EDWIN BOOTH.

The keen sense of loss which has come to the American people because of the death of Edwin Booth may well be shared by all the English-speaking communities of the world. If Mr. Irving be left out of view, it is plain that for many years Mr. Booth has had no rival as a tragedian among those actors who use our language; and it is equally plain that there is to-day not even a candidate for his vacant place.

As for Mr. Irving, it is fair to say that neither his career nor his success has been precisely upon the plane of Mr. Booth's. By turns a comedian, a player of melodrama, an attempter of tragedy, and a master of farce, Mr. Irving, in his picturesque and versatile talents, has ever displayed an eccentric quality of which there was not a trace in the American performer. Mr. Booth will be remembered as a classic tragedian, while it is more than probable that Mr. Irving's Louis XI., Mathias, and Dubosc will be recalled when his Hamlet and King Lear have quite slipped out of general recollection.

The student of the history of the English stage will not find, outside of the Kemble and Kean families, a person whose equipment would vie with that of Edwin Booth; including within the word "equipment" all that may be reasonably expected from tradition, heredity, and surroundings in early life. Mr. Booth inherited from his father, Junius Brutus Booth, — an actor accounted by many competent critics the greatest of his brilliant period, — a definite bent and a full gift. He was born to the buskin as truly as Edward III. was born to the royal purple; in his infancy and youth he breathed the atmosphere of the stage, and histrionic traditions and aptitudes came to him as a part of his birthright. Edwin was undoubtedly inferior to his father in that plasticity which may be cultivated, but cannot be acquired; yet his temperament was admirably well adapted to the needs of his craft, and especially of that department of the actor's art to which, after a little experimenting at the outset of his professional life, he wholly devoted himself. In Mr. Booth's nature there was a remarkable combination of sensibility, thoughtfulness, power, and reserve. His intellect was vigorous, intuitive, and singularly lucid. Physically he was nobly equipped for his work: with a voice of exceptional purity, range, and carrying power; with a figure of medium height and size, but well knit and proportioned; and with a mobile face, finely, almost faultlessly chiseled, lighted by dark eyes of extraordinary brilliancy and depth, and marked in repose by a cold but highly distinguished beauty. The histrionic art has ever been a jealous mistress to her followers, and no class of professional men and women are, as a rule, so completely absorbed by their work as are actors and actresses. In this respect Mr. Booth surpassed even the custom of his class. For forty years all his strength and industry, all his powers and parts, were concentrated upon the study and practice of his art. Ambition to excel and to shine was, of course, one of the feeders of the zeal which burned with such a pure and steady flame; but it was only one. He was an actor as Shelley was a poet, Raphael a painter, Mozart a musician, — an actor by every instinct of his nature, by the impulse of every drop of his blood. It may well be believed that what is called "society" lost much by his seclusion; but the social or unsocial habit of such an artist is not to be criticised. He knew what he had to do, and how best or only he could do it, and through his fidelity to the law derived

from that knowledge he wrought not only to his own best advantage, but to that of the entire community and nation.

Mr. Booth's peculiar quality as a player was the natural product of his endowment and mode of life. As an artist he lived an ideal existence. He was too quick and keen not to profit by his inevitable contacts with men, but assiduous reading, study, and toil in the closet or on the stage supplied both the substance and the color of his performance. In a man less richly endowed by nature such a life might have brought forth but barrenly; with Mr. Booth it seemed to be the condition of his most fruitful achievement. Well has the artist lived whose hours have been spent in lofty intimacy with the great poets and dramatists; and so it was well with our tragedian. His habits and associations were at once the consequence and the cause of his artistic temper. Under the guidance of the chosen companions of his life he became incapable of vulgarity; and as a player he became the shining exponent of that school of acting whose chief characteristic and distinction is ideality.

All that was corporeal of the artist fitted well to his fine spiritual conditions. Some of my readers can recall his first appearance as a leading player at the Boston Theatre, thirty-six years ago, and will remember that, like all other artists, he had his early faults and crudities of method; but the process of correcting and ripening was rapid, and for a quarter of a century or more Mr. Booth was recognized as the best accomplished actor of our stage. Free and graceful in motion, with carriage and step which lent themselves with equal and perfect ease to the panther footfall of Iago, the dignified alertness of Macbeth, and the stately progress of Othello; with a beautiful face whose mask was as wax under the moulding fingers of passion; with a voice whose peculiar vibrant quality had an extraordinary power to stir the soul of the listener at the very moment of its appeal as music to the ear, — all of Edwin Booth that was, in the choice phrase of Shakespeare, "out of door" was "most rich." And, without unduly exalting the mere material of his art, it is worth while to dwell for a moment upon the service which he constantly rendered to the ever-imperiled cause of pure and elegant speech. "Orators," teachers, preachers, many actors, — some in one way, some in another, and some in nearly every conceivable way, — set the example of bad utterance of our language. Mr. Booth's tongue might well in its kind have secured for him the praise which Chaucer's pen won for the first great English poet; for in his speech he was a "well of English undefiled," reviving and refreshing the ancient tradition, which is now dying of inanition on English and American soil, that the stage is the natural guardian of the nation's orthoepy.[1] A faultless pronunciation, an enunciation distinct, clean, and clear without formalism or apparent effort, an exquisite feeling for the sweetness of words, and a perfect sense of their relation to one another united to give to his delivery exemplary distinction, and to make it a model and a standard. And, at a moment when the art seems almost to be lost to our theatre, one must recur with melancholy pleasure to his mastery of the noble art of reciting English blank verse. The vast majority of our players helplessly and

[1] Many points of unique elegance in Mr. Booth's enunciation might be mentioned. Two of the finest were the effortless distinctness of his delivery of the letter *r*, and the delicate purity of tone with which he always sounded our short *o*. Both these points are worth noting; for New Englanders appear to be absolutely incapable of the former, and as for the short *o*, it seems quite to have disappeared from the speech of large sections of the West and South, being replaced by the sound of *aw* or of *a* in "partner," with hideous results. The only mispronunciation I ever observed in Mr. Booth's speech was of the word "all," which he gave habitually with a very queer employment of the *a* in "father" as the vowel sound.

hopelessly stumble, nowadays, in the attempt to interpret Shakespeare's lines: if they essay the rhythm, the meaning suffers a kind of smooth asphyxiation at their hands; if they devote themselves to the thought, the verse degenerates into a queer variety of hitchy prose. Mr. Booth, at no point of his career, seemed to find any serious difficulty in putting into practice the theory to which all the great actors and critics before his day had subscribed, — that in Shakespeare's blank verse sound and sense are as a rule so vitally united that what makes for the life of the one conduces to the life of the other; or, rather, that the master poet uses the melody and the flow of his measure as an implement in the expression of the idea or the emotion, almost as if he were a composer of music, employing words in lieu of tones.

It is understood that no one can achieve high success as an actor who is not a master of the art of elocution, using the word "elocution" in its amplest sense. Such a master was Edwin Booth. Very few of our players are capable of dealing as he dealt with a difficult text, in such a fashion as will keep that perfect relation of word to word, and clause to clause, by intonation, cadence, breathing, pause, and emphasis, which shall convey to the ear and mind of the listener the thoughts of the dramatist in all their fullness, power, beauty, and just proportion. A definite touch here and a slurring there, a firm grasp of one end of this phrase and of the other end of that, a scramble or rush toward the close coupled with an attempt "to make a point," — that is a fair account of all that the commonplace actor ever attempts in dealing with long poetical or declamatory passages. Clever old Colley Cibber had upon this theme a word which, indicating the magnitude and delicacy of the player's task, will help us to distinguish the inferior histrionic artist in this kind from the superior: "In the just delivery of poetical numbers, particularly where the sentiments are pathetic, it is scarce credible upon how minute an article of sound depends their greatest beauty and effect. The voice of a singer is not more strictly ty'd to Time and Tune than that of an actor in theatrical elocution. The least syllable, too long or too slightly dwelt upon in a period, depreciates it to nothing, which very syllable, if rightly touched, shall, like the heightening stroke of light from a master's pencil, give life and spirit to the whole."

Nearly all great actors experiment with a variety of parts early in their professional lives, and some players continue the experimenting process through their entire careers, though the general tendency of middle and later age is of course toward the stability of repetition. In his first years upon the stage Mr. Booth was moderately tentative, but soon settled himself to an almost steady presentation of what may be called the classical characters of the English theatre. In his repertory were all the first men's parts in the chief tragedies of Shakespeare, except Timon, Posthumus, Coriolanus, and the Antony of Antony and Cleopatra; and also Shylock, Benedick, and Petruchio in the maimed one-act summary of The Taming of the Shrew. In the histories, he played Gloster, — both in the familiar Colley Cibber perversion of Richard III. and in the excellent acting version of Shakespeare's play prepared for him by Mr. William Winter, — Brutus and Cassius in Julius Cæsar, and in 1887, and for a short time thereafter, Richard II. in the drama of that name. On several occasions during the first half of his career he essayed Romeo. Outside the Shakespearean drama, his principal parts were those of Sir Giles Overreach in Massinger's A New Way to Pay Old Debts, Don César de Bazan, Sir Edward Mortimer in The Iron Chest, Claude Melnotte, Pescara in The Apostate, Ruy Blas, Brutus in John Howard Payne's tragedy, Bertuccio in

The Fool's Revenge (Tom Taylor's version of Le Roi s'Amuse of Victor Hugo), and Richelieu. All the characters in this group, except the last three, he practically dropped from his acting list for a long time in the middle of his professional life, but some eight or nine years before his death "revived" them, in the stage phrase, for performance in New York, Boston, and some other cities.

I have spoken briefly of Mr. Booth's fine physical equipment, and of the excellence of what may be called the outward part of his technique. But to attain success nobly and truly in the presentation of the characters which have been enumerated, it was necessary that great conditions of mind, temperament, and spirit should be united in the impersonator. Mr. Booth's intellectual strength and lucidity were of prime importance to all his achievement, and conspicuous factors in all his work. I have no means of knowing what Mr. Booth's ability and desire were on other lines of study, but of Shakespeare and the other English dramatists he was a close, intuitive, and discriminating student, often showing scholarly ability in judging of texts and readings, and constantly displaying such a mastery of the great playwright's thought in sum and in detail as is possible only to a vivid and refined intelligence working strongly and assiduously. Justly to conceive, as an actor should conceive, a character like Hamlet, Iago, or Shylock is a true intellectual gift, and has been given to a comparatively small number of performers. Mr. Booth's mind's eyesight was as clear as crystal: he read, saw, understood, conceived; then, by the operation of the artist's constructive faculty, brought all the portions of his conception together, each clearly defined in itself, and definitely related to every other; and when all had been, as it were, fused, or rather brought into a vital union, within the alembic of the spirit, the living product appeared. From time to time, of course, his conceptions of great characters changed, as his views of them were changed by further study or observation: lines were deepened in one place, and softened in another; colors were darkened here, and clarified there; perhaps the entire character grew or lessened in size or sweetness or spirituality, or even was so modified in significant particulars as to produce a new effect. But at each stage of the process the artist's thought was clear and vivid, and fairly and intuitively related to the writer whom he sought to interpret. A good example of these changes may be noted in passing. Mr. Booth's youthful idea of Shylock was of a literary and conventional order, according to the prevailing tradition of the stage; it made prominent and predominant all the best traits of Shakespeare's creation, and exhibited the Jew as a victim of persecution and an avenger of the wrongs of his race and religion, showing him as a figure of heroic qualities and proportions. Then a remarkable change took place in the artist's idea, and he proceeded to suppress the ideality of his conception, and to strengthen in it all that was rudest and of the coarseness of common clay. His father's Shylock had been likened to a roaring lion, and described as "marked by pride of intellect and intense pride of race." Edwin Booth's was now an ignoble, greedy, malicious usurer, a creature of tremendous but vile and vulgar passions, sometimes hideously jocular, in the trial scene fawning upon Portia after the ruling in his favor, incapable of exaltation except for some rare brief moment, appealing to the spectator's imagination only on the lower side. This impersonation was, in its way, very human, and effectively embodied a conception of Shylock which may be easily defended as natural and Shakespearean. Gradually Mr. Booth made the tone of his impersonation more sombre, dispensed with his lighter touches, and presented a personage of

greater power and depth, though still of common mould. At last he came to a theory of the character in which the extremes of his former conceptions were avoided; out of which was evolved an impersonation of remarkable justness, consistency, and fullness, wherein neither the essential baseness of Shylock's nature nor the frequent dignity born of his passionate purpose was sacrificed. The depth and intensity, the lodged hate, the inflexible will, the stubborn spirit, and the fanatical conviction of the Jew were indicated with continuous and imposing power; but Shylock was not represented with the loftiness of a Greek sage or of a Christian martyr because of the force of his evil passions and resolved temper. In this final assumption, Shakespeare's composite thought and unrelenting neutrality in the invention of Shylock were supremely well expressed; yet every one of the previous impersonations had been lucid, intellectually vigorous, and fairly interpretative of the master dramatist.

Through these qualities of intellectual force and clearness, used with the patient discretion of a close student, Mr. Booth became possessed of that rarest of histrionic possessions, a large style. The phrase is applied with flippant frequency to many artists, and seems to be comprehended about as seldom as it is merited. Upon the stage, a large style is characteristic of the actor who is conscious, at every moment of his performance, not only of the needs of that moment, but of the total value and color of the character he is presenting, and of the relation borne by the passion of the instant to all the stirs of passion which have preceded it. With the mere reading of the definition, the observer of our modern stage has a painful vision of the small, deformed, fragmentary, spasmodic methods prevailing even among our more ambitious actors, who for the most part are well contented if they can utter any passion with a vaguely befitting naturalness. In the playing of such artists, Juliet, Imogen, and Parthenia have but one mode of expressing tenderness; Rosalind and Viola but one kind of vivacity; Gloster, Spartacus, and Lear but one form of rage. Many examples of Mr. Booth's largeness and artistic fullness of style might be cited. His Iago is especially in point. In his scheme of that character, also, there had been an interesting process of development. Midway or moderately early in his career, Mr. Booth apparently decided that he must fit his performance of the part to his physical limitations. He made Iago a light, comfortable villain, and bore down upon that side of the crafty Venetian's nature which allies him most closely with common humanity. But later he darkened the hues of his conception, and steadily increased its force, impetuosity, and profundity. As thus finally presented, his Iago was a masterpiece in respect of its breadth and finish of style, and was consummate in its malign beauty. In immediate appeal to the eye and the taste of the spectator it was exceedingly interesting: a fascinating man, whose gayer air had the crisp sparkle of a fine winter's day; whose usual thoughtfulness was easy, poised, unaffected, potent, but not ponderous; whose talk was sensible, shrewd, and just cynical enough to relish to the taste of the worldly; whose wit was astonishingly keen, quick, inventive, prolific, and uttered with exquisite aptness by a tongue which drove or clinched a nail at every stroke; handsome in face, graceful and free in motion and in manners, polished, frank, and rich in *bonhomie.* In the deeper portions of his nature, Mr. Booth's Iago was endowed with an intellect as swift and subtle as electricity, and, like that mysterious element, capable of playing lightly over surfaces, or of rending the toughest obstacles in sunder; his temper was like some ethereal quicksilver in its sensitiveness, adapting itself to every mood of those whom it sought to influence; and

in its intensity of malevolence and potency of maleficence his spirit had that right satanic quality which stopped not short of a consuming desire to torture and "enmesh" "all" good men and women, "ensnaring" them both in "soul and body," and did not fear to thrust its blasphemy into the very face of the Almighty. In diabolic force and blackness Mr. Booth's assumption was, I suppose, inferior to that of his father and of some of the other actors of the old heroic school. But in absolute self-consistency, in perfectness of proportion, in the maintenance of a most "politic state of evil," and in the unfailing relation of every point and particular of the conception to every other and to the total scheme it was as noble an illustration of largeness of style as has been afforded by our modern stage.

Intellectual force and lucidity — of which, as has been said, Mr. Booth was possessed in an extraordinarily high degree — are essential to the conception of dramatic characters, and to the presentation of such characters in a large and finished style. The ability deeply to move and convince the spectator by performance is derived from the possession of another quality or set of qualities. To identify this quality or these qualities is not easy. Neither patience, nor close observation of nature, nor superior mimetic skill, nor even sincerity, nor all these together, will necessarily furnish the player with the power to enter into the inmost life of the personages that he represents, to possess them or to be possessed by them completely, and then so to present them as to carry conviction to the soul of the spectator. I do not mean by "conviction" to imply that the auditor will ever, except for brief instants and at long intervals, lose the sense of the player's art, or forget that that art is representative, but that the actor shall so bring his audience into touch with the spirit of his creations that they shall be spiritually discerned, received, accepted, through the imagination believed in, and so loved or hated, honored or contemned; shall be, in other words, brought into genuinely and deeply sympathetic relations with the men and women who see and hear. Lacking this power, the histrionic artist may interest, please, or charm, but, how clever soever he may be, cannot by any possibility profoundly stir the passions or touch the heart. A full sense of the difference among players in this respect is sometimes slow to develop itself, but it comes sooner or later to nearly all who study the stage intelligently. It is not difficult to divide our leading modern actors of the "serious" order into two classes, according to their possession or lack of this ability, and then to see that those of one variety appeal successfully to the eye, the taste, the critical judgment, to what may be called, in a large sense, the pictorial faculty, of their spectators; the actors of the other sort, to the same faculties, but chiefly to imagination, sensibility, and sympathy. These diverse appeals are made through the same or similar dramatic characters, and often, so far as I can judge, with little or no conscious difference in the ambitions or hopes of the actors, all of whom, apparently, aim to touch the heart. Yet the results are as far apart as entertainment is from emotion. Mr. Irving and Mr. Willard may be named as players of the first kind; Salvini and Booth of the second. Some superiority in delicacy or fullness of sympathy, some hold upon a more intuitive imagination, some higher potency or fervor of temperament, avail to give players of the larger order a more complete possession of the soul of the part which they assume, and then the gift so to share that possession as deeply to stir the "convinced" listener with the passions of the part.

One simple, excellent test may be applied to indicate or enforce the distinction which has been made: try the performance by repeatedly witnessing it,

and observing its effect upon the mind and memory. Mr. Irving's Louis XI., for instance, may be fairly regarded as a fine example of his histrionic cleverness. In effectiveness and variety of "points," in delicacy of detail as to form, color, action, and tone, in consummate mimetic skill, it can scarcely be surpassed; its picturesqueness is perfect. But scarcely even at a first sight of the performance is the spectator deeply moved either to horror, pain, or loathing; on a second view, curiosity only remains; and when, by another sight, curiosity has been satisfied, there is no further desire to witness the performance. Mr. Irving's impersonation of Charles I., to take another instance, stays, if it stays at all, within the memory of those who have beheld it as if it were an exquisitely finished portrait in oils of the unfortunate monarch; but the recollection causes no trouble of the spirit. Mr. Willard's Cyrus Blenkarn is recalled for its careful workmanship, decent reserve, and regard for the modesty of nature, which are respectfully and unperturbedly remembered. These artists and such as these, fine and admirable as they are in many respects, show the eyes, but do not grieve the heart; like a procession of shadows and pictures their creations come, and so depart. Compare with this the hold which the greater performances of Salvini have upon the spirit, first in representation and afterward in remembrance. It is scarcely possible to recall his Conrade in La Morte Civile, or his Othello, or his Samson, without a sense of tug at the heartstrings; and repeated view of such performances scarcely dulls the spectator's pleasure, for the spirit is slow to tire of the strenuous joy of its own sympathetic travail or pain.

To Mr. Booth this great power was given, not indeed in the interpretation of all his characters, but of the chiefest of them. He entered into and uttered the inner life of his prime creations, and one knew the completeness of his mastery by the delightful heartache, the throb in the throat, the flush of the cheek, which bespoke the "conviction" of the auditory. His Richelieu, as it was presented at the highest point of his career, when it had been largely divested of theatricalness, but had lost nothing of the player's force, may be selected as a good example of his power in this kind. The character itself does not afford the greatest opportunities, of course; but it is interesting at the outset to note that Mr. Booth not only filled to overflowing the conception of Bulwer, but went far beyond it, and imported into the character of the cardinal a wealth of truth and life which transcended the scheme of the text. The inconsistencies of the cardinal were reconciled or made acceptable by Mr. Booth's treatment. The personal flavor and intellectual quality of the man were shown with absolute vividness; his wit, his humor, his cunning, his insight into character, his bodily delicacy and frequent lonesomeness, his one exacting form of vanity, his diplomatic unscrupulousness, his aptness in flattery, his subtlety, speed, versatility, and fruitfulness of resource, were made portions of a living picture, and fused by the imagination of the player into a creation which took possession of the spectator's memory. A hundred even of his lighter phrases are unforgettable. The sly shrewdness — delighting in its knowledge of men, and in its own duplicity as a necessary implement of statecraft — with which, questioning Joseph concerning Huguet's fidelity, he says,

> "Think — we hanged his father!
>
> . . . .
>
> Trash! favors past — that 's nothing. In his hours
> Of confidence with you has he named the favors
> To come, he counts on?
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Colonel and nobleman!
> My bashful Huguet! that can never be!
> We have him not the less — we 'll promise it —
> And see the king withholds;"

the exquisite finesse and perfect ease with which, after frankly holding out the bait of a colonelcy to Huguet, in the words,

> "If I live long enough — ay, mark my words —
> If I live long enough, you 'll be a colonel,"

he adds, half under his breath, slowly, in a ruminating tone as if expressing a confidential afterthought, yet with a cleanly edged enunciation which carries straight to the captain's ear,

> "Noble — perhaps ; "

the delicately ironical flavor of the half-line with which, after his resignation, he comments upon the king's appointment of his successor, De Baradas,

> "A most sagacious choice ; "

the tenderness of his comforting promise to Julie, his stricken ward,

> "All will be well ; yes, yet all well,"

the short words dropping full and slow and sweet, as if they were laden with balm, — where could one pause in the chronicle, every line of which is a reminder and proof of the extraordinary intuition and just naturalness with which the actor penetrated the depths of the cardinal's spirit, and converted his knowledge into the very substance of imaginative life? Early in his career Mr. Booth played the character brilliantly well, but with every added year he made some gain on the lighter side of his performance, bringing to it a yet wiser discretion, a more delicate chastity of phrase, a more complete abnegation of vulgar over-emphasis, until the portraiture was etched, as it were, on the tissue of the spectator's brain with some uninjurious acid. The more intense, vehement, and lofty passions of the character were interpreted by Mr. Booth with varying degrees of histrionic skill. Often, in his younger period, his declamation of this or that famous speech of the cardinal was superfluously theatrical, or degenerated even into rant; at his point of greatest ripeness he had nearly rid himself and his style of fustian, and met the supreme test by producing powerful effects without extravagance in speech or in action. But, with all its imperfections on its head, Mr. Booth's Richelieu, at any time within the last fifteen years of his life, demonstrated in its stronger aspects the master actor upon the lines which I am now considering. It indeed piqued and gratified the curiosity, and stimulated and fed the spectator's sense of the picturesque. But that kind of achievement was as naught in comparison with the actor's "conviction" of his hearers' hearts. Always at some point in the performance, often at many points, when the cardinal's spirit blazed in ecstasy of courage or wrath, or when, especially, all weaknesses and insincerities solved in the pure flame of a true love of France, Richelieu stood, moved, and spoke, a veritable incarnation of the spirit of patriotism, the listener's soul would be stirred, thrilled, strained almost, it sometimes seemed consumed, by a passionate sympathy. Such pain and such joy it is given only to the actor of the first order to produce. The source of the producing power lies chiefly, perhaps, in temperamental force, and its basis may be partly or largely physical. But, however derived, it is unmistakable, the *sine qua non* of the great tragedian ; and the lack of it relegates the tragic actor to the second rank of his profession.

The tragedian who is master of the mimetic detail of his art, of a large and finished style, and of the power to compel the hearts of men by the passion of the scene is a great actor. Edwin Booth was such a master. For my present purpose, it remains only to be said that his prime distinction among the players of our time lay in a quality for which I know no better name than ideality. The possession of that quality, a century or even half a century ago, could scarcely have conferred distinction

upon a serious actor. Players were endowed with it in various degrees, of course; but from Garrick to Junius Brutus Booth, through all the illustrious lines of Kembles and Keans, the tragedians of the elder day assumed it as a part of their theory, so to speak. It was taken for granted by the scholarly Macready, and even the passionate and sensuous-natured Forrest confidently aspired to its possession. It is easy to see why these artists had a tradition in favor of ideality: their acting had been modeled upon the requirements of the dramas and characters which they represented; their playing was ideal, even as and because their plays were ideal. In our time a change has taken place, slowly, but with almost unremitting steadiness: we have seen the tragedies of Shakespeare less and less in evidence, and, in a day when the study of the master poet is more thorough and more general than ever before, we have witnessed the phenomenon of the gradual disappearance of his serious dramas from the theatre. Edwin Booth came down to us from a former generation, and brought with him the tradition which, transmitted to him by his father, had had its source in the rude stage upon which Burbage played. He was an actor of the ideal order, and not of that school which is now known as the realistic. Nothing but necessity would compel me to comment upon that offensive pair of adjectives, whose votaries and vassals are wearying the world with their endless battles and squabbles, — the world wherein room *must* be found, in one way or another, for Raphael and Verestchagin, for Scott and Tolstóy, for Corot and Courbet, for Hawthorne and Jane Austen, for Shakespeare's Imogen and Ibsen's Nora. Upon the stage the schools are sharply distinguished, but seldom clash, because they seldom meet. Tragedy of the higher order is the natural home of ideal acting, even as comedy is the usual place of the realistic. Thus far, indeed, the dramatists whom the world has accepted as great are ranged with the ideals. Most of them, whether writers of tragedy or of comedy, are of the old régime, to be sure; for the positions of Ibsen and of the Belgian, Maeterlinck, have not been settled for English-speaking people, any more than have the places of Mr. Pinero, Mr. Herne, Mr. Barnard, Mr. Harrigan, and other playwrights of local reputation. But the drift is now steadily away from what has been received as classic, and, especially in comedy, the stage "is subdued to what it works in, like the dyer's hand."

In playing the tragedies of Shakespeare, on the other hand, sensitive actors have for the most part found themselves under a strong compulsion toward the ideal style. All good acting must of course be derived from and keep a firm hold on reality or nature, and must be, therefore, in its essence, realistic, in the preciser sense of the word. Yet, in the higher ranges of the drama, and especially in its poetic forms, there are many characters which demand both to be conceived and to be expressed ideally; that is to say, to be lifted above the commonplace of daily life into the realm of fancy; to be so represented that, though their kinship with humanity is never lost, their prime citizenship is demonstrated to be in the land of the imagination. Even when the question is not of the most exalted or poetic creations, most persons can perceive that the style of the dramatist ought in some measure to control the style of the actor; that Rosalind demands a different treatment from Lady Gay Spanker, Sir Giles Overreach from Martin Berry. And though an eccentric actor has occasionally done his despite upon Shylock or Gloster, an almost perfect consensus of mankind would probably assume that the great tragic characters of the higher drama should be played in a fashion accordant somehow with the loftiness of their language and scheme.

It is foreign to my purpose to discuss the peculiarities of this loftier mode of

playing. The essential thing to be noted is that the artist of the ideal school reaches his results by a method which removes them from and above every-day life; deliberately departing, in his bearing and utterance, from the familiar mode of parlor, counting-room, and street by the adoption of a style at once more distinct, more formal, and more elevated. The absurdities into which this manner may run in the gesture, walk, and declamation of incompetent performers have been the subject of ridicule almost ever since the stage and the actor came into existence. Shakespeare, even in the day when tragedy was "preferred" by gentle and simple, declared, through the mouth of Hamlet, that the extravagant action, the strut, the bellow, and the rant of the actor of the robustious sort offended him "to the soul." Even very capable players are in danger, as we all know, of achieving fustian in attempting velvet. But the grand style in its own place is none the less the true style because the attainment of it is beset by grievous dangers. Its function is not at any time nor under any temptation, whatsoever the opinion of superficial critics to the contrary may be, to defy or defeat nature. When the histrionic artist has the true feeling for his business and a true skill in his art, his product is supremely natural, if the nature of man, as seen by the clarifying, penetrating light of the imagination, and cleansed by the poet's power from what is transient and inessential, is to be taken as the standard. Upon the stage poetry has a language and voice of its own, which differ from those of our working-day life mainly because the higher mood of the mind or spirit which is here intermittently experienced is there maintained without fall or break; and that language it is the business and privilege of the actor of the ideal order to speak to the audience, which is his world.

Edwin Booth's art was preëminently idealistic. That he sometimes erred and displeased by his adherence to a stilted and conventionally theatrical style is not to be questioned. But, judged at and by his best, he attained the noble distinction of so interpreting the loftiest creations of the first of dramatists that his impersonations were both beautifully ideal and harmonious with the essential truth of life. If the faults of his Hamlet had been twenty times greater than they were, they would not have destroyed the high value of an assumption which reproduced the essence of the poet's thought, and imaged before us the very form and soul of Shakespeare's prophetic embodiment of the anxious, speculative, superrefined, and introverted humanity of modern times. Mr. Booth's impersonation of King Lear may be instanced, I think, as the greatest expression of his powers in this noble kind. The artist's achievement in this part was the more remarkable because of his lack of the highest physical force, and the impossibility — consequent, perhaps, upon that deficiency — of his reaching such sublimity of effect as that of Salvini, for example, at the Italian's grandest moments. But Mr. Booth's Lear was so wrought as to be as pure a triumph of the spiritual over the material as the warmest devotee of the idealistic could wish to see. Without extravagance of gesture, — which indeed Mr. Booth always used sparingly, — without violence of voice, without extreme effort of any kind, the chaotic vastness of Lear's nature, the frenzied wrath and woe of the "child-changed father," his agony of contrition over his rejection of Cordelia, the intellectual splendors which fitfully illuminate the pathos of his madness, and the sweet anguish of his restoration to a new life of the soul were greatly displayed. The subtlety, picturesqueness, and graphic vividness of all the details of the performance, especially in the second and third acts, were remarkable, but were scarcely to be esteemed in comparison with the immediate power of

the impersonation to touch the deepest springs of emotion. It might be said without extravagance that the actor's victory in the performance was like that of the dramatist in the tragedy. Who can estimate, or overestimate, the worth to the world of such art as this? The actor dies, and leaves no sign or memorial of his prowess, it has been often said; even Garrick and Edmund Kean, Siddons and Rachel, are but names, to which the modern ear scarcely permits a hospitable entrance. But acting such as that of Mr. Booth in Lear, which lifts the spectator for a time almost to the level of the play, and transports him beyond the ignorant present, which shows the spirit to itself by the searching illumination of the poet's genius, must have a power far transcending the effect of the moment. In his highest achievements, Edwin Booth was an actor of the spirit to the spirit, for the spirit, — a pure interpreter of the master dramatist; and the echoes which he there awakened must roll, like the poet's own, we may well believe, from soul to soul, and grow forever and forever.

I have not attempted to deal, except indirectly, with Mr. Booth's faults of style, but justice seems to demand a few words of comment upon his two chief professional limitations. He was unsuccessful in playing the lover upon the stage; he had no gift in mirthfulness. The former proposition needs, perhaps, a little qualification. Mr. Booth at some moments, as in his Hamlet, Othello, and Sir Edward Mortimer, succeeded in speaking the voice of the divine passion with impressive earnestness and with the suggestion of great depth of feeling. But his touch in this kind was always heavy, his tone portentous. The fluent love of youth, love of that intermittent, palpitating, many-hued variety which is redundantly called "sentimental," he had no skill to utter; and his impersonation of Claude Melnotte, for example, was even more artificial than Sir Bulwer Lytton's style in The Lady of Lyons. In comedy, Mr. Booth often sparkled, and sometimes, as in Petruchio and Don César de Bazan, he was gay and entertaining. But, like all his family, he had no power to excite laughter. His performance of Benedick may be cited as his highest achievement in the lighter drama: it was elegant, easy, of great intellectual brilliancy and charm, but quite devoid of that capacity for creating mirth which Shakespeare makes a prime quality in his hero.

Of Mr. Booth's personal character it would be unbecoming in me to speak in this place except for a reason which compels me to say a single word. He presented the spectacle — the more impressive because it has not been very common — of a life which was all upon one plane. Pure, generous, high-minded, incapable of vulgar arts either of defense or display, he lived upon the stage of the world, even as on the mimic stage, an ideal life. And the one appalling disaster and sorrow of his experience he bore with such patience and magnanimity as presently reconquered the favor of a shocked and bewildered nation. Only great men can thus greatly endure great griefs. The soul of Edwin Booth, like the art of Edwin Booth, was of the truly heroic type.

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