of the character. To Charles Coghlan, who only received nine pounds a week with us when he replaced Montague, we paid, on later occasions, fifty, and then sixty pounds; and without multiplying examples, I may say that such rates were maintained proportionately throughout the company.

The salary list grew to be not only remarkable, but out of all relation to the receipts in so small a theatre; and, besides the increased pay, the elaborate and careful dressing of our plays—which astonished playgoers and was looked upon as a revelation in what was a period of stage heedlessness—together

with the improvement of the details of scenery and accessories on the stage, entailed heavy expenditure. I have often reflected how little the public realises what a great employer of labour the manager of a theatre really is. Although a writer in a leading magazine said, "The Vestris-Mathews system had erred on the side of unnecessary extravagance; the Bancrofts did not seek to gild refined gold," it was not long before we found it inevitable that the prices of admission should be raised throughout the theatre. Modest advances were made at first. The charge for admission to the stalls was first raised from six to seven shillings; but it was on the occasion of the costly production of *The School for Scandal*, in 1874, that the boldest step throughout our management was taken in my resolve to raise the price of the stalls to ten shillings, and the charges to other parts accordingly. Some action of the kind was rendered imperative in so small a theatre as the Prince of Wales's, though, as *The School for Scandal* had only recently been acted for a long time at another theatre, and with some admirable actors in the cast, the moment chosen certainly was dangerous for so radical an innovation.

When our decision was conveyed by my business manager to Bond Street, one of the principal librarians remarked, "Of course Mr. Bancroft means for the first night only?" When informed that the alteration was intended "for the future," the answer was, "Oh, let Mr. Bancroft have his way; he will change his mind in a week!" Such, however, was not the case. The bold example was soon followed by the Gaiety Theatre, then by the Lyceum, and afterwards by nearly every manager in London. As the question of "ten-shilling stalls" has since been so often discussed, it may be as well to leave on record how the custom originated and who was its wicked inventor.

It was also one of our innovations to allow a single play to form the entire programme—a thing unknown before.

It has been pleasant to read again, after a lapse of many years, a mass of friendly, flattering tributes to our efforts to restore the somewhat damaged credit of English acting by forming a company with a style, a tradition, and an *ensemble* of its own. While, manifestly, it would not be fair to trouble the reader with these tributes at length, we cannot forego the gratification of recalling one or two of them. We will select the words of the author of *Thespian Cartes*—a series of popular dramatic articles much read in their day—and of a distinguished French man of letters, writing in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.

These critics pointed out that at the Prince of Wales's "the *afflatus* of these admirable Bancrofts" pervaded the whole. Whatever test was applied, no true principle would be found wanting. The first was clearly *respect for the audience*, who were not considered a mass of beings from whom money is taken, and who then, after being the prey of the box-keepers and bill-sellers, were to be packed and squeezed into seats. It was recorded that we had abolished all such petty exactions; and that our audiences were rather visitors whose good-will it was sought to conciliate, with the result that the house was thronged with intellectual and cultured adherents, many of whom were by no means theatre-goers as a general rule. On the stage there was an *ensemble* moulded and perfected by assiduous rehearsals. The factors of the company changed from time to time, but the principle regulating the whole seemed immutable. The secret of this was declared to be good management, by which the spirit was transmitted by a sort of hereditary descent from actor to actor, so that, though the men and women went, the family remained intact, the *esprit de corps* was not lost. The real principle which made each company as admirable as the last was the principle of a sagacious government—the control of a master mind. We were rightly stated to have set our faces

from the first against the obnoxious "star system"; no trace ever being visible of the vile tradition, once prevalent among actors, of defrauding a comrade of a chance. "Self-abnegation has, throughout their management, been a strong point with the Bancrofts. How frequently they strengthen their admirable productions by appearing themselves in small parts—an example, happily for the future of the stage, laid to heart in his apprenticeship by their accomplished comrade, Hare, since he left them and himself became a manager."

"Again and again," said these kindly critics, "it has been curious to observe at the Prince of Wales's how performers who elsewhere had made but little mark had acquired good habits in that wholesome atmosphere of dramatic art. No theatre had more often sustained the inevitable losses which must follow the secession of actors; yet, when the changes which necessarily came about deprived the management one by one of their services, the loss, which threatened to be severe, was so ably met as to be scarcely perceptible. . . . To those who have at heart the welfare of the stage, it is one of the most cheering signs of the times that the system which has been steadily pursued at this theatre by its accomplished rulers has rendered it, in spite of many disadvantages, the most uniformly prosperous of all our places of amusement."

It was gratifying to find our old friend J. Comyns Carr, whose gifts of wit and brilliant talk have enlivened many a meeting, expressing his opinion that since *Society* was produced towards the close of the year 1865, and the visit of the members of the Théâtre Français in 1871, the advancement in the art of acting in England had been in every way remarkable. The pitiable comparisons that used to be instituted between our own players and those of the Continent were now confessedly out of date, thanks to the tradition of thoughtful and careful management which was first established by ourselves, and had

served as a standard to which the conductors of other houses had since been obliged to conform.

To continue this egoism, we will finally indulge in the pleasure of recording how a critical pen declared that only those who could remember what took place before our reign, not in the acting of any individual actor, but in the generality of the playhouses, could realise the immense strides made by our management in all that relates to dramatic representation. "The alteration for the better in all that appertains to the theatre is due to Mr. Bancroft, with the support and aid of his brilliant wife, more than any existing manager." The times were ripe for a man who, though an apostle of progress, would be no mere enthusiast, but a leader by reason of sympathy with higher things—a leader with a perception keen and searching, with an intelligence broad and unprejudiced, with a brain constructive and original, with a desire to do and a heart to dare. Our management of the Prince of Wales's Theatre, it was said, brought a new era to the English drama. It was manifest that the one class who had not travelled with the times was the actor. His vocation, singular to say, while eminently intellectual, had invited, with but few exceptions, men to uphold it often deficient in tone, bearing, and the advantages of early association. If such men as Charles Kean, Alfred Wigan, Charles Mathews, or Leigh Murray were significant for their gifts, both as gentlemen and histrions, they visibly contrasted with others of their order unhappily lacking the marks of breeding and education. "At the Prince of Wales's was seen a unity, the secret of strength; and how Bancroft enlisted under his banner a following of young actors into whom he infused a harmony of surpassing excellence is a fact never to be forgotten."

No one who, in whatever calling, has served the public with the best of his strength, could read such tributes to his labours without just pride; and I refrain from the false humility of ignoring them,



preferring rather even to add some generous words penned by a comrade whose charm has left so profound a mark upon playgoers that she is cherished and remembered by them, and always will be, with gratitude and love—Ellen Terry.

“The brilliant story of the Bancroft management of the old Prince of Wales's Theatre used to be more familiar twenty years back than it is now. I think that few of the present generation of playgoers who point out on the first nights of important productions a remarkably striking figure of a man with erect carriage, white hair, and flashing, dark eyes—a man whose eyeglass, manners, and clothes all suggest Thackeray and Major Pendennis, in spite of his success in keeping abreast of everything modern—few playgoers, I say, who point this man out as Sir Squire Bancroft, could give any account of what he and his wife did for the English theatre. Nor do the public who see an elegant little lady starting for a drive from a certain house in Berkeley Square realise that this is Marie Wilton, afterwards Mrs. Bancroft, now Lady Bancroft, the comedian who created the heroines of Tom Robertson. . . . I have never, even in Paris, seen anything more admirable than the *ensemble* of the Bancroft productions. Every part in the domestic comedies, the presentation of which they had made their policy, was played with such point and finish that the more rough, uneven, and emotional acting of the present day has not produced anything so good in the same line. The Prince of Wales's Theatre was the most fashionable in London, and there seemed no reason why the triumph of Robertson should not go on for ever.”

The list of comedians who appeared at the old Prince of Wales's Theatre—many of whom we were the means of bringing before the notice of the London public—contained distinguished names. Let the brief candle of stage-fame burn once again in their honour. It was there that John Hare became famous; it was there that Ellen Terry's Portia first

charmed the world of art ; it was there the Kendals, by splendid acting in *Peril* and *Diplomacy*, largely added to their fame ; Forbes-Robertson, H. B. Conway, Kyrle Bellew, Charles Sugden, F. Archer, Charles Collette, and Albert Chevalier all played there as young men, while Carlotta Addison, Henrietta Hodson, Marion Terry, Fanny Brough, Linda Dietz, Kate Phillips, and Mrs. John Wood had all been members of our company.

Among the comedians who have received their final call, leaving rich memories behind them, and who once played there with us may be named : Charles Coghlan, George Honey, H. J. Montague, Arthur Cecil, John Clayton, John Clarke, Henry Kemble, William Terriss, William Blakeley, J. W. Ray, Lin Rayne, Arthur Wood, and Frederick Younge ; Lydia Foote, Amy Roselle, Lydia Thompson, Fanny Josephs, Louisa Moore, Sophie Larkin, Roma Le Thiere, Marie Litton, Sophie Young, Lucy Buckstone, Mrs. Leigh Murray, Mrs. Gaston Murray, and Mrs. Hermann Vezin.

Surely a choice record recalling many handsome legacies to the traditions of our stage !

“ It so fell out that certain players

We o'erwrought on the way ; of these we told him :

And there did seem in him a kind of joy,

To hear of it.”

It is, perhaps, a fitting moment to record here that of the large financial result achieved in the old Prince of Wales's Theatre a little less than one-half was made from the Robertson comedies, the remainder by other plays.

Our reason for abandoning our first managerial home, endeared to us as it was by the brightest events of our career, and in which the happiest part of our lives certainly was passed, will be told in a chapter devoted to its successor, the Haymarket Theatre.

My wife suffered deeply at bidding “ Good-bye ”





to a house so endeared to us both by pleasant memories, so rich in artistic recollections, the outcome, be it remembered, of her own initial, splendid courage. Even the silent walls, she said, seemed to frown their reproach to us for leaving them. Often in the twilight of after-years, when it was closed and deserted, have we pensively gazed upon the dilapidated, crumbling, once brilliant little theatre, and wondered if the past was but a dream. Could it be true that Dickens and Lytton had so often sat there to listen to us, with hundreds and hundreds of the greatest in the land? Could it be that actors, and painters, and authors, since known to all the world, had fought for places in the pit? Could it be that we once had difficulty to find a seat there for Gladstone, and had listened to an ovation given within its walls to Beaconsfield? Could it have been under that mournful-looking porch that the constant stream of youth and age, of beauty, wit, and wealth, had flowed for so many years? And was the satirical, dirty placard, "To be Sold," the only reminder of all that had been? *Vale!*

## CHAPTER IV

### T. W. ROBERTSON AND HIS COMEDIES

“The very age and body of the time.”

My soprano comrade shall sing the first notes of this chapter.

It was a lucky event in my career which led to what was afterwards called “the dawn struck with life and hope and promise by the Bancrofts,” when in the very early days of management I was asked to read a comedy called *Society*, written by T. W. Robertson, whose since-famous name was then almost unknown. Robertson was at that time in very low water; as he expressed it to my husband soon afterwards, “I often dined on my pipe.”

#### “SOCIETY”

*Society* had been offered in turn to all the London managers who played comedies, but not one of them, including Buckstone, Sothern, and Wigan, would have anything to do with it; the consensus of opinion, written and spoken, being that it must fail wherever it was produced. The fear of it was chiefly due to a scene called “The Owl’s Roost,” which, it was thought, would be condemned by the critics and offend the journalistic world, since it contained realistic sketches of men who were well known to the author, and were indeed his boon companions in “Bohemia.” Danger seemed to me better than

dulness: the play was so original and so striking, that I promptly decided to risk its production. So began my acquaintance with T. W. Robertson. Time has not lessened my remembrance of the charm with which he read his comedy. He was of a highly nervous temperament, and he had a great habit of biting his moustache and caressing his beard—indeed, his hands were rarely still. He was at that time thirty-six, above medium height and rather stoutly built, with a pale skin and reddish beard, and small, piercing, red-brown eyes which were ever restless. As the rehearsals advanced, I grew to like the play more and more, although my own part was a poor one, being in fact a simple *ingénue*. My views of natural acting so entirely agreed with Robertson's that everything went smoothly and merrily. Although many people, to the last, dreaded the effect of the "Owl's Roost" scene, my faith in his comedy remained unshaken, and was happily justified, for its success became the talk of the town. Acquaintance with the author soon ripened into the friendship which had so marked an influence on my future theatrical life.

*Society* was produced in November 1865. In reviewing the play, John Oxenford, the *doyen* of the dramatic critics, and himself a well-known figure in "Bohemia," wrote of it in *The Times* that the scenes in which the "Owls" figured were indeed the best, not only because they were extremely droll, but because they constituted a picture of the rank and file of literature and art, with all their attributes of fun, generosity, and *esprit de corps* painted in a kindly spirit. He went on to refer to a report which had reached him—which he declared, if true, to be only the more absurd on that account—that some thin-skinned gentlemen had objected to these scenes as derogatory to the literary profession. Never, in his opinion, was "snobbery" more misplaced. The piece was vehemently applauded from beginning to end. Success could not be more unequivocal.

A distinguished French critic, M. Augustin Filon, after describing the famous episode in which the only five shillings in the "Owl's Roost" passes from hand to hand throughout the entire assembly till it finds rest in the pocket of the member who originally asked for the loan, remarked that the incident was taken from actual life. Thus reproduced upon the stage, it seemed indescribably comic, and proved the turning-point in the fortune of the play.

The management was young and struggling, and the scenery was simple enough, with the exception of a very realistic interior of a West-End square in moonlight, beautifully painted by Charles Stanfield James; but already the correct dressing of our plays had impressed theatre-goers and critics, and I clearly recall the impression made by the carefully chosen frocks I wore as Maud Hetherington, as this came upon an age of much indifference to reality. A very little while before, I had seen a leading lady at the Haymarket Theatre end one act in a dinner-dress, and pay a morning call in the next act wearing the same garments!

The comedy was admirably acted. John Clarke was lifelike as the little cad John Chodd, Junior; Frederick Dewar (afterwards so famous as Captain Crosstree in Burnand's burlesque of *Black-eyed Susan*) excellent as Tom Stylus; Mr. Bancroft and I made considerable success as the hero and heroine; and it was then I gave our old friend John Hare the opportunity, as Lord Ptarmigan, of laying the foundation of his brilliant reputation. He and our two selves formed a trio which, alas! as I write, represents the entire original cast.

On its production *Society* was played for 150 nights—in those days an extraordinary and, as it seemed to us, never-ending run. It was a bright and happy time for Robertson. He and I never once during our acquaintance knew what it was to have an angry word: a delightful reflection! We were of mutual value to each other; he knew it, and



certainly our good stars were in the ascendant when Tom and I were "first acquaint."

Looking back, as my wife and I often do, through the long vista of more than forty years, it is still easy to understand the great success of this comedy. In those now far-off days there had been little attempt to follow Nature, either in the plays or in the manner of producing them. With every justice was it argued that it had become a subject of reasonable complaint with reflective playgoers, that the pieces they were invited to see rarely afforded a glimpse of the world in which they lived; "the characters were, for the most part, pale reflections of once substantial shapes belonging to a former state of theatrical existence, whilst the surroundings were often as much in harmony with the days of Queen Anne as with those of Queen Victoria." I do but echo unbiassed opinions in adding that many other so-called pictures of life presented on the stage were as false as they were conventional. The characters lived in an unreal world, and the code of ethics on the stage was the result of warped traditions. The inevitable reaction at length made itself apparent; the author of *Society*, it was truly said, rendered a public service by proving that the refined and educated classes were as ready as ever to crowd the playhouses, provided only that the entertainment given there was suited to their sympathies and tastes.

The Robertson comedies appeared upon the scene just when they were needed to revive and renew intelligent interest in the drama. Nature was Robertson's goddess, and he looked upon the bright young management as the high-priest of the natural school of acting. The return to Nature was the great need of the stage, and happily he came to help supply it at the right moment.

In this connection I may quote from a brilliant pen on a novel scene in *Society*, which was acted by my wife and myself. "Then came an idyll,

evolving amidst the trees of a London square. What love—youthful, tender, tremulous love—in the very heart of this city of mud, fog, and smoke! Love, so near that you might touch his wings! That was the kind of impression it evoked.”

*Society*, although eclipsed in success by the later Robertson comedies, which were written especially for us, was always well received and welcomed when we revived it. The first occasion was for a hundred nights, which began in the autumn of 1868, when I resigned the part of the hero, Sidney Daryl, to the gay and handsome Harry Montague, and played Tom Stylus, the jovial Bohemian journalist and editor of *The Earthquake*, a character in which I always revelled. No part that I have played ever gave me greater pleasure to act. I recall the pride evoked in me by the dictum of a distinguished writer, that “the art and subtle delicacy displayed were worthy of the elder Coquelin,” which was saying much.

I fear my knowledge of music is as feeble as my love for it is strong—and “I had a song to sing, O!” To keep myself in tune, I introduced an old piano into the clubroom and enlisted Meredith Ball, our conductor, as a member of the club so that he might play the accompaniment, the chorus being taken up with solemn and grotesque humour by the “Owls.”

This revival was connected with an episode that occurred shortly before we began to rehearse for it. On returning from the theatre to the first home we occupied after our marriage, I had been constantly told by a maid-servant that “a young gentleman had called,” and that he seemed very persistent about seeing me. One day the girl informed me that “the young gentleman” had in a most determined way pushed past her, bounded up the steps, and walked into our little drawing-room, where he then was. I joined our visitor rather angrily, but was at once disarmed by the frank manner of a handsome young fellow of about twenty, who within five minutes pointed to a window of a room in the opposite villa

and said, "That's the room I was born in ; my aunt, Mrs. Grote, then lived there, and my mother was staying with her." Of course the "young gentleman" was stage-struck ; he was formerly in the Navy, but had acted a few times in a country theatre and "wanted to go upon the stage," adding that "he was resolved not to leave the house until I had given him an engagement." His courage and cool perseverance amused and amazed me ; the very force of his determined manner conquered me, and the upshot of our interview was that I did engage him. His name was William Terriss, and Lord Cloudwrays, in *Society*, was the small part in which one who grew to be among London's greatest stage favourites made his first appearance in a London theatre.

After acting with us for two seasons, he suddenly asked to be released, saying that he had made an early marriage and wished to seek fortune in the Falkland Islands ; he returned, however, in a year or so, to England and the stage, accompanied by a beautiful baby named Ellaline, who has inherited her father's bright nature and gifts. Later on Terriss distinguished himself in many characters ; in none more than as Thornhill in the original production by Hare of *Olivia* at the Court Theatre, and, to my mind, as "Bluff King Hal" in Irving's sumptuous revival of *Henry VIII.* at the Lyceum. It was there his undaunted courage showed itself while rehearsing the duel in *The Corsican Brothers* with his already eminent manager, to whom he boldly said, "Don't you think, governor, a few rays from the moon might fall on me ? Nature, at least, is impartial !" The heroes in a series of melodramas at the Adelphi Theatre afterwards gained much from his convincing, breezy dash : it was while he was acting in one of them that a malignant madman stabbed him at the stage-door and robbed theatre-land of the sunshine he spread around him.

I remember Lionel Monckton telling me a weird story, his mind being full of the horrible tragedy, of

how he was startled on returning home late that night by the discovery that an old grandfather clock, which was a present to him from Terriss, had not been wound and had stopped exactly at the hour of the murder. Poor Terriss! The last time I saw him was shortly after I received my knighthood, when he sprang to his feet and, in the presence of many friends, gave vent to a torrent of words of congratulation and appreciation—which seemed to bubble from his lips—so unexpected, so strangely generous and unstudied, as to move me very much. I little thought we should never meet again.

In the autumn of 1874 *Society* was again revived, when it ran for five months, and could have been played longer still, had we not found it necessary to cut short its career. The last appearance of this true friend was at the Haymarket Theatre in 1881, when we produced it for fifty final performances before giving up the rights in his comedies to the author's children. The delicate comedy stood the lapse of time and transplanting to the larger stage remarkably well, although then sixteen years old—no mean age for any play.

One of these final performances brought a flattering letter from the accomplished German actor Ludwig Barnay, then appearing at Drury Lane with brilliant success as Marc Antony with the Meiningen company. He wrote :

“Allow me to tell you how much I was charmed with yesterday's representation of *Society*. I confess I wondered at and admired likewise the perfection of the particular artistic performances, as well as the entire production and the excellent *ensemble*. Receive my hearty thanks for giving me the opportunity of seeing this representation, which will form a striking point in my London recollections.”

#### “OURS”

*Ours* was the second play by Robertson which we acted, and the first he wrote expressly for us. It was

produced in the autumn of 1866, and achieved a success which went far to strengthen the ultimate fortunes of the theatre and the fame of its author. The almost hysterical effect of the second act, upon audience and players alike, remains firmly in our recollection and is talked over by us still. The imagination was so powerfully wrought upon when the troops are leaving for the Crimea, that as they heard the bugle calls, the words of command, the tramp of the departing soldiers marching to their bands playing "The girl I left behind me" and "The British Grenadiers," so could they see, as plainly, the chargers prancing, the bayonets gleaming, the troops forming, the colours flying; they could even see, as it were, the form of Queen Victoria taking her farewell of her soldiers from the balcony of Buckingham Palace as the curtain fell to the strains of the National Anthem.

It is interesting to recall the great surprise caused in those days by such simple realistic effects, until then unknown, as the dropping of the autumn leaves throughout the wood scene of the first act, and the driving snow each time the door was opened in the hut. It may also be worth while to note that this play, like *Masks and Faces*, was suggested to the author by a picture, Robertson having evolved the plot from thoughts inspired when Millais first exhibited the "Black Brunswicker."

Except as regards John Hare and ourselves, the names of those who first acted in *Ours* would convey nothing to modern playgoers. Their tiny flame of fame long since flickered and burnt low. When the charming comedy was produced the author's name was no longer obscure; but the success of its first revival in 1870, when it ran for nine months, far eclipsed that of the original production—the play was riper, and Robertson's reputation had grown enormously meanwhile through our successful production of his later plays. If the six comedies he wrote for the Prince of Wales's Theatre were arranged in the

order of success achieved by them throughout their career, *Ours* would rank second; more by accident than design it became our sheet-anchor in times of storm and stress. Even greater pains than attended its production were bestowed upon the revival, and the play was dressed, with regard to the exactitude of uniforms, in a more complete way. Admiral Sir Edward Inglefield, an old friend and our neighbour at the time, gave us a valuable bit of realism in a Russian drum, captured by himself in the Crimea, which figured in all our subsequent performances of the play. It was said of this revival that *Ours* strongly developed the powers which had been exhibited in *Society*, with the addition of a subtle but poignant pathos, which, though not a *distinctive* characteristic of Robertson, had since proved one of his greatest merits.

On the day following this revival the author wrote this letter:

6, ETON ROAD, N.W.  
November 27, 1870.

MY DEAR MARIE,—

*Ours* was acted so excellently last night, that, as I may not see you for the next few days, I write to express the great gratification it gave me to see that the "light troupe" had distinguished themselves more than ever.

You know that I am not given to flattery, and that my standard of taste for comedy is somewhat high. I was really *charmed*, and I was very ill the whole night. The remark of every one I heard was, "What wonderfully good acting!" and I was pleased to find Boucicault descanting on it to a chosen few. He said that not only was the general acting of the piece equally admirable, but that he had never—including Paris—seen such refinement and effect combined, as in the performance of the second act. He said, too, that the actors who had played in the piece before acted better than ever. I mention this because the same thing struck me. Bancroft was most excel-

lent, and I have never seen him succeed in sinking his own identity so much as in the last act. I felt grateful to the folks on the stage-side of the foot-lights, and I am not given to that sort of gratitude.

If the revival should draw, could not the first and third acts be relieved of some ten minutes' talk? Cut wherever you like. I shan't wince, for I don't care about either the first or the last acts. If they had been less perfectly acted they would have missed fire, and deservedly.

Yours very sincerely,

T. W. ROBERTSON.

No letter in our collection is more valued by us; for, as will be told later on, the writer never saw a play in the little theatre again. It was followed by corroboration from another critical pen, that of Dion Boucicault, the brilliant father of an accomplished son, the present owner of the name. The latter has been our friend from his childhood, in the days when, as a plucky little boy only just able to swim, he took "headers" with me into the deep sea off the stern of a fishing-smack at Scarborough.

326, REGENT STREET,  
November 27, 1870.

MY DEAR BANCROFT,—

Accept my warmest congratulations on the very great improvement in the present performance of *Ours* over the original cast, especially in the part of Chalcot.

The tone of the whole is elevated, and I entertain no doubt the play will have a second run.

Mrs. Bancroft was herself throughout admirable. Give her my love. She looked good enough to eat, every bit. Her dresses were exquisite. Why do they call the "roly-poly" farce? It is eminently natural.

Yours very sincerely,

DION BOUCICAULT.

The approval bestowed upon the new Hugh Chalcot by Robertson and Boucicault was borne out

by the critics. A well-known writer stated that I had never been seen to greater advantage. Hugh Chalcot was a thoroughly English character, and it was played as though it was my own character, instead of a creation by Robertson. No part in the piece, he went on, pleased the audience better, and the merit was the greater inasmuch as the character was decidedly foreign to anything I had hitherto attempted.

The effective part of Sergeant Jones was admirably played in this revival by Charles Collette, whose quiet humour about "the twins" was as good as his manly pathos when told that the infants would be cared for during his absence at the war. No doubt Collette's early career as a subaltern in the 3rd Dragoon Guards was of use to him.

It being manifest that the play would enjoy a long career, we ventured to offer Robertson an increase on the modest fees we had paid him during the original run. His reply to a letter wishing him to agree to this proposal prompts me to note that he was the first of my friends to call me "B.,"—an abbreviation in which I have ever since rejoiced.

WEDNESDAY MORNING, *December 7, 1870.*

DEAR B.,—

Don't be offended that I return your cheque. I recognise your kindness and intention to the full; but having thought the matter over, I cannot reconcile it to my sense of justice and probity to take more than I bargained for. An arrangement is an arrangement, and cannot be played fast and loose with. If a man—say an author—goes in for a certain sum, he must be content with it, and "seek no new"; if he goes in for a share, he must take good and bad luck too. So please let *Ours* be paid for at the sum originally agreed upon. With kind love to Marie, and many thanks,

I am, yours always,

T. W. ROBERTSON.



It may interest our readers to be told that the highest fees paid by us to Robertson were at the rate of five pounds for each performance of his comedies. In earlier days for his many works, chiefly adaptations from French plays and novels, such as *Still Waters Run Deep* and *The Ticket-of-Leave Man*, Tom Taylor was content with a single payment of fifty pounds an act—a powerful contrast to the percentage demanded by modern dramatists.

*A propos* of the fortunate career which followed the revival of *Ours*, a letter from one so eminent as Mr. Ruskin naturally gave us much pleasure :

DENMARK HILL,  
March 16, 1871.

MY DEAR MR. BANCROFT,—

I cannot refuse myself the indulgence of thanking you for the great pleasure we had at the play on Wednesday last. As regards myself, it is a duty no less than an indulgence to do so, for I get more help in my own work from a good play than from any other kind of thoughtful rest.

It would not indeed have been of much use to see this one while Mrs. Bancroft could not take part in it; but much as I enjoy her acting and yours, I wish the piece, with its general popular interest, did not depend so entirely upon you two, and, when you two are resting, on the twins. I was disappointed with Mr. Hare's part; not with his doing of it, but with his having so little to do. However, that was partly my own mistake, for I had a fixed impression on my mind that he was to wear a lovely costume of blue and silver, with ostrich feathers, and, when he was refused, to order all the company to be knouted, and send the heroine to Siberia.

In spite of his failure in not coming up to my expectations, will you please give him my kind regards, and believe me,

Yours very gratefully,

J. RUSKIN.

We revived *Ours* again with great success in 1876, the most notable change in the cast being that Ellen Terry played the heroine; and when we decided that our last performances in the old Prince of Wales's Theatre ought to be of a play by Robertson, it was *Ours* that we selected for our farewell to that prosperous first home. When we revived it yet once again at the Haymarket in 1882, the performances evoked an extraordinary amount of public curiosity. Of the cast on this occasion it is interesting stage history to mention that Pinero was the Colonel Shendryn; Arthur Cecil, Prince Petrovsky; and Mrs. Langtry, Blanche Haye. One evening a few years earlier, chatting, happily, with Millais at a dinner party, I lingered in his delightful company, not knowing that more people were coming later, and when we went upstairs, a lady was standing in the middle of the drawing-room, very plainly dressed in black—one of a small group. We both exclaimed at once, "Who is that lovely woman?" I asked a generally well-informed man, who said, "I am told she is a Mrs. Langworthy, or Lang-something; and that her father is the Dean of Jersey." Later in the year, at Lord Houghton's and several other houses, we met again. Mrs. Langtry was then famous, with all London running at her heels. The dinner party I have spoken of chanced to be the *début* of the lady whose name soon afterwards was known by every one. We have a charming drawing of her given to us by poor Frank Miles, with a *pendant*, also by him, of Mrs. Cornwallis West in the zenith of her beauty.

Of this revival of *Ours*, *The Times* remarked—betraying, perhaps, that age was beginning to tell on the comedy—that the whole performance was an admirable argument in favour of those who believed that the real life of the theatre is in the actor and not in the dramatist. So long as my wife and myself sustained our present characters, there was no fear that *Ours* would lose its popularity. "These performers will always impart *prestige* to any piece by

Robertson." Altogether, we acted *Ours* seven hundred times, and more than once, before or after a new production, we found the old play a trusty, faithful friend. It was the last of the Robertson comedies revived under our management, when we played it for a short time during our farewell season.

#### "CASTE"

Although *Ours* contains the finest act—the second—*Caste* is the author's masterpiece. It was the third of the comedies he wrote for us. More than forty years have passed away since it was produced, and few modern plays have survived that length of time, to be still acted with success. Our remembrance remains keen of the author's reading of his work to the little band of players who had the privilege to act it first and to create its seven splendidly contrasted characters. George Honey played the boldly painted, bibulous Eccles. This admirable comedian began his career as call-boy at the Haymarket Theatre, and told us that he well remembered the snuffing of candles round the dress circle between the acts. Perhaps no young actor—and our old friend Sir John Hare was a very young man in those days—was ever given a finer opportunity to establish a reputation so early in his career than in the three strongly contrasted Robertson characters he first acted: the sleepy old peer in *Society*, the diplomatic Russian Prince in *Ours*, and the out-spoken gasfitter, Sam Gerridge, in *Caste*. It is one of the bright remembrances of the youthful management.

Of poor Fred Younge, who was afterwards killed in a railway accident, we used to say that he really grew to believe himself to be George d'Alroy, so earnestly did he seem to live in the part and breathe its joys and sorrows. Lydia Foote's charming and sympathetic acting as Esther Eccles may still be remembered by old playgoers. Miss Larkin, a very

capable actress whom we introduced to the London stage, was the first Marquise. The characters of Polly Eccles and Captain Hawtree call for individual remark, having been so long and so closely associated with ourselves.

My wife says: *Caste* was especially endeared to me by the dedication, "from her grateful Friend and Fellow Labourer, the Author." I loved the part of Polly for the innate fine qualities of her nature; her devotion to her dissolute, worthless father; her filial desire to screen him; her love for her sister; her real goodness with a rough exterior; the under-current of mischief and keen appreciation of humour. I enjoyed the boundless love of fun, the brisk gaiety of Polly's happy nature, and I felt, acutely, the pathos of her serious scenes.

The character is very dramatic in parts, and requires all the nervous acting I could bring to bear upon it. The last act of *Caste* is the longest in which I ever appeared, and the longest in modern drama, but, as a leading critic wrote, "not a minute too long." It played an hour and twenty minutes, and Polly is seldom off the stage throughout it. Almost every word she has to say is a pearl, so to speak; the sudden transitions from broad comic humour to deep feeling pleased me, and my heart was in my work. Polly Eccles, as a work of art, no doubt stood first in the list of my Robertson parts; a wide range of feeling must be at command to reproduce fully the intentions of the author. I was very proud to read in *The Times*: "To have seen Mrs. Bancroft in this character is to have witnessed a piece of acting unsurpassed. She attains the extreme point reached in domestic comedy."

At the memorable reading of *Caste*, Robertson, after describing the home of the Eccles family, said, "Enter George d'Alroy and Captain Hawtree, one fair, the other dark." At the close, the part of

Hawtree, to my delight, was handed to me. During the early rehearsals of the comedy, I was dining on a Sunday evening with Sothern. I was the baby of the party, and remember well the pleasure of being presented to John Oxenford, who was then dramatic critic to *The Times* in the days of the dominion of Delane. There was, however, a *real* baby in the drawing-room, who was cuddling the head of a great tiger-skin before the fire: he is now well known to the stage as "Sam" Sothern—a name, by the way, for which his godfathers and godmother were not responsible. At dinner I found myself seated next to a soldier whose appearance faintly lent itself to a make-up for Hawtree. With some diplomacy I afterwards went to Younge and suggested, if it would suit his views, that he should be the fair man. He asked how on earth he could do such a thing. Being the sentimental hero, he of course was intended to be dark; while I was equally compelled to be fair, and wear long flaxen whiskers in what he called the dandy or fop, a conventional stage outrage of those days, for whose death I think I must hold myself responsible. I eventually succeeded in touching a very pardonable vanity—the only drawback to his ever-to-be-remembered performance being that he had already partly lost his *première jeunesse*—by suggesting that a chestnut-coloured wig would give him youth. At any rate, I got my way; but I believe, at the time, I was by more than one actor thought to be mad for venturing to clothe what was supposed to be, more or less, a comic part, in the quietest of fashionable clothes, and to appear as a pale-faced man with short, straight black hair. The innovation proved to be as successful as it was daring.

The outline of the plot of *Caste* was first used in a contribution by Robertson to a Christmas volume edited by Tom Hood, and had I at the time read the story, I should certainly have begged Robertson to retain the incident of the loss of an arm by the character corresponding to Hawtree, as I think I

could have turned it to good account in the last act, which takes place after his return from active service. This was the first of what grew to be known as "Bancroft parts," a compliment which, like many others, proved by no means an unmixed blessing; a strong effort on my part was needed later on to avoid the doom of playing no others.

Brief extracts from long eulogies will suffice to record the effect of the production. With the aid of only two simple scenes, a boudoir in Mayfair and a humble lodging in Lambeth, Robertson was declared to have succeeded in concentrating an accumulation of incident and satire more interesting and more poignant than might be found in all the sensational dramas of the last half-century. (The play had that hearty human interest that springs from the vigorous portraiture of character and the truthful representation of life and manners as they really are. The characters looked and talked so like beings of everyday life that they were mistaken for such, and the audience had a curiosity to know how they were getting on after the fall of the curtain. . . . The comedy was said to be acted with that completeness which was essentially the chief characteristic of our theatre, while it was placed on the stage with a most studious attention to all those details of decoration which rendered perfect the illusion of the scene. At the end of each act the curtain was raised in response to the genuine acclamations of the house, when the *tableau* was ingeniously changed to mark the natural progress of the story. This novelty, indeed, proved very successful, and has been imitated often since.

A little incident which occurred soon afterwards at any rate testifies to the natural effect of my make-up as Hawtree. We played the first act of *Caste* at Covent Garden for the benefit of William Harrison, the celebrated tenor and former rival of Sims Reeves, in the theatre where he, Louisa Pyne, and Charles Santley had done so much for English opera. We wrongly guessed the time at which our



MARIE BANCROFT AND JOHN HARE IN "CASTE"

"Oh, the ghost!—the ghost!"

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7.



item in the long programme would be given, and an eccentric-looking trio, formed by John Hare, dressed as Sam Gerridge the gasfitter, Arthur Sketchley, then well known as an entertainer, in evening dress (ready for "Mrs. Brown at the Play" between the acts), and Captain Hawtree, walked over to an hotel in Bow Street in the dusk of an intensely hot evening, and asked for brandies-and-sodas, to the amazement of some occupants of the coffee-room, who could not understand the gasfitter's familiarity with his companions.

In those days there was no copyright law with America, and Robertson was cruelly robbed of the large fees he should have received. Shorthand experts were placed, for several successive nights, in different parts of the theatre to take down the text of *Caste*. This was so secretly and cleverly done as to enable the play to be acted throughout the United States without one cent of payment—the work, it is to be the more regretted, of an actor. He is since dead, so I will not write his name.

In some respects our experiences with *Caste* were the same as with *Ours*. Its success on its original production in 1867 was very great; but the triumph in 1871 of the first of its several revivals was far greater, due largely, no doubt, to the increased fame acquired in the meantime by the play, its author, and its interpreters. The only material change in the distribution of characters was that Charles Coghlan played d'Alroy. Night after night the little house in Tottenham Street was transformed into the "little house in Stangate" (the home of the Eccles family), and on both occasions we only withdrew *Caste* to make room for another play, that we might continue a principle already formed of making a *répertoire*. "Not a vacant seat in the stalls, boxes full, dress circle full, every place occupied; and not only this, but the same air of refinement, that unmistakable stamp of audience with which it is pleasant to associate, and which makes a visit to the Prince of

Wales's one of the pleasantest treats which can fall to the lot of the playgoer." Polly was again the object of extraordinary praise; while of Hawtree a leading critic wrote that it was—and is—the perfection of acting, and in the highest sense a most artistic assumption. Another friendly pen wrote long years afterwards: "Could nine hundred and ninety-nine actors out of a thousand suppress or avoid the farcical, or make the part the magnetising human study Bancroft made of it?"

It was sometimes said that the Robertson comedies could only be effective in a small theatre. To refute this let me state that in the summer of 1873 we played *Caste* for a few weeks at the enormous Standard Theatre in Shoreditch. It was a risky experiment to act this delicate comedy in a theatre larger even than Drury Lane and before an East-end audience, and we ourselves were a little in doubt as to the result; but any fears we entertained were soon dispelled, for densely packed houses nightly received the play with enthusiasm, appreciating fully its most tender scenes, and listening with rapt attention. The case was well put in a long article on this engagement in which it was said that, apart from the perfection of the play and players, that East-end theatre was a sight worth going far to see when the play was *Caste* and the players the Prince of Wales's company. From basement to ceiling within its vast area gathered night after night interested, intelligent, enthusiastic audiences, who received the play with storms of impulsive applause. It made the writer wonder whether, "wise as we were," we did not err in one respect—that of playing ordinarily in too small a theatre for the attractions we offered and the amazing popularity we commanded.

The play was again revived with all its old success in 1879, when John Clayton played George d'Alroy; Arthur Cecil, Gerridge; and the ill-starred Amy Roselle, Esther. George Honey was re-engaged for his original part, Eccles; and I may mention that, so

rapid, through our initiative, had been the advance in theatrical salaries, that he then drew sixty pounds a week, with a guarantee for not less than six months, as against eighteen pounds when he first played the part, but little more than ten years earlier.

It was during this revival that poor Honey was stricken with a fatal illness. For some time he had not been well, and spoke of rheumatism in his arm and side; we learnt afterwards that for some days he had changed part of his business on the stage, and acted, as it were, left-handed; but, in all his long connection with us, Honey had never once felt ill enough to fail in his work, nor was he of a complaining nature. When I left the stage after the scene in which Polly teaches Captain Hawtree the proper use of a tea-kettle, I was in the nightly habit of finding Honey in the green-room. On this particular evening he was not there. As I was about to put on my uniform for the next act, the call-boy rushed to my door, saying, "Come down, sir, please—Mr. Honey's in a fit." I reached the wings just as the cue was given for the entrance of poor Honey, who by this time had been lifted from the ground and placed in a chair. The situation reached in the play was the end of the first act, where George d'Alroy defies the world, resolving to marry the humble Esther Eccles; Sam Gerridge and Polly, in contrast, have been quarrelling, and she has locked the door against him, retaining the key. The romance of George and Esther, at its supreme moment, is rudely interrupted by the shaking of the door from the outside, and the voice of the now drunken Eccles, noisily asking to be let in, awakes the lovers from the land of dreams. Esther and George exchange looks—looks deeply full of meaning—that carry on the tale; the girl silently crosses the room, gets the key from her sister, unlocks the door, when the wretched father reels into the room. This is what happened. There was no time for thought; at the moment I only grasped the fact that Honey

suddenly was helpless. I gave the knocks, shook the door, crying out to Polly, in the voice of Eccles, for him to be let in. The business of the scene was gone through without those upon the stage knowing that anything was wrong. As the key was turned in the lock I gathered Honey in my arms, and held his body in the open doorway, upon which tableau the curtain fell. It took but a moment then to make the painful discovery that the audience had roared with laughter at the powerless form of a stricken man. The late Henry Kemble finished the part on that sad evening, and continued to play it till the close of the revival. Poor Honey lingered for a year, but never really recovered.

Before our rights in the Robertson comedies expired we finally revived *Caste* at the Haymarket in 1883. We were fortunate enough to persuade that great actress, Mrs. Stirling, to appear as the Marquise. She played the part as it had never been acted; the tones of her grand voice still linger in the memory as she said to her son, "I may never see you again: I am old; you are going into battle." We also were able to replace George Honey's splendid performance of Eccles by the different but able treatment of David James. We thought it impossible ever to realise another Eccles, so keen was our remembrance of each intonation in every speech as originally rendered; but in some scenes we preferred James's humour. We can imagine no funnier treatment of many lines, and still laugh heartily at the remembrance of his bibulous assurance to the Marquise that he was "always at home on Thursdays from three to six." I fear this must be owned to be a "gag," for which the new Eccles was very much obliged to his daughter Polly, and which the author, had he lived, would, as in other cases, certainly have added to his book.

And since those days, the original Sam Gerridge of our company has added another striking portrait of Eccles to his gallery of artistic creations.

A pleasant souvenir of the old play came from Linley Sambourne, a gift of the earliest drawings he submitted to *Punch* when quite a youngster: an amusing sketch of Papa Eccles, who had evidently "met a friend round the corner," supported by Captain Hawtree and Sam Gerridge. In the artist's own words: "It was done early in the year 1867, when I was just beginning to draw, and twenty-two years of age. I went to the pit to delight in *Caste*, and drew the sketch from memory. The late Mark Lemon selected it from others for me to put on wood for *Punch*, and it appeared in the number for July 20, 1867."

By a happy chance, Hare was not acting in his own theatre at this time, and the idea occurred to us that it would be delightful to all three if, on the last performance of *Caste* under our management, he would appear in his original character of the gasman. His answer to a letter suggesting this happy thought will best speak his feelings on the subject :

THE RED HOUSE, HORNTON STREET, CAMPDEN HILL,  
March 6, 1883.

MY DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,—

Believe me, I reciprocate all the kind feeling expressed in your letter. It will be to me a source of the greatest pleasure to be once more "Sam" to your "Polly" on the occasion of your last appearance in *Caste*, associated as that play is, in my mind, with such a host of pleasant and kindly memories. Those old times were indeed happy ones, and the recollection of them is not easily to be effaced. Believe me, dear Mrs. Bancroft, always yours,

JOHN HARE.

He, and all concerned, had a tremendous reception; indeed, it would sound like exaggeration to describe the affectionate enthusiasm which followed the performance, or the scene that occurred at the

close of it. The audience, it was said, seemed as though they could not endure finally to break the association with the past. Polly Eccles had been throughout the evening the recipient of magnificent presents of flowers, one gigantic bouquet bearing her name in roses. At the end of the play these beautiful offerings were all banked up in every direction on the humble furniture of "the little house in Stangate," while time after time Polly Eccles bowed her adieux to the excited audience—standing now with her old comrade, the first Sam Gerridge, who then played the part for the last time, now with Mrs. Stirling, and finally again and again with her hand in Captain Hawtree's.

I quote one sentence only from the next day's wealth of praise: "To have seen Mrs. Bancroft as Polly Eccles is to charge the memory with one of the most gracious souvenirs it is likely to carry." And so good-bye to *Caste*.

#### "PLAY"

Robertson's next comedy, *Play*, which was produced early in 1868, may be dismissed briefly. It was the least successful of the six, and ran little more than a hundred nights. We never revived *Play*. It was a tender plant, and owed much to the care with which it was nursed. It was, however, adorned by one of Robertson's exquisite love-scenes, "acted to perfection," it was said, by Mrs. Bancroft and Montague, to the accompaniment of sweet music played by the sighing wind upon the old Æolian harp which hung upon the ruined walls of the Alte Schloss. Other parts were taken by Lydia Foote, Mrs. Leigh Murray, myself, John Hare, and William Blakeley—afterwards for many years a prominent favourite at the Criterion Theatre—whom we introduced to the London stage, and who, as Mr. Bodmin Todder, acted with great humour. Hawes Craven painted some really beautiful scenery, and Robertson,

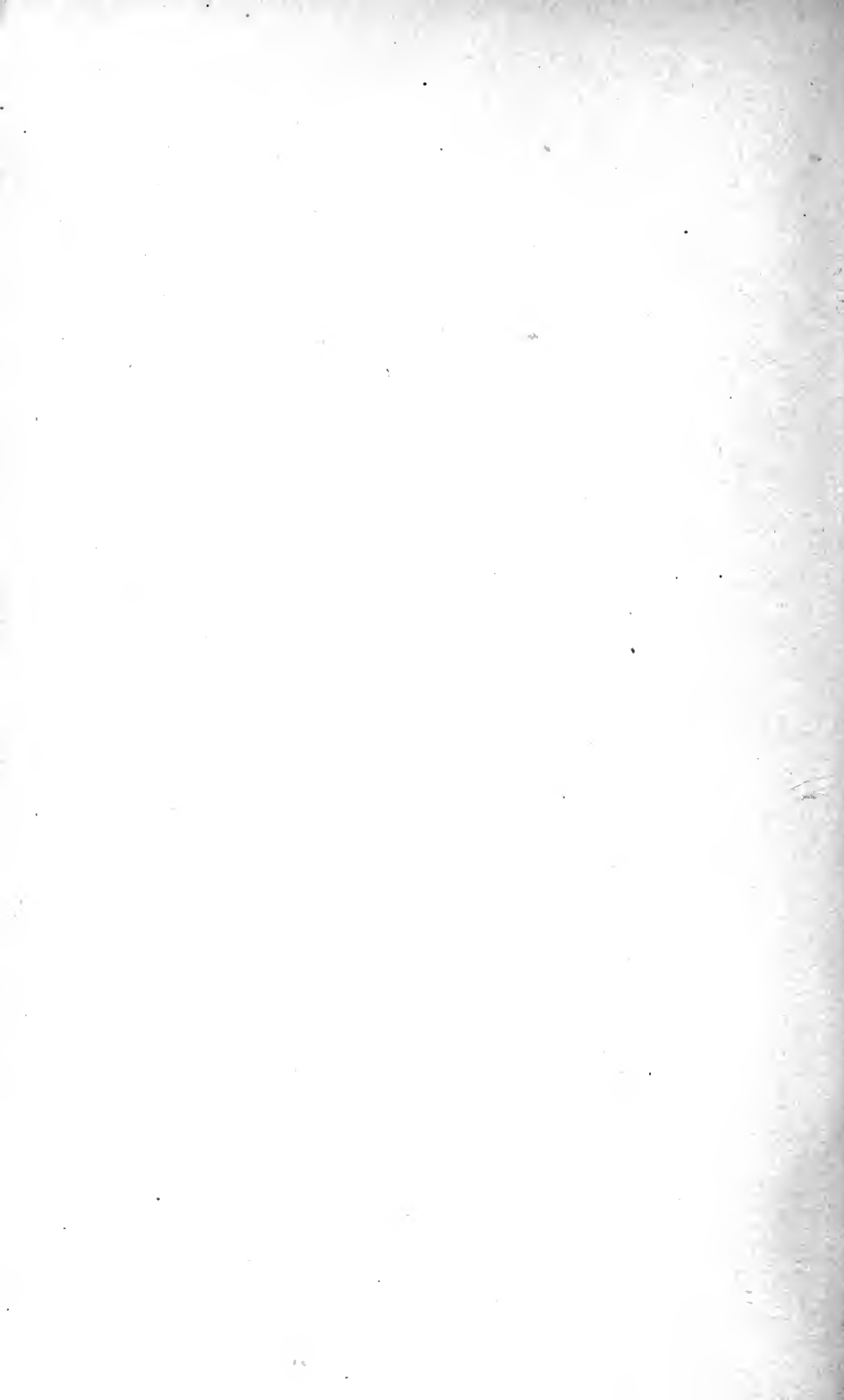


CHARLES BROOKFIELD'S CARICATURE OF THE TWO TRIPLETS  
(see p. 151)



CARICATURE OF HARE, BANGROFT, AND HONEY  
IN "CASTLE"

Linley Sambourne's first drawing for *Punch* (see p. 101)





who was fresh from Baden-Baden, supplied a great deal of local colour, the scene of the play being laid in Germany, in the days when public gambling was allowed there.

On the night of the fourth performance the Prince and Princess of Wales (now King and Queen) were at the theatre, which we note from the fact of its being the first time his Royal Highness came behind the scenes and honoured the green-room with a visit. It was also the first time we had either of us ever met and been in conversation with the Prince, whose well-known love of exactitude in such matters enabled us to correct a slight error in some German uniforms worn in the play. We also record, as interesting, that his Royal Highness was accompanied by Frederic Leighton, subsequently President of the Royal Academy, and Carlo Pellegrini, whose amazing caricatures, with the now historic signature "Ape," were then first attracting attention. *A propos* of one of them, I remember asking Edmund Yates what a mutual friend would say about Pellegrini's caricature of him, which certainly was a little trying. "Say, my dear B.? He will tell everybody he thinks it delightful; but when he gets home he will lock the door and rub his head in the hearth-rug!" Pellegrini drew some special and rather elaborate caricatures of Irving as Benedick and of myself as Captain Hawtree. No "sittings" were ever given for his work, his notes for them being taken generally when the subject did not know it, and the sketches made from memory. Later on he painted a portrait in oils of me, and, in a characteristic note, said: "I have sent your facsimile to the Grosvenor Gallery: I hope you will be well hanged—I mean the portrait." Poor "Pelican"!—a most amusing creature, and a fund of merriment to his multitude of friends.

Our only further acquaintance with *Play* was once seeing it acted—and very well acted, too—by those clever amateurs, the "Windsor Strollers"—our chief remembrance being the really admirable

performances of the two comic characters by Arthur Gooch and Mrs. Wrottesley.

### “SCHOOL”

Of *School*, our next Robertson comedy, there is a very different story to tell. It was the most successful play he ever wrote. Both in its initial run and in the total number of performances given during our revivals it eclipsed its rivals, *Ours* and *Caste*. Altogether we played *School* eight hundred times, while the total performances of *Ours* reached seven hundred and of *Caste* six hundred and fifty. To say this is not to say that *School* was Robertson's best play. *Caste* is beyond comparison more dramatic, and *School* contains no scene to equal the second act of *Ours*. But the public, as ever, were masters of the situation, and on its first production the play ran from January 1869 to April 1870. It benefited, no doubt, by the growing prestige of both theatre and author, and the success of his earlier plays, as not infrequently happens in the case of novels and pictures, or other distinguished works in the beautiful world of Art.

Robertson acknowledged indebtedness for the outline of his plot to a German play by Roderick Benedix, called *Aschenbrödel* (Cinderella). This, doubtless, accounts for the anomaly of finding a resident usher in a girls' school, as well as for the parody on the pumpkin and the glass slipper in the last act, though one well-informed critic suggested that Robertson's youthful experiences in the days of privation, when he attempted to take an usher's place in Hamburg, may have furnished a few hints. Another piece of indebtedness gives a curious instance of how innocently a writer may plagiarise. Robertson one morning, when the rehearsals were well advanced, added a few lines to a speech of Jack Poyntz in the third act, and said, “At a theatre last night I was introduced to a lady, who told me

that, although I had forgotten her, she well remembered me, reminding me where we had met before, and adding that I then made use of these words: 'When Nature makes a pretty woman, she puts all the goods into the shop-window.' Whether I ever did say them or not I haven't the least idea, but they seem to me quite good enough for Jack Poyntz," and he wrote them into the part. Some years after, when reading Goldsmith's comedy *The Good-natured Man*, to see if we thought it worth revival, this sentence from the mouth of Miss Richland was revealed: "Our sex are like poor tradesmen, that put all their best goods to be seen at the windows."

We ourselves were responsible, through certain suggestions offered to the author, for the addition of one of its most effective scenes, sparkling with satire and *badinage*, between Jack Poyntz and Naomi—so admirable in contrast to the "milk-jug," sentimental love-scene which it immediately followed, and of which the *doyen* of the critics, John Oxenford, wrote that the dialogue between the young lord and Bella, while they conversed in the moonlight contemplating their own strongly cast shadows, and fancifully commenting upon them, was replete with the prettiest conceits, in which it was hard to say whether wit or sentiment had the mastery. The acting of Montague and Carlotta Addison in this scene is a delightful memory. The comedy was originally divided into three acts, and it was with difficulty we persuaded the author to change them into the then novel number of four. We were never in doubt as to the issue. A few days before the production, in a letter to an old friend, I wrote these words: "We are on the eve of the greatest success we have yet enjoyed." And so it proved. The critics were unanimous in a wealth of praise for theatre, author, and actors. *The Times* review of the play began with these flattering words: "The fact is not to be denied that the production of a new

comedy by Mr. T. W. Robertson at the theatre which, once obscure, has become the most fashionable in London, is now to be regarded as one of the most important events of the dramatic year." The success, in the opinion of the same critic, achieved by *School* eclipsed all previous triumphs of the author, and was greatly to be attributed to the manner in which it was played, to "that polished perfection of realisation that pervades the management of the Prince of Wales's Theatre down to its minutest details."

Edmund Yates, in a signed article, called *School* the most fascinating of all the Robertson plays, the sunniest, pleasantest, brightest of idylls, plotless indeed, but how interesting and amusing, its dialogue crisp with metaphor and crackling with antithesis. And it was, he declared, acted to perfection—a strong term, but a fit one. "I do not think it would have been possible to have had any of the characters better played."

The two hundred and fiftieth performance of *School* deserves a brief record. It was honoured by a second visit from the King and Queen, then Prince and Princess of Wales. The evening was terribly foggy, and during the performance it became so exceptionally dense and thick that at the close the streets were dangerous to traverse. At eleven o'clock the Royal carriages, after great difficulty—the coachmen having lost their way in Clifford Street—arrived safely, surrounded by a large body of police, bearing torches, who so escorted the Prince and Princess of Wales to Marlborough House.

The following letter from the brilliant comedian who for so many years adorned the English stage will tell its own tale :

EDINBURGH,  
November 27, 1869.

MY DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,—

You will never guess what I am going to ask you, and still less why I ask it,

Will you and the principal members of your company play me a scene from a short act at Covent Garden on Tuesday morning, January 4? "Good gracious!" you exclaim, "what on earth for?" Because it is my farewell previous to leaving for Australia! If after this you can resist, if you do not with tears in your eyes falter out, "I consent," you are made of sterner stuff than I give you credit for. Give my kind regards to Bancroft and ask him to join in the good work. Say what you will play, and rely on it that the "approbation of our kind friends before us" will be certain.

A line to Pelham Crescent will reach me; and in the meantime I will meditate on the most gracious form in which I can express my thanks.

Faithfully yours,

C. J. MATHEWS.

The performance, which was in many ways memorable, took place before a splendid audience; all the leading actors of the day appeared in various selections. The principal members of our own company played the "Examination" scene from *School*, in which Naomi Tighe could not resist improvising an extra question to be put to her as to "What she considered would be the most valuable possession of Australia?" The answer, "Charles Mathews, of course," appealed at once to the hilarity of the audience.

Afterwards a banquet was given to the great comedian, at which he presided himself and proposed his own health in a most amusing speech.

"The important task assigned to me has now to be fulfilled, and I rise to propose what is called the toast of the evening with a mixture of pleasure and trepidation. I was going to say that I was placed in not only a novel but an unprecedented position, by being asked to occupy the chair to-day. But it is not so. There is nothing new in saying that there is nothing new; and I find in *The Times* newspaper

of October 3, 1798, an advertisement of a dinner given to Mr. Fox on the anniversary of his first election for Westminster. 'The Hon. Charles James Fox in the chair.' Here is a great precedent; and what was done in 1798 by Charles James Fox is only imitated in 1870 by Charles James Mathews. I venture to assert, and I think I may do so without vanity, that a fitter man than myself to propose the health of our guest could not be found; for I emphatically affirm that there is no man so well acquainted with the merits and demerits of that gifted individual as I am. I have been on the most intimate terms with him from his earliest youth. I have shared in all his joys and griefs, and am proud to have this opportunity of publicly declaring that there is not a man on earth for whom I entertain so sincere a regard and affection."

When we revived *School* in 1873, only a little more than three years after its withdrawal, it was played for seven months; the principal change in the cast was that Charles Coghlan replaced Harry Montague as Lord Beaufoy. Montague's bright career was cut short by almost sudden death in America, where his personal charm had made him as great a favourite as he had been here. When in his happy company, he had the gift of giving you the idea that he had thought of nothing but you since your last parting, and when he said "Good-bye" that you would live in his memory until you met again.

A leading critic wrote of the revival that such an author as Robertson might have gone to his grave unhonoured and unknown had it not been for those who so truly appreciated his particular sentiment; adding that it was little less than marvellous how the spirit and meaning of such a play as *School* was sustained after five hundred representations.

The following letter was from that clever old lady Mrs. Procter, the widow of "Barry Cornwall."

She was well known and much beloved in those days.

32, WEYMOUTH STREET, PORTLAND PLACE,  
January 2, 1874.

MY DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,—

It was very like you sending me that pretty little New Year's note.

I thought I should like to give myself a treat in 1874, and so went to see you. "Time has not touched your infinite variety"; I laughed and cried as I have done before.

Your note will be placed in my book of letters. I think you shall be put between Dr. Parr and Lord Brougham—no, Naomi Tighe shall be next Lord Byron and Shelley; Jack won't mind. My regards to Mr. Bancroft.

Yours,

ANNE B. PROCTER.

The next revival of *School*, in 1880, was an anxious step. We had then left the old Prince of Wales's Theatre for the Haymarket. Soon afterwards we decided to learn at once whether the Robertsonian mine was likely to extend to our new home, or whether the vein was, so far as we were concerned, worked out. Our own faith in it was strong, although but little shared by friends to whom we announced our intention. One of them was Edmund Yates, who said, "You don't really believe, my dear B., that those little tender plays can be safely transplanted to your beautiful but much larger theatre. Your judgment will surely prove at fault this time, greatly as I respect it in things theatrical." Yates had to wait three months for his answer, which was given in vulgar figures, that the profit on the performance of *School* from the first Saturday in May until the first Friday in August exceeded ten thousand pounds. I will only add that the head of the firm of chartered accountants who audited such

affairs is still in business. From that time we looked upon the financial result of our subsequent management of the Haymarket Theatre as far on the road to—in racing slang—a dead certainty. It may be added here that when *Ours* was revived in 1882 it achieved an equivalent result, while the farewell of *Caste* in 1883 ran it very hard.

*School* was then acted for seven months. From overwhelming praise we select the statements that the comedy bore the transfer safely because it was so carefully done; that the Meissonier-like touches that had been so conspicuous on the small canvas were probably not the same as they had been years ago at the Prince of Wales's, but that Robertson's comedies proved themselves capable of being adapted to new conditions and of disclosing fresh charms to take the place of any which they might necessarily have lost in their change of locality; that the first scene of the wood might have come from one of the great French landscape painters. A French critic, writing in *Le Voltaire*, added that, so good was the scenery, he could have sworn he saw a cow in the distance cropping the grass, and he longed to get on the stage and roll on the sward. Another wrote: "In the art of amusement Mrs. Bancroft has literally no rival. Time and circumstance bend before her sway, and genius establishes itself." One of the touches which most amused the audience was the result of an incident which occurred during an early rehearsal of *School*, in the scene where Lord Beaufoy, having found Bella's shoe, asks the girls if they have lost anything. My wife was so engrossed in the character of Nummy that instinctively and in alarm she put her hand to her chignon. This purely impulsive action so amused Tom Robertson that he begged her to do it always. Bursts of laughter and applause greeted it every night, and the "business" was written by Robertson in his book.

Our two lost friends the brothers Coquelin, *aîné* and *cadet*, saw *School* during this revival.



A letter from *aîné* will be found in a later chapter.

*Cadet* published his flattering impressions in *La Vie Humoristique*:

“Les décors sont exécutés de main de maître. C’est le triomphe de l’exactitude. Les comédiens sont excellents. M. Bancroft joue dans la pièce un rôle de grand gommeux anglais à monocle, et rien n’égale son élégance et sa stupidité. Madame Bancroft joue la pensionnaire gaie; cette petite femme est un mélange d’Alphonsine et de Chaumont—gaie, pimpante, mordante et d’une adresse! . . . C’est la *great attraction* du Théâtre de Haymarket.

“Après, je reviens rapidement en cab (‘Hansom’) à mon hôtel, et je me demande en chemin pourquoi les cabs vont si vite? C’est tout simple: les cabs vont très vite parce que les cochers les poussent derrière.”

I leave my desk to verify the inscription on a merry photograph he gave us, which hangs on our staircase in good companionship. “A Madame Bancroft et à Bancroft. Leur ami Coquelin cadet. 18—.”

Just like him! Poor *cadet*! It is distressing indeed to know how sadly he must have suffered before the painful evening when, in the middle of the play, he rushed through the stage door, dressed for his part of an *abbé*, to be seen no more at his beloved Comédie Française. It is painful to think of his bright spirit quenched by melancholia. One can only trust that in his retirement he was comforted not only by the devotion of his great brother, who was hastened by grief and anxiety to his own lamented end, but also by such sweet thoughts as were disclosed by another so afflicted in the following pathetic document or “will”:

“My right to live, being but a life estate, is not at my disposal, but, these things excepted, all else in the world I now proceed to devise and bequeath. I give to fathers and mothers in trust for their

children all good little words of praise and encouragement, all quaint, pet names and endearments, and I charge the said parents to use them generously as the needs of the children require. I leave the children for the term of their childhood the flowers, fields, blossoms, and woods, with the right to play among them freely, warning them at the same time against thistles and thorns. I devise to the children the banks, the brooks, and the golden sands beneath waters thereof, and the white clouds that float high over the giant trees, and I leave to the children long, long days to be merry in, and the night and the moon and the train of the Milky Way to wonder at.

“I devise to the boys jointly all the idle fields, all the pleasant waters where one may swim, all the streams where one may fish or where, when grim winter comes, one may skate, to have and to hold the same for the period of their boyhood. The meadows, with the clover blossoms, and butterflies thereof, the woods and their appurtenances, squirrels, birds, echoes, and strange noises, all the distant places which may be visited, together with the adventures there found. I give to the said boys each his own place by the fireside at night, with all the pictures that may be seen in the burning wood, to enjoy without let or hindrance and without any encumbrance or care.

“To lovers I devise their imaginary world with whatever they may need—as stars, sky, red roses by the wall, the bloom of the hawthorn, the sweet strains of music, and aught else they may desire. To young men all boisterous and inspiring sports and rivalry, and I give them disdain of weakness and undaunted confidence in their own strength. I give them power to make lasting friendships, possessing companions, and to them exclusively I give all merry songs and brave choruses.

“And to those who are no longer children or youths or lovers I leave memory, and bequeath them the volumes of the poems of Shakespeare, and other

poets, if there be others, to live over their old days again without tithes.

“To the loved ones with snowy crowns I bequeath happiness, old age, the love and gratitude of their children until they fall asleep.”

When we finally and briefly said farewell to *School* three years afterwards, the performances might have been prolonged indefinitely; but we dreaded the continuance of the trying monotony, for when of late years the long-familiar parts were resumed, all count of the intervals seemed to be lost, and we almost grew to believe that we had never played any others.

Let us here recall that we ourselves acted altogether about three thousand nights in the Robertson comedies—equal in time to some years of life. We might indeed have gone on reviving these plays until madness or old age arrested us: the familiar *Chanson de Fortunio*, as played in *Ours*, one almost dreamt had been a cradle lullaby, and was yet to be a requiem.

The glorious original run of *School*, which lasted for fifteen months, was saddened by the knowledge, which gradually became manifest, that Robertson, who had been ailing for some little time, was gravely ill; and we learnt to our sorrow that he was suffering from serious heart trouble.

#### “M.P.”

The last of the comedies he wrote for us was *M.P.* Before it was finished, he rapidly grew worse and was unable to leave his house and attend rehearsals; and it fell to my lot to read the play to the company, who received it with enthusiasm. From the first, however, we were conscious ourselves of some weakness in the work. In spite of its delicate charm, its many beauties, it bore marks of the sad fact that it was the effort of a fading man. The concluding scenes were actually dictated by the author

from his sick-bed, and we were distressed by a growing fear lest the play should not act so well as it had read. We felt strongly that an adverse verdict might be fatal to the slender thread by which Robertson held his life; and if ever a play was snatched from failure, this one was by the extraordinary care with which it was rehearsed and the affectionate work devoted to it by all concerned. We rehearsed it persistently and patiently for six weeks, a thing then quite unknown, and a longer time than we had yet given to any play. Towards the end we used to meet at his house and show poor Robertson, act by act, the result of our labours. Almost up to the moment of its announcement, the comedy remained unchristened, when a conversation between us, as we were driving to one of its rehearsals, led to an inspiration on the part of "M. B." (Marie Bancroft), who suggested that it should be called *M.P.* This bright idea was immediately telegraphed to cheer the author, who answered, "Send the happy letters to the printer, and tell Marie I owe her five hundred pounds for them."

Happily our efforts were rewarded, and the play achieved a brilliant success, again partly due to the vogue enjoyed alike by author, theatre, and company. We dispatched messengers in hot haste to the sick author after each act, with the good news of its splendid reception. This success, we have no doubt, prolonged Robertson's life at least by months, and rekindled for a while the flicker of hope that was left to him. An able, kindly pen compared this incident to the close of Mozart's career, who, when he could be no longer present at the Vienna Opera House to hear his last great work, *Die Zauberflöte*, noted the movement of the hands of his watch, and said, "Now they are singing such-and-such a song; now this or that scene is going on." "Earnestly do we wish," said the writer, "that the fate of the two men may not be similar"—a wish, alas! that was not to be fulfilled.

The demand for seats during the first hundred performances was extraordinary ; but it was impossible to push back the stalls any further, as they had already encroached on the pit as much as could be allowed.

An exhaustive article written by the accomplished Tom Taylor—who, during an illness of John Oxenford's, was replacing him on *The Times*—said that Robertson had added another leaf to the garland he had so honestly and honourably won at our theatre. "None of his 'first nights,' we should say, can have been more genuinely and pleasantly successful than that of his new comedy, *M.P.*" The writer went on to say that in the way of light comedy there was nothing in London approaching the pieces and the *troupe* of the Prince of Wales's taken together ; authors, actors, and the theatre seemed perfectly fitted for each other. Paris itself furnished no exact *pendant* to this theatre. These comedies were, indeed, he continued, so unlike other men's work, that they amounted to a creation. Light as they were, there was in them an undercurrent of close observation and half-mocking seriousness which lifted them above triviality. "Mr. Robertson is perfectly seconded by his actors. The love-scenes are sweeter and more poetical than any the author has given us."

The play was also compared to the preparation of an elegant supper by a skilful French cook, where, with a little "stock," a bunch of garden herbs, a spoonful of salad oil, and a *souppçon* of spice, the guest may rise from table and exclaim that he has supped like a prince.

A Parisian journalist who was in London taking notes qualified his otherwise unfavourable verdict when he went to the Prince of Wales's Theatre and witnessed the performance of *M.P.* Candidly avowing that he was under the impression that modern English plays were exclusively adapted from the French, and that really good actors were not to be found in England, he was obliged to admit that the

comedy he saw was not only of native growth, but was filled with sparkling, pointed, and witty phrases, and was performed by clever actors and actresses. He ended his narrative of personal experience with the remark, which is the highest compliment that a Frenchman of the world can utter, "*J'ai passé une soirée charmante.*"

Through the summer and autumn of that year (1870) Robertson continued to grow worse. His sufferings were very great—indeed, as he once said to us, the pain was so acute that, when it had for the moment passed, it seemed to leave an echo in his bones. We were all the more horrified, therefore, one morning in November—when a cold white fog had penetrated into the theatre—to hear the hall-keeper announce to us, with a frightened look upon his face, that Mr. Robertson was at the stage door. We were terror-stricken, knowing him to be in an unfit state to leave his house, even in fine weather. In a piteous plight he came for the last time among us; many of the company then spoke their farewell word to him. He stayed for half an hour in dreadful suffering, tortured by a cough which told what he endured. In an agony of pain, caused by a violent paroxysm, he stooped down and knocked with a hollow sound upon the stage, saying, in a voice made terribly painful by its tone of sad reproach, to imaginary phantoms, "Oh, don't be in such a hurry!" When he recovered, we with difficulty persuaded him not to stay, for he persisted in the thought that the mere sight of the familiar stage and of the theatre which he loved and always called his "home" would alone do him good. The little band that formed our company then grouped together, and the talk was only of the sad visit which John Hare, Carlotta Addison, and our two selves are alone left to remember.

Robertson was quite unfit to work, and could make no more than scanty notes for a play we had

talked about, the story of which bore some resemblance to *The Vicar of Wakefield*—his love for Oliver Goldsmith was always strong within him—and which was to have been christened *Faith*. There are also notes in existence, which belong to Pinero, for another projected work called *Passions*.

The winter was one of unusual severity, and Robertson was advised to go to Torquay for a few weeks, where the weather was equally wretched. The journey seemed only to hasten his end. When he returned to London he was rarely able to see even his closest friends. Shortly before the end we were fortunate enough to call at a good moment; he begged to see us, and we found him propped up in a big chair, breathing with difficulty. He talked for some little time of the new play he had conceived for us, adding that only earlier in the day he had jotted down more notes about it. All this we knew could not be, and when we went away we both felt we should never touch his hand again. Two nights later, when the play was over, Dion Boucicault gently broke the news to us that, quietly and suddenly, the end had come, as Tom sat in his chair. "Born January 9, 1829. Died February 3, 1871." He was only just forty-two. On the next day we saw, lying in the room where he died, its limbs dangling and disjointed, an old doll, with the sawdust trickling from its tattered body—the doll with which he used to amuse his little daughter up to the very end.

On the night of the funeral we closed the theatre; we knew no better way to show publicly our estimate of the loss we had sustained. Upon this act the comment of *The Times* was that, though it could not recall to mind any precedent in this capital for so singular a compliment to a dramatic author, perhaps there never was an instance of a dramatist being so intimately associated with the fortunes of a particular theatre, as Robertson was with the stage and company under our control.

Tom Robertson was fond of comparing our conduct with that of other managers towards him in his early days, and would often linger after the rehearsals were over, to give us painful accounts of his many disappointments in life. He would talk with bitterness, but he none the less appreciated the change in his fortunes. After referring to the times when he had one meal a day and three parts a night to play, he would add, "Now I have three meals a day and no part to play, and for this relief Providence has my most heartfelt thanks."

We were for something more than five happy years the best of friends; our opinions on the art of acting perfectly coincided with his own; and the result was, to quote the words of others, "a new era in dramatic history." There is no doubt that, when he wrote for us, his whole heart was in his work, for his best plays were written for the theatre where he never knew failure.

It was fully recognised at the time that our appreciation of his genius and our care in producing his comedies did much to inspire and encourage him; while he, by his loyal co-operation, did much to sustain the reputation of the theatre. Indeed, there is hardly any sign of novelty in the plays he wrote for other theatres; not one of the dramas produced elsewhere was written in the vein by which he made his name, and which he was entitled to call his own, as, away from our theatre, he almost seemed to have no just pride of authorship.

Although his own style was quite of another kind, Robertson was a great admirer of Sardou, and we recall distinctly his enthusiasm on a return from Paris after seeing *Patrie*, and a like appreciation, at another time, of Meilhac and Halévy's *Frou-Frou*.

Some of his peculiarities may be worth recording. He always sat in the same box on first nights of his comedies at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, and during their progress rarely looked at the stage, but keenly watched the audience, glancing rapidly from



one part of the theatre to another, to gather the different effects the same point or speech might produce on various people; while, between the acts, he would often push his way into parts of the theatre where he would not be recognised, and listen to the opinions he could overhear. He also made a point of having some one—entirely unconnected with theatrical life—in each part of the theatre, whom he would see on the following day and hold conversations with, carefully comparing the impressions and the remarks he drew from these different witnesses—generally, he said, with valuable results.

Never were the oft-quoted words, “What shadows we are! What shadows we pursue!” more fully realised than in Tom Robertson’s life and death. After an early manhood passed in struggling misery, sometimes almost in want, he was snatched from life when he had only just begun to taste its sweets. He planted his footprints rapidly upon the sandy shores of Fame; but he trod deep enough, for Time has not yet effaced them.

Tom Taylor, writing in later years on Robertson, recalled how the author and the theatre, the actors and the rôles, all seemed made for one another. The public and the time were in harmony with the spirit of the plays and the talent of the performers; everything had come about as it should. A critic of equal rank said: “What pleasant figures Mrs. Bancroft has presented to us! that Naomi or ‘Nummy’ Tighe in *School*, or that lively girl who made the pudding in the Crimea, or Polly who made tea for Bancroft, in *Caste*. Her face beaming with good-humour and a refined gaiety—such as old people tell us was the fascination of Mrs. Jordan—made the charm of these characters.” She had revived, the writer continued, the almost lost idea, that there were other arts of acting besides exaggerated gestures, and that the eye, the mouth, the expression dimly opening, and then spreading over the face; the delayed speech, whose meaning was anticipated by a preparatory

glance; the struggle of pleasure and pain, also revealed in the face, the eager motion forward, checked irresolutely, the lips assuming a fictitious solemnity, only to relax in the contagious merriment of the *ingénue*—these evidences of delicate emotion were the really interesting portion of acting, and had an inexhaustible attraction for the spectator. “And now to turn to her ever-welcome husband—the good-humoured, good-natured, unselfish Bancr—no, the Tom Stylus, or Captain Hawtree, or Jack Poyntz, those friendly officers to whom he has introduced us.” Here could be applied the unfailing test of the sending the spectator home in good-humour, smiling to himself, and a recurrence with satisfaction thereafter to that pleasant figure. That gravity of a good, honest fellow, that unobtrusiveness, friendliness, had never, he declared, been so faithfully presented as in those characters, full of delicate touches, which only a study from *within*, and not mere observation of such peculiarities, at mess-tables or in Rotten Row, could furnish. There were but few actors, he considered, to whom that process was known; not one who had greater faculty for observation, or who was more keenly alive to the ridiculous. “A profound student of human nature, he can invest even a questionable character with good qualities. No man can be thoroughly bad when represented by Bancroft.”

Mr. Justin McCarthy, in his *Portraits of the Sixties*, wrote :

“Marie Wilton devoted herself to the revival of genuine English comedy; a revival in the strictest sense, because for a long time there had been little or nothing of real comedy seen upon the English stage—it had come to be the opinion of many London managers and actors that there was no chance of success for English comedy. The great demand was for translations from the French. I remember arguing the point with Leicester Buckingham, who declared that no London manager would run the risk of producing any comedy which had

not already passed successfully through the ordeal of performance in Paris. . . . Marie Wilton succeeded in reviving English comedy on the English stage. She brought out the comedies of the late T. W. Robertson, and these were thoroughly English. The spell of the French stage was broken for British audiences. Since that time English comedy has never lost its hold upon the public, and Lady Bancroft may claim to have borne a leading part in this momentous artistic revival."

It was Milton who wrote of "the inward prompting which grows daily upon me, that by labour and intent study, which I take to be my portion in this life, joined with the strong propensity of Nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to after-times, as they should not willingly let it die." And so, in a humble way, we think it was with Robertson. After-times may never realise what they owe to these six little plays on which we have dwelt with gratitude and love; they conveyed with surpassing charm the spirit of the passing hour; the younger generation may know them not, but it remains true that Robertson and the old Prince of Wales's Theatre worked a "complete reformation of the drama of which the playgoers of to-day are reaping the fruit." To quote the late Joseph Knight, "Robertson may be credited with the foundation of a school the influence of which survives and is felt."

Tributes to the dramatist may be multiplied almost beyond number, but we will be content to add that when he was presented to Charles Dickens, who was a frequent visitor to the old Prince of Wales's Theatre, the great novelist said that what so strongly appealed to him in Robertson's charming comedies was, of all things, "their unassuming form, which had so happily shown that real wit could afford to put off any airs of attention to it."

The whole secret of his success was truth. Behind his work there lay not only a consummate knowledge

of the stage, but a touch of inborn genius, and he achieved his success without pandering to the lower tastes of humanity. There was not the slightest suspicion of vulgarity in his art. He never wrote a line or suggested a thought with a coarse or dubious intention. His aspirations were noble and his characters gentle; and, though there was much cynicism in his plays, it was never levelled at anything pure or good. Concerning such plays as his—so chivalrous in sentiment, so English in tone—we may truly say, as Wordsworth said of his books and dreams:

“Round these with tendrils strong as flesh and blood  
Our pastime and our happiness will grow.”

There can be no better assurance of Robertson's lovable nature than the fact that he made no enemies. No one envied him his success. He was as much beloved in private as he was appreciated in public.

The great American actor, Joseph Jefferson, who was then entrancing London playgoers by his performance of Rip Van Winkle, said that of all the men he ever talked with, Robertson was the most entertaining.

When another distinguished American, Artemus Ward, lay dying, he was affectionately tended by Tom Robertson, a strong attachment having sprung up between them. Just before Ward's death Robertson poured out some medicine and offered it to the sick man, who said, “My dear Tom, I won't take any more of that horrible stuff!”

Robertson urged him to swallow the mixture, saying, “Do now, there's a dear fellow, for my sake; you know I would do anything for you.”

“Would you?” said Ward feebly, grasping his friend's hand for the last time.

“I would indeed,” said Robertson.

“Then you take it!”

Ward passed away a few hours afterwards.

We cannot better close the chapter than by



Prof. J. W. Foster  
M. D. 1848



applying to Robertson himself the words he then wrote of his lost comrade :

“ Few tasks are more difficult or delicate than to write of a departed friend. The pen falters as the familiar face looks out through the paper. The mind is diverted from the thought of death as the memory recalls some happy epigram. It seems so strange that the hand that traced the joke should be cold, that the tongue that trolled out all the good things should be silent, that the jokes and good things should remain, and the man who made them should be gone for ever.”

## CHAPTER V

### SOME OLD COMEDIES

“Courage and hope, both teaching him the practice.”

WHEN Robertson died, I was twenty-nine. Few people, nowadays, remember or know the youth of the Bancroft management. It was thought by many, and said openly by some, that his death would be a blow to the Prince of Wales's Theatre from which it could not recover, and at the time such expressions as “That bubble has burst” reached our ears. We waited quietly and patiently, fully alive to the importance of our next step, and resolved that it should not be a timid one.

In my own estimate of my capacity for management, I have often thought the most valuable quality to have been *courage*: ours was then a position which certainly called for it. Not the least important form of managerial courage is the strength of will to withdraw a play while still very remunerative, not only from belief in the attractive powers of its successor, but also that life may be spared to it to allow of its increasing the *répertoire* of the theatre, either for revival when ripe enough to be played again, or for use as a stop-gap to stem the tide of ill-fortune and dam the floods of failure which must have a share in the most favoured theatrical enterprise. That enterprise is one which so partakes of the character of gambling that I found its powers strong enough in this respect to rob me of all desire for that form of



excitement in other ways, and may add that I have often laughed at ridiculous rumours (as widely remote from truth as many others that have reached me about me and mine) of the sums I have realised by fortunate dealings on the Stock Exchange; the truth being that my few gambling speculations proved conspicuous failures, while I have but a feeble definition to offer of the meaning of "bulling" or "bearing," and such words as "contango" are as foreign to me as the tongues of Persia and Arabia.

It is now, certainly, one of our pleasantest reflections that with the sole exception of the loan—happily, so soon to be repaid—with which the theatre was started, we have neither of us ever been indebted for a shilling's-worth of help to any one, every penny we have ever owned being solely the result of our twenty years' hard work in theatrical management. And how much more than money do we owe to it! Some acquaintance with many of the most able and most gifted people in every rank of life, in our own and other lands, whom we never should have known at all but for the calling we have loved and served.

In the early days, when at the age of twenty-six I found myself face to face with the responsibility of sparing my wife the more laborious side of managing a London theatre, I took for my text some words which were written of a distinguished actor more than a hundred years before: "By his impartial management of the stage and the affability of his temper he merited the respect and esteem of all within the theatre and the applause of those without." Like many other texts, not easy to live up to; but if in the years which followed, when in a harassing profession I bore the weight and responsibility of ruling others, I in the main obeyed my maxim, it is all that can be asked of poor humanity.

My wife from the beginning placed perfect confidence in my judgment in the choice of plays, and accepted my opinion in all important matters, even when it chanced to be at variance with her own.

Whenever I was at fault, she stood more firmly by my side, and never once allowed her faith in me to be shaken by an occasional mistake. I can most truly add that throughout our managerial career she was my strongest help: modest in success, full of courage to meet a reverse, as faithful in sorrow as in joy.

Walls, they say, have ears; were trees endowed with lips, those round the garden and the little orchard of the house we lived in then could tell of many an anxious walk and talk between us two about the theatre's future, which had, of course, become a serious problem.

Brilliant offers to visit America, with our distinguished little company, had first to be considered; but then, and later, my wife's terror of the sea intervened and remained, to our great loss, an insurmountable obstacle. Throughout her life she has loved to be beside it, but to be on it is another matter, and, in her own amusing way of putting it, the mere sight of a sailor in the street makes her feel uncomfortable. But what a pity! Art belongs to the world, and hers should have been seen on the Western side of it, to say nothing of how much even then we should have been the pioneers.

My first thought towards our next step was *Vanity Fair*, the character of Becky Sharp for my wife, supported by Hare as Lord Steyne and myself as Rawdon Crawley. We were unlucky: three dramatists of the day failed to make a worthy play from Thackeray's masterpiece.

#### “MONEY”

We finally resolved that the first successor to the Robertson comedies should be a production of Lord Lytton's *Money*. Many head-shakings and ominous forebodings followed the bold announcement of our intention; some of our best friends thought the step a mad one, and that certain failure awaited the temerity of our attack upon what had grown to be known as a “standard work.”

It was certainly a venturesome move—although *Money* was really ten years younger than *Caste* is now.

At its first production by Macready, with Helen Faucit, Mrs. Glover, Benjamin Webster, and Walter Lacy also acting in it, the author, then Mr. Edward Lytton Bulwer, thought it, as he wrote in a letter to a friend, “badly acted; the principal comic part in the play, Sir John Vesey, was made by Strickland a dead weight throughout, Macready himself being a little unnerved by his own afflictions, and the whole thing was much too long.” Macready did not like the part of Evelyn, although it was specially written to give him the opportunity of appearing in a modern play, and, as he admitted in his diary, “I wanted lightness, self-possession, and, in the serious scenes, truth. I was not good; I feel it.” He had just lost a much-loved daughter—such a grief as players must hide and bear—which perhaps biassed his judgment. Although the original production proved successful, the comedy had since acquired the reputation of being unlucky, and one that had persistently belied its name.

This was the play that, in spite of the forebodings of our friends, we determined to do. When we consulted as to how to cast it, the idea of making the part of Lady Franklin a young woman did not strike us, and my wife, who shared the belief with me that considerations as to what parts we should play ourselves were not to influence decisions in the refusal or acceptance of plays, cheerfully sank her own importance as an actress on this, as on too many subsequent occasions, and agreed to accept the small part of Georgiana Vesey, while I resigned “Deadly” Smooth—not without a pang, I confess, for it had been a favourite part of mine in the country—and undertook the not slight task of trying to invent still another type of “dandy” and bestow whatever might result from the effort on the character of Sir Frederick Blount. This was done, eventually, by

a careful, but not slavish, imitation of a friend, who never detected my audacity and remained one of my warm admirers.

The many small but important parts were very carefully treated, and we worked diligently at the rehearsals for six or seven weeks, with the conviction that we were playing for the highest stake we had risked up to that time, though always conscious that success would break our trammels and allow our choice of plays a much wider range in the future.

I applied to the author to be allowed to make a few alterations in his play, chiefly with a view to avoiding a change of scene, and received the following response :

12, GROSVENOR SQUARE.

DEAR SIR,—

I am obliged for your courteous letter, and have no wish to make frivolous objections to your performance of my comedy. If it suits your convenience to play Act IV. without change of scene between one room and another in Evelyn's house, so be it ; only let me see first how you would modify lines.

It is not a few verbal cuts here and there on which I should think it worth while to cavil with a management so accomplished and so skilled as yours.

Yours truly,

LYTTON.

Fortified by the courteous sympathy received from the distinguished author during interviews at his charming house in Grosvenor Square — now occupied, I believe, by Mr. Pierpont Morgan, Junior — on the treatment of his work, we rehearsed with renewed vigour, bestowing the greatest pains upon the cast and upon the most elaborate interiors of rooms we had as yet shown. An exact reproduction of a card-room in a West-end club was a strong feature ; and there was no thought of “supers” to

represent the members, who were actors, recruited by well-mannered aspirants whom I was delighted to encourage to go upon the stage. I was justified by the subsequent careers of several youngsters who made their first appearance then.

The play was produced on Saturday, May 4, 1872, with a cast which included, as I have said, ourselves; John Hare as Sir John Vesey; Charles Coghlan as Alfred Evelyn; Frank Archer, who then made his first appearance in London and a marked success, as Captain Dudley Smooth; George Honey as Graves; Frederick Dewar as Stout; Mrs. Leigh Murray as Lady Franklin; and Fanny Brough—then quite a girl—as Clara Douglas. Perhaps the actor who gained most by the production was Coghlan, whose performance of the difficult part of the hero I will only briefly say has never, in my judgment, been excelled. Of my own performance *The Times* told me that the part of the “exquisite” was raised by me “to an importance which did not belong to him in the olden time”; and *The Daily Telegraph* said that there was such polish about the impersonation of the foppish baronet, Sir Frederick Blount, as to redeem the character from the imbecility with which it had been previously invested. “In a delineation of this kind Mr. Bancroft has not a rival upon the stage, and the inane ‘swell’ who still forces upon you the conviction that he is a true gentleman at heart requires so many qualifications to be faithfully rendered that the merits of an assumption of this kind are much more frequently over-looked than over-rated.”

Time has not greatly interfered with the following old saying which we printed on the playbill :

“’Tis a very good world we live in,  
To lend, or to spend, or to give in,  
But to beg, or to borrow, or get a man’s own,  
’Tis the very worst world that ever was known.”

The success of our new rendering of the old comedy was instantaneous and very great, revealing

possibilities in the Prince of Wales's company which some of our warmest admirers had not suspected. One of the most accomplished critics of those days wrote that, while of the general excellence of this company no doubt had ever been entertained, the question had been raised whether the talents of the individual members would bear the task of a performance drawing upon another kind of repertory than that supplied by Robertson. The question had indeed been satisfactorily answered by the production of *Money*. Another journal, the *Athenæum*, never given to excessive praise, recorded that from the current blemishes of English acting the Prince of Wales's company was to a great extent free. No attempt was made by any of its members to eclipse his fellows, or to monopolise either the space on the boards or the attention of the audience. No piece was presented in such a state of unpreparedness that the first dozen performances were no better than rehearsals; no slovenliness in the less important accessories of the play was permitted. A nearer approach was witnessed, accordingly, than elsewhere in England could be found, to that *ensemble* it was the boast of the Comédie Française to encourage. Actors were measured, so to speak, by their parts, and were only to take such as fit them. "Mrs. Bancroft herself, with an artistic feeling to be expected from her, accepts a subordinate character. The example she sets is followed, and, as a result, the performance takes the town with a sort of wonder."

Discarding the traditional business, we followed what became our practice in all our revivals of old comedy, and produced the play entirely in accordance with our own ideas of its appeal to a modern audience. We were delighted when Lord Lytton expressed his wish to be present at the first performance; he slipped away just in time to avoid appearing on the stage in reply to the enthusiastic calls, and sent us the following letter:

12, GROSVENOR SQUARE,  
May 10, 1872.

DEAR MADAM,—

Our mutual friend, Mrs. Lehmann, I trust conveyed to you my high appreciation of the remarkable skill and ability with which the comedy of *Money* has been placed on your stage. But I feel that I ought to thank you, in words not addressed through another, for the gratification afforded me. Had the play been written by a stranger to me, I should have enjoyed extremely such excellent acting—an enjoyment necessarily heightened to an author whose conceptions the acting embodied and adorned.

Truly and obliged,

LYTTON.

To MRS. BANCROFT.

The Frederick Lehmanns—for many years the kindest of friends, for some of them dear neighbours—who were of the party in the author's box, soon afterwards included us in a charming dinner-party, when the guests invited included Lord Lytton, Lord Chief Justice Cockburn, and Wilkie Collins. It was at that time we first saw the then freshly painted portrait of their daughter Nina (now Lady Campbell), a picture of lovely childhood which alone would have immortalised the brush of Millais.

Some nine months later the eminent author of the play we were still acting died at Torquay after a short illness. Indeed, it was only a few days before that his son, then Mr. Robert Lytton (the first Earl, Viceroy of India, and afterwards Ambassador to France), who had been for some time abroad, did us the honour to seek our acquaintance, enclosing a letter of introduction from his father. This led to a long talk about our production of *Money*, which "Owen Meredith" arranged to see on the following evening, just before his summons to the author's death-bed.

*Money* then ran for more than two hundred performances, a triumph far eclipsing all its previous

records, and served the exchequer to a greater extent than any of our productions up to that date, excepting only *School*. Our bold adventure was well rewarded, and encouraged us to further efforts.

Less than three years later we revived the comedy, when, through one of our few failures, we were in sudden need, and again crowded houses testified to the now favourite old comedy's undiminished popularity. On this occasion my wife appeared as Lady Franklin, the character being then for the first time acted as a young woman, Carlotta Addison was the Georgina, and Ellen Terry the most distinguished Clara Douglas since the days of Helen Faucit. An accomplished critic pointed out how an accomplished actress could win success from the most unlikely material. All the winning wilfulness of Lady Franklin, all her coaxings, all her teasings, all her plots, counterplots, and trickeries, only took up twenty-two scraps of conversation in dialogue. "The concentration of Mrs. Bancroft's art at this point is marvellous. A more perfect example of comedy art in its truest and best sense has certainly not been seen in our time."

On an occasion of one of those giant performances which are sometimes given for the benefit of an old actor, Webster—who had long retired and who was nearly, if not quite, eighty—was unwisely induced to appear in a selection from *Money*, in his original character, Mr. Graves, which he had created nearly forty years before. When the sad wreck of the once famous, handsome actor came to the wing dressed for the performance, I saw plainly how feeble he was. As his cue approached, he suddenly clung to me in a terror-stricken way, and said with emotion, "Oh, my dear boy, where am I? I'm very frightened; I don't remember what I have to do." Fortunately he had but a few words to say. I endeavoured to cheer him, and putting my arm round him, said gently, "It's all right, Mr. Webster; you remember Mrs. Bancroft, don't you?" "Remember Marie? Of course I do!"



"Then, sir, you've nothing to fear: she will look after you directly you step upon the stage."

I had to reassure and talk to him in this way as his cue came nearer and nearer. I told him how and when to start; he gave me a last wistful look, and then obeyed me like a little child. After the applause which welcomed the great comedian of days gone by had died away—which he had lost the art of acknowledging, but stood as if in a dream—Mrs. Bancroft gently took her place by the old man's side, as her part allowed her to do, and helped him through the lines he had to speak.

When we moved to the Haymarket Theatre, it was *Money* which we finally selected as our first production in our new home. We were influenced in this choice by the fact that our own parts in the play would be light; for while the elaborate preparations before and behind where it seemed unlikely a curtain ever again would hang were going on through every hour of the day, I was at the beck and call of architect, clerk of the works, scene-painters, decorators, stage-carpenters, costumiers, upholsterers, and the host of smaller folk employed *ad infinitum* in such an enterprise.

This was the last run of the comedy for which fees were paid, as the copyright had then nearly expired; indeed, we had to make special terms with the then Lord Lytton ("Owen Meredith") for its revival. Rehearsals, which had begun in peace at the Prince of Wales's, were ended in tumult at the Haymarket. The five years that had intervened since our last production of the play rendered it impossible to recall some of the former successes to the cast, but while we ourselves retained our old parts, Marion Terry, Arthur Cecil, Conway, and Forbes-Robertson then appeared for the first time in the play, which introduced Charles Brookfield to the London stage, and also Frederick Terry, who appeared as a boish member in the club scene.

The opening night of our new theatre was an

eventful one and will be dealt with elsewhere, as will the demonstration that greeted my abolition of the pit. To add to that, there was a dense fog; while the new surroundings and the want of sufficient rehearsal on the unfamiliar stage affected many of the company with nervousness. Dutton Cook aptly discerned that the players hardly yet understood the perspective, or the *optique du théâtre*, of their new position. "Mrs. Bancroft, who had an extremely affectionate greeting when she stepped on the stage as Lady Franklin, was the only member of the company who entirely controlled her nervousness." Shortcomings in the *ensemble* were remedied as we grew accustomed to the great change in our surroundings, and the play ran with great success for eighty nights, with a result which surpassed what would have been possible in our former home, and at once rendered our prospects at the Haymarket more secure than, at the time, was either thought or believed.

#### "THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL"

Our next and still more daring excursion at the Prince of Wales's into the field of old comedy was *The School for Scandal*, which we produced in the spring of 1874. Supported by the brilliant success achieved by *Money*, and the importance to the theatre of finding a part of value for my wife, I decided to go still further to the classics, and venture upon a production of Sheridan's masterpiece, with a view to presenting the grand old comedy as an exact picture of its period.

The first steps towards this ambition were long and careful visits to both the Print-room and the Reading-room in the British Museum, and equally valuable pilgrimages to Knole. This entrancing country seat I visited in the companionship of George Gordon, our principal scenic artist, in order to choose such types of rooms as, from their wealth of pictures and old furniture, might best serve our scheme of

elaborate and faithful decoration. For many months before the date of the production we were at work upon the details of the play. During the hundred years which had elapsed since it first took the town, the tastes and requirements had considerably changed, and we felt that it would be only just to the great comedy to heighten its effect by an unprecedented attention to the costumes, scenery, and general appointments, and by a few transpositions in the sequence of the scenes, made with every regard for the integrity of the text—an arrangement which was the joint work of Charles Coghlan and myself. My wife conceived the idea of introducing, for the first time, the *minuet de la cour* at Lady Sneerwell's reception, which greatly enriched the scene. The general effect of this interpolated dance was reproduced on the curtain painted for us when we moved to the Haymarket, and a replica of it can still be seen at the now altered theatre. This dance also inspired a charming picture by Val Prinsep, R.A., exhibited in the Royal Academy; the sketch of “The Minuet,” as our old friend called it, he kindly gave to my wife. Our example in introducing the dance has so often been followed at subsequent revivals of the comedy as to cause it to be regarded as part of the original work. The same story might be told, no doubt, of my part of the rearrangement, by which Charles Surface's banquet and the subsequent sale of the portraits of his ancestors took place for the first time in the same scene. This plan is now always adhered to, and was even announced some years ago by a manager in America as his own “new arrangement.” “Out, out, brief candle!”

Another feature which we introduced into the comedy for the first time was Lady Teazle's black page. My wife resolved that our Pompey should be a real one, but we had great difficulty in finding him. The docks, workhouses, charitable institutions, and every likely place we could think of were searched in vain. At last a boy of the true type of

African beauty, with large protruding lips, gleaming eyes, receding forehead, woolly hair, and a skin which shone like a well-coloured meerschaum pipe, was lent to us by an owner of sugar plantations. The boy was called "Biafra," after the ship he came over in, and looked a picture in his laced scarlet coat, his white turban, and gilt dog-collar. Lewis Wingfield was so taken by the boy's appearance that he painted a portrait of him and gave it to my wife.

The cast included, besides ourselves as Lady Teazle and Joseph Surface, John Hare as Sir Peter, and Charles Coghlan as Charles Surface, performances which are elsewhere alluded to; Lin Rayne was an original and admirable Benjamin Backbite, and Fanny Josephs a most captivating Lady Sneerwell.

The production of the comedy was so exceptional at the time as to draw a powerful description of its many beauties from the picturesque pen of Clement Scott, who then was rendering great service to the stage by his tributes to the acting of those days:

"There are four complete and accurate pictures of high life towards the close of the eighteenth century. We are shown society in Lady Sneerwell's drawing-room; society in Sir Peter Teazle's house; society at Charles Surface's; and, finally, a complete insight into the life of Joseph Surface. Come, then, to Lady Sneerwell's. It is the morning of a great rout or assembly. The amber satin curtains are half pulled up the lofty windows. The sunshine falls upon the quilted panels of spotless gold satin. Lady Sneerwell, in powder and brocade, sits sipping her tea out of faultless china in a high marqueterie chair, her feet upon a cushion of luxurious down. The appearance of the room is dazzling. The tone of society is a lavish and lazy luxury. Here comes Mrs. Candour with her fan and her scandalous stories; Crabtree with his richly embroidered coat; Sir Benjamin Backbite, in pink silk, with his mincing, macaroni airs, his point-lace handkerchief, his scented snuff; and here amongst this gaudiness, frivolity,



THE BANCROFTS AND JOHN HARE IN "THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL"



and affectation, sits poor Maria, detesting the shallowness and insincerity of the age in which she was born. Change the scene quickly to Lady Sneerwell's drawing-room at night. The spinet and the powdered musicians; the room being bared of furniture and empty for a dance. Watch the gorgeous footmen calmly going round the room to snuff the guttering candles; listen how the guests chatter and flatter one another, seated on rout-seats against the wall; they take snuff with an air and bow with courtly gravity; they turn a verse or recite an epigram. Sir Benjamin Backbite is pestered for the latest folly, Mrs. Candour is teased for her latest bit of scandal. But see, Lady Teazle enters, her train held by a negro page-boy; all eyes are attracted by her beautiful dress, while all tongues are wagging about the young wife who has married an old bachelor. The music gives out the first bars of a glorious minuet, and tells us of the days when musicians wrote for dancing, and when dancing was an art. We know not which most to admire, the refined orchestration or the studied courtesy of the polished dance.

“Change the scene again to a room at Sir Peter Teazle's: its semi-circular shape is seized as an opportunity for exhibiting some tapestry, which may have come from the manufactory of Sir Francis Crane at Mortlake, may have been picked up in Flanders, or Bayeux, or Gobelins, dated in the reign of Louis Quatorze. A rare chandelier, suspended by a crimson silken cord, contrasts well with the carved oak ceiling. A mandolin lies neglected on the floor, and the whole apartment is rich, heavy, and luxurious—the favourite apartment of a wealthy man of taste. Here Sir Peter welcomes his old friend ‘Noll’; here Lady Teazle, sitting on a low stool at his feet, pets and coaxes her testy and withal affectionate old husband. Once more we make a change. We are amongst bachelors, and dice-players, and wine-bibbers. We are in the extravagant home of Charles

Surface, where his servant Trip borrows money by way of annuity, and Charles himself sits at the head of a rollicking crew surrounded by the portraits of his ancestors. How they drink, and talk, and sing, and swear! How they empty the punch-bowl, carefully and continually replenished by the drawling Trip. Here sits Charles Surface in a costume whose colour can only be compared to that of a blue convolvulus ruined by the sun, his vest unbuttoned, his ruffles loosened, and his whole being abandoned to the gaiety of the moment. Moses and Premium are introduced, and made to join the festive group, mutually pleased and shocked. The family pictures are sold *coram populo*, without any necessity of retiring to another room. Some are smoking, some are snuffing, all are drinking, laughing, and making merry. All round are colour, richness, animation, and revelry. This, then, is the picture of bachelor life. Here are the wild oats sown. The scene is hushed and still when we come to the library of Joseph Surface. The picture is in wonderful contrast to the banquet at the home of his brother Charles. The furniture is massive, heavy, and important. The bookcases are of oak, as black as ebony. The windows are of painted glass. The fireplace is as carved and pillared as an old cathedral cope-chest. The bindings of the books are of russia leather, and there are ponderous tomes amongst them. The carpet is of thick pile, and from Turkey. The only contrast of colour in the room is found in the Oriental blue vases on the mantel-shelf, in the blue delft dishes on the walls, in the polished brass of the coal-scuttle, in the gleam of the Venetian mirror, and the dull crimson of the all-important screen. These probably are the mere ideas sought to be conveyed to the audience by the beautiful pictures placed before them."

The parts we ourselves played were so different from those rendered familiar to London playgoers by frequent repetitions of the Robertson comedies,



and were treated in such an unconventional way, that we venture to add comment by the same writer upon the performance of them :

“ At last we obtain—at least in modern days—a Lady Teazle who is the fresh, genuine, impulsive maiden wedded to an old bachelor, and not the practised actress, with all her airs and graces. How often in Lady Teazle the character is forgotten, the actress and the old business invariably remembered ! In the scandal scenes we were presented with an archness and sly sense of humour, always evident but never superabundant, in which Mrs. Bancroft has a special patent ; in the coaxing scene with Sir Peter Teazle, the childlike desire to kiss and make friends, the almost kitten-like content when the reconciliation is made, and the expressive change of the countenance from sunshine to storm when the wrangle commences again, were admirably conveyed. But it was reserved for Mrs. Bancroft to make her most lasting impression in the screen scene. With wonderful care and welcome art the impression conveyed to an innocent mind by the insinuating deceit of Joseph was accurately shown by expression to the audience, though the excellence of the general idea culminated in what is known as Lady Teazle’s defence, when the screen has fallen, and the *dénouement* has taken place. This was entirely new and thoroughly effective. The tones, alternating between indignation and pathos, between hatred of Joseph and pity for her husband’s condition, were expressed with excellent effect. It was the frank and candid avowal of a once foolish but now repentant woman. The womanly instinct which bids Lady Teazle touch and try to kiss her husband’s hand, the womanly weakness which makes Lady Teazle totter and trip as she makes for the door, the womanly strength which steels Lady Teazle in her refusal of assistance from Joseph, and the woman’s inevitable abandonment to hysterical

grief *just before* the heroic goal is reached—were one and all instances of the treasured possession of an artistic temperament.”

The celebrated Miss Farren, afterwards Countess of Derby, performed the part of Lady Teazle, it is said, with a finished air of complete, fashionable indifference. But this is hardly Sheridan's creation. The old country training and the rustic simplicity were never entirely effaced in Lady Teazle. Dutton Cook, one of the hardest of critics to satisfy and please, said that my wife's performance must have strongly resembled that of Mrs. Jordan in the part.

According to the same critic, my reading of Joseph Surface, in that it was one of the most original and reflective performances, would attract most criticism and would probably court the most objection. He recalled how when Fechter played Iago, and discarded the hackneyed villain, there was a similar disturbance. According to stage tradition, Iago and Joseph Surface are such outrageous and obvious rascals that they would not be tolerated in any society. “Mr. Bancroft reforms this altogether, and, by a subtlety and ease most commendable, valuably strengthens his position as an actor and his discrimination as an artist.” Joseph Surface could be played as a low villain, or as a hungry, excited, and abandoned libertine; I had adopted the golden mean. The deception was never on the surface, the libertinism was never for an instant repulsive. “It is one of those instances of good acting which strike the beholder when the curtain is down and the play put away.”

Our *School for Scandal*, according to a well-known critic, was practically a new play; and that not so much by reason of the alterations in the sequence of its scenes as on account of the heart and sympathy infused into what had before so often seemed a string of brilliant, cruel epigrams, unconnected by a thread of human interest. Future managers, he continued, would thank us for the upsetting of the

great traditional Dagon, and the rebuilding of the play on a natural basis. Words which admirably express the principle underlying our treatment.

The critic of *The Times* said that so novel a conception so perfectly realised deserved the attention of every one who took an interest in the contemporary stage.

As we have shown, our production of *The School for Scandal* attracted remarkable notice and proved a success of the first rank artistically and financially, aided greatly in the latter field by the bold step then taken, and explained in an earlier chapter, of increasing the price of seats.

We will quote one or two extracts, equally characteristic and appreciative, from a number of interesting letters we received at the time. Wilkie Collins wrote that the get-up of the comedy was simply wonderful; he had never before seen anything, within the space, so beautiful and so complete; but the splendid costumes and scenery did not live in his memory as did the acting of Mrs. Bancroft. He did not know when he had seen anything so fine as her playing of the great scene with Joseph; the truth and beauty of it, the marvellous play of expression in her face, the quiet and beautiful dignity of her repentance, were beyond all praise.

"I cannot tell *you* or tell *her* how it delighted and affected me. You, too, played admirably." The "key" of my performance he thought perhaps a little too low; but the conception of the man's character he considered most excellent. "I left my seat in a red-hot fever of enthusiasm. I have all sorts of things to say about the acting—which cannot be said here—when we next meet."

A veteran actor, who for many years had acted with distinction in the play, whose training we fairly thought might rebel at our innovations, after asking our "permission" to congratulate us upon a success so justly and honourably achieved, went on to say that our boldness, liberality, and taste in rearranging

and mounting the play, instead of "offending his prejudices," most fully and thoroughly gratified them, more especially so, as he had ever thought that the revival of a great dramatic work should resemble the production of a grand book. The illustrations should be original, new, and more brilliant and appropriate than any upon the same subject that might have preceded it. The last edition should be the handsomest and the best, as it unquestionably was in this present instance. It would be, he believed, a very long time before any one would be so rash as to attempt another illustrated edition of *The School for Scandal*.

The distinguished Academician, W. P. Frith, whose pictures in those days had often to be guarded from the crowds at Burlington House, wrote to me, "You and all your people gave to me and mine very great pleasure last night." He was afraid to say how many times he had seen *The School for Scandal*, and how many great actors and actresses he had seen in it. He would not say but that on some occasions one or two of the parts had been better filled; but take our cast altogether, it was one that no other theatre could show, and the play was rendered with high intelligence. My wife, he concluded, was, as she always was, perfect. In his opinion, the minuet was one of the most delightful bits of grace and exquisite taste ever seen. It took him back to the days of his great-grandmother, a hundred years ago.

We will only add a characteristic and appreciative letter from another stage veteran, Walter Lacy :

"When long years since, Macready was announced to play Richard III., although I had banqueted right royally on the grand Edmund Kean, and was not to be weaned from my old love, I thoroughly enjoyed the highly intellectual treat prepared for me by Mac's new reading; and so was it to-night in the classic little temple where I made my *début* in *The French Spy* with Celeste, shortly after seeing the new Richard

at Drury Lane. As Macready carefully avoided every point made by Kean, much of the comedy to-night was made pathetic, and *vice versa*, but, both in conception and finish of execution, evincing the common sense, good taste, delicacy, and refinement of yourself and our most natural actress, whose Lady Teazle had touches of unapproachable excellence. The brothers were equally admirable, and would have perhaps been even more so had they changed parts. Mr. Hare's screen-scene was worthy of his reputation, and nothing could surpass the Lady Sneerwell. The 'picture'-scene is distinctly in advance upon the old arrangement. Thanks for a great treat."

I dispute Lacy's judgment in suggesting that I might with advantage have exchanged parts with Coghlan, whose splendid acting as Charles Surface was greatly praised by all the critics and by all judges of our art. While sharing to the fullest extent this admiration for his performance, I would yet venture to wonder if, in its beautiful finish, the character was not in his hands somewhat more suggestive of a dissolute young French *marquis* than of a reckless and boisterous young Englishman. Be that as it may, a strong factor towards our success with the play, in my opinion, was the fact of our both being really young men, for the brothers had too often been represented by actors of fame, but whose united ages were hardly attractive, and after all, the dramatic side of the comedy greatly depends upon Uncle "Noll" and his two nephews.

It was at this time that our company suffered a great loss in the departure of one of its oldest and one of its most valued members, John Hare. Time has not weakened our remembrance of his services and his long association with the Robertson comedies. Wisely enough—for there was ample room in those days for two such theatres as the then Prince of Wales's in friendly rivalry—he had for some time entertained ideas of commencing management on his own account.

Hare and I had dressed in the same room together for years—those years being the happiest of my life, for they began when I was twenty-four and ended when I was thirty-three. I can claim to be his oldest theatrical friend. After he left us, the little dressing-room knew me no more; the next night I found a lonely corner somewhere else. It was pleasant some years afterwards to hear him speak these words:

“To praise a man before his face is a somewhat delicate task; but, fortunately, we all know Bancroft so well and esteem him so highly, that he may well be spared any eulogies from me. His great ability as a manager is known to all, and it should never be forgotten that he was the first to originate and to introduce those reforms to which the dramatic profession owes so much of its present proud position; although other managers have followed his lead, it should always be remembered that the lead was his. Those who have been fortunate enough to serve under his management can testify to his unvarying kindness, his generosity, and his just dealings with all, and many of his most generous actions have been known only to the recipients of them. Perhaps not the least pleasing of Bancroft’s reflections in the evening of his life, when we trust he may long enjoy the rest he deserves and has worked for so well, will be that his long career as a manager has been one of probity and honour, that he has intentionally wronged no man, but that many owe much to him, and hold him in affectionate remembrance.”

Although I always detested scratch performances, I once consented to play Sir Benjamin Backbite in *The School for Scandal* at some big benefit at Drury Lane. Mixed up in the programme were actors of every age and standing—Webster and Toole, Buckstone and Kendal, Wigan and Montague, James Anderson and H. J. Byron, Amy Sedgwick and Mrs. Alfred Mellon, myself and Compton. With the last I shared a dressing-room, and his companion-

ship, though brief, was delightful. He was a charming, courteous old gentleman, a cousin of the late Sir Morell Mackenzie, and father of Edward Compton, so well known by his admirable work in the provincial cities, and of the lady who has acted with such success in *Lord and Lady Algy* and others of her husband's plays.

The remembrance recalls to my mind an occasion when the elder Compton was present at a banquet presided over by a distinguished bishop, who mistook the sedate and quietly dressed comedian for a well-known Nonconformist minister and, as a compliment, asked him to be kind enough to say grace. The old actor, who was very flattered and flustered, rose to the occasion with these words: "O Lord, open Thou our lips, and our mouths shall show forth our praise!" The effect of this utterance was, perhaps, equalled by a sporting parson, an old and well-beloved member of the Garrick Club, who once at a county cricket match, in his own neighbourhood, entered a tent where a big luncheon was announced to be served. He was motioned by some friends and neighbours to preside at the head of the long table; and then one of them thought it only proper to ask their vicar to say grace. He obeyed in these words: "For what you are going to receive you will all have to pay three-and-six!"

#### " MASKS AND FACES "

The third old comedy which we chose for revival, and which we invested with the richness and beauty of Georgian days, proved to be one of our staunchest friends until the close of our management ten years afterwards—*Masks and Faces*, written by Charles Reade and Tom Taylor.

I confess that personal feeling had a large share in the choice, although it was not without much fear and trembling that I resolved to play the part of Triplet. I felt, however, that unless I made some

effort equally bold, I should be condemned perpetually to the inanition of ringing the changes on what had for some time achieved the dignity of being called "Bancroft parts." No actor perhaps has suffered in one way more than I have through having made some early success in a certain marked line of character, which, but for great efforts on my own part, I might have been doomed to play to the end of my career. Long runs of successful plays, lasting for several years, made it very hard for both audiences and critics (especially as many people fostered the fable I never could account for, that my early manhood was passed in the mess-rooms of cavalry barracks instead of the drudgery of country theatres) to accept my efforts in parts other than those typical of military swelldom, and this fact gave me double work to secure praise in those of quite another description. Nor was it without difficulty that I succeeded in persuading my wife to play Peg Woffington. Her feelings on the subject she will explain in her own words.

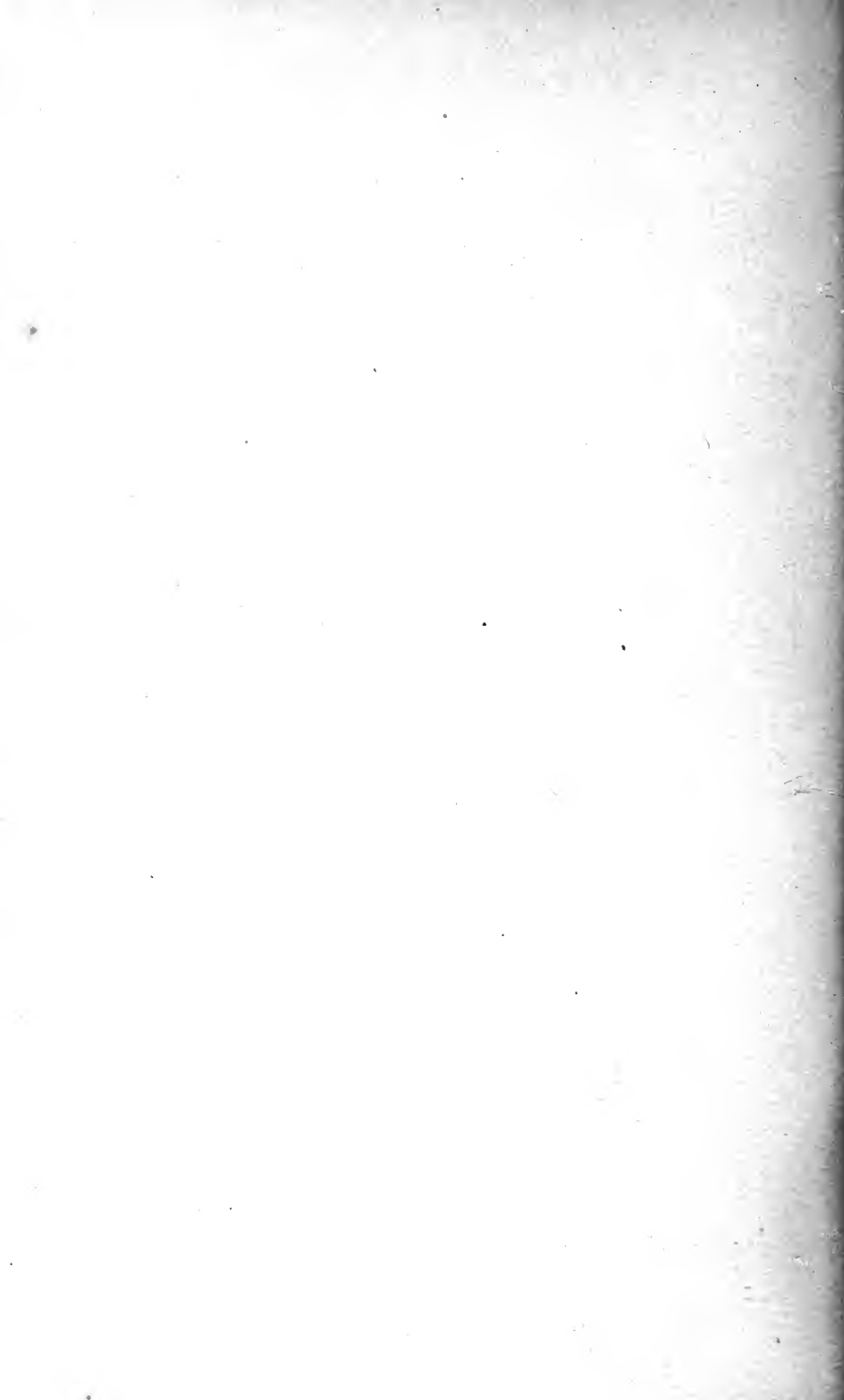
When it was suggested that I should play Peg Woffington, I felt more gratified than I can express, for to be considered capable of acting a part so different from anything I had undertaken before, a character with such serious moments—at times almost reaching to the point of tragedy—was indeed a compliment. But when I began to think the matter over, I felt, very keenly, how physically unsuited I was to the part. Peg required a tall and handsome presence—I was neither tall nor handsome; my brains would tell me probably how to act it, but, alas! I could not shut my eyes to the fact that I should be severely handicapped by the tall, willowy figure and beautiful face of Ellen Terry as Mabel Vane. So I begged Charles Reade to release me from a hasty promise and give Peg to Ellen Terry, while I would willingly take the small part of Kitty Clive. I had so often taken a "third seat back" for the good of the play,





MARIE BANCROFT AS PEG WOFFINGTON

From a painting by H. Allen



that there would have been nothing unusual in this ; but he would not consent to such an arrangement, so with many misgivings I finally undertook to play Peg. Miss Terry never knew all this. I wish she had !

I do not think there was ever any member of my profession who suffered more from want of self-reliance and courage in acting than I did whenever I had to appear in a new part. Restless nights, loss of appetite, and a heart beating fifteen to the dozen were my portion, until the play was well out. When dressing me for a new piece my maid, in sympathy, would say, “ Never mind, madam ; twelve o’clock must come ! ” The moment I set foot upon the stage my courage returned and Richard was himself again.

Moreover, I never acted a part without feeling that I might have done it better. I can well understand the sufferings of the late John Parry, who at length was compelled to give up appearing in public on account of nervous exhaustion. A highly strung, artistic temperament is a great gift, which one should be proud of and thankful for. But oh ! how tiresome it can be !

My own views of the part of Triplet differed just as much from previous representations. But, in the immortal words of Sam Weller, “ If there was no difference of opinion there would be no fancy weskits.”

It was not an easy task to persuade Charles Reade, to whom the play belonged, to consent to the changes we sought to make in his work. At length, after many a tough fight, we won the day and gained our wish, afterwards having the great satisfaction of Charles Reade’s tribute to every change—he discarded the old book for ever. It was the *treatment* of the play we chiefly ventured to alter.

Our great fight was over the end of it ; and only after many struggles with Charles Reade did he allow us to cut out the old stagey, rhyming tag, and agree

to the pathetic ending we proposed. We conquered him at last by acting to him what we wished to do. Reade said afterwards, "Dear Peg, you are too much for me; and after this I don't measure my wit against yours. I cave in, as the Yankees say, and submit at once to your proposal."

My wife and I had many a talk about the play with Charles Reade, as to which was his share and which was Tom Taylor's. He frankly told us the whole story of its growth and completion, always regarding the work as fairly divided between them. The conception of the play, which arose from his looking a long time one day at Hogarth's portrait of Peg Woffington in the Garrick Club, and the most beautiful scene in the last act between the two women, were certainly Reade's; but Taylor was responsible for a delightful part of the second act, and undoubtedly put many of Reade's early ideas into more workmanlike shape. The part of Peg Woffington was mainly Reade's work, while that of Mabel Vane was chiefly Taylor's.

Reade had a singularly varied nature, which never has been, and never could be, more ably described than by Ellen Terry:

"Dear, kind, unjust, generous, cautious, impulsive, passionate, gentle, Charles Reade! who combined so many qualities, far asunder as the poles. He was placid and turbulent, yet always majestic. He was inexplicable and entirely lovable—a stupid old dear, and as wise as Solomon! He seemed guileless, and yet had moments of suspicion and craftiness worthy of the wisdom of the serpent." A superb description, with the clear insight of a gifted woman.

Very diligent rehearsals attended this production before we felt it to be ready to face the ordeal of criticism. As we have said, we ourselves undertook the parts of Peg Woffington and James Triplet; Coghlan played Sir Charles Pomander with great distinction; Archer was the Ernest Vane; Margaret

Brennan an admirable, sarcastic, acidulated Kitty Clive; and Ellen Terry lent all her charm as an actress and her beauty as a woman to her attractive and lovable rendering of Mabel Vane.

Permission was obtained from the Committee of the Garrick Club to have copies made of some pictures of the time from its celebrated collection, and so we adorned the walls of the first act, which represented the green-room of old Covent Garden Theatre, with reproductions of Grisoni's portrait of Colley Cibber as Lord Foppington, the well-known picture of Garrick as Richard III., Vandergucht's portrait of Woodward as Petruchio, and Zoffany's Garrick and Mrs. Pritchard in *Macbeth*, dressed in court clothes of the period.

The beautiful tapestry chamber which formed the scene of the second act was, perhaps, with a group of characters on the stage, one of the most real pictures of the times ever shown in a theatre; while Triplet's home bore resemblance to the garret of Hogarth's "Distressed Poet."

Success of the highest kind rewarded our work. Charles Reade, although very critical, was very pleased. On reaching home after the first performance he wrote the following lines, and sent with them in the morning an autograph letter of Margaret Woffington's: "Presented by Charles Reade to his friend Mrs. Bancroft upon her admirable personation of Peg Woffington in *Masks and Faces*. C. R., November 6, 1875."

A few days later we received a long and interesting letter of criticism from Charles Reade, on the treatment of his play written after three visits to the theatre. Of our own acting as Peg Woffington and Triplet the distinguished writer was so generous as to say that he really could see in these two performances no fault. There were a few lines, here and there, read somewhat differently from the way he read them, but when they were read naturally and effectively, "I ask no more; I don't want machines

to act my plays." He then repeated that he could see a wealth of thought, care, labour, and talent in our performances; and could see nothing wrong. He intended by-and-by to propose a single variation, but he had no correction to offer; and in particular he disowned with contempt the shallow suggestion of those critics who would have Peg Woffington in Act II. shake off her blow entirely, and make those introductions with a comic gusto, forgetting alike that she is acting the woman of quality and that she is not herself as happy as a lark. "No; give me the actor who considers not each line only, but the dominant sentiment of the entire scene, and deals with the line accordingly."

His warm praise of Coghlan's fine acting as Sir Charles Pomander and of Ellen Terry's exquisite Mabel Vane, two impersonations which seemed to us both beyond the range of fault-finding, is faintly qualified; while he complained of one actor that his performance was "going off, through his taking snuff without discretion. Very few actors are to be trusted with a snuff-box; indiscreetly used, it fritters points away, instead of sharpening them." The letter ends:

"But who can foretell the future? You and Mrs. Bancroft and Miss Terry have the third act pretty much to yourselves, and you may be able to make the piece safe. Still, you must not fancy that the play is written unevenly. Of course, it is written on the principle of climax, and the third act is the most brilliant; but remember, too, in the third act we grease the fat sow, for the act is nearly all in the hands of first-rate actors.

"My winter cough has come on. I shall most likely not be out at nights for three months, and may never again have the great pleasure of seeing your performance and Mrs. Bancroft's, so I say my say and exhaust the subject."

The new Peg Woffington shall now, in her own words, describe the reading she gave of the great

comedian of Garrick's day, of whom it was truly written :

“Nor was her worth to public scenes confin'd ;  
 She knew the noblest feelings of the mind ;  
 Her ears were ever open to distress ;  
 Her ready hand was ever stretched to bless.”

In answer to a critical letter from a friend, my wife replied :

“You ask me to explain to you, and to make clearer, why I presented Peg Woffington in a new light and as a different woman from what my distinguished predecessors had made her. All great parts are capable of various conceptions, and it is often a thankless office to play a character which has been originally created by an actress of position ; I felt this difficulty keenly when I agreed after long persuasion to accept the part of Peg. Many people then remembered the great original, our friend for many years towards the close of her long life, the celebrated Mrs. Stirling, who bequeathed to me a charming portrait of herself by Phillips in the character. When I was first spoken to on the subject, I urged that the task would be a hard one for me, and I was frightened at the thought of it. There was, as far as I could see, but one way out of the difficulty, to treat the part in a distinctly new way ; so I set to work carefully to consider if it was possible to clothe Peg in a new dress.

“When I read the book I was deeply impressed by the beauty of the words Peg had to speak in her serious scenes. I soon felt that one who could utter such sentiments and make so great a sacrifice must be more than an ordinary woman, capable of good deeds and noble aspirations. Her words in the first scene addressed to the man she loves, to whom she confides her innermost thoughts, telling him how wearisome she finds the emptiness of her life, point to a superior mind. She wants to be a good woman, and asks him to help her. He teaches her to trust

him, and promises all that she asks, and she is happy, thinking him worthy and honest. But when she discovers that he has deceived and insulted her by presenting himself to her as an unmarried man, when all the time he has a young and neglected wife, her love gives way to the bitterness of injured pride, hatred, and revenge—revenge against him, and her, and all the world. Then in the scene when, full of venom, she overhears a conversation between the young wife and Triplet, the only friend who clings to Peg, the gentle sweetness and innocence of Mabel so affect her that her revenge and anger disappear, leaving the beauty of her nature to prompt her to make the greatest sacrifice in a woman's power.

“Here is a fragment of the scene between the two women :

“PEG : Such as you are the diamonds of the world! Angel of truth and goodness, you have conquered. The poor heart which we both overrate shall be yours again. In my hands 'tis but painted glass at best, but set in the lustre of your love, it may become a priceless jewel. Will you trust me ?

“MABEL : With my life !

“Surely a woman who can utter such words must be by nature good and capable of fine emotions. She is sensitive, lovable, trusting and charitable, headstrong and impulsive, ready to act upon a revengeful impulse, however she might regret it afterwards ; she pines for honest friendship and finds it not, and in the last act one can see how her nature is warped and nearly spoiled. Read her farewell speech to Mabel, so simple, true, and pathetic :

“MABEL : In what way can I ever thank you ?

“PEG : When hereafter, in your home of peace, you hear harsh sentence passed on us, whose lot is admiration, rarely love, triumph, but never tranquillity, think sometimes of Margaret Woffington, and say, ‘ Stage-masks may cover honest faces, and hearts beat true beneath a tinselled robe.’

“As the play had been previously acted, after



this touching farewell she goes off into laughter, and ends the play with a rhymed comic tag, which so jarred upon my senses that I could not have given effect to the original end, because I could not feel it. If Charles Reade had not allowed me to alter the end of the play I could not have acted the part. It was some time before I could bring him round to my way of thinking, so I illustrated my meaning by acting the last scene to him as I wished it to be done. The change which I suggested was this: After Peg's farewell to Mabel, and while kissing her, her eyes meet Ernest's; she stands gazing at him, as if to realise the fact that he could have been capable of so much cruelty. Pale with emotion, she hands Mabel to him and watches them as they are going through the doorway, casting a lingering look upon him. At that beautiful moment of her anguish, crushed and broken, I am convinced that she should be left to commune with her thoughts, with no one by her side but her true friend, Triplet, upon whose breast she leans, and at last gives way to the tears which have up to now been denied her. The curtain should fall upon these two figures, leaving Peg in the hearts of her audience, who have followed her in her sorrows, and must, therefore, pity her. While deeply sympathising with the wife, they must love Peg for her noble conduct, and weep with her in her suffering.

"During my rehearsal, which took place in our own house, Charles Reade was silent; at the end, when I looked at him for his opinion, I found that he was crying. He rose from his chair, took my hands in his, kissed me, and said, 'You are right, my dear. You have made me cry; your instincts are right; it shall be so.'"

Of the new Peg Woffington two leading critics wrote that in the gift of silvery utterance my wife had no rival. As ever, the accomplished and incomparable actress revelled in the scenes of playfulness

and humour, and finally flung her impulsive nature and energy into an Irish jig, danced with exquisite grace and modesty. Her Peg Woffington was declared to be "one of the finest of her impersonations—a masterpiece—a performance of real genius which would compare favourably with any acting upon any stage in the world."

The following letter, which was written during a stay at Homburg, is rendered more interesting to my wife as she now enjoys the friendship of the present Lord and Lady Forester.

11, UNTER PROMENADE,  
17th August, 1883.

DEAR MRS. BANCROFT—

You named last evening that Peg Woffington was your favourite part; Rachel's was that of Adrienne Lecouvreur. How interesting that the two finest actresses I have ever seen should select for their favourite part that of an actress!—and how natural! for who could so well understand it?

Truly yours,

M. A. FORESTER.

My own appearance as Triplet, a character of which I also gave a new reading, was of much importance—at least, to me. Happily it set me free from the threat of everlasting duration in "swelldom." I bestowed great thought upon the part, and my view of the character was that Triplet was a man of greater refinement than, so far as I could learn, he had been hitherto considered. This I justify by the delicate treatment Peg Woffington shows Triplet in her charity and help: were he not the broken wreck of a somewhat cultured person, I think the kind-hearted, busy actress would have relieved his wants in a blunter and simpler way.

Charles Reade's opinion has already been quoted. To repeat many of the expressions of approval lavished by the critics on what they not unnaturally

considered something of an experiment on my part would be to weary the reader; but I make two extracts which have a special interest. The first is an admirable description of the aim of my rendering of the character. Webster's, it was said, was an actor's Triplet; mine a broken-down gentleman, as pathetic a picture as ever was drawn by Thackeray. Triplet's scenes with Peg with the manuscripts, and with Mabel Vane with the sherry and biscuits, were declared exquisitely touching. What it conveyed so admirably was the idea of a man who has been a jolly fellow, but who has been crushed by misfortune. His temperament is light, airy, enthusiastic, and sanguine, but the *res angusta domi* have been too much for him. He is prematurely saddened by distress. He is a man, and he is gentle. Emphatically he is a gentle-man. Never was a man so buoyed up by hope as the new Triplet. He does not cringe or whine. When Peg Woffington chaffs him about his manuscripts, he shows some reverence for the calling of the author. When Mabel Vane encourages his literary vanity, the genial fellow, mellowed by his wine, rhapsodises and eulogises the poet's calling. When sunshine steals into the poverty-stricken garret, no one is so gay as James Triplet. But it was one thing, the writer went on, to understand a part, and another to give it artistic expression. "If you want to see a bit of delicate and suggestive art, watch how Triplet, ravenous with hunger, slips some of the biscuits into his pocket, and, looking into vacancy, says, 'For my little ones.' If this had been flung at the heads of the audience, the idea would have failed; but Bancroft, by the way he does it, touches every sympathetic chord in the whole house."

Another verdict was that nothing better had been seen upon the modern stage, and that whatever I might now choose to play, concerning the range of my powers there could be no question.

In the course of the run we received the following

letter from our valued friend, the great surgeon, Sir William Fergusson :

16, GEORGE STREET, HANOVER SQUARE,  
March 15, 1876.

DEAR MRS. BANCROFT—

I have to thank you most heartily for the great treat of last night. I have rarely enjoyed myself more thoroughly at the theatre. I was familiar with the play in former days, when Mrs. Stirling and Webster were in all their force; and, though prepared by newspaper and other reports to be pleased, I fancied that old recollections would cause me to feel a blank.

From the beginning to the end last night my interest never flagged; and, with pleasant memories of the past, I cannot refrain from saying to you and your good man how truly I was gratified.

With kind regards to Squire, I remain, yours very sincerely,

WM. FERGUSSON.

There came also some pleasant lines from George Vandenhoff, an old and famous actor who passed many years in America :

“I have to thank you for a great pleasure in the charming performance of Mrs. Bancroft. It is years since I saw the play, and I confess to you that I did not know there was an English-speaking actress who could move me to tears and laughter by turns as the accomplished Peg Woffington did last night. Her comedy reminded me of poor Nisbett in her best days, and her pathos had the sincerity in it which that accomplished comedienne never reached.

“I had not seen you act before, and your Triplet was a worthy pendant to your lady’s admirable picture.”

Our great success brought a renewal of even magnified temptations to visit America with *Masks and Faces* and *The School for Scandal*, which had to be regretfully resisted from the old cause—my

wife's terror of the sea. During the run of the play I remember attending a meeting of a theatrical character at the Mansion House, and encountering Benjamin Webster there. The old actor, after looking long and wistfully at me, said pleasant, graceful things of his own old part to the younger Triplet.

The next time we played *Masks and Faces* was at the Haymarket in 1881. The rehearsals were conducted with all the care bestowed upon a new work. Elaborate dresses were made from the designs of the Hon. Lewis Wingfield, and the scenery and accessories realised the beauties of the eighteenth century as fully as any of our previous productions. An interesting newspaper correspondence on the occasion of this revival bears evidence of our exactitude. We were even able to settle the question of whether or not Roman numerals on the dial of a clock were correct, by speaking of the actual time-piece which Foote presented to the green-room of the old "Little Theatre in the Haymarket," more than a hundred years before.

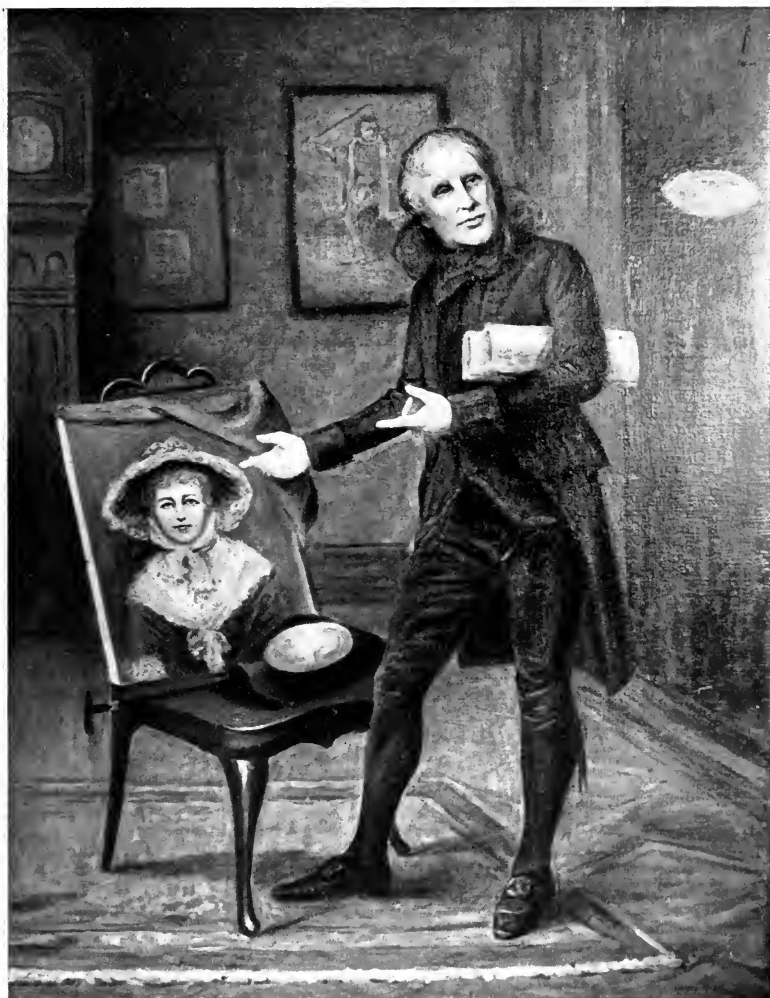
Marion Terry succeeded her sister Ellen as Mabel Vane, Conway played Pomander, while Arthur Cecil and I commenced by alternating the parts of Triplet and Colley Cibber. After a while Cecil asked to be relieved from his share of Triplet, which proved to be beyond his limitations. The portrayal of manners upon the stage and the acting of emotion are two very distinct and different qualities. This alternation was the subject of a comic sketch by Charles Brookfield, who was then a member of our company, depicting the two Triplets, the one lean and hungry, the other in better feather, as both dressed for the part by mistake on the same evening, and meeting on the way to the stage with these exclamations: "Really, my dear Arthur!" "Oh, my goodness, B.!" Dear Arthur certainly looked too highly nourished for poor half-starved Triplet. Henry Kemble and Charles Brookfield made the two critics,

Snarl and Soaper, of much value in the lighter scenes.

The stir made by the performance far eclipsed our first production of the play. It drew crowded audiences for more than a hundred nights, with a financial result which altogether surpassed its success in the smaller theatre, and the criticisms were one loud chorus of praise. Clement Scott wrote: "In my time, in pure comedy, in the sunlight sparkle of humour, and in the art of immediately influencing the audience, Marie Bancroft stands unrivalled." . . . Triplet, with his black cravat hiding the absence of linen, his patched attire and general air of seediness, not wilfully displayed but rather ineffectually concealed, was not, he declared, the least picturesque, and assuredly not the least touching, figure in the performance. "Bancroft is a greater actor when playing Triplet than in the Robertsonian parts with which he has been so long identified; higher praise it would not be possible to bestow."

A very able and, if I may be allowed to say so, not too easily pleased critic, Mr. William Archer, did me the honour to give it as his opinion that there was "no more delicate, more pathetic, more lovable piece of acting" than my Triplet on the English stage. The green-room scene appealed to him more irresistibly every time he saw it. "Such acting would move a heart of stone or an eye of glass. Every one who has not seen it should see it forthwith, and every one who has seen it once, twice, or thrice should see it again, even to the seventh time."

The same cultured pen many years afterwards, writing of another performance of Triplet, said: "So familiar was I at one time with Sir Squire Bancroft's rendering of the part, that the mere repetition of the words called up in my mind almost every attitude, expression, and intonation of that masterly and most pathetic piece of acting. It was really a curious phenomenon. I do not remember ever before to have experienced so vivid and complete an evocation



SQUIRE BANCROFT AS TRIPLET

From a painting by H. Allen





of a memory latent for many years. My bodily vision dwelt but languidly on the Triplet of the moment, so intent was my mind's eye upon the delightful phantasm which the words of the part conjured up."

One night, just before the play commenced, our business manager came to tell me that Mr. Gladstone had taken stalls which were rather far removed from the stage, and had asked if anything could be done to place him nearer, as his sense of hearing was becoming less keen. The only vacant seats in the house were in the royal box, which we begged to place at his disposal. In a day or two came this autograph letter of thanks in generous acknowledgment of so small a politeness:

10, DOWNING STREET, WHITEHALL,  
*April 5, 1881.*

DEAR SIR,—

Let me thank you very much for your courtesy in allowing me with my party to occupy a most advantageous post in your theatre on Saturday night. By so doing you secured to me the fulness of a great treat, which otherwise declining powers of sight and hearing would somewhat have impaired.

For the capital acting of the chief parts I was prepared; but the whole cast, likewise, seemed to me excellent.

I remain, dear sir, your very faithful and obliged,  
W. E. GLADSTONE.

The date of the letter reminds me that the life of another great statesman, Lord Beaconsfield, to whose memory I owe my humble allegiance, was then hanging by a thread, which added deeply to our regret at never having known him. Only a few weeks before his fatal illness we missed the honour of presentation to him, arriving at the house of a friend only in time to see him drive away in the company of Lord Rowton. The date of his death,

April 19, is still well remembered as Primrose Day. These two great rivals, Disraeli and Gladstone, we have heard both cheered and hooted in their turn by the mob. How truly the words of Shakespeare apply to any sometime idol of the crowd: "There have been many great men that have flattered the people, who never loved them; and there be many that they have loved, they know not wherefore; so that, if they love they know not why, they hate upon no better ground."

Charles Reade came to see the revival of his pet play, the occasion being, I think, his last visit to a theatre. He was, as we had always found him, generous in his praise, keen in his judgment, helpful in his criticism. Not long afterwards the distinguished writer passed away in his seventieth year.

Reade, whose world-wide fame as a novelist and man of letters entitles his name to be enrolled among the Victorian literary giants, had for years been a martyr to asthma and bronchitis. He was brought home, after a fruitless search for better health on the shores of the Mediterranean, only in time to die in his native land, where his memory will long be honoured. The recollection of his friendship, which we enjoyed for full twelve years, we shall always treasure.

Our pleasure may be best imagined at finding, from the following words in the *Life of Charles Reade*, that this feeling was reciprocal: "Below a very natural and sweet letter of hers, Charles Reade has inscribed these words: 'Marie Bancroft, a gifted and amiable artist, who in this letter makes too much of my friendship, which both she and her husband had so richly earned by their kindness and courtesy to me.'"

#### "LONDON ASSURANCE"

We also revived Boucicault's comedy, *London Assurance*, for the season 1877, at the little old

theatre. The following letter preserves an interesting item about its authorship :

ROYAL ADELPHI THEATRE,  
March 21, 1877.

DEAR MR. BANCROFT,—

Pray pardon my not having written to you before, but a nervous attack to my right hand prevented me. *London Assurance* was mine ever since it was written.

The plot was originally John Brougham's, for which Vestris made Boucicault give him half the proceeds ; so, between one and the other, I paid very dearly for it.

With kind regards to you and Mrs. Bancroft, I am, yours faithfully,

B. WEBSTER.

With Boucicault's consent, I had arranged his comedy in four acts instead of five. Boucicault was in America at the time, and sent me his sanction from Chicago in these words: “Your shape of *London Assurance* will be, like all you have done at the Prince of Wales's, unexceptionable. I wish I could be there to taste your brew.” We found it necessary to purge the play of some impossibly old-fashioned elements and of the accretions of “gag” which had grown around it.

I think the cast we gave the old comedy justified the revival and its bright run of a hundred nights: Arthur Cecil, Sir Harcourt Courtly; Kendal, Charles Courtly; Mrs. Kendal, Lady Gay Spanker; Henry Kemble, her fox-hunting husband, Dolly; Charles Sugden, Cool; myself, Dazzle; and Mrs. Bancroft in the small part of Pert. I fear that in the second act, to which the appearance of Pert is limited, my wife ran riot in the desire to augment its value. Pert is a smart lady's-maid who has only one short scene; but this in the course of a few nights played double the time intended by the author, and I do not know what he would have said to the liberties taken

with the text. The audience, however, laughed immoderately and seemed thoroughly to enjoy it, so I must include them in the conspiracy. I well remember one night Mrs. Boucicault looking with amazement from a private box at Pert's audacity, but at the same time laughing as heartily as the rest of the captivated spectators.

There were no more such revivals at the old theatre, and only one at the Haymarket. I had ardently wished to give an elaborate production there of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, but was not, at the time, satisfied about a performance of Falstaff, as we could not succeed in getting John Clayton, whom we wanted for the part, and whose wide range of abilities I always held in high esteem. My wife and Mrs. John Wood, with their buoyant flow of animal spirits, would have revelled in the mischievous wives. I should have, personally, rejoiced to play the jealous Ford—a part in which Charles Kean excelled. In the company were very able comedians, including Arthur Cecil, Alfred Bishop, Henry Kemble, and Charles Brookfield for other characters. I always felt assured of a great success, a glorious romp, similar to that so splendidly achieved at His Majesty's by Tree with the aid of Mrs. Kendal and Ellen Terry.

#### “THE RIVALS”

I afterwards turned my thoughts to what I had also contemplated, a picturesque and historical production of *The Rivals*, and had bestowed much work and thought upon a rearrangement of certain scenes to prevent the frequent change so common and often so unnecessary in the days of Sheridan, and to allow of the intended elaborate picture of old Bath.

To carry out these plans we sought the aid of Pinero, who, with myself, became responsible for the version presented of the standard comedy. The text

was, of course, strictly preserved, some transpositions in the dialogue and some variation of locality being sufficient for the purpose. William Telbin went down to the famous old city to seek authorities and make sketches for his beautiful opening scene, in which so much eighteenth-century detail was shown, including the arrival of the coach from London, the bookshop where Lucy was seen exchanging novels for her lackadaisical young mistress, and the old watchman calling the hour as the curtain fell on the act at nightfall. We must have tried the patience of those kind friends in the reading-room of the British Museum, who cheerfully devoted considerable time towards helping our researches to learn all we could of the fashionable resort of our forefathers—the Homburg and the Marienbad of their day.

The gavotte we introduced in the "tea-room" leading from the pump-room, where hung the authenticated portrait of the city's former king, Beau Nash, was the result of some pains, and the designs for the historically correct and beautiful dresses were made by Forbes-Robertson. Mrs. Stirling came to give her splendid performance of Mrs. Malaprop; Pinero himself (it being his last engagement as an actor) undertook Sir Anthony; Lionel Brough was the Bob Acres; Alfred Bishop the Sir Lucius O'Trigger; Forbes-Robertson was Captain Absolute; Eleanor Calhoun (a highly promising young Californian actress) was the Lydia Languish; Mrs. Bernard Beere played Julia; and, influenced by the remembrance in very early stage days of Leigh Murray's estimate of the thankless part of Faulkland, when he told me that he preferred it to that of Captain Absolute (a choice which, I admit, I cannot understand), I resolved to try and force this comically jealous nature into more prominence than it sometimes receives. The attempt was successful, if I may judge from what was said at the time—that "this singularly manly and satisfactory" Faulkland

was a distinct revelation, and that I had shown that Faulkland, played in the spirit of high comedy, had at least one brilliant scene, the greatest success of the revival. "Faulkland is for the first time brought within the frame of a comedy picture."

The following words were written some years subsequently by William Archer:

"The Bancrofts steered clear of the worst vices of actor-managership. Partly, no doubt, because they always formed a committee of two (a very different thing from an autocracy), they on many occasions showed a most commendable spirit of self-abnegation, and met with their reward in the increased esteem of all who know good acting when they see it, be the part small or great. Bancroft's Faulkland in *The Rivals* dwells in my memory as an altogether masterly performance, far more truly artistic than many a much-applauded piece of actor-manager bravura."

The revival was given towards the close of the season in 1884, but the old comedy was a bad selection for elaborate illustration. Its plots and incidents are too disjointed and fragile to bear such detailed treatment as harmonised perfectly with the author's great companion work, *The School for Scandal*.

The full houses the revival attracted for a few weeks sufficed to more than recoup the large outlay on its production; but the performance never laid a firm hold upon the public, and my wife was not playing in it.

I have always remembered our dear friend Ada Rehan—one of the greatest English-speaking actresses of our day, whose charm and personality cast a spell over playgoers, but whom we did not then know—afterwards telling me that she considered the scene of old Bath, to which I have alluded, as the most perfect stage-picture she had ever seen.

We will end these records of old comedies with a pleasant sentence from a good-bye letter Pinero

wrote to us when he resolved to give up acting and devote himself to play-writing:

“In one’s early days, what is known as ‘sentiment in business’ flourished poorly. In the Haymarket Theatre, the actor’s willingness to do as much as he can for his managers is outmatched by his managers’ anxiety to do more for the actor. I carry away with me a regard for you both, quite unbusinesslike, but which I am glad to acknowledge always and everywhere.”

*✓ gave up  
Prince Thw  
- 1879-*

## CHAPTER VI

### OTHER PLAYS

“A mingled yarn, good and ill together.”

Two plays were written for the Prince of Wales's Theatre by Byron before his partnership there came to an end—*War to the Knife* and *£100,000*. They were both successful and more than fulfilled their mission.

Soon after Robertson's death, having waded through reams of rubbish, we were told by Hare that Wilkie Collins, with whom he was acquainted, had written a drama founded on *Man and Wife*, a novel of Collins's, which created a great stir at the time of its appearance. We read the play and at once agreed to produce it. A letter from the author, which we quote, ratifies the time we came to this decision, although the play was not acted until eighteen months later.

August 1, 1871.

DEAR MR. BANCROFT,—

Let me assure you that I feel the sincerest gratification that *Man and Wife* has been accepted at the Prince of Wales's Theatre. Every advantage that I could possibly wish for is, I know beforehand, already obtained for my work, now that it has secured the good fortune of addressing itself to the public with Mrs. Bancroft's introduction.

Believe me, very faithfully yours,

WILKIE COLLINS.



So commenced a friendship which it was our privilege to enjoy through the remaining years of one whose masterly romances had lightened many an hour and given us infinite delight; for deep is our debt of gratitude to the creator of Margaret Vanstone, Mercy Merrick, Rachel Verrinder, Hester Dethridge, Captain Wragge, and Count Fosco. Wilkie Collins as a novelist might be compared with Sardou as a dramatist: the smallest brick in the structure is intentionally placed, and carries many others; if a single one were knocked out or displaced, serious results would to a certainty befall the entire fabric.

We asked Wilkie Collins to read his long-postponed play to the company. This he did with great effect and nervous force, giving all concerned a clear insight into his view of the characters; and, indeed, acting the old Scotch waiter with rare ability to roars of laughter. He had been, it should be recalled, a valued member of the band of amateurs led by Charles Dickens. We felt the play required certain alteration which could best be made after some rehearsals, and also were impressed with the necessity to do all that was possible to deserve a success in our first really new piece since the Robertson comedies; so we decided to aid the cast to the utmost of our power by taking small parts, my wife agreeing to play Blanche Lundie, a bright, pretty part, but quite of a secondary order, as was that she had just played in *Money*, while I offered to appear as the Doctor, an important but minor character confined to a dozen sentences.

A distinguished critic, in reviewing the progress of the stage during our management, went so far as to say that the greater portion of my wife's career had been occupied in loyally subordinating herself for the sake of the general harmony of the work; while as for me, though myself an actor, I had shown the solid judgment of a man who is always ready to seek the co-operation of another histrion,

apart from envy or malice. If my wife had been mindful of the obligations of art, and brought to her aid some of the fairest, brightest, and most refined actresses of her time, I had demonstrated the same impartiality in relation to my own sex; and our management had been conspicuous by the absence of that jealousy which too often dwarfed the character of a company in relation to its chiefs.

It is true that we never allowed considerations as to what parts there were for ourselves to bias our judgment in the acceptance or refusal of plays, as many instances recorded in this book will show.

We bestowed great pains upon the rehearsals of Collins's play, often having the advantage of the author's presence and assistance, which, when the work was well advanced, proved of real service. He also, in the kindest way, fell in with our views and altered the second act—in which he originally intended to divide the stage into two rooms, the parlour of the inn at Craig Fernie, and the adjoining pantry of old Bishopriggs—in accordance with our suggestions, and greatly, as he generously admitted, to the advantage of its representation. In this scene we went to unusual pains to realise a storm, and I think electric lightning was then first used, as was also an effect we introduced of moving clouds.

I was modest and nervous about stage-management in those days, and had not yet asserted myself in that capacity. Some of my views bore fruit in secret at Collins's house, and one prominent member of the cast was schooled by me in his part at our own.

*Man and Wife* was produced in February 1873, in the presence of the most brilliant audience which the theatre had as yet seen assembled within its limited walls. The list included names well known throughout England in every art and calling; but, alas! it would now be but a sad record:

“Our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.”

We learned from one newspaper report of the *première* that the demand for places was so unprecedented that stalls were sent up to five guineas cash by speculators, while two guineas were offered for seats in other parts of the house. Literary and artistic London was present in unusual force, and an audience more representative of the intellect of the time has seldom been gathered within the walls of a theatre.

The great excitement might perhaps be ascribed to two causes. In the first place, *Man and Wife* was the first new play that had been produced at the Prince of Wales's for some years; and in the second place, it was widely guessed that in this play the style of comedy with which our theatre was closely identified was to be in parts exchanged for drama of a more serious interest.

The cast also included Hare, Coghlan, Dewar, Mrs. Leigh Murray, and Lydia Foote, and the play was an instantaneous success.

Wilkie Collins passed almost all the evening in my dressing-room in a state of nervous terror painful to see, and which I could not have endured but for the short part I had to play. His sufferings were, however, lessened now and then by loud bursts of applause, which, fortunately, were just within earshot. Only for one brief moment did he see the stage that night, until he was summoned by the enthusiastic audience to receive their plaudits at the end of the play. Ever modest, ever generous, he largely attributed his success to the acting, and was loud in his admiration, at the final rehearsals, especially of Coghlan and Hare, Miss Foote and Mrs. Bancroft. He wrote to a friend describing the scene as follows:

“It was certainly an extraordinary success. The pit got on its legs and cheered with all its might the moment I showed myself in front of the curtain. I counted that I had only thirty friends in the house to match against a picked band of the ‘lower orders’

of literature and the drama assembled at the back of the dress circle to hiss and laugh at the first chance. The services of my friends were not required. The public never gave the 'opposition' a chance all through the evening. The acting, I hear all round, was superb; the Bancrofts, Lydia Foote, Hare, Coghlan, surpassed themselves; not a mistake made by anybody. The play was over at a quarter past eleven. It remains to be seen whether I can fill the theatre with a new audience. Thus far, the results have been extraordinary."

It is true that the opinion of the press critics was sharply divided, some attacking the play as ardently as others commended it; and some little disagreement reigned even over the acting of the three principal characters—Coghlan's version of the brutal athlete, Geoffrey Delamayn, Dewar's of the old Scotch waiter, and (strangely enough) Hare's of the retired Scotch lawyer, Sir Patrick Lundie, all of which seemed to ourselves to be admirably rendered. All were agreed, however, that "one thing may at least be said, and that is, that the Prince of Wales's company has shown itself capable of power." Small as was the part played by my wife, her performance was declared to be "simply exquisite in the charming piquancy of its mingled amiability, innocence, and droll shrewdness in the early portions of the play, and the naturally and quietly expressed pathos of the last act"; while as for my own little part of Doctor Speedwell, I found in it two causes of consolation, if any consolation were needed. One was the generous recognition it received.

"For this trifling part," it was written, "Mr. Bancroft assumes the most complete disguise, and entirely sinks his own identity with the skill as well as the generous abnegation of a thorough artist. The brows of the doctor, overshadowed by grey hair, the penetrating eyes that would cause a patient to hope or shudder as they formed a rapid diagnosis



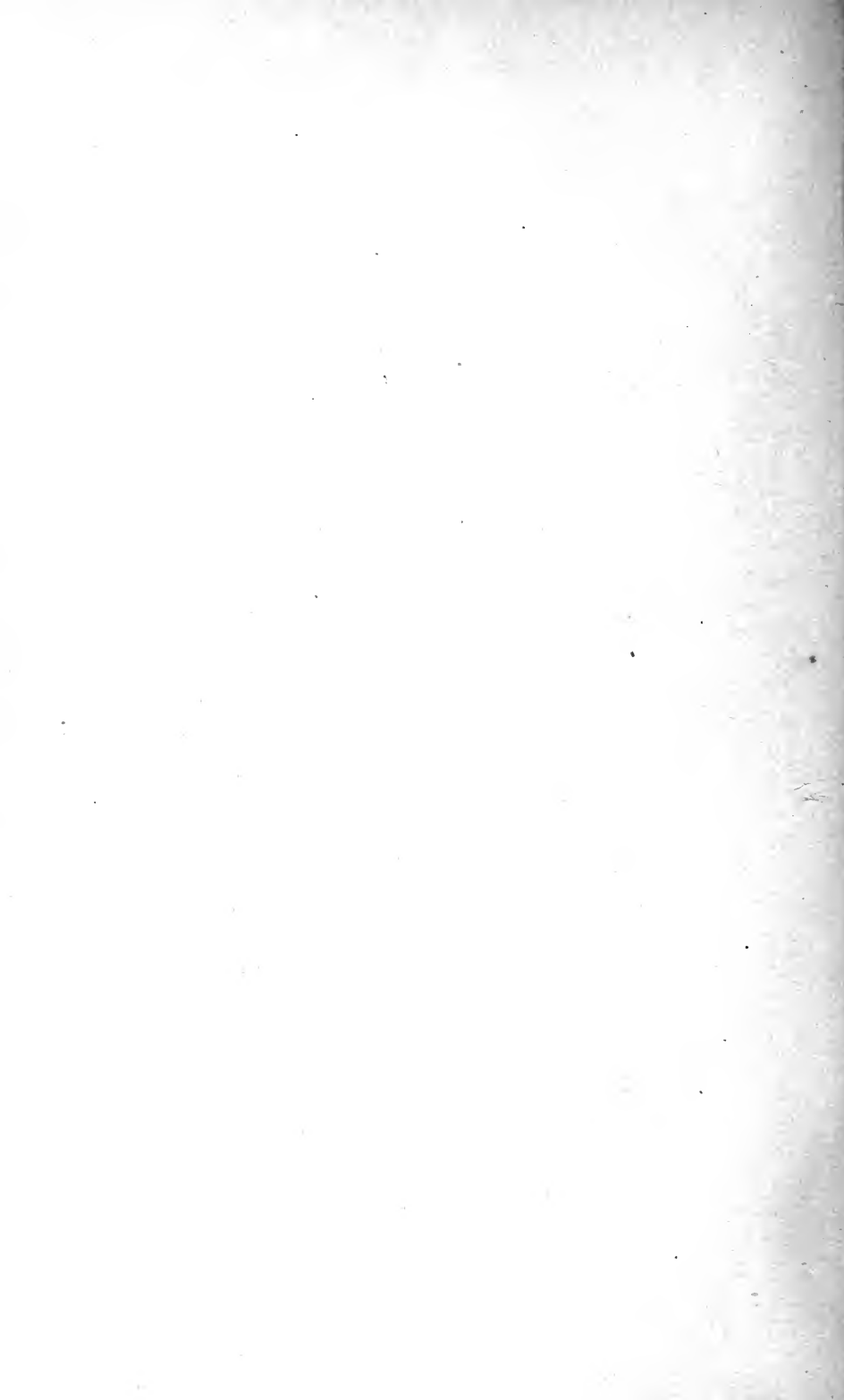
SQUIRE BANCROFT (AGED 32)



AS DR. SPEEDWELL

ON AND OFF THE STAGE

From photographs taken on the same day



of his condition, were so unlike those of Bancroft that he was not for some time recognised."

The other cause of consolation was that the brevity of the part gave me frequent opportunities of seeing Aimée Desclée at the Princess's Theatre, which was close by, in the early acts of *Frou-Frou* and others of her great parts. The impression left on my memory is that she was one of the finest and most touching actresses who ever adorned the art I love. Did not Alexandre Dumas *fils* exclaim after her sadly early death?—"Elle nous a émus, et elle en est morte. Voilà tout son histoire!"

A tour of *Man and Wife* to the leading provincial theatres was soon started, Charles Wyndham being engaged for the part of Geoffrey Delamayn, and Ada Dyas for that of Anne Sylvester, both of whom acted with great *éclat*.

*Man and Wife* was a favourite play with the Royal Family: the then Prince of Wales saw it twice, and the Princess three times, between February 25 and March 4, and again were present before its withdrawal in July, being then accompanied by the Czarevitch and Czarevna, afterwards Emperor and Empress of Russia.

The favour thus shown to this production on one occasion caused, indirectly, the plot of a little domestic drama.

The Royal box was made by throwing two ordinary private boxes into one, and on a certain Friday night news reached the theatre that it was required for the following evening. Both boxes had been taken—one at the theatre, the other at a librarian's in Bond Street—and nothing remained unlet but a small box on the top tier. Not to disappoint the Prince of Wales, it was decided that every effort should be made in the morning to arrange matters. The box which had been sold at the theatre was kindly given up by the purchaser, and a visit to Bond Street fortunately disclosed the name of the possessor of the other. The

gentleman was a stockbroker, so a messenger was at once sent to his office in the city, only to find that he had just left. After a great deal of difficulty our invincible messenger succeeded in learning his private address, where, on arrival, he was told by the servant that "Master went to Liverpool on business this morning, and won't be back till Monday."

The door of a room leading from the hall was opened at this moment, and a portly lady appeared upon the scene.

"Went to Liverpool!" echoed the messenger. "Nonsense! He's going to the Prince of Wales's Theatre this evening."

The portly lady now approached, and asked if she could be of any service. The messenger repeated his story and stated his errand. The lady smiled blandly, and said that, if the small box on the upper tier were reserved, matters no doubt would be amicably arranged in the evening, and so the man went away rejoicing.

At night, not long before the play began, the gentleman who had in vain been sought so urgently arrived in high spirits, accompanied by a very handsome lady. When the circumstances were explained to him, he very kindly agreed to put up with the alteration.

There ended our share in the transaction; but hardly were the unfortunate man and his attractive companion left alone than the portly lady from his private residence reached the theatre and asked to be shown to Box X. She was at once conducted there; the door was opened. Tableau! What explanation was given as to the business trip to Liverpool we never knew, or whether the third act of this domestic drama was rehearsed later at the Law Courts before "the President."

Although *Man and Wife* did not achieve the same length of run as some of its predecessors, the receipts for the first eighty performances were on a



par with previous successes. Subsequently a summer of unusual heat affected the theatres, and the *fêtes* of many kinds given that year in honour of the Shah of Persia were also detrimental to them. Having broken the spell, as it were, and proved that we could be successful in plays widely different from those which first made the reputation of our management, we wrote to Wilkie Collins to say that his play would exhaust its attraction by the end of the season. This was his answer to the letter :

90, GLOUCESTER PLACE, PORTMAN SQUARE,  
July 17, 1873.

MY DEAR BANCROFT,—

Thank you heartily for your kind letter. I should be the most ungrateful man living if the result of *Man and Wife* did not far more than merely “satisfy” me. My play has been magnificently acted, everybody concerned with it has treated me with the greatest kindness, and you and Mrs. Bancroft have laid me under obligations to your sympathy and friendship for which I cannot sufficiently thank you. The least I can do, if all goes well, is to write for the Prince of Wales’s Theatre again, and next time to give you and Mrs. Bancroft parts that will be a little more worthy of you.

Ever yours,

WILKIE COLLINS.

When the season closed at the beginning of August, his play had been acted one hundred and thirty-six times.

I was travelling once to the Engadine in the pleasant companionship of the late Frederick Lehmann. We halted for the night at Coire, where the railway ended in those days, the rest of the journey consisting of a long and beautiful drive over the Albula or the Julier Pass. Lehmann, after we had dined, told me, very impressively, how the quaint old town reminded him of an eventful evening he had

spent there on the homeward journey some years before with Wilkie Collins. Collins had then become a confirmed opium taker. They were close friends, and had passed some weeks together at St. Moritz. On the morning of their departure, as their carriage was creeping up the mountain road, Collins said to Lehmann, "Fred, I am in a terrible trouble. I have only just discovered that my laudanum has come to an end. I know, however, that there are six chemists at Coire; and if you and I pretend, separately, to be physicians, and each chemist consents to give to each of us the maximum of opium he may by Swiss law, which is very strict, give to one person, I shall just have enough to get through the night. Afterwards we must go through the same thing at Basle. If we fail—Heaven help me!" The two friends played their parts skilfully, and, owing greatly to Lehmann's perfect knowledge of the German language, they both succeeded, and the trying situation was saved.

In confirmation of this story I may add that one Sunday evening when our friends Sir William Fergusson, the eminent surgeon, and Mr. Critchett, the distinguished oculist and father of a distinguished son, Sir Anderson Critchett, were, with Wilkie Collins, among our guests, Critchett said to Sir William during dinner that he had Mr. Collins's permission to ask him a question, which was this. The novelist had confided to him the quantity, which he named, of laudanum which he swallowed every night on going to bed, and which Critchett had told him was more than sufficient to prevent any ordinary person from ever awaking. He now asked Sir William if that was not well within the truth. Fergusson replied that the dose of opium to which Wilkie Collins from long usage had accustomed himself was enough to kill every man seated at the table.

It was during our performance of *Man and Wife*, I remember, that the death of Macready occurred.

The great actor of a former generation, who for years had lived on a hard-earned modest competency at Sherborne in Dorsetshire, went afterwards to Cheltenham and, soon after the completion of his eightieth year, died there. He retired from the stage in 1851, when he was fifty-eight, in the height of his great powers, and is one of the strongest instances of a public favourite having resisted every temptation to return to it. His funeral at Kensal Green attracted an enormous crowd, including a pathetic group of old actors who had once been members of his company, some of them being thought long since dead. On reading the tablet belonging to his catacomb one could not fail to be struck by the frequent sorrows that had befallen him, and to reflect how much they might be responsible for the constant and reiterated regrets which so abound in the late Sir Frederick Pollock's interesting *Life of his eminent friend*. Much that was beautiful in his complex character may be learnt from a delightful little volume called *Macready as I Knew Him*, written by Lady Pollock.

In his declining years his health had been much enfeebled, and his last visits to London were to place himself under the care of the great surgeon, Sir Henry Thompson. His last visit to a theatre was on one of those occasions, when he yielded, although then infirm, to the persuasions of Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins to go with them to see Fechter play his own old part of Claude Melnotte in *The Lady of Lyons*. Macready sat in silence nearly all the evening, and when the curtain fell he merely muttered, "Very pretty music!" I should doubt if Macbeth or Lear were ever better played than by Macready, while as Richelieu, Werner, and Virginius he must have been beyond compare.

It was he who, during his management of Drury Lane Theatre, was the pioneer of gorgeous Shakespearian productions. These were followed by the sumptuous revivals of Kean at the Princess's, to be outdone in splendour by Irving at the Lyceum,

some of whose grand illustrations have, in their turn, been eclipsed in pictorial pageantry by Tree at His Majesty's.

It is dangerous to tell anecdotes of any actors of the past, lest the stories should have been in print before. That doubtless is the case with one told me years ago by a tragedian of a past generation. Macready was playing *Hamlet* in America, and during rehearsals had so severely found fault with the actor, a local favourite, who took the part of the King, that his Majesty determined at night to be revenged upon the great man by reeling, when stabbed by Hamlet, to the centre of the stage (instead of remaining at the back) and falling dead upon the very spot Macready had reserved for his own final effort before he expired in Horatio's arms. Macready groaned and grunted, "Die further up the stage, sir. . . . What are you doing down here, sir? Get up, and die elsewhere, sir!" when, to the amazement of the audience, the King sat bolt upright on the stage, and said, "I guess, Mr. Macready, you had your way at rehearsal, but *I'm King now, and I shall die where I please!*"

Another little incident, told sometimes of other tragedians, really happened to Macready. He depended very much in *Virginius* upon a subordinate actor's emphasis and delivery of a simple sentence. At rehearsal he was very patient and repeated the words, as he wished them spoken, over and over again to a young actor, who in vain tried to catch the desired tone. At last Macready said peevishly, "Surely, man, it's easy enough—can't you speak the words as I do?" "No, sir, I can't," was the actor's reply, "or I might be in your position instead of earning only thirty shillings a week."

Once in the late 'sixties I was on the platform of a Great Western Railway station, when an official said to me, "Did you notice that venerable old gentleman who just now alighted from the train?" I said "No." He then told me it was Macready;

and so, alas! I never even saw him, but I had the pleasure of knowing his son Jonathan, the surgeon, since whose death I have met Macready's youngest son and grandchild.

Certainly one of the most charming and successful plays we ever produced was *Sweethearts*, which we first accepted from its renowned author, Sir William S. Gilbert, under the title of *The White Willow*. After the play was put into rehearsal in 1874, I was so fortunate, when we were all at our wits' end for a title, as to hit on *Sweethearts*; *The White Willow*, *Doctor Time*, *Thirty Years*, *Spring and Autumn*, being among the many proposed names which my suggestion was thought to beat.

No play of its length, perhaps, ever excited more attention than *Sweethearts*. Pages could be filled with the chorus of praise which burst from the press. One leading critic wrote that Gilbert had determined to test talent by a most difficult stage exercise; and that my wife had been able to prove beyond dispute the studied grace and polished elegance of her dramatic scholarship. “ From the subject set to her, called *Sweethearts*, she has produced the poem of ‘ Jenny.’ ” The success of the creation was declared complete. No striking or unusually clever writing, no wit, or epigram, or quaint expression of words, no telling scene, or passionate speech, taken separately or in combination, could be said to account for the impression made by the actress. The audience was fascinated by the detail of the portrait, as charming in youth as it was beautiful in age. “ By this character of Jenny, with all its elaboration, its variety, its contrast, its tenderness, its suggestion, and its poetical decoration, the best work of the artist has been put forward. It is the most valuable kind of dramatic scholarship.”

More perfect acting than Mrs. Bancroft's in the second act, sang another voice, had not been seen upon the stage. For her archness and sly roguery

in the first act, her love of fun brought into striking contrast with ready touches of pathos, everybody was prepared. But for the finished portrait of a stately and elderly lady in the second act they were not prepared. It was to the life. Anything more exquisite than this assumption the writer had never seen.

In all her career, said a third, from the dawn of her genius to the present noon of her prosperity, my wife had never so thoroughly revealed the effect of her innate talent and of the hard artistic training she had undergone. The *ars celare artem* was here at its highest and its best; there were tones and touches, delicate hints and suggestions, which were absolutely marvellous in the wealth of meaning they conveyed. The thoughtless insolence of the girl, the chastened cheerfulness of the elderly woman, were both pourtrayed with a mixture of vigour and refinement such as was nowhere else to be met with on the English stage. Of her acting, indeed, it might be said, as one of our old poets said of the face of his mistress:

“’Tis like the milky way i’ the sky,  
A meeting of gentle lights without a name!”

Many curious and touching letters were addressed to Mrs. Bancroft, impelled by the emotions the play and her acting caused the writers of them, the following kind note, addressed to her by a former leader of our profession so distinguished as Mrs. Charles Kean, giving her especial pleasure.

47, QUEENSBOROUGH TERRACE, KENSINGTON GARDENS,  
March 28, 1875.

DEAR MADAM,—

I have been so long ill that I have seen nothing of what has been going on in the theatrical world; but I had a great desire to see you in *Sweethearts*, and did so on Saturday. Allow me now to thank you much for the enjoyment you afforded me by your charming acting as Jenny Northcott.

Perhaps it may not be displeasing to know that a very old actress thought it perfection. Your style is all your own, and touchingly true to nature.

Again thanking you, believe me, truly yours,

ELLEN KEAN.

Strange that this praise should be confirmed more than thirty years later by Ellen Kean's child-pupil, Ellen Terry, in the fascinating story of her life.

During the second act, early in the run of the play, the occupant of a stall close to the stage was palpably unable to control his emotion. At last he attracted the attention of his neighbour—a lady—so markedly, that he turned to her and exclaimed, quite audibly to the audience, “Yes, madam, I *am* crying, and I'm proud of it!”

I have seen all the finest acting that I could see in the last fifty years, and still rejoice in all that I can see now. I can summon noble phantoms from the distant past, and dwell upon sweet memories of more recent days. After the most searching thought, the most critical remembrance, I can recall no single effort at acting so perfect, in my own judgment, as my wife's performance, or performances, in *Sweethearts*. The creatures of the different acts were, from the first line to the last, absolutely distinct, but equally complete; the one a portrait of impetuous youth, the other of calm maturity. There was not, throughout them both, one single movement of the body, one single tone of the voice, one single look on the speaking face, to change or alter; there was nothing that could in any way, it seemed to me, be bettered.

Again came tempting offers from America, again to be declined; but it was pleasant to receive, later, from a friend in the distant land, words written by its accomplished poet and critic, William Winter:

“Our age indeed has no Cibber to describe their loveliness and celebrate their achievements; but surely if he were living at this hour, that courtly,

characteristic, and sensuous writer—who saw so clearly and could pourtray so well the peculiarities of the feminine nature—would not deem the period of Ellen Terry and Marie Bancroft, of Ada Rehan and Sarah Bernhardt, of Clara Morris and Jane Hading, unworthy of his pen. As often as fancy ranges over those bright names and others that are kindred with them—a glittering sisterhood of charms and talents—the regret must arise that no literary artist with just the gallant spirit, the chivalry, the fine insight, and the pictorial touch of old Cibber is extant to perpetuate their glory.”

A few years later we revived *Sweethearts*, giving it a place in a summer programme of the lightest nature ever offered to the public, but which, to the amazement of most people, was found strong enough to fill the theatre from early May until the end of the season in August. The playbill, which proves what may almost be termed the audacity of the experiment, comprised *Heads or Tails*, a little comedietta, written by Palgrave Simpson, in which Henry Kemble was very amusing as an amorous young man afflicted with a chronic cold; followed by *Sweethearts*, which my wife and I acted together for the first time; and Buckstone's comic drama, *Good for Nothing*, with this cast of characters, which will speak for itself: Tom Dibbles, Arthur Cecil; Harry Collier, John Clayton; Charlie, H. B. Conway; Young Mr. Simpson, Henry Kemble; and Nan, Mrs. Bancroft.

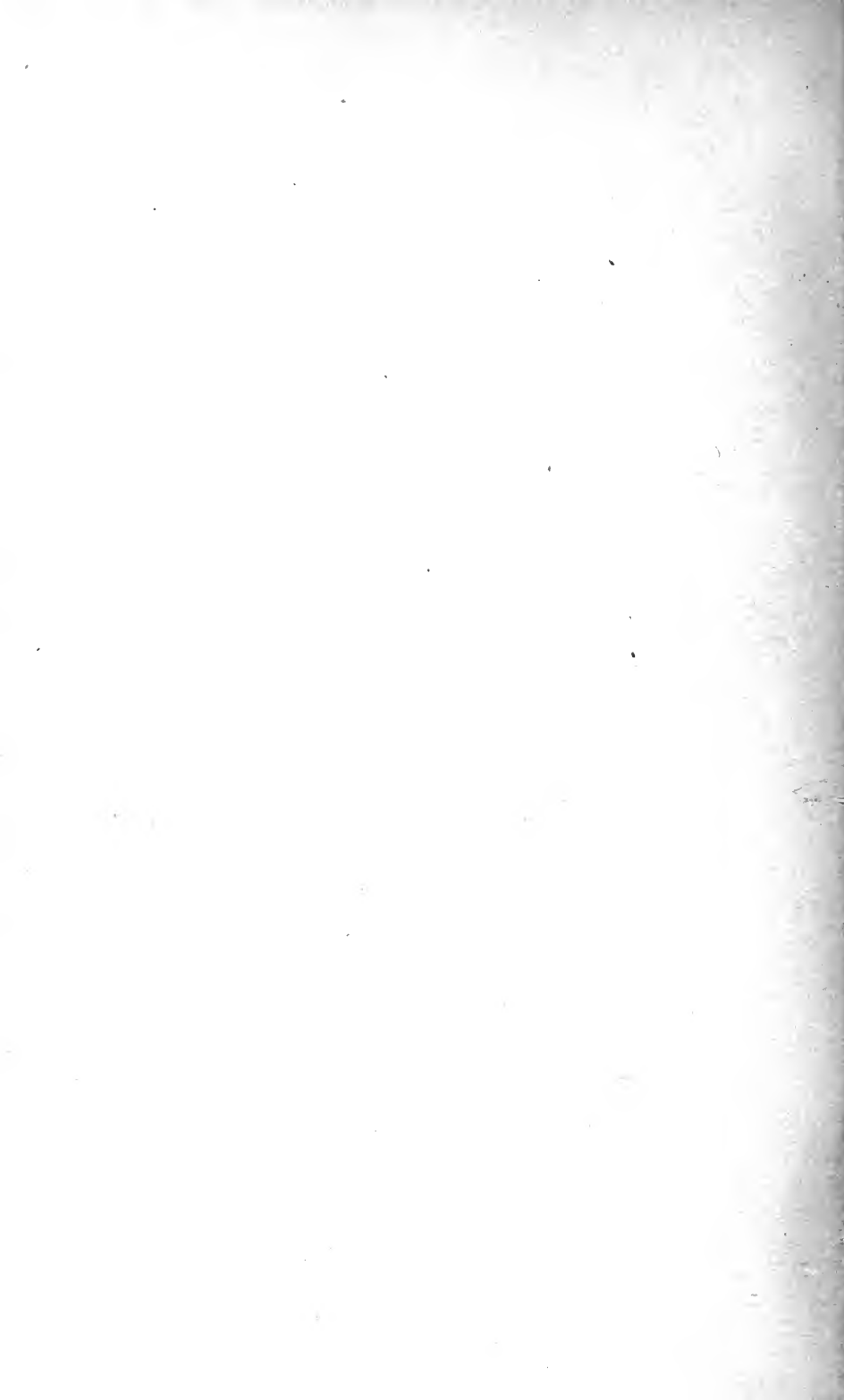
Once more, during the final season of our management, we again revived, for some farewell performances, this gem of Gilbert's and also *Good for Nothing*; when a faithful member of our Chorus sang that my wife had never shown in such a marked manner the versatility of her temperament or the elasticity of her art. The audience could scarcely believe their eyes when they saw the delicate-minded and silvery-toned Miss Northcott turned into the dirty-faced, touzle-headed little reprobate, whose





NAN

"I wish I had tuppence, I'd run right away!"



knowledge of the Cockney vernacular was so absolute and complete. The assumption of one piece of finery after another was deliciously droll ; and as the actress bounded out of the door with a tiny parasol over her shoulder, there went up a spontaneous shout of laughter and applause. My Spreadbrow the writer dismissed with a few words of unqualified praise. My rendering of the young man in the first act he declared to be full of fine points, eloquent of unexpressed feeling, while in the second division of the “dramatic contrast,” as the play was called, I had represented the selfish and cheery old bachelor with abundant sly touches of observant humour. “We do not remember this part of the play to have been so well acted nor to have gone so well.”

This bill was completed by *Katharine and Petruchio*, the mangled version arranged by Garrick of Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew*, in which Forbes-Robertson and Mrs. Bernard Beere acted the chief parts.

Another very successful piece on a small canvas was *The Vicarage*, an adaptation, made at my request by Clement Scott, of *Le Village*, a *proverbe*, by Octave Feuillet, which we produced in 1877 with the appropriate description of “a fireside story.” It appealed at once to the tastes of our audiences, with Mrs. Bancroft as Mrs. Haygarth, the Vicar’s wife, Arthur Cecil as the Vicar, and Kendal first, myself afterwards, as George Clarke, C.B., the old friend who disturbs for a while the peace of the rural vicarage by persuading the Vicar that his life there is too dull and narrow, and that it is his duty to travel.

Scott’s treatment of the theme made a touching little play, in which my wife had an opportunity of repeating the success achieved in the second part of *Sweethearts*. Indeed, one critic declared that, if possible, Mrs. Haygarth was an even more delightful old lady than she whose acquaintance was made in

*Sweethearts*; it was difficult to imagine anything more touching or effective than her loving, benign face beneath her matronly cap, and the sustained sweetness and chastened grace of her deportment. This was the central figure in the group, and all was in harmony with it. "All recollection of the theatre passes away—the spectator feels himself in the company of some genial old country parson and his amiable, elderly wife, in rustling dove-coloured silk and creamy shawl."

Spontaneous criticisms from fellow-workers are always delightful in every art, as was this kind expression from a veteran tragedian:

GARRICK CLUB,  
May 3, 1877.

DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,—

Pray do me the favour to accept an old actor's warmest felicitations on your rendering of the parson's wife in *The Vicarage*. More perfect, quiet acting I have never witnessed. You must believe me sincere when I tell you it moved me even to tears—the delicate harmony of comedy and pathos awakened me to surprise and admiration. Having gratified my love for legitimate acting so much, you will not, I trust, refuse to accept the sincere and appreciative thanks of

Yours very faithfully,

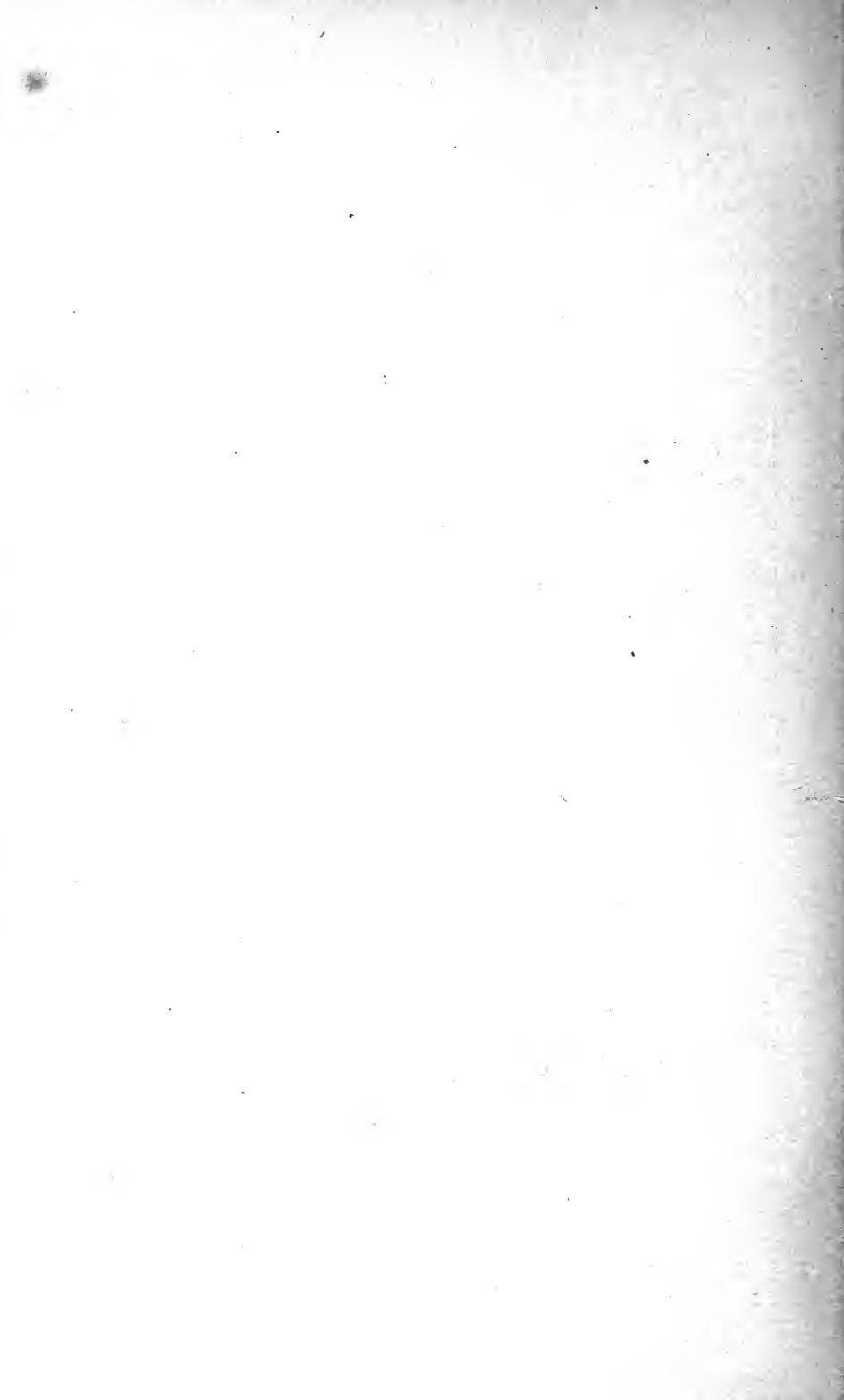
JAMES ANDERSON.

We also acted this little play with great success at the Haymarket, and several times subsequently for charities.

A favourite old comedy, *An Unequal Match*, which Tom Taylor read to the company, the play being somewhat altered for the occasion, was also revived by us in conjunction with the farce, first made famous by Alfred Wigan and the Keeleys, *To Parents and Guardians*. The action of the latter



ARTHUR CECIL AND MARIE BANCROFT IN "THE VICARAGE"



Tom Taylor reduced, at my suggestion, and with great advantage, he considered, to a single scene. It proved an excellent afterpiece, and gave Arthur Cecil an admirable part in the old French usher, while Henry Kemble quite revelled in the boyish troubles of the fat butt of the school, known to his playmates as Master William Waddilove.

Another interesting fact may be mentioned : that Albert Chevalier then made his first appearance on the stage, as one of the schoolboys. The programme added a considerable sum to the treasury, and ran for a hundred nights.

Later on, at the Haymarket, we revived Tom Taylor's drama *Plot and Passion* for a limited time, in which Ada Cavendish, Arthur Cecil, H. B. Conway, A. W. Pinero, and I acted the chief parts.

The elements were often unkind to us on the opening night of a season, and this year they were more so than usual. The evening was most tempestuous and the sound of the storm penetrated into the theatre. The large ventilator over the sunlight, and smaller ones above the gallery ceiling, groaned and rattled as the hurricane of wind whirled them round and round, threatening their safety. When the audience assembled, it could not have been in a cheerful frame of mind. Whether the drama, or the actors, or the spectators were, one or the other or all three, a little dull, does not much matter now ; but the production did not take rank with our successes—indeed, it would have been added to our brief list of failures, of which the next chapter will render an account, had not the novelty which completed the programme, and which was most warmly received, fortunately made amends. This was an admirable adaptation by Burnand of a bright little comedy called *Lolotte*, once played with great success by Chaumont, and later by Réjane, of which I had bought the English rights some time before. *A Lesson*, as this adaptation was christened, as

played by Brookfield, Conway, Blanche Henri, and Mrs. Bancroft, was extremely successful. Burnand was not able to be present on the first night, but his letter of the following day will confirm our impressions of the elements:

18, ROYAL CRESCENT, RAMSGATE,  
November 27, 1881.

MY DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,

Excuse the style of this letter, for after such a fearful night *here*, not at the Haymarket, I write with (a pen—yes) *several tiles off!* I sincerely congratulate you upon what appears from *The Observer* to have been a Big Success with a very Small Piece. We came down here to rest and be thankful. We did not rest and we are not thankful. Such a gale! The centre part of the Crescent verandah at the back blown right down, and the doors blockaded; chimneys nowhere; wrecks, alas! everywhere. Tugs and lifeboats in full employ. “A night for crossing!” Well, to some it was a night for crossing themselves and saying their prayers, for we thought that Mother Shipton’s prophecies had come true, and there was an end of everything, as there is to this letter. Wife and self immensely pleased. We thought of you at 10 and 10.30 last night, and wondered.

Yours very truly,

F. C. BURNAND.

To Tom Taylor we returned again in the following season, reviving his clever comedy and Haymarket success of former days, *The Overland Route*, which we had long wished to do when occasion arose. In the previous year I had purposely made a voyage to Malta. The trip was of the greatest service in furnishing all kinds of detail (of which I made rough drawings and took copious notes), and was made on one of the older type of the fine P. & O. fleet, built long before the present floating palaces were contemplated, and better suited as a model for our projected ship-scene. There were no such luxuries



in those days as cold chambers for preserving food. I occupied the doctor's sanctum, and although the space and privacy were highly valued, the luxury was not an unmixed blessing, for just outside my cabin there was a kind of poultry-yard, the feathered occupants of which never failed to remind me of their existence in the early hours, while, periodically, their short span of life was noisily shortened for table purposes. Very close, and also within view, was the slaughter-house and home of the ship's butcher! The traveller by sea in those days had to be careful in the choice of a deck-cabin.

A brief stay at Malta was full of interest, including a visit to the monastery, where, in the vaults below, dead monks, like mummies, were propped up in niches, and I can still remember the calm smile of the brother who acted as guide, when he pointed to a vacant space which, he explained, was waiting for him. A different resting-place was one suggested by an epitaph in the cemetery on the grave of a former resident in Soho, "who had been ordered by his physician to a warmer climate."

I afterwards went on to Constantinople, landing at Syra on the way. There I caught sight of a small boy who, as he walked down the chief street, affixed here and there upon the walls a brief announcement printed upon note-paper with a mourning edge. Upon inspection, I gathered that it referred to the funeral of an old lady, which took place a few hours later. Her body, clothed in a dress which most likely meant the savings of her long life, and with the face horribly rouged, was carried forth by sailors upon an open bier; as it passed, some people came out upon the house-tops and cast vessels of water on the ground between the corpse and those who followed it to the grave—a proceeding supposed, by an old Eastern superstition, to keep death from the survivors.

One amusing incident of my voyage I recall. It seemed that who and what I was had much puzzled a fellow-passenger, a Russian gentleman, who, when

I had left the ship, was told my calling. He held up his hands in sorrow and exclaimed, "An actor! What we have missed! *There was a piano on board!*"

In our production of *The Overland Route*, the saloon and the upper deck of the P. & O. ship were reproduced, after months of labour, by Walter Hann—thanks to the opportunities so kindly placed at our disposal by an old friend, Sir Thomas Sutherland, the Chairman of the P. & O. Company. His name always reminds me of some brief, but perfect, holidays enjoyed on "trial trips" of the P. & O. vessels, in company eminent in the various careers of life—trips which remain among my most cherished recollections.

In our production we were fortunate in securing real coolies, lascars, seedie boys, and ayahs, to lend reality to the picture. The scene of the last act, when the ship had run aground upon a coral reef in the Red Sea, was magnificently painted by William Telbin, whose acquaintance with the East and the Holy Land enabled him to treat the subject truthfully. This scene was particularly admired. One of the papers, after rightly ascribing to me the credit of inventing and arranging the stage-business when the steamer is supposed to strike upon the reef, went on to say that it was all wonderfully well done. The suddenness of the thing, the sound of the ship crashing on to the rocks, the hiss of the escaping steam, the screaming of the women, the lowering of the boats, and the passing of frightened children in their night-dresses up the cabin stairs, all contrived to form an exciting and impressive picture which was received with the loudest applause.

Our nightly voyage in the *Simoon* was in the fairest weather, for our revival of the old comedy was received with all the favour given to a new production. In the cast were David James, Alfred Bishop, Charles Brookfield, Frederick Everill, and Mrs. John Wood; while Mrs. Bancroft played the

fascinating Mrs. Sebright, and I appeared as the ubiquitous and ingenious ship's doctor, Dexter. A small part in the comedy was acted by Percy Vernon, the present Lord Lyveden. I wonder if he recalled his mimic adventures on the *Simoon* while undergoing the experience of a real shipwreck on the *Argonaut*.

An amusing scene between Mrs. John Wood and herself, which became a feature of the evening, was cleverly written by Mrs. Bancroft, who also supplied an admirable addition to a dialogue between Mrs. John Wood and David James, who naturally made the most of it. The comedy justified our faith and drew a large sum of money.

The last new play we produced during our management was an early work from the pen of one who was then a young author but who has since earned, by the strong and varied fertility of the work he has achieved for the stage, the distinguished position of being justly regarded as the leading English dramatist, Arthur Pinero. This comedy, to which he gave the attractive title *Lords and Commons*, was written with amazing speed, being completed in three weeks.

The author read and rehearsed his play, even then, with the supreme skill of which he is master, giving all concerned a clear insight into the value of his characters—an art rarely possessed in the highest degree, in my experience, but by author-actors, as, for instance, Boucicault and Robertson. This faculty is shared, doubtless owing to a long-since-acquired intimate acquaintance with the stage, by Gilbert. Strange to say, Byron was devoid of the power; on the other hand, so far as our experience goes, it is distinctly owned by Burnand, who acted a good deal *en amateur*, and was the founder of the A.D.C. at Cambridge.

The author diligently directed the rehearsals, and no pains were spared by all concerned to bring his

work successfully through its ordeal. As for *décor*, perhaps stage illusion went as far as need be in the old hall and the terrace, which were perfect specimens of Telbin's art, while the tapestry-room was made complete to the smallest detail by Walter Johnstone. Caryl Court, both in its decay and renovation, was a splendid stage specimen of an old English mansion.

*Lords and Commons* allowed us the great pleasure of again numbering Mrs. Stirling among the members of our company, to which Forbes-Robertson also returned, to remain prominently connected with us until the close of our management.

Other members of the cast, besides ourselves, were Alfred Bishop, Charles Brookfield, "Willie" Elliot, Eleanor Calhoun, and Mrs. Bernard Beere. The construction of the play was full of talent and ingenuity, the type of characters striking and original, and much of the dialogue was of the highest excellence; but unfortunately the sympathy of the audience was forfeited early in the story by the fallen aristocrats, and, once lost, it was difficult to restore it to them, in spite of the pathetic beauty of the closing scene, which, we always thought, was treated with exceptional skill by Forbes-Robertson. That the author did not regard *Lords and Commons* as among his best plays may be presumed from his not having included it in his published works.

The play, which was produced in November (a dangerous month), was acted for eighty nights, and attracted full houses for the first seven or eight weeks of its performance, when Christmas hurt its run. Without pretending to rank as a great success, the career of the play was by no means without profit to author and manager, although it did not answer early hopes. This result was partly owing, it may be, to the high standard which the press and the public had grown to expect from us; a compliment—however gratifying as a sort of medal awarded for general excellence—by no means without what most medals possess, a reverse side.

Bar. once set the stone in motion, Mr. Dromish, it must run its course. You have shown me the value of that <sup>which</sup> for fifteen years of manhood I spurned.

Mr. D. What is that?

Bar. This labour <sup>in</sup> you speak of. For one month I have worked shoulder to shoulder with men whose muscles are firmer, whose health comes more freely, whose hands are more skilful, than my own. I am in a new world! I seem to have but one ambition - to be as active and as patient as these poor people I have despised. My life is refulminating - to-day is too brief for me, tonight only endurable because it is the high road to tomorrow! And I owe <sup>all</sup> this to you.

[She rises and comes to him.]

Mr. D. To me! I am proud to hear you say that.

Bar. You have brought me something of real happiness - real contentment. (Underly.) You might have changed me for the worse if you had been so inclined.

Mr. D. No, no - no, no. (She lays her hand upon his arm.) and now is my work to end? You say I have set the stone rolling - is it rolling away from me altogether, or does my influence

27.



A none too kindly critic in a well-known paper wrote that whatever, in parts, might be the faults of the play, there could be but one opinion respecting its mounting and the manner in which it was acted. Nothing could be more perfect than both. If the parts were not always quite worthy of their exponents, the latter were in all respects worthy of their parts. My wife and myself, he continued, with loyal devotion to our art, had contented ourselves once more with subordinate characters. My part was that of an ex-swell of Pall Mall, who had developed into a Californian miner, and was altogether an amusing person with his beard, his rolled-up shirt-sleeves, and his habit of making foot-stools of the chairs in Caryl Court, while my wife was the bright, clever little American flirt. "She has the best lines in the play to speak, and speaks them as no other living actress could do." Special praise was accorded to the beautiful acting of Mrs. Stirling, and to an extremely clever character-sketch by Brookfield, whose make-up was so remarkable that he was positively unrecognisable, both before and behind the curtain.

In my wife's words: It would sometimes be interesting to an audience to be given a peep behind the scenes and in the green-room; they would often see what servants of the public the actors are, how often, when suffering acute pain, or when in profound sorrow, they go through their work, and so bravely that the audience does not detect even a look of it. I have known that grand old actress Mrs. Stirling, when suffering from severe bronchitis, go to the theatre in all weathers and at great risk, more especially at her advanced age, when she should have been in her bed. I have known her arrive at the theatre scarcely able to breathe, but insisting upon going through her duties. This was often an anxiety, for, while admiring her courage, I feared bad results from it. Mrs. Stirling's sight being impaired, she always dreaded stairs; and, unfortunately for her, in

the hall of Caryl Court there was a long gallery and then a flight of steps leading from it to the stage, while behind the scenes there was another flight to reach this gallery. Luckily she did not enter alone, but had the kindly help of Eleanor Calhoun, who played her daughter in the play. When Mrs. Stirling was so ill, these stairs were naturally a double anxiety, but she would not hear of any change of entrance in the scene which might affect others, and I often felt more than anxious about her. One would imagine, to see her slowly and cautiously ascend the flight of steps, stopping every now and then to murmur, "Oh, these stairs!" that she would scarcely be able to get through her part; but although she has stood gasping for breath and terribly ailing, the moment her cue came to go on the stage she seemed to cast her skin, as it were, and to become twenty years younger; vigour returned to her limbs, and she walked with a firm and stately gait. Her wonderfully-preserved, beautiful voice was alone worth a long journey to listen to, and her performance of the part was such as no one else *could* have given.

My husband and I enjoyed her society until the close of her long life. We often sat and gossiped with the grand old lady at her house in Duchess Street until her peaceful end. I seem still to see her saddened eyes as, in answer to my farewell words, they accompanied her lips, which said, "And God bless *you*, my dear!"

No regret so keen, in connection with our early retirement from management, has been felt by my wife and by me as that it could not be our lot to produce some of the mature work of Pinero—a pride and privilege which fell to others, a great gift. But we were left with something then, that has been since, and always will be to us both, a proud possession—his friendship.



## CHAPTER VII

### FOUR FAILURES

"In the reproof of chance  
Lies the true proof of men."

THE word "failure," in this instance, is taken to mean the production of a play by which money was lost. In the course of our twenty years of management we had four such catastrophes: *How She Loves Him*, *Tame Cats*, *Wrinkles*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. The first failure we considered undeserved, and were sorry for. The second and third we thought were thoroughly deserved. The fourth we have always been proud of; it was, in fact, within an ace of proving a triumphant success.

After the first run of *Caste*, in 1867, in order to relieve Robertson (who was on the eve of going to Germany to be married to his charming second wife) from following it at once with another play, and to avoid offering the public *toujours perdrix*, we fixed upon *How She Loves Him*, a cleverly written comedy by Boucicault, which had been originally acted in America. The following letter has reference to the author sending us the comedy in three acts, not in five, as it had been first acted:

MY DEAR MARIE,—

Shall I tell you what you said when you read the piece? "Oh dear! this is not what I expected. I don't see this at all!"

Now, show me how good you think me by saying outright what you think, and don't offend me by "doing the nice," and by imagining that you can ever wound my vanity.

The piece you have *is* the old piece cut into three instead of into five acts, with two scenes *added* to bind the first and second acts into one, and the fourth and fifth into one, the second being the old third. There! you see I will not allow you any escape! The comedy is one of "character and conversation," sketchy and slight. It does not "smack" on your palate, and you are disappointed sadly. There, there, pout it out! Push the glasses away, and say, "Give me something else," and don't dare to imagine that I shall be the less sincerely yours,

DION BOUCICAULT.

It was eventually settled that the comedy should be produced in its five-act form, and the rehearsals were commenced under the direction of the author. H. J. Montague—a young actor of great personal charm, who had every chance of at once growing into public favour—was engaged, and also William Blakeley, who was known well to both of us in Liverpool, and who in this play made his first appearance in London, and in a bath-chair. Boucicault's power as a stage-manager was a lesson to young managers. Sometimes, however, he would change a fragment of the stage business, previously arranged, for the worse—not perhaps an altogether unknown weakness with dramatic authors. There was, we thought, a distinct instance of this at the end of the first act of *How She Loves Him*, which at last got very muddled. A rather good idea struck me, which was a distinct improvement on what had been rehearsed; but we hardly, in those early days, liked to interfere with such an autocrat, kind as we had always found him. Our old friend long since forgave and laughed at the disclosure of the stratagem by which we brought about the wished-for alteration.

It was done by attributing the notion to himself, as one which he had, we ventured to tell him, discarded too hastily at a previous rehearsal. Whether he really, at the time, saw through the trick or not, he never divulged; but he rewarded the stratagem by adopting the suggestion.

While these rehearsals were in progress, it was my lot to see the burning of Her Majesty's Theatre and Opera House in the Haymarket, where Tree's beautiful theatre now stands. I happened to be on my way to join a supper-party in the old coffee-room of the Café de l'Europe, then partitioned off into the old-fashioned “boxes” of the time, and much frequented by Keeley, Buckstone, Walter Montgomery, Sothern, Kendal (already a young Haymarket recruit), Walter Lacy, and other kindred souls. There was no possible chance of reaching my destination, so I stood among the enormous crowd, rooted to the spot by the fascination of the flames, which quickly enough worked their will. It was the fiercest fire I ever saw, and nothing could be done by our late intrepid friend, Eyre Massey Shaw, and his firemen beyond saving the adjoining hotel—which was not where the Carlton now stands, but in Charles Street—and other buildings. Thus the old home of Jenny Lind, of Malibran, of Grisi, of Titiens, of the immortal *pas de quatre*, became, as they all now are, a memory.

*How She Loves Him* was produced in December 1867, the cast including, besides our two selves, Hare, Montague, Blakeley, Mrs. Leigh Murray, and Lydia Foote.

Nothing could have been more cordial than the applause which greeted the first and second acts, and the good news was sent to the author at the Princess's Theatre, where he was acting in one of his celebrated Irish dramas. An immensely amusing scene in the next act between a patient and doctors of every possible belief—allopathic, homœopathic, hydropathic, and electropathic (an episode of which we were strongly reminded in Bernard Shaw's delightful

*Doctor's Dilemma*)—was received with hearty laughter, until, unfortunately, a situation at the end of it, about which Boucicault had been very obstinate at the rehearsals, went all wrong, and the audience, once made angry, would not allow the rest of the play to redeem the mistake. It was a great pity, for, like all work from that gifted pen, it contained great characterisation and charm of writing, much in this comedy being described as “worthy of Congreve and Douglas Jerrold.”

Individually, the failure of the play was a great loss to me, as I made a personal hit in a part which otherwise might have grown popular—Beecher Sprawley—a character in which I built up some eccentricities founded on the peculiarities of two friends, neither of whom detected me, and both of whom were among the warmest in their praise. I afterwards revived some of the idea when I acted in *Money*.

Edmund Yates, with whom at that time I had the barest acquaintance, thus wrote of my performance: “The parts I have seen Mr. Bancroft fill in *Ours*, *Caste*, and the comedy now under notice, could not possibly have been better played.” The characters, he went on to point out, were of the *genus* “dandy”; in former years, the actor personating them would have put on a palpably false moustache, would have worn spurs, carried a riding-whip everywhere—the whole personation representing a creature such as had never been seen by mortal man off the stage. On the other hand, in voice, costume, bearing, and manner, he declared me to be an exact type of the class I was intended to represent, with a very slight exaggeration, which was as necessary for stage purposes as rouge itself. “I am told,” he added, “that members of the class depicted object to Mr. Bancroft’s delineation as a *charge*; but they forget that they are really the *charges* of society.”

Boucicault’s kindness about *How She Loves Him*

continued till the end of its run, and was never in the faintest degree interfered with by the disappointment resulting from its failure to draw large houses. He even carried his good-nature so far as to decline to accept any fees throughout its career of forty-seven nights. When it was withdrawn he wrote in a charming letter to my wife :

“ I regret that my comedy was caviare to the public. I doubted its agreement with their taste and stomach, and so told you before it was played.

“ It has profited you little in money : lay by its experience.

“ The public pretend they want pure comedy ; this is not so. What they want is *domestic drama*, treated with broad, comic character. A sentimental, pathetic play, comically rendered, such as *Ours, Caste, The Colleen Bawn, Arrah-na-Pogue*.

“ Robertson differs from me, not fundamentally, but scenically ; his action takes place in lodgings or drawing-rooms—mine has a more romantic scope.

“ Be advised, then, refuse dramas which are wholly serious, wholly comic—seek those which blend the two. You have solved this very important question for yourself. Comedy, pure and simple, is rejected of 1868.”

The story of our production of his brilliant comedy, *London Assurance*, written when he was twenty-one, is told in a previous chapter. Later, when he was slowly recovering from a serious illness, he wrote me a characteristic letter, which contained these sentences :

“ I doubt whether I shall ever cross the ocean again. I am rustivating at Washington for a month or two, having recovered some strength, and am waiting now to know if my lease of life is out, or is to be renewed for another term. I have had notice to quit, but am arguing the point (‘ just like you,’ I think I hear you say), and nothing yet is settled between Nature and me. I send my kind love to Mrs. Bancroft, and true wishes for your success.”

That he "argued the point" to good purpose will be within the memory of many. Happily he lived to visit England once more, and three years later he wrote to me from Park Street as follows :

MY DEAR B.,—

I send you the promised sun-picture, or photograph, with inscription. Now, my dear friend, will you feel offended with an old soldier if he intrudes on your plan of battle by a remark?

Why are the Bancrofts taking a back seat in their own theatre? They efface themselves! Who made the establishment? with whom is it wholly identified? of what materials is it built? There—it's out!

Tell Marie, with my love, that there is nothing so destructive as *rest*, if persisted in; you must alter the vowel—it becomes *rust*, and eats into life. Hers is too precious to let her fool it away; she is looking splendid, and as fresh as a pat of butter. Why don't you get up a version of *The Country Girl*? Let her play Hoyden, and you play Lord Foppington.

I daresay you will ask me to mind my own business. Well, if you do, I shall say that the leading interests of the drama, *which you and she now represent*, are my business, that the regard and affection I have personally entertained for your wife since she was a child—pray excuse me—and the friendship I have long felt for you, induced me to repeat what I have heard from more than one person on both sides of the Atlantic.

Ever yours sincerely,

DION BOUCICAULT.

Much of this advice was as kind and as true as the writer of it, but we had too long "gone our ways" to follow it, too long been contented merely to support a good *ensemble* when occasion demanded it. rather than thrust ourselves into all the leading

parts which often we could aid others to represent better.

The portrait of himself as Shaun, the Post, in his typical Irish drama, *Arrah-na-Pogue*, hangs on our walls, in cherished remembrance of a long and happy friendship.

It was on "The Hill" at Epsom, in 1867, the year memorable on the Turf through the snowstorm in which Hermit won the Derby, that I was introduced to Edmund Yates, whose friendship and pleasant company I enjoyed without a break, rough fighter and fierce opponent as he could be, until it was cut short by the fatal seizure with which he was stricken in the stalls of the Garrick Theatre on the first night of Hare's revival of *Money* in 1894. The first fact reminds me that, many years afterwards, I came across, at a public sale, among some effects which had belonged to Mr. Baird—famous on the Turf as "Mr. Abingdon"—a letter-case made from the coat of Hermit, and so inscribed on a silver shield. I bought it, that I might have the pleasure to offer it to one who seemed to me its proper owner, and on the thirtieth anniversary of the never-to-be-forgotten race I gave the pocket-book to Mr. Henry Chaplin.

About a year after that first meeting with Yates came a letter from the General Post Office, where he was head of a department, which was very welcome, for we were ever on the look-out for new plays.

MY DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,—

Is there any use in my finishing a comedy which I have on hand, and submitting it to you? Of course, it should stand on its merits, but I have so much work that I would not go on with it if you were engaged, say, *two-deep*.

Sincerely yours,

EDMUND YATES.

We heard the first act read, and then decided to produce the play. Unhappily, it fell off in the later acts, and at rehearsal *Tame Cats*, as the comedy was called, did not come out well, as is by no means unusual. The play was produced. The cast was good, including my wife and myself, Hare, Montague, Blakeley, Montgomery, Carlotta Addison, and Mrs. Buckingham White. The evening was not a cheerful one. My own part of a mock poet and one of the "Tame Cats" of the house represented was resented by the audience and critics, some of whom mistook it for the caricature of one far above such ridicule—Algernon Charles Swinburne—no such impertinent idea having entered the head of either author or actor. *Tame Cats*, a work of very second rank, was harshly received, and the play was doomed. It was acted for eleven nights.

It was on that evening that Charles Collette made his first appearance as a professional actor. He had for some time been the life and soul of his old regiment (3rd Dragoon Guards) *en amateur*, and his brother-officers rallied round him with too much fervour on the evening of this new departure. They did their old comrade more harm than good by the vehemence of their reception of all he said and did in the small part of a Government clerk. The first words spoken by him were, accidentally, *à propos* enough, "There's nobody about; I wonder what they're saying of me at the War Office?" To the amazement of the rest of the audience, the friendly dragoons received this simple speech as the finest joke ever penned.

Another cause of undesired laughter was the behaviour of a magnificent macaw, which we had secured to give colour with his splendid plumage to the scene of a garden by the river. At rehearsals the beautiful creature behaved well enough, but on the first night, no sooner was the curtain up, than the crowded house and glare of gas so alarmed the bird that, with his huge wings spread out, he sprang



to the ground, waddled round and round the stage with deafening shrieks, dragging his stand, which made as much noise as a hansom cab, after him. The louder the audience laughed, the louder the bird screamed, until he made an ignominious exit, being seized and dragged away, and was heard no more. He was presented to the “ Zoo,” where, for all I know, he may be still, profoundly meditating on his brief but eventful stage career.

Some years afterwards, while we were on a visit to The Temple at Goring, a charming riverside residence he had taken for the summer, Edmund Yates asked us if we still had the prompt copy of his comedy, adding that he should greatly like to read it. The book was hunted up and sent to him. In a few days it came back with this verdict: “ My dear B., it’s poor stuff, and well deserved its fate.”

Once more it was in our search after new plays—a search which never ceased—that we were destined to meet with failure. Among the wilderness of manuscripts that we read after Robertson’s death was a new play by Byron. We felt bound to decline it, and it failed entirely when produced elsewhere. In its place we gave him a commission to write another, which we guaranteed to produce by a certain date—a dearly-earned lesson in what to avoid in management.

The outline of the plot we gave him; it was, roughly, in this wise, the suggestion growing from the idea of an amplification of the young people and the old people in Gilbert’s *Sweethearts*. There were to be contrasts of age throughout. In the early part of the play young folk were to injure old folk, and in the end, when they had grown quite old themselves, were to redeem their error and repair their wrong by atoning for it to the youthful descendants—to be acted by the same people—of the old couple whom they had wronged in their youth. This was accompanied by a strict injunction that the parts for

Coghlan and Ellen Terry—who, at the time, were such valued members of our company—were to be of the first importance, while he might write quite secondary characters for our two selves.

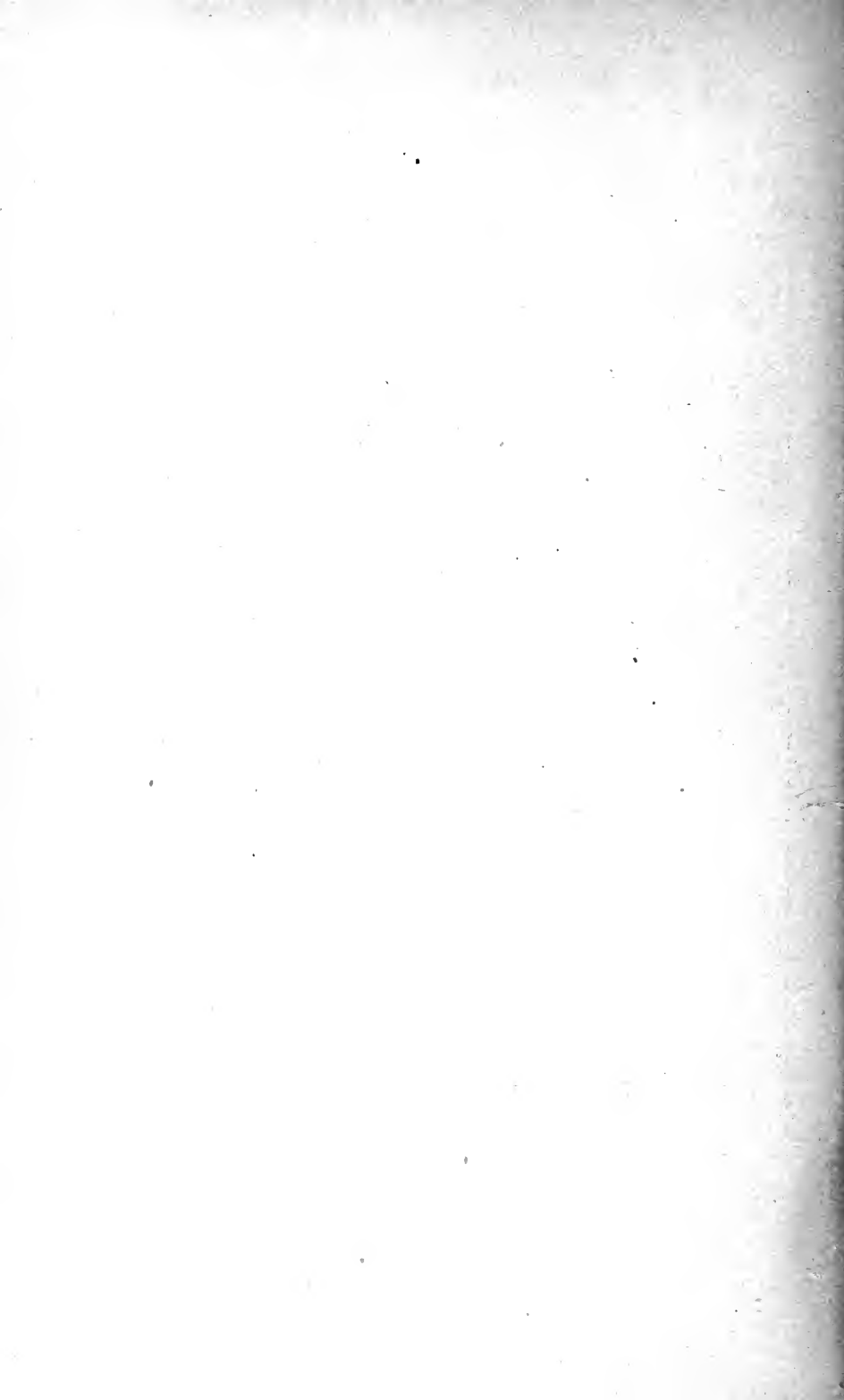
Byron read to us two acts of what was to be a three-act comedy, and bitter was our disappointment. The only parts of any value were those destined for ourselves, while the plot quite departed from the intended story and drifted into other channels. We determined to face our obligation, and to hope for something better from the last act. Unfortunately, this did not mend matters, for we found it impossible even to ask Miss Terry to take the part designed for her; and Coghlan refused (with every justice) to accept the character intended for him.

With the firm resolve never again blindly to accept an unwritten play from any dramatist, we went bravely to work upon *Wrinkles*, sparing neither money nor pains over it. On the morning before its production, I met dear Corney Grain in Bond Street, who asked me if we were going to have what he called "our usual success." I at once said "No," and that its fate was sealed, for we were never blinded to the faults of the play by the excellence of our own parts, which contained some of the most amusing things its gifted author ever wrote. On the first night they provoked such laughter that they almost saved the play; but the story was so feebly treated, and Byron had been so obstinate about proposed changes at the end of it, that our fears were prophetic, and the curtain fell to a chorus of ominous sounds which pronounced a verdict of flat failure.

On the following morning Byron came to us very contrite, and, when too late, agreed to the alterations we had wanted made in time. He deeply regretted the failure for our sakes, as well as his own, and wished to forego all fees. This, of course, we could not listen to, and resolved to turn the tide as best we could. We announced the failure of the play and then withdrew it—a fate which forcibly



MARIE BANCROFT



reminds me of the answer given by Gilbert in reply to a question about one of his own plays which, although it certainly ranked among his highest literary achievements, had not proved attractive. *Question*: “How did it end?” *Answer*: “Oh, it ended in a fortnight!”

We approach now the most marked of the few failures our management knew—a failure of which, as I have said, we shall continue to be proud.

Persistent attacks of hay-fever had so distressed and pained Mrs. Bancroft for some summers, that I determined, at all hazards, to arrange a programme without her for the time of year which proved so trying. This was no easy task, and led me naturally to anxious thought for some attractive stop-gap. As I have before said, it was I who was mainly responsible for the choice of plays during our management; and let me at once admit that it was I whose anxious thoughts were led by a variety of circumstances—amazing as the revelation seemed to be when subsequently made public—towards Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*. To show how far our work was always in advance—no success ever blinding us to the necessity of forethought—I mention that the formation of this plan preceded its execution by full twelve months. Our failures received the same amount of forethought as did our triumphs.

With the notion of this production in our minds, we chose Venice as the scene of our holiday in the summer of 1874, and travelled thither after a stay in Switzerland, arriving in the great heat of the early days of September.

There, as arranged beforehand, we met George Gordon, our chief scene-painter, whom we found brimful of the delights his few days’ stay had given him. Every hour seemed occupied in settling to what purpose we best could put it, and very carefully we chose picturesque corners and places from the

lovely city to make good pictures for our narrow frame. In the Palace of the Doges we saw at once that the 'Sala della Bussola, with its grim letter-box, the *Bocca de Leone*—which had received the secret accusation of many an unfortunate suspect—was the only one capable of realisation within our limited space; and this room we resolved should be accurately reproduced for the trial of Antonio and Portia's pleading on his behalf. We also arranged to show different views of Venice in the form of curtains between the acts of the play. We bought many books, we made many drawings, we were satiated with Titian and Veronese, we bought many photographs and copies of their gorgeous pictures to guide our costumes. When all was settled, after entrancing days and evenings spent in seeing and doing all we could in the time at our disposal, we went away reluctantly, leaving George Gordon to complete his sketches, he being only too happy to linger among the beauties of Venice.

Having decided to take the great risk of casting Coghlan for Shylock, the first attempt we made towards special engagements—a proposal to Mr. and Mrs. Kendal—having broken down, the thought of Ellen Terry, who then had not acted for some time, came to us, and resulted in her engagement for Portia. The following characteristic letters from that gifted actress, who then was twenty-seven, and whose art so completely conveys the power of "charm," will be the best comment on the subject we can offer.

DEAR MR. AND MRS. BANCROFT,—

I received the form of engagement this morning, together with the kind little letters. Accept my best thanks for your expressions of goodwill towards me. I cannot tell you how pleased I am that I seem to see in you a reflection of my own feelings with regard to this engagement.

My work will, I feel certain, be *joyful* work, and

*joyful work should turn out good work. You will be pleased, and I shall be pleased at your pleasure, and it would be hard, then, if the good folk "in front" are not pleased.*

Believe me, I am in *all ways*, sincerely yours,

ELLEN TERRY.

48, LONDON ROAD, TUNBRIDGE WELLS,  
*Friday.*

DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,—

It is delightful in this place just now. The grass *so green*, and everything so clean. I feel years younger since yesterday morning, and look much better. Thanks for letting me have a box *at all* the other night—sending so late I did not deserve to get it. A bird's-eye view is not becoming to the party *viewed*, aber "Besser Etwas als Nichts."

What was the matter with Mr. Bancroft? He acted *SPLENDIDLY*—and did the morning *shiveryness* better than ever.

Do let me know about *Bassanio* soon. You don't know how anxious I am that it may not be——! ("No matter.")

Have you ever seen *Mr. Kelly* act? I don't know if he could *look* the part, but his acting would be perfect. He can show *gradation* of feeling—and has the *tenderest voice I've ever heard*. Kelly in a *small* theatre would be the "right man in the right place."

I'll not bore you any longer, but oh! I am so anxious (about my *Bassanio*, I mean).

Are you quite well, I wonder? How I wish you were here this beautiful brisk day. Am just going for a drive, so farewell.

With kind regards to Mr. Bancroft,

Yours very sincerely,

ELLEN TERRY.

I took upon myself the great responsibility of rearranging the text of the play, so as to avoid change of scene in sight of the audience, and to adapt the

work, as far as possible, to its miniature frame ; being greatly fortified in my researches by the discovery of the following passage, by such an authority as Dr. Johnson, which I came across in an edition of the play that had been my father's, and which I had often read when I was a boy, for *The Merchant of Venice* was always high up among my favourites of Shakespeare's plays :

“The old quarto editions of 1600 have no distribution of acts, but proceed from the beginning to the end in an unbroken tenour. This play, therefore, having been probably divided without authority by the publishers of the first folio, lies open to a new regulation, if any more commodious division can be proposed. The story in itself is so wildly incredible, and the changes of the scene so frequent and capricious, that the probability of action does not deserve much care.”

Here was a discovery, indeed, in so eminent an opinion, and I resolved to make use of it in our play-bill. Perhaps there will be no better opportunity to describe the sequence of scenes I eventually decided on, for I often have regretted that I did not print the play as we produced it. The first tableau, “Under the Arches of the Doge's Palace,” with a lovely view of Santa Maria della Salute, contained the text of the opening scene and the third scene of Act I., the dialogue being welded together by carefully arranged processions and appropriate pantomimic action from the crowd of merchants, sailors, beggars, Jews, who were throughout passing and re-passing. The second tableau was in Portia's house at Belmont, and opened with a stately entrance of Portia and her court to the strains of barbaric music, which announced the arrival and choice of the golden casket by the Prince of Morocco. After his disconsolate departure came the dialogues between Portia and Nerissa from Act I. scene ii., followed by the announcement of the Prince of Arragon, and his choice of the silver casket. In the third tableau we



returned to Venice, a most quaint spot of the old city being chosen for the outside of Shylock's house, which, without exception, was the most extraordinary scenic achievement in so small a theatre, the close of the scene being the elopement by moonlight of his daughter. This tableau was then repeated by daylight for the scene of "the Jew's rage" with Salanio and Salarino, and his subsequent frenzied interview with Tubal. The fourth view was a repetition, with some changed effects, of the hall in Portia's palace, where Bassanio chose wisely from the three caskets, and heard afterwards of Antonio's arrest. The next tableau was the "Trial Scene," and the last, "Portia's Garden at Belmont."

The words of songs from some of Shakespeare's other comedies were introduced and sung by boys as Portia's pages, but no syllable of the text was altered, transpositions of the dialogue alone being necessary for my arrangement of the play.

As Coghlan was to have the responsibility of acting Shylock, it was right that he should have a share in the stage management of the play, and this I gave him. Much charming music was specially composed by Meredith Ball, which should not be allowed to perish. The views of Venice shown between the acts—comprising the Campanile and column of St. Mark, the Rialto, and a view of the Grand Canal—were beautiful pictures by George Gordon, who, with his friend and fellow-worker, William Harford, devoted months of labour to the scenery. The utmost realism was attained. Elaborate capitals of enormous weight, absolute reproductions of those which crown the pillars of the colonnade of the Doge's Palace, were cast in plaster, and part of a wall of the theatre had to be cut away to find room for them to be moved, by means of trucks, on and off the small stage, which, although narrow, fortunately had a depth of thirty-eight feet. The scenic artists also consulted a great authority, E. W. Godwin, who kindly gave them valuable archæological help, which

was acknowledged, at Gordon's wish, in all programmes. To attribute further assistance in the production to Mr. Godwin is an error.

The preparations throughout involved so much labour and anxiety, that, as time went on, the success or failure of our dangerous experiment began to seem as nothing to the longing to get rid of its heavy weight. After the final rehearsal it was revealed to us, and plainly, that—radiant and exquisite as we could see the *Portia* would be, beautiful beyond our hopes as were the scenery and appointments—the version of *Shylock* which Coghlan proposed to offer would fail to be acceptable; so it may be believed our hearts were heavy on the evening of April 17, 1875, when the curtain rose upon the costly venture.

Of course there was a brilliant audience, including quite a remarkable number of Royal Academicians. The play throughout was well received, but never with enthusiasm. With this, I think surprise had much to do; it all looked so unlike a theatre, and so much more like old Italian pictures than anything that had been previously shown upon any stage in all the world—a bold statement, perhaps, but I make it without hesitation. Some of the dresses seemed to puzzle many among the audience, notably those worn by Bassanio and by the Venetian nobles who accompanied him to Belmont in their beautiful velvet robes of State reaching to the ground, the striking and correct costume of the Prince of Morocco and his gorgeous attendants, and that of the equally picturesque Spanish nobles who accompanied the Prince of Arragon. I need not add that the painters were loud in praise of all this.

It may be that it all came a little before the proper time, and that we saw things too far in advance; for the play, in our opinion, only just missed being a great success. We have heard of "*Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark"; I fear our production was equally wanting—there was no *Shylock*. Nor should it be forgotten that the

absence of Mrs. Bancroft was another serious drawback, for Miss Terry was then, comparatively, unknown, and had still to earn the brilliant position she soon won, and of which her superb acting in this production was, without doubt, the foundation-stone. As I, and I alone, was responsible for the mistake in giving Coghlan the part of Shylock, I held it to be but right to stand by him, and so turned a deaf ear to the suggestions that poured in on every side as to what we ought to do, and was dumb to the remarkable applications from many a decayed tragedian, who vowed that if the part were but given over to him the fortune of the production would still be assured. Coghlan was then a young man, three or four-and-thirty, and his brilliant successes under our management far more than excused this solitary instance, among the varied claims we made upon his great ability, in which he failed to reach our expectations; while my error, after all, was not much greater than asking a tenor to sing a bass song. The extent of his failure, I confess, has always been a mystery to me: so vague and undecided was he that, positively, on the night of the first performance, when "called" for his opening scene, after lingering on the staircase he returned to the dressing-room and tore off his wig and "make-up," which was good.

In a recently published book by a Shakespearian student I found the following appropriate remarks:

"In 1872 the Bancrofts, greatly daring, had produced Lord Lytton's *Money*, in 1873 Wilkie Collins's *Man and Wife*, and in 1874 *The School for Scandal*. All of these had succeeded, and in each Coghlan had scored a triumph. His Alfred Evelyn and Charles Surface were both the acme of polished acting, and his Geoffrey Delamayn was a revelation in its brutal strength. In the spring of 1875 excitement ran high in the theatrical world when it was announced that the management proposed to produce *The Merchant of Venice*, and the

opinion was generally expressed that the Bancrofts were 'riding for a fall.' The production took place, and was damned—the gallery jeered and the press condemned.

"I went to the old Prince of Wales's Theatre to experience one of the greatest surprises of my theatrical life, and to have my confidence in press criticism shattered for ever. At that time I had seen nothing to approach the beauty of this production of *The Merchant of Venice*, and even now I have only twice seen it surpassed—viz. by the Lyceum productions of *The Cup* and *Romeo and Juliet*. The play was skilfully arranged in seven scenes by Bancroft, and each scene was lovely. The Prince of Arragon was retained and also the concluding scene in Portia's garden. The characters talked and moved like human beings, and above and beyond all else there was the Portia of Ellen Terry. Imagine never having seen Ellen Terry, expecting nothing, and having her sprung upon you in the heyday of her youth and beauty and exquisite art! Frank Archer's Antonio was a perfect performance, and Lin Rayne's Gratiano was the best thing he ever did. The support generally was good, though in one or two cases a trifle modern, but undoubtedly the venture was wrecked by Coghlan. Coghlan was far too skilful an actor not to have been able to give his audience the generally accepted Shylock, had he wished to do so. He had clearly thought out the character for himself, and his performance was the result. It was very clever, very natural, exactly the Jew you might meet in Whitechapel, but it was grey instead of being lurid, and quite ineffective. He did not spoil the picture at all, but instead of standing out, the character fell back among the others, was not more important than the Venetian gentlemen; the *dramatis personæ* consisted of 'Portia and others!' I have never since, not even at the Lyceum, seen Portia's opening scene so effective and so perfectly stage-managed.

“It is a curious fact that the productions in which Ellen Terry first appeared both as Portia and Viola—both productions exquisite, and both parts amongst the most beautiful things she has given us—should have been failures.

“The lot of the imaginative manager who has to depend upon the artistic instincts of the British critics and British public is indeed not a happy one.”

Had I been less ambitious, and chosen either *As You Like It* or *Much Ado About Nothing*, I think success would have rewarded the attempt. With what charm Ellen Terry played Beatrice all the world now knows, and how supreme she would have been as Rosalind all the world may guess; while Coghlan, either as Benedick or Orlando, would have been a perfect companion picture.

I doubt if there is a more difficult character in some respects than Shylock to excel in, especially in the powerful scene where the Jew upbraids Salanio and Salarino, followed at once by the tremendous interview between Tubal and himself. The fact of rushing on the stage in a white-hot frenzy, with nothing to lead up to its gamut of passions, is the main difficulty. Of the many Shylocks I can remember, Charles Kean did most with this particular scene, his performance being, I have no doubt, as far as he could make it so, a reproduction of his father's. *A propos* of which, my wife's father has often told me, among many interesting stage episodes of his early career, of his having, when a country actor, played Tubal with Edmund Kean, who did not appear at rehearsal, but sent word to the theatre that “he should like to see the gentleman who was to act the part of Tubal, at his hotel.” Mr. Wilton obeyed the summons, and dwelt always on the kindness with which Kean received and instructed him, after saying, “We'll run through the scene, Mr. Wilton, because I am told that if you don't know, beforehand, what I'm going to do, I might

frighten you!" Mr. Wilton described the performance at night as *stupendous!* and said that, although so prepared, Kean really frightened him out of his wits.

I think it was Douglas Jerrold who said of Edmund Kean's wonderful acting as Shylock that it never failed to remind him of a chapter from the book of Genesis. George Frederick Cooke, who had seen Macklin, must also have been a fine representative of the part: John Philip Kemble, I think, left it alone. When I was a boy I knew an old gentleman who adored the stage, and possessed the imitative faculty strongly: I remember the idea he gave me of John Kemble and Charles Young as Othello and Iago; and better still, the powerful contrast to it in his descriptive rendering of Edmund Kean as Shylock, which told me what Mr. Wilton meant.

Macready writes of the difficulties the part presented to him, and of his dissatisfaction with the attempts he made to act it. It is said of him, and I believe with greater truth than attaches itself to many theatrical anecdotes, that he never went on the stage for the scene with Tubal without hanging on to the rungs of a ladder, and trying to lash himself into the required condition by snarling and cursing at some imaginary foe, or, failing the ladder, he would seize and shake an unoffending super until his cue came.

I have seen a good many representatives of Shylock belonging to the old school—Charles Kean, Phelps, G. V. Brooke, and James Wallack, with a link between it and the new in Edwin Booth, followed by Irving, Wigan, Novelli, Tree, and Bourchier. On an occasion, a few years ago, when the most eminent English actor was attacked in print by the most eminent actor of France, the former wrote in the *Nineteenth Century*: "Criticism is generally sufficient in the hands of the professors of the art. If every artist were to rush into print

with his opinions of his compeers, there would be a disagreeable rise in the social temperature." What sound advice! I will follow it.

My arrangement of the text and scenes of *The Merchant of Venice* was highly praised by Dutton Cook, whom we regarded as one of the ablest, as he was certainly one of the most difficult to please, of the dramatic critics of the time. Personally I always worked my hardest, often with scant success, to wring praise from his cold but honest pen. He, subsequently, regretted that Irving did not adopt my arrangement when he revived the play at the Lyceum some four years later, and made so great a success as Shylock himself, and when a larger public endorsed the verdict on our entrancing Portia—a performance which lives in the hearts of playgoers who were so fortunate as to see it.

In our production we raised Portia and her caskets to their proper place, the beautiful comedy, with its sweet love scenes, having previously been mutilated for the glorification of a "star" Shylock, who would order the play to finish, with his part, in the fourth act. Miss Terry, it will be interesting to state, was then content with the modest sum of twenty pounds a week—which ranked as a high salary in those days. Our restoring her to the poetic stage is the bright achievement connected with the enterprise. 1875

The signature of the accomplished writer of the following letter would alone justify its insertion here, without the appropriate references it contains:

Please, Mrs. Bancroft, may I see *The Merchant of Venice*? I only returned from the "Rialto" last Tuesday, and am very anxious to behold the much-talked-of *mise en scène* at the Prince of Wales's. It may content Mr. Coghlan to know that I bought two and a half yards of *smaniglio*, or Venice gold chain, from Shylock himself, and that he was the quietest

and most gentlemanly Jew I have ever met, but a desperate "do." If you can spare seats for Monday next, you will inspire gratitude in the heart of your most faithful servant,

GEORGE AUGUSTUS SALA.

This letter was by no means an isolated example. During its brief career there seemed to be a widespread curiosity among artists of all kinds, especially actors—including Salvini—and men of letters, to see our *Merchant of Venice*. They were all delighted with it, and many of them delighted us by coming again and again. Ellen Terry wrote justly, "The audiences may have been scanty, but they were wonderful. A poetic and artistic atmosphere pervaded the front of the house as well as the stage itself." In spite of all this, the revival, from its start, barely paid its way, and we soon put another play in rehearsal. Directly this was settled, I advertised in the newspapers that "the performance of *The Merchant of Venice* having failed to attract large audiences, the play would be withdrawn," which seemed to me a more dignified course than some ridiculous evasion such as "owing to prior arrangements." Strange as it may seem, directly the announcement appeared, the audience improved nightly—the many beauties of the production having, I suppose, begun to be talked about—and for the last few performances the theatre was quite three-parts full. The Prince of Wales, when he came to see it, was as warm in praise of the production as in regrets for its failure to attract; and we received a petition as influential as it was flattering, signed by many leaders, not only in the world of art and literature, but in almost every thoughtful branch of society, imploring us to act *The Merchant of Venice* a little while longer, in the hope and conviction that our reward must surely come. Whether it might have grown to be one of the few productions that outlived failure and eventually achieved success is now impossible to



say, for we stood by our advertisement and withdrew the play after thirty-six representations.

As one of the leading critics said, "Its failure was frankly owned, and bravely met."

The result of the brief run, when the receipts were averaged, was just sufficient to pay its nightly expenses, leaving us minus the cost of the production, some three thousand pounds—a large sum to spend upon a play in so small a theatre.

Although our poor *Merchant of Venice* was what the French actors know as a "baking," and we English describe as a "frost"—indeed, it might be called our "Moscow"—some defeats are so near the verge of victory to bring consolation for disaster.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SARDOU AND HIS PLAYS

“An eminent monsieur.”

ALTHOUGH often strongly tempted to turn for a play to the prolific French stage, for many years we abstained from drawing on that fruitful source, and it was not until early in 1876, when we saw staring us in the face the more than threatened failure of a play of Byron's, that we did so. My wife had often hankered after the principal part in Sardou's *Pattes de Mouche*, and we now decided that it should be at once got ready. I saw Tom Taylor, who had a peculiar faculty for Anglicising French plays, and arranged with him for a new version of this brilliant comedy on lines that were fresh, which he quite agreed with and was pleased to have suggested to him.

An announcement that Taylor was engaged upon this work for us appeared in the press, and soon afterwards was followed by a letter to me from Hare, to say that the idea of *Les Pattes de Mouche* had also occurred to him, and that he wished to revive the existing English version of the play, called *A Scrap of Paper*, for the Kendals, also to replace a programme which had failed to attract. Our emotions were very conflicting, between a strong desire to produce the comedy ourselves and an equally strong desire not to thwart the wishes of a friend towards whom we were anxious to show

good feeling. This desire proved to be the stronger of the two; so with deep regret we stopped Tom Taylor's work and gave up two parts which we had long wished to play, and which for many subsequent years might have proved a powerful addition to our *répertoire*. Wiser conduct on our part would have been to proceed with and produce our intended play in amicable and interesting rivalry.

Maintaining our faith in Sardou, I applied to his works again later on—the result being a decision to have a version of *Nos Intimes* prepared, with the great loss that there would be no part for Mrs. Bancroft in it. B. C. Stephenson, who then had always written as “Bolton Rowe,” had been anxious to do some work for us, and he, in the first place, was commissioned to commence the adaptation, which was completed by myself and Clement Scott, who, wishing to preserve his *incognito*, chose the *nom de guerre* of “Savile Rowe.” Scott was elected as *collaborateur* on account of his power of speed; and, accepting my alterations and suggestions, he quickly revised and much improved the adaptation.

The play, under its English title of *Peril*, was produced early in the autumn of 1876, when the theatre had just been refurnished and redecorated.

As my wife did not appear in the cast, strong measures had to be taken. Happily, we were able to secure the services not only of Mr. and Mrs. Kendal—a previous suggested engagement with whom had, unfortunately, fallen through—who played Dr. Thornton and Lady Ormond, but also of Arthur Cecil, another first-class recruit, who appeared as Sir Woodbine Grafton. Henry Kemble then commenced his long association and affectionate friendship with us, joining our company to play Crossley Beck; Charles Sugden was the Captain Bradford; and the sweet girlish beauty of Lucy Buckstone adorned the *ingénue*.

When I first thought of doing the play I had a great wish to act the doctor, but, following a warm desire to make Kendal's advent pleasant to him, I

resigned the part in his favour. I grew, however, to like the character of the husband very much. His tender vein of manly pathos in the third act became quite a compensation, and the performance advanced my reputation. In reviewing the play, a critical authority in *The Times* said that my representation of the character was without fault; in the display of feeling exhibited by Ormond, when a doubt of his wife's honesty takes momentary possession of his mind, I had acted as assuredly I had never acted before. "The tears of a strong man are said to be as grievous a sight as it is possible to see; and such intense anguish as that thrown by Mr. Bancroft into his voice and his manner is touching in its utter simplicity."

A writer thoroughly acquainted with the French stage said "that the most perfect theatre in London" had ventured to give, for the first time since its existence, an English version of a French comedy. "What is worth doing, is worth doing well," had been the Bancroft motto all along, and had not been deviated from. He had nothing but praise for the appointments of the piece, and unmixed pleasure in the admirable work of the performers. The writer had seen the piece in Paris almost the first night it was played. There were Félix, Numa, Parade, Madame Fargueil, and Blanche Pierson, luminaries in the histrionic firmament; but they shone not brighter than their English *confrères*. To follow step by step my acting as Sir George Ormond, to enter into every detail as it was conceived and executed, would be simply to pen long strings of verbal applause. If Parade, as the simple-minded, vulgar *bourgeois*, was admirable, I, as the educated, refined aristocrat, was no less so. Where the former was the anvil on which every malicious sally of his so-called friends produced a dull thud, leaving the mark of the stroke on his mobile face, the latter was the elastic surface on which every beat produced a rebound of equally sharp-pointed satire, delivered

with consummate art, and yet true to nature. If the *Marécat* of Numa was as dry, sparkling champagne, the *Sir Woodbine Grafton* of Arthur Cecil was as full-bodied, flavoured port, not so effervescent, perhaps, but more nourishing. The *Dr. Tholosan* of Felix was not a better performance than the *Dr. Thornton* of Kendal—a trifle less didactic, perhaps, but more consistent with the supposed age of the character. Tholosan often drifted into priggism, Thornton never did. The sweets came at the end of the repast. The *Lady Ormond* of Mrs. Kendal, he declared, was charming, thoroughly refined and artistic, adding that the scene in the second and that in the third acts were masterly and above criticism.

Though the press was almost unanimous in praising the skill with which a French play had been transformed into an English one, there was naturally some repining that we had not been able to find an original English comedy to our liking. Of course it was a matter for serious concern that while a management existed which was on the look-out for novelty, and prepared to pay a price for it which a few years before would have been pronounced fabulous, no dramatist had arisen to supply work of a kind that justified the speculators in the preliminary outlay. But so it was.

‡The play was very elaborately placed upon the stage. The old hall of Ormond Court took days to erect, and was so strongly built with its massive staircase and gallery as to make it impossible to remove it entirely for change of scene. We so arranged the play as to allow the hall to remain almost intact during three acts, the boudoir being constructed to be "set" inside the walls of it; in fact, from September to the following April the stage wore the aspect, day and night, of an Elizabethan interior, furnished with a wealth of oak and armour, so mixed with decorative china and modern luxuries as to make it often worth a visit apart from its stage aspect. We might, had we so chosen, have given banquets there.

The success of the production maintained receipts

as high as any of its predecessors in the little theatre, excepting only *School*. It was the one solitary occasion on which we achieved this happy result without the aid of my wife's services; and the thought made her rest more pleasant than usual.

*Peril* was the first play of which we gave a series of afternoon performances, and so opened out a distinct source of income from future successes.

It was during this successful run that I heard Sardou was about to produce a new play at the Théâtre du Vaudeville called *Dora*, and made plans to be *en rapport* with the *première*. My part in *Peril* was too important to allow me to give it up so early in the run, but I was represented in Paris by B. C. Stephenson. He returned extremely nervous as to the new play's chance of success in England, although much impressed by one or two of its scenes, an incomprehensible timidity which in these days would have cost me the play. I pursued the matter further, on the strength of a criticism I read in a French newspaper, and found that the author had already sold the English and American rights to a theatrical agent. With him I proceeded to treat, inducing him to give me the refusal of the play until the approaching Ash Wednesday—a day on which London theatres were then closed by order of the Lord Chamberlain. This was arranged. I went over on Ash Wednesday and saw the play. At the end of the famous *scène des trois hommes* I told the agent I had seen quite enough, whatever the rest of the play might prove to be, to determine me to write him a cheque at the end of the performance.

Another fine scene followed in a subsequent act, and I felt assured there was ample material for a play in England, whatever the difficulties of transplanting it from Gallic soil might be. I gladly gave him fifteen hundred pounds, then by far the largest sum ever paid for a foreign work, for his rights, and was quite content with my bargain.

Soon afterwards we placed the manuscript in the hands of Clement Scott and B. C. Stephenson for consideration as to the line to be taken in its adaptation ; with them, as was our custom with all French plays, we worked in concert. A long time was spent in considering the plan of action before the work was begun. Happily the chief solution of many difficulties came to me in suggesting the diplomatic world as the main scheme ; I took the adaptors again to Paris, and on the return journey, in a *coupé* to Calais, the whole subject of the new play was well threshed out between myself and my fellow-workers, and we saw our way to what eventually became *Diplomacy*.

The play occupied both us and the “Brothers Rowe,” as they were called, for some months ; it was revised and revised, but at last approached completion. Only a careful comparison between the original manuscript and the English version would prove the labour it involved, and the tact and skill it required to retain just what was necessary from the French second act and incorporate it with the first. In Clement Scott’s own words :

“The sheets of manuscript were taken to Bancroft for his careful revision and judgment before they were sent on to the printer ; the names of Savile and Bolton Rowe were on the programmes, but Bancroft deserved to share fairly in any credit that fell to the adaptation of a very difficult work. He did not actually write the dialogue, but his judgment and suggestions were invaluable. I have never met so careful, experienced, and diplomatic an editor of dramatic work as Bancroft, and *Diplomacy* is not my only experience of the value of his assistance, equally with that of his gifted wife, on any play submitted to them. . . . I think Bancroft would make a model editor, for he has such consummate tact, such patience, such knowledge of men and things. He is so thoroughly a man of the world.”

When the play was read to the company, it produced a profound impression. Then there arose a

tantalising difficulty as to its title. Our dear old friend Charles Reade reminded us of the existence of his play *Dora*, founded on Tennyson's poem. Several other suggested titles were found to be liable to the same objection. Eventually all the titles thought of were, one night at home, written on slips of paper and put into a hat. We decided that the one drawn oftenest in a given time should be resolved on. This chanced to be *Diplomacy*, which came out a long way ahead, and was best of all, perhaps, fitted to the line we adopted in the play. The hero, a young sailor in the French, had become our military *attaché* at Vienna, while his brother was to be First Secretary in our Embassy at Paris. There was no kinship between these two important characters, as Sardou wrote them, and the change was a happy thought which was of great value to the play. Accident served us in regard to the stolen document; England was in the thick of the Eastern question, owing to the political relations then existing between Russia and Turkey, and discussion of the Constantinople defences was prominent at the time.

Nothing in our career, we thought, more clearly foreshadowed success than this production, and our view was evidently shared by a leading librarian in Bond Street, who called upon me a week before the play came out, offering to buy up every stall in the theatre at its full price for six months, and to write a cheque in full on the spot. I asked Mr. Ollier why he ventured upon such a proposal; he replied that in a long experience he could not recall such a powerful cast as we were about to give the public, which, with some flattering remarks on our management, he declared must mean a gigantic success. I thanked him heartily for his offer, which amounted to some sixteen or eighteen thousand pounds, and then—to his amazement, it is needless to say—declined it. I did not fall into a trap which would have surely turned our true friends the public into angry foes.

*Diplomacy* was produced on January 12, 1878—



a date which was chosen "for luck," as being my wife's birthday—with a cast which was one of the strongest of modern times. My wife and I took the parts of Countess Zicka and Count Orloff; the Kendals played the hero and heroine; John Clayton was the Henry Beauclerc; the Baron Stein was Arthur Cecil, who had been pursued up till the last moment by his second self, the Demon of Indecision, and even at the dress rehearsal had, to our intense amusement, presented himself in a totally different "make-up" for each act; Charles Sugden appeared as Algie Fairfax; Miss Le Thiere as the Marquise de Rio-Zares; and Miss Lamartine as Lady Henry Fairfax.

The scenes at Monte Carlo and Paris were elaborately prepared and decorated, although, we frankly admit, not so elaborately as to allow truth in a rumour current at the time that one suite of furniture had in the days of the Empress Eugénie formerly graced her boudoir in the Tuileries. Our desire for realism in the last act, which we laid in the British Embassy, induced a special visit to Paris for final details, for which every opportunity was given to us through the kindness of Sir Francis Adams, who was then First Secretary, and another friend, now Sir George Greville, who, since we knew him in his youth, had entered the diplomatic service and become an *attaché* under Lord Lyons.

The play, from start to finish, was a triumph. Before I went upon the stage for the famous "three-men" scene, I told the prompter I was sure the applause would be tremendous at the end of it, and asked him to keep the curtain up a longer time than usual when we answered the call. He more than obeyed me in his zeal, and I thought would never ring the curtain down again. Nothing, however, checked the salvos of applause and the roar of approving voices, for, again and again, the curtain had to be raised in answer to the enthusiasm, which, at the close of the fine scene, splendidly acted by the

Kendals, in the third act, was repeated. At the end of the play, in answer to an extraordinary ovation and enthusiastic calls for the author, I announced that the news of the reception of his play should be at once telegraphed to Monsieur Sardou, to whom the adaptors of his work wished all the praise to go.

It was only with great difficulty that Mrs. Bancroft was persuaded to take the part of Countess Zicka. She felt herself to be physically unsuited for it, a feeling which even the warm praise of the critics did not help her to overcome. It was said by *The Saturday Review* that her performance surpassed in mastery and finish that of Mlle. Bartet.

Speaking for myself, my wife's acting forcibly brought to my mind an interesting talk I once had with Irving, who considered she could act any part she chose; that she would succeed in many which her physique debarred her from realising in appearance, and would earn a triumph in all of them that it was suited to.

I myself chose to act Orloff. The part perhaps gave me as great pleasure as any character I have ever played—even as Tom Stylus in *Society* and as Triplet in *Masks and Faces*; all three were delightful to act. Although the part of Orloff is confined mainly to the one great scene—he hardly appears in the first act of the play, and is not seen at all after the second—the character makes great demands upon the actor. When I saw *Dora* originally, I felt the cast in regard to the Orloff to be faulty, and that the scene between the three men would gain if the part were given to an actor in whom the audience placed equal confidence with the representatives of the other two characters, called by us Henry and Julian Beauclerc. To my thinking, in the big scene Orloff is the most striking part of the three, and demands the greatest judgment in the acting. *A propos* of this feeling towards the part of Orloff, it was pleasant to read in *The Saturday Review* that some time previously, when writing of the performance

of *Dora* in Paris, their critic had expressed a doubt whether adequate interpreters could be found in London for the great scene between the three men. The writer admitted at once that he was delighted to find this misgiving need not have been entertained. The scene, which unquestionably was the one upon which the play depended, was played as admirably in London as it had been at the Vaudeville in Paris. My performance in the scene as Count Orloff was held to give "a fresh proof of a fine power of impersonation, a thing somewhat different from acting in the loose sense which was too commonly attached to the word." The character demanded an unusual capacity for indicating rather than expressing a passionate emotion, and with my rendering of it the critic added that he could find no fault.

Equally welcome was the valued criticism of our ever-sympathetic friend Wilkie Collins, who wrote that he had never seen me do anything on the stage in such a thoroughly masterly manner as the performance of my share in the great scene. "Your Triplet was an admirable piece of acting, most pathetic and true, but the Russian (a far more difficult part to play) has beaten the Triplet."

It was an especial pleasure, also, to find a distinguished French critic writing of my performance that "M. Bancroft a toute la distinction qu'exige le rôle du Comte Orloff, et dans la fameuse scène de trois hommes, où le Comte dévoile aux deux Beauclerc ce qu'il pense être l'infamie de *Dora*, M. Bancroft a été complètement remarquable."

From a grateful but too laudatory letter written by Mr. "Savile Rowe" I make an extract :

"It was your strong intelligence and perception of dramatic effect, my dear Bancroft, that secured for playgoers such a work as this. Your assistance has made the 'grand trio' the talk of the town, and your consummate judgment and stage management are found in every scene and every group.

"My own pen, necessarily forced to silence, longs

to enter the literary arena to proclaim what I so sincerely feel. . . . As to Mrs. Bancroft, what higher compliment can any critic pay than those tears she commands at will? What higher artistic triumph can there be than to play such a character and wring from it every possible drop of sympathy? . . . One false note in such a harmony would have produced discord."

The success of the play, which owed much to the fine acting it received, passed all our experience. The crowds that congregated outside the doors every night were large enough to make several audiences, and, had the theatre been twice its size, would have brought us quickly quite a fortune. The house was crowded to its utmost capacity in every part, and that not six, but seven times a week, for we gave an unbroken series of morning performances. This continued for more than six months, and the seats were secured for a longer time in advance than I had ever heard of—months, not weeks.

The first time the late Prince Imperial saw the play was from the dress circle—an example which many distinguished people followed rather than wait for stalls and boxes. Lord Beaconsfield, who rarely went to the play—his only previous visit to our theatre, when we were acting *School*, being recorded by himself in his last novel—came one night to see *Diplomacy*. On entering the stalls, he was recognised by the audience, and received an immense ovation, he being then at the height of public favour. It was during this extraordinary career of success that an idea, which a year before had dawned upon us, became confirmed—that theatrical management might result in the means of retiring early from its cares.

One penalty we had to pay for the craze the success had grown to be. Burnand saw the play one night; when the curtain fell he went straight home to his desk, and did not leave it until he finished a masterpiece of parody, which he called

*Diplunacy* and produced with all speed at the Strand Theatre.

The travesty was as funny as it was well played, the mannerisms and peculiarities of the actors being seized by the burlesque company, whose members paid visits to our *matinées* while their rehearsals were in progress. For our own part, it was very amusing to “see ourselves as others see us,” and we all went to laugh heartily at the good-natured caricatures. At the same time, the skit had for us certain disadvantages. It being easier to get seats for the burlesque than for the original, people, tired of waiting, would sometimes go to the Strand before seeing our play—a fatal thing to do—and try afterwards to take things *au sérieux*. *Diplunacy* had a great and deserved success, and ran by our sides for many months.

When August came we could not, whatever the cost, forego our holiday abroad, and so we resigned our parts to Sophie Young and Forbes-Robertson. The Kendals, too, had arranged with us to take the play to the leading provincial theatres, and they had to be replaced in London by Amy Roselle and Conway. In spite of such a heavy blow, still the success continued—of course in a minor degree—until the following January, when we decided, with a view to a subsequent revival, to withdraw the play while it was full of vigour.

During its triumph, in acknowledgment of a little gift we ventured to send the distinguished dramatist, came this letter :

CHER MONSIEUR,—

Pardonnez-moi le retard que j’ai mis à vous écrire. Je suis en ce moment accablé de travail ; répétant chaque jour de midi à cinq heures, écrivant toute la matinée, et le soir trop fatigué pour reprendre la plume.

J’ai reçu avec un bien vif plaisir le charmant objet que vous voulez bien m’envoyer à titre de souvenir

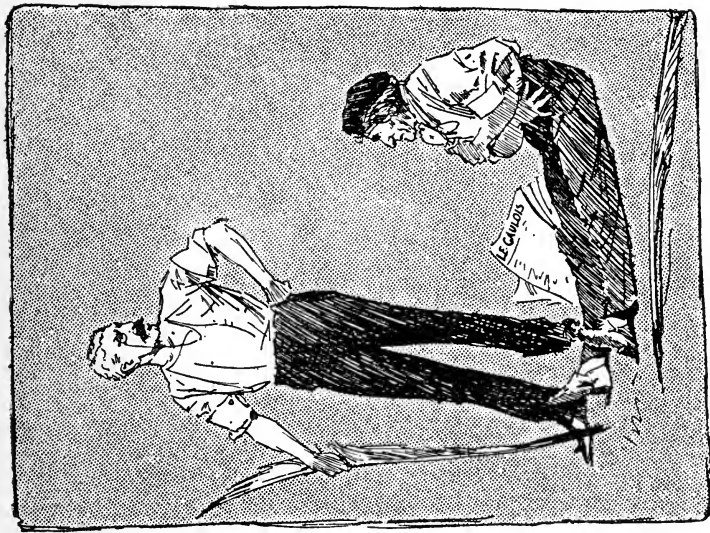
de la part de Madame Bancroft, et de la vôtre. Je suis on ne peut plus sensible à l'amicale pensée qui vous a conseillé le gracieux envoi, et vous a fait choisir l'objet de tous le plus propre à me rappeler sans cesse et le succès de ma pièce à Londres et la charmante urbanité de son directeur. Je ne fumerai plus désormais une cigarette, sans penser à tout cela, et le souvenir ne s'envolera pas avec la fumée.

Priez Madame Bancroft de vouloir bien agréer mes salutations les plus empressées, et permettez-moi de vous serrer la main cordialement à l'anglaise.

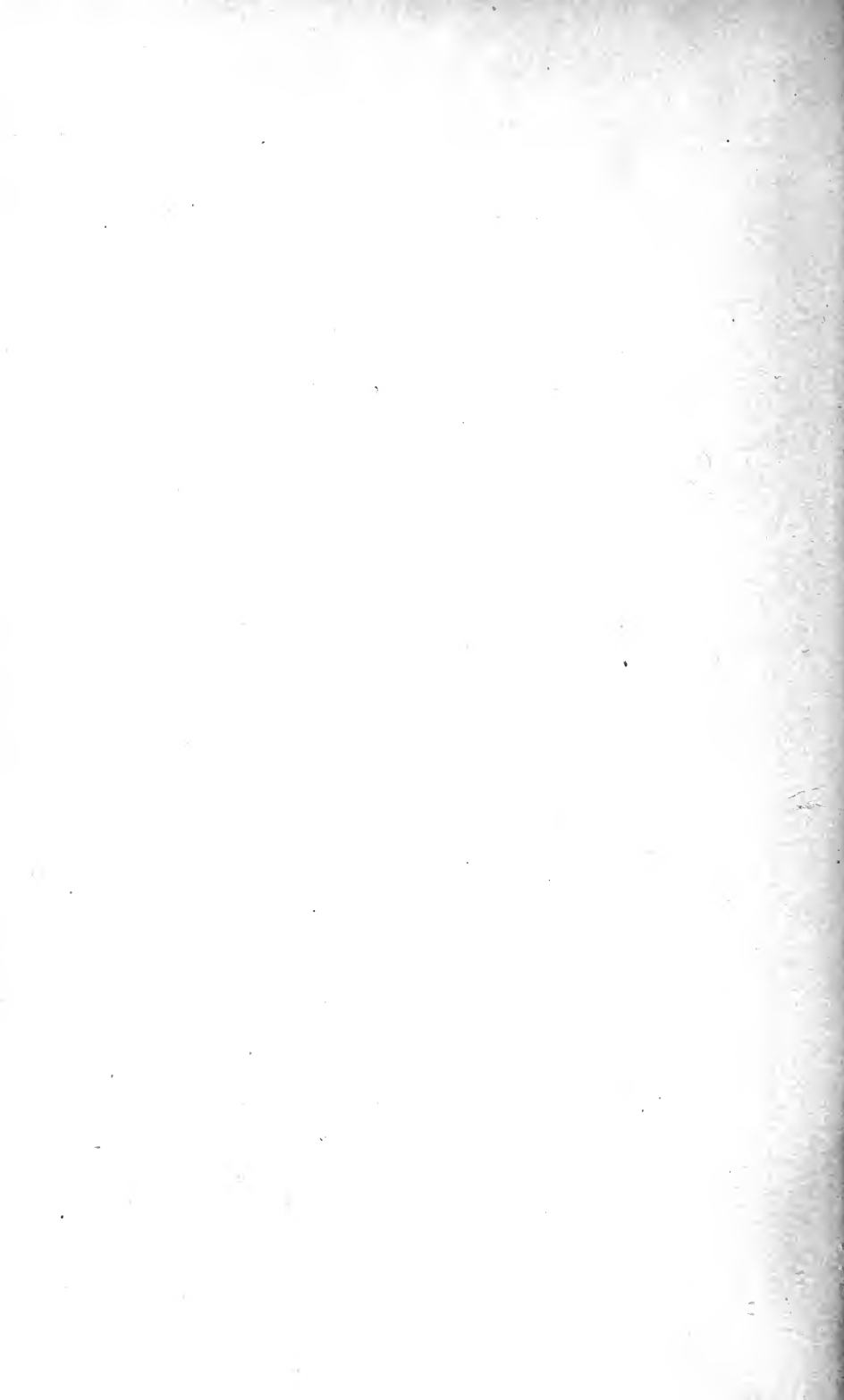
VICTORIEN SARDOU.

When in Paris, on our way back from the En-gadine, I accepted an invitation which had reached me through Pierre Berton, then the *jeune premier* of the Vaudeville and the original representative of the lover in *Dora*, and had the pleasure of going with him to see Sardou at Marly-le-Roi. We had a charming day, passing on our road from St. Germain the *château* of the great rival dramatist, Alexandre Dumas. The old house, standing in a forest of well-kept grounds, where Sardou passed much of his long and busy life, looking down upon the distant city where he had known the miseries of a struggling author and had basked in the adulation of the theatre-going world, is itself, with its enormous sphinxes, which guard the massive iron gates, its tapestries, old furniture, and "black-letter" folios, alone well worth a visit, even without the privilege I enjoyed of a long talk with their distinguished collector. Sardou was a small, nervous, lean, and wiry man, shabbily dressed, wearing an old smoking-cap, his throat enveloped in a white silk muffler—*et toujours souffrant*, he being a martyr to neuralgia. His head in those days, when he was only forty-seven, struck me as a mixture of familiar points in pictures of Napoleon, Voltaire, and a typical Jesuit father, while his smile was almost as telling as Henry Irving's.

*Vladov*



"TOUCHE!" VICTORIOUS BANCROFT AND VICTORIEN SARDOU





He talked with nervous speed, and then, with a charming manner, would check himself politely for my foreign ear. He deeply regretted knowing no English; but said that his children, to whom he pointed as they played under the shade of the big trees, were learning our language. Even in a single visit it was easy to feel that he had read and studied much. He was known to have rather a mania for building and reconstructing. He was a hard worker, a great reader, and loved to be surrounded by beautiful things. He talked for a long while about *Dora* (*Diplomacy*), and dwelt with glee on being abused for the perfume incident by which Zicka's theft is detected, which he proved to have been a bit of real life. The accomplished Director of the Théâtre Français, Jules Claretie, thus speaks of him: "Il sait tout, Sardou, il a tout lu, il cause comme personne. L'auteur dramatique est égalé en lui—et ce n'est pas peu dire—par le merveilleux causeur, érudit, alerte, léger, profond, incomparable. C'est un conteur exquis et un diseur parfait." I found that, like the great majority of his countrymen, he had never left his native land! At our parting he gave me a portrait of himself, inscribed, "Souvenir bien cordial au Directeur et aux Artistes du Théâtre du Prince de Galles. Septembre, 1878. V. SARDOU."

When, some six years later, we revived *Diplomacy* at the Haymarket during our last season of management, no less than four members of the original cast were engaged in management for themselves. The Kendals, as partners with Hare, were in the full tide of success at the St. James's; John Clayton and Arthur Cecil were similarly situated at the Court, where they started the memorable series of Pinero's farcical comedies; so that the new cast, good as it was, could not hope to vie with the old one. The lovers now were played by Forbes-Robertson and Eleanor Calhoun, and Brookfield was the Baron Stein. Neither of ourselves retained our former characters.

My wife was glad to resign Zicka to the capable hands of Mrs. Bernard Beere and to "write up" for herself the smaller part of Lady Henry Fairfax, which thus became an important and enjoyable character, and in which she showed, according to a distinguished French critic, "un talent exquis de comédienne." For my own part, I resigned, with many a sigh, my favourite Orloff to Maurice Barrymore, thinking that, on the whole, I should best serve the general effect as Henry Beauclerc. The play was again received with the greatest enthusiasm. One incident during its second run might have brought it, and the theatre, to a sad end. We narrowly escaped a serious catastrophe.

A piece of scenery in the garden outside the villa at Monte Carlo caught fire, which at once alarmed the audience. My wife and I chanced to be at the wing waiting for our cue. I saw the accident happen, and immediately took Mrs. Bancroft by the arm, walked with her on to the stage, and stood close to the flame. This presence of mind calmed those who were agitated, and meanwhile a fireman extinguished the blaze. Those of the audience who had risen from their seats paused and behaved with remarkable composure, so happily all was soon well.

*Les Bourgeois de Pont-Arcy*, Sardou's next production, which was first acted in Paris during the run of *Diplomacy*, was not such a prize as its predecessor; indeed, it was with grave hesitation that we accepted it, having, in fact, first refused the play, as Hare had done. Although effective in parts, there remained the painful defect of unlocking a skeleton from a dead man's cupboard, and shattering his widow's belief in his nobility and goodness. "The evil that men do lives after them."

The play, which was cleverly adapted by James Albery and called *Duty*, was produced at the Prince of Wales's Theatre after the announcement had been made of our intended move to the Haymarket; and,

in spite of its being acted by Forbes-Robertson, Arthur Cecil, Conway, Mrs. Hermann Vezin, Marion Terry, Linda Dietz, and Mrs. John Wood, failed on its own merits to attract large audiences. It was played only for fifty nights, and narrowly escaped being an addition to our “four failures.”

Meanwhile, the great Frenchman had written to me on the subject of a new work he was engaged upon for the Théâtre Français; and, while our workmen were busy over the transformation of the Haymarket, I went to Paris, and again had a pleasant reception at Marly-le-Roi. Of course I found Sardou wrapped in the inevitable white muffler, and of course as inevitably *souffrant*. A long and cheerful talk confirmed my hopes about the play, and sent me home in high spirits.

Perhaps the enthusiastic author placed too much reliance on a remark he then made, “Il y a dans la pièce un très beau rôle de femme, dans le genre de *Dora, et pas l'ombre d'adultère.*” At any rate, when *Daniel Rochet* was produced, it proved to be rather a theological discussion than a drama, and certainly would not then have been acceptable on the English stage, even had the difficulty as to its licence been overcome. Sardou, however, was very angry at my refusal of the play, and never really forgave me for so firmly disputing his belief in it, although my judgment was confirmed in Paris when it was acted at the Français, with the accomplished Delaunay as the hero.

Nothing daunted, a year afterwards I crossed the Channel again, in a storm which I shall not readily forget, to be present at the *première* of *Odette*. The play proved greatly successful, the opening and closing acts especially so. The first act, indeed, is a play complete in itself, and one of the most powerful the great dramatist ever wrote. When the curtain fell on it there was a spontaneous chorus of voices in the *couloirs*—“La pièce est finie! Qu'est-ce qu'on

peut faire ?” In spite of this, and of many apparent difficulties in adapting it to the English stage, I bought the rights, intending to do our best with it.

We entrusted the adaptation to Clement Scott, with whom, as usual, we worked in concert ; though he modestly preferred that his name should not appear, the play being simply announced as written by Victorien Sardou.

It was a difficult play to manipulate, Sardou having conceived it as a strong protest against the condition of the law of divorce in France, of which an outraged husband could not then avail himself. So warm were the author’s feelings on the subject of this law, that he also attacked it from a comical point of view in his Palais-Royal comedy *Divorçons*. This state of affairs differed so materially from the English experience, that it was found necessary in Anglicising the work to make the husband a man who shunned such *exposés*, and chose rather to punish his wife by leaving her as such, and so preventing her marriage with her lover. With a view to adapting the part perfectly to the slight accent of that remarkable and touching actress Modjeska, whom we had been so fortunate as to engage to play it, we left the erring woman a foreigner. In like manner, we increased the importance of the major-domo at the gambling-hell, so admirably acted by Brookfield ; while the part of Lady Walker—suggested and in a great measure written by my wife—was of infinite value in her hands to the lighter scenes, acted in concert with Pinero, who was still a member of our company.

The rehearsals were very prolonged and painstaking, but it was impossible to escape the radical fault of the play—the overwhelming strength of the first act. The long absence of the heroine from the stage which followed—until, in fact, the middle of the third act—was another blemish, and recalls a little incident that happened when I saw the play again in Paris. A couple came into the stalls directly

the first act had ended, and sat in front of me. By their chatter, it was evident that Blanche Pierson, who played Odette, was the great object of their visit and the idol especially of the lady. The curtain having just fallen upon the opening scene, fully an hour and a half, allowing for two long French *entr'actes*, had to elapse before Pierson appeared again. When the second act was about a third over, the lady said to her companion, “Mais, où est Pierson ?” Then, at each fresh entrance of a female character, she cried, “Ah, la voilà ! Mais-ce n'est pas Pierson.” Further and further proceeded the play, which was constantly interrupted by the plaintive question, “Mais donc, où est Pierson ?” and the querulous reply, “Tais-toi, ma chère.” At the end of Act II. and till the curtain rose again, little more was heard but “Où est Pierson ?” The third act commenced with a long scene between two men ; the little lady grew more and more exasperated, when at last, to her evident relief, quite a crowd of women in evening toilettes entered. With a sigh of forgiveness she eagerly scanned the features of each one of them in turn, only to find the object of her adoration still absent. No words can paint the expression of anguish she then threw into her inquiry, “Mais, mon Dieu, mon ami, où donc est Pierson ?” When, at length, the charming actress really entered, and her long-suffering companion whispered triumphantly, “La voilà, c'est elle ; c'est Pierson !” the poor little woman answered, “Oui, mais allons-nous-en, il est temps de se coucher maintenant !”

Actors often have the reputation—it may be as ill-deserved as many other charges brought against them—of gauging the worth of a play by the value they set upon their individual parts ; certainly the foible held good in the case of *Odette*, so far as the original representatives of the husband and wife were concerned. The former is all-important until the middle of the play, while the little anecdote just related explains how the wife disappears for a long

time and then is paramount in the closing scenes. Adolphe Dupuis, when asked what the new play would do, replied that if the end were only as good as the beginning, he should have little doubt of its success; but he greatly feared the catastrophe (in which he was but little concerned) would prove too weak; while Blanche Pierson's answer to the same question was that, after so strong a beginning, she dreaded the dulness of the following act (in which she had nothing to do), and which she feared the pathetic ending could hardly save! Little plays are acted on both sides of the curtain.

Our English version was more sumptuously placed upon the stage than any play of its *genre* had ever been before; and it was then that we first had the advantage of the services of William Telbin, to whose brush we owed the splendid scene of the villa at Nice, with its exquisitely painted view of its harbour and the Mediterranean. My wife and I were always amongst the greatest admirers of Modjeska. When she spoke certain words, her lips, as they passed, seemed to give them a sort of tremulous caress. She was, in a version of *La Dame aux Camélias*, the supreme type of a Magdalen; you almost had your doubts if she could have so sinned, but none as to her salvation.

Madame Modjeska received the warmest of welcomes on her return to the London stage in *Odette*, and rendered infinite service to the play by her superb acting. The close of the first act created the same *furor* as in Paris, the curtain being raised again and again in answer to the tumult of applause, and made us fear the like excitement could not be re-kindled. The second act (which was greatly improved by subsequent cutting) was too long; but the powerful interview at the end of the third between the long-parted husband and wife was loudly cheered, chiefly owing to Modjeska's fine acting. The effect of the end left us in doubt as to the ultimate fate of the play. It proved, however, to be a success,

best described, perhaps, by the word *aggravating*, as from week to week, through the comparatively feeble demand for seats in advance, we were kept in doubt as to its real hold upon the public, and as to whether the play would last through the season—for which period we had guaranteed a costly engagement to Modjeska. All, however, went well; the stalls and best places were occupied nightly, but the play never appealed greatly to the cheaper parts of the house. The result of the production and its run of eighty nights—three months being all we asked from it—was largely profitable, in spite of the early feeling of insecurity concerning it.

Of the play that was to be our next and last Sardou production we had news long before it saw the light at the Haymarket Theatre. We knew that Sardou had devoted some months to the writing of a new play and that Sarah Bernhardt was to create a great part, but all he had divulged so far about the plot was that it dealt with the modern terror—Nihilism! When the play was put into rehearsal, I received news that Sardou's reading of it had, as usual, been masterly, and had wrung floods of tears from the great Sarah. Her part was said to be magnificent and specially adapted to her genius; there was a good part for Berton also, but nothing else of importance, except a small part which, my informant told me, “if she would condescend to it, Mrs. Bancroft could play divinely.”

*Fedora* was produced at the Vaudeville in December in 1882, and I felt the importance of witnessing the *répétition générale*, which in Paris has all the force and effect of a *première*, excepting only that the audience is restricted to the privileged. On the eve of the big rehearsal I dined with Pierre Berton, when he told me the story of the play. I confess, from its bald relation, I reluctantly arrived at the conviction that my journey was in vain, and that the eagerly expected work, which was keeping all

Paris in a fever of expectation, and formed the main topic of the Boulevardiers, would prove to be a bloodthirsty melodrama.

On the following day I found myself among the favoured occupants of the stalls, and seated next to a pleasant Englishman who wrote as "Theoc" for a London newspaper. We were surrounded by literary and artistic celebrities: in a *baignoire* was Alexandre Dumas, the dramatist's equally celebrated rival; above, in the balcony, sat Blanche Pierson and Maria Legault, looking down on the scene of their recent triumphs in *Odette*. The two great actors Got and Coquelin came from the classic home of Molière; Alphonse Daudet and Georges Ohnet were in close companionship; and that dreaded critic Francesque Sarcey, Auguste Vitu of the *Figaro*, and Albert Wolff—whose strange features were ably reproduced in the Musée Grevin, the Madame Tussaud's of Paris—were among the scores of names, owned by those of Boulevard "light and leading," which I can recall.

After some delay, Sardou and the managers came to a space kept for them in the stalls, and the play began. In five minutes the audience was under a spell which did not once abate throughout the whole four acts. Never was treatment of a dangerous subject more masterly; never was acting more superb than Sarah showed that day to those privileged to witness it. Rachel has been described as the "panther of the stage": her feline mantle certainly descended to Sarah Bernhardt; though years afterwards, when I saw that great actress Eleanora Duse play the part of Fedora, she showed me that both Sardou and Sarah had left some things unthought of.

At the *répétition générale*, however, Sardou's delighted appreciation of the magnificent rendering of his heroine was only equalled by his pleased acceptance of the congratulations which were showered upon him at the end of every act. Without the faintest notion then as to who would play the two chief parts in London, there was not a



moment's hesitation from me in writing a very heavy cheque to buy the English rights.

The enthusiasm was repeated on the following night, at the first public performance, and I returned home rejoicing.

After well weighing the matter, I gave the manuscript to an old friend and master of our language, Herman Merivale, and asked him if he would like to undertake its adaptation. Without being at all keen upon the matter, he promised to take the book down to Eastbourne, where he then lived, and to see what he thought about it. The next day came a letter to say that he had put off opening the parcel until quite late at night, when, after carelessly glancing over a few pages, he grew so engrossed in its story that he found it impossible to get to bed until the last sentence of the fascinating play was devoured. Naturally we were delighted with this opinion, and arranged for the work to be commenced at once; the adaptation was admirably and speedily finished, being a labour of pleasure. Great aid was given to Merivale, who warmly acknowledged it, in the character that had to be written up for herself—another act of self-abnegation—by my wife.

After further careful thought, we decided to entrust the splendid part of *Fedora* to Mrs. Bernard Beere, and engaged Coghlan to play the hero. As for ourselves, we were satisfied to take two characters which the French describe as "side-dishes," and to give them all the value in our power.

Loud were the ominous predictions with regard to the fate of *Fedora* in England. Grave head-shakings emphasised the opinions freely urged that the subject would be found repugnant. Outspoken were the thoughts that the task was hopeless without Sarah Bernhardt.

One day, when the long rehearsals were drawing to a close, and when I had never felt more certain of success, Edmund Yates came to me with a very

long face, and said that he had been told in the morning by a mutual friend, when riding in the park, that so great was our alarm, so heavy our apprehension, that he knew positively we had commenced secret rehearsals of another play, binding all concerned to profound silence, to meet the failure which we were assured stared us in the face. I laughed, and then implored Yates on no account to contradict the rumour, but rather to encourage the sour prognostications, adding that nothing in the mysterious world of the theatre was more valuable than a revulsion of feeling; an audience that comes prepared for frost and failure soon thaws and warms to fever heat in its reception of success.

That my sanguine expectations were verified when the play was produced in the beginning of May 1883 is a matter of stage history. Its success was never in doubt. News of its magnificent reception was telegraphed to Sardou, who was staying at Marly, all efforts having again failed to induce him to cross the Channel to pay his first visit to London and assist at our *première*.

Mrs. Bernard Beere had seen Sarah Bernhardt in the part, but was soon persuaded during rehearsals to give up attempts at imitation, and allowed me to guide her, as she warmly said, to the great success she deservedly enjoyed. The adaptation had been admirably done. We modified a few painful details in the first act, and, remembering the powerful effect of the unseen passing of the troops past the windows in *Ours*, resolved to leave their full import to the imagination of the audience. Soon after the production I received a striking proof that we had acted wisely. A very old stager said to me, "My dear B., when the surgeon went into the bedroom and the doors were shut, I give you my word I plainly saw the knife and heard the dying man's moans through the wall!"

*Fedora* took so firm a hold on public favour that the thermometer—which often rules the playhouses

with an iron will—made no difference; and it was a sad misfortune that we could not keep the theatre open all through the summer; but two sad calamities, the burning of the Ring Theatre in Vienna and a similar catastrophe at the Alhambra, led the old Metropolitan Board of Works (the predecessors of the London County Council in the structural control of the theatres) to require certain alterations in the theatre which compelled us—quite rightly, I think, for the protection of the public—to break the run and close for some weeks.

My experience, however, often told me how large a sum of money a successful play can make in less than a hundred performances, and fairly short runs, for this reason, formed our main policy at the Haymarket.

During a portion of the run of *Fedora* I replaced Coghlan as Loris Ipanoff—a thankless task, and one which made me regret I had not played the part all along or let it entirely alone, it being quite out of my accepted line. With no wish to over-estimate my own work, when I had settled down to it I regarded my performance of the powerful scene in which Loris relates at great length, in an impassioned interview with Fedora, the story of his wrongs, as among the best of my serious efforts as an actor.

Years later I found this opinion curiously substantiated. Allan Field, an old friend, wrote to me to say that, during a conversation with him, that brilliant but weird genius, Robert Buchanan, had mentioned my Loris Ipanoff as “one of the very best bits of acting he had ever seen.”

It seems strange, nowadays, to remember that this great success—one of our greatest—should have been produced at the beginning of May, a time of year we often chose; but, were I still engaged in theatrical enterprise, I should not dare to do so any more in the face of such deadly modern foes to serious plays as the revived fashion of the opera, the increase of week-end country visiting, the motor and its many consequences, the open-air exhibitions

—all attractions which have more than once sounded the death-knell of a fine play first acted at that time of year. Even Pinero's powerful and absorbing work *The Thunderbolt*—a masterpiece of stage-craft and construction, and, if in one word I may venture to say so, admirably played—could not withstand them; a small blow certainly to the pride of the author, and to the manager of the St. James's Theatre, who had done the stage such service by his production of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and *His House in Order*. Indeed, George Alexander may well and always feel proud of having produced the former great work, in the teeth of its several refusals by others to whom the play had been previously offered. A veritable *panache* in his managerial cap.

It was during a revival of one of Sardou's plays, *Diplomacy*, that a paragraph in a London newspaper suggested that a more recent work of his owed something of its story to an English comedy. Accusations of plagiarism are always galling, particularly to a playwright at once so inventive and so sensitive as the great French dramatist, although, indeed, it has been ruthlessly said that play writers have been noted stealers: in France they stole from Spain; in Germany and Italy, from France; in England, from France, Germany, and Italy; in America, from everything and everybody. It was only natural, of course, that Sardou should reply to the charge with some indignation. Unfortunately, through being, I can only presume, very irate, he scattered accusations broadcast, and went on to declare, in no measured terms, that English managers and playwrights had long been in the habit of "stealing" his plays—a lamentable outrage, I fear, from which all French dramatists suffered gravely before the birth of the "Berne Convention." On this occasion, however, he recklessly declared, as an instance, that in the case of the revival of *Diplomacy*, no mention had been made of the name of the original play or its author. On learning that both his own

name and that of *Dora* had their honourable place on the programme, Sardou shifted his ground and declared, to my amazement, in a letter to the *Gaulois* (a copy of which paper fortunately was sent to me), that, though that might be the case, yet at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, when *Diplomacy* was first acted there, the names of the original play and its author were ignored. More than that, he complained that we had "imposed upon London a travesty of his play," and that though he had, indeed, been paid for it, the sum he received was no more than £480, while I had made many thousands.

Knowing the facts and remembering the very different spirit in which Sardou had acknowledged the triumphant success of *Diplomacy*, I was naturally astounded, and, the statement being one of fact, not of opinion, only one course remained open to me: to commence a paper war with my doughty assailant. I wrote immediately to the *Gaulois* and to the London papers to say that the name of *Dora* and of its author had been fully acknowledged in every announcement and programme of *Diplomacy*, that the title was only changed through the existence of Tennyson's *Dora* and its adaptation to the stage by Charles Reade, that I had telegraphed news of the success of his play to the author himself and had received his most complimentary reply; also that I had paid for the play not £480 but £1,500. Still the distinguished dramatist was not satisfied. He held to it that the names of *Dora* and its author did not appear on the programme of its first performance. In reply I sent to the *Gaulois* a sheaf of documents: the preliminary announcement in *The Times*, the playbill, the programme, my telegram to Sardou (announcing the success of his play, and that its adapters refused to appear at the fall of the curtain when I informed the audience that I could only accept the compliment of the applause on behalf of M. Victorien Sardou, who was the author), and his own warm telegram in response.

I will conclude this little episode—which, happily, took place before the bright epoch of our *entente* with the great French nation—by reproducing a sketch from *Punch*; and may also add that when Sardou revived *Dora* in Paris he himself put the first and second acts into one exactly as I had suggested. English players and playgoers have long forgotten this little outburst of temper in their gratitude for the enjoyment they have for many years derived from the writer's genius. Still, the misunderstandings might have been pleasantly obviated if Monsieur Sardou had only seen his way to do himself the justice and other lands the honour sometimes to quit his native country. Had he, as we often hoped he might, accepted the warm invitations that were made to him to come and see for himself the regard in which he was held in England, he might, perhaps, have learnt to admit that there were plays and players, playwrights even, in other cities than in Paris.

Victorien Sardou died full of years and honour. Latterly, his technique may have lost some of its ingenuity; but, at his best, his inventiveness was more than enough to stock the pigeon-holes of half a dozen dramatists. Of him it may be said, as was once said of a celebrated English playwright, that, in his zenith, he bestrode the theatrical world like a Colossus, and it is certain that he has left it deeply in his debt.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE HAYMARKET THEATRE

“An honest tale speeds best being plainly told.”

WHY did we abandon the Prince of Wales's for the Haymarket Theatre? Why did we retire from management so early in life? Perhaps no two important questions during the last quarter of a century have been so often put to us. I will make some effort to answer them.

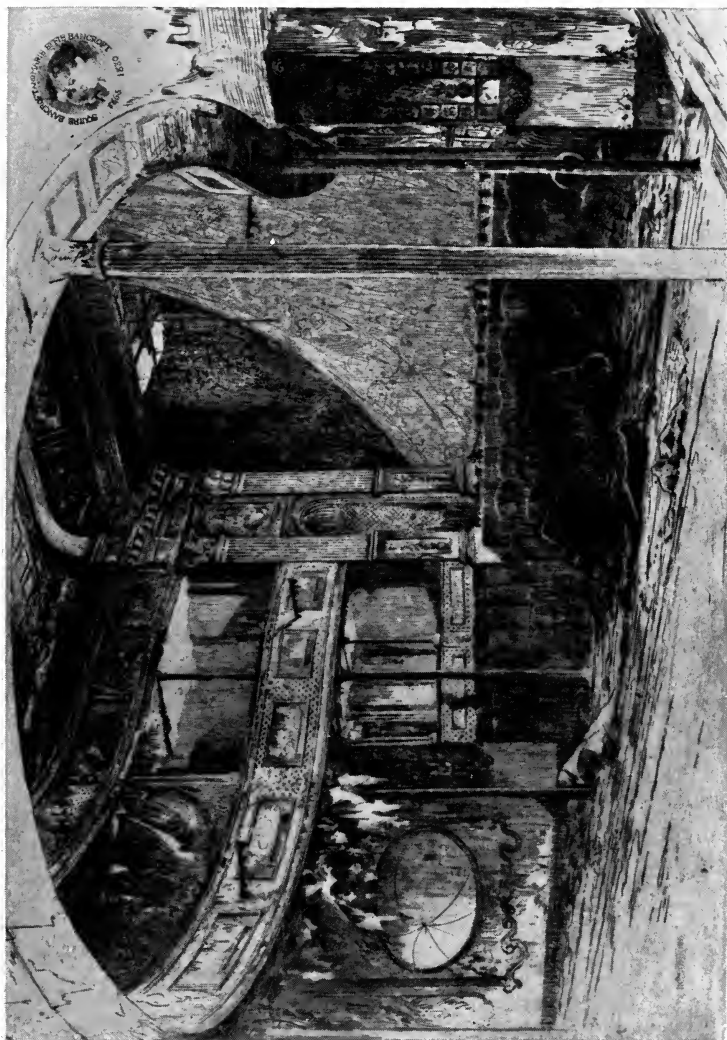
Although we suffered very much at times from the inconveniences of the Prince of Wales's, and were annually reminded of its many drawbacks when the house was inspected by the Lord Chamberlain's representatives, we were loth to leave a home so endeared to us by the brightest events of our career. Nearly every theatre in London, at one time or other, had been offered to us; and I always, half-jokingly, replied, “No, the Haymarket only will tempt us.” The knowledge, however, of the ease with which we could fill a larger house with a good play, and some remembrances of the shoals of people who had never been able to see *Diplomacy*, for example, led to serious thoughts upon the subject, as well as to schemes of building a new theatre, which we more than once contemplated. Nor must it be forgotten that a dozen rivals had sprung up since the opening of the Prince of Wales's Theatre in 1865, when their number was very limited, and that all these new houses naturally imitated, and sometimes improved upon, the luxuries we had started.

It is worth noting that for twenty-three years before the opening of the old Prince of Wales's not a single new theatre had been built in the West End of London. In 1866, the year after the success of *Society*, the Holborn Theatre was opened; in 1867, the old Queen's in Long Acre; in 1868, the Globe and the Gaiety; in 1869, the Charing Cross, afterwards called Toole's Theatre; in 1870, the Vaudeville and the Opéra Comique; in 1871, the old Court Theatre; in 1874, the Criterion; in 1878, the Imperial; in 1881, the Savoy and the Comedy; in 1882, the Avenue (now The Playhouse) and the Novelty (now the Kingsway); and in 1883 the Prince's (now the Prince of Wales's in Coventry Street).

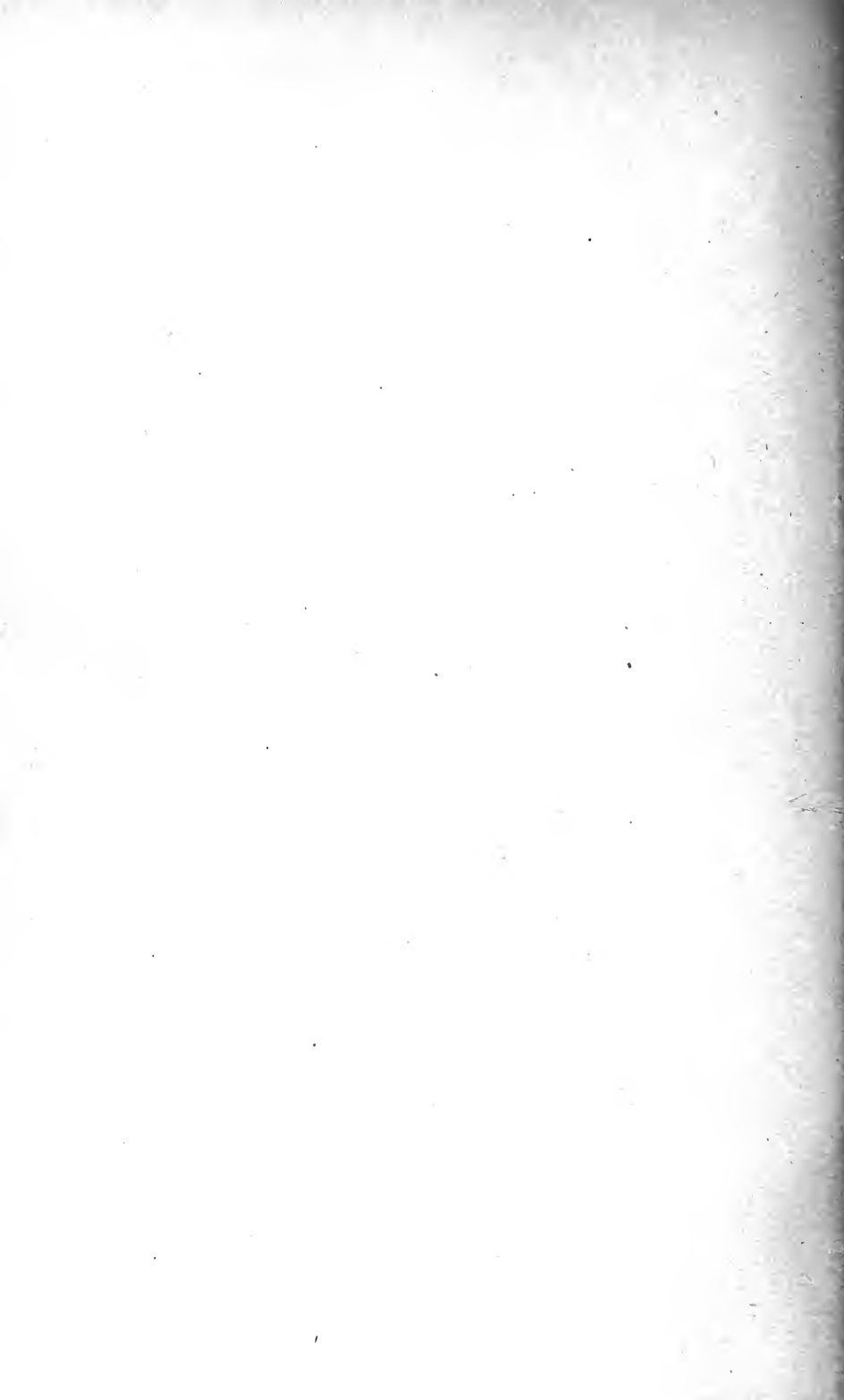
Fifteen new theatres during the twenty years we remained in management, and many of them furnished with the same regard for the comfort of the audience as had marked our innovations at the Prince of Wales's! Of those fifteen seven have now ceased to exist; but their places have been more than filled. In 1887, Edward Terry opened his theatre in the Strand, and subsequent years have seen the building of no less than fifteen others: the new Court, the Shaftesbury, the Lyric, the Garrick, Daly's, the Duke of York's (originally called the Trafalgar Square Theatre), the Apollo, His Majesty's, Wyndham's, the New Theatre, the Scala, the Aldwych, the Waldorf, Hicks's, and the Queen's.

This was our state of mind when, one day in the spring of 1879, a friend came to us with the news that the St. James's Theatre, which in those days was looked upon as a disastrous house, and had not won the high reputation it has since achieved and still so justly enjoys, was in the market, and could be bought outright, in fact, at a very tempting price. We hesitated, of course, and weighed the position carefully; thinking that, if we removed there, our title could be taken with us and the theatre re-christened. But the fortunes of the Haymarket Theatre were then also at a low ebb, and some strange presenti-





A LAST GLIMPSE AT THE OLD THEATRE



ment which pursued me seemed to withhold me from even entering the St. James's, lest we should be tempted by all the possibilities and advantages it offered to secure the property, only to learn, too late, that we had lost the Haymarket—which was, truth to tell, the one theatre we really coveted. Superstition gained the day: we declined the offer of the St. James's.

A week later we received another visitor, Lord Kilmorey, who came with the news that he had bought the St. James's Theatre and wished us to be his tenants, a proposition which he submitted in the kindest and most flattering way. He found us, to his surprise, obdurate in declining to remove, heartily as we appreciated all the compliments he paid us.

We did not often go to parties after our work, but now and again some particular invitation tempted us to the effort. This was the case one evening not long after our talk with Lord Kilmorey. There was a tremendous crush, and my wife and I were in different rooms, when presently a man, equally well known in the world of fashion and art, came up to me and said he had just heard something uttered so openly that, in spite of an intense dislike of repeating things, he thought he ought to tell me. This turned out to be that Lord Kilmorey had bought the St. James's Theatre, and that Hare and Kendal, jointly with Mrs. Kendal, were to be his tenants. I did not move a muscle, and merely answered, “Why not? A week ago Lord Kilmorey paid my wife and me the compliment first, and what could be more natural than his second step?” “That is not all I heard so loudly spoken,” replied my friend; “it was also said that the theatre is to be greatly altered and beautifully decorated with a view to making it the Comédie Française of England and of *shutting up the rat-hole in the Tottenham Court Road!*”

I laughed and thanked him for his information, adding that I was tired and obliged to leave early. I really wished to think. I found my wife and asked

her if she would mind our going home. I was rather silent on the way until we reached our house—when I said, suddenly, that I must write a short letter, which would only detain me a moment. Without mentioning a word to her of what I had been told, I had, during our drive home, made up my mind how to act. The amicable rivalry of our old friend Hare at another small outlying theatre, as the Court was, had mattered little—indeed, was often good for both of us—but this news mattered much. So powerful a trio as himself with the Kendals, in a new and better-placed house, rendered handsome and up-to-date, “gave me pause.” It was a supreme moment to search for the possibility of saying “check!” I sat down and wrote a short note to J. S. Clarke, who was then the lessee of the Haymarket Theatre, naming an hour when I would call there in the morning and expressing the hope that I might be so fortunate as to see him. I posted the letter in a pillar-box close by and then joined my wife, without revealing anything.

The next day I presented myself at the stage-door of the Haymarket, was shown in to Mr. Clarke, whom I had never met, and after a brief salutation said to him, “I am going to put my cards at once on the table. I want the Haymarket Theatre: what do you want for it?” The little man nearly jumped from his chair, with an expression on his face that would have done credit to his admirable performance of Dr. Pangloss; my frankness, he said, took his breath away from sheer admiration, and he could do nothing but deal equally frankly with me. Suffice it to say, that the result, after several interviews, was the purchasing by me, on his own terms, of the remnant of Mr. Clarke’s lease and the granting of a new one to me, which I limited to a period of ten years, as I felt that if I could not achieve my object in that space of time I could not do so at all, having, as I have already hinted, vague ideas of some day retiring from management.

Our annual rental of the Haymarket Theatre, including rates and insurance, did not exceed five thousand pounds, but I undertook to spend a large sum of money on the theatre by entirely remodelling and rebuilding its old-fashioned interior. It was not until the matter was really settled that I breathed a word to my wife of the negotiations which resulted in our becoming, at this crisis, the lessees of the first comedy theatre in England. I remember, when the news leaked out, Edmund Yates writing of it as "the most Napoleonic stroke of theatrical business in his long experience."

The time that followed was a very busy one, for the last season's work at the little old theatre had to be carried on while the rebuilding of our new house was in progress. For months I lived a sort of anxious *Box and Cox* existence between the two theatres, as the following words in a letter from J. S. Clarke will testify. "I called at the Haymarket yesterday, to learn that 'Mr. Bancroft has just left by the stage-door,' and afterwards at the Prince of Wales's, to be informed that 'Mr. Bancroft has just gone by the front door.' A plague o' both your houses!" I was pledged to the trustees of the Haymarket to spend not less than £10,000 on their property—this amounted, in fact, to £17,000 before the curtain was raised on our new venture, and a further sum of £3,000 was added a little later: £20,000 in all, drawn from the savings made at the little theatre—a risky venture! The old house was greatly in need of rebuilding, and certainly of re-furnishing; I was amused to hear a man describe the fleas they disturbed as being "more like ponies!" Although the work was carried on both by night and by day, I was surprised to find how long a time it took to pull down the old structure. Often at night I found a dreadful fascination in watching the work of demolition, peering through the chinks in the hoarding to see the falling masses of timber which were hurled from the upper parts into the once classic pit by

gangs of workmen in hideous dust and uproar ; the effect being rather that of demons joyfully engaged in some destructive orgie.

Strangely enough, at the very time when his former home was being so ruthlessly destroyed, poor old Buckstone, whose health had for some years been failing, died at Sydenham. I confess to some feeling, which we both entertained when told of this, that at least he was spared seeing the house that had for so many years been his—where once he had secured what must have been fortune enough—demolished and rebuilt beyond his recognition. Buckstone ! What enjoyment his name recalls ! What an eye he had ! what a mouth ! He seemed to breathe joyousness ; his work gave the idea of being a delight to him, and my youth owed much happiness to his ripe and over-brimming humour.

To tell an unrecorded anecdote of Buckstone is nearly impossible ; they must have all been printed. One night, during the later years of Buckstone's life, a well-known and admirable imitator of the prominent actors of the day was prevailed on by Mrs. Buckstone, at an evening party, to give an imitation of her husband, who, she urged, was in another room, and really had grown too deaf, in any case, to hear the fun. After a reluctant consent, the reproduction of the favourite actor's peculiarities was most ably given. The laughter was loud enough to attract Buckstone's attention, and he entered the room in the middle of it, and stood close to me. Seeing the sort of amusement going on, he asked me, " Who's he imitating now ? " " You, sir," I replied, stifling my laughter. " Eh ? " " You, sir," I repeated. " Oh, me ! Ah ! devilish good, I dare say ! I think I could do it better myself ! "

The chief features in my scheme of the new theatre were the proscenium in the form of a large gold frame, with all four sides complete, and the abolition of the pit. Of the latter more must be said later ; the idea of the proscenium was quite

original. No theatre in Europe had the *complete gold frame* before it was seen at the Haymarket, from which it has now gone, though the sincerest form of flattery has been paid to my notion in several theatres since—notably in Brussels and at Frankfort. The scheme was for a time involved in some difficulty, and gave great trouble to the architect and his subordinates. My intention was to contrive hidden foot-lights, which, when the curtain fell, and was within a few feet of them, would descend to make room for the heavy roller, and which would, when the curtain was raised, follow it immediately, so that the stage should never perceptibly be darkened in either case. After a succession of experiments and much worry, the means to this end were invented by a simple workman, and carried out in a manner that acted successfully until we left the theatre. The work, of course, grew heavier and heavier towards the end. The Italians who were laying the mosaic flooring in various parts of the theatre even remained at their posts throughout the Christmas holidays.

At last all was ready, the finishing touch to the beauty of the decorations being given by my wife's ivory-coloured satin curtains. There was no private view, no party, no "interviews," no assembly of any kind; this had been our custom always. But just before I began to dress, Irving was announced to me, on the way to his own work. He was greatly struck with the change in the theatre, and especially admired the new curtain and the Shakespearian pictures, the latter by that able artist J. D. Watson. We two stood together in the balcony, where he shook my hand in friendship and wished us "luck"—a few minutes before the doors were opened to the public in the densest, cruellest fog that perhaps even London ever knew.

This was on the last night of January, 1880, and we had the pleasure of being allowed to hand the proceeds of the first performance given in the beautiful new theatre to Buckstone's widow, who had been

left, unhappily, in straitened circumstances. The play was *Money*, as has been told in a previous chapter.

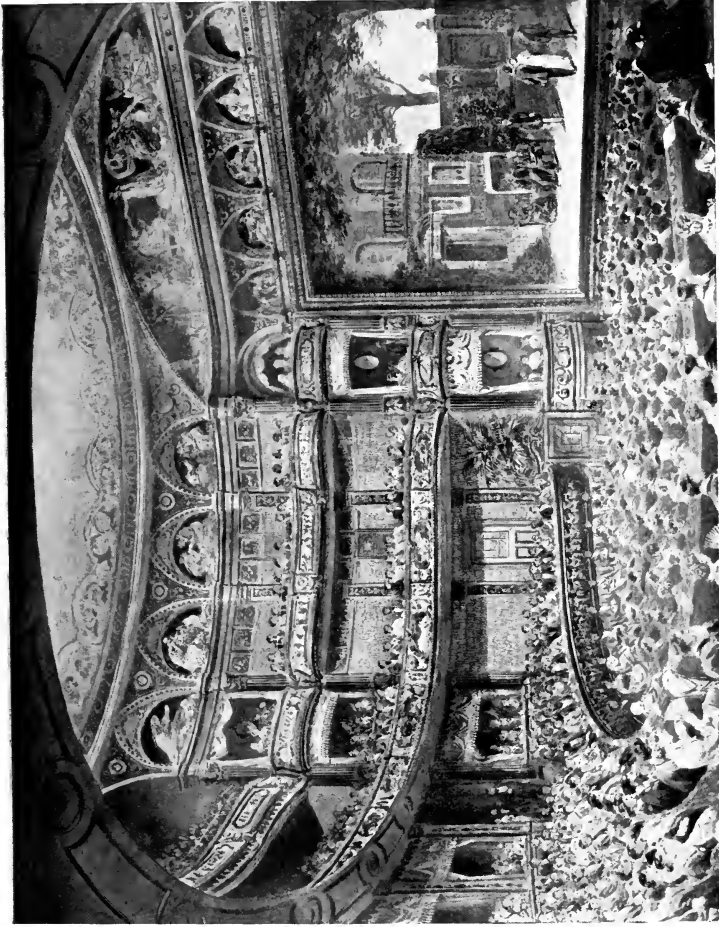
How the audience ever reached their seats, and how the company all got there to act, was really a marvel.

To take the events of that eventful opening night in their proper sequence, I must begin with the Pit Question, and the riot that occurred when the curtain rose. Anonymous reports had reached me that there would be an organised disturbance. I was sanguine enough, however, to hope that an advertisement which I had issued beforehand, and the nature of the accommodation offered in place of the old pit, would prevent anything of the kind. Those hopes were vain. It was no doubt a bold measure to abolish the pit, more especially from the Haymarket Theatre, which had been long known to boast the best and most comfortable pit in London.

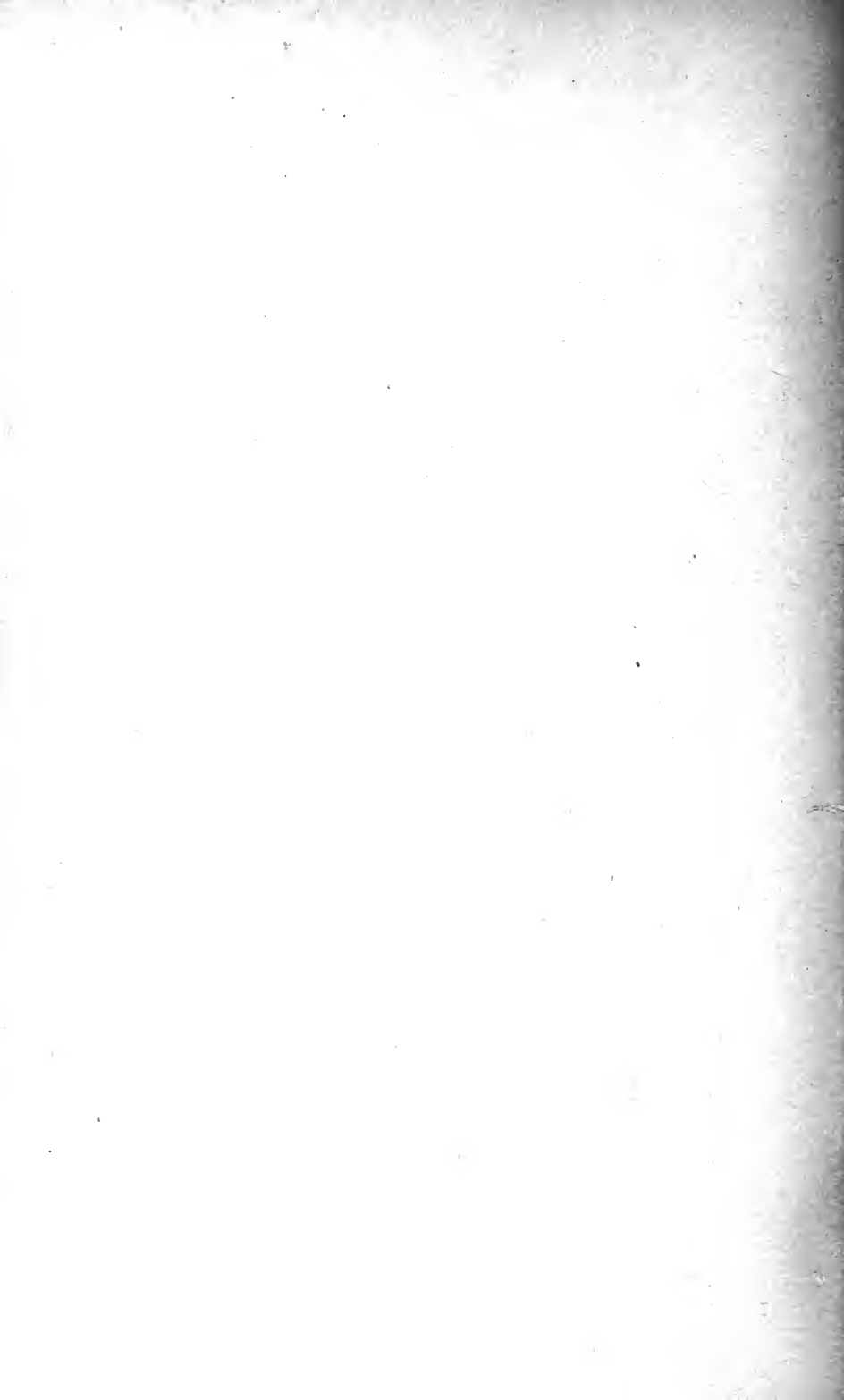
In the old days, the pit in every theatre occupied the entire floor, extending to the orchestra, and, as the charge for admission in the leading houses was three shillings and sixpence, the pit quite earned its title of being the "backbone of the theatre." The dress circle and private boxes were the resort of the wealthier classes, or the fastidious. The modern stall was then unknown. Gradually this luxury was introduced. Row by row, very insidiously, the cushioned chairs encroached upon the narrow benches, which, year after year, were removed farther and farther from the stage, until at last, in many theatres, all that was left of the old-fashioned pit was a dark, low-ceilinged cavern, hidden away under the dress circle, which, by contrast with its former proud state, seemed but a reminder of the Black Hole of Calcutta.

The pit had long lost, in most West-end theatres, the possibility of being the support it used to prove; the managers, with ourselves as their leaders, having, row by row, robbed it of its power, and made the





INTERIOR OF THE HAYMARKET AS REBUILT



stalls instead their "backbone." This grew to be pre-eminently the case with our own management, which, owing to the large salaries paid to actors and the expenses of production, could not have endured without the high-priced admission which I had the courage to inaugurate.

The rising of the curtain was greeted by hooting and howling from a few noisy voices—it takes but small lung-power to disturb any large meeting—mingled with angry cries of "Where's the pit?" Eventually I walked upon the stage and faced the anger of the few who made the noise, which quite drowned the friendly greeting of the many. Utterly unprepared with a speech, for I had disregarded the anonymous warnings I had received, I owed, I believe, something to the manner in which I spoke the few broken sentences I was allowed, through the tumult, to utter, and to the fact that I never showed during that *mauvais quart d'heure* the least sign of temper. From a tiny little window in her dressing-room my wife, as she told me afterwards, could hear everything that was said upon the stage; while I was going through my ordeal, her profile was glued to the aforesaid aperture, very much resembling a postage stamp. At length she resolved that if the uproar lasted much longer she would address the audience, asking them to listen to her for the sake of "Auld Lang Syne." Happily the noise and hooting wore themselves out, and her speech was unnecessary. Her dread was that she too might be received with groans and hisses, and she was cold with fear; but when she made her appearance, it was to a roar of affectionate welcome, hearty and prolonged—as was my own, I may add, when I appeared as actor, not as manager.

My wife was, I think, the only member of the company who entirely controlled her nervousness, and the eventual success of the opening performance was largely due to her.

Most things have their comic side, and so even

had this little riot. In remembrance of all the circumstances we placed a private box at the disposal of J. S. Clarke, who had arranged with other members of his family to meet his son outside the theatre, but was late in arrival through the dense fog. When his son reached the theatre he ran to the box, and saw, through the little window in the door of it, that it was still unoccupied, and also that I was standing on the stage and facing the audience. He went back to the portico, hoping every instant for his father's arrival. After a while, fearing he might have missed him through the fog, young Clarke again went to the box, to find it unoccupied, and to see me, through the glass window, still standing in front of the footlights as before. Such part of the audience as he could observe was applauding violently. In this way, for a long while, he was occupied; going to and fro from the back of the private box and the front of theatre, always to see me still in the same position. At last he ran against his people emerging from a cab, when, half an hour behind their time, they reached the theatre. Seizing his father's arm, he said, "Come along, come along, or you'll miss the end of the most wonderful ovation! Bancroft, to my certain knowledge, has been bowing to the audience for the last twenty minutes. *No actor in the world ever had so magnificent a reception!*" When they entered their box they could *hear* as well as *see* my greeting.

In words written by Clement Scott in his account of the proceedings: "At last a happy compromise was effected. Three cheers were given for the manager who for fifteen years had devoted himself to the furtherance of art, and by general consent it was determined that 'The play's the thing.'" As to the justice of the complaint, the situation was well summed up by *The Times*: which pointed out that it was hardly to be expected that a manager would rebuild his theatre to gratify that portion of his audience from which he expected to reap the

smallest amount of profit; and that the translated playgoers would find—had probably found already—that they were quite as well cared for under the new as under the old management; that they were more comfortably seated, and had as clear and comprehensive a view of the action of the stage. “We do not suppose,” the article concluded, “that there will be any repetition of such a scene.” Nor was there.

Another voice in the Chorus was good enough to ascribe to me powers of management “as unique as my histrionic talent,” and to find me “a perfect master of the difficult art of organising, cheerfully looked up to by his subordinates and with unbounded admiration by his co-players who are nearer his rank in the profession.” I had been described, it appears, as a managerial martinet, but without foundation. The writer declared me to be kind and courteous to a degree, though very properly refusing to risk the success of a play through laxity of study or stage discipline. “As punctual at rehearsals as a clerk in his attendance at the Bank of England,” I was declared to have set “a salutary example,” and by my career to have proved that theatrical success may be made a certainty if two essential gifts are possessed—sound judgment and indomitable industry. Whether it was “sound judgment” to abolish the pit at the Haymarket the writer thought might be questioned by some, though he regarded it as indicative of my fearless originality.

There were many curious incidents connected with that evening. A party of four from Putney managed to reach the theatre, but when the performance was over were persuaded to make their way for the night to a friend's house in Bayswater, where the carriage and horse might be accommodated in the mews. After a journey of some hours they arrived at the house, but found the mews more than full of other befogged victims. At their wits' end, they were at length forced to this expedient: the carriage was left

outside in the road, and the horse, a valuable animal just recovered from a long sickness, and man passed the night in the hall of the house!

A strange experience also happened to a late dear friend of many years, Dr. George Bird. Living in Welbeck Street, he eventually crossed Oxford Street safely, and then felt convinced that he was somewhere parallel with his own house, but whether in Harley Street, Wimpole Street, or Welbeck Street, he felt unable to determine. At length the brilliant idea occurred to him, that in this land of doctors, if he groped his way to some door which bore a brass plate, the name on it would tell him where he was. He carried out this plan, and in the first doorway he entered found a brass plate. Lighting a match, he *read his own name!*

A letter written by a cultured and travelled and well-known man was one of many flattering criticisms which reached us about the theatre:

“Having seen the interiors of many theatres in Europe, I feel convinced that there is nothing either in design, decoration, comfort, or *tout ensemble* to equal the Haymarket. Viewing it as a house of comedy, it has not a rival.

“The proscenium and drop-scene are simply perfection. The delicate tints of the panels, the extreme finish of the paintings in them, the wealth of gilding, and the general harmony of colouring, display an artistic merit of rare excellence.

“In the distribution of the seats there is a boldness and liberality in apportioning the space, which should be an example to others for all time.

“In a word, it would be difficult for professional cavillers to pick a hole in this, the most tasteful theatre in Europe.

“Public men must always prepare to encounter opposition when they innovate, be it for good or evil. Still, the heartfelt applause of nineteen-twentieths of a brilliant audience must have been token enough of the superb work you have achieved, and of the ex-

ceptional reputation you and Mrs. Bancroft have earned as the inaugurators and chief exponents of a new school of dramatic art and of theatrical excellence."

The opinion also of an eminent French comedian may be interesting :

"Que son aménagement est bien entendu ! Ah, cette fois-ci, Bravo, et sans restriction. Cet orchestre qu'on ne voit pas, cette rampe presque imperceptible, cette absence du manteau d'Arlequin, ce cadre contourant la scène ! Le spectateur est devant un tableau dont les personnages parlent et agissent. C'est parfait pour l'illusion et pour le plaisir artistique."

I was inundated with communications from both sides upon this vexed Pit Question, many of the letters being from occupants of the upper circle on the first night and, nearly all, full of expressions of sympathy, whether the writers agreed with me or not. I will dismiss the subject with one important letter—from Sothern—which came a little later on, through the distance it had to travel. His long connection with the Haymarket Theatre alone would give it weight :

SAN FRANCISCO,  
March 5, 1880.

MY DEAR BANCROFT,—

I'm a poor hand at letter-writing ; I've such hundreds to answer that I hurry-scurry through them as best I can ; but I *must* send you a scrawl to congratulate you on the admirable way in which you quelled the disgraceful disturbance on your first night at the Haymarket. Leaving your snug little theatre, where you had done so much—so very much—to improve our art, and where you were so brilliantly successful, seemed to me a most dangerous move, but I admire your pluck in taking the Haymarket, and in doing precisely what I advised Buckstone and the trustees to do ten or twelve years ago—*i.e.* abolish the pit. There was no other way of making the

theatre pay, with the risk and heavy expenses of first-class management and first-class artists.

I most sincerely hope and believe that your daring experiment will be crowned with the success that you and Mrs. Bancroft so richly deserve.

Sincerely yours,

E. A. SOTHERN.

Soon after writing that letter, our old friend returned to England and paid us a visit, when we found him sadly changed. Of course no one could better understand the alterations in the theatre than old Haymarket actors, who always failed to trace how the building could ever have borne its former shape. Sothern was particularly struck with all he saw on either side the curtain, and wished that in his bright days the house had been as we made it. The once far-famed "Dundreary" never acted again; month by month he seemed to lose his strength, and fade away as he sought for health at different seaside places. We visited him as often as his sad state allowed, for we both were fond of him, and I was almost the last of his old friends to grasp his hand. A few went with his remains to Southampton, where, in accordance with his wish, all that is left of the once courted Edward Askew Sothern lies, leaving only, as Byron says, "The Glory and the Nothing of a name."

Not until some time after he had passed away did the following extract from a series of theatrical opinions by Sothern, which appeared in America under the title of *Birds of a Feather*, come to our knowledge:

"Mrs. Bancroft I consider the best actress on the English stage. She commenced her profession as a burlesque actress, and was one of the best we have ever seen in England. When she took the Prince of Wales's Theatre she discarded burlesque, and, to the amazement of every one, proved herself the finest comedy actress in London."



So much for the first question asked in the chapter. I will now attack the second: "Why did we retire from management so early in life?" There were many reasons. A very sordid one was that in our opening season at the Haymarket Theatre, which lasted just six months, we had realised a profit of £5,000 on the revival of *Money* and of £10,000 on the revival of *School*. These facts not only proved the value of our *répertoire*, but allowed us to look with some ease, in a financial sense, upon the future of the new enterprise. The reason, however, we felt the most was the difficulty, through keener, ever-increasing opposition, of keeping together what for many years had been a picked company.

I should not like to be misunderstood. My wife and I are not among those who fail to see talent in the young and have praise only for the dead:

"They that revere too much old time,  
Are but a scorn to the new."

The stage, indeed, abounds with talent; but, through changed conditions, much of that talent is scattered about, both at home and in other lands, and cannot any longer be concentrated as in our day. Although I agree with a distinguished man of letters that "the stage continues to grow in wealth, power, and public consideration," I feel that, in the main, it must be injurious to the welfare of the drama, and to the art of acting, to find so many theatres, both here and in America, controlled by powerful and wealthy syndicates. The owners of the heavy purses which provide the large capital involved are not expected to look beyond their pockets, and, with every apology to my clever and good-natured friend whose name is parodied, I ask to be forgiven for saving from oblivion a witty remark from a brilliant tongue—that "the stage could not really advance until we saw the '*Decline and Fall of the (F)ro(h)man Empire.*'"

To return to the Haymarket, the consequent difficulty, almost the impossibility, at any cost, of

continuing to cast plays as strongly as we had done at the old theatre, touched our pride—not our pockets; for, financially, the success of the revivals at the Haymarket, although they were less ably acted in parts, had far and away eclipsed our original productions at the Prince of Wales's: so much so, I frankly admit, as to cripple our ambition. We achieved in four years the task I thought might, with strenuous work and continued good fortune, be accomplished in ten. Such was the tide of prosperity which had followed our perilous removal.

The strain of a larger theatre, moreover, with its increased anxieties and the much harder work necessitated by shorter runs, began to tell upon us both. I had not, in those days, enjoyed the pleasure of meeting Sir John Fisher, or I might have laid to heart, at a time when it would have served me, an axiom he has uttered to me since: "If you keep a dog, don't bark yourself." I had, for years, foolishly wasted much strength in doing the work nowadays discharged by subordinates; and this, unfortunately, before the helpful advent of telephones and typewriters. Besides, for a dog to be worth much, he must be a champion or a prize-winner; and such are not on every bench! This sense of fatigue brought with it perhaps an undue dread of losing even an iota of the high public favour we had so long enjoyed. We feared that our distinctive work would become confused with that of our followers; and not in our day of management did we wish it to be said, "There is no longer a Haymarket Theatre; there is only a theatre in the Haymarket."

Some time, however, before we decided upon retirement, one plan suggested itself to my mind, which would have lessened our work and at the same time have been, we thought, largely for the welfare of the English stage. With this feeling uppermost in my mind, I submitted the outline of the scheme in a letter to Hare, who was still joint lessee with the Kendals of the St. James's Theatre. Roughly the

proposition was that he and they should give up that theatre and join forces with us—as partners—at the Haymarket, my idea being that the combined strength of our five names would be unassailable; that the theatre, like the Comédie Française, should rarely be closed; that three of the names at least should always be in the programme, and the whole five of them for a considerable part of the year. I wished also to make further efforts to acquire the adjoining property, now occupied as the “Pall Mall Restaurant,” to be used as a splendid foyer.

The project did not proceed far enough with Hare for me to go into figures; and those dreadful things, very likely, seemed to him an insurmountable objection. The large profits made by us at the Haymarket were, I think, as little suspected as known; and, naturally enough, at the first glance it may have seemed impossible that they could have borne such division as I proposed. Or it may be that what was really strength looked like weakness. At any rate, our old friend decided against my proposal, and replied that he thought it better for us to remain in amicable emulation, so carrying out Shakespeare's precept:

“And do, as adversaries do in law,  
Strive mightily, but eat and drink as friends.”

After dwelling anxiously on the subject of retirement, and fortified by another season of extraordinary success, which included the farewell to *Caste* and the production of *Fedora*, we went so far as to fix the date in our own minds, thinking the end of twenty years' management would be a suitable climax to set upon our labours—a period which I have often thought is long enough to hold the reins in any calling. But we kept these thoughts to ourselves until we felt assured they were not transient. Only those closely connected with the control of a popular theatre can know the strain it involves, and they alone can count the cost which buys its prizes.

In considering our decision, the fact must not be lost sight of that we started management at a time of life very exceptional for the taking on of serious responsibility. Besides, for our wants, and for the claims upon us, we now had all we needed. Great wealth, I fancy, must mean considerable anxiety: I often think of words I heard spoken by a well-known man of vast riches when asked if he could mention what particular advantages he derived from the possession: "Only one comes to my mind," he replied—"I can afford to be robbed."

When we were quite resolved, we wrote to our near friends, and to those whom we thought sufficiently interested in such a matter. From the many replies we received, perhaps the following extracts will not be without interest, even after so long a lapse of time. Burnand wrote:

DEAR B.,—

You are a lucky man, and a wise one. A deservedly fortunate pair, and a sagacious couple.

At your age to be able to retire!! My! Wouldn't I if I could! But I shall never be able to retire; never free, never out of harness, until I lie down in the loose-box and am carried off to the knackers, unless I go to the dogs previously by some shorter and cheaper route.

Yours ever,  
F. C. B.

In spite of severe illness these sympathetic lines were penned by Wilkie Collins: "With all my heart I congratulate you both on retirement from the toils and cares of a career of management which will be remembered among the noblest traditions of the English stage."

Gilbert wrote: "I congratulate you heartily upon what I am sure is a subject of congratulation to Mrs. Bancroft and yourself, however discomfiting

your retirement from management must necessarily be to all playgoers."

There could be no more competent critic of the circumstances than Hare, who wrote: "I am delighted, though not surprised, to learn that you are in the proud position of being able to retire in the prime of your life from our harassing and wearying profession. You have both worked well and loyally, have done the stage the highest service, and well deserve your rest."

Pinero, whose last experiences as an actor were acquired under our management, before he resolved to abandon the stage and, happily for the modern drama, devote himself to playwriting, wrote: "It is my opinion, expressed here as it is elsewhere, that the present advanced condition of the English stage—throwing as it does a clear, natural light upon the manners of life and people, where a few years ago there was nothing but mouthing and tinsel—is due to the crusade begun by Mrs. Bancroft and yourself in your little Prince of Wales's Theatre. When the history of the stage and its progress is adequately and faithfully written, Mrs. Bancroft's name and your own must be recorded with honour and gratitude." These were valued words from one who, by the splendid works he has produced, long since earned an unchallenged position among the great dramatists of England.

Our intention was not made public till the autumn of 1884, when we just briefly announced in the advertisements our last season in management. The statement caused a considerable stir, and drew forth not only much comment but even leading articles in the chief newspapers—from which our Chorus will sing a few bars. In allusion to a short speech extracted from me on the first night of the last season, *The Times* remarked: "The effect of Mr. Bancroft's words was magnetic. Spoken from the heart, they went straight to the heart, and manager and audience felt themselves drawn

to each other by the bond of affection that links old and well-trying friends."

*The Daily Telegraph* and other leading journals paid us the tribute of saying that we were equally eminent as managers and players, and even if our achievements in the latter capacity could be forgotten, we should continue to be regarded as the great reformers of the stage. . . . Only those playgoers, it was said, who were familiar with the state of the stage before the Prince of Wales's Theatre revolutionised our English dramatic system had any idea of what our management had done towards the furthering of the better condition of things that was now enjoyed. . . . Prior to the realistic effects produced at the Lyceum, a great advance in stage decoration had been introduced and achieved at the Prince of Wales's Theatre when under our control. It was in that little theatre that attention was first directed to the naturalness of scenery and to the soft effect and comfort of set scenes representing interiors. It was here, too, under the same reign, that, when the Robertson comedies were introduced, men and women were represented on the stage as men and women conduct themselves in real life. At the Haymarket Theatre the same policy had been continued. This was declared to be a matter which deserved to be recorded in theatrical history. Twenty years earlier, it was recalled, our theatres had fallen almost to their lowest ebb; for though there were some good actors there were no really good companies, while stage management was almost a lost art. Thanks, however, to our example, a vast improvement had been effected. There were now many houses where performances of a high order were to be seen. But between originating and following there was all the difference in the world. As Tennyson had said: "Most can raise the flower now, for all have got the seed." Future historians of the stage were bidden to note that in the remarkable revival of the stage which that

generation had witnessed "the Bancroft management" had led the way. . . . "By those whose experience does not go far enough back, the revolution in dress and scenery is dated from the Irving management at the Lyceum; but it was at the Prince of Wales's Theatre that it was first started." And the writer put his finger on the source of our great pride and pleasure when he spoke of the satisfaction we should receive from the public acknowledgment that we had inaugurated the brighter era which had opened over the English stage, and should leave behind us followers in our footprints. "Retiring as they will do in the fulness of their fame, and with their laurels still green, they will carry with them into private life the proud consciousness of having unfalteringly upheld the best traditions of the English stage, and of having won the universal esteem and acclaim to which their artistic talents and their personal worth entitle them."

The following extract is chosen with some hesitation from a "fighting" article, written at this time, 1885, by a well-known playwright, who is renowned for his warm sympathies and outspoken expressions of opinion:

"The movement which lifted the stage out of the Slough of Despond, and ultimately set it on its present pinnacle of popularity and consequent prosperity, originated at a time when Henry Irving was an almost unknown actor. Irving did not initiate this great reform; the reform initiated Irving. The tide was turned by others, and on its billows Irving floated into fame. Before Irving was a manager, the comedy theatres had carried stage management to a high pitch of excellence, and the public had already begun to flock towards the stage, attracted not simply by the beauty of the mounting, but by artistic acting and a genuine interest in the play. We must go farther back than Irving; we must go farther back than the comedy theatres; we must go back to the parent comedy theatre in Tottenham

Street. The Kendals, John Hare, and the excellent St. James's company, John Clayton, Arthur Cecil, and the admirable Court, are simply reproductions and developments of the Bancrofts and the old Prince of Wales's Theatre."

Our farewell season, I fear, added but little to our fame, being devoted mainly to short revivals of familiar plays already dealt with in this book. The date of our very last appearance in management was fixed upon and made known: July 20, 1885. What the performance should comprise caused us much anxious thought. It was finally composed of selections from *Money* and *London Assurance*, to be acted by former members of our companies, and part of *Masks and Faces*, with the leading members of that season's company in the cast, and with ourselves as Peg Woffington and Triplet. Irving had expressed his earnest wish to have a share in the proceedings, an offer we gratefully accepted, it being agreed that he should speak some lines written by Clement Scott. His acknowledgment of our invitation came in these words:

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

If this were not indeed a "labour of love," I should not put pen to paper any more, or cudgel my brains in any delightful cause again. I take it as an act of extreme friendship to endow me with this "office of love." This compliment to me shows me that you two, who are about my oldest friends, recognise that I have some place in the revivalism that you instituted. My sole fear is that, with all my earnest endeavours, I shall not be able to do full justice to a theme that is so dear to my heart, or express with adequate enthusiasm what I really feel.

Yours affectionately,

HENRY IRVING.

We also received a characteristic letter from dear Toole, offering to "play the audience in or out; as



early as you choose, or as late; or even, on such an interesting evening, turn up the gas, go round with apples, oranges, etc., ring up the curtain, clear the stage, or anything!"

And William Terriss wrote:

"It scarcely needs a letter from me to tell you how *more than pleased* and complimented I shall feel at being able (if you will permit me) to participate in your farewell performance. The more so as it was your kindly aid in my early days which did so much to give me what poor position I now hold. Our profession will lose in you a consummate artist and a kind, generous gentleman—and we shall experience equal loss in your gifted wife."

From the day that our farewell performance was announced, the booking-office was besieged by applications, made in every possible way, to secure seats, and it became a very difficult matter to deal with them, as no building that I know anything about would have held the many thousands who honoured us with a wish to be present. On all important occasions the task of the management is very onerous in apportioning the seats, but for so special a night the difficulties were a hundredfold increased. To accommodate as large a number as was possible, the capacious stall and balcony arm-chairs were taken away, and smaller ones placed in their stead. We had another difficulty to contend with in the efforts made to obtain admission, at almost any cost, by bribery; and only owing to the perfect loyalty of all concerned was it possible to carry out our intention that every place in the theatre should be either sold at the ordinary charge or given away. This, so far as we were concerned, was accomplished, though twenty guineas were freely offered by enthusiasts for a corner in any part of the theatre.

We were much honoured by the King (then, of course, Prince of Wales) suggesting the date, in order that he might, with the Princess of Wales, be present; while the Prince and Princess Christian

also signified their intention to occupy a private box. Great compliments were also paid us by "all sorts and conditions of men" in the personal letters we received wishing seats to be reserved.

In answer to the following little note, a seat was of course found for so distinguished a member of our calling as Mrs. Keeley, who before she died, at a very advanced age, had the honour of being sent for by Queen Victoria :

MY DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,—

Will you allow me to be one of the crowd who will assemble on the night of the 20th, to express their regret at your retirement from management, *for regret will be the general feeling?*

My career was *ended* when yours *began*.

With kindest regards to Mr. Bancroft and yourself,

Believe me, yours sincerely,

MARY ANNE KEELEY.

I select the following letter from a cherished little bundle of them received at this time :

29, CARLYLE SQUARE, CHELSEA,  
July 16th, 1885.

MY DEAR MR. AND MRS. BANCROFT,—

The sadness I feel at the prospect of never again working under your management is far too genuine for me to endeavour to convey it by any conventional expressions of regret. Although I have always appreciated your unvarying goodness to me, it is only by the depression of spirits and general apathy which I now experience, that I recognise how much my enjoyment of my profession was affected by the kind auspices under which I had the good fortune to practise it.

Yours affectionately,

CHARLES H. E. BROOKFIELD.

Very early on the eventful day earnest knots of playgoers began to assemble round the doors leading to the unreserved seats, which we would not allow to be secured in advance. I have heard of the most enthusiastic among those present at Macready's farewell of the stage, when plays began much earlier than now, being at the pit entrance of Drury Lane by one o'clock; and when Charles Kean retired from the Princess's, I was myself in the crowd at an early hour; but our admirers seemed even more devoted. Hour by hour the number swelled. It grew so large at last, and so utterly beyond all chance of more than a fraction of it ever fighting its way into the theatre, that the traffic had to be turned aside by the police, and sent, to the amazement of many occupants of cabs and other vehicles, by neighbouring thoroughfares.

Several managers of leading theatres changed their programmes, or altered the hours of commencement, in order to be present; while other friends sacrificed some days of hard-earned holiday purposely to remain in England for the occasion, and more than one returned from the Continent to do us honour.

In addition to our own names, and those of Irving and Toole, the playbill contained the following names of past and present members of our companies:—F. Archer, Maurice Barrymore, Kyrle Bellew, Alfred Bishop, W. S. Blakeley, Charles Brookfield, Arthur Cecil, John Clayton, Charles Coghlan, Charles Collette, W. G. Elliot, John Hare, David James, Henry Kemble, W. H. Kendal, Edmund Maurice, A. W. Pinero, J. Forbes-Robertson, Charles Sugden, William Terriss, and Charles Wyndham; Carlotta Addison, Eleanor Calhoun, Mrs. Cannings, Mrs. Kendal, Mrs. Langtry, Mrs. Stirling, Ellen Terry, and Mrs. John Wood.

It was a tribute never to be forgotten. My wife had much difficulty in controlling her emotions, and her own words best describe her state of mind.

No written description can give an adequate

idea of the whole scene from the rise of the curtain until its final fall. For many weeks I had felt as though a heavy weight were tugging at my heart. Those two relentless words "Good-bye" haunted me, wherever I went, whatever I did. They were the last visions in my mind when going to sleep, and they rose up in big letters on my awakening. The beautiful theatre presented a striking appearance. The Royal box was occupied by the Prince and Princess of Wales, accompanied by the three young princesses; the box on the opposite side by the Prince and Princess Christian, with whom were Lord and Lady St. Helier (then Mr. and Mrs. Jeune). During the evening I found an opportunity of glancing at that remarkable audience. I saw the late Lady Salisbury by the side, I remember, of Lord Lytton ("Owen Meredith") and the Rev. Henry White of the Savoy Chapel. Close by were Lord Granville and Frederic Leighton. Among others, I caught sight of Lady Dorothy Nevill, looking like a charming portrait of one of her own ancestors; and I saw also Henry Thompson, Edmund Yates, and a face rarely seen at a play—that of Robert Browning.

How I managed to dress for my part I know not. I can only remember floral offerings of every conceivable design being brought to me, until there were so many that they had to be taken to a larger room. When I walked on to the stage in *Masks and Faces*, my reception was so overpowering, and the "good-bye" in my throat so big, that it was with the greatest difficulty I managed to keep up until the end, and to speak the touching final words of the play: "Good-bye. When hereafter you hear harsh sentence passed on us—whose lot was admiration, rarely love; triumph, but seldom tranquillity—think sometimes of Margaret Woffington and say, 'Stage *Masks* may cover honest *Faces* and hearts beat true beneath a tinselled robe.'

The "Valedictory Ode," composed by Clement

Scott, was then spoken by Henry Irving. Among its stanzas were the following :

“ Not to all artists, earnest though their aim,  
As retrospective vision there appears  
The priceless gift of an untarnished name,  
The blameless history of twenty years.

“ Fired by the flush of youth, they found a way  
To give the fading art a healthy cure ;  
The stage they loved revived beneath their sway,  
They made art earnest, and they kept it pure.

“ Such an example in the after-age  
Will throw a softening haze o'er bygone care ;  
We close the volume at its brightest page,  
But leave a blossom of remembrance there.

“ Good-bye, old friends ! it shall not be farewell ;  
Love is of art the birth and after-growth ;  
' Heaven prosper you,' shall be our only knell,  
Our parting prayer be this—' God bless you both !' ”

Irving was followed by Toole, who set the audience laughing loudly with his humorous and affectionate speech, which concluded with the hope that the brief engagement of Irving and himself under our management, which was limited, in fact, to one night, would not be reported as having been the means of closing the theatre !

The stage was strewn with the beautiful flowers that had been arriving throughout the evening for Mrs. Bancroft ; and in their midst—full of thought of how serious the moment really was to us—I made a farewell speech ; in which, addressing the Prince and Princess of Wales and the audience, I told them how for a long time I had dreaded that moment, and had often wondered if, when it came, I should be able to speak at all. But my best hope of doing so was in the remembrance that I had to offer, as well as my own thanks, the thanks of my wife, whose life, from her early childhood, had been passed in the service of the public, for the many years of constant kindness shown to us, not only by the brilliant and

representative audience then before us, but by that great world of friends unknown, yet known so well—the public. I assured them that we had not taken this, to us, important step without full reflection—we knew how much, in resigning management, we gave up; but release from the sordid side of life, which must have its share in every profession, made some amends—while that which for so long a time had been our pride was also a great responsibility; and we asked them to believe that we valued their regard too highly to risk for a moment a fraction of its decay.

We felt, the speech went on, how far beyond our merits were the honours and compliments which had been showered upon us from every side, and how deeply conscious I was of the poverty of my attempt to acknowledge them. Robbed now of the actor's art, I must ask them to clothe my words with all the eloquence and wealth of thanks I meant them to convey.

If it had been my privilege, I said, to spare Mrs. Bancroft such labour and anxieties as should not fall to a woman's lot, how amply had I been repaid! Most of us, I thought, owed Mrs. Bancroft something, but I was by far the heaviest in her debt. I alone knew how she had supported me in trouble, saved me from many errors, helped me to many victories; and it was she who had given to our work those finishing touches, those last strokes of genius, which, in all art, are priceless.

It would ill become me, I went on, to talk of what we had tried to do; but, should we be remembered as the humble pioneers of anything that might have advanced the art we loved—if we should be thought, in some way, to have made its position better than we found it—it would be a high distinction. No one could succeed without a staff and an army. In every branch our fellow-workers—from those distinguished authors and actors, those masters of the craft whose names would spring at once to the memory of my hearers, to the humblest members

of our ranks—had been so loyal and forbearing to us that we should feel for ever in their debt. Indeed, I declared, it was but the simple truth to say that all we had earned of fame and fortune we owed to the calling we had followed, and it would be a poor return not to give it back the brightest feelings of our natures.

Our thanks were not yet exhausted. How cordially, I said, were they due to those old comrades who had come that night to give us so strong a sign of their good-will, joined by those valued friends, John Toole and Henry Irving! The distinction given to our retirement by such proofs of friendship, and by Irving's recital of Scott's generous poem, were, to us, beyond value; and I asked the audience to believe that our remembrance of such kindness—like our remembrance of the scene before our eyes—would never pass away.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” I concluded, “I have detained you too long. . . . To say how much we thank you is but little, to feel how much we thank you is a great deal. As managers, I have now, in my wife's name and my own, to bid you good-bye. We do so with feelings of thankfulness, of great respect, and, if you will permit us to approach you so nearly, with feelings of deep affection.”

I add a few words from a letter written at the time by my wife:

“How my husband got through his farewell speech is a marvel to me, for he was painfully agitated. The stage was beautifully decorated with masses of flowers by several ladies, who kindly offered to do the duty, and a path was formed right down to the footlights, with a border of bouquets on either side, through which we walked when we went on to make our final bow. The curtain was raised many times, and the sight of the upstanding audience cheering and waving their handkerchiefs was something to remember. The sound of their voices, the

enthusiasm, the deafening applause, and the strains of 'Auld Lang Syne' played by the band were all so bewildering to my senses that I felt dazed and as if in a dream.

"When all this was over the Princess of Wales sent for me, and, after gracious words of sympathy, presented me with the bouquet which she was carrying. You may imagine how deeply all this affected me. Many dear friends came round to speak pleasant words to me afterwards. We remained in the theatre some time before leaving, but the crowd which had assembled in order to see us depart, completely blocking the whole street, still waited, and as we passed through to the carriage, those who were near enough pressed forward to shake hands with us, while expressions of regret and good wishes were called out on every side. As the carriage went slowly through the crowd, hands were thrust in, and, grasping mine, the people shouted, 'It mustn't be good-bye!' 'Don't go away!' 'Stay with your friends!'

"In the silence of the night I reflected on the past—on my early struggles and its hard work, on many triumphs, on bold achievements. . . . I had a long think and a good cry."

My wife's reflections will be understood.

I will now turn to the weighty words of influential writers from whom, throughout our career, we received encouragement and support—so valuable in early days, so great an honour later, when maturer work was judged by the highest standard. Such writers have done much to aid the actor and his art to reach the position they now enjoy.

In the morning after the performance on which I have dwelt so long, we were equally surprised and flattered to find that all the principal papers contained leading articles on the subject of our career. We read in *The Times*, that on the side of acting, as on that of staging plays, we had led the way in beneficent reform. We had aimed, and with success,



at forming a cast of equal strength throughout, and thus giving a finished performance in place of the scrappy, uneven representations with which most managers had previously been content. London now had several companies trained to work together, and capable of doing justice to all the characters in a play; but, though playgoers were now learning to look upon this as a matter of course, it must be remembered that things had been very different twenty years before. The idea was by no means widely held when our management began. The benefits of the change were felt in all ranks of the profession; for a higher standard of attainment had been set up, and with it had come a more liberal remuneration and greater social consideration for the actor.

“They are equally eminent,” said *The Daily Telegraph*, “as managers and as players”; and even if our achievements in the latter capacity could be forgotten, we should continue to be regarded as the great reformers of the stage, and the introducers of naturalness into what, before our time, was often strangely unnatural. Before the era of our management truthfulness of theatrical representation had been almost unknown in England. It was owing to us that the principle had now been adopted by all English managers; and we should be remembered, not only for our histrionic talents, but because our influence on the English stage would, beyond doubt, prove permanent.

*The Morning Post* pointed out that, for sensational impossibilities and situations of the conventional type, we had substituted material less highly spiced perhaps, but far more wholesome in every way, and while trusting in one sense far less to the accessories of a play, in another we had utilised them in a subordinate manner to the fullest advantage. In a word, the great gulf which had for so long yawned between the people of actual life and the typical characters of the stage was completely bridged over.

The stage had been rescued from the dislocation between the drama and all that is best in our social life. And the task had been far from easy.

“Only actors and actresses who have mastered their art know precisely how much and how little exaggeration is required to make Art and acting look like Nature.” This just observation in *The Standard* was followed by the statement that I had solved this problem many years ago and had never lost the secret, and my wife “would not have made prisoners of us all if she had not given herself the trouble to learn the art of acting.” Gifted with rare quickness of apprehension, and a lightness of touch that could not be excelled, she had yet always remained a careful and conscientious student, whose work would be vainly searched for traces of crudity in anything she did.

*The Daily News* recalled how twenty years before it had been the common canon of theatrical management that there could not again be any original English plays. They had gone out with the days of Sheridan. “The Bancrofts had the courage to break away from the bondage of this absurd superstition.” We had attained our celebrity by the production of pieces which were genuinely English and came straight out of the ways of English life. We had made their people move and talk and demean themselves just as English people of the class represented would do in English homes. We had reasserted the claims of English life in two ways—in the story of the play and in the manner of its acting.

*The Daily Chronicle* entitled us the pioneers of truth in art and of excellence in everything pertaining to what we essayed. We had begun our campaign at a period when sweeping reforms in regard to stage mounting were sorely needed. Our management stood alone in the endeavour to improve stage details, and in the keener competition that had ensued we had never been found in the rear. That English dramatic art had reached its present pitch of excellence

was owing to ourselves. "By their influence, and under their control, the domain of the stage with which they have been associated, the comedy of manners, has made gigantic strides; their wise and liberal patronage of the modern school of drama has produced most salutary and beneficent effects." We had aimed religiously at the highest attainable forms of art in every direction. The great and healthy reform which had marked English stage work during the last twenty years was due to our united influence, our earnest labour, and to our genuine talent and sterling good-will. Not only had we been generally wise in the choice of plays; to us, more than to any living member of the profession, was due the improvement in scenery, in costumes and matters of detail which had been a distinct gain to art. We had encouraged rising talent; we had adequately recognised the assistance of our colleagues; we had never adopted the star system.

And *The Saturday Review* declared: "It is not too much to say that the majority of the leading players of the day have kept their terms and graduated under this master and mistress."

Justin McCarthy, in *Portraits of the Sixties*, written some years later, devotes a whole chapter to our work, from which we cull the following:

"Marie Wilton was realistic in the higher and better sense of the word—she could express human emotion exactly as it might express itself in the life of an English home, but at the same time she had that true dramatic instinct which enabled her to divine the deeper feelings that might never reveal themselves to the ordinary observer. . . . I must therefore always regard her as having created a new epoch in the development of modern English drama, and we can see the effect of her work on the English stage of to-day as distinctly as we could have seen it when she was still moving enthusiastic audiences in her London theatre. . . . Marie Wilton was as fortunate in the artistic companionship which her

marriage created for her as in the other conditions of her life. In Sir Squire Bancroft she found a master of her own dramatic art, and a man peculiarly gifted with the qualities which make a successful theatrical manager. Bancroft was a consummate actor in the parts which he believed suited to him. . . . In such comedies as those of Robertson, Bancroft's successes came upon a level with the successes won by his brilliant wife. His acting was always natural, always in the true sense dramatic, but it was never melodramatic; he never sought to produce effects which might not be associated with the incidents of ordinary human life. I do not mean to convey the idea that Bancroft limited his art to such plays as those of Robertson, or to the representation of English life as it then appeared, for he made a great success as Joseph Surface and as Triplet. . . . Any intelligent spectator could see that he had a capacity for acting which was not limited to the faithful reproduction of modern manners. Every now and then would come from his lips some sentence delivered with perfect colloquial ease, and in the tone of society, and showing that the actor had an amount of dramatic intensity and a depth of expression which had in other plays found their full effect in scenes of more passionate emotion. . . . The career of the Bancrofts will always have a chapter to itself in the history of the British stage. The husband and the wife were very different in their styles of art, and each had a marked and distinct individuality. They were much alike in one valuable quality—they could both accomplish the greatest successes in comedy without calling in the spurious aid of farcical exaggeration. In this happy gift they are both entitled to rank with the best actors of the Parisian school."

From a valued source also came these words :

"Let me congratulate you both most warmly on the demonstration of last night. I am a pretty old playgoer, dating from 1840, and in bygone days never missed any event of genuine interest. Among

the most prominent of such occasions was the farewell of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kean, on Monday, August 29, 1859. *The Times* spoke of it as 'one of the most imposing ovations ever seen within the walls of a theatre,' and it was; last evening was another, but there was this difference—the thoroughly representative character of last night's audience was *never*, in my experience, equalled. Therein shines the true public feeling, all up and down the ladder, towards you both."

The following letter, addressed to my wife by a complete stranger, is only a single instance out of a very large number of similar tributes :

"How many of your most respectful admirers were unable to be present at your farewell last night you will never know ; but many of us absent in body were present in spirit. You have helped the writer of this letter in many ways, and not least in having cleared away the mists of prejudice and ignorance which a puritanical education had raised up.

"It has been by such good work as yours and your husband's that the Drama has risen to its proper position, and been ennobled even in the eyes of those brought up to despise and condemn it."

Here are a few final financial statements which will help to make theatrical history. The nightly expenses at the old Prince of Wales's Theatre never exceeded £70 ; at the Haymarket, when we began there, they reached £100 ; and had increased by the end of our stay to £120. £10,000 was spent at various times in altering and decorating the little old theatre ; £20,000 in the same way at the Haymarket. The net profit on the twenty years' management exceeded the sum of £180,000.

Although we finally abandoned managerial cares, we had not left the stage, but of course had given up much of its glory, and at the best could only re-appear now and then.

It may be that for my share in the too early withdrawal from continuous and triumphant work

of the famous actress who joined her lot in life with mine I was to blame. If blame there was, I must plead excuse in a vivid, it may be an exaggerated, remembrance of pitiful words, written by a powerful pen, on the subject of lingering too long upon the stage. These were words which drew the painful picture of a much-loved servant of the public clinging to the faded chaplet won as its idol in earlier days; clutching at the withered trophy after the time had arrived for its graceful surrender to youth and promise before the admiration once so showered upon her should be replaced by indulgence; indulgence to be followed by the bitterness of compassion; compassion in its turn by the anguish of what is worse than all, indifference. Indulgence—compassion—indifference. The mere writing of such words causes one pain. The clever woman was right who compared glory to wine—as it could provoke both intoxication and thirst. Even of the illustrious Sarah Siddons, Hazlitt once wrote, “Players should be immortal, but they are not. Like other people, they cease to be young, and are no longer themselves. It is the common lot. Any loss of reputation to Mrs. Siddons is a loss to the world. Has she not had enough of glory? The homage she has received is greater than that which is paid to queens. The enthusiasm she excited had something idolatrous about it. Does she think we have forgot her? Or would she remind us of herself by showing us *what she was not?*”

“She cannot go back to the past’s bright splendour,  
When life seemed worth living, and love a truth,  
Ere Time had told her she must surrender  
Her double dower of fame and youth.”

Twilight in art—as in nature—must be sad; surely a sweeter picture is the splendid sinking of an autumnal sun. Let us not be reminded that

“Cold upon the dead volcano  
Sleeps the gleam of dying day.”

## CHAPTER X

### HOLIDAY NOTES

“Trip, trip away.”

IT may be a relief to the reader to turn for a few pages from strictly theatrical matters to reminiscences gathered in our simple holiday travels. These were never very far afield. In the early years of our management holidays were brief, and were passed at Scarborough or Margate or Broadstairs. It was on the Kentish coast that two episodes took place which, with others, shall be told by the soprano voice in our duet. So for the moment I lay down my pen.

Even in the tranquillity of a quiet seaside place a story of romantic interest can be found.

One morning early I was walking on the beach when I saw a young fellow hard at work taking a new boat to pieces. He was evidently in very low spirits, and it only needed a little show of interest to induce him to explain his strange procedure. He looked round to see that there was no one near, and said, “Would you mind listening to me a while, lady?”

He reflected for a moment, as if to gulp down his emotion. Then he told his story in his Kentish dialect. I will repeat it as best I can.

“Little more nor a year ago I was the ’appiest chap in these parts, for I loved a girl and she loved me. We was engaged and goin’ to be married, and

I 'ad bought and made from time to time bits of things for furnishin' a cottage a mile or two out yonder. I was that 'appy, I could 'ardly sleep, mum—she filled my 'ead noight and day. All at once a dandified young chap come here with a kind of tutor they called a 'coach'—what teaches young fellars to be gentlemen, you know, mum. She didn't know she was so pretty till he told her; he filled her mind with vain notions, and she begun a-lookin' at 'erself all day long in the lookin'-glass, and dressin' of 'erself more gay like. She was leavin' off being the simple lass I loved; she looked to me like a boat a-driftin' away somewhere, and I was losin' sight of her. This fellar was allus a-runnin' after her and givin' her things, so I made up my mind to marry her outright, although I was poor. All at once, one mornin' quite sudden, they both ran away." His voice failed him here, and he paused for a second or two before he added, "I 'eered no more of 'er, for I never moved a step to foller 'er. I was sick in my 'eart, and it seemed chilled loik; but my old mother had to be seen to and took care of, so I up and set to work, without tellin' the mother anything except that my girl 'ad gone to a place in London. Well, things was prosperous with me, and soon I had as much as a hundred pound in the bank. Two months ago I 'eerd that the fellar 'ad deserted my poor gal, and she and her baby-choild was starvin'. So I took the little cottage we was to 'ave if she 'ad been true to me; I puts in the bits of furniture wot I'd got together, and a little more. I've never spoken to 'er, and I never will, but so long as I live she shall never want. We can't now never come together no more; but I can't put on one side the remembrance of what she might 'ave been to me. That boat I built for 'er and me, and christened it after her, *Alice*. I painted the name in blue, because it was the colour of her eyes, and I began a-breakin' of it up, as she 'as broken up my life."

How near akin are truth and fiction! I lived again



in the sorrows of Ham Peggotty and Little Em'ly ; and almost under the shadow of “ Bleak House,” where Dickens once had stayed.

I afterwards wrote a little play on the subject, which was admirably acted for me at the Haymarket Theatre for a charity by some old friends, who included Mr. Leonard Boyne, Mr. George Giddens, Kate Rorke, Annie Hughes, Kate Phillips, and the late much-lamented Rose Leclercq (a great loss to the stage), to all of whom I was greatly indebted.

Mr. Pigott, in sending me his licence for the performance, was kind enough to say :

“ I feel grateful to you for the unalloyed enjoyment I have found in reading a piece so pure and generous and kindly in spirit, so true to life and nature, so pathetic in its simplicity, so delicately humorous in its observation of character, and, above all, so courageous in its consistency of purpose and intention, from beginning to end, as *A Riverside Story*. You have the courage to abjure the silly and false conventionality of the ‘ happy ending ’ to a sad story ; and you do not think it due to the prejudice of the British public to wind up a domestic tragedy with a country dance. For my own part, I confess, I prefer your truer nature and your finer art.”

Another scene of humble life impressed itself on my memory—a little story of a homely woman who kept a small sweet-stuff shop. One day I looked in, as I had done before, but not to eat the acid-drops or bulls-eyes which graced the tiny window in a single row of greenish glass bottles, and which had lost their colour and stuck together as if to keep one another warm. I made my way to the cramped sitting-room, where I was greeted by several little voices, some laughing, some crying. There was the mistress of the house holding a baby at her breast with one hand, and combing the hair of an older baby with the other, while the rest of the progeny were scattered about the room. The poor woman appeared rather unamiable, and I asked her how she was. She replied, “ Oh, mum, I'm

as well as can be expected, but I'm worried a good deal! My 'usband is the most inconsiderestist man I knows. Last night he comes 'ome for 'is tea. I'd done a hard day's washin', and I was that tired, mum, I could 'ardly 'old up my 'ead. He looks at me and he says, 'Why, missus, ye're a lively one, I don't think! I comes 'ome tired from work, and wants to see yer 'appy. Why don't yer larf?' 'Larf!' I says—'larf! It's all very well for you to talk! While ye're at work you 'ave yer pals to talk to, and yer 'ave the fresh air to enjoy. Here am I stuck at home with six brats wot's a-fightin' and squallin' all day long. Wot's there to larf at in that? I 'ave a babby to nuss, wot's that weak as the doctor says I ought to drink porter, and where is it to come from? Wot's there to larf at in that? There's Liza in bed with measles, and she 'as to be watched noight and day, so I don't get no sleep. Wot's there to larf at in that? Then there's Johnny with his 'ead that bad, wot's brought on by the school-teachers a-crammin' verses into it. The doctor says that the lad'll 'ave absence on the brain. Wot's there to larf at in that? I looks in the glass, and I can see myself a-gettin' holder and huglier every day. Wot's there to larf at in that?'"

The scene of many later happy holidays was Switzerland; to some part of that beautiful country we went regularly for nearly thirty years. During that time we have driven over nearly every one of its wonderful mountain passes, and the memories we cherish of the descent into Italy by the Splügen, of the marvellous Simplon, and of the monarch of them all, the Stelvio, are with us still—happily so, for I must go no more to those great heights.

Resting once at Berne, we paid a hurried visit to the funny old performing clock, a description of which, years afterwards, as Lady Henry Fairfax, I turned to good account in *Diplomacy*. From the "Beau Rivage" on the shores of Ouchy we made a pilgrimage to the Villa Beausite on the outskirts

of Lausanne ; the house in which John Kemble lived after his retirement from the stage in 1817, and near which he was buried in 1823. With difficulty we discovered the last resting-place of "the noblest Roman of them all"—in the strangers' quarter of a now unused cemetery on the road to Berne. When at last we found a sexton to unlock the rusty gates, we searched for the vault. The stone was sadly neglected, and the enclosed grave choked with weeds. These, by our directions, were cleared away, and we left some flowers in their stead, a small tribute to the memory of a great man. A few years later we went there again, and then found the grave in perfect order, some member of the Kemble family having, doubtless, come to know of its neglected state. We believe the improvement was due to Fanny Kemble, the daughter of his brother Charles and aunt of our friend Henry Kemble, whom we met soon afterwards travelling with the old lady. No greater lover of the Alps has lived than Fanny Kemble. Year after year, until old age came, did the mountains draw her towards them, and many an eloquent description of their beauties is to be found in her charming books.

Those were the days of youth and high spirits, and I am afraid I must confess to my husband having been something of a practical joker, who would go even to such boyish lengths as this. One night, at a mountain hotel, when a dance was going on in the drawing-room, which opened by very large windows on to the terrace, a friend and he drove some cows into the midst of the dancers, who scattered themselves in all directions with cries of "Les vaches!—les vaches!" He plagued the musicians terribly, too, for he was always hiding the drumsticks. The performer on the noisy instrument they belonged to passed much of his time in violent gesticulations, as he asked, "Wo sind die Trommelschlägel?"

Of all our holiday resorts we were most faithful

to the Engadine; our attachment to the beautiful valley never weakened. We first went to Pontresina, and soon learned to love the little village which slumbers in the valley of the Inn, six thousand feet above the sea. It is all, alas! very different now, with its railway, its tramcars, and hotel omnibuses. We also stayed at different times at St. Moritz, Campfer, and Maloja. We met many friends in all those villages and had happy times with them.

At Pontresina we became acquainted with Madame Goldschmidt—the world-famed Jenny Lind—and her husband, Otto Goldschmidt. It was she who told us of an incident which occurred during one of the provincial tours of the great “Swedish Nightingale” and her operatic company. The tenor of the troupe stammered painfully when he spoke, though, when he sang, not a trace of the affliction could be observed. One day they were about to start for the next place on their list, where they had to appear that evening. They were all in the railway carriage and the train was on the point of starting, when suddenly the tenor discovered that a certain black box, which carried the important part of their wardrobe, had been left behind. In a terrible state of excitement and anxiety, he stammered out: “The b-b-b——”

BARITONE: What’s the matter?

TENOR: The b-b-b——

BARITONE: What is it, my dear fellow?—what is it?

TENOR: The bl-bl——

BARITONE: Sing it, man!—sing it!

TENOR (in recitative): All, I fear, is lost!

BASSO (shouting): What’s lost?

TENOR: I fe-ar is lost!

BARITONE: What do you mean, man? Go on!

TENOR: The black box!

BASSO: What of it, man?—what of it?

TENOR: The black box has been for-got-ten!

TUTTI: Oh, my goodness, we shall have no clothes!

Here is one of several letters written to me by the great singer :

1, MORETON GARDENS, SOUTH KENSINGTON.

DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,—

I am sorry to hear that your head still troubles you. I hope time and calmness will come to your help ; stage-work is so apt to disturb the *head*—the hurry, the anxiety one is always in on the “planks” (as we call the stage in my own country), makes the head to quiver and the sensitive nerves to quake.

It is very kind of you to offer us a box ; only, as you *always* can sell yours, it is rather a hard task to ask you to become a loser by us.

But your kind offer, sincere as I know it is, has been fully appreciated by us.

Believe me, dear Mrs. Bancroft, yours sincerely,  
JENNY LIND GOLDSCHMIDT.

We gave several successful entertainments at Pontresina, the profits being divided between the little English church and the funds of the *Verschönerungs-Verein* (I have copied that word carefully from an old programme ; I certainly never could spell it myself), or Paths and Ways Improvement Society. The first consisted of a reading of the death of “Jo” from *Bleak House*. A good sum was realised and a path made up one of the hills known as the Little Muottas. A year or two before, an old friend of ours and lover of the Engadine had strayed there one afternoon with a favourite book. The time flew by, and when he began to retrace his steps he found the night was falling, and that he had lost his way. Knowing the descent would grow more and more dangerous, he wisely returned to the summit, by which time it was quite dark, and made efforts to attract attention by placing newspapers, one by one, on the end of his alpenstock and setting fire to them. He was answered from the village by a return fire.

The news soon spread that a search-party of guides had gone up the mountain. His wife, being among the visitors who heard all this, began to wonder what could have detained her husband. The benighted wanderer was found and brought down in safety. With great discretion he dismissed the guides when near the village, and sauntered to his hotel as if nothing had been amiss, passing unobserved through the little crowd which was waiting anxiously to learn who it was the men had been sent in search of. As he, with complete *sang-froid*, arrived at the hotel, his wife ran towards him, saying, "Oh, my dear, I am so glad to see you back! Where have you been? Some silly man has lost himself on the mountain, and *I feared it might be you!*"

Dear Arthur Cecil took his share out of the path by pounding up and down it daily in the vain endeavour to get thin! Up this same path I came across a remarkable specimen of the English language affixed to a tree, as a warning to all who used it: "In the month of Juli and August it will cuttered the wood in the forest Because by the transport stones also are coming down is it necessary to have care of it."

It was a great pleasure to help towards the building of the little church, and we got up several entertainments in its aid; and so not only was the foundation-stone laid, but the pretty church was consecrated and opened. A kind old friend of mine, the late Bishop of Gloucester (Dr. Ellicott)—whose acquaintance I made through a letter he wrote me to ask if I was connected with the Pleydell Wiltons of that city—took a leading part in the ceremony. The Bishop was devoted to the Bel Alp, and once, when he took my husband, who was staying there, on to the great Aletsch glacier without a guide, said to him, speaking of Pontresina, that he did not consider the Morteratsch glacier one "fit for a gentleman."

We were lucky in the friends we met to help us

with the entertainments in each succeeding year. *Cox and Box* was acted by the brilliant composer of its delightful melodies, Arthur Sullivan, and by Arthur Cecil and Joseph Barnby, the last making a capital Sergeant Bouncer. Arthur Sullivan was very anxious to have a gaudy waistcoat for Mr. Cox, and we searched Pontresina and St. Moritz high and low, but nothing of the kind could be found. At last, after fruitless efforts, an idea struck me. I hunted for a piece of the most startling material that I could buy, and succeeded in finding a pattern that gave one a headache to look at. Arthur Sullivan brought me one of his own waistcoats, which I covered with this wonderful conglomeration of colour. He was in ecstasies, and vowed he would never have it taken off!

*The Vicarage* was acted by ourselves and Arthur Cecil; and so were *Good for Nothing* and a scene from *Money*. These, with songs and recitations and overtures played by Arthur Sullivan and our musical friend already mentioned, Otto Goldschmidt, made up happy evenings and drew large sums.

It was at Pontresina that I had the privilege of acting for a short time as sick-nurse to one whom I, with others in all ranks of life and all parts of the Empire, recall with affection and regret. My patient was Prince Christian Victor of Schleswig-Holstein, then a boy of twelve or thirteen, who was staying there with his parents and his younger brother, Prince "Abby." Prince Christian Victor fell ill with serious throat mischief; and when Princess Christian asked me if I would help her, I readily took charge of him and helped to nurse him till he recovered. He was a capital patient, gentle and obedient. When he was well enough to sit up and be read to, what he demanded first was always the cricket news out of the papers, at which his large blue eyes glistened with excitement. On the day when he was allowed to take his first short walk, he looked up at me, as

we were returning to the hotel, and said with a pathetic smile, "You are so good to me, Dr. Bancroft" (for so he called me). "May I kiss you?"

I allude to this incident because it is told in the *Life of the young soldier*, whose promising career was so sadly cut short during the South African War. My copy of the book was given to me by the afflicted Princess, with a locket containing a portrait of her poor son—the last "snapshot" taken of him by a comrade-in-arms.

At Pontresina, also, we cemented a friendship, begun some years before, with Lord Fitzmaurice. He was our principal supporter at a supper which we once gave to the guides. An amusing feature of the entertainment was the big frying-pan which for so many years had done good service at the Boval hut; on this occasion it was highly polished and filled with tobacco and cigars. I well remember the speech which Lord Fitzmaurice made in fluent German; and how, after supper, when we had listened to songs from the guides, they presented me with a basket of edelweiss tied with the guides' colours, and escorted me to the street, where their parting cheers awoke the slumbering villagers and the visitors who had sought an early bed! Among the latter was the late Lord Goschen, who the next morning said he much wished we had invited him to the little feast.

Those were the days of the old-fashioned *table d'hôte*, at which we made up a happy party. One evening Arthur Sullivan drew the attention of Edmund Yates, who was at the head of the long table, to a new arrival some way removed from us—a remarkably pretty woman. Yates, ever an admirer of the fair sex, the better to have a good look at her, rose from his chair very much in the attitude of a public speaker. Arthur at once rapped the table with his knife, and said, "Hear, hear!" The attention of the surrounding guests was instantly



attracted. Yates was so absorbed that he did not for the moment realise his ludicrous position. When he did, he resumed his seat in confusion—and, for the first time for years, I should say, positively blushing.

The incident was greatly enjoyed by our old friends, Sir George and Lady Lewis, and the popular Cambridge don Mr. Oscar Browning. We also have met in the beautiful Swiss valley, the Mundellas, the de la Rues, Mr. Briton Riviere, Mr. Henry Shee, the two great explorers Burton and Stanley, Professor Huxley, the Hares, the Pineros, and a charming young lady known then as Miss Endicott, for it was before she had ever seen the great statesman, the Right Hon. Joseph Chamberlain.

I am glad to include in the illustrations to this volume a photograph of Mr. Pinero and my husband on the "saddle" of the Diavolezza, taken by the widow of Colonel Burnaby. The frontispiece to this volume is from a drawing made, unknown to me, by Beatrice Ward—Leslie Ward's sister—as I sat by a window in our room at Pontresina, reading.

On our way to the Engadine we have stopped at Ragatz, and I remember an occasion when the little town was *en fête* to celebrate the birthday of "Son Excellence Monsieur Emanuel Arago," who was one of the Foreign Ministers at Berne. Very old, very distinguished, and much beloved, he was serenaded at early morn, and flagged, *fêted*, and fireworked until dewy eve. At night a little French play, written for the occasion, was acted at the Kursaal, a leading character in it being taken by the Franco-American Duchesse Decazes (*née* Singer). On a young visitor asking me, naïvely, "Is she a real Duchess?" I am afraid I had the impudence immediately to answer, "Real? Oh yes; but *machine-made*!"

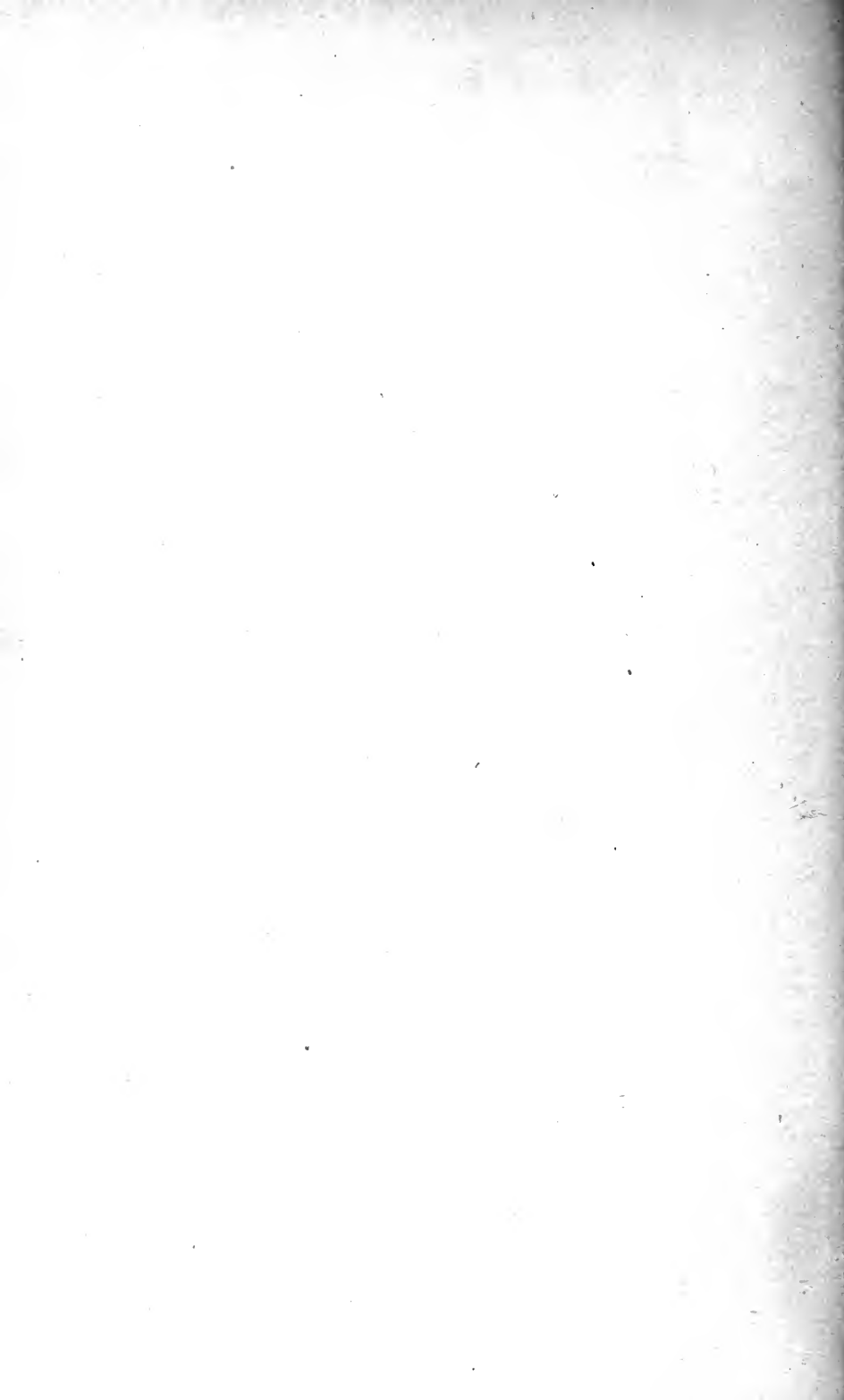
During one of our later visits we had the unpleasant experience of an earthquake. A long spell of perfect weather was broken by a thunderstorm of great violence, which culminated at night in two

slight, but decided, shocks. The first, and slightest, was followed in a few minutes by a positive *tremblement de terre*. I have no personal impressions to relate, as sleep ignominiously robbed me of the privilege of assisting at the earthquake; but some who, though in bed, were still awake, attributed the roaring sound and the accompanying rattle of crockery to the fall overhead of heavy trunks or furniture. One lady, who occupied a room low down, thought barrels of wine were being rolled about in the cellars, while other disturbed creatures imagined that gigantic American trunks, belonging to unusually late arrivals, were being dropped on the staircases. In the morning we learnt that the alarm had been shared at St. Moritz, Samaden, and other villages, but, beyond some cracks in the ceilings of old houses, we heard of no damage.

My good-bye to Pontresina shall be a little tale of filial love which we learnt there. For five-and-twenty years Madame Leupold, a brilliant pianist, who for some time gave lessons to the daughters of the present King and Queen, had visited the little village with her son, Hugo. She had long been a sufferer from sleeplessness and neuralgia, and the noise of even the quietest inn became unbearable. At last she took up her quarters in a humble summer cottage, on the grassy slope above which was a favoured nook where, when well enough, the little lady would sit for hours attended by her devoted son. On their arrival one year, as towards evening they reached their destination, the mother's eyes sought her favourite retreat—to see, to her amazement and regret, that a *chalet* had been built upon the spot she knew so well. Horrified, she turned to her son, and exclaimed that Pontresina would never be the same to her again. He consoled her, saying that to-morrow they would seek another corner. In the morning Hugo went to his mother with the news that he knew all about the little *chalet*, that he had the key, and that he would show her over it if



PINERO AND BANGROFT IN THE ENGADINE



she would go with him. Arriving at the porch, they unlocked the door, and both entered. The invalid's delight and admiration were unbounded at the charming little rooms, with their lovely views, the tiny kitchen, the open piano, and every detail of pretty furniture. "Oh, Hugo, what a little Paradise! What taste!—what comfort! Tell me who the owner of it is." He kissed her and said, "*You, mother dear.*" Silently, with the aid of good friends in the village, had Hugo carried out the building and furnishing of this fairy home, and in his own quiet way he had acted his little play.

My final recollection of the Engadine is of a happy Christmas spent at St. Moritz—in those days chiefly the winter resort of invalids, but now largely given up to youth and strength. One poor young fellow, with a Wellingtonian nose, I remember well—so pleasant and so cheerful. His name was Marshall, and we called him "*Marshal Nez.*" The life there, my husband said, very much resembled that on shipboard—of which, as the reader has already been told, I remained ignorant—for the people did not merely come and go as in the summer season, and so every one seemed to know every one else. The short but lovely days had five hours of warm sun, a deep-blue sky, and an atmosphere that was absolutely still. Skating and tobogganning were, of course, the chief amusements. The Cresta "run," then quite new, has two terrible corners, which I christened "*Battledore*" and "*Shuttlecock*"—names which are still retained. The length of the run was then about three-quarters of a mile, and at "racing" pace it was covered in a minute and a half. The slow walk up again took fully twenty minutes, and reminded one of marrying in haste—to repent at leisure!

The village shops in the Dorf were open, but those at the Bad seemed to be hermetically sealed. The big hotels, the Kurhaus and the Trinkhalle, were all as silent as the big clock, which, as my

husband said, had "grown tired of telling the hour to no one!"

We have happy memories, too, of the Italian Lakes—which we visited after leaving the Swiss mountains—and especially of Como; of charming hospitalities on its shores and of the friends we met and made there. At Cadenabbia, particularly, we have dreamed away many days of repose.

Seated one night in front of the Hôtel Belle Vue, when the lake was bathed in moonlight, we were told a little story of its fascination in words something like these:

"It is five-and-twenty years since I first visited the Lake of Como, and I come to it again and again whenever I can do so. The first time I was here, I fell into conversation with a stranger—who was then what I am now, a middle-aged Englishman—whom I had met on one of the boats. He told me that he had first known the lake twenty-five years before, when he was a youngster enjoying his holiday on the eve of joining his regiment, to which he had just been gazetted, in India. He fell ill with fever during his first year of service, and was sent home on sick-leave. He disembarked at some port in the Mediterranean, and resolved to take the Lake of Como for a brief visit on his way to his own country. Bewitched more and more by its beauties, he lingered on, till at last he realised how little of his leave would remain for home and friends. When, at length, he reached England, he found it so cold and sunless that the thought of his beloved lake acted like a magnet, drawing him irresistibly back to pass there the brief remnant of his leave. 'I came,' said the soldier, 'as fast as I could get here, being miserly over every hour I had left to me for indulgence in its fascination. One day, quite soon, I met an Italian girl with whom I fell desperately in love. In a few words I'll tell you my life and history since I proposed to her: I was accepted; I resigned my commission; I married; I bought a villa on the shore of Como; I've lived

there ever since, and here' (pointing to a handsome lad of some twenty years) 'comes my son. Let me present him.'"

There is no truer lover of Cadenabbia than the Right Hon. Henry Labouchere. We often met him there, before his retirement from public life, and before he had made his winter home in a beautiful villa at Florence. On one occasion we arrived in the evening and peered through the windows at the crowded *table d'hôte*. In a conspicuous position we saw, to our amusement, the witty M.P. seated between two well-known dignitaries of the Church whom we had known at Pontresina when the church there was opened. They appeared to be revelling in amusing stories, and the trio was very merry. When the meal was over, we asked one of these prelates how he had got on at dinner. "Oh, admirably!" he replied. "My friend and I were so fortunate in our neighbour, a delightful companion. I wonder if you happen to know who he is?" In the grove of olive trees the then senior member for Northampton was seated in a rocking-chair in a halo of cigarette smoke. I said, "Don't you recognise him?" "No." "That is Mr. Labouchere." "Really, you don't say so!" What those simple words might have been meant to convey I never knew, for the parson hurried off to impart the information to his companion.

Hard by the hotel was a shop kept by an old curiosity dealer, with whom Mr. Labouchere and ourselves had some harmless fun one day. I had been buying some pretty pieces of silk, and, when about to leave, stopped to turn over a tray full of odds and ends, in which old shoe-buckles, coins, supposed relics from Pompeii, and every conceivable kind of rubbish were mixed together, including a piece of old iron-work which, on closer inspection, amused us immensely. We saw our way to a joke with the *bric-à-brac* merchant, and retired to a distant corner with our treasure, pretending to examine it closely, and, to the amazement of the old Italian,

entering into apparent ecstasies over it. At last we asked him what he would take for the seeming treasure. The wily dealer, completely taken in by our pantomime, was at once alive to its merits, and assured us it was a "rare specimen." We cordially agreed, and begged him to be candid as to its being really genuine. "Mais oui, oui, oui, c'est vraiment—vraiment véritable; et bien remarquable!" "Combien?" "Pour vous—mais seulement pour vous—vingt-cinq francs."

We suggested the five without the twenty. The old man asked us if we wished to rob him. We worked up the scene until we were obliged to go away to hide our laughter, saying we would think the matter over.

This wonderful discovery, this veritable antiquity, was a broken fragment of worthless old iron, impressed with the Royal arms and motto of England, and stamped with these words: "Barnard, Bishop & Barnard's Patent Mowing Machine!"

Oh! what a fuss there was one year over the services at the beautiful little English church at Cadenabbia, which by some were thought too "high"! One visitor was very irate, and appealed vehemently to Mr. Labouchere for his sympathy and support, saying with bitterness that he could no longer worship there. The politician humorously pointed with his cigarette to the opposite shore, and suggested that the visitor should transfer his patronage to the English church at Bellagio. He was met with the objection that the services held there were as much too "low" as those at Cadenabbia were too "high." Mr. Labouchere was, of course, equal to the occasion; he informed his interlocutor that there was still a third course open to him—to wait until the bells of the rival establishments began to ring, then to hire a boat, to row to the exact middle of the lake, there to stop, and then to say his prayers between the two!

There also we paid visits to Signor Piatti, the



monarch of the violoncello, at his pretty villa, and heard duets played by him and Madame Schumann.

When in Italy we were often invited by Ouida to go and see her at Florence, but could not do so. She tried several times to write a play for us; the admirable title of one of them I will give to modern playwrights, *A House Party*. I add the last letter I received from that strange and accomplished woman; it was written very shortly before her death.

DEAR THALIA,—

I have been and am still very ill. For two days I was near death. I should grieve to leave my dear dogs. Their lives are too short in comparison with their devotion. I did get your long letter after some delay. I fear many letters are lost between Italy and England. I have seen a bag filled with the contents of pillar-boxes reposing in sweet solitude on the pavement of a deserted street in Florence!

I am so glad that you and your dear husband are both well and happy. What a brilliant life you have both had! I wish I could come and see you all and the dear old country, where its sons and daughters are never content except when they are out of it.

Love to you and Sir Squire. Believe me, always your and his admirer and friend,

OUIDA.

Another delightful and much-regretted friend whom we met there, and who was too soon removed, was Mrs. Craigie ("John Oliver Hobbes"), of whom Lord Curzon so eloquently said at the unveiling of her memorial, "Like an apparition she burst upon the scene in her young prime, flashed across it in a swift trail of light, and vanished into the unseen."

During one of our holidays I came across—I cannot remember exactly when or where—an extraordinary bill from a decorator for certain reparations

in a foreign church. I reproduce it in the hope that it may amuse the reader, as it did me.

Touching up Ten Commandments . . . . .	25 francs
Reviving Pontius Pilate, and putting a new rib in his back . . . . .	15 "
Putting a new tail on the rooster of St. Peter and mending his comb . . . . .	20 "
Embellishing and gilding left wing of the Guardian Angel . . . . .	27 "
Washing the servant of the High Priest and rouging his cheek . . . . .	15 "
Bordering the robe of Herod and dressing his wig . . . . .	22 "
Cleaning the ears of Balaam's ass and shoeing him . . . . .	20 "
Decorating Noah's Ark . . . . .	25 "
Mending the shirt of the Prodigal Son and cleaning his ears . . . . .	15 "
Renewing Heaven, adjusting the North Star, and cleaning the Moon . . . . .	35 "
Reanimating the flames of Purgatory and restoring Souls . . . . .	30 "
Reviving the flames of Hell . . . . .	20 "
Putting a new tail on the Devil, mending his left hoof, with several extra jobs for the Damned . . . . .	45 "
Total . . . . .	<u>314</u> "

Of course we often stayed in Paris on our way home from these trips abroad, and paid more than one interesting visit to the charming green-room of the most complete of theatres—the Français—where we also saw some of the *loges des artistes*.

In the year of one of the great exhibitions I ventured in the *ballon captif*, and we also visited the realistic panorama of the *Siege of Paris*. At the latter we were greatly annoyed by a strange-looking creature, who persisted in dogging our steps whichever way we turned. He wore an old slouch hat, the collar of his coat was turned up, and one could not fail to observe his moustache, which seemed to grow upwards in a singular fashion. This man followed us round and round the gallery, always halting when we did. At last, growing more familiar, he bestowed upon us mysterious nudges and mutterings, which, without disclosing his nationality, cast doubts upon his sanity. He presently became more violent in his gesticulations; then suddenly his

moustache *fell to the ground*, and at once revealed the well-known features of that dear old practical joker, Johnny Toole!

Our ever-regretted old comrade played another joke upon us a few days later at the Restaurant Champeaux, in the Place de la Bourse, which then had a shingly floor and trees reaching to its glass roof. He had seen us enter the restaurant, where, presently, to our amazement, our little party became the object of extraordinary attention. Nothing seemed to be thought good enough for us. The bowing and scraping increased with each course; no end of little *politesses* were pressed upon us; humble waiters left our table to the control of more gorgeous persons, and the proprietor, or manager, superintended our meal himself. Meanwhile, groups of visitors were whispering together, and staring at us in a marked manner. We wondered what it could mean! When, at last, our bill was brought, it certainly seemed a little extravagant, but as nothing compared to the ceremonial with which our coats and cloaks were handed to us. What seemed to be the whole staff and their relatives—uncles, cousins, aunts—were assembled to witness our modest departure. We learnt, when we gained the street, that we had been pointed out as members of the English Royal Family, travelling *incog.* to see the exhibition quietly! We certainly discovered that we had breakfasted *en prince*.

One year, I remember, we made a longer stay than usual and saw more of the historic city than we ever had the chance to know before. Among other places, we drove to Père la Chaise, where we saw the tomb of Abélard and Héloïse, and other vaults almost as celebrated. After wandering in the heat up and down countless alleys, we emerged upon the broad main path of the cemetery, at the end of which, above its noble flight of steps, we caught sight of a crowd of people and the figure of a man violently gesticulating. We thought ourselves indeed in luck;

evidently a big funeral was taking place, and one of the customary orations was being delivered by some eminent Frenchman. We hurried down the path and up the steep stone steps, hearing, as we drew nearer, the voice of the speaker, and noticing, more and more, the rapt attention of his listeners. Suddenly, as we got quite close, we found to our great surprise that the speech was being made in our own language, and as I panted up the last few steps, exhausted by heat and fatigue, I just caught these words: "Yes, that is the tomb of the great Cherubini; there lie the remains of the distinguished actor Talma; and there" (in a lower tone, as the orator pointed us out) "are Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft, of the Haymarket Theatre!" The crowd consisted of a "personally conducted" tourist party, and we both felt fit to sink into an adjacent open grave!

And now I will hand the pen back to my husband.

The baritone solo will be brief. There is but little to add to this chapter. In these days of easy travel, with such temptations as "A Week in Lovely Lucerne for Five Pounds," there is no need to dwell on trips to Norway or Continental watering-places, where, whether the baths are of mud or pine, and the springs charged with salt or iron, the life is much the same.

In recent years the fascinations of Monte Carlo have drawn me there for a short while at Easter time, and during one of these visits Monsieur "Sem" made his admirable caricature of me. I have also twice visited the Côte d'Azur in the autumn. The first time was at the close of a holiday on the Lake of Como, when it occurred to me that it would be an experience to learn, on the way to Genoa, what the wicked place looked like in the dead season. I found the weather little hotter than that I had left in Italy. By a clause in the lease of the Hôtel de Paris, I was told, its omnibus with the four grey horses, driven by a near relation of the Postillon de Longemeaux, must



CARICATURE BY "SEM"



meet every train that stops at Monte Carlo throughout the year. It was, however, a bad moment to ask their hospitality, as a big addition to the hotel was being built, so noise and dust ran riot. The work was only just begun, but, judging by its growth hour by hour, under the hands of picturesque gangs of Nicois and Italians, it seemed credible that all might be finished in time for the season, as they assured me it would be. In "the rooms" I found four tables going—all in the centre *salle*, three being devoted to roulette (what a prize that monk who invented the game would take in mathematics even nowadays!). These three were surrounded by strange and motley crowds, for ever changing, except in face, in which they always look the same. At the one table reserved for *trente-et-quarante*, the *croupiers*—I beg their pardon, *Messieurs les employés*—were often idly waiting for a game until the afternoon. I only saw one heavy player; he scattered *mille* notes as though they were cigarette papers, and "sowed" his *louis* like grain upon the green cloth. The weather was really delightful, but—there was a flaw—the mosquitoes had not yet taken their departure. Over the ravages they caused let me draw a veil thicker than the net curtains, which do but little to prevent them. Everywhere were signs and sounds of the coming season. Every place was *en réparation*, and the gardens were resuming their beauty almost by magic, or as if produced in some theatre painting-room; for virgin turf was taking the place of burnt-up earth, which looked but yesterday as brown as Hyde Park after a baking August Bank Holiday. In fact, the spider was weaving the very prettiest of webs, and making his "parlour" more than ever inviting; indeed, he worked, and fiercely, night and day, either by flaring gas-lights or in the glare of the beautiful southern sun.

My wife accompanied me on two visits to the Riviera, but for Monte Carlo she cared but little. I remember that one morning, when we entered the

rooms at the opening hour, we could not fail to notice in the rush a quiet-looking, middle-aged Englishman, who made for one of the *trente-et-quarante* tables and seated himself in the most business-like way. He then took out a packet of *mille* notes, counted the maximum and placed his stake upon *Rouge*, long before all the preliminaries were finished or the game begun. When a neighbour remarked casually on the boldness of the first stake, the man replied that he was not a gambler; he was only spending a few days in the place from curiosity, but was acting in obedience to the most vivid dream his life had ever known. On the strength of this dream he had just cashed a cheque for five hundred pounds, all of which, practically, was lying on the table. His dream had told him to make for the table he was seated at, to take the particular chair he had chosen, opposite a picture which he pointed out, and to put the maximum on *Rouge* for the first *coup*. All this he had done. The cards were now made and shuffled, then cut and dealt. The top row of cards counted thirty-two: the *croupier* said "*Deux*," which looked all in favour of *Noir*; the second row followed, they made thirty-one; the *croupier* grunted "*Un*," and then said, "*Rouge gagne et Couleur*." The maximum was counted and placed back on *Rouge*, twelve *mille* notes were counted—all very methodically—and placed on the top of the others; the player quietly took them up, put them in his pocket, rose, bowed to the *croupiers*, said, "Good-morning; I'm not going to play the fool," and walked away.

We soon followed, and strolled in the glare of the sun upon the beautiful terrace. A pigeon-shooting match was in progress, and a poor wounded bird flew feebly towards us and almost fell upon my wife, its blood spattering her dress. This painful episode ended, there and then, her stay at Monte Carlo.

I will bring these holiday notes to a close by a reference to the Passion Play at Ober-Ammergau, which it was twice my privilege to see acted—first



in 1890, again in 1900. Many as are the descriptions that have been written of this famous festival, I do not know of one composed from the point of view of an actor and stage-manager; and it is on this account that some notes of mine, made when its effect was fresh upon my mind, may even now have a little interest.

What I felt in 1890 about the "Gospel according to St. Daisenberger," as I have heard it—somewhat profanely—called, was much what I felt in 1900, except that my second visit revealed to me the absolutely mechanical nature of the performance, each representative giving as exact a reproduction of his predecessor in the part as "coaching" could make possible. The theatre was then a new structure, and, happily for the occupants of the cheaper seats, was entirely roofed in.

In 1890 visitors had to walk or drive a great part of the way from Munich to Ammergau; ten years afterwards the train went there direct; and, when next the play is given, no doubt motors will be the chief conveyance to the little village, whose name is known as well as that of any city in the world.

Animated as it is by religious enthusiasm and local superstition, the version of "the story which has transformed the world" may be too doctrinal in treatment and too overlaid with foreshadowings from the Old Testament of events chronicled in the New. But the whole representation—the evident result of organised skill (with the aid, it is whispered, of an accomplished stage-manager from Munich)—remains marvellously good when considered as the work of tradition carried out at the hands of peasants; and this both in its acting and in the judgment shown throughout in selecting faces and figures, even down to such minor parts as Barabbas or the Impenitent Thief.

I hardly like to quarrel with the "crowd," which was splendid in material, if a little trying in the painful unanimity of its frequent shouts. Now and

again things were attempted—like the appearance of the Angel in the Garden of Gethsemane—which the limited dramatic means at command could not impressively realise. It should be remembered that these players give in truth a morning performance, and have to face the veritable elements, knowing nothing of the mysteries of the limelight; nor do they dabble with cosmetics, beyond some powder in a beard, and a slight pallor on the face of Christus.

The tableaux from the Old Testament were admirably done, but I thought there were too many of them. Adam and Eve expelled from the Garden of Eden and the Remorse of Cain were the most satisfying of them. So motionless, indeed, were the figures that I clearly heard a visitor who was seated near me express his regret at the introduction of "the waxworks." When I first saw the play the best performance by far was given by Josef Mayr as the Christus. On my second visit he had grown too old for the part; but, with a patriarchal beard, was of great value as the Prologue and Chorus, and declaimed the frequent explanatory verses with dignity and the repose of a practised actor.

The best acting on my second visit was shown, I thought, by the representatives of Judas, Caiaphas, and John; the two disciples were played by villagers who had taken those parts on the previous occasion, and both were admirable. The Christus, Anton Lang, although in appearance he far eclipsed his predecessor, lacked his strength and his convincing voice; but Lang is young enough to repeat his work, and, no doubt, will do so with increased success at the next production. The female parts were played feebly in 1900, for I remember well, in contrast, the Madonna of ten years before; but I could not keep my managerial mind from casting the play in London, and longing to see Irving as Judas, with Tree as Pontius Pilate, and to listen to the beautiful voice of Forbes-Robertson as the Christus. By far the

most effective and affecting scene was the Last Supper; this moved me to tears, while I was impressed by choked but audible sobs around me; but, when the scene was over, I felt—I hardly know why—that there are still some things which should not, however reverently, be mimicked, “and these are of them.”

The Crucifixion had not the same effect upon me. Curiosity during the twenty minutes the figure is on the cross took the place of emotion—partly, perhaps, because I was tired, while the chief “trick” of it was discovered in a moment, I remember, by my wife, who was with me on the occasion of the first visit. The Descent from the Cross—a careful study in detail from the great Rubens picture—was tenderly treated by the actors of Joseph of Arimathæa and Nicodemus. The Resurrection, however, seemed to me trivial and childish, and the Ascension did not prove a fitting end to a performance so remarkable and unique, when all is said and done, that to see it once is well worth any trouble by the way.

I remember that the representation lasted eight whole hours—two of which might have been ruthlessly cut away with great advantage to the rest; for the bringing of Christ before Annas, before Caiaphas, before Pilate, before Herod, and again before Pilate, grew wearisome. Yet throughout all these hours there was never a hitch, never a pause, never the faintest sound of preparation from the vast numbers engaged behind the curtain. All this was as striking as the stillness of the audience, some four thousand in number, who sat throughout, if not with reverence, at least with profound respect.

Many are the heart-burnings, and even jealousies, in the little village, while the play is being cast by a committee from whose fiat there is no appeal; and deep is the grief at the enforced resignation, through advancing years, of former favourite characters. Thus, even in the peaceful Bavarian Alps,

as in London's busy theatre-land, I was reminded of a whisper in our ears in the early days of our own enterprise—that management is not always a bed of roses!

One word of advice might be given to the Burgermeister and others in control: to keep the chief performers from the gaping crowd on the eve of the play, or so to arrange that they should not then follow their usual vocations. To see, for hours, a stream of adoring maidens pleading for the autographs of Christus or Johannes on the photographs they have bought from them is hardly edifying; nor does it add to the dignity of the morrow to overhear a dispute with Pontius Pilate about the price of a bedroom, or to think that it may have only just been put in order by Martha or Mary.

After our first visit my wife received from Josef Mayr, a wood-carver by trade, a letter, of which the following is a translation:

Forgive me for only being able to thank you, honoured lady, to-day for the distinction you have conferred upon me by sending me your photographs. Let me thank you, indeed, most heartily for them.

It makes me very happy indeed to have received them from your own hands. The amateur would like to enclose with these lines one of his likenesses in the part of Christus, as a sign of his deep respect for the great English artist, did he not consider it too bold an action. In fact, he has not the courage to do so.

I remain with esteem and respect,

Your devoted

JOSEF MAYR.

## CHAPTER XI

### REAPPEARANCE

“Let's return again,  
And suffice ourselves with the report of it.”

As it fell out, on my wife's birthday (January 12), in 1893, the following announcement appeared in the columns of the *Daily Telegraph*:

“An important revival of the celebrated play, *Diplomacy*, with a remarkable cast, will be the next production at the Garrick Theatre. Mr. Hare has persuaded Mr. Bancroft to reappear in his original character of Count Orloff; Mr. Arthur Cecil has been specially engaged for his old part of Baron Stein; Julian Beauclerc will be played by Mr. Forbes-Robertson; Mr. Gilbert Hare will be the young attaché; and the elder brother, Henry Beauclerc, will be played for the first time by Mr. Hare. Miss Kate Rorke will be the new Dora; the Countess Zicka will be acted by Miss Olga Nethersole; and Lady Monckton will appear, for the first time under Mr. Hare's management, as the Marquise de Rio Zares.

“But, in addition to these conspicuous attractions, there will be one of even greater significance. To show her friendship and regard for her old comrade, Mrs. Bancroft has most generously given her services for a certain number of weeks, and will appear as Lady Henry Fairfax. Although this part is a small one, it is needless to say how valuable the services of this brilliant actress will prove, and her temporary

return to the stage cannot fail to be welcomed by all classes of playgoers with interest and delight."

Some months before the arrangement referred to in the above paragraphs was made, the revival of *Diplomacy*, which is my property, had been mooted by another prominent manager, who wished to do the play on most liberal conditions; but I regarded my wife's part as so unworthy of her—her original appearance in it being one of many instances of self-abnegation during our management—that I declined to entertain the proposal, although she was tempted by exceptional personal terms. Very shortly afterwards Hare came to me with a strongly expressed desire to revive the play at the Garrick Theatre, a desire that put a different aspect on the case, and aroused other feelings, far away from mercenary. It was very soon agreed that Hare should revive the play, and that I should act my old part of Orloff, an arrangement which he and I both found pleasant. The special engagements referred to were made, and the rehearsals about to begin, when my wife said to me, "Do you think Hare would like *me* to play Lady Henry Fairfax for him?" I answered that the part would be a wretched one for her to reappear in after an absence from the stage of more than seven years; urging also how I had refused, and so recently, the former application for the play, mainly on that account. These and other arguments I used; still she persisted, and said she would reappear in the part, poor as it was, if Hare thought her doing so for a short time would be of advantage to him, and that, if so, it should be a service on her part of comradeship and without any consideration of money. I was greatly touched by her generous feelings, and at once expressed them to our old friend, who felt the kindness deeply, but feared—I think wisely—that my wife's withdrawal from the cast after "a short time" might, in the end, be more injurious than beneficial to the run. I told her all this, and

the answer was, "Well, I will play the part for fifty nights if Hare would like that"—an offer that was joyfully accepted. The revival was a brilliant success.

Immediately after the announcement was made the booking office was besieged, and the theatre was crammed to its full capacity for many months. When the promised fifty nights were coming towards an end, Hare begged my wife to name the terms herself on which she would continue to play. She answered that she would remain with him *on the same terms, and no other*, until he closed his theatre in July. This she did with delight until five days before the season ended, when, unhappily, she was thrown out of a cab and received a serious injury to her knee, from which she has suffered ever since.

In describing the scene on the first night of the revival, a distinguished journalist chronicled how the chief honours were reserved for my wife.

"The cheering," he related, "began as soon as her merry, musical laugh was heard at the wings; it grew in volume directly she was seen; and when at last she was permitted to speak the opening words of her part to Henry Beauclerc, 'You have not forgotten me, then, after this long absence?' the delighted audience seized upon the words as the cue for a tremendous shout of welcome that made the rafters ring. She was the idol of the hour; and when she came to the well-remembered description of the famous clock at Berne, the house became rapturous, laughed itself almost out of breath, and cheered and cheered again. The art of the actress was proved to be undimmed, and her triumph was complete."

According to another of those present:

"The evening was a festival in honour of her return; from the opening scenes to the final words it was a triumphal fugue, repeated in endless variations, with her as its theme. Rarely within the walls of any theatre had there been witnessed so overpowering a demonstration—so emotional, so entirely personal in

its object, so obviously spontaneous. The moment she entered the room she seemed to brighten everybody and everything in it. I do not know when I have had a greater treat than hearing the music of that perfectly pitched and perfectly modulated voice, which made itself tunefully heard, without any apparent effort, all over the house. . . . Time, inexorable as a rule, seemed to have reversed its course in her favour, for she seemed positively to have grown younger. The merry laugh, that would always be remembered by playgoers as one of her particular charms, had not lost a note, and her spirits had suffered no depression."

When the curtain fell on the last act the enthusiasm was so great that Hare went before the curtain and made a charming little speech, some words from which may be quoted here.

"The function will ever be memorable to me personally, and to you, I venture to think, too, as the date of the return to the stage of my old friend and once manager. With the greatest kindness, she has consented to appear in this revival; and, I think, after the reception that has been afforded her to-night, she will hesitate to be away from the scene of her triumphs for so long a period as that which has just elapsed."

This only redoubled the applause. My wife was led on to the stage by Hare, but the audience would not be content without some words from her own lips, which she gave with a laughing plea for the woman's right to the last word; and still she was kept on the stage to bow her acknowledgments to the cheers and applause which seemed as if they would never stop. It was a long, long time from the fall of the curtain before the enthusiastic audience finally dispersed.

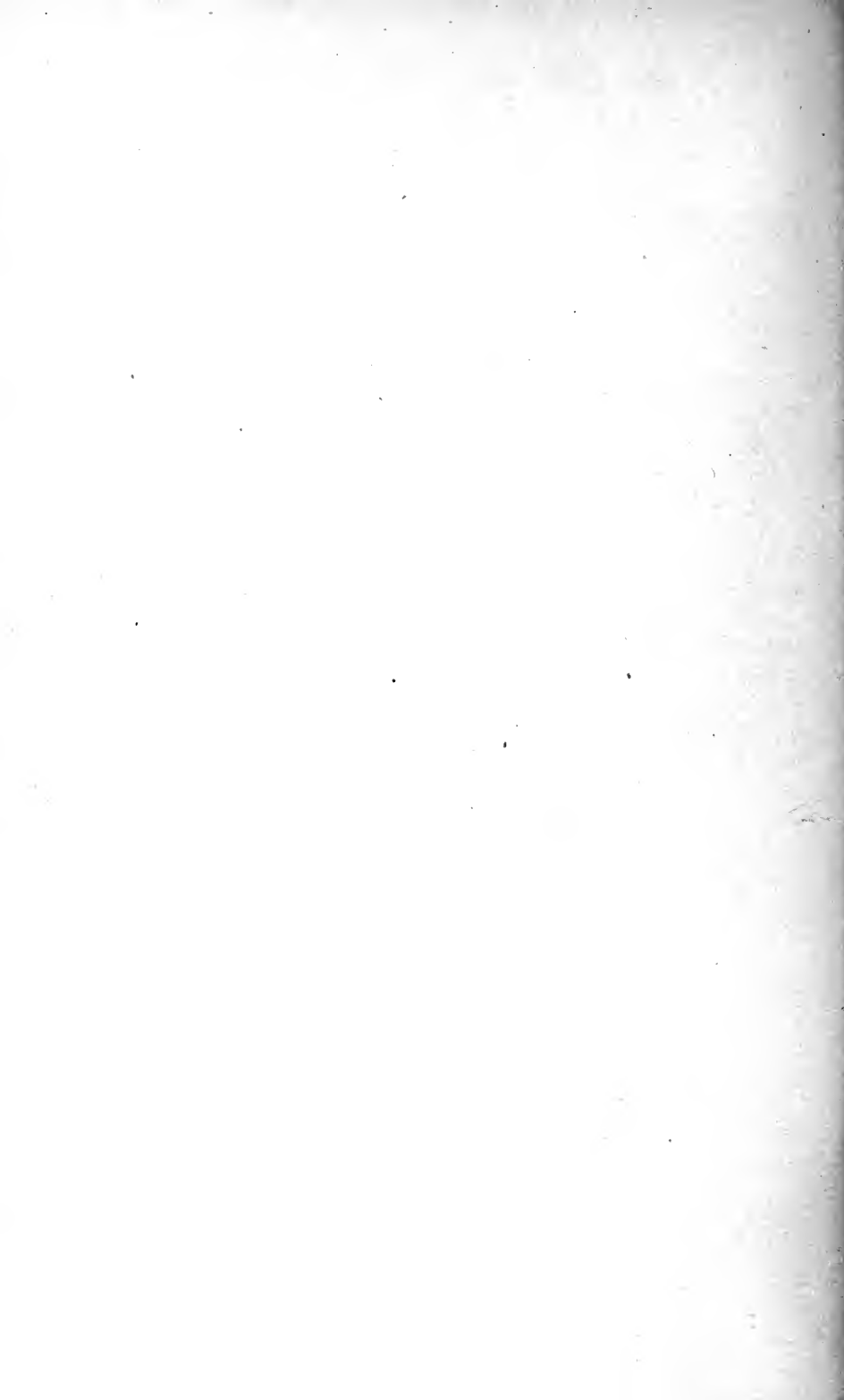
Another little ceremony, which came as an utter surprise to the central figure, and of which I was only told during the evening, was still to take place. Without saying a word of it to her, a large number





REAPPEARANCE

From a drawing made in the dressing-room



of my wife's friends and admirers collected on the stage, where Lady St. Helier (then Lady Jeune), acting on behalf of the Princess Christian, who was unfortunately prevented from being present as she had hoped to be, presented my wife with a beautiful diamond watch-bracelet, the gift of old friends and admirers. From the very graceful speech made by Lady St. Helier on that occasion come the following words :

“ When you gave up management a few years ago we all felt that your disappearance would leave a blank not easily, if it ever could be, filled, and it is no disparagement to any one to say that no one ever has taken your place. You cannot doubt how deep and genuine is the pleasure with which your reappearance has been welcomed, and in long years to come I feel sure the echo of the cheers which greeted you will live in your heart as an expression of public gratitude and affection towards one to whom we all owe a debt of deep and lasting pleasure. We all felt we should like to give you something as a souvenir of to-night, and flowers naturally suggested themselves as the most lovely and delicate offering we could lay at your feet. But flowers fade, and we did not wish our little present to be swept away in the flood we see around us of beautiful but fading flowers. We hope that the gift which we offer you may always serve to remind you, though very inadequately, of the esteem, regard, and great affection of the friends who give it you.”

It was a joyous time for all concerned in the play, which has always proved a great success.

My wife greatly valued the charming souvenir Hare gave her on the hundredth night of the revival, and also all the kindness and consideration he showed towards his old and first London manager, while her affectionate reception by the public warmed and rejoiced her heart.

I know, of course, that it might occur to some minds that as my wife added largely to the receipts by joining the cast of *Diplomacy*, not only the

management, but I—who had a pecuniary interest in the result of the production—gained considerably.

The intimacy of more than forty years entitles me to say that no such idea crossed her mind, no such stuff was in her thoughts. It was freely acknowledged to be “a labour of love,” and, in simple truth, a flower plucked from the sweet garden of a generous nature, in harmony with the life of one who had been a bread-winner since her tongue could lisp.

For the joint tour my wife and I afterwards made with Hare and his company to Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Edinburgh, and Glasgow, a different arrangement was entered into, and continued when the performance was resumed at the Garrick Theatre until the close of the year.

The accident to which I have referred was most unlucky. My wife was sadly injured, but I need only allude to it so far as it affects this narrative.

Various acts of sympathy were shown to her, not only by friends, as might have been looked for, but by many whom my wife had neither met nor known.

She was also honoured, through the Duchess of Roxburghe, by the late Queen’s sympathy, and by Her Majesty’s desire to be kept informed of the progress made towards recovery.

The letter which I add gave my wife infinite pleasure, the writer of it not being prone readily to show his feelings :

89, PROMENADE, HOMBURG,  
July 29, 1893.

MY DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,—

I can’t help writing to tell you how delighted we are to hear you are making such good progress towards recovery—and that you are likely to be able to get out of town next week. Apart from any feeling of personal regard, it would have been a public calamity if your accident had permanently disabled you. I have a horror of “gush”—and the Englishman’s desire to keep his emotions to himself is always strong within me—but there are occasions when this

desire yields both to extreme pleasure and to extreme sorrow ; and when such an invaluable artist as yourself has had so narrow an escape from a dreadful catastrophe, it is impossible not to relieve one's feelings by writing to express one's gratitude, even at the risk of being tiresome. Please show me that you forgive me for worrying you with this letter by not replying to it—I shall then know that I have given you little or no trouble. I shall learn how you are.

My wife sends her best regards and joins with me in my pleasure at the good news.

Believe me to be always sincerely yours,

W. S. GILBERT.

After some weeks of kind and skilful treatment by Sir William MacCormac she was able to travel to Sheringham, all plans for a foreign trip having, of course, been abandoned. We were fortunate in the companionship of two old friends, Mr. and Mrs. Perugini, who were staying in the same hotel ; while the owners of Sheringham Hall and Felbrigg in the kindest way begged us to drive through their beautiful parks, whether closed to the public or not, and showed us, also, much hospitality. The fine Norfolk air gave sufficient strength to allow my wife to fulfil the promise she had made to take part in the brief tour with Hare. So long a time had passed since she had acted out of London, while of the five cities we visited she had only appeared in two, that, naturally, she added greatly to the success of the visits, and proved to be, in fact, as great an attraction as the play itself, in spite of her really slight part in it—the smallness of which was everywhere much deplored.

During the tour the exciting news came that we were all to go to Balmoral and act *Diplomacy* before Queen Victoria. Hare had special scenery prepared, and the play was carefully rehearsed to meet the size of the small stage.

I make a pause in my narrative to say that,

except when Her Majesty was seated in a carriage, my wife and I had only then seen the late Queen on two occasions.

The first of these was after the serious illness of the Prince of Wales from typhoid fever, in 1872, when the excitement reached so high a pitch that the bulletins from Sandringham were read out in the theatres between the acts, and the National Anthem and "God bless the Prince of Wales" were nightly played by the orchestras until more reassuring news came. I may say here that actors have always seemed to me to be strongly loyal, as a body: a survival, perhaps, of those troublous times of long ago when the theatres were all shut up, and the players among the first to rally round their King; for when treason was abroad and near the throne, the actors threw aside sock and buskin and took up arms to serve His Majesty.

The manifestations of loyalty to the throne and of personal attachment to His Royal Highness, which this illness seemed to set ablaze, culminated on the day of General Thanksgiving, when the Queen went, with the Prince of Wales, to the service held at St. Paul's. We were fortunate enough to receive tickets for the Cathedral from the Lord Chamberlain, and so witnessed the imposing ceremony. I shall never forget the august effect, nor the wonderful sound of it, when the vast and silent assembly rose as the great west door was thrown open and a loud voice announced "The Queen."

The second time was at the Jubilee of 1887, when we were splendidly placed in Westminster Abbey. An impressive sight! Three things concerning it dwell in my memory: the stately walk of the Queen down the nave, and the extraordinary impression created by that small but majestic figure; and two other personages—the then Crown Prince of Germany, soon afterwards for so brief a reign the Emperor Frederick, and the strikingly handsome Prince Rudolph of Austria.

The *Diplomacy* tour ended on a Saturday at Glasgow, and the Royal command was fixed for the following Thursday. My wife and I resolved to pass the intervening days at Ballater, where the season was practically over, there being but one or two ardent sportsmen remaining to "kill fish." We were made comfortable at the Invercauld Arms, the dismantling of some rooms being postponed on our account.

When we arrived there on the Monday evening we found a letter of welcome from the Hon. Alexander Yorke, who was in waiting at the Castle, and the news that he had the Queen's commands to invite us to attend an amateur performance which was to take place there on the following night, and in which the Princess Beatrice was to have a part. Mr. Yorke added that a similar invitation had been sent to Hare (who had decided to fill up the time at Aberdeen), as well as to the ladies and gentlemen of his company.

We were now well advanced in "chill October," and my wife, in her still far from robust state of health, did not dare risk the long drive to Balmoral and the late journey home. This was accepted as a sufficient excuse for her absence. I, however, was glad to avail myself of the honour, and, having chartered a carriage, had the pleasure of the company of Lady Monckton and Miss Kate Rorke, who, with Forbes-Robertson and Gilbert Hare, were able to arrive from Aberdeen in time, the telegraph wires having been kept busy to arrange things.

The amateur performance was a version of Sardou's *Pattes de Mouche*, and it was a valuable and interesting guide in regard to the size of the stage and the effect of a performance on the audience. The Queen was wheeled in a chair by her Indian servants to a private entrance to the ballroom, and conducted to her seat by her gentlemen-in-waiting and attendants. The comedy was acted under the

management of Mr. Alexander Yorke, an experienced and clever amateur. He and the Hon. Mary Hughes acted the two principal characters; other parts being taken by the Princess Beatrice and, if I remember rightly, by Sir James Reid and Sir Arthur Bigge.

When the play was over, to my surprise, Sir Henry Ponsonby, for many years the Queen's Private Secretary, came to me, and said, "The Queen will receive her guests in the drawing-room. I shall present you to Her Majesty; and then, as Mr. Hare is not here, will you kindly present the members of his company?" adding, after a moment's thought, that perhaps it would be better if Lady Amptill presented the ladies and I presented the gentlemen. I began to feel nervous at the unexpected responsibility, but was so reassured by Sir Henry that I soon was more at my ease. When I had the honour of being presented, the Queen, who stood alone in the centre of the room, surrounded by a circle formed by members of the Royal Family, Her Majesty's guests—who included, I remember, Sir Algernon and Lady Borthwick (as Lord and Lady Glenesk then were), and Johannes Wolff, the celebrated violinist, as well as the ladies and gentlemen in waiting—spoke to me for some minutes in perhaps the most beautiful and winning voice I ever listened to, although I have lived in the company of a strong rival to it for more than forty years. The Queen alluded with great sympathy to my wife's accident, and kept up a conversation with regard to the pleasure with which she was looking forward to seeing her act, in a way which placed me more than ever at her feet. I afterwards presented Mr. Forbes-Robertson, Mr. Gilbert Hare, and other gentlemen of Hare's company. The Queen then bowed with great charm to all present, and, in an impressive setting of ceremonial curtseys and salutations, retired with her ladies to her own apartments. We all had the honour of joining Her Majesty's guests,



among whom was Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, who was the Minister in attendance, at supper before we drove in high and happy spirits back to Ballater. It was an eventful evening, and I was proud that it should have befallen me.

My wife has never kept a diary, and my own attempts to do so have been very feeble, fated always to come to an untimely end before even the month of January was past. I may, however, take this opportunity to say that I have long contemplated the possible appearance, in some form or other, of this volume, and so have helped a naturally good memory by making certain notes. In this instance I am enabled to quote from a letter written at the time by my wife from Ballater, and her words will help to string this little chronicle together.

“B. has given me a glowing account of last night’s visit to Balmoral to see the amateur performance. The play was a version of *A Scrap of Paper*. B. says that Miss Hughes and Alec Yorke were both excellent in the principal parts, and that Princess Beatrice acted very well *en amateur* as the wife. The evening was full of surprises. He had to present the company to the Queen; both Forbie [Forbes-Robertson] and Bertie Hare are loud in his praise and say no one could have done it better, although he says himself that he was frightfully nervous. It would, however, take a small earthquake to upset his control. After the ceremony they all stayed to have supper with the Royal Family and the Household. Now I know the more than kind way in which the Queen spoke of me to B., I feel assured of a gracious welcome. He tells me the Queen’s exact words were: ‘I am so looking forward to Thursday, having never seen Mrs. Bancroft act, but I have for many years heard very much about her.’

“I am now going for a long drive in this beautiful country.”

The performance of *Diplomacy* was a splendid success and rejoiced all concerned in it. What astonished us most was the laughter and applause the play provoked—very different from the solemn ordeal of acting at Windsor, where rigorous court etiquette is observed. The Queen and the Empress Eugénie, who was staying at Abergeldie at the time, sat side by side. I was guilty of boring a tiny hole at the back of the scene to watch the effect of my wife's fun in her imitation of the Berne clock, and can only say, without the faintest affectation, that she never had a finer audience than Queen Victoria; not one of Her Majesty's subjects ever laughed or enjoyed the buoyant nonsense of it more.

When the play was over the Queen again received her guests, the Empress Eugénie being also there. Those who were not present on the Tuesday then had the honour of being presented by Lady Amphill and Sir Henry Ponsonby. Here again I can quote from another letter written by my wife.

“I was made very happy by the goodness of the public to me on my reappearance, and that has now been followed by the great delight of knowing from her own lips that I have given pleasure to the Queen, greater because I had abandoned the hope of ever acting before her, as since the Prince Consort's death she had never, as you know, been to a theatre. The words of praise were charming, the manner was even more so. To hear that singularly beautiful voice, to provoke that equally beautiful smile, gives me the sort of happiness which children feel. Lady Amphill presented me to Her Majesty, who at once placed me at my ease—her talk was so *friendly*. After dwelling on my wretched accident she was quite bountiful in expressing delight at the play, and ended by referring to the Berne clock and saying, ‘How you have made me laugh! and it is so nice to be merry.’

“ I then was presented to the Empress Eugénie, still strikingly handsome, who was also full of compliments and told me she had not seen a play acted for five-and-twenty years. I knew the thoughts that were behind her words.”

As I followed my wife and made my bow to the Queen, Her Majesty said, with a smile, “ Now I *have* seen Mrs. Bancroft.” The Queen’s final words, on retiring with her ladies, were: “ What an evening! and now it is all over.”

We then were presented by the Princess Beatrice, in the name of the Queen, with the gifts Her Majesty had already chosen as souvenirs of the occasion. My wife received the royal cipher in brilliants, rubies, and sapphires, surmounted by the imperial crown. I treasure a gold cigar-case.

At supper, I remember, my wife was telling a funny Scotch story, *sotto voce*, to Mr. Yorke, which Prince Henry of Battenberg partly overheard, and then insisted upon hearing fully. The laughter was most hearty, as was Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman’s appreciation of the accurate Scotch dialect, which surprised him.

I recall an incident of the evening, which left an ineffaceable impression on my memory.

The lady who had been in attendance on Her Majesty joined the party late, and said to Forbes-Robertson, next to whom she was seated, “ The Queen wishes it to be understood that she is quite aware that several of the ladies and gentlemen she has seen act this evening are the friends of her children.”

Prince Henry made a charming speech, which was admirably responded to by Hare, before we broke up in the small hours and drove through the snow-wrapped country back to Ballater.

Early in the morning, before we left for home, my wife wrote to Mr. Yorke to say how deeply she was impressed and touched by the kindness and help

she had received. Owing to her weak knee, a room on the ground floor had been assigned to her quite close to the improvised stage—one of the Royal servants, I remember, was stationed outside the door—and all the comfort was provided for her that forethought could suggest. I saw the letter, which was both charmingly and humorously expressed, and was not surprised to hear afterwards that it had been kept by the Queen.

In the following year my wife acted again in the Garrick Theatre, when she accepted an offer made to her by Hare to appear as Lady Franklin, her old part, in *Money*. She had the advantage of being again supported by Arthur Cecil as Mr. Graves, so they renewed the success of our old Haymarket days in their laughable scenes. The old comedy was strongly cast, and ran merrily for months. Besides Hare himself, Forbes-Robertson, Bouchier, Aynsworth, Brookfield, Kate Rorke, and Maud Millett also acted in it. I resisted all temptations to reappear.

A tragic circumstance was connected with the first night of this revival. Edmund Yates was seated in the centre of the stalls, and throughout my wife's performance he had laughed and applauded heartily. At its close, when she was loudly called before the curtain, he turned to his neighbour and said, "The old brigade, the old brigade—it will take a deal to beat it!" He then stooped for his hat, and fell forward in a fit. He never recovered consciousness.

"How oft when men are at the point of death  
Have they been merry!"

I helped to take him to the Savoy Hotel and to break the dreadful news to Mrs. Yates, to whom my wife and I had for many years a sincere attachment.

Once again my wife yielded to temptations to appear; this time with Tree at her old home in the Haymarket. She acted for fifty nights in *Fedora*, with Mrs. Patrick Campbell in the chief part and Tree as Loris Ipanoff.



ARTHUR CECIL AND MARIE BANCROFT IN "MONEY"



When Tree arranged with me to revive *Fedora*, which had not been acted since I produced the play in 1883, there was, unhappily, a discordant note connected with the revival which caused distress to all concerned, since it involved the withdrawal by Tree—in accordance, of course, with his right to do so—of Mrs. Patrick Campbell from Hare, to whom he had lent her services for a time. This happened at the most unfortunate moment, at the height of the great success Mrs. Campbell had achieved in Pinero's brilliant play, *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*, so strikingly following up, as she did, her first triumph with Alexander as *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*.

This meant a serious blow to both manager and author, no matter how they might replace Mrs. Campbell. It was a painful illustration of the inevitable risk which one manager takes in borrowing from another the services of an important actor or actress, unless for an entire run. There had already been an instance of borrowing in connection with the same play; for Hare had lent Forbes-Robertson to Irving for the part of Lancelot in Comyns Carr's play *King Arthur* at the Lyceum, and was obliged to claim his services for the production of Pinero's play at the Garrick Theatre.

Hare's loss was far the greater of the two, as the unfortunate circumstance deprived him of a leading actress at the crowning moment of a great success, to which she was essential, while the withdrawal of Forbes-Robertson still left Irving and Ellen Terry to support the Lyceum play.

But for this regrettable episode, the engagement gave my wife much pleasure. Though playing a comparatively small part herself, she was glad to act with Mrs. Patrick Campbell, in the same way that it always pleased her to act, on her own stage, with Mrs. Kendal, Ellen Terry, and Madame Modjeska.

My old part in *Fedora* was taken by Nutcombe Gould, whose premature death robbed the stage of a charming personality.

This engagement was the last my wife fulfilled. I know she would wish me to say concerning it that Tree, of whom she then knew comparatively little, treated her throughout with a special courtesy and consideration which neither she nor I have in the least forgotten.

I would like to allude here to the constant gentle acts and kindly thoughts shown to my wife in many ways by our brothers and sisters in art since her retirement, when she goes to the play; not only by the older managers, who of course have known her for many years, but by those whose friendship and acquaintance are of later date. I hope that one and all of them know and believe how much pleasure they have given and how truly thanked they are.

Then came our very last appearance, which was for a charity, on May 12, 1896. It chanced to be at the Haymarket Theatre—in the beautiful theatre which is now all changed; and it also chanced to be in the second act of *Ours*, which was represented by the following cast: Hugh Chalcot, Mr. Bancroft; Prince Perovsky, Mr. Tree; Sir Alexander Shendryn, Mr. E. S. Willard; Angus MacAlister, Mr. George Alexander; Sergeant Jones, Mr. Forbes-Robertson; A Servant, Mr. Frederick Kerr; Lady Shendryn, Miss Rose Leclercq; Blanche Haye, Mrs. Tree; and Mary Netley, Mrs. Bancroft,—a remarkable list of names, if one who figures in it may say so. My wife adds a farewell note.

Mary Netley is by no means a good part to read, and had not Robertson asked me to “build it up,” she would have fallen comparatively flat with the audience. When the play was originally read to us, the author begged me to do all I could in the scenes which chiefly concerned myself in the last act, for somehow, he said, he felt unable to make Mary as prominent as he wished. So at the rehearsals I set to work, and invented business and dialogue, which, happily, met with his approval. He always declared



I greatly helped the act, which was in parts very weak. The audiences always laughed heartily at the fun and frolic which in the days of high spirits I adopted. I remember with what care I made the famous roly-poly pudding during the first run—it was eagerly waited for by some poor children hard-by. *Ours* was, in spite of its weak last act, always a great favourite with the public, and never failed to be our good friend whenever we called upon it to help us; and so the play remains a treasure in “my memory locked.” My husband and I have always looked upon the second act of *Ours* as the best the author ever wrote, an opinion which we are sure Robertson shared. It was fit and proper that it should so fall out that our last appearance should be in this fine scene. The emotions it stirred, the patriotism it evoked, the waving of handkerchiefs and the buzz of delighted voices when the curtain finally fell, are cherished memories that will never fade. A sweet good-bye!

It was in that same year that I received a letter from Sir Arthur Bigge expressing Queen Victoria's strong wish to see my wife act again; and a performance consisting of *The Vicarage* and a selection from *Money* was to have taken place by Her Majesty's command. Unhappily it had to be postponed through the illness of poor Arthur Cecil, an illness that soon afterwards took a serious turn and ended—to the grief of his multitude of friends—with his death.

A few recitations and speeches have been given since for benefits and charities; and when a special performance took place at Drury Lane Theatre in honour of Ellen Terry's stage jubilee, by her wish—expressed in these welcome words: “I do so much hope you will. If you have the will, do find the way, and don't let me be without the support of one of my best and oldest comrades”—my wife had the pleasure of addressing a speech, first to the audience,

and then to the great public favourite in the names of her fellow-servants of our art. It was a memorable occasion.

On the afternoon of June 16, 1897, my wife and I had been to a musical party. On our return, there were several letters in the hall: one of them I transcribe:

FOREIGN OFFICE,  
June 15, 1897.

MY DEAR SIR,—

I have had the honour of submitting to the Queen that the Honour of Knighthood should be conferred upon you on the occasion of the approaching Jubilee; and Her Majesty having been pleased to approve of my recommendation, in recognition of the high position which you occupy in the profession to which you have rendered such notable service, it becomes my duty to acquaint you with Her gracious intention. It affords me much satisfaction to be the instrument of making this communication to you.

Believe me, yours very faithfully,

SALISBURY.

S. B. BANCROFT, Esq.

I was very moved and impressed; after a little while I went upstairs, and without comment left the letter, in its envelope, with my wife. I then wrote to Lord Salisbury:

18, BERKELEY SQUARE,  
June 16, 1897.

MY LORD MARQUESS,—

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your lordship's letter informing me of the great and unexpected distinction you have shown me in submitting to the Queen that I should receive the Honour of Knighthood, and of Her Majesty's most gracious approval of your lordship's recommendation.

I would beg leave to add how deeply sensible I am of the flattering words in which you acquaint me of this great honour, and also that it is a profound gratification to me that the recommendation should have emanated from your lordship.

With much respect, believe me to be, my Lord Marquess,

Your faithful servant,

SQUIRE B. BANCROFT.

TO THE MOST HONBLE.  
THE MARQUESS OF SALISBURY, K.G.

When the announcement was made public, by letter and telegram came between two and three hundred congratulations. Some of them were a surprise to us—as, for instance, warm expressions of pleasure from the late Duke of Westminster, the late Lord Goschen, the Bishop of Ripon, and the then Dean of Canterbury (Dr. Farrar). The most acceptable of them all, however, were the unstinted words of congratulation we received, without exception, from the prominent members of our own profession.

At the Jubilee Garden Party given by the late Queen at Buckingham Palace a few days afterwards, the then Prince of Wales graciously and warmly expressed his congratulations on our honour.

The “accolade” was conferred at Osborne. We crossed from Southampton to the Isle of Wight in the Royal Yacht, and I had the pleasure to travel in the company of some personal friends who then became Sir Felix Semon, Sir Lucius Selfe, Sir Charles Howard, and Sir George Martin.

Once again we were privileged to speak with Queen Victoria. This was at the Garden Party given by Her Majesty at Buckingham Palace in the last summer of her life, when she graciously honoured some among her loving subjects whom she seldom met.

Then came the end of the reign of that great Monarch, that amazing woman.

“O Queen of Queens!  
How far dost thou excel  
No thought can think.”

On that never-to-be-forgotten day we saw what Ella Wheeler Wilcox so pathetically describes as *The Queen's Last Ride*. My wife was at Lord Glenesk's house in Piccadilly. I had the honour to be invited to the Chapel Royal at Windsor.

“Though in Royal splendour she drives through town,  
Her robes are simple; she wears no crown!  
And yet she wears one; for, widowed no more,  
She is crowned with the love that has gone before,  
And crowned with the love she has left behind  
In the hidden depths of each mourner's mind.  
Bow low your heads; lift your hearts on high—  
The Queen in silence is driving by.”



MARIE BANCROFT



## CHAPTER XII

HENRY IRVING

“Like a great sea-mark, standing every flaw.”

IN obedience to the following words, written by his elder son, I will tell what I can of Henry Irving.

“It rests with those who knew him well, who at different times were his companions, to convey to those who neither saw nor heard him some idea of a personality the power and impressiveness of which none can question. It is well that those of them who will, should tell us something of Henry Irving.”

In a book, written with all his usual charm, by the Right Hon. George Russell is a description of Lord Beaconsfield which, when I read it, seemed to me not only a faithful portrait of the great Tory leader, but one that might as truthfully be applied to the late great leader of the stage. I will quote the passage :

“In private life he was affectionate, easy-going, facile, obliging. He lived in a circle of hypnotised worshippers, whose highest joy was to promote his interests and establish his rule and magnify his majesty. For the man who crossed his path or frustrated his ambition, or opposed his onward march to the supreme place, a different side of his nature was brought into play.”

Irving was a born leader, and grew to be a fine judge of mankind. He owned that mysterious power which draws towards its possessor the affection of his

fellows ; and he must, early in his life, have learnt the important truth, that to be well served, you must first teach yourself how to become beloved.

He also illustrated a theory, strongly held by such a master of our art as Regnier, that to make a really fine actor a man ought to be obliged to fight against some physical drawback. This remark of one of the greatest of all French comedians applied to his distinguished comrade Lesueur—whose performance in the *Partie de Piquet* prompted Charles Coghlan to give us, under the title of *A Quiet Rubber*, his admirable version made known so artistically to English audiences by John Hare.

Although denied, by the accident of life, the advantages of a first-class education, Irving possessed the knowledge and the learning which schools and colleges may fail to teach ; and certainly, in his later years, he would have graced, in manner and aspect, any position to which he might have been called. The refinement of his appearance grew to be remarkable—the Church or the Bench, equally with literature or science, might with pride in that regard have claimed him as a chief. This personal attribute only came to him towards the autumn of his life, which it so adorned. Truth to tell, in the early part of his career he had but little, if any, of it. In those distant days there was indeed a smack of the country actor in his appearance ; and, if it is not profanity to utter the thought, even a suggestion of a type immortalised by Dickens.

The first time I ever spoke to Irving was in the very early years of the old Prince of Wales's Theatre. It was when he was at the St. James's Theatre, and had a lodging in Old Quebec Street. I was walking through the Burlington Arcade with Montague—a mutual friend—and there we met him and all three had a pleasant talk. I can recall his appearance perfectly ; which was much as I have suggested. He wore a moustache then and carried an eyeglass (though he was not nearly so short-sighted as I am),



before he adopted the long familiar *pince-nez*. We soon became friends, and remained so throughout his remarkable career—the most remarkable in many respects that ever befell, or perhaps ever will befall, an actor. My contribution to all that has been so fully and so ably written of Irving will be a few personal items which will owe any interest or value they may possess to their association with himself.

Without being in the least distant or proud, he was reticent and secretive ; yet such was his peculiar force and magnetism that many thought they were intimate with him who were never really allowed to be so.

An interesting incident of his early life was revealed to me by Irving. He told me something new to me about himself when he was engaged by Sothern, in the summer of 1867, to act in Paris the part of the drunken clerk, a character drawn by Tom Taylor in a vein of downright melodrama, in *Our American Cousin*. "Lord Dundreary" proved a flat failure there. The little troupe of players was disbanded and returned to London, with the exception of Irving, who, then finding himself abroad for the first time, lingered in the bright city for a couple of months, until he was summoned home to attend rehearsals for his autumn engagement. He told me that during his stay in Paris he lived in a garret on a few francs a day and paid nightly visits throughout that time to the cheap parts of the theatres. Although he had no knowledge of the language, he was all the while zealously studying acting of every grade and kind.

When, in later years, he entertained in his princely fashion eminent foreign artists, in answer to some torrent of compliment showered upon him in French, he would, without the slightest affectation—a failing from which he was entirely and happily free—bestow upon the animated speaker the charm of his beautiful smile and simply say, "I am sure it is all something very kind and sweet, but I don't understand one single word."

Soon after his success in James Albery's comedy, *Two Roses*, at the Vaudeville Theatre, and shortly before what proved to be the turning-point in his wonderful career—his joining Bateman as a member of the Lyceum company—I had occasion to go to the office of English and Blackmore, who then were well known as dramatic agents. As I was on the point of leaving, one of them said to me, "Oh, by the way, would Irving be of use to you next season? We have reason to believe he desires a change." The question, even then, was startling: I replied that I should indeed be delighted to offer him an engagement, but feared it would be difficult to do so with advantage to him, as there were already Hare, Coghlan, and myself in occupation. How possible it is that a different answer might have influenced future events in theatre-land, and how strange it seems now to recall that the Bancroft management was then already some years old!

At a dinner-party given by Edmund Yates in 1878, while *Diplomacy* was in its first run and our theatre was crowded every night, Irving spoke to me of its great success. I answered that in my belief the same could be achieved as readily at the Lyceum if money were freely and wisely spent there. This was a few months before his own illustrious management began. I adhere to my belief; but wide is the difference between spending and wasting, while, also, the disasters which are now admitted to have darkened his brilliant reign were sometimes, it must be conceded, the result of grave errors of judgment in the choice of plays. For instance, after the undoubted success which attended his splendid production of *Much Ado about Nothing*, and when it was attracting all London, largely owing to the superb rendering of Beatrice by Ellen Terry—indeed, a cherished memory—I urged him after such a triumph to produce *As You Like It* for her, and to let her, while still young, show us Rosalind. I went on enthusiastically about the all-round cast he

then had in the theatre : Terriss for Orlando ; Forbes-Robertson for Jacques ; Fernandez for the banished Duke ; and the choice of those sterling actors Howe and Mead for Adam and the old shepherd. I was adding several other names when I felt his glittering eye upon me as, with his forefinger pointed to his breast, he jerked out, " Good—very good—but where do I come in ? " I answered, " Touchstone ! " And so I would again, for of certain comedy parts he was a brilliant actor, raising them to great prominence. Nothing came of the suggestion, but such a revival then, I still maintain, would have meant both fame and fortune.

*King John* and *King Richard II.* were other plays I more than once in friendly talks ventured to urge upon him. It seemed to me that he was singularly gifted to pourtray the characters of both monarchs ; while he allowed all his own wealth of ideas concerning a great production of *Julius Cæsar*, for which he had splendid help from Alma-Tadema, to slide away and vanish, losing, eventually, the opportunity of playing Brutus and casting Forbes-Robertson and Terriss for Cassius and Marc Antony. In a sordid sense, as an artistic asset, Irving was often wasted. As he was a believer in them, so was he a masterly exponent of the imagination, the mystery, the witchcraft of the theatre, which by their power can force even a student to see a play by Shakespeare *acted on the stage* and so render him discontented with the reading of it at home. It was thus that he commended our art to many a cultured mind, and it is for that we cherish his great achievements.

Naturally enough, he must, early in his career as a manager, have been influenced by a previous remarkable series of Shakespearian and other stage productions—those by Charles Kean at the Princess's Theatre, which included *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth*, and *Henry VIII.* ; and the following popular dramas : *The Corsican Brothers*, *Louis XI.*, *The Lyons Mail*, and *Faust*, all of which, excepting

*Henry VIII.*, perhaps from its great cost, must valiantly have served Irving's purpose. It was in the later years of his hard-worked life that his judgment, like his strength, began to fail him: as evidenced by the production, for example, of *Coriolanus*, *The Medicine Man*, and *Dante*. Had Irving been in partnership with a capable comrade, to whose guidance he would sometimes have submitted, he might have lived and died a man of fortune, instead of, as must have been the truth, allowing several to pass like water through his hands—to say nothing of being harassed by the need of money.

Prior to his first visit to America in 1883 one of the greatest compliments ever offered to an actor was paid to Henry Irving, and through him to the entire theatrical world, in the banquet which was given in his honour under the presidency of the Lord Chief Justice of England (Lord Coleridge)—an event only paralleled by the festival when John Kemble left the stage. To name those who filled the great St. James's Hall on the occasion would be to print a list of the leaders in almost every phase of intellect and eminence.

I performed rather a feat in connection with this banquet. *Fedora* was then being acted at the Haymarket, and began at an hour that allowed me to sit down to the soup, although I had rapidly to disappear with the fish. In the second and third acts of the play I wore evening-dress. Some eight minutes before the end of the second act, and during the interval, I was free, and so I returned to the hall, just as I was—made up as the French diplomat, my head suggesting a kind of young Duc d'Aumale. I stood in the doorway, and having fortunately arrived at the happy moment when Lord Coleridge was proposing the chief toast, I was able to remain long enough to hear part of Irving's reply. Of course I knew my time almost to a second, and was back on the Haymarket stage without causing a moment's delay. When I had finished my part, I went again

to the hall, and was lucky enough to hear James Russell Lowell, then America's representative in this country, conclude an eloquent speech.

The following week another banquet took place, which emanated from myself, the idea having occurred to me to give a farewell supper to Irving before his departure, and to let it have a distinctive character by inviting none but actors. Feeling that nowhere could it be given so appropriately as in the Garrick Club, I ventured to ask the Committee if, in the special circumstances, it might take place in the handsome dining-room. Greatly to my delight, my request was granted, with the remark, from the late Lord Glenesk, that it was "an honour to the Club." The room, so appropriate for the purpose, its walls being lined with the portraits of those whose names recall all that is famous in the great past of our stage, was arranged to accommodate a party of a hundred. Those who, like my chief guest, have left us, included James Anderson (who played the lovers with Macready), Lawrence Barrett (the clever and poetical American actor), Wilson Barrett, William Creswick (another veteran), Arthur Cecil, J. S. Clarke, John Clayton, Charles Coghlan, George Conquest, David Fisher, Corney Grain, Augustus Harris, Henry Howe, David James, Walter Lacy, Frederick Leslie, C. Marius, T. Mead, John Ryder, Arthur Stirling, William Terriss, J. L. Toole, and Charles Warner. Happily, as I write, we have here with us still George Alexander, J. H. Barnes, Kyrle Bellew, Lionel Brough, Dion Boucicault, Alfred Bishop, Charles Brookfield, H. B. Conway, W. G. Elliott, James Fernandez, George Grossmith, John Hare, W. H. Kendal, Henry Neville, A. W. Pinero, Charles Sugden, Beerbohm Tree, Edward Terry, Hermann Vezin, and E. S. Willard. Barry Sullivan, an actor of an older school, bluntly and frankly declined my invitation: he could not, he wrote, bring himself to acknowledge the justice of the position to which Irving had undoubtedly attained.

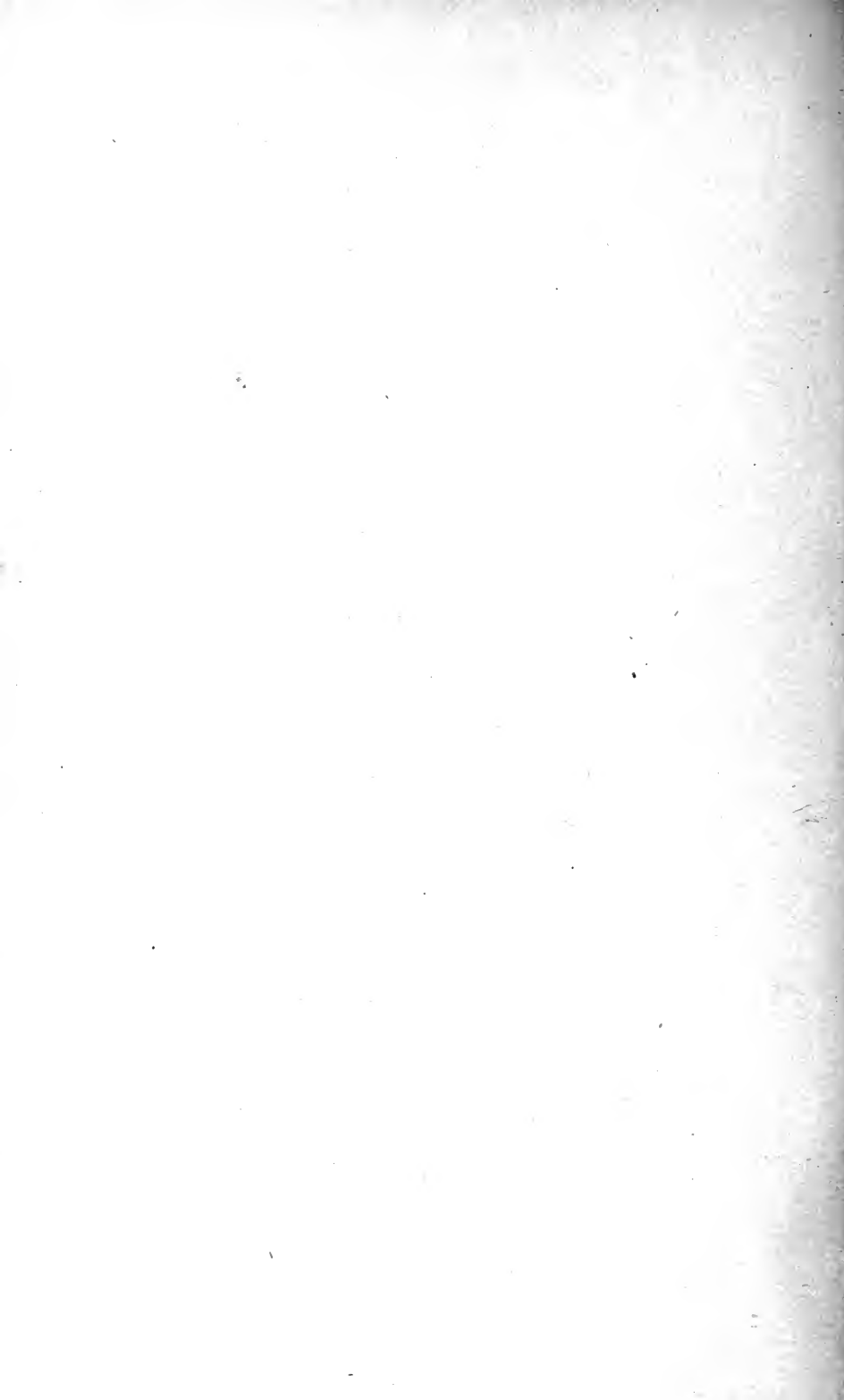
A humorous drawing of a supposed finale to the supper was one of the early successes of Phil May. He made two copies of it ; one of the three belongs to His Majesty the King, the others are owned by Pinero and myself.

I will end my reference to this supper-party by relating a pleasant incident which happened late on a night in the following spring. My wife and I were, in fact, on the staircase on our way to bed, when we were startled by a loud ringing at the door bell. The servants had locked up the house : I heard the door-chain loosened, and in a moment more a well-known voice asked if I was at home or not. As I ran downstairs I called out to my wife, "Come down again ; I'm sure it's Irving !" He almost embraced me in the hall, and said, in the next breath, "How white you've grown, old fellow !" He had only that day returned from America, and, after dining with his old friend Mr. J. M. Levy in Grosvenor Street, took his chance of finding us at home. What a long, delightful talk we had ! and the clock struck often while we listened to his tale of travels and experiences.

Irving's wish that I should act with him was first expressed when he tempted me to play Château Renaud in *The Corsican Brothers*. I was still busy in management, and the idea could not be seriously entertained. Later, in 1889, when we had left the Haymarket, he contemplated a production of *The Dead Heart*, and flattered me by saying that unless I would appear with him as the Abbé Latour he would not carry out the plan. I tried to persuade him to let me undertake the part as a labour of love, but he would not listen to the proposal. After a long talk—neither of us, I remember so well, looking at the other, but each gazing separately at different angles into the street—he said that I must content him by being specially engaged, on terms which at last were settled. The money, which I arranged with the treasurer should be in bank notes, was regularly put aside by me into a drawer of my desk.



IRVING, TOOLE, AND BANCROFT  
From a drawing in colour by Phil May





My income was fixed and ample; I did not wish, I dare say very foolishly, to upset things by spending considerably more in one year than in others; and so, eventually, I gave a thousand pounds of the amount to the “Darkest England” scheme, propounded soon afterwards by “General” Booth, and the rest of the money to similar objects. The first action proved to be one of the torments of my life, as I have since been asked to subscribe to every charity under the sun—or in the shade. It is but fair to add that I never regretted the impulse, which certainly was the means, indirectly, of adding largely to the funds of an experiment that was amply proved by high authorities, and subsequently acknowledged by the most august in the land, to be sound and deserving. The following letter will not be without interest; I may add my regret that I never enjoyed the pleasure of meeting that fiery free-lance, the writer of it:

MY DEAR SIR,—

I send you herewith a copy of my *Ballads*, which I have taken leave to inscribe to you. The inscription is merely the permanent record of my sympathy with your noble letter to *The Times* on the subject of “Darkest England.”

Personally, of course, I write with no religious bias, for I have no creed, and crave for none; and I see as clearly as anybody the *absurdities* of the Salvationists. To me, however, the stirring up of the social deposits to some sort of vitality is a subject far too solemn for ridicule, and those who are pouring scorn on the scheme would have treated either Socrates or Jesus of Nazareth quite as cavalierly as they are treating General Booth. Nor would either of these great men have been welcomed by the Scribes of Culture, or the Pharisees of Science.

I trust that you won't think I've taken your name in vain, and that you will believe me to be,

Yours faithfully,

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

To return to professional matters, it was a strange experience to me to re-enter a theatre to serve instead of to govern: moreover, in one where the policy was so entirely different from our own. My wife and I had been content to choose plays without regard to ourselves; the policy at the Lyceum was upon another plane; and so perhaps I could not be expected to like, or to be in sympathy with it. *The Dead Heart* is a story of the French Revolution, somewhat on the lines of *A Tale of Two Cities*. It was pleasant to find *The Saturday Review* entirely in accord with the view I took of Latour and my "excellent appreciation of the sentiments which would have swayed the aristocrats of that day. It is not quite that the Abbé regards the people with contempt—he evidently does not suppose that they belong to the same order of created beings as himself. And this is the true reading."

This was the year of one of the great Paris exhibitions, where I saw the portrait of an Abbé in a violet-coloured dress, and resolved to adopt it in the Prologue, the events of which took place before the destruction of the Bastille. Irving and Lewis Wingfield both helped me in the matter. The latter, to use his own words, "turned the British Museum upside down" in his researches, and sent me authorities from Ferrari's *Les Costumes françaises des différents États du Royaume, 1776*, and Migne's *Les Ordres religieux*, but "could not find such an animal as a violet abbé," adding that "Gonzalez was a very clever painter who did as he pleased, and most likely invented him. However, as you have found authority for him in Uzanne, I should go on with him, as he will be very pretty and new."

Irving sent me the following note: "The connection many of them had with the Church was of the slenderest kind—consisting mainly of adopting the name of Abbé—and wearing a distinctive dress, a *short, dark violet coat* with a narrow collar"; and said, in the letter enclosing it:

MY DEAR B.,—

This was what the Abbés wore for a long time after the foundation of the Order by Francis I. If there hasn't been a violet priest, we'll set the example and lead the fashion.

Ever yours,

H. I.

The best scene in the play was between Irving and myself, in which we fought a duel to the death. I recall his words when we first stood up to rehearse it: “I had no idea you were so much the taller.” In the preparation of this fight we both wore glasses, necessitated by our short sight, and were obliged to do so at all rehearsals, but we had both been good fencers in our youth. A clever drawing of the duel at the supreme moment was made by Bernard Partridge. From all I have heard said of it the fight must have been very well done—real, brief, and determined. It was a grim business, in the sombre moonlit room, and certainly gave the impression that one of the two combatants would not leave it alive. The scene remains in the memory, and I often still hear from many old playgoers that it was the best thing of the kind they ever saw. Walter Pollock, who had revised the play for Irving, gave me a charming souvenir of it in the shape of a miniature rapier made from Toledo steel.

A pleasant circumstance will live in my remembrance while memory lasts—the extraordinary demonstration with which the audience did me the honour to greet my reappearance on the stage.

One night during the hundred and sixty on which *The Dead Heart* was acted, when we had acknowledged the loud applause which always followed the duel, Irving put his arm round me as we walked from the stage together, and said, “What a big name you might have made for yourself had you never come across those Robertson plays! What a pity, for your own sake; for no actor can be remembered

long who does not appear in the classical drama." Quite true: the name of many a bombastic actor of tragedy is unjustly remembered long after the fame of even peerless comedians survives, if at all, but feebly, in the imperfect annals of tradition, or in the records of the rare student of the stage.

To support Irving's generous words about myself I must turn to the Chorus, which, fortunately, will sing of us both, and so, I hope, excuse me. *The Times*, after remarking that it had been a happy thought to cast me for the part of the Abbé Latour, gave its opinion in exact support of all I had tried to convey from the stage, adding that never had the cynical, faithless, treacherous courtier found a more polished representative. This reading of the character, with "its splendid audacity, its biting sarcasm, its utterly corrupt and depraved selfishness, and its perfect *tenue*," was declared admirable. Very striking, too, was said to be the duel scene between Landry and the Abbé, as rendered by Irving and myself; the one cold, implacable, pitiless, the other haughty, contemptuous, and cynical, with a perceptible under-current of deadly hate and treachery combined, nevertheless with all the pride of caste and the unflinching courage of the *gentilhomme*.

Other leading journals were equally laudatory. My Abbé Latour was found to be a cruel, crafty villain to the life, and it was recorded that "finer acting could scarcely be conceived than that in the scene where Landry and Latour, at last face to face, and with death, the final arbiter, between them, fought out their quarrel." Neither critics nor audience, it was said, were prepared for the realistic duel which stood out vividly as the finest and most thrilling situation of the play—without doubt, so it was pronounced, the best stage duel English playgoers had witnessed. "The conjunction of the two actors gave the artistic climax of the evening. They rose upon one another as though each would scale the other and overtop him, and did it so quietly and

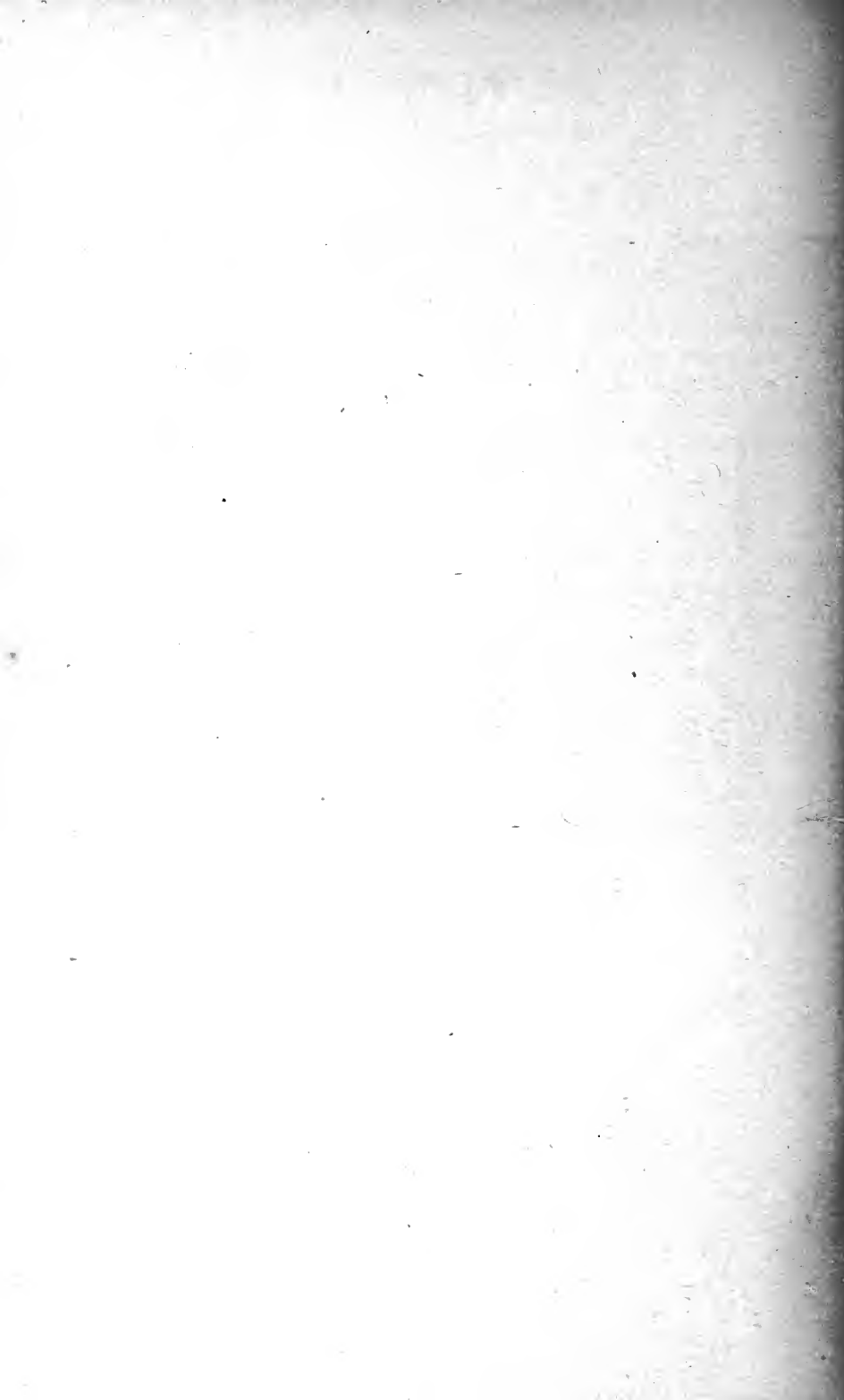


IRVING AND BANCROFT IN "THE DEAD HEART"

From a drawing by Bernard Partridge

You know me Abbi' Lacey

Yours  
Lacey:  
1890



composedly, though hate and scorn wrapped them both, that not until the act was over did the audience realise what admiring terror had been roused."

The death of the Abbé, waving his blood-stained handkerchief as he cries *Vive le Roi*, and with his last breath contemptuously spitting at his *canaille* opponent, was pronounced the culmination of a scene which reached an almost painful intensity.

"Grandly and brilliantly satisfactory," was the phrase of another writer, who described the Abbé as courtly, suave, libidinous, satanic in thought and deed, word and suggestion, an ideal incarnation of wickedness, "rivalling Irving's Dubosc in malignant intensity." "But splendidly seductive as he is in the earlier scenes of the play, it is only when he is caged in the Conciergerie, only when his fine feathers have been stripped off, that Bancroft reveals the wonderful power which has hitherto been latent in him, and that a great actor was lost to the heroic drama when he devoted himself to light comedy." . . . "Irving's scene with Latour, culminating with the death of the Abbé, is worthy of association with Bancroft's impersonation of the last-named character." More could not be said, because the Abbé offered a singularly polished and well-considered presentment of the cynical and utterly heartless villain; and "made us regret, with his perfect finish and fine elocution, that the stage has been so long without such an actor as Bancroft."

That great actor Coquelin *ainé*, who saw the play, also paid a very high tribute to my performance, which appeared in the French press after his return to Paris.

At this time I presided at a banquet given to Toole before he went to Australia, when Irving spoke the following eulogy of me, which I recall with pride :

"There never was an instance where thoroughness and perseverance were more deservedly rewarded. One point must strike all in connection with Bancroft's career—before he left the Haymarket, at the age of

forty-four, he was the senior theatrical manager of London. In conjunction with that gifted lady who was the genius of English comedy for so many years, he popularised a system of management which has dominated our stage ever since, and the principle of which may be described as the harmony of realism and art. His management is associated with the early successes of notable artists. In the old Prince of Wales's Theatre John Hare became famous. It was there that Ellen Terry's Portia first charmed the world, and it was there that Marie Wilton and Bancroft became identified with types of character which have not lost their hold upon the public. I am quite certain that the man of whom such things can be said is sure of a remarkable place in the history of the stage. As a manager, his courtesy was as conspicuous as his judgment. As an actor, he has earned from his brother and sister artists the warmest tribute that good fellowship can pay."

Irving's allusion to my having been the senior manager recalls to me a reminder of the fact at the first dinner given by the Prince of Wales at Marlborough House to the principal actors of London of that date—one of the many gracious acts by which his present Majesty has endeared himself to the theatrical profession. On this memorable occasion I found myself honoured by being placed on the right-hand side of our Royal host. This was in 1882. Without having previously realised it, I found that I had already been senior in managerial service for some years. The actors present among the distinguished guests invited were Henry Irving, J. L. Toole, John Hare, Charles Wyndham, Charles Coghlan, W. H. Kendal, John Clayton, David James, Arthur Cecil, Henry Neville, Lionel Brough, Hermann Vezin, George Grossmith, and myself. H. J. Byron was also bidden, but was too ill to obey.

I do not think a really satisfactory portrait of Irving exists. The one which Millais painted and gave to the Garrick Club in 1884 is, to my mind,



slightly effeminate in its beauty and lacking in strength of character. Sargent once painted him, when Irving was fifty, and the work was exhibited in the Royal Academy in 1888. It was of course a clever likeness, but not a pleasant one. The great painter showed you points in the great actor, as he so often does in his sitters, which you had never seen before—points which his searching eyes could not help seeing, and which, once having seen them, you cannot afterwards help seeing always. Irving disliked this portrait, and thought it a failure; for some years it was hidden away in a garret; and when he left the old Grafton Street Chambers, his solitary home for so many years, for Stratton Street, he came across it and hacked the canvas to pieces with a knife. What a treasure lost! What an end to befall such a man's work of such another man!

Irving was dreadful in answering letters—I mean in his delay—but I have read many sweet words written by him, especially to young people.

Here are a few lines he sent me years ago, which I cherish with others and with many souvenirs of our affectionate friendship.

MY DEAR BANCROFT,—

I shall wear your gift—and a rare one it is—as I wear you, the giver, in my heart. My regard for you is not a fading one. In this world there is not too much fair friendship, is there? And I hope it is a gratification to you—it is to me, old friend—to know that we can count alike upon a friend in sorrow and in gladness.

Affectionately yours,

HENRY IRVING.

Irving's generosity was unbounded. The constant evidence of it made you feel towards him as Iago felt towards Cassio when he said, "He hath a daily beauty in his life that makes me ugly."

At one of many dinner parties given in those

days by the much regretted younger brother of Lord Burnham, I recollect Irving saying to Frank Lockwood, afterwards to become Solicitor-General, "The fortunate actor is the actor who works hard." He then pointed across the table to me, and added, "Look at that fellow, and remember what hard work meant in his case. 'B.' is the only actor since Garrick who has made a fortune purely by management of his own theatre—I mean without the aid of provincial tours and visits to America." After a pause he continued, "But he has paid the penalty of leaving his best work as an actor undone."

I recall also a banquet given to Irving on his return from one of his tours through the United States, at which I was seated next to the then Lord Chief Justice of England, Lord Russell of Killowen, who had for many years honoured me with his friendship. Halfway through the dinner the Lord Chief said to me: "I have to propose Irving's health. What shall I say?" Of course I could only reply that no one could answer the question so well as himself. However, the Lord Chief persisted, with that well-remembered, imperious manner of his, "Come, come, my friend, you must have done it often: tell me what I am to say." At last, I recalled an occasion when I had proposed Irving's health, and said that I spoke of him as possessing "the strength of a man, the sweetness of a woman, and the simplicity of a child." Lord Russell turned to me at once, with the question, "How about the wisdom of a serpent? I could not have left that out."

On one of the occasions when we were tempted to return, for some charity performance, to the stage (of which, by the way, we never took a formal leave, our retirement having been from management only), my wife and I talked the matter over, and a reckless inspiration came to us that the old farce of *Box and Cox* might be done in a striking way. So I said to those concerned, who badly wanted to raise a thousand pounds, "Well, if you can persuade Irving to appear

as Box, I will play Cox, and my wife Mrs. Bouncer.' Irving would not yield, so the rather wild idea fell through.

By chance I came across some words which truly go to show how history repeats itself. They were written of Queen Elizabeth. "To her encouragement the theatre was still more directly indebted for the stamp of approbation that was at once discriminating and royal, and therefore productive of the most beneficial influence upon the fortunes of the stage." How closely the language applies to the great Queen, as well as to the great actor whom we have lost! For it will ever be remembered that Irving was the first member of the dramatic profession to receive from his Sovereign a long-coveted prize, the honour and dignity of State recognition—so placing the actor's calling on a level with the other arts, no more to be looked at askance, but recognised as leading to a share of the distinction enjoyed by his fellow-men.

When Irving received his knighthood, it fell to my lot to present the beautiful casket designed by his comrade and friend, Forbes-Robertson, to contain the address he received from the members of the theatrical profession throughout the land. This address I described as a personal roll-call of the British stage, for it numbered, among some thousands of autographs, the names of survivors who had done honour to our calling in former days, the names of those who were then its most brilliant ornaments, and the names of those whose destinies were still in the future—who were, in fact, the heirs and guardians of the present and the past.

In far more eloquent words than I can command—words from the pen of Arthur Pinero—the address said: "The history of the theatre will enduringly chronicle his achievements, and tradition will fondly render an account of his personal qualities; and so, from generation to generation, the English actor will be reminded that his position in the public regard is

founded in no small degree upon the pre-eminence of Sir Henry Irving's career and upon the nobility, dignity, and sweetness of his private character."

Irving was greatly moved. When the ceremony was over, he turned to me and said pensively, "The honour which the Queen and all of you have done me should make me a better man."

In the fascinating story of her life, Ellen Terry tells of an opinion expressed to her on Irving's distinguished appearance at the Jubilee Fancy Dress Ball given at Devonshire House. A similar opinion was also uttered to me, my informant being Lord Rowton. Irving was clad as a Cardinal, and seemed to be the only person in all the great assembly who was not masquerading. The solution is simple. He knew how to put on fantastic robes, and possessed the power to wear them as if the garments were his by right.

My memory is keen of what passed on the last of the many occasions Irving sat at our table. He was very affectionate in his manner towards my wife, and delighted at having to take Ada Rehan down to dinner. When the ladies left, he enjoyed heartily a pleasant talk with Sir John Bigham, whom he had never met before. Of course he stayed until every one else had gone; he then sat on and opened his heart to us. He gave me a sad account of the great trouble he had recently gone through—far greater than we knew—in America, in consequence of the complete failure there of *Dante*. He looked too worn and frail to be still battling with the fever of the theatre. My thoughts were sad about him as we parted, and I watched him walk slowly towards his home close by.

But, indeed, for a year or two before the end it was manifest to those who loved him that the sword had worn out the scabbard. This I strongly realised the last time I dined with him—it was at the last party he ever gave—and I recall with sadness the eloquent expression on the faces of his two sons, who

were present, late in the evening, when they both sat facing him. We met again and had a happy talk in Stratton Street; his manner, I remember, was cheerful, and then, certainly, he still looked forward, but his beautiful hands were almost transparent. Once more I saw him; we both were driving. He was lost in thought, and did not answer to my salutation. In another month he had fallen with his armour on, as he, no doubt, had settled should be.

I rejoiced that his sons showed me their love by doing me the honour of asking me to be one of the pall-bearers when he was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey. My wife and I have known them from their childhood, and feel—with deep interest in their careers—sincere affection towards them both. I enjoy, too, with Lady Bancroft, the friendship of the lonely lady who is now their widowed mother.

At the end of the supremely impressive funeral ceremony I was glad to be responsible for a touching episode by the side of Irving's open grave. I sent a word to the two delegates from the Théâtre Français, who thereupon walked side by side from the choir, where they had been seated, to Poets' Corner, clad, according to the custom of their land, in evening dress, and bearing a beautiful wreath, the offering of Irving's French comrades. They knelt and laid it by the grave, remaining on their knees while they uttered the prayer for the dead from the Catholic Liturgy; then, crossing themselves, they rose and retreated among the mourners.

Soon afterwards I received a letter from the Dean of Westminster, which ran as follows:

“I want, through you, to convey my most sincere thanks to the Committee for their kind words as to the details of the funeral service. It was a deep satisfaction to me to have drawn together into the Abbey Church so remarkable a gathering of the members of your profession and to help them to share in something of its inspiration.”

It is much to have lived to provoke the following words :

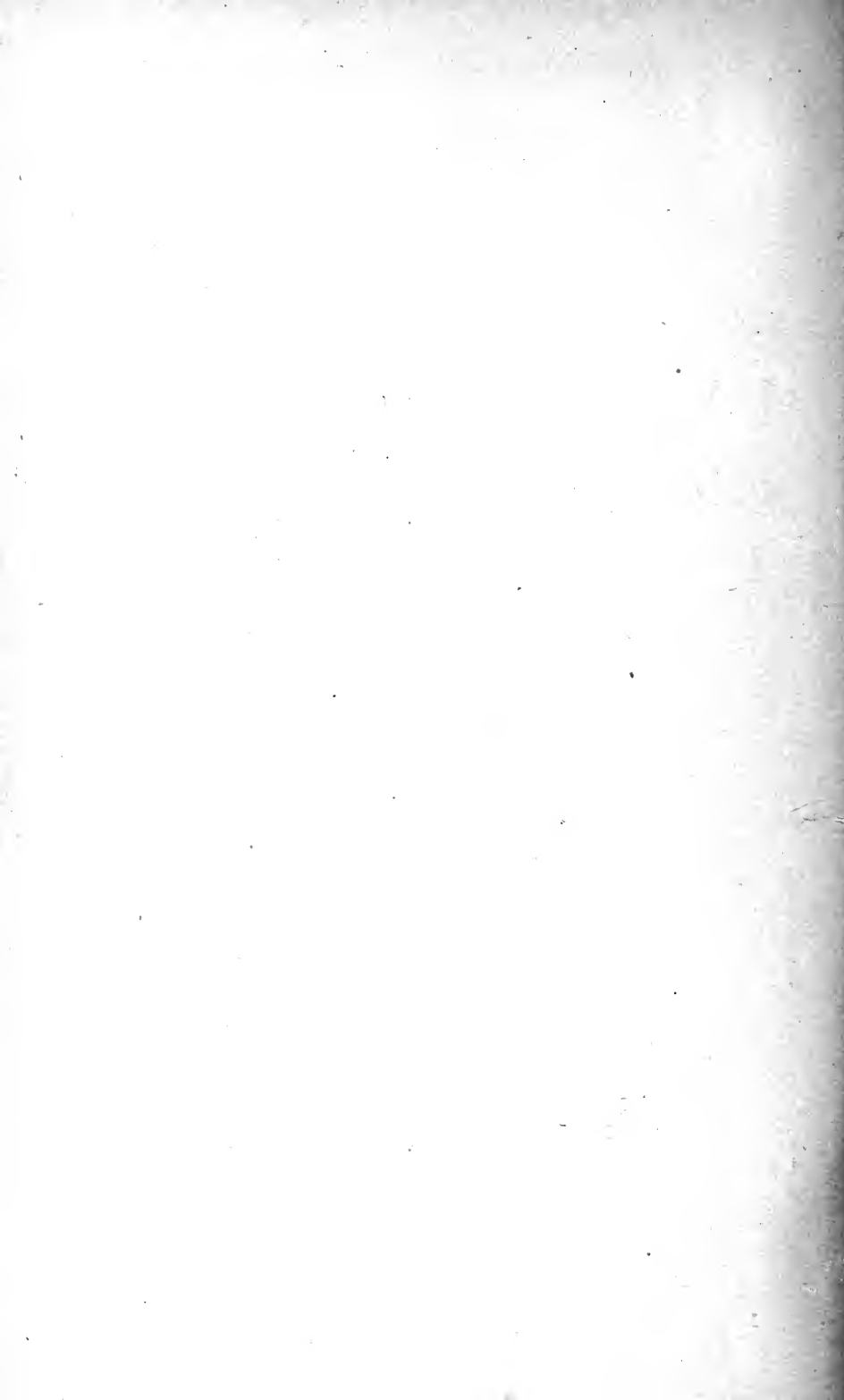
“Irving believed in his profession and in himself. He aimed at the highest, and never faltered. The theatre is an instrument of vast and beneficent power. The harp-strings slumber till touched by the magician’s hand ; the echo of his artistic life will sound on in human hearts long after its music has ended in the silence that waits for all.”

My feebler pen cannot cope with such a writer. Yet I yield to none in the warmth of my tribute to the leader of my calling. His remarkable campaign has taken its place in the annals of his country, for Henry Irving earned the privilege granted to but few, and has won eternal honour for the stage in the eyes of the world.



THE LAST PHASE: HENRY IRVING ENTERING THE LYCEUM

From a snapshot lent by Arthur W. Pinero





## CHAPTER XIII

### “ A CHRISTMAS CAROL ”

“ I shall journey through this world but once. Any good thing, therefore, that I can do, let me do it now, for I shall not pass this way again.”

SOME years ago, in the summer time, I was walking near my house when a cheery voice called out, “ Hi, Bancroft ! ” A victoria drew up by my side, in which was seated that dearly-loved old man, the Reverend William Rogers, irreverently but affectionately known as “ Hang-Theology Rogers.” He said he wanted me to do him a favour. I replied, “ I will do anything in my power, sir, for you, and with all my heart.” He then explained that an institute at Bishopsgate, in which he was greatly interested, would be opened in the coming autumn, adding that some of his many friends—whose well-known names he mentioned—were going to help him. Would I join the number and deliver a lecture there ? I told him I could only lecture on the Stage ; he answered, “ What subject could be better ? ” I asked if a Reading would do as well ; he replied, “ Anything you like—only come.”

During my subsequent holiday in the Engadine my thoughts turned towards Charles Dickens and my strong love for his works—a love learnt, with what little else is good in me, from my mother, in the far-off days when the green-backed numbers of the world-famed novels were so keenly waited for, month after month. The end of it was that I devoted some

time and much thought to an arrangement of the immortal *Christmas Carol*.

The circumstance added to my acquaintance with Mr. Rogers. I several times had luncheon at the Rectory, and many interesting talks with my delightful host, the remembrance of whose friendship I shall always cherish. In a letter I received from the Rectory House in Devonshire Square, at this time, he wrote:

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

I think your proposal is excellent, and will most certainly attract. After you left me I was taken bad in the carriage and have been very weak since—curious that I should have been so near the verge of realising our very interesting conversation. However, I am pulling round and hope to get out of this “drear abode of Erebus the black” on Monday for a fortnight at Mickleham, ready on my return to enjoy your Reading. I write in a recumbent position, so excuse cacography.

Yours sincerely,

WILLIAM ROGERS.

The Reading duly came off and proved a success. The kind words of thanks sent to me by the dear old clergyman are too flattering for publication. It seemed a pity that the labour the Reading involved should be wasted, except for this one occasion, and that the Reading should never be repeated; and it was thus the idea occurred to me to make some effort to benefit hospitals by this means. So it happened that the scheme was indirectly brought about by one of the best men whom it has been my privilege to know. He did not long survive; he succumbed to an illness due to a chill he unfortunately contracted through his invariable habit of driving in an open carriage. As the end was approaching, his sister, who kept house for him at the old City rectory, more than once suggested that

she should send for his life-long friend, the then Dean of Westminster—Dr. Bradley—to read to or talk with him. The dying man, in a casual way, several times put her off from doing so. At last, in answer to an affectionate persistence, he said gently, “No, my dear—no, my dear; don’t trouble concerning me. I think I know as much about it all as any of them.”

A memorial to the much-loved old man was afterwards got up; but, as such things often do, it hung fire towards the end and could not be completed for the lack of some eighty or a hundred pounds. It was then that I was asked if I would give a Reading to make up the sum required. Remembering all the circumstances, I thought it a proper case for breaking my rule to restrict the Reading to the aid of hospitals; but at the same time pointed out the necessity of obtaining a distinguished chairman. The first appeal was made to Lord Rosebery, a great friend and warm admirer of the dead parson, who, with that charm given but to few, had recently presided at the Mansion House, at a meeting where Mr. Rogers was presented with an admirable portrait of himself, in honour of his labours in the City. Unfortunately, Lord Rosebery was going abroad and could not do as he would have wished. I was then told that the next man to be approached was Lord Russell of Killowen (then Lord Chief Justice of England). I reminded those concerned that he, being a devout Roman Catholic, could hardly be expected to comply, adding that he had only quite recently presided at a Reading of the same story which I had given for the benefit of a Catholic institution. The Committee, however, said they could but be refused, and made their request. Lord Russell replied at once, in the kindest words, that I had gone out of my way to help a charity of his faith, and that he would gladly do the same for me. In an eloquent and generous speech he made on the occasion, the Lord Chief spoke of William Rogers

in terms which bore no taint of the bigot which the great Irish lawyer was sometimes said to be. I cherish the remembrance of many acts of kindness shown to me and mine by Lord Russell of Killowen, but not one of them touched me more deeply than his generous, large-hearted tribute to the simple, liberal-minded Vicar of St. Botolph, Bishopsgate.

At the Reading to which Lord Russell referred, Cardinal Vaughan had promised to preside. He, however, was prevented by indisposition, and the Lord Chief Justice took his place. It was given for the charity of the Sisters of Nazareth. Although I do not chance to belong to the beautiful faith their lives so sweetly illustrate, I have the privilege and honour to be allowed to call some of the ladies there my friends.

I had previously received the following letter from the late "Mother-General," who died recently revered and respected by all who enjoyed the privilege of her acquaintance.

NAZARETH HOUSE, HAMMERSMITH,  
June 23, 1897.

DEAR SIR,—

My telegram reached you yesterday, I trust. We all *rejoice* exceedingly at the *well-merited* honour conferred on you. We cannot express all we feel in your behalf. All we can say is, that this honour may be only a foretaste of what is prepared for you in the Heavenly Kingdom for your *great charity* to God's Poor, and for the continued effort you make in their behalf.

With love to you both from all the Sisters,

Yours gratefully and respectfully,

MARY OF THE NATIVITY,

*Supt.-Gen.*

Two of these dear ladies called once upon a connection of mine, whose charity was stronger than his faith, and were announced by his manservant as "the two Sisters of Lazarus." My friend at once

said, "What, Mary and Martha! Pray let them come in." The Sisters entered, laughing heartily, and quite appreciating the situation. It was the same friend who once gave the same manservant a Bible, adding to the inscription he wrote on the front page the words: "And much good may it do him." The addition was greatly prized by the recipient, who read the words with a meaning which I fear his satirical master did not altogether intend them to convey.

To return to the Reading. It was naturally gratifying to find *The Daily Telegraph*, in its comment on the circumstance, recording that, "true to that catholicity of sentiment and action in the aid of charity universal," I had given my recitation—it was, in the opinion of the writer, no longer a Reading—of *A Christmas Carol*, in aid of the noble work of the good Sisters at Nazareth House; and that I had read already for every possible charity, irrespective of creeds, thinking only of good works, never of dogma.

"As to the success of Sir Squire Bancroft's *tour de force*," the report continued, "the most learned and the most lucid judgment or criticism came from the lips of the Lord Chief Justice of England, who presided on this occasion. Every one present hung upon his words when he pronounced, in earnest and solemn tones, this work of Charles Dickens to be a 'Christmas sermon which all should take to heart,' a noble example of true humanity, unselfishness, and charity, and then proceeded to deliver a very pointed and admirable criticism on the brilliant effort which had just concluded. He said, and very justly said, that quite apart from histrionic ability and the gifts of the actor as such, no man could convey the sense of the immortal *Carol* unless he possessed a warm, sympathetic, and charitable heart. It is well that these words should be spoken with such dignity and authority by so excellent a critic and so good a judge."

The fact was, the writer went on to say, that by constant repetition and study, and by unswerving earnestness, I had changed a prose romance into a spoken poem. "An actor of rare observation and versatility, with a keen sense of humour, he indulges in no show, no bombast, no affectation. Everything he does is done in the best of taste, and the audience is conscious rather of a cheery conversationalist and a teller of good stories than a public reader."

The most successful passages were stated to be, perhaps, those of racy humour. The Fezziwig dance of "Sir Roger de Coverley," the game of Blind Man's Buff with the "plump sister," the immoderate laughter of the irrepressible nephew, and poor Bob Cratchit's Christmas goose feast, had literally brought down the house. Never had a couple of hours slipped so pleasantly away, and there was not the slightest fatigue or effort on the part of the reader, who had seemed to enjoy it as much as any one in the crowded hall. And this, as the writer justly said, was the secret of success. "A nobler devotion of the acquired talent of an eminent actor and the leisure earned by the fruits of industry and judgment has seldom been recorded. Here is a man still eager for work, still loving his art, and he devotes his talents to the service of the suffering, the afflicted, and the poor. It is a fine example."

After this Reading I was gratified at receiving the following letter from the Cardinal Archbishop:

ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE, WESTMINSTER,  
November 25, 1897.

DEAR SIR SQUIRE,—

Allow me to express to you my very hearty thanks for the charity you have performed in behalf of Nazareth House. I am very grateful to you for this great act of kindness. May God bless and reward you is the prayer of

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT CARD: VAUGHAN.

At about the same time I had a similar pleasure in giving the Reading for the Jewish Hospital, at which the Chief Rabbi did me the honour to preside. The audience, which comprised many of the most prominent followers of that great faith, was, it is needless to add, one of the most responsive I have appealed to—for the Jews are well known for their wide knowledge and true appreciation of art in all its branches.

My allusion to these leaders in ancient creeds reminds me of an occasion when two similar dignitaries who attended a big function sat side by side at luncheon. The Cardinal helped himself bountifully to cold ham, which was declined by his neighbour the Chief Rabbi, to whom the Cardinal said, "When will the day come when you, sir, will partake of ham?" The Chief Rabbi replied, "At your Eminence's wedding."

A great stimulus was given to the success of these Readings by one of the many acts of kindness with which I have been honoured by the King. Soon after I started them, I had the good fortune to meet His Majesty (then Prince of Wales), by the invitation of Lord Burnham, at Hall Barn, where His Royal Highness was staying for a shoot extending over several days. On the afternoon of my arrival the Prince at once spoke about the "Carol," and asked if I would like to give the Reading at Sandringham at the coming Christmas-time, when the house would be full of guests. Needless to say, I could have wished for no greater honour, no greater help to any project. A few days later I heard from Lord Knollys, and all was arranged.

On my arrival at Sandringham I was met by Sir Dighton Probyn, and we were soon joined by my Royal host, who took a personal interest in the preparations for my evening's work. In the drawing-room, before dinner, I found among the "house-party" two old friends, Sir Charles du Plat and Sir Charles Hall. On entering, the Princess of Wales paused to look round the room, and then, breaking through the

formalities usually observed on these occasions, advanced towards me and graciously welcomed me as her guest. I felt deeply honoured. At the table, also, were the present Prince and Princess of Wales and a large company. The audience for my Reading was completed by invitations given to many friends and neighbours, the household, and the servants—the ballroom being quite full. The Reading was accompanied by loud laughter and applause, a special tribute being paid to my impromptu description of the memorable turkey as “real Norfolk.” In the billiard-room, later in the evening, I had suitable opportunity to show the present King the gold cigar-case which was given to me by Queen Victoria at Balmoral, saying that it was the first occasion on which I had carried it. The Prince at once replied, suiting the action to the word, “Perhaps you would like me to be the first to take a cigar from it?”

I have always gratefully remembered some words spoken by the present Prince of Wales at a meeting of the Committee of what is now called King Edward’s Hospital Fund:

“I take this opportunity of referring to one particular class of the community from which the London hospitals derive frequent, substantial, and unassuming help—that is, from a profession whose generosity and readiness to help those in adversity is almost proverbial—I mean the dramatic profession. I sometimes think we do not fully realise how much of their valuable time and of their artistic powers are gratuitously given by the members of the stage for charitable purposes.”

The good-nature of the Prince towards my calling does not end in gracious words; they have often gone hand in hand with kind acts.

We all, I suppose, sometimes say what is known as “a good thing.” I was credited with one when the Prince and Princess of Wales honoured by their presence the *fête* organised by the actors for the benefit of their Orphanage.



My wife had lost a little green parrot, for the return of which I offered a reward of ten shillings, giving our address, but no name. One of the newspapers, however, had a paragraph headed, "Lady Bancroft's Lost Lovebird." It was my privilege, with others, to receive their Royal Highnesses at the Botanical Gardens, when the Prince produced a newspaper cutting and said, "I think I have Lady Bancroft's lost bird. One of the breed was flying about for some days in the garden of Marlborough House, and a gardener succeeded in catching it this morning. Pray go and see if it is yours, as I hope it may be; but, mind, I shall claim the reward." I replied, "Certainly, sir; it is small, but appropriate, being—*half a sovereign*."

By the first set of Readings I had the pleasure of handing over between three and four thousand pounds to hospitals in town and country. There were too many flattering comments about the good result, but I cannot refrain from adding some of the words given, to my surprise, by *The Morning Post*, in the unusual and highly complimentary form of a leading article, which said that:

The Reading at Stafford House had brought to a close, for that season, a splendid work which was being done in the cause of philanthropy. The programme had consisted, of course, of Dickens's *Christmas Carol*, which had delighted so many audiences, and upon that occasion the institution to be benefited was the Chelsea Hospital for Women. There were many ways of showing charity, and this was one that, though doubtless congenial to the tastes and disposition of the reader, involved an infinity of labour and no small amount of personal inconvenience. It was, at any rate, effectual. The reader had not confined his work to the Metropolis alone. I had recited the *Christmas Carol*—and it was far more a recitation than a reading—in all parts of the country, and the result was that I had been able during that winter to make gifts to various hospitals in London

and the provinces of sums which in the aggregate exceeded £3,000. As the readings would be resumed the following winter, and as it was my intention to extend them over even a longer period, the ultimate result of my efforts was likely to be the addition of a very large sum to the funds of the institutions which ministered to the sick and suffering in all parts of the country. There was surely to be found in this the truest kind of charity. That virtue took many forms, and numerous appeals were being then made to it. In some cases it was associated with the ostentation of wealth ; in others it was carried on entirely in secret. These were the two extremes, and each had its advantage. That which was now under discussion might be described as a middle course. The benefactor could not hide his work, for it was done in public, and it was to the public that I appealed. I had retired from the stage after making for myself a high reputation and a competent fortune, and might fairly claim to enjoy my retirement in leisured ease ; yet I had imposed upon myself exhausting labour in order that I might confer a lasting benefit upon my fellow-countrymen. The large sums which had by this means been distributed to the various hospitals to which I had given my services testified to the popular appreciation of the readings, and it was interesting to inquire what was the cause of that success. The secret was twofold. It was to be found, in the first place, in the intimate relation which the Reader established in the mind of his audience between himself and his subject, in the manner, to use a common phrase, in which he entered into the spirit of the story. While he was reading or reciting—it mattered little which it was called—he was the representative of the character he was assumed to pourtray, and he conveyed to the audience the meaning of the author in a manner that would have satisfied even the man who was at once a great master of the art of public reading and the author of the *Christmas Carol*—Charles Dickens himself. That led up to the second secret of my



*Squire Bancroft.*  
*from the portrait in oils by Hugh Riviere.*



power, and that was my combination of the platform and the stage. Without making any comparison, it might be said that in that respect there was sometimes a certain failure on the platform and elsewhere, and that a reader or speaker failed to gain the attention of his audience, not because his elocution was defective, but for lack of a little borrowing of dramatic effect. It was one thing, of course, to enact a part with all the accessories of scenery, of dresses, of make-up, and it was another thing altogether to read the same thing upon a platform, sandwiched between a chair and a table. It was because the performances of the *Christmas Carol* combined the best points of both, bringing the experience, the boldness, the gesture, the facility of expression acquired on the stage to bear upon the work on the platform, that they had succeeded in a degree which must be as much a source of just pride to the reader as it was of satisfaction to those who listened to him. He had given of his substance. He had utilised his brains and his powers for one of the noblest forms of public charity, and he had been justified by the appreciation with which his work had been everywhere received. An undertaking so public-spirited deserved public recognition, and the man who by his strenuous effort had attempted to lessen the stream of suffering and to attenuate the pangs of misery certainly deserved a frank and full acknowledgment."

Lord Glenesk, in whose famous journal this great compliment appeared, also wrote to my wife :

"The splendid lesson brought back so many memories of foolish neglect of opportunities—of hard words too hastily poured forth—that I was thankful for the lesson, so eloquently given, and when I think of the *example*, of the self-sacrifice—the travellings in winter weather—the abandonment of Home to succour the poor, I recognise the noble motive."

I have reason to be proud of the names of distinguished men who have presided and spoken at these Readings. During the first winter I was

honoured by the late Prince Edward of Saxe-Weimar, the Bishop of Ripon, Bishop Mitchinson, the Lord Justice Clerk of Edinburgh, the late Dean of Canterbury (Dr. Farrar), the Dean of York, the Dean of Norwich and the late Dean of Manchester ; the late Duke of Beaufort, the late Earl of Lathom (then the Lord Chamberlain), the late Lord Malmesbury, Lord Reay, the late Lord Glenesk, the late Lord Loch, the Right Hon. St. John Brodrick, (when at the War Office—now Lord Midleton), the Hon. Sydney Holland, Sir Frank Lockwood, Sir Henry Thompson, the Vice-Chancellors of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and the Headmasters of Eton, Harrow, and Winchester. To give the Reading now and again to the boys at the great public schools of England remains among my true pleasures.

At the close of one of the Readings, at which he had been present, Lord Strathcona expressed a flattering wish to make my acquaintance, and then said how sorry he was that the *Carol* could not be given in Canada. I replied that I thought it might be, as I should much like to visit the Dominion. After a warning from the grand old peer not to make rash offers lest I be taken at my word, I agreed to talk the matter over at home, as the prospect of a separation of three thousand miles and the rigours of a Canadian winter meant matter for thought on both sides. I had my wife's helpful sympathy throughout, and it was settled that I should be a fortnight in Canada, and give the Reading at Montreal, Quebec, Ottawa, Kingston, Toronto, Hamilton, and London.

My arrangements for the second series in England were already completed ; and, looking back, I certainly may claim to have worked hard that winter. For instance, in the course of twelve days I gave eight Readings, and travelled many hundreds of miles. Itinerary: Read at Newcastle-on-Tyne, when Sir Edward Grey presided ; a late supper afterwards. The next day, read at Glasgow ; supper at the Con-

servative Club. The following morning, luncheon with the Lord Provost in the Municipal Buildings ; then a night off. The next evening, read at Southport ; another supper. On the Saturday afternoon, read at Liverpool ; a big dinner afterwards. Sunday, returned home. Monday, read at Bath ; big dinner-party to follow. Tuesday afternoon, read at Torquay, after a luncheon-party on arrival ; the same evening, on to Plymouth, late dinner. Wednesday, early morning visit to James Doel, then the oldest living actor ; read in the evening. Thursday, returned to London. Friday afternoon, read in the Inner Temple Hall, Lord Halsbury (then Lord Chancellor) presiding. Saturday, sailed for Canada.

It has been my rule to bear my own travelling-expenses on these expeditions, so I paid an ordinary return fare to New York, it being impossible to sail direct for Canada, as at that time of year the St. Lawrence was frozen over. No sooner, however, had I alighted from the train at Montreal than I was taken possession of, and treated like a prince, until I quitted Canadian soil. Owing to the long and truly valued friendship I have enjoyed with Sir Rivers Wilson, who owns that phase of youth which defies old age, a private railway car was placed at my disposal on the Grand Trunk Line, of which he is chairman, while the chairman of the Canadian Pacific insisted on doing the same for me—in both instances a great privilege and a great surprise. I was entertained in delightful fashion at Montreal by Sir George Drummond ; at Quebec by the Bishop ; at Ottawa by the Governor-General, Lord Aberdeen, where I had the pleasure of meeting Sir Wilfrid Laurier ; at Toronto by the Governor of Ontario, Sir Oliver Mowat,—all of whom presided at Readings ; and when I told Sir Oliver how much I wished to see Niagara, he made arrangements for a private car to meet me there, that I might see all its winter wonders in a way only possible to those so favoured.

My other hosts, although their names are not so

widely known, shared in a hospitality which was boundless and ever to be remembered by me. The weather was a real type of Canadian winter, the winter of the "Lady of the Snows." When I entered the sleigh to go to the hall at Montreal on my opening night, I had to face a blizzard, and said to my host that we surely should find an empty house. He laughed, and answered that they could not wait for weather there. And so it was. The place was packed with a splendid audience that made me feel at home after I had spoken three sentences, and followed me throughout the Reading with the keenest interest and manifest pleasure.

In response to some too-flattering words spoken by Sir George Drummond, I ended by thanking the audience for the great kindness shown to one who, though a stranger, declined to think of himself as a foreigner in a land where both he and his audience revered the same great Queen. The outburst of cheering at the simple words amazed me and showed me what loyalty meant.

One criticism on this Canadian enterprise, which appeared after the first Reading, shall represent the many columns written on the subject. The writer described how, of his own volition and at his own expense, the reader had undertaken to visit that country to give a series of Readings in aid of the funds of hospitals and the Victorian Order of Nurses. The generous offer had been gratefully accepted by those who had this work at heart, conscious that they would be under a lasting obligation to one whose art had delighted his generation in the Mother Country, and whose Sovereign, upon the recommendation of the Marquess of Salisbury, had conferred upon him the honour of knighthood to express her appreciation of the services he had rendered to his profession by the refinement and elevated character of his art. The reader, according to this friendly critic, was simplicity itself. This, apart from his talent, constituted his charm. He neither read nor declaimed, as those



words are ordinarily understood, but by his voice and gesture and attitude, by a sympathy so delicate as to make every minor chord of feeling its own, by a sense of humour, a tenderness which felt all the poignancy of sorrow and loss, he made Dickens's characters live and move and suffer and enjoy. One saw a gentleman in evening dress; but, by the alchemy of art, he became Scrooge, and the ghost, and Bob Cratchit, and Tiny Tim—each and every character in turn. This was accomplished by a sympathetic transmutation, by virtue of which the reader became the character itself. The audience had perceived that in the reader, who really never looked upon his book, and whose method was simply the expression of naturalness, they had before them the finished artist.

I was "snowed up" for some hours on my way to Quebec, and crossed the grand river in a sleigh.

One little incident which occurred during the happy fortnight I spent in the Dominion may be worth relating. I was seated in my "observation car" on the way to Toronto, when the "porter," as the man in charge is called, brought me the card of an "interviewer," who followed at his heels before I could deny myself. The young man at once seated himself familiarly close to me, and informed me that he was engaged for an American journal on a political errand, but that, hearing there was what he was pleased to call a "distinguished Englishman" on board the train, he thought he might do a stroke of business for us both, adding, as he produced a note-book, that he understood I was engaged in giving medical lectures in Canada. I replied that my mission was not exactly of that nature, although it chanced to have some connection with hospitals; upon which the irrepressible young man ejaculated, "Hospitals? Exactly—near enough! And you, sir, I presume, are an eminent member of the noble medical profession in the old country?" I regretted that, unfortunately, I could not claim

that distinction. "But you are, of course, a doctor?" he persisted. I answered in the negative. Not the least abashed, my tormentor, who really was amusing me very much, then bluntly put the question, "Then, sir, what are you?" I told him I was an actor. "An actor! Then where on earth do the hospitals come in?" I endeavoured briefly to explain. He seemed more than ever bewildered, as he said, "Then, sir, may I ask your name?" I replied that I had remarked that for some minutes he had been trying hard to read it on an article of luggage, which I thereupon pushed towards him. He repeated the name slowly—"Bancroft!—Hospital!—Sir—Squire—Bancroft! Guess, sir, you puzzle me. I have heard of a Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft who were in that line in your country, but never came over here. Any relation?" I replied that I chanced to be the male member of that firm. The young man rose, put up his note-book, and, as he made for the corridor, said solemnly, "Sir, I wish you a pleasant journey. I guess I know more about local politics than your attainments."

When my work was done, its bright experiences were brought to a close with the sights of Niagara in its solemn, winter grandeur—sights never to be forgotten, including the mighty whirlpool where Webb, the champion swimmer of the Channel, so rashly threw away his life. After sleeping with the roar of its mighty waters in my ears—a sound which it baffles my paltry pen to describe—I spent an hour or two at Buffalo, and then caught the "Empire Express" to New York. I was there simply as a private person, homeward bound, and merely desirous of seeing once again a city I had known many years before. But I had not been, literally, ten minutes in the hotel, and that at a late hour—I had merely asked at the office if the room I had telegraphed for had been reserved for me, had written my name in the book of arrivals and been shown to my room—when a boy knocked

at the door to say that an "interviewer" wished to see me. The mystery remained unsolved, for in a few minutes I was in bed.

Naturally my amazement was great at the marvellous changes in New York since my brief visit as a boy, nearly forty years before; and I was, I own, and more than ever, full of regrets at never having acted in America. There, as at home, we should have had the glory which is the reward of pioneers. In Bond Street, in which at the date of my previous visit I had lodged, I found, instead of pleasant private dwellings, lofty warehouses and towering cranes; the same with Houston Street and Bleecker Street close by. Between them Laura Keene's theatre had stood, while Wallack's theatre was then below Canal Street. In those days there was not a single shop on Broadway above Bond Street, opposite which was the theatre farthest "up town"—called, I think, the Metropolitan—with the single exception of the Academy of Music, as the Opera House was named, which was on Fourteenth Street. I believe this theatre, in some form, still exists. Down by the City Hall and Astor House I went up a tremendous "sky-scraper"—a strange, Gilbertian, topsy-turvy form of architecture—which extinguished everything below; indeed, the spire of Trinity Church looked itself very like an extinguisher, and the churchyard of St. Paul's, hard by, seemed very small and insignificant. When I descended, I went there to look again at the grave of the once famous actor George Frederick Cooke, who died in America: he who threatened to make "Black Jack," as he called John Kemble, "tremble in his shoes," and kept his word; he who had seen Macklin play Shylock in the way that Pope immortalised, and went still further on the right road himself, only to be surpassed, in turn, by his own intense admirer, Edmund Kean. It was Kean who erected to Cooke's memory the vault I speak of. Afterwards it was restored by Charles Kean, and

later still by Sothern, whose goodness, at the time when I read the inscriptions, had left it in sound repair. I trust it is so still, or it would be a labour of love to English actors again to restore it.

From what I now read and hear, the New York of ten years ago has by this time become equally "ancient history" with the city I have written about.

The four days I spent there were very happy, very long, and very busy, but tinged with regret at the discovery that a letter written to me by Augustin Daly, and addressed to an hotel at Montreal, had not come to hand. The purport of the letter was to invite me, if my plans would allow of such an arrangement, to read the *Carol* at his theatre one afternoon before I returned to England. This might easily have been done, perhaps in aid of the American Theatrical Fund. I was indeed sorry.

I derived much amusement, however, from a conversation I had with Daly on the telephone at my hotel. Being unfamiliar, then, with that useful but aggravating instrument, I dictated my share of the task to a diminutive Yankee boy with a powerful twang. When Daly asked, "How is your dear wife?" I prompted the boy to say, "Splendid; heard from her this morning." The answer at once came back, "So glad to hear it, and so glad to hear your voice again!"

I sailed for home in the *Umbria* with a bewildered sense of great kindness and hospitality from Augustin Daly, from John Drew, and from friends in an old-world remnant of the city—Washington Square—at whose house I met an always welcome friend, George Smalley. I treasure recollections of proffered welcome from leading clubs; of the company of the famous actor, William Gillette, of Daniel Frohman, and a former member of our company, Maurice Barrymore (father of the accomplished Ethel Barrymore). It was Maurice Barrymore, by the way, who sent an amusing answer by telegram to a proposed engage-

ment, the terms of which did not appeal to him: "Offer duly received; have sent it to one of the comic papers." I recall, too, Ada Rehan's bewitching *Country Girl*; and, above all, the pathetic room at the Players' Club in Gramercy Park, which was built by Stanford White for Edwin Booth, where the touching souvenirs of America's great actor are treasured and tended, just as he left them when his sweet and generous spirit passed away.

After the figures were added up, I was as surprised as pleased to find that during that busy winter the large sum of seven thousand pounds had been paid to hear my Reading of Dickens's simple story.

I may here relate an unaccountable blunder I committed when on my way to give the Reading at Bradford under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Ripon. At that time there were two express trains to the North, one from Euston, the other from King's Cross; both started at 1.30, and by both of them I had recently travelled on similar errands. Full of thought, I drove to Euston instead of to King's Cross. When I asked for a ticket, there was some delay; and at last it was given to me with the name of my destination, Bradford, written upon it in ink. I thought it strange that tickets for so important a place should be out of print, but took my seat in the train; and it was only when well beyond Rugby that I realised what I had done. Eventually, after hurried, anxious talk with the authorities at Crewe, I got out at Stafford. There, in great excitement, I ordered a special train and telegraphed home to allay anxiety. Some difficulties about the special, owing to the Christmas traffic, were overcome by my earnest appeals to disregard cost. I was, indeed, prepared to pay anything demanded of me, for never once in my life had I failed to keep an appointment with the public, and should have been doubly distressed at breaking an engagement in which I was doing the work for nothing. Eventually, I reached Bradford five minutes before the time fixed for the Reading.

To add to my troubles, the confusion had driven out of my head the name of the hall where I was to give the Reading. Fortunately, one of the flymen on the station rank remembered it, and drove me quickly to its doors. The audience was already pouring in. After inquiry at an hotel hard by—the same hotel in which a few years later Henry Irving stumbled in the hall and then fell dead—I found the Bishop. He had telegraphed to London for the cause of my absence, and receiving no explanation, had settled to fill my place by giving his lecture on Dante ; but on my appearance he immediately drove to the hall, asked for a short delay, explained the reason, and then returned to fetch me. I dressed by magic, swallowed some soup, and, appearing on the platform only fifteen minutes late, was greeted with great warmth. I had never before felt so pleased, as I told the assembled crowds, to face my audience.

There is but little more I need tell. With less frequency, but not less interest, I have given the Reading winter after winter, for hospitals chiefly out of London, and to the boys at the great schools. The Readings to the latter I look upon as my special treat ; money, of course, has no part in such pleasures. I hope, before I have done—and I am not far off it—that my gift will reach the sum of twenty thousand pounds, all paid to hear me read Dickens's story. The expenses of the Readings are small, being limited to the hire of a hall and a little printing. Another result has been that a good deal of money has been given in annual subscriptions and, I have some reason to believe, as legacies in wills. I have in mind especially the case of a bachelor of real wealth, who moved me very much by some simple words he once spoke to me. I hope he will never marry !

I recall a few more names of distinguished men who have, by presiding, so largely helped at these Readings ; but my heaviest debt is due to those dear ladies on committees who have worked so hard to sell the tickets. Without their aid I should not have

achieved one-half the good result. I kiss their hands.

The Duke of Norfolk, a few years since, postponed an important engagement in London and journeyed purposely to Sheffield to help the hospital. We were rewarded by a fine result. Among others who have presided are the Duke of Abercorn, the late Duke of Westminster, the Duke of Fife, Lord Lathom, Lord Wolseley, Lord Tredegar, the late Dr. Creighton (when Bishop of London), Lord Alverstone, Lord Avebury, Sir Edward Grey, Sir William Broadbent, Dr. Bradley (when Dean of Westminster), the Deans of Windsor, Lincoln, Rochester, and Gloucester, and several of the Lord Mayors of London, notably Sir Alfred Newton, who first gave me the Egyptian Hall at the Mansion House when I realised my largest sum, eight hundred pounds, owing to an indefatigable secretary of the Earlswood Asylum. I received much kindness, too, from the never-ending charity of the Stock Exchange. This Reading, I remember well, was given on the afternoon of Black Friday. The Lord Mayor was late, having been detained at the War Office over the patriotic offer of the C.I.V. to go to our help in the South African War. In art, Sir Edward Poynter and Arthur Pinero have honoured me as chairmen; and Henry Irving had promised to do so, unfortunately at a Reading which had to be postponed.

From many letters on the subject, I have selected three. The first was written by a friend and lover of Charles Dickens, a man who knew him well, and who, though he no longer mingles with the world, survives. I may disclose his identity to some when I say that in olden times he daily rode a very tall horse in the Row, the animal being rarely known to break from a slow and stately walk. W. S. Gilbert one morning, seeing its solemn approach, galloped towards it and, as he dashed by, called loudly to the rider that if he persisted in going on in that way he would be taken up for *furious loitering*! This is what the friendly critic wrote:

"Yours is the best *Carol* reading I have ever heard—*bar one!* C. D.'s reading was so complicated by the intense interest of the author's personality, so bound up with the gratification of excited curiosity to see the very author of the *Carol* in the flesh, that it is quite impossible to discriminate judicially, and to separate the mere reading from the reader himself, in the case of C. D. Therefore, it is unfair, and indeed ungenerous, to compare, or contrast, C. D.'s own reading with yours, or any one else's reading."

"Our old friend Bellew would have read *Maud* infinitely better than Tennyson read it; yet the reading of *Maud* by Bellew could never have equalled in interest, and in its effect on the audience, the author of *In Memoriam* standing there, actually in the flesh, reciting his own composition."

"There are passages in your reading which are, to my mind, more natural and more touching than C. D.'s—which all through was tainted with just a *souppçon* of insincerity. But he had points of admirable dexterity which told immensely. When old Fezziwig was dancing, C. D. stopped before the word 'wink,' as if searching for a phrase, and then jerked it out very effectively, as if on a sudden inspiration. He made an immense hit of this."

"When Tiny Tim beats his knife on the table and 'feebly cried "Hooray!"' C. D. gave it in a high, childish treble, with a suggestion of feeble crippledom that was very good business. You put in some lines last night which are from *The Chimes* (unless I am doddering), and most beautiful they are!

"There may be a few other little reminiscences which come up out of the half-forgotten past, but are of no account. One thing, you *got* the audience quite as much as he did. The handkerchiefs were going freely, both male and female; one girl became hysterical, and went rapidly out. When you did the laughing, which is entirely new and all your own, it became infectious, and they all laughed really and uproariously. The reading is a genuine success as



a reading; and the impression is deepened and intensified by the knowledge of the genuine generosity with which the readings are given. May they go on, and prosper!"

The second came from a cultured friend, who wrote:

"I am anxious to tell you how deeply interested we were from first to last this afternoon.

"'Readings,' as such, are a novelty to me. I had no idea such dramatic force of interpretation could be put into the story, and your very fine rendering was altogether a revelation. Though sitting well back, every syllable reached me from a sympathetic voice, and the meaning of every passage, every word, was made abundantly clear by your remarkable emphasis and action. It was a real *tour de force*, and for me a genuine intellectual treat. I doubt very much whether Dickens himself had realised the true dramatic possibilities of his story, and my reason for this is that when closeted alone with the volume there is a dead level of excellence running clear through the story; whereas under your interpretation it would seem that the first half of the story is really finer as a piece of prose composition than the second half, in spite of the fact that the dramatic effort was, if anything, keener during the second than it was during the first part.

"It was purely your own exposition of the text that provoked this piece of criticism, which in one's armchair would have certainly escaped me.

"The measure of general excellence cannot be put to a higher ordeal than this. The tear-compelling rendering of pathetic passages is quite another matter—a valuable adjunct, but intellectually on a lower plane.

"Be it Canada, Calcutta, or Fiji, wherever you take your *Carol*, lovers of Dickens will love to hear you read him."

The third letter came from a well-known actor, in these terms:

"When I heard Dickens read his own work I thought I should never hear anything so fine again, but I have to-night. I shall certainly never try to read the *Christmas Carol* after your supremely admirable performance."

Of all the many compliments which have been paid to me, one of the most enjoyable came from the lips of a public school-boy, and I valued his words at their true worth. In the middle of the Reading the youngster turned to his mother and said loudly, "I say, mater, isn't he jolly good? He ought to have been an actor."

One serious word. Whatever the worth of my work, it has been a labour of love, if only to make the story better known to a new generation; remembering always and echoing the words Thackeray wrote when Dickens first sang his *Christmas Carol* to the English-speaking world: "It seems to me a national benefit, and to every man or woman who reads it a personal kindness."

Not the least of the many pleasures the work has given me have been the approval and the sympathy of the immortal writer's surviving children: of his son, Henry Fielding Dickens, who has maintained the cherished inheritance of his name with honour and distinction; and of his daughter, that sweet woman, Kate Perugini. To their names I would affectionately add another—borne by his faithful friend, their faithful friend, that gentle, loving lady, Georgina Hogarth.

## CHAPTER XIV

### DEPARTED GUESTS

“He would have all as merry  
As, first, good company, good wine, good welcome,  
Can make good people.”

THE Shakespearian heading I have chosen for this chapter reminds me of a remark made by Sir William Gilbert, that it always seemed to him quite as important for a host to remember what he intended to put on the chairs as what he meant to put on the table.

Chatting one evening with a dear friend in my dining-room, I happened to mention the name of another once-dear friend who had but recently left us, when my companion said, “I last spoke to him at this table; and how many have sat round it, my dear B., whom he has now joined!” This set us both thinking, until I said, “Yes, indeed, I am sure there must be a hundred such friends whose names would be known far and wide.” The thought haunted me through the night, and the next morning I wrote some names down. They recalled a wealth of friendship and love, admiration and esteem, joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, all mixed together—a human salad. Some of my thoughts concerning those departed guests I will tell the reader.

Certain of their names, so prominent when, as young people, we first knew them, may be faded now, but few are completely forgotten.

“Their ears are deaf to human praise,  
Their lips to mortals mute;  
But still their words deep echoes raise,  
Their thoughts have endless fruit.”

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE COCKBURN was the first great man of light and leading who dined with us in the days of our youth, and he shall head the list. We knew him in the early days of the Tichborne trial. He had one of the most musical and telling male voices I ever listened to. In the street he looked not unlike the skipper of his own beloved yacht. We enjoyed his friendship for the last ten years of his life.

I recall one evening when the Lord Chief dined with us and Mr. Critchett was among our guests; he asked my wife to introduce him to Sir Alexander. She did so in these words: "Will you allow me, dear Chief, to present to you Mr. Critchett, the celebrated oculist? As Justice is blind, you may find him a most useful man." To which Sir Alexander replied, in his courtly manner, "If, when you first lift the film from my eyes, you will permit me to gaze on Mrs. Bancroft, I shall thank you, sir."

Returning to our work from a holiday in Switzerland, we rested for a night at Geneva. On the next day we learnt by the firing of guns and a display of bunting that the *Alabama* claims had just been settled, the Conference having been held there. England's representative—Lord Chief Justice Cockburn—was staying at the Hôtel des Bergues; so we lost no time in calling upon him. The circumstance is a reminder of a characteristic letter received from the Lord Chief just before he started on this mission.

40, HERTFORD STREET, MAYFAIR,  
Tuesday.

DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,—

I should be delighted to dine with you, as you so kindly wish; but, alas! I am just leaving for Geneva. Your note makes me wish the *Alabama* had gone to the bottom of the sea the day she was launched! In utmost haste, very truly yours,

A. E. COCKBURN.

Early in the list must come CHARLES MATHEWS. This finished comedian and polished gentleman has

several times been mentioned in this book ; now, with regret, we write his name for the last time.

Mathews was thirty when he went upon the stage, and for more than forty years—as he worked continually until a few days before his death in the summer of 1878—was one of the greatest of the public's favourites. In defence of the view he took of his art, he once said, " It has been urged against me that I always play the same characters in the same way, and that ten years hence I should play the parts exactly as I play them now ; this I take as a great compliment. It is a precision which has been aimed at by the models of my profession, which I am proud to follow, and shows, at least, that my acting is the result of art and study, and not that of mere accident."

My wife and I passed many happy evenings at his house in Pelham Crescent in the early part of our married life.

It was during a holiday at Scarborough that we added to our list of friends that strange and interesting creature HENRY FOTHERGILL CHORLEY, in his day an authoritative musical critic ; always a friend to the young—notably to Arthur Sullivan. He was a man who neither loved nor hated by halves ; but of his nature we fortunately knew only the tender side. We grew to know him well, which meant to like him much. It happened that he first felt an interest in us through having accidentally overheard the terms of affection in which we chanced to speak of Charles Dickens, whose death was then recent. Chorley's love for the great writer was profound, and he referred to it in these pathetic terms : " I have a letter from poor Mary. If universal sympathy of the warmest kind in every form could soften the agony of such a trial—they will have it in overflowing measure ; but it will not give back one of the noblest and most gifted men I have ever known, whose regard for me was one of those honours which make amends for much failure and disappointment. I cannot express to any human being the void this will

make for me to my dying-day." As his friends fell from him, Chorley would say, with a sigh, "There goes another page from my book. Shall I have courage to try and replace it by a new leaf?"

His love for Dickens was manifested until the end of his life, for by his wish two branches from the cedar trees which grew on the lawn at Gad's Hill were placed on either side of him in his coffin.

In those days we also first met J. M. BELLEW, whom, when he was still a clergyman of the Church of England, I had often heard preach. He had great oratorical gifts; and doubtless owed something of his pulpit popularity to his grand voice, his long silvery hair, and altogether remarkable appearance. His reading of the "death chapter" from the Burial Service was very impressive, but his delivery of the Commandments was theatrical. In the fifth commandment he used to thunder out the words, "Honour thy father," then drop his voice to its most dulcet tones, gently to murmur, "and thy mother."

Later on we were neighbours, and I remember the story of another neighbour, also a clergyman, who for years wore one of the most palpable of wigs, although convinced in his own mind that no one shared the secret. He even went so far as to wear several wigs in turn, the hair on each of them being of different lengths. Bellew one morning met his friend just as he was leaving the house, and asked if they could walk together. "Delighted," said the owner of the coffee-coloured "jasey," "if you are going towards Bond Street, where I must stop to *have my hair cut.*"

I have always thought Bellew should, like his son, have gone upon the stage, which he would certainly have adorned. It was said that Fechter's striking and original performance of Hamlet owed much to his help and counsel.

I come now to an old and valued friend of quite another stamp, MR. J. M. LEVY: a kind, wise man, the founder of the vast fortunes of *The Daily Telegraph*, and, in my opinion, one of the greatest friends

to the drama, in his own or any other times. It was Mr. Levy who first gave to its affairs, in the great journal he then controlled, the prominence and the importance which he always considered its due, and which have been maintained by his successors. Our stage owes him much, and English actors should hold his memory in high regard.

Mr. Levy rarely dined from home on a Sunday, and then for many years left his guests, punctually at nine o'clock, and drove to Fleet Street. He once came to us, and I remember that a messenger from Fleet Street arrived by his orders during dinner, specially to bring him the assurance that all was well there. Telephones were not even in their cradles then.

My wife reminds me of a pathetic incident at a dinner-party given by Mr. Levy in Grosvenor Street, when Henry Russell, the veteran composer of *Cheer, Boys, Cheer, The Red, White, and Blue*, and a mass of stirring patriotic songs, was among the guests. After dinner the two old friends talked of the days of their youth, and in his enthusiasm our host begged Russell to sing once more *The Ship on Fire*. The old man at last consented, on condition that his host should sing a verse of a ballad too. It was delightful. Russell dashed at the piano, and amazed all present by the force of his voice and the earnestness of his accompaniment. Afterwards, when Mr. Levy warbled, in a sweet, soft voice, true to time and tune, the old song, *She Wore a Wreath of Roses*, the reader will readily believe that tears trickled down the cheeks of several who had the good fortune to be present.

Towards the end of a long and honourable career, he was a great sufferer. I was sitting by his side one afternoon at his house, when Corney Grain joined us, and in the course of conversation alluded to the deaths of two public men, which had recently occurred, dwelling for a moment on the subject. I can hear Mr. Levy's voice now as he waved a trembling hand and said, "Don't, Corney Grain—don't! Speak to me of them when they are dancing."

Another early friend was TOM HOOD, the clever son of an illustrious father. Not long before he died, he gave my wife a copy of that droll nursery story, *The Headlong Career and Woeful Ending of Precocious Piggy*. She has drawn many a laugh from the little ones to whom she has read the story, and her copy—a gift from the son who so cleverly illustrated his father's quaint fancy—has an extra drawing which represents "Piggy" in evening dress, with crush hat, gloves, and opera-glass complete, and the following verse :

"Where are you going to, you little pig?  
 To the new Prince of Wales's, dressed out in full fig,  
     In full fig, young pig?  
     A pig in full fig!  
 You'll see Marie Wilton, you lucky young pig!"

Next from the dim distance I remember SHIRLEY BROOKS, a handsome, fresh-coloured man, with beautiful eyes, who was then the able editor of *Punch*. The following letter from him recalls an early honour which befell me and made me very proud :

GARRICK CLUB, *Saturday, April 3, 1869.*  
 3.55 p.m. Rain. Wind, S.W.

MY DEAR BANCROFT,—

As your proposer here, I have the great pleasure of informing you that you have just been unanimously elected to the Garrick Club. Trusting that this will not render you *unduly* undomestic, I add, with my congratulations to you, my best regards to Mrs. Bancroft.

Ever yours faithfully,  
 SHIRLEY BROOKS.

George Duplex, an old physician, who had attended Edmund Kean, was my seconder.

The mere mention of the Garrick Club recalls great happiness enjoyed within its walls for forty years. I was received there in my youth with a welcome never to be forgotten, by men of mark in all the walks of life ; and I am honoured and cheered



in my advancing years by the friendship now given to me by their successors—a sweet compensation for the flight of time. This reminds me that I recently discovered my service on the committee of the club to be longer than that of any other member, as it dates from 1877.

Among the club's notable collection of works of art connected with the stage, I have the honour to be represented by a replica of the portrait of myself painted for me by my young friend Hugh Riviere, the son of my old friend Briton Riviere. The rare, if not unique, distinction, I trust, awaits the family of having Royal Academicians in two consecutive generations.

One of my early Garrick friends was the MARQUIS OF ANGLESEY of that time. I was his happy guest for many years at Epsom, where he had a private stand opposite the winning-post. In those days at the Garrick Club an old-fashioned card game, four-handed cribbage, was a good deal played, and Lord Anglesey was among its devotees. The following note has a reference to it :

WEST PARK, SALISBURY, *January 24, 1876.*

DEAR BANCROFT,—

I left London the morning after dining with you, or should have acknowledged your letter sooner. I have, however, written to Lady Constance and sent her the charming Woffington Gavotte, and she begs me to say she is extremely obliged to you for it.

What a pleasant dinner you gave us, but what a disastrous night I had !

Yours very truly,

ANGLESEY.

Lord Anglesey had intended to be present at our opening performance at the Haymarket Theatre, but died, after a short illness, the night before.

I made the acquaintance of the great actor EDMOND GOT in the troublous days of the Commune. When the chief members of the Comédie Française, of whom for many years he was the *doyen*,

were acting for some time in London, I was present at a banquet given in their honour, at which Lord Dufferin presided. He, with Lord Granville and Alfred Wigan, the actor, made speeches fluently in French. I recollect that I had the luck to be seated between the late Sir Frederick Pollock and George Du Maurier, both friends and lovers of the drama.

The Théâtre Français was kept open in those sad days by another part of the troupe, who played to receipts varying between eighty and two hundred francs a performance! In England money was made, and it fell to the lot of Got to take a share of it to his besieged comrades in Paris. The eminent actor had served in the French cavalry before he went upon the stage, and owed his life to the fact, through being recognised by an old companion-in-arms when he fulfilled the perilous errand of bringing succour from England to his fellow-players.

On July 8, 1879, he wrote :

“Je veux vous remercier de la gracieuse hospitalité que vous avez bien voulu nous offrir dans votre théâtre, et vous prier de mettre aux pieds de Mme. Bancroft l'hommage de mon respect et de ma très sincère admiration.

“Quant à vous, monsieur, vous avez montré ce que peut obtenir de ses artistes, un habile administrateur doublé d'un parfait comédien, c'est-à-dire un ensemble que je souhaiterais rencontrer sur beaucoup de scènes parisiennes, et quelquefois sur la nôtre.”

Got was accompanied by the incomparable *jeune premier*, LOUIS DELAUNAY, than whom few actors have given more pleasure to the world—for all the world at some time finds its way to the Théâtre Français. In 1879, at the time the illustrious company was playing in London with all its strength—a strength never since equalled—Delaunay told me a story of that charming, buoyant actress Jeanne Samary (a niece of the great Madeleine Brohan), who died all too soon, and who was noted for staunchly upholding the dignity of her calling. One

evening a very rich young man, the son of a well-known banker, who had the *entrée* of the Comédie Française, was standing in the green-room when Samary entered it. He made a profound bow. The actress slightly inclined her head, looked at him frigidly, and said, "May I give one so young as yourself a little advice? I was surprised, monsieur, when we met yesterday at the Salon—on varnishing day, too—to see you in the company of a woman of no reputation." "Madame," the young man replied indignantly—"madame, that lady was my sister." "Indeed, monsieur; I could not possibly have guessed it. In this theatre, to which I have the honour to belong, I always receive you as in my house. I knew you saw me at the Salon, but declined to recognise me; and so I concluded that your companion could only be one whose presence at your side made you pretend not to know me."

LORD JUSTICE HOLKER was a friend since youthful days in Liverpool, when he was a leading member of the Northern Circuit. I was present in court on an occasion when, in the middle of an important speech, he begged a moment's delay from the judge. He then beckoned and whispered to his clerk, who left the court. There was a long pause until the man returned and handed something to Holker. It turned out to be his snuff-box, from which the learned counsel deliberately took a heavy pinch, and then, quite calmly, went on with his address.

The last time we met, many years afterwards, he looked, and was, gravely ill. It was at the Grosvenor Gallery, where there used to be such happy times, such notable gatherings, on Sunday afternoons—meetings never to be forgotten by those who enjoyed the privilege of invitation.

The first great surgeon whom we knew was SIR WILLIAM FERGUSSON: he was marvellously kind to actors, from whom he would never take a fee. All we could do as a small return was to make him free of our theatre. On one occasion—it was the

first night of Wilkie Collins's play *Man and Wife*—Sir William took a box. Happily my wife caught sight of him, and a cheque for the price of the box, with a strong rebuke, was sent to him as soon as possible, to which he answered :

16, GEORGE STREET, HANOVER SQUARE,  
24 February, 1873.

DEAR MR. BANCROFT,—

I have so often trespassed on your liberality that I was reluctant to ask such a favour on so important a night. It appears, however, that I have not escaped your vigilance, and I have now for myself and daughters to express our thanks for the great politeness evinced by you and Mrs. Bancroft.

I agree most cordially with the *Observer* of yesterday, and concur in all that is so favourable ; but regret that Mr. Dewar has not met with that approbation which he deserves. His performance is the most unctuous bit of Scotch I have seen on the stage since the days of McKay (the Baillie), and was not appreciated by the audience, chiefly, I imagine, from want of knowledge of the true idiom.

The beautiful rooms you show us in your theatre make us disgusted with our own plain homes.

Yours very sincerely,

WILLIAM FERGUSSON.

The name of H. J. BYRON comes next upon our list. In an earlier chapter we have told something of this old friend. When the following letter was written, Byron's health had long been failing, and it was evident to the few friends he cared to keep about him that his race was nearly run. He grew dreadfully restless, and was constantly changing his home, generally having at least two empty houses on his hands. Within quite a short period we have correspondence dated by him from Eccleston Square, Bedford Square, Clapham Park, and Sutton.

LANGTON LODGE, SUTTON, SURREY,  
June 25, 1882.

MY DEAR BANCROFT,—

I ought to have answered your very kind letter before, but upon my word the weather has been so depressing that I have had no “go” in me, and have not taken up a pen, except under protest and on compulsion, for a month. If the sun would only show up like a man, I should feel like another one; but constant clouds and almost ceaseless winds drive one wretched. Good for the theatres, though. You will both soon enjoy what the papers always madden me by calling a “well-deserved” or “well-earned” holiday, and will, I suppose, seek the Engadine again.

I hope Mrs. Bancroft has escaped her quondam enemy, hay-fever, this year; I always think of her when passing the carts full of it—hay, not fever!

I have a lot of work on hand, with a most horrible and revolting distaste for doing it, and the very name of a playhouse drives me frantic. A boy came and left a bill announcing Collette as *The Colonel* at the Public Hall here last week. It is lucky I didn't catch him, but the Sutton boys are very agile. I like Collette, and I like *The Colonel*, but there *are* limits. Arthur Sketchley has been here for two or three days. He left yesterday, but the staircase still trembles. [This, of course, in allusion to Sketchley's bulk and weight.] And now, hoping you may both enjoy your rest, and with kindest regards,

Believe me, yours always sincerely,

H. J. BYRON.

A valued friend of those earlier days was the distinguished musician SIR JULIUS BENEDICT. I pause for a moment to express a hope that his son may one day be as distinguished on the stage.

Many years ago, when we were resting in a Swiss hotel high up in the mountains, we were amused by discovering likenesses amongst the visitors to

some of our acquaintances and friends, and spoke of them by the names of those whom we thought they resembled. There was an old lady in the hotel whose features so strongly suggested Sir Julius Benedict, that we never called her, among ourselves, by any other name.

One terribly wet day, when we were quite in cloudland, the mist being so dense that nothing could be seen beyond the railings of the terrace, and few had ventured beyond it, who should appear, to our amazement, but the veritable Sir Julius himself, who with wonderful pluck had walked up the mountain in the drenching rain. After having coffee with us, he expressed a wish to see the principal rooms. When we came to the large drawing-room, we saw the little old lady who went by the name of "Sir Julius," knitting at the farther end of it. As we entered, we looked at one another, and wondered whether we should draw attention to the resemblance. In a moment our merriment was changed to sentiment. No sooner had one of us uttered the name of Sir Julius, than the old lady looked up, fixed her eyes upon him for a moment, as though to realise, as it were, the fact that she was not dreaming, then rose from her chair, approached slowly and, with tears in her eyes, exclaimed, "Ach, Jules! mein Gott, sind Sie es!" The old man started, and seemed suddenly affected, then, kissing both her hands, said, "Meine liebe! meine alte Freundin!" Greatly surprised at this touching recognition, we left the old couple alone.

Before leaving, Sir Julius told us the history of this little drama. The old lady had been the object of his earliest love, the first romance of his life, and they had not met for full forty years.

I mention now an excellent actor of the olden time, WALTER LACY, whom I saw in nearly all Charles Kean's revivals at the Princess's Theatre in my boyhood. He was a great favourite at the Garrick Club, and most amusing through his extra-

ordinary choice of words. For instance, in describing the acting of an aspiring tragedian in the great scene between Shylock and Tubal, where the Jew learns how his daughter parted with the ring which he would not have sold for "a wilderness of monkeys," Lacy said, "At this point, sir, he leapt three feet into the air, and then gave a cry like the skreel of a banished eagle!" Speaking of some of his own performances, he thus related his different methods of dining: "When I played 'Bluff Hal,' Henry of England, I drank brown porter and dined off British beef; but if I had to act the Honourable Tom Shuffleton, I contented myself with a delicate cutlet and a glass of port which resembled a crushed garnet, and then sallied on to the stage with the manners of a gentleman and the devil-me-care air of a man about town!"

Speaking of an actress who was a popular favourite in his day, he said, tapping his forehead, "Mashed potatoes, sir, mashed potatoes, behind the *os frontis*!"

The old actor reached an advanced age, as the following letter will show:

13, MARINE SQUARE, KEMP TOWN, BRIGHTON,  
June 29, 1897.

MY DEAR BANCROFT,—

Still screwed to my chair with the painful sciatica, it is with the greatest pleasure I learn of your elevation to Knighthood which Her Imperial Majesty could not have bestowed on a more worthy man, and I heartily join with our whole profession, in my eighty-ninth year, in wishing you very many years of health and happiness to enjoy your well-earned dignity. Pray present my warm congratulations to Lady Bancroft.

Always sincerely yours,

WALTER LACY.

TOM TAYLOR, who was then the editor of *Punch*, we only claimed once as our guest, and only once

did we dine with him and Mrs. Taylor, a charming lady. They lived at what was then a country house, in Lavender Sweep, quite beautiful, with a small park and certainly one cow. I remember, too, a deal-topped dining-table, covered with a collection of notable autographs. Johnston Forbes-Robertson, who was then a young actor in our company, and combined the use of the palette and mahlstick with his love for the sock and buskin, had played often with Samuel Phelps at the end of his career. His admirable portrait of the famous actor, in the character of Cardinal Wolsey, was added, by subscription on the part of a hundred members, to the valuable collection of paintings owned by the Garrick Club. In this transaction I took an active part, writing, among others, to ask Tom Taylor to be one of the subscribers. He replied, in his always illegible handwriting :

LAVENDER SWEEP,  
January 30, '79.

DEAR BANCROFT,—

I shall be delighted to be one of the hundred to buy Forbes-Robertson's picture, and am very glad to hear of the excellent intention, which honours the two arts at once : acting, in the subject ; acting and painting, in the artist.

Very truly yours,  
TOM TAYLOR.

My first recollection of SERJEANT BALLANTINE is of being taken to have supper with him at "Evans's" Concert Rooms, by the Piazza in Covent Garden, where the National Sporting Club now is. The place was a strange contrast to the modern music-hall. The entertainment comprised comic songs, glees and choruses sung by boys, and imitations of the occupants of a farmyard by a certain Herr Von Joel. The fare was "Early Victorian"—steak and chops served with potatoes, which were squeezed from their jackets, in a napkin, for a favoured few by the proprietor, "Paddy Green" himself.



Serjeant Ballantine was prominent in the first Tichborne trial, when, with Markham Spofforth, he professed belief in the Claimant.

He was a great theatre-goer and lover of the play until the end, as the following letter, written during the last season of our management, will show :

9, SUFFOLK STREET, PAUL MALL, W.,  
January 16, 1885.

MY DEAR BANCROFT,—

Many thanks for the treat you gave me last night ; the play and the rendering of it were equally fine. I was delighted to see your wife as bright as ever, but must find this fault with the piece—it gives the audience too little of her admirable performance. Please tell her so. With my kind remembrances to you both,

Believe me, sincerely yours,

WILLIAM BALLANTINE.

Sweet memories are recalled by the name of the great American comedian, JOSEPH JEFFERSON. Dear Rip Van Winkle ! What an artist ! Had he not been so successful as an actor, he might easily have made painting his profession, his pictures having been more than once shown in the Academy. When last in England he gave us a charming souvenir from his brush of some happy days we had passed together, chiefly on the river. The subject is a backwater on the Thames in the early haze—the *genre* being greatly that of Corot.

Jefferson had lingered in the old country long after his engagements here were over, for he loved England and its people, and now was going home. The following letter was an answer to a wish that he would add, if possible, to the value we set upon his gift by writing his name on the canvas, which is quite important in size, although so modestly spoken of by himself :

MY DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,—

I was sorry to find yourself and Bancroft from home when I called on Monday with the little sketch of the Thames. I am glad you like it.

Many thanks for your kind and beautiful letter. I shall be in London on Sunday, and will call for the purpose of wishing you both good-bye, and to sign the picture as you request.

Mrs. Jefferson joins me in love to you both, and we still hope some day to see you in America.

Always your friend and admirer,

J. JEFFERSON.

Jefferson loved Nature. To linger on an old bridge, or wander in a country lane, would give him hours of happiness. Once, after a long ramble near Cookham, he said, "What a beautiful place is your England! How I should like to take it in my arms and just carry it right away!"

A little story of periodical visits to a certain theatre in his own country we thought touching in its simplicity. At this theatre the actor had for years taken friendly notice of an old scene-shifter named Jackson, whose life had interested him, and who always got some substantial recognition when the engagement ended. This went on for years, until, on one occasion, the kind comedian looked about for the old man in vain. He sent for the master carpenter, and asked him where Jackson was. The man first answered the question with a sorrowful look; then, simply pointing upwards, said quietly, "I guess he's *shifting clouds!*"

We were naturally proud of the friendship in our early days of so prominent a man as LORD HOUGHTON. One night I chanced to meet him at the Vaudeville Theatre, in Paris; between the acts he suggested our having some supper together after the play. We went to a café close by, where, to my amazement, his supper consisted solely of an ice. *A propos* of some pictures we had seen in the play,

he told me of an amusing story of his going to some dealers in Wardour Street, where he was well known, in search of a piece of furniture. On entering the shop he caught sight of the portrait of an admiral, apparently of Nelson's time, which he rather fancied and asked the price of. "Ten pounds," was the answer. Lord Houghton offered five; the dealer was obdurate. The subject was dropped, the article wanted was sought for upstairs, was found and bargained for. On going away Lord Houghton again returned to the price of the admiral's portrait. At last the dealer said, "Well, my lord, and to your lordship only, seven pound ten"; but his customer would not go beyond the offer of a fiver, and there was an end of the matter.

Soon afterwards, visiting a neighbour in Yorkshire, Lord Houghton caught sight of his friend the admiral hanging in the dining-room. He recognised him at once, and said, "Halloa, who's that? What have you got there? Something new?" "Yes," replied the friend; "he was a celebrated admiral who fought with Nelson—a fine portrait, too—recently bequeathed to us—an ancestor of my wife's." "Ah, was he?" said Lord Houghton. "A month ago he was within two pound ten of becoming one of mine!"

EDWARD ASKEW SOTHERN, and many acts of friendship shown to me by him, have been mentioned in this volume.

I was once the victim, although it was not traced to him for years, of one of his many practical jokes. On my reaching my dressing-room the stage-door keeper told me that a parcel had been left for me which he did not like the look of, continuing, mysteriously, that he did not like the feel of it either. "It's unpleasant, sir, very unpleasant, to the touch—I think there's something alive inside it. I only speak to warn you, sir, because if you opened it unawares, it might give you a fright!" "What on earth do you mean? Fetch the parcel, and we'll very soon see the contents."

The mysterious package was brought in. It was covered with thick brown paper, properly directed, and was officially marked "8*d.* to pay."

Directly I touched the packet I shared the man's belief, and my thoughts turned first towards the gift of a harmless sucking-pig; his, I fancy, took a more serious direction. We cut the string and, after removing a quantity of paper, disclosed the body of a dead *monkey*! The beast, although it had evidently only been dead a short time, was horrible to look at, and certainly, but for the warning I had received, would have alarmed me.

What to do with the wretched brute was my next thought. I did not mean to let the practical joke end with me, nor to waste the animal, but decided to pass it on to some one else; and after a little thought fixed on a young actor named Herbert, who had not yet arrived. Of course the hall-keeper was in the secret, and we carefully packed the animal up again, and attached the official label to the fresh covering.

When my victim arrived, he was asked for eight-pence, and then had the parcel sent to his room. Soon there was a wild shriek, and of course I rushed upstairs to see what was the matter.

After all sorts of cogitations, the poor monkey was left that night in the cellar of the theatre; and as otherwise no further fun seemed likely to arise from it, a long letter was concocted in French, as though written by an eminent foreign naturalist, who had by an unfortunate blunder sent the ape to a wrong address, requesting its recipient to be so kind as to readdress the "rare and very valuable specimen" to "Monsieur Herberte" at Long's Hotel, *to be called for*. Unfortunately, I have no end to my story. How long the mysterious parcel remained at the hotel before the "rare and very valuable specimen" too powerfully asserted its presence, I never knew—never inquired.

When we took the Haymarket Theatre, our old friend SIR EYRE MASSEY SHAW, in his due regard

for the public safety, did not spare us, and caused many things to be done which in earlier days had been neglected. We cheerfully submitted to his strenuous requests, which might indeed be called commands. Just before the opening night he sent me this letter:

FIRE BRIGADE, SOUTHWARK,  
January 28, 1880.

DEAR BANCROFT,—

I have tried all legitimate means to get a place for your opening night, but without success. Now I am trying what love will do.

Is there any way in which I can be present, *pour assister*, as the French say?

Forgive me for troubling you: my only wish is to show my appreciation—and admiration—of your successful efforts to serve the stage. My kind regards to Mrs. Bancroft and yourself,

Yours very truly,

EYRE M. SHAW.

I come next to DION BOUCICAULT. The amount of work done by him for the stage was colossal, from the days when, at the age of twenty-one, he wrote *London Assurance*, until his death in 1890; and how much of it, whether original or otherwise, was virile and dramatic! Old playgoers here and in America are largely in his debt. He was perfect as a host, charming as a guest, sympathetic as a listener, brilliant as a talker; and it has been said of him that he not only knew how to order a good dinner, but how to cook it as well.

With pardonable pride in the honour shown to so young a man as I was then, I have preserved the *menu* of the first dinner-party to which he invited me. It fully bears out his reputation both for hospitality and wit. The long list of wines includes "Cognac, 1803," which came from the cellars of Napoleon III., and had the imperial "N" on the bottle; and below the list are these words: "The

wine will be tabled—Every man his own Butler—Smiles and Self-help.”

HENRY STACEY MARKS was one of my earliest friends among eminent painters, although I saw but little of him since distant days. Some years ago, not long before his death, I bought at Christie's the panel paintings he did for Birket Foster of Shakespeare's "Seven Ages." He called one day to see them, and gave me their full history. In his book of Reminiscences he expressed his approval of their new home—my dining-room; their possession gives me great pleasure. I thanked Marks best, I think, by buying his portrait, painted by Oules, and presenting it to his old comrades of the Royal Academy.

We first met the American tragedian EDWIN BOOTH at a dinner-party given for the purpose by the Millais. He was a fine actor, a link between the older and the newer school. His performance in *Richelieu* and *The Fool's Revenge* would alone entitle him to high rank.

Our acquaintance with him began at the time when he was acting at the Princess's Theatre in 1881 and afterwards with Irving at the Lyceum, when they alternated the parts of Othello and Iago. He was a sad man then; his second wife, Miss McVicker, who had been an actress and played with him at his own theatre in New York, left the stage soon after their marriage and at the time was gravely ill. Booth was glad to come to us and dine sometimes on a Sunday night, from Clarges Street, where he lodged for a while. A letter written to a dear friend will best tell the pain his work must then have cost him.

“I scratch in haste, therefore excuse my incoherence. I am tired in body and brain. The poor little girl is passing away from us. For weeks she has been failing rapidly; and the doctors have at last refused to attend her any longer, unless she follows their directions and keeps her bed day and night.



*Erin South*





They tell me that she is dying, and that I may expect her death at any time. It is very pitiful to see her fading before our eyes. Edwina, deprived of sleep, and half dead with sorrow for the only mother she has ever known, and I—worn out with my nightly labours and wretched all the while—sit turn by turn to cheer her. The doctors, Sir William Jenner and Morell Mackenzie, have pronounced her case hopeless. Edwina has written to Mrs. McVicker; and at last Mary knows that she is dying. You can imagine my condition just now; acting at random every evening, and nursing a half-insane dying wife all day, and all night too, for that matter. I am scarce sane myself. I scribble this in haste at two in the morning, for I know not when I will have a chance to write sensibly and coherently again. Good-night. And God bless you!”

Mrs. Booth lingered for a few months, and was taken to her native land to die.

I now write the name of CHARLES READE, one of the literary giants of the Victorian era.

I have but little to add to what we have said about this old and valued friend, in reference to *Masks and Faces*: it shall take the form of one of his characteristic letters, written in the summer of 1879:

19, ALBERT GATE, KNIGHTSBRIDGE.

DEAR BANCROFT,—

I hear you take the Haymarket—date not mentioned. Though I do not feel equal to writing new stories, or new plays, I desire to keep those alive that I *have* written, and cannot help asking you to consider seriously *The King's Rival*, with my new and vastly improved third act.

This comedy, although shelved in London for five-and-twenty years, has been shelved nowhere else. It has been played for years in the country with success, and also in the United States. Yet this has been done with a loose, ill-constructed third act which introduces a superfluous Queen, who is seen no more

and does next to nothing with the King, who is, or ought to be, the leading male character of the piece.

Besides this, a good scene between Nell Gwynne and Pepys in the King's closet has somehow slipped out of the printed text.

I have perfect belief in your judgment, and think if you would compare the printed third act with that which I have to offer, it would give you some confidence that I could make this comedy a great success if I had you for the King and Mrs. Bancroft for Nell Gwynne. Amongst other suitabilities it so happens that you could reproduce the head and face of Charles the Second to the very life.

I have no doubt that there are one or two things in the part of Nell Gwynne Mrs. Bancroft would dislike; but so there are in Peg Woffington. It is not on these spots, believe me, that any character depends, and she would have carte blanche to strike out, and my assistance to add if she saw her way to any new effect.

My life draws near its close: the comedy will be revived and badly played as soon as ever the breath is out of my body. Whereas if you and I revive it, and put our heads together over it, we should produce, in a theatre neither too large nor too small, a *high comedy*, such as it is certain no living writer can write.

All this is prospective. Your arrangements are doubtless made for a year. You have no Richmond in your company, but you have the best Charles, the best Pepys, and the only Nell Gwynne left in the kingdom.

Wishing you success in so noble a venture, by which in any case the public will profit,

Yours very sincerely,

CHARLES READE.

MR. CRITCHETT was frequently our guest, as we were his. He was for years an affectionate, and after

his loss a much-regretted, friend. I remember my wife jokingly saying to him that his profession was "all my eye." He at once replied, "Yes, my dear, and you are my Betty Martin."

Among the many acts of kindness shown by him to actors was one to a humble member of our company, whose child had the misfortune so seriously to injure an eye that Mr. Critchett found it necessary to remove it; afterwards, and for several weeks, going long distances to watch the little fellow through the various stages of adapting an artificial substitute. He not only insisted upon doing all this, but provided everything that was necessary, the distinguished oculist's fee being limited to the father's grateful thanks. The only return we were allowed to insist upon to him and to other such men was to make them at all times, and especially for performances of exceptional interest, free of our theatre, where they were ever most welcome guests.

I became acquainted with PRINCE LEININGEN through his great attachment to the Garrick Club; when in England he passed a great deal of his time there. Like all the Royal Family, he loved the drama, went constantly to the play, and was an admirable critic. His favourite seats at the Haymarket Theatre, as we constructed it, were in the front row of the balcony; and he often told me we had robbed the treasury by having made it, in fact, the cream of the house from three points of view—ease of access, comfort, and perfect view of the stage.

I received the following letter from the Prince after our first book appeared:

AMORBACH, BAVARIA,  
*September 26, 1888.*

MY DEAR BANCROFT,—

I have just read the book which Mrs. Bancroft and yourself have written, and I cannot resist sending you a line to say how much I have enjoyed it. My acquaintance with Mrs. Bancroft, I mean as one of her audience, dates from the opening of the little

house in Tottenham Street, now, alas! no longer in existence. Before that time I was not much in London, my profession keeping me away at sea; but since the above-mentioned event, I do not think I have ever missed a piece Mrs. Bancroft has acted in. In my humble opinion as an outsider, the gem of her *répertoire* is *Sweethearts*, and next to that, *Masks and Faces* and *Caste*. I wonder whether you agree with me? I well remember the morning in Count Gleichen's studio and one or two other occasions when I dropped in. We laughed a good deal, but as to the progress of the bust in those days, I fear it was a case of "business done—none."

My copy of your book is marked "third edition," which shows what a success it is, and I have no doubt it will run through many more.

Please remember me kindly to Mrs. Bancroft, and believe me,

Sincerely yours,

LEININGEN.

The name of MONTAGU WILLIAMS recalls a long and happy friendship. Once a soldier, then an actor, afterwards a barrister, finally a police magistrate—in which last capacity he will be remembered for his charity and goodness to the poor.

I was lucky in interrupting, by accident, at the Garrick Club, a volley of rapturous enthusiasm which he was firing off over our last performance of *Caste*, given the night before. He said, I remember, that he felt it to have been worth five years of life to have so enjoyed being present.

Albert Smith, of *Mont Blanc* fame, and Montagu Williams married sisters, Mary and Louise Keeley, daughters of the celebrated comedian. One very warm afternoon, a young barrister, who had just left the Old Bailey—where Montagu Williams, who was in great demand, was vigorously defending an undoubted scoundrel—was walking westward when he

met Mrs. Albert Smith, who had lost her husband some two or three years before. He had a pleasant talk with the lady, being all the while under the impression that he was speaking to her sister, Mrs. Montagu Williams. Mrs. Albert Smith remarking on the sultriness of the weather, the young barrister replied, "Yes, it is hot; but not half so hot as where your poor husband is!"

Next comes the name of FREDERIC CLAY. Sad thoughts arise from the sudden check, by grave illness, to his career.

I recall an evening when I dined in Montagu Square, ostensibly with Frederic and Cecil Clay, but really with their father, James Clay, the friend of Beaconsfield and the finest whist player of his time in London. I afterwards went on with Frederic Clay to spend an hour with Gounod, who had before been to our house, so I had an interesting time.

I remember another merry evening when Clay and Sullivan were among my guests at a Sunday dinner, one of the number being late in arriving. Suddenly, to beguile the time, the two musicians sat together at the piano and improvised such sweet harmonies that we were all entranced, and it grew to be very late indeed before they were allowed to break off and at last go down to dinner.

The late DUKE OF BEAUFORT was a well-known figure in stage-land, as well as a warm friend to those he cared for. I add extracts from a frequent correspondence.

BADMINTON,  
January 23, 1879.

MY DEAR BANCROFT,—

I shall have much pleasure in joining you and others in purchasing the Phelps portrait and presenting it to the Garrick Club.

Our weather here is frightful: the only disagreeable incident absent is snow—luckily; but one risks an ear or a bit of one's nose if one puts one's head

outside the door. Bitter N.E. wind and 14 degrees of frost. I hear you are overflowing at the Prince of Wales's Theatre. It was a great treat to see Polly Eccles and Hawtree quite in the old form. I liked Arthur Cecil's performance too—very difficult, remembering Hare so well in it, and I confess Miss Roselle quite astonished me. I had fancied I should regret Miss Lydia Foote, but she completely put Miss Foote out of my head, and I forgot her, so much did Miss Roselle absorb my interest and attention. It was very good acting. Honey was Eccles and Honey. I do not think, as some do, that he overdoes it, and that it is not comedy. The whole play is throughout bright, light and deep shade constantly and rapidly varying, as seems to have been meant by the author.

Believe me, with kind remembrances to Mrs. Bancroft,

Yours very truly,  
BEAUFORT.

Referring to our farewell night at the Haymarket Theatre, the Duke wrote:

“Do you know, I feel it is too melancholy an occasion to assist at. I should hate it all the time. Some day, when you both play for a benefit or a charity, I hope to be there to welcome you. Let me say how very much I regret your determination to retire from management. What a loss I feel it, and how sure I am the general public will share that feeling!”

Only quite elderly playgoers will find memories awakened in their minds by the mention of JAMES ANDERSON, an actor of the old time and school who had played the youthful parts with Macready. I remember Mrs. Charles Kean telling me, many years ago, in my earliest days upon the stage, that James Anderson was the best actor of “lovers” she had ever met. I knew him well at the Garrick Club.

BEDFORD HOTEL, COVENT GARDEN,  
 May 21, 1891.

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS,—

Your charming floral gift, token of remembrance of this old May-bird's birthday, at the ripe age of eighty-one, was very gratifying and pleasant.

That you both may live to be as old, content, and happy as I am, is the best wish of your grateful old friend,

JAMES R. ANDERSON.

To MR. AND MRS. BANCROFT.

BARON HUDDLESTON, "the last of the Barons," was our friend, with "Lady Di," for a great number of years. Their names recall happy days at The Grange, Ascot, and many stories told there, one of which I will tell here.

In the year 1844 a man named Bowen was tried for destroying and defacing a parish register. He had devoted himself for years to getting up, and, as it now transpired, to manufacturing pedigrees. He was desirous of making out a link in the title to some property, and conceived the notion of forging an entry in an old will to effect his object. He went to Oxford, and there applied to see the wills of a certain date, for in those days, strange to say, wills were kept in old wine-hampers in the Bodleian Library. The custodian produced a roll of wills of the year required, and from these Bowen abstracted one will without detection. He took it away, and by means of chemicals deleted a passage, and inserted in its place, in handwriting which marvellously imitated that in which the body of the will was written, the words essential to his purpose. He then paid a second visit to the Bodleian, when he replaced in the roll the will he had altered. The next step was to apply in due form for a copy of that particular will. The clerk who was given the task of copying it went away to dinner, leaving the will open on his desk. During his absence a strong mid-day sun

playing through the window of the office upon the will, brought out the original handwriting, and the clerk on his return found, to his amazement, passages in the will which certainly had not been there before he went to dinner.

This, of course, excited immediate suspicion. The curator had some difficulty in bringing to his mind the face of the scoundrel, but he perfectly well recollected that the man had in his possession a remarkable-looking carpet-bag.

In the meantime, in order to remove the original evidence of the entry which he had destroyed, Bowen went to Pirton Church, in Worcestershire, where, in the parish register, was the entry which he wanted to remove. He got the curate to show him the register; and then, feigning illness, while the clergyman went to fetch a glass of water for him, he tore out the entry. The curate, fortunately, heard the tearing of the paper, and, turning back just in time to discover what had been done, detained the man while the police were sent for. Bowen had in his possession at the time the identical carpet-bag which had engaged the attention of the custodian at Oxford, and in it were found pieces of old parchment, chemicals, and coloured inks. He was sentenced to seven years' transportation.

No man's appearance, perhaps, gave less the suggestion of a poet than that of ROBERT BROWNING. He looked, I always thought, far more like a highly respectable man of affairs than a great man of letters. When first he dined with us, I had the luck to know his taste and make him happy by placing a bottle of port within his reach, that he might help himself as he pleased and not be offered other wines. He was for years among our most honoured guests. His story was graphic of how, at the time Longfellow visited England, the two poets were driving in a hansom when a heavy shower suddenly came on, and Longfellow insisted upon thrusting his umbrella through the trap in the roof of the cab that the



driver might protect himself from the rain. What a picture!

Here are two of his many letters to us:

19, WARWICK CRESCENT, W.,  
June 29, 1885.

DEAR MR. BANCROFT,—

It is unfortunate for my own enjoyment, but probably lucky for my poetical reputation, that I did not know you—or rather, one resembling you—earlier as friend or as a manager. I should inevitably have gone mad at playwriting, or attempts that way, which might have profited neither the management nor my poor self. As it happened, an early disillusion gave me a distaste which I have not been wise enough to get the better of—and hence comes that rarity of my attendance at the Play, which I remorsefully acknowledge now that I know how much I have irrevocably lost by it. If you please to keep a place for me, on the occasion which you mention—all I can say is, there will be present no more thorough well-wisher and admirer of the donors than, dear Mr. Bancroft,

Yours most truly and gratefully,

ROBERT BROWNING.

DEAR MR. AND MRS. BANCROFT,—

Are you too tired of being told how much everybody admires and loves you both? All I can say is, that I heartily wish I had been privileged to begin feeling twenty years ago what I feel now, and I shall make myself what amends are in my power by feeling so as long as I live.

All happiness to you, from yours gratefully and affectionately ever,

ROBERT BROWNING.

At a Richmond dinner he greeted my wife's appearance on the terrace of the Star and Garter with this impromptu—which, let me add, may be very

imperfect, as it was hurriedly written down on a *menu* card :

“ Her advent was not hailed with shouts,  
Nor banners, garlands, cymbals, drums ;  
The trees breathed gently sighs of love,  
And whispered softly, ‘ Hush ! she comes.’ ”

I was in Westminster Abbey on the cold, cheerless, foggy morning, the last day of the year 1889, when he joined the “ Poets ” in their “ Corner ” there.

I come next to SIR OSCAR CLAYTON, well known in days gone by as a Court surgeon. We knew him first at Homburg. His dinners at the corner of Harley Street—the house, like many others, has been absorbed by the “ flat ” octopus—sparkled with good company, but were of the old fashion ; a separate choice wine being served with every course, of which there were, also, far too many. It is surely pleasanter to drink one wine throughout and get the best of dinners over quicker than we did.

One of the leading Victorian novelists, WILKIE COLLINS, was long beloved by us. To what has already appeared about him in this volume I will add another of his letters.

90, GLOUCESTER PLACE, PORTMAN SQUARE,  
November 28, 1872.

MY DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,—

I am sincerely sensible of the kindness which has prompted the compliment you pay me.

Bancroft’s note tells me nothing about your health—so I gladly assume that the Brighton air is proving itself to be the best of all doctors. It either kills or cures. In my case, it kills. I can neither eat, drink, sleep, nor walk at Brighton. Cold perspirations envelope me from head to foot, and Death whispers to me, “ Wilkie ! get out of this, or much as I should regret it, just as you are beginning to write for the most popular theatre in London, I shall be obliged to gather you in the flower of your youth ! ”

Believe me, dear Mrs. Bancroft,

Always truly yours,

WILKIE COLLINS.

Among some scraps and letters marked "Wilkie Collins" I found the following story. Whether he told it to me or whether I meant to tell it to him, I cannot recollect.

A tired woman walking alone on a dusty road in France hailed an advancing *diligence* for a lift on her lonely way. She was allowed to get up on to the roof of the coach, and she soon fell into a deep sleep. At the next stage, where there was a change of horses, the guard and coachman forgot to tell the men who replaced them about their extra passenger, who still slept heavily. Soon after a fresh start had been made, there was an accident to the "skid," a very heavy iron sabot. It was taken off the wheel and thrown up on to the roof. This incident was followed, at the next stage, by the sight of blood running down the panels of the *diligence*—and general consternation at finding the woman with her head smashed in, and dead. Preparations for burial revealed the body to be not that of a woman at all, but of a man. Further search disclosed letters which proved him to be one of a desperate band of thieves, together with carefully drawn up plans for robbing a neighbouring *château*, where he was going in the disguise of a new housemaid.

How many pleasant memories are once again recalled as I write the name of SIR MORELL MACKENZIE! He had been for years a friend—indeed, it would be impossible to over-estimate the services he has rendered us. He sternly refused at all times to accept any fee or reward, whenever he might be sent for and however mortgaged his time; and he even went to the extent of paying, throughout a prolonged sickness in our house, three visits in a day. One night at the old Prince of Wales's Theatre he was in the stalls, and a message was brought round that he wished to see us. Directly he entered the green-room, he startled us by saying quietly, "You have a dying man upon your stage, who is only fit to be in bed." Inquiries told us that a poor fellow who only appeared as a servant for one minute had

been for some weeks ill, but was for so short a time in the theatre and kept his troubles so much to himself that we knew nothing of them. Mackenzie for months drove almost daily to a humble lodging in Kentish Town, where by no chance could the popular physician be likely to have other patients, in order to keep this one alive. The poor actor was patched up for a time through unceasing kindness; but his state was such that it was beyond the power of doctors to do more, and soon his troubles ceased for ever.

These acts of kindness would seem to be bequeathed by eminent surgeons and physicians to their successors, for they are practised still.

We lost a pleasant friend when EDWARD SMYTH PIGOTT passed away. He was for years the Examiner of Plays: an accomplished gentleman and amiable official. The licence for the performance of *Fedora* was enclosed in the letter I now copy.

LORD CHAMBERLAIN'S OFFICE, ST. JAMES'S PALACE,  
May 1st, 1883.

MY DEAR BANCROFT,—

The English version of *Fedora* seems to me an admirable piece of literary workmanship. It reads almost like an English original.

No wonder you are anxious about your "Fedora." Training a filly for the Oaks who has only distinguished herself as a two-year-old in moderate company is a trifle to it!

The part is all *Sarah*. Though I have not seen her in it, I can see and hear her in it, from that "*I don't know*" in Act II. to the "Where are you, Loris?" at the end. It is written exactly to her measure—that electric play of feature and gesture, that nervous intensity, that range of power and variety of accent, and sudden changefulness of mood, which belong to the feline instinct or temperament. With all best wishes,

Always yours heartily,

EDWARD S. PIGOTT.

I come now to that remarkable man and journalist, GEORGE AUGUSTUS SALA. In a letter received from him, bearing date, "Monday, 13th October, 1884," which he sent us on the eve of his lecturing tour in Australia, and which is a beautiful specimen of his marvellous handwriting (he could easily have performed the feat of writing the Lord's Prayer on a space the size of a threepenny piece), are these words :

I have written this on the back of a slip of "copy" which has served its turn. In the event of my returning from the Antipodes as "a grand pianoforte," this scribble may serve as a memento of

Yours very faithfully,

GEORGE AUGUSTUS SALA.

The "grand pianoforte" was not his mode of return. Eight years later he was in good enough health and spirits to write as follows :

10, ST. MICHAEL'S PLACE, BRIGHTON,  
28. 10. 1892.

MY DEAR MR. AND MRS. BANCROFT,—

Thank you ever so much for your simply delightful birthday present. But I must try to make a trifling return for your kindness. Lo! the prose-writer busteth into rhyme :

"I'm sixty-four!—I'm sixty-four!  
My teeth are gone, my eyes are sore;  
My ears are deaf, my beard is hoar;  
'Tis time a dark brown wig I wore;  
My heart is withered to the core;  
O'er books I can no longer pore;  
Of friends I've few, of foes galore;  
And daily I feel more and more  
That I am growing an old bore,  
Whose jokes belong to days of yore,  
Or else come from Joe Miller's store;—  
Ah me! next year, if I'm alive,  
WHAT SHALL I BE AT SIXTY-FIVE?"

Always

G. A. SALA.

Both my wife and myself knew the HON. LEWIS WINGFIELD from our very early days. I met him first in Dublin with Walter Creyke, who was secretary to Lord Carlisle, then Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. They were both enthusiastic amateur actors, and I remember Wingfield, later, as a dramatic critic on one of the London evening papers above the signature of "Whyte Tighe." He loved the stage and all that appertained to it. As I have already mentioned, he designed some admirable stage costumes for us. After his death there was a sale of his effects at Christie's, which I attended to secure some memento of a long friendship. I was talking with another old friend, Harry Weldon (Norroy King of Arms), who now, I think, must be Lady Bancroft's oldest friend, for they first met in the old Strand days. As we were going to a second room, to look at one or two things there, a small picture was put upon the easel and a few opening bids were at once made for it, much to the surprise of Weldon, who was one of the executors and thought it valueless. When we returned, to his amazement the picture was exciting keen competition for its possession, and bidding had advanced to something like two hundred pounds. Weldon told me the little canvas had hung in a dark corner of a back room and had cost Wingfield some few francs abroad. In the sale-room, however, it was recognised as an authentic example of the master Mantegna, and was eventually knocked down for five hundred pounds.

I remember, at Wingfield's house in Mecklenburgh Square, once meeting General Boulanger, whose name had caused some stir in the world.

I come now to kindly, genial SIR RICHARD QUAIN, to whom, at our table, my wife once said that his bright and cheery manner would alone make him welcomed by any sufferer. "Ah!" he replied, with his well-known Irish brogue, "although I am by nature cheerful, I began quite the other way. Luckily I was cured in my youth by a kind friend

who was already an eminent physician. One day he took me with him to see a patient who was in a critical state, and when we got upstairs and were outside the door of the bedroom, I put on a grave and, as I thought, appropriately solemn countenance. My friend happily turned round just in time to whisper, 'For mercy's sake, don't look like that, man, or the poor soul will take you for the undertaker!' I never forgot that lesson."

Quain was delightful company, both as host and guest.

67, HARLEY STREET,  
January 20.

MY DEAR MR. BANCROFT,—

Thanks very much for a most pleasant evening. The *Three Ages of Woman* will live in my memory as long as Shakespeare's *Seven Ages of Man*—all so clever.

Ever yours most truly,

R. QUAIN.

Years and years ago, when we passed a happy holiday at Broadstairs, GEORGE DU MAURIER was hard by at Ramsgate. We took with us an eccentric man, who had been a dresser in the theatre, to give him the advantage of sea air after an illness, for which he had been treated as an in-patient at St. Mary's Hospital. We had several times visited him there, and had one day asked him if he knew what had really been the matter with him. He replied, quite promptly, "Not exactly, sir; but what I had in my throat the gentleman in the next bed had in his stomach!"

We supplied our friend Du Maurier with this notion for one of his incomparable *Punch* drawings.

Poor "Kiki"! We wish he had lived to see how his son Gerald adorns the stage he so deeply loved himself.

The MARQUIS DE CASA LAIGLESIA was a strikingly handsome and attractive man. He represented

Spain at the Court of St. James's. We had the pleasure to make his acquaintance at the house of that remarkable hostess and woman, Lady Molesworth. I remember her saying, when she first called upon my wife, that she was married from the house we now have lived in so long. His Excellency only dined with us on one occasion, which leads to a little story against ourselves. We had a servant who, on the memorable evening, beat all records in the skill of misplacing the letter "h." Flinging the door open, he announced, "*The Spanish Ham*"—making a perceptible pause before he added "*bassador*." I never shall forget the effect produced. Edmund Yates and Corney Grain, who were of the party and talking together at the moment, bolted into the small drawing-room and behaved certainly as well as the circumstances permitted. My wife had the profoundest difficulty to control her laughter and accord a proper reception to our guest, who was, of course, innocent of the abuse of his distinction. The reader's imagination will, I am sure, finish the incident better than any description I could further give of it.

I shall not readily forget the strong personality of SIR EDGAR BOEHM, who for years was frequently our guest, nor an evening when he and I were separated at table by a lady who told us a story of her own sad experience, as a warning against long partings between husband and wife. Her early married life was passed in India. She had been obliged frequently to come home to recruit her health, and the last of these visits was greatly protracted. While she was still in England her husband returned on leave, and the wife went to Southampton to meet his ship. She put off in the tender; as it approached the vessel the husband and the wife, each eagerly looking for the other, came near enough for recognition, and waved and waved and kissed their hands until she reached the companion-ladder and scaled it to the deck. As she was about to fall into



his outstretched arms, he said, alas!—"Great heavens, Mary, how old you've grown!"

Later in the same evening another lady, in answer to an opinion I timidly expressed that it was just possible she might be on the verge of "spoiling" her two charming young boys, turned upon me with the question: "Do you think I can ever sufficiently apologise to them for my share in bringing them into this world?"

The late LORD LONDESBOROUGH is still remembered as a keen playgoer. We cherish warmly the recollection of his unceasing kindness. Our theatre did not seem to be furnished if he and Lady Londesborough were not present on a "first night."

NORTHERWOOD, LYNDHURST,  
April 18, 1883.

DEAR MR. BANCROFT,—

Both Lady Londesborough and myself were very sorry that we were unable to be present at the farewell to *Caste*. The demonstration was most thoroughly well deserved, for there is no one to whom the stage, and therefore the country, owes more than to you and to Mrs. Bancroft. It is always satisfactory when the public shows its appreciation of those who do their work, and make their mark, without beat of drum and flourish of trumpets.

With our kind regards to you both,

Believe me, yours very truly,

LONDESBOROUGH.

In a letter to Mrs. Bancroft some years later, Lord Londesborough, who in the later years of his life was blind in one eye, said: "Perhaps you do not know that it was very much owing to a consultation held at Lord's between Bancroft, Thornton, and W. G. Grace that I came up to London when I did, and possibly saved my remaining eye."

One of our oldest friends was EDMUND YATES. I remember an incident which he told with the *verve* of a clever actor—a power inherited from his gifted

parents, who both adorned the stage. After an unfortunate railway accident, when many people were injured, a search was made among the wrecked carriages for the victims. While two guards were looking about with the aid of lighted lanterns, they came across a prostrate figure, wedged in between broken timber. This poor man was apparently so injured that one side of his body and face was, as it were, forced in an upward direction. The guards immediately set to work to endeavour, one pulling one way and one pulling another, to get him straight. They continued their operations for some time; the chief man directing his mate to pull up one side with a jerk, whilst he held firmly by the other. At length, pausing to recover their breath, they heard the poor victim cry out piteously, "No, no: born so, born so!" It was then that they realised that this apparent result of the railway accident was in reality a permanent physical deformity.

I have a bundle of most amusing and interesting letters from Yates, extending over twenty-seven years, but they are too outspoken for publication. George Augustus Sala told me once, at the Beef-steak Club, of a conversation that occurred after a dinner party. The question was put to Sala, Boucicault, and Yates, who, I think, was the host, as to whether, and how far, they really repented of "back-slidings," of which they might have one and all been guilty. Boucicault at once replied that he was profoundly sorry for all his sins; Sala followed, and admitted, in a rather half-hearted way, that he hoped some day to be sorry; Yates, after a long pause, brought his big hand down heavily on the table with a savage "No!" He was a fighter to the end.

A most welcome Sunday evening guest was the then well-known Chaplain of the Savoy Chapel, the REVEREND HENRY WHITE. He always, in very courteously worded letters, carefully sealed with the arms of the Savoy, begged us not to wait for him, but arrived just in time from his evening service. In

one of those letters he said : " I cannot tell you how much I value the friendship you have allowed me to enjoy so long. But ' my love's more richer than my tongue.' "

I once was walking with him from a party late at night, and put a question to him on a sacred subject. After a pause, he said, " Please don't press me for an answer ; if I can be of use to you, or any man, it is only in my church. "

He tried hard to persuade me to read the Lessons there. I told him that I thought it would be a mistaken thing for an actor so to parade himself.

Henry White's sermons were often called " *Elegant Extracts.* " I thought them very interesting. He read the Litany with peculiar beauty of voice and intonation, and I shall never forget the simple pathos with which at the funeral of Florence Toole he spoke the words (there was no music at the ceremony) of the hymn " *Abide with me* " : the effect was almost equal to that produced by the majestic voice of Clara Butt.

" *Fighting Dan,* " as SIR DANIEL LYSONS was called, had put up his sword when we first met. We have passed happy hours together at home and abroad. He had an unbounded opinion of my wife. Here is a little note from him.

ALDERSHOT PARK,  
*July 3, 1882.*

MY DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,—

If you and your husband are able to come down for our garden-party, will you come early to lunch and make a longer day of it ? A little country air will do you good. My " *missus* " has not returned from London, so I write to save time.

Yours very sincerely,

D. LYSONS.

Next I briefly name LORD ALCESTER, whose gentle, courtly manners, and dandy lavender gloves, little bespoke the stern admiral who, as Beauchamp Seymour, bombarded Alexandria.

The once dashing war correspondent, ARCHIBALD FORBES, at a time when he had fallen into ill-health from the severity of his career, wrote me the following letter. It was just after the tragic death of Edmund Yates.

1, CLARENCE TERRACE, REGENT'S PARK,  
June 2, 1890.

DEAR BANCROFT,—

I know that you sometimes walk as far as Regent's Park, because we have walked together there. For the sake of the dead and the living, I am much concerned in the prosperity of *The World*, and have some ideas on the subject which, for what they are worth, I am desirous of discussing with any one in authority whom I can get to give some measure of heed to me.

I know you share in my affectionate regard for Mrs. Yates, and I hear that poor Edmund has nominated you as one of his trustees; if, for the widow's sake, you accept the trust, will you listen to me? I am a close prisoner, owing to the state of my health; I wonder whether you can spare time to have some talk on the subject; if so, do me the favour to send me a line a couple of posts in advance, that I may make sure of being downstairs.

Remember me most kindly to Mrs. Bancroft, whose emotion when we met outside the Savoy Chapel nearly broke me down, and believe me,

Very sincerely yours,

ARCH. FORBES.

ADMIRAL SIR EDWARD INGLEFIELD was a cheery neighbour of years ago. He seemed to be a Jack-of-all-trades. If his watch stopped, he could mend it; if he broke a window, he could replace it; if a chimney smoked, he could cure it.

We once met at his house the beautiful and celebrated Mrs. Norton. The Admiral's slight connection with the following incident may excuse the telling of it.

Like most theatrical people, we were tormented at all hours of the day by stage aspirants or the “great unacted.” One morning, quite early, when the servant, who knew our ways and had learnt at certain hours to deny us to all comers, had been sent on a message, the bell was answered by a foolish housemaid, who had no right to attend to its summons. The girl admitted two ladies, and then told us that “Mrs. Louison wished to see us.” We were very busy and very angry; and, knowing no person named Louison, we sent a polite message of regret at being unable to see any one so early without an appointment. We afterwards heard that when this message was delivered both the ladies, after laughing heartily, went away on foot. In the evening a letter was received from Lady Sophia Macnamara, explaining that she was one of the callers in the morning. She had mistaken our house for that of a leading dental surgeon, with whom an appointment had been made for the Princess Louise, on whom she was in waiting, and the Princess was our other visitor. The foolish servant had blundered over the name. An answer explained the facts of the case from our side; and shortly afterwards, when Sir Edward and Lady Inglefield invited us to meet Her Royal Highness, the Princess, on my wife being presented, laughingly inquired if she remembered Mrs. Louison?

When first I had the honour of receiving an invitation to the Royal Academy banquet, the courtly President of that time, LORD LEIGHTON, whose friendship we had enjoyed since the early days of our management, prefaced it by this letter:

2, HOLLAND PARK ROAD,  
*Saturday.*

DEAR BANCROFT,—

As an old friend, and on public grounds, it will be a sincere pleasure to see you at the Banquet of the Royal Academy. Ever since I

have been President the tribute of an invitation has always been paid to your profession.

Pray remember me most kindly to Mrs. Bancroft.

Very truly yours,

FRED. LEIGHTON.

THE RIGHT HON. A. J. MUNDELLA was also a friend of early days, chiefly at Pontresina and Maloja; from the latter place he wrote:

HÔTEL MALOJA,

Sunday night, September 6, 1885.

DEAR MR. BANCROFT,—

We leave here at six o'clock in the morning *en route* for Bellagio, Milan, Verona, Munich, and Dresden. We hear with regret that we shall just miss your arrival here; we have been hoping every day that you would come earlier, but I suppose that potent little "Lady Henry Fairfax," who commands *Home Secretaries* and *Prime Ministers*, has vetoed your good intentions and frowned on the denizens of Maloja. I know how cruelly she can behave to her old friends. I understand that the poor clock at Berne has never recovered her mimicry, and has had "something wrong with his inside" ever since hearing of it. Well, well, we must forgive her, and hope to meet you in England, vigorous in body and refreshed in spirit.

We all send you our warm regards and best wishes for the remainder of your holiday.

I am, faithfully yours,

A. J. MUNDELLA.

When I first met OSCAR WILDE he was quite a young man—had just come down from Oxford. At the time he brought to my mind some words from the pen of Benjamin Disraeli: "The affectations of youth should be viewed leniently; every man has a right to be conceited until he is successful."

What clever plays he wrote: might still be writing! What clever things he said: might still be saying! I have found a letter of his, written from the St. Stephen's Club after seeing *School*:

DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,—

I am charmed with the photograph and with your kindness in sending it to me; it has given me more pleasure than any quill pen can possibly express, and will be a delightful souvenir of one whose brilliant genius I have always admired. Dramatic art in England owes you and your husband a great debt.

Since Tuesday I have had a feeling that I have never rightly appreciated the treasures hidden in a girls' school. I don't quite know what I shall do, but I think I must hold *you* responsible.

Believe me, sincerely yours,

OSCAR WILDE.

In the world of Art I can recall no greater gap than was made by the death of SIR JOHN MILLAIS; he was indeed an attractive, lovable creature. In 1874 I tried hard to get him to paint a portrait of my wife, and offered him a thousand pounds to do it. First, he "shied" at taking money at all from "a brother in Art." Secondly, he feared he should not succeed, for this reason: "I know no face that it would be more difficult to tackle; it lives entirely upon expression, which is ever changing, both on the stage and off it. No, my dear fellow, the job must be done either in seconds or left alone for ever."

This was his characteristic acceptance of an invitation to dine with me:

DEAR BANCROFT,—

I'm your man.

Yours sincerely,

J. E. MILLAIS.

My earliest experience of the late Master of the Rolls, the first LORD ESHER, was when I was chosen foreman of the jury in an interesting case which he tried, as Mr. Justice Brett, when the Law Courts were at Westminster.

We afterwards knew him very well, and owe to him and the late Lady Esher many kindnesses. I select two from a little packet of characteristic letters which the distinguished judge wrote to my wife :

6, ENNISMORE GARDENS,  
January 1, 1895.

DEAR FRIEND,—

You are a very perplexing person to write to. If I say "Dear old friend" it won't do in every sense; because, although you are an old friend, you are in looks and ways a young woman. If I say "Dear little friend," it is a term of endearment, but you are a very great person. However, I begin by wishing you both a very happy year. If it is as prosperous as your goodness and energy desire, I can wish you in that respect no more.

I cannot tell you how I chafed under not being able to see you in *Money*; but in the mornings I was in court, in the evenings I did not venture out! Vile old age!!

Lady Esher went to see you, and told me she had never seen anything more charming than you. With that I stop.

My love to you both. Believe me always a very true admirer and very truly yours,

ESHER.

6, ENNISMORE GARDENS,  
October 28, 1897.

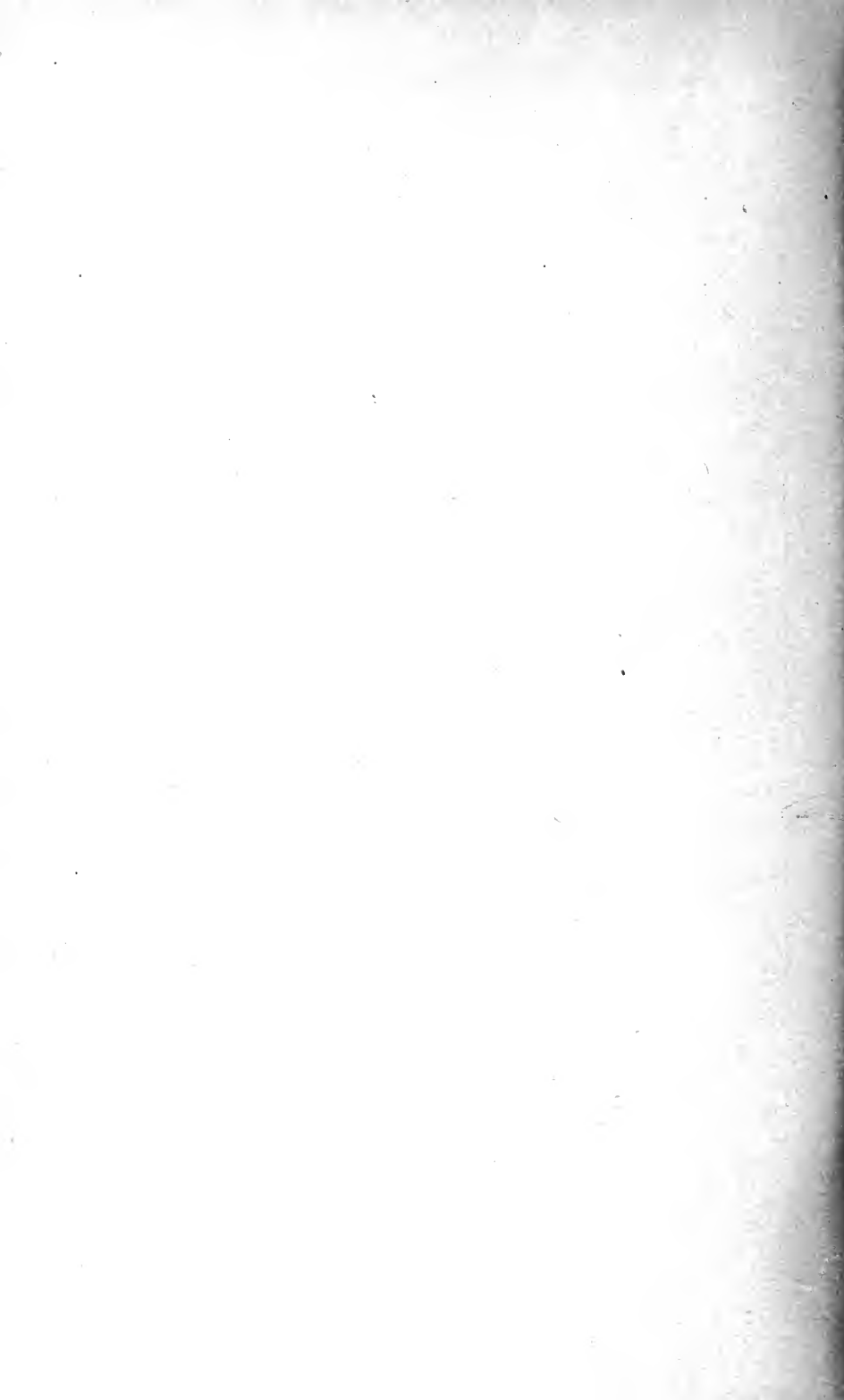
DEAR CHARMINGEST OF FRIENDS,—

Thank you with all my old heart for your kind letter. It is as charming as the prettiest step you ever danced, the prettiest note you ever sang, the prettiest smile you ever threw to all who saw





JOHN EVERETT MILLAIS



any one of them and forthwith adored you. In what state must I be, who saw and heard them all and also received this dear note!

Believe me,  
One of them,  
ESHHER.

Of SIR EDWIN ARNOLD and his pretty Japanese wife we retain pleasant recollections. I have come across this letter from him :

DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,—

Many thanks for a great treat. How well you and Bancroft show in your beautiful art that you know your Wordsworth :

“Keep, ever keep, as if by touch  
Of self-restraining art,  
The modest charm of not too much—  
Part seen, imagined part.”

Sincerely yours,  
EDWIN ARNOLD.

We had many years of friendship with AUGUSTIN DALY, whose services to the stage were known and recognised on both sides of the Atlantic.

We remember a happy luncheon-party he gave at the Savoy Hotel in October 1891, to celebrate the seventieth birthday of dear old Mrs. Gilbert, an admirable actress who left England for America early in life, and was for many years a valued member of his company. Two other veterans, Mrs. Keeley and Mrs. Alfred Mellon, were also present.

A few days afterwards there was another pleasant ceremony—the laying of the foundation-stone by Ada Rehan of Daly's Theatre, and the christening of it by my wife.

It was always a delight to enjoy the company of another well-remembered American, who was also a great humorist, BRET HARTE.

He and I chanced to go to the same dentist ; and

on one occasion, at the very blackest time of the Boer War, I found him in the waiting-room turning over a mass of ancient literature, very back numbers of illustrated papers and magazines. After a little while he said, with perfect gravity, "I am sorry to learn from these journals that there are fears of trouble in the Transvaal!"

A strange and fascinating personality comes to our memory next in CARLO PELLEGRINI. His power over our language, as has been often said, seemed to lessen the longer he lived in England. He had an intense admiration for my wife's acting. On a bright afternoon following her first appearance in a new part, I was driving with her in Regent Street when we saw Pellegrini advancing towards us just by the Café Royal. By his vigorous gestures he made the coachman pull up; then he knelt on the pavement, took off his hat, and placed it by his feet, and, kissing his hand to her, ejaculated, "Oh—my—my—my—One!" The remarkable performance attracted a little crowd, which we left staring at what it doubtless thought to be a madman.

One night a member of the Beefsteak Club was giving, in his absence, what was really a clever imitation of the delightful little man. Suddenly Pellegrini's head appeared above a screen by the door, and he interrupted the laughter by saying, "My fellow, when you im-i-tate, does it well!"

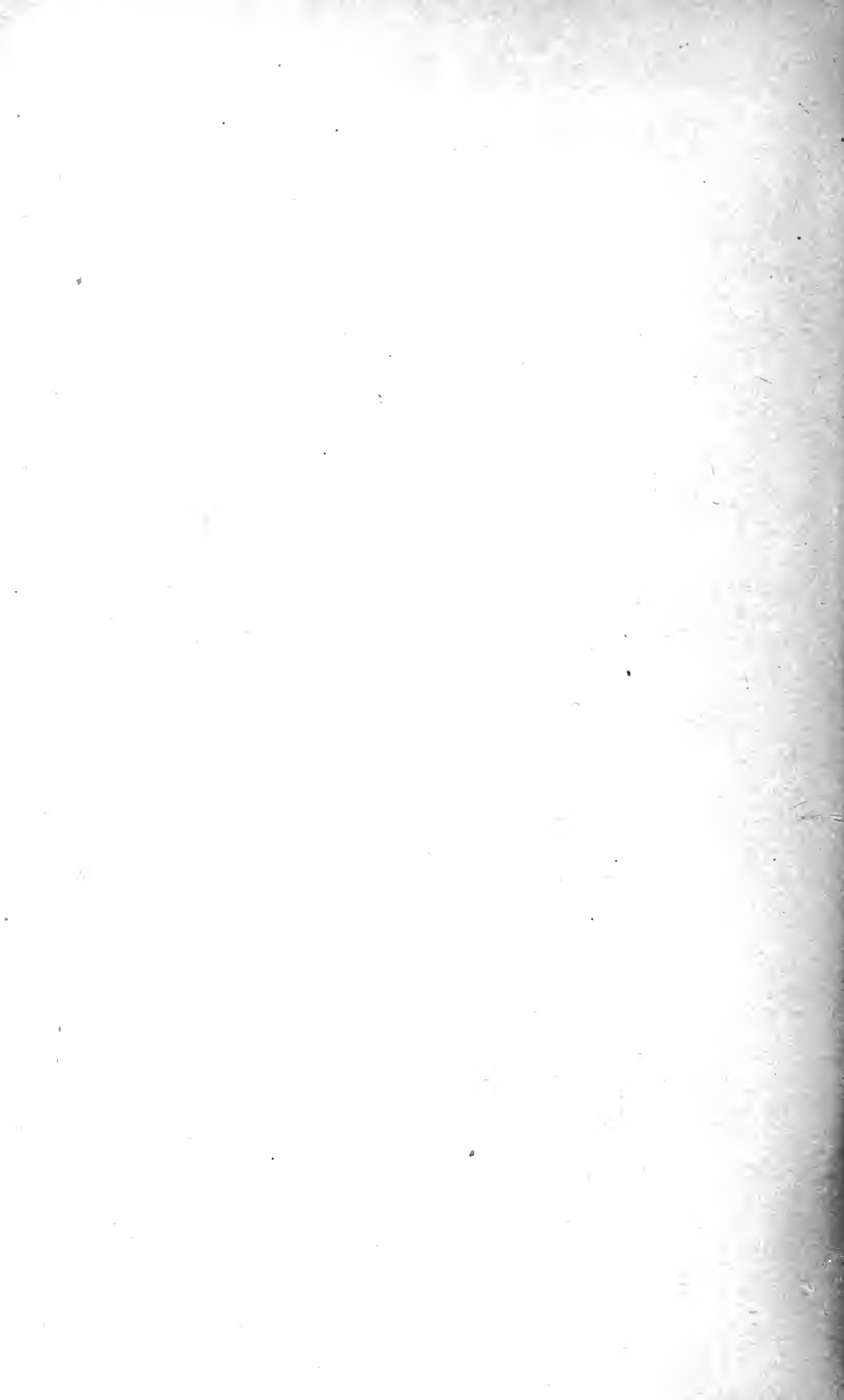
I saw him a few hours before he passed away. Almost his last words were these to his faithful servant, "Wil-li-am, put me on clean shirt—I die clean!" Poor, beloved, regretted "Pelican"!

RICHARD CORNEY GRAIN was a master of the art of "entertaining" at the piano—a giant indeed—and I say so with a remembrance of an old friend of my youth, John Parry. Corney Grain's name was by many thought to be assumed; a mistake also made about Stirling Coyne's, a dramatic author of my early days, known as "Filthy Lucre!"

The following letter was written from the Beef-



CARLO PELLEGRINI



steak Club in October 1894, on Dick Grain's fiftieth birthday:

MY DEAR B.,—

What a good fellow you are! And what have I done that you should treat me in the way you have? It is worth while being fifty to thank you for a gift as undeserved as unexpected. I can only end as I began, by saying what a good fellow you are!

Yours most sincerely,

R. CORNEY GRAIN.

After his death, in the following spring, the little gift to which the letter refers was handed back to me, and I subsequently further inscribed it and gave it to another gifted old friend and compeer, George Grossmith.

When we first made the acquaintance of JAMES McNEILL WHISTLER the little White House in Chelsea stood alone. At his celebrated breakfasts, at which the table was so quaintly adorned, "Jimmy" would cook the buckwheat cakes himself—and how well he did it!

We had the pleasure of being among the first and very distinguished audience at a private house in Queen Street when he gave his now historical *Ten o'Clock*, in which he wandered from the wisdom of Touchstone to the Book of Isaiah.

There is no need to attempt a fresh description of this strange, rebellious, tempestuous, fascinating, flamboyant creature. He often reminded me of Irving's words as Mephistopheles: "Why, what a mighty fuss you're making!" His portrait, by the way, of Irving as King Philip, which has varied in price from a few sovereigns to half as many thousands, recalls Whistler's historical saying, "Why drag in Velasquez?"—as I now do, merely to give myself an opportunity of saying of the great Spanish master's "Venus and the Mirror," that, although he was content to show her face "as in a glass darkly," he

could barely be called backward in exposing more substantial claims to admiration.

The two great explorers, SIR RICHARD BURTON and SIR HENRY M. STANLEY, were both friends of ours, and often dined with us. I couple their names because we were once together, with Lady Burton and Lady Stanley, at an hotel in the Engadine, and afterwards on the Lake of Como. My wife grouped them for a photograph, with Captain Mounteney Jephson, Stanley's friend and companion on his last great enterprise in "Darkest Africa," and a faithful black servant, Sali, who suffered terribly from the Engadine climate. One glorious morning I remarked to Sali that at any rate *that* day, with such a splendid hot sun, must be all right; but he only whined, "No, no, no, sar; ice make him cold!"

Burton was full of talk and anecdote; Stanley was silent and reserved. But my wife could always succeed in thawing him, and we remember well the dramatic force with which he told us interesting stories of his conversations with the King of Uganda.

Our friend, everybody's friend, ARTHUR CECIL, was a delightful and an affectionate companion. Our memories are stored with incidents arising from his humorous vacillations. On one occasion we had passed a happy holiday in the Engadine; and, when the time had come for us again to turn our faces towards the Haymarket Theatre, it chanced to be on the same day that the Barnbys and Arthur Cecil had fixed to depart. Both Barnby and ourselves offered Arthur Cecil, for the pleasure of his company, a seat in either of our carriages to drive over the Albula Pass to where the railway began. Those who knew Arthur Cecil and the difficulty of his life—how to make up his mind—may guess the strait in which this double offer placed him. At length the matter was decided by his learning that our carriage would start twenty minutes later than the other, and he went with us. His eccentric proceedings at our departure from the hotel, messengers being con-



tinuously dispatched in search of things forgotten, followed by his prolonged adieux, procured for him the distinction of being spoken of by the German head-waiter—who had witnessed an entertainment given by us for the little church—in these glowing terms: “*Das ist, gewiss, der erste Komiker!*” Finally we drove away amidst roars of laughter from a crowd of friends who saw us off—the hood of the carriage being laden with unpacked luggage, including a large wet sponge, hurriedly flung in at the last moment—punctuated by cries from Arthur Cecil, who shouted, “I must go back! I haven’t paid my laundress! I owe something to the chemist! I’ve given nothing to the church!”

He was very fond of “little Mary,” and once at the Garrick Club was, positively, known to attack a friend’s dinner which began with stewed eels, his own having only just ended with orange tart!

The next name is that of our beloved friend, SIR FRANK LOCKWOOD. My first meeting with Lockwood was at Scarborough in 1870 or 1871, when he was a young actor at the theatre there. Fortunately for the bar, and I think for himself, he abandoned the stage as a career; but he loved it, and was much attached to the society of actors, all his life.

On one occasion when he dined with us, as, happily for ourselves and our guests, he often did, I asked him if the thought of a judgeship appealed to him. He answered emphatically, “No,” that he was “too fond of the fight.” Something must have gone wrong with him, for shortly afterwards he referred to the conversation, and added that lately he had pined for the relief from struggle and sighed for a seat on the Bench. Few men have been more truly mourned.

26, LENNOX GARDENS,  
June 22, 1897.

MY DEAR; “LADY B.”—

We saw B. at the Mansion House to-day and tendered to him our very sincere congratulations.

I wish you had been there ; you would have received an ovation almost equal to that offered to the Queen herself!

Nothing has pleased me so much for a long time as this well-deserved honour paid to you and your husband. God grant you may both live many years to enjoy the love and respect of your many friends, amongst whom you must please to include me and mine.

Yours ever affectionately,

FRANK LOCKWOOD.

Lockwood's caricatures and drawings were most amusing. One of them is reproduced here—a reminder to dine with him at Brooks's.

SIR HENRY DE BATHE was a kind friend for many years, and surely, in his prime, one of the handsomest men who ever stepped.

He told me once a most dramatic story of the days when he was serving in the Crimean War. One evening in the terrible winter time it was his duty to go to the trenches and direct the clearing of the dead and wounded after a brief and deadly encounter with the enemy, the brunt of which had been borne by men in the French regiment, drawn from the convict settlements, and known, I think, as the *Régiment de discipline*. These men were always thrust, poor wretches, into the hottest places when trying work had to be done. De Bathe and his men came across one poor fellow who was grievously wounded but still alive. De Bathe had him gently placed upon a stretcher, lifted his head, and poured brandy from his flask into the soldier's mouth. The man took his hand and pressed it, murmuring in perfect English, "Thank you, De Bathe." De Bathe was, of course, thunderstruck, but after a moment's amazement stooped down and asked him how it could be that he, a Frenchman, knew his name and could also speak English. The wounded man smiled gently and whispered, "Eton!" He then fainted. De Bathe

To remind



7. 12. 91.



Yours

Sharps



A PICTURE-LETTER FROM FRANK LOCKWOOD



accompanied the stretcher to the French lines, and left kind directions, adding that he would return as soon as his duty would allow him. He did so, but the man was dead. De Bathe lifted the cover from his face and gazed upon it long and earnestly without recognising the features of the lost creature: once his school companion, now known only as a French convict with a number—and the fictitious name of Henri Dubois.

From his very early days at the bar we counted among our friends SIR CHARLES HALL, who became Recorder of the City of London, and was always *persona grata* everywhere, especially beloved by young people for his wonderful conjuring tricks. Here is a recipe for a salad for which I asked him. Try it.

Of four good lettuces take the hearts  
 (They still have got  
 What man has not),  
 Break roughly into equal parts;  
 For hours in water they should lie,  
 If fairly you'd this salad try.

One teaspoonful, not chopped too fine,  
 Tarragon, chevril and shalot,  
 Of the two first, proportions even,  
 But of the last as one to seven;  
 In a large cup the three combine,  
 And mind you bruise them not.

A pinch of powdered sugar too,  
 Black pepper ditto—or say two;  
 And in the words of Sidney Smith,  
 Lest you this salad spoil,  
 Be niggard of your vinegar  
 And lavish of your oil.

Six tablespoonfuls of the first  
 Will barely quench thy salad's thirst;  
 Three teaspoons then of vinegar  
 Must in the mixture vanish,  
 But mind, perfection to attain,  
 The latter must be Spanish.

## DEPARTED GUESTS

Stir them together, pour them in  
                   The bottom of the bowl,  
 Then add a teaspoonful of salt,  
                   The essence of the whole ;  
 Throw in your lettuce, stir it round,  
                   And if you have a soul  
 Stir not the lettuce in its midst,  
                   But round and round the bowl,  
 Using two wooden kitchen spoons  
                   That have no other mission,  
 Your salad's finished—so am I—  
                   And so is my commission.

There is a beautifully situated house off the Avenue Road called "The Elms," where Mario once lived. My wife and I were tempted once to make a bid for it; but I felt that at the time it was beyond our means. Later on, our friend SIR AUGUSTUS HARRIS lived there, and in the pretty garden we have been to some charming afternoon gatherings. I remember dining there with Harris one evening to meet Mascagni, soon after the great success of *Cavalleria Rusticana*; which reminds me of another dinner-party where I met Marconi, from whom I was only removed by one other guest. Afterwards, in the drawing-room, a lady asked me who was the interesting man to whom she saw me talking. I said, "Oh, don't you know? That is Signor Marconi." She answered, "Really! how delightful! Do present him to me. I want to tell him how entranced I always am when I listen to his divine *Intermezzo*!"

The allusion in this letter of our old friend HERMAN MERIVALE to his "comfortable independence" is sad, for he was subsequently robbed of it by fraud.

HÔTEL DE L'EUROPE, FLORENCE,  
 May 12, 1885.

MY DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,—

Have you, can you have, a father-in-law on the loose? What other expression to use I know not. On Sunday morning in the little English church

here I found myself sitting behind a tall back, which in height, build, shape of head, trick of movement, and all things, reminded me so much of your good husband that I was quite "intrigued." His hair was cut in the same way, though it was white. And I saw that he had an eye-glass in his right eye. Suddenly he turned his head, and displayed your husband's features in something so really like a reproduction, that but for the nature of the place I must have asked him his name. In twenty-five years Bancroft will be so like him, that I know I have seen him beforehand.

When that retirement of yours comes off, if ever you find time hang heavy on your hands, bestow some of that "tediousness" upon me in the form of another bright budget of chat like the last, which represents a style of correspondence now almost extinct, but a definite pleasure in life. Three weeks of Florence has been a revelation. The spirit of the place has taken hold of me, and I feel as if my home and work were pointed out to me for the end of my time. At all events, it is idle for a man still young, with no children and a comfortable independence, to muddle away life and money in an English provincial town. Here one might do something. I have had very hard times in the earlier part of my life for very different causes, but have always been an idler. Now I've just awoke to the consciousness that it's seven months since I did a stroke of work of any kind. When the price of a play, every other year, with what one has of one's own, gives one all one wants, it is tempting to be lazy. But plays are disappointing to me now. I care but for the two good old forms of tragedy and comedy; and tragedy only attracts me as a spectacle, while comedy disappeared with Robertson. Still, if I ever write plays again, I shall go for comedy; for I quite agree with you that it is the true stage-need and charm of life.

Sincerely your friend,

HERMAN C. MERIVALE.

Of CHARLES COGHLAN as an actor my own opinion was so high that I greatly value being allowed to make the following extract from a letter he wrote to a mutual friend: "There is a strange quality of strength in Bancroft's acting which you do not value at its worth: his method seems so easy—until you see another actor take one of his parts. I have done this, and so know the truth of what I write."

Coghlan was a fine actor—in his earlier career one of the best; and yet he will not be remembered. Stage fame, like more solid reputations, must owe part of its brief life to accident. In private life he was a mysterious creature. He often lived in the country, but near to London. My wife and I once rode on horseback to have luncheon with him in an old-fashioned, picturesque house at Kingsbury; his handsome sister Rose was also there, I remember. In those days he drove a coach; and although the team would hardly have passed muster with the Four-in-Hand Club, he was a capital whip. At Elstree I stayed a night with him, and was beguiled into a little partridge shooting the next morning; but soon retired, for I felt very like Mr. Winkle, and was conscious that danger was far nearer to the keeper and his dog than to the birds.

After he left us in 1876 he was much in the United States.

WINDSOR HOTEL, FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK,  
September 26, 1876.

MY DEAR BANCROFT,—

I snatch a few moments from my professional duties—ahem! rehearsal from 10 to 4—but no matter. Although the patron saint or guardian angel or whoever it may be—by the way, who does look after theatres?—of the Prince of Wales's Theatre must weep at such a statement. But I have been very busy—really. I am happy to say that I have made what is considered to be a very great success here so far. I opened in *Money*



on the 12th instant, and the papers are nearly of one mind in pronouncing me the best actor that England has sent to America for years, and which is not saying much after all—but still I am content. I would send you some notices but that the search would involve a journey in the elevator, and so you must kindly excuse me until next mail. Seriously, though, the New York press have unanimously expressed themselves with great warmth in my favour; and the comments made upon my first appearance—in ten provincial papers—begging their pardons, they don't think small potatoes of themselves in this country—are most flattering, and prophesy for me a brilliant future. I like the place and the people very much—except the bird of freedom, who takes rather too much exercise. The audiences are pleasant; they require acting to be hot and strong, but this being done for them they get enthusiastic. I don't think they will do me much harm. My fault was never exaggeration!! I might indeed have always been fully advertised as “quiet to write and perform,” so I think I can enter upon a course of experiments on the strength of my blood-vessels in, say, San Francisco or Chicago with advantage to myself and safety to my auditors.

I am in excellent health and spirits. Had a delightful voyage—and am rolling, I may say wallowing, in dollars. The sheriff has not yet found his way to the stage door, and all is peace—for a time.

Please give Mrs. Bancroft my best remembrances.

Sincerely yours,

CHARLES F. COGHLAN.

Coghlán died in America, at Galveston, where his remains were washed out to sea by a flood. The coffin was some time afterwards found floating on the ocean and eventually buried again.

I come now to a prince of hosts, SIR HENRY THOMPSON. A list of the men who have dined

at his "Octaves" would be a remarkable record—  
—I prize the memory of having been many times  
a guest during twenty years.

A copy of Sir Robert Ball's *Story of the Heavens*,  
which Thompson gave to my wife in October 1889,  
is inscribed "To Mrs. Bancroft, with an old friend's  
kind regards :

"Homage from an Astronomer  
To a Star of the First Magnitude."

Sir Henry sent me his essay, *The Unknown God*,  
with this letter :

35, WIMPOLE STREET,  
September 14, 1902.

MY DEAR BANCROFT,—

Kindly do me the favour to read carefully  
this brief but closely compressed result of the labours  
of half a lifetime—a real "Pilgrim's Progress"—I  
have termed it so in the text.

And if you were mad enough to give it as  
a "Reading" after the manner of the wonderful  
*Christmas Carol* of Dickens, may I be there to hear !!

Always your admiring and sincere old friend,  
HENRY THOMPSON.

The well-known critic, CLEMENT SCOTT, did  
loyal service to the stage in his bright days. No  
writer, perhaps, possessed greater power in conveying  
his impressions with force and rapidity. Here is  
a reference to some work he did for us.

WAR OFFICE, PALL MALL,  
March 15, 1877.

MY DEAR B.,—

I am very anxious for many reasons that  
you should propose your own terms for *The Vicarage*.

1. You came to me with an idea, and I did not  
suggest it.

2. You proposed and I carried it out to the best  
of my ability.

3. It is your child, and I have in equity no right to any subsequent support from it.

4. It was the happy commencement of what I trust may be a long literary partnership and cordial companionship.

Under the circumstances, you propose and I accept! The work has more or less been a labour of love with me, and if, by some happy accident, I may have struck the keynote to emphasise the undoubted fact that your wife is the very first artist of her day, I shall be more than rewarded. I believe myself that it will be one of the most complete *artistic* triumphs of our memory.

Since that one rehearsal I have thought of little else, and I hunger for the evening, not so much on my own poor account (for I have done little more than revive an old tune), but on hers, an artist incomparably superior to any actress of her time, and who through good-nature and good taste has never been quite extended to her own art-limit.

I long to hear the cheers which will greet your wife's success.

Yours ever,

CLEMENT SCOTT.

LORD ROWTON was a friend from the days when he was Montagu Corry, and for some years a next-door neighbour. In his courtly way, and with the best of what he called "Society manners," he regretted that the numbers of our houses could not be reversed—his being 17, ours 18—so that he could have addressed my wife, he said, as "sweet seventeen." As it was, he always wrote to her as "Dear 18," and generally with the signature, "Your faithful neighbour, 17." Here is an example:

17, BERKELEY SQUARE,  
8 a.m., June 22, 1897.

MY DEAR "18,"—

I am anxious to be one of the first (how many will join, later!!) to tell you how delighted I

am that this Honour has been conferred on Bancroft—and you!

It has been admirably won.

Yours ever,

“17.”

Not a moment for a formal letter.

I remember one night, when he was ill, walking slowly home with him from the Beefsteak Club. He stopped suddenly in Bond Street and said reflectively, “The whole of my life seems to have been passed in holding my tongue.”

When the light flickered and burnt out there was much darkness around.

My mind abounds with sweet memories of the great musician and loved friend, SIR ARTHUR SULLIVAN. Many of them are connected with the Riviera, where we knew him both in health and sickness. I remember my wife and I meeting him one morning in the rooms at Monte Carlo, when we arranged to have luncheon together at the Café de Paris. They walked away together to order it, while I, to my cost, lingered behind. When I left to join them I walked slowly across to the café; and my countenance as I entered must have told a sad story, for Arthur’s cheery voice rang out, “Come along, B., this way to the cemetery!” I doubt if my wife has ceased laughing yet.

Dear Arthur Sullivan! An entrancing personality—a great loss. When I last saw him, there seemed little of him left but those beautiful, plaintive eyes.

Soon afterwards I had the sad honour to be one of the pall-bearers when he was laid to rest in St. Paul’s Cathedral.

The “wee laird,” LORD SHAND, comes next. My wife and I were among his guests at the last dinner-party he gave, a few evenings before his regretted death. Both Lord and Lady Shand had been kind friends for many years, in London, at



ARTHUR SULLIVAN



Marienbad, and on the Riviera. It was at their hospitable table that we improved our acquaintance with three men distinguished in widely different careers: that great man of science, Lord Kelvin; the delightful, "breezy" First Sea Lord, Sir John Fisher; and the attractive Master of the Temple, Canon Ainger.

One of those accomplished men who know something about everything, but not enough, perhaps, about anything, was HAMILTON AÏDÉ. We were present at many of his charming and artistic parties, but, evidently, not at one to which the following note refers.

QUEEN ANNE'S MANSIONS,  
*Saturday.*

DEAR BANCROFT,—

I was sorry you did not come to my party on Thursday; so was Sarah Bernhardt, who wished to express, personally, her admiration of your wife's performance; but I can quite understand that Mistress Woffington is an exhausting part.

Sincerely yours,

HAMILTON AÏDÉ.

The great actress afterwards wrote my wife this letter:

BIEN CHÈRE MADAME,—

Je vous remercie mille fois pour vos si belles roses et l'aimable lettre de Monsieur Bancroft. Je suis très heureuse que vous ayez pris plaisir à m'entendre, et très touchée que deux artistes de votre valeur m'accordent du talent.

Veillez me croire reconnaissante, et agréez, Madame, je vous prie, mes meilleurs sentiments.

SARAH BERNHARDT.

We have always been rich in the friendship of eminent lawyers, most of whom I have found imbued with affection for the stage. In the list of these the name of LORD HANNEN is conspicuous.

I recall with admiration his imposing appearance when he presided at the Parnell Commission, which through the kindness of the Bar I attended more than once.

I remember my wife saying to Lord Hannen, when he was President of the Divorce Court, that he seemed to her to pass his life in separating united couples. The learned judge replied that he passed much of it in wondering why the said couples had ever wished to be joined together.

The best souvenir of dear SIR GEORGE GROVE is one of his delightful letters :

DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,—

It is shameful after all this interval to come to you with a request in my right hand! and yet I am forced so to do on behalf of Lord Charles Bruce; the enclosed letter will explain his wish. As I hear everybody say that Margate air is good, I came here on Saturday. I cannot say much for the air this morning, because there is none, but I can speak well for the rain, which is coming down in buckets-full. The sea is being turned upside-down upon our heads, and I suppose that is better than nothing. People said to me, "Go to Margate—it will brace you up." Here I am, ready to be braced, or embraced, but I do not quite see the fun of it just yet.

My humble duty to Bancroft, and to you, Madam, feelings which no tongue or pen ever could express.

Yours devotedly,

G. GROVE.

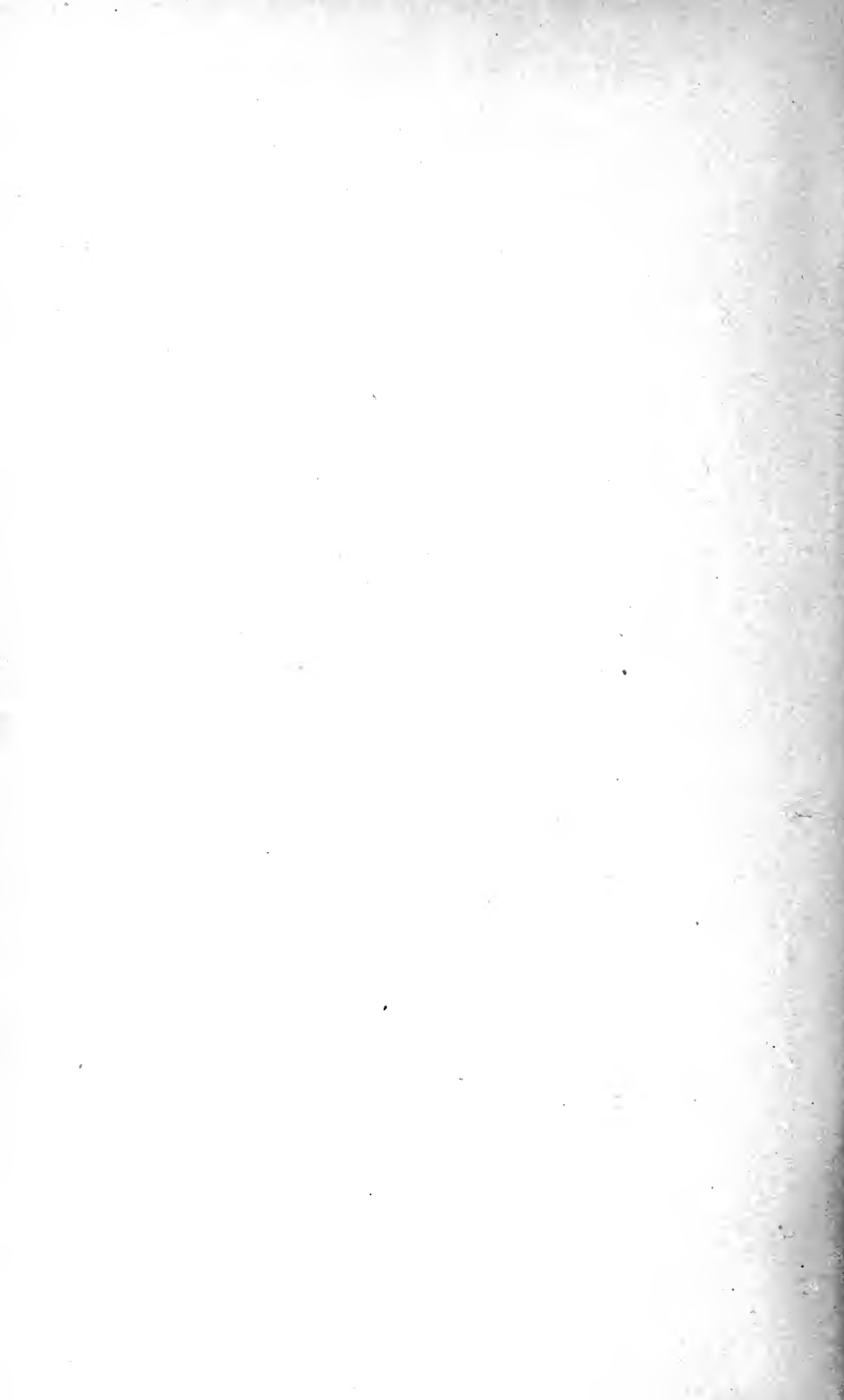
For a lengthened period I enjoyed the friendship of that great man LORD RUSSELL OF KILLOWEN, as the two preceding chapters will have shown.

My wife and I agree that his was one of the most dominating personalities we have known; for my own part, when I was in a room with him, I could never forget his presence. He was tremendously





LORD RUSSELL OF KILLOWEN AND GEORGE BANCROFT



downright. No man ever more firmly said what he meant or meant what he said. I admired his rigid punctuality, not being free from that quality myself, and am grateful to him for kind acts as well as kind words.

He was a faithful playgoer, and, if in London, never missed a "first night" at our theatre.

I was told that, when asked what was the worst punishment for bigamy, he answered at once, "Two mothers-in-law!" A reply worthy of his Irish tongue.

The following letter was written in 1895 :

HOUSE OF LORDS,  
*Saturday.*

DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,—

You will be glad to know that Mr. George Bancroft discharged with tact and dignity the duties of Marshal to the Senior Judge on the late Northern Circuit. He made an excellent Marshal. The only thing to be said against him is that he unmercifully "rooked" *both* the Judges at *bézique* !

I am, dear Mrs. Bancroft,

Faithfully,

RUSSELL OF KILLOWEN.

I one day met FREDERICK GOODALL fresh from a Council Meeting at the Royal Academy, when he shattered my nerves and stimulated my pride by telling me that within a few hours I should receive the honour of being asked to respond for "The Drama" at the forthcoming banquet at Burlington House. It was a difficult task. The greatness of the audience impressed me with my own littleness. I limited myself to five minutes, and in the course of them said that the Drama had no greater patron and friend than the most exalted in the realm ; gracious words and courtly deeds had gone far to kill decaying prejudice ; while in the august presence of one to whom all actors would ever be in debt, I begged

leave to say that their humble duty was only equalled by their loyal affection. Nor was I unmindful that the proposal of this toast at that great banquet was a mark of respect to the stage which could only make the stage the more respect itself. I could not speak in that room—surrounded as I was by the rulers in that fairy-land—without some attempt, however faint, to say that my admiration of the beautiful art, so splendidly illustrated year by year upon those walls, was as true as my love for the living pictures we players tried to paint. Our pictures, alas! died early, for the greatest actor's work must be a passing triumph; it was not cut in marble, nor did it live on canvas, but could only owe its fame to written records and tradition. Vast wealth might keep for us, and for the ages yet to come, the undying splendour of a Reynolds or a Millais, but no sum could buy one single echo of the voice of Sarah Siddons. In spite of this I would not for one moment have it thought that I underrated the ecstasy—as it might almost be called—of an actor's high success; for this at least I knew I felt—and felt I knew—that the Drama remained the most winning, moving, fascinating, alluring, untiring thing that ever was conceived or carried out for the enlightenment and recreation of mankind. As England could claim to be the parent of the Drama in Europe, so could she claim to be the mother of the greatest dramatist the world had owned—that pearl of greatest price—whose mighty genius left all art in debt that never could be paid, and whose works alone would make the stage eternal.

With that large-hearted man, J. L. TOOLE, we enjoyed a lifelong friendship. Much that was lofty in his character was hidden behind his drolleries.

#### COMEDY

Another old comrade and mutual friend, John Clarke, had a pardonable, but insatiable, weakness for praise. Toole took a mischievous delight in playing upon it, by lauding other actors in Clarke's

own pet parts. One night Clarke and himself, with two other genial members of the Arundel Club, who lived in the same neighbourhood, were driving home-wards together in a four-wheeler, when Toole determined upon getting Clarke to invite them all indoors for a final chat. Clarke demurred at first, urging the lateness of the hour; but Toole had only to mention some wonderful criticism he pretended to have heard of Clarke's acting in *Box and Cox*, and the whole party was promptly invited in. But little of the promised criticism did poor Clarke ever hear. No sooner was he inside the house than Toole began to praise Jimmy Rogers's performance of "Cox." Clarke at once discovered that it was late and that he wanted to go to bed, but a deft word of praise for Clarke as "Box," and the host was offering whisky and cigars. The next moment, on Toole's dropping a remark on the excellence of Buckstone, the original of the part, Clarke was trying to turn his guests into the street. But Toole had not done with him yet. He declared that Clarke got more applause than George Honey when they acted the old farce together, and immediately he was pressed to come nearer the fire and make a night of it. But when Toole said that the original farce had been quite superseded by Sullivan's musical version, and Clarke's performance by Arthur Cecil's success in it, his words were stifled by his being bundled out and having the street-door slammed in his face.

## TRAGEDY

Just before Christmas-time in 1879 I received this letter:

4, ORME SQUARE,  
*Saturday.*

MY DEAR BANCROFT,—

You have been so very kind about my poor boy that I write you a line to tell you of a great trouble—he has been getting worse. Sir James Paget has been here consulting, and this afternoon

the poor fellow has undergone another terrible operation—his leg has been taken off to try and save his life. Pray God it may, although I fear the shock will be too great for him. I am still unable to leave my room. Tell your dear wife: you have been so kind in your enquiries for my poor dear suffering boy. I am quite broken-hearted.

Yours sincerely,  
J. L. TOOLE.

In a few hours the boy was dead; the father had to be carried to his son's bedside to say good-bye to him, and a few days later carried to the side of his grave. I have seen nothing in my life more tragic.

Pleasant memories of hospitality and kindness are called up as I write the name of DR. WILLIAM PLAYFAIR. With all his family, he was devoted to the play; his son, Nigel Playfair, in fact, resigned his first profession, and has justified the step by the ability he has since shown as an actor.

I remember Mrs. Playfair being very ill some years ago at Mentone: I was at Monte Carlo at the time, and went to see her. I took great pains in trying to make my name clear to the waiter, with the result that I was announced as "*Monsieur le Baron Kraft*," by which designation the doctor always addressed me afterwards.

The celebrated sculptor, ONSLOW FORD, called so early from his work, has left us a fine reminder of Irving as *Hamlet*. Presently we are to see our late chief "in his habit as he lived," by Brock; the value of that monument to me will be the fact that it was erected to his memory by his comrades. I do not remember the members of any other calling in a like way so honouring themselves.

The *doyen* for many years of dramatic critics, JOSEPH KNIGHT, was always a popular member of the Garrick and Beefsteak Clubs. My wife had two King Charles spaniels, which we christened *Pepys* and

*Rowley*: not knowing how the King obtained the latter as a nickname, I wrote to Knight, as editor of *Notes and Queries*, to ask him, and he replied:

27, CAMDEN SQUARE, N.W.,  
February 28th, 1900.

MY DEAR BANCROFT,—

There was an old goat which in the time of Charles II. ran about the private garden of the palace and was called Rowley. This animal was good-humoured, familiar, and amorous. These qualities also distinguished the King, to whom the name was transferred. This origin is due to "Richardsoniana." Best regards to Lady Bancroft and yourself.

Yours always,  
JOSEPH KNIGHT.

I was very pleased to have it in my power to serve SIR WILLIAM BROADBENT, for friendship's sake as well as for that of the great hospital he worked for.

DEAR SIR SQUIRE,—

I was equally delighted and impressed by the Reading last evening. What a splendid audience! The *power* of doing such fine work, and *doing it* in a noble cause, is a great privilege.

Yours very truly,  
W. H. BROADBENT.

The shadow of the bluff and burly form of VALENTINE PRINSEP, known to his friends only as "Val," is next thrown upon our screen.

He made my wife three presents—a beautiful Indian bracelet, on his return from painting the Durbar; the sketch of "The Minuet," which was inspired by our representation of *The School for Scandal*; and a large white Venetian poodle. The first and second gifts she prizes still; the third, who through unbounded spirits and destructive activity

was the terror of the gardener, came to an untimely end after swallowing a cricket-ball.

1, HOLLAND PARK ROAD,  
Saturday.

DEAR BANCROFT,—

Marco ought to be shaved when the warm weather sets in, up to the shoulder, with tufts on his legs and tail.

Please tell Mrs. Bancroft I have not forgotten my promise. The sketch has been sent to be framed, that the frame at least may be worthy of her acceptance.

Yours very truly,  
VAL PRINSEP.

The well-known actor WILSON BARRETT had many ups and downs. After realising what must have been a small fortune at the Princess's Theatre by the production of such admirable dramas as *The Lights of London* and *The Silver King*, he threw it away over more ambitious schemes, which left him, I believe, gravely in debt. Nothing daunted, he eventually, with indomitable courage, relieved himself from all difficulties by the wonderful career of *The Sign of the Cross*, by which he again amassed large sums.

Not long before his unexpected death, I received a pleasant letter from him :

THE WALSHINGHAM HOTEL, PICCADILLY,  
September 19, 1902.

DEAR BANCROFT,—

Here is a little souvenir of our late troubles in South Africa, a Kruger sovereign; they are curious. There are few men in our profession I esteem as much, none whose good opinion I value more. That you should take so much trouble over me is very gratifying indeed. The kind thought which prompted you gives me extreme pleasure. I can thank you for the gift; there are no thanks worthy of the thought.



Please convey my kindest remembrances and good wishes to Lady Bancroft, and believe me,  
Gratefully yours,  
WILSON BARRETT.

Our friendship with LORD ST. HELIER dates back to a time when he had not yet become the husband of a still older friend. We are full of memories of their many acts of kindness and hospitality, shown to us both in London and at Arlington Manor. When they came to us we could say and feel, "Your presence makes us rich."

PROBATE DIVISION,  
June 22, 1897.

MY DEAR BANCROFT,—

I am truly delighted at the Honour. It is a most proper recognition of all you and Mrs. Bancroft have done for the stage, and that, I am sure, will be the universal opinion.

Please let me and my wife wish to Sir Squire and Dame Bancroft very many years of happiness.

Yours very truly,

F. H. JEUNE.

It was a sorrow to lose so suddenly the warm friendship and bright company of that charming painter G. H. BOUGHTON. He was much attached to theatre-land and a prominent "first-nighter." I append a few pleasant words from him:

DEAR BANCROFT,—

A most enjoyable evening—Mrs. Bancroft's *Lesson* is indeed a lesson in the art of acting—an exhaustive exposition better than any amount of mere talk—literally an "acted lecture." Your doctor in *Peril* admirable—holding the whole play together.

Sincerely yours,

G. H. BOUGHTON.

HENRY KEMBLE, a descendant of the illustrious Kemble family, was a loss to the stage, as to a multitude of comrades. He was our staunch and much-loved friend since his youth. A fearless, odd, outspoken creature: few men have been more sincerely regretted in many places than "The Beetle"—so called, ages ago, from an enormous brown cape he then wore. He was most amusing at times in a quaint way—as, for instance, when he told an income-tax collector that he followed a very precarious profession, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer was not justified in looking upon him as a source of income!

I have many birthday presents from him: his final gift was a little silver helmet inscribed with this Shakespearian quotation:

"No Squire in need  
And no poor Knight."

The last words he penned were to my wife, for whom he had great affection, in the form of a telegram, written a few hours before he died in Jersey in 1907. They were these:

All over, dear, dear Lady B. Blessings on you all.

BEETLE.

A kind host, a welcome guest, was LORD JUSTICE MATHEW; one of many friends whom we met in the Engadine. I cannot, unfortunately, recall the wit of a speech he made at a picnic tea-party which my wife gave there, when, in legal terms, he proposed her health as his "learned Sister Bancroft," but I do remember a charming story he told me of his fellow-countryman, the renowned Father Healy, which I have never seen in print.

A pretty young English girl was seated at dinner next to the witty priest, and said to him: "They

tell me, Father Healy, that you have no mistletoe in your country." "Is that so, my dear young lady? Now I think of it, I believe it is true." "Then what do the boys and girls do at Christmas-time without it?" "Is it kissing you mean, my dear? Sure, they do it *under the rose!*"

My wife and I first made the acquaintance of that distinguished diplomatist SIR EDWARD MALET as long since as 1878, when we read a clever poetic play which he had written. The following kind letter reached me at Monte Carlo. I have enjoyed several visits to the fairyland *château* from which it was penned, and have met delightful company there.

CHÂTEAU MALET, MONACO,  
*April 4, 1901.*

DEAR SIR SQUIRE BANCROFT,—

My cousin, Augustus Spalding, tells me he met you on the high road yesterday with Mr. Pinero. Will you give me and my wife the pleasure of lunching with us on Saturday next, the 6th, at half-past one? and if Mr. Pinero does not object to an invitation from an unknown admirer, it would give us great pleasure if he would come with you. Hoping that you may both be disengaged,

I remain, truly yours,

EDWARD MALET.

We are proud to number among these hundred names that of SIR REDVERS BULLER, whose Victoria Cross was a thrice-won distinction. He and Lady Audrey Buller were for years kind friends, as the following lines will tell:

29, BRUTON STREET, W.,  
*June 24, 1897.*

DEAR BANCROFT,—

May I add one to the hearty congratulations you will doubtless receive on the announcement of Tuesday last? I am so glad of it, as I think it but

a fair recognition of yourself individually and of your profession generally.

With sincere regard and admiration for you both,  
Yours very truly,  
REDVERS BULLER.

My wife at the same time received a very charming letter from Lady Audrey.

I first knew SIR HOWARD VINCENT when his energies were devoted to criminal investigation. I have a very pleasant letter to remind me of his thirty years' acquaintance :

1, GROSVENOR STREET,  
*Thursday morning.*

MY DEAR BANCROFT,—

It would be difficult to remember a happier evening than you gave your guests last night. I am haunted by the mottoes which decorate the cornice of your library :

Old books to read.  
Old wood to burn.  
Old wine to drink.  
Old friends to trust.

Charming ! Where did you get them ?

Sincerely yours,  
C. E. HOWARD VINCENT.

The well-known and much-loved *doyen* of war correspondents, SIR WILLIAM HOWARD RUSSELL, was for many years a friend. It was delightful on one occasion to seat him between Sir Henry de Bathe and Dion Boucicault ; with the former he had faced the rigours of the Crimean campaign, and all three had been schoolfellows in Dublin some forty years before. "Billy" Russell's Irish wit sparkled during that happy evening, and is not yet forgotten by their (then) young host.

After seeing us act in *Masks and Faces* he wrote :

DEAR BANCROFT,—

I must tell you by word of pen how greatly appreciated the performance was last night; true art devoted to a true embodiment of human nature and human feeling.

Yours sincerely,  
W. H. RUSSELL.

Of OTTO GOLDSCHMIDT, "little Otto," we have happy memories at home and in the Engadine, when he assisted us greatly at the charity entertainments we gave there. An overture à *quatre mains*, played by Arthur Sullivan and himself, was a great feature on more than one occasion. He told me the following story, which, like many others, may or may not be familiar. When Meyerbeer died, a conceited young musician sent the great master Verdi, whom he knew, the score of a funeral march which he had composed with a view to its performance in honour of the illustrious man who had passed away, adding that he would call the following day for Verdi's candid opinion upon its merits. When he presented himself, he received this verdict: "Forgive me, my young friend, if I cannot refrain from thinking that it might have been better had you died and Meyerbeer been left to compose a funeral march."

We knew SIR A. CONDIE STEPHEN for years; our first meeting was at his uncle's in Cadogan Square. We liked him very much.

KNIGHTSBRIDGE,  
June 22, 1904.

DEAR BANCROFT,—

In a book of reminiscences I read lately, the author said of a certain dinner-party that his only regret was not to have had every guest at table for an immediate neighbour; so I felt last evening at your house.

Yours very truly,  
A. CONDIE STEPHEN.

We enjoyed the friendship of LORD GLENESK for many years, and received much kindness and hospitality at his hands. He was only second to Mr. J. M. Levy as a true supporter of the drama, of which he had great knowledge. We saw both joyful and mournful national ceremonies from Lord Glenesk's mansion in Piccadilly, and passed pleasant hours in the old-world garden of his house on Hampstead Heath.

The following letter was written when our retirement from management was announced :

DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,—

I have observed your career from its beginning, and can bear testimony to the enormous improvement you have effected on the English stage.

You were the first to teach the school of Nature, and not only by your own bright impersonations, but also by your influence over all those with whom you were brought in contact, to prove that English art is second to none.

Following in your footsteps, and emulous of your achievements, many have attained fame and fortune. But it is my firm belief that to you, and to you especially, is to be attributed the great and successful development of our Modern Drama.

Sincerely yours,

ALGERNON BORTHWICK.

I think it well, however sadly, to close this long list with the names of the most eminent French actor and the most eminent English actor of my day.

My friendship for CONSTANT COQUELIN was as sincere as my appreciation. I knew him for many years. He was among the most outspoken admirers of my wife's acting. He said "her splendid vitality was contagious: her winning magnetism would fill the largest stage." If my saying so does not detract from this praise, I may add that he showered en-

comiums in a Parisian journal on two of my performances.

Nearly thirty years ago he wrote to me :

CHER BANCROFT,—

Vous avez un excellent théâtre que vous dirigez en maître—et en maître artiste—que pouvez-vous désirer de plus ?

Votre ami,

C. COQUELIN.

In his home his buoyant gaiety was charming, while his love for his simple old mother was enshrined in his heart as sweetly as it would seem always to be in that of a good Frenchman.

In the farewell words of M. Claretie, the accomplished Administrator of the Théâtre Français : “He was more than a stage king, he was a king of the stage, and will leave a luminous trail in the heaven of art.”

The final notes are struck by HENRY IRVING. They were penned from 15A, Grafton Street, in the early morning of June 22, 1897.

I

“Hail to thee, dear Lady and dear friend!  
All happiness and joy be with you ever.”

Affectionately yours,

HENRY IRVING.

II

MY DEAR B.,—

My heart rejoices at the richly deserved honour paid to you and your dear wife. God bless you both, and may health, peace, and happiness be yours for many, many years !

God save the Queen !

Affectionately ever,

HENRY IRVING.

And still we leave many former friends unnamed,  
but my century is made, and I declare the innings  
closed.

“For some we loved, the loveliest and the best  
That from his vintage rolling Time hath prest,  
Have drunk their cup a round or two before,  
And one by one crept silently to rest.”

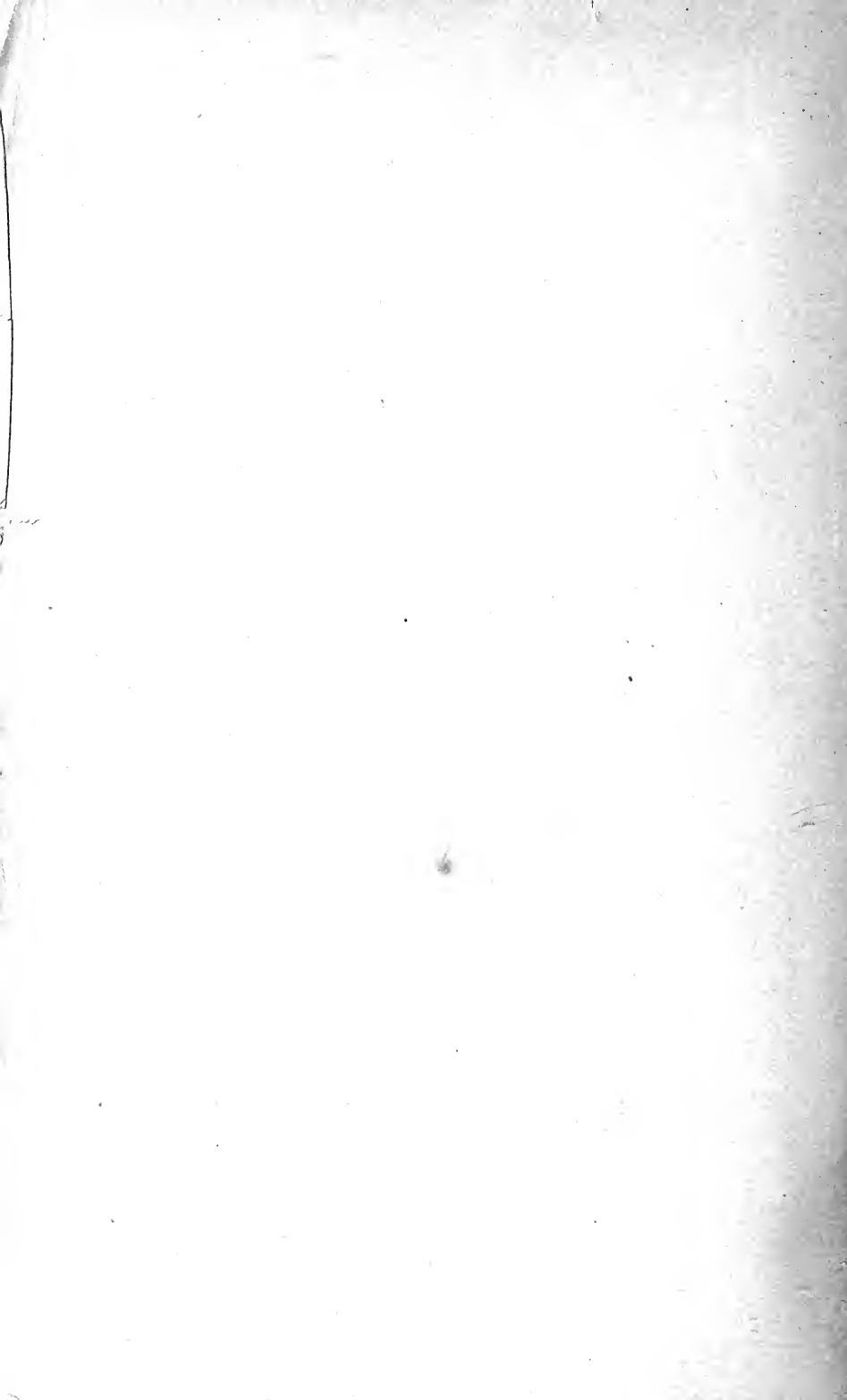
Their names have reminded my wife and myself  
very forcibly how much we have owed to the calling  
we both have loved and lived by. It is pleasant to  
remember this, and on many a Darby and Joan  
evening to think and talk it over.

As we players pass down the ages—the remorse-  
less figure of Time following at our heels with his  
relentless scythe, mowing us one by one from his  
path—successors happily and joyously, in all the  
splendour of youth, are ready to take on our work,  
as those of to-day have replaced others whose turn  
was done. Three hundred years have rolled away  
since Philip Massinger wrote: “Mark how the old  
actors decay, the young sprout up.” So it will ever  
be. The vineyard may keep its most luscious grapes  
for favoured years, the orchard may not always yield  
the choicest fruit; but the beautiful art of acting will  
live on. If the sacred fire burns dimly for a while, it  
will never expire, being “not of an age, but for all  
time.”





"DARBY AND JOAN



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## 2/6 NET NOVELS

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"An excellent story, well conceived and brightly written."—*Daily Mail*.

### THE GORGEOUS ISLE. By GERTRUDE ATHERTON.

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### A COUNTY FAMILY. STORER CLOUSTON.

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---

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, LONDON, W.

# MEMORANDUM

TO : [Illegible]

FROM : [Illegible]

SUBJECT : [Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

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