

## THE PLAYERS

WITH the interesting complexity of metropolitan life there comes a specialization of the various social organizations. There are clubs nowadays for each of the professions and for each of the arts. The lawyer, the engineer, the electrician, the railroad man has now a place in the great city where he can meet his fellows and talk shop, each after his kind. Clubs for the allied arts have been attempted, but with no notable success. Literature, music, painting, and acting all pull different ways, especially when journalism is added as a fifth wheel; and the hardy vitality of The Fellowcraft, of The Salmagundi, and of The Authors shows the decisive advantage of unity of pursuit among the members of an association. The times are ripe, therefore, for The Players—the club of the actor, of the theatrical manager, and of the dramatic author. The Players is the theatrical club as The Century was originally the artistic, but in The Players the domination of the professional element is carefully guarded in the constitution. Outsiders may be admitted freely, but a majority of the board of directors must always be chosen from the members who are actors, managers, or dramatists, the three divisions of the profession for whose use and behoof the club was formed.

Nearly three centuries ago an English actor, Edward Alleyn, bought the manor of Dulwich and built there the college which still exists; and more than two centuries ago an English actress, Eleanor Gwynn, gave the land at Chelsea on which stands the hospital erected through her influence. Not a score of years ago an American actor, Edwin Forrest, died leaving a home for those of his craft who should fall into poverty in their old age. These are all noble benefactions, but I doubt if any one of them is more useful in its way than the club

founded only two or three years ago by an American actor, Edwin Booth, and intended by him to be in some measure a memorial of his father, Junius Brutus Booth, one of the foremost figures in the history of the American stage, while at the same time it should be the center and home of all that is best in the American theater of to-day.

For years Mr. Booth had desired to devote a proportion of his professional gains to an enterprise of this sort, and in the summer of 1887, while on a voyage on Mr. E. C. Benedict's steam yacht *Oneida*, the matter was thoroughly debated between him and the other members of the party—Messrs. Lawrence Barrett, T. B. Aldrich, Laurence Hutton, and William Bispham. The project was put into writing at that time, and the matter rested until Mr. Booth's coming to New York in the autumn. It was on the voyage that Mr. Aldrich made the felicitous suggestion that the proposed club should be named The Players. During the autumn Mr. Booth had several conferences with two accomplished theatrical managers of New York, Mr. A. M. Palmer and Mr. Augustin Daly, and in January, 1888, Mr. Daly gave a breakfast; and then and there Messrs. Lawrence Barrett, William Bispham, Edwin Booth, S. L. Clemens, Augustin Daly, Joseph F. Daly, John Drew, Henry Edwards, Laurence Hutton, Joseph Jefferson, John A. Lane, James Lewis, Brander Matthews, S. H. Olin, A. M. Palmer, and William Tecumseh Sherman resolved to incorporate themselves into a club, which, in accordance with Mr. Aldrich's suggestion, should be called The Players.

At midnight on the last day of that year, The Players, already increased to a hundred, found themselves in possession of as sumptuous a house as any in New York. Mr. Booth had bought a fine old-fashioned dwelling, No. 16

Gramercy Park, and this Mr. Stanford White had transformed into a club-house of delightful unconventionality and indisputable comfort, perfect in its most artistic decorations, in its luxurious furniture, in its ample equipment; and this perfect club-house Mr. Booth made over to The Players by deed of gift at the witching hour when the clangor of many bells

nearly 175 out of the 660 resident and non-resident members; and they are the most frequent in attendance, especially on the midnight gatherings of Saturday, when the actor may rest, after two performances, serene in the consciousness of a clear forty hours before him. The next largest delegation is that of the authors, painters, sculptors, and architects—practitioners in the



IN THE READING-ROOM.

declared the arrival of the year 1889. Thus The Players came into being full-armed for the struggle for existence, and not enfeebled by debts and deficiencies. It began as a proprietary club of a new sort, one in which the proprietor generously presented to the members a house ready for occupancy, that every man might at once feel at home in it.

Since the midnight when The Players gathered about Mr. Booth, before the broad fire with its blazing yule log, and beneath Sully's noble portrait of Junius Brutus Booth, looking down with eyes of tenderness and subtle pity, the club has prospered. Its membership has increased rapidly until now it includes nearly every actor of reputation, almost all of the scanty band of American playwrights, and most of the theatrical managers of New York, with many from other cities. The attendance at the regular weekly suppers, when Saturday night stretches swiftly into Sunday morning, often reaches as high as sixty or seventy. The desire of the founder of the club is in course of accomplishment.

The constitution declares that "any male person over the age of twenty-one years shall be eligible to membership who is an actor, manager, dramatist, or other member of the dramatic profession, or who is engaged in literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, or music, or who is a patron or connoisseur of the arts." Those connected with the dramatic profession are the most numerous class in the club; they number

kindred arts with whom the player-folk foregather gladly; as Mr. Story says in verse:

Yet it seems to me  
All arts are one—all branches on one tree—  
All fingers, as it were, upon one hand.

The mere outsider admitted under an elastic definition of "a patron or connoisseur of the arts" is in a minority, although there is no need to accept Mr. Story's saying in prose, that an amateur is "a person who loves nothing" and a connoisseur "a person who knows nothing." Early in the history of The Players a tentative classification of its members into four divisions was rashly made by a scoffer: first, the Players proper,—actors, managers, and dramatists; second, the artists; third, people who lived near Gramercy Park; and fourth, millionaires. Of millionaires there are perhaps a sparse dozen on the rolls of the club, but it is a rarity to see one within the doors. There are also two or three clergymen among The Players, including the Rev. Dr. Houghton, of the "Little Church Around the Corner," who may be called the chaplain-in-ordinary to the profession, and whose request for the closing of the theaters on Good Friday night has been acted upon by many of the managers.

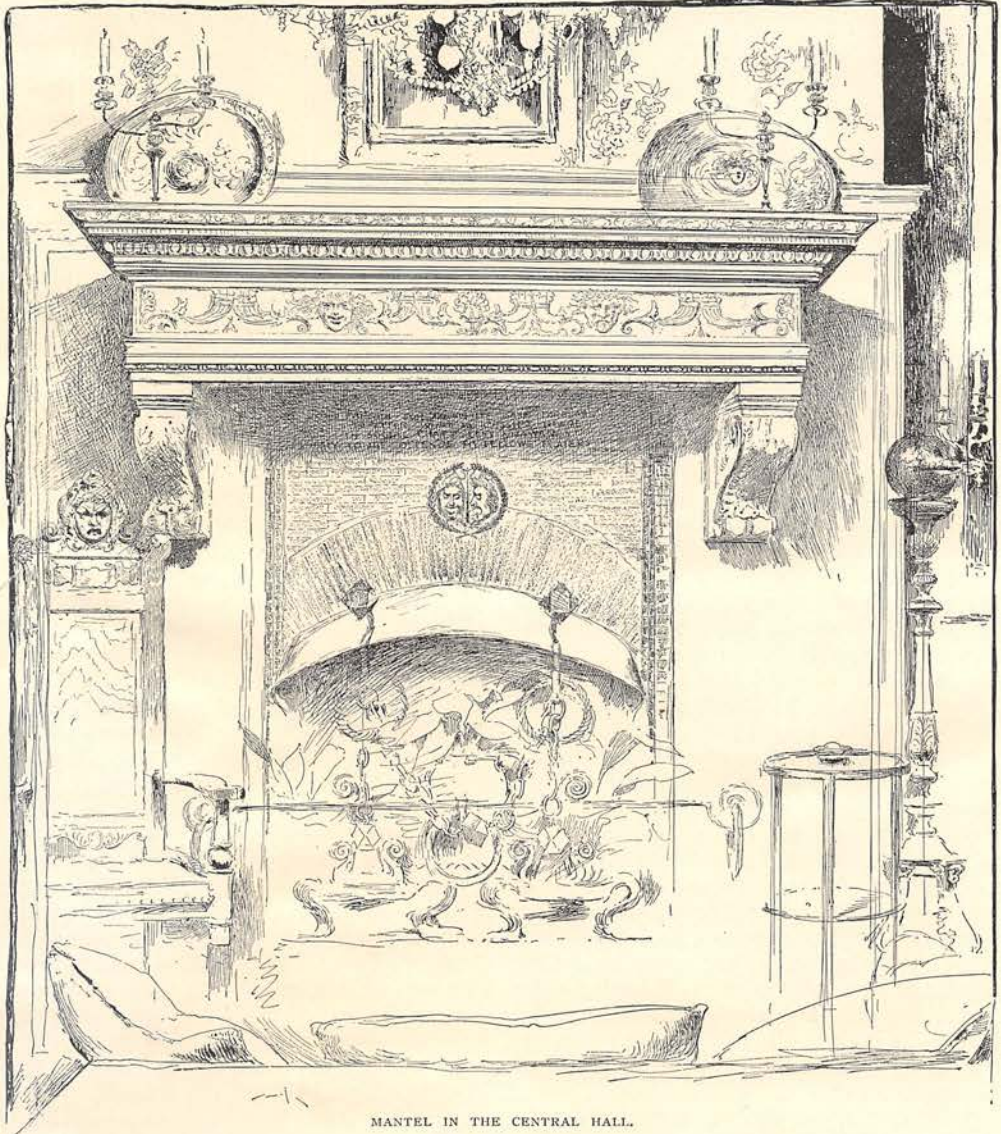
Keenly alive to the disadvantage of a close association of journalism with the dramatic profession, there is an unwritten law of The Players which holds as ineligible for membership

the dramatic critic, the theatrical reporter, and the out-of-town correspondent, all gentlemen whose duty it is to formulate opinions on the words and deeds of actors, authors, and managers. Thus *The Players* is free from the possibility, remote though it be, of a scandal such as occurred in the Garrick Club of London, when Thackeray had to insist on the expulsion

quatrain composed by their founder and inscribed under the marble mantel in the hall:

GOOD FRENDE FOR FRIENDSHIP'S SAKE FORBEARE  
TO UTTER WHAT IS GOSSIPT HEARE  
IN SOCIAL CHATT LEST, UNAWARES,  
THY TONGE OFFENDE THY FELLOWE PLAIIERS.

The ample hall where one may read this pertinent request is reached by low flights of



MANTEL IN THE CENTRAL HALL.

of Mr. Edmund Yates for a personal lampoon. As the members of the Fellowcraft (which is the club of the newspapers as *The Players* is the club of the theater) hang twined roses over their dinner-table to show that the words there spoken are *sub rosa*, so the members of *The Players* obey the mandate expressed in the

two steps leading up from the entrance. To the right and facing Gramercy Park is the reading-room, with the daily and weekly journals and the monthly magazines. Up half a dozen steps is a broad alcove extending over the entrance; and from this coign of vantage is to be had the best view of the portrait of

Mr. Booth, framed over the fireplace of the reading-room. This picture was presented to The Players by Mr. E. C. Benedict. It was painted by Mr. John S. Sargent, and it is one of the most brilliant, vigorous, and vivid portraits of the nineteenth century. It is a full-length, and it represents Mr. Booth standing negligently before the yule log of the hall, much as he stood on the night when he gave the house to the club. His attitude is easy, and the countenance is lighted by the kindly smile so often seen upon the face of the tragedian. What most endears this picture to The Players is that it is a portrait, not of the actor merely, but rather of Mr. Booth himself, as he is known to his fellow-members. In the alcove are portraits of Macready by Washington Allston, and of Rachel by Gilbert Stuart's daughter.

Between the fireplace and the window hangs Mr. J. Alden Weir's fine portrait of the late John Gilbert, the first of The Players to die after the club was opened. Below this is a portrait (by Zoffany) of David Garrick as *Abel Drugger* in Ben Jonson's play, now no longer acted. On the other side of the room is another picture of Garrick by Sir Joshua Reynolds, set off by a George Frederick Cooke by Sully and one of Naegle's portraits of Edmund Kean. Elsewhere in the reading-room are a portrait of E. A. Sothorn by Mr. W. P. Frith, one of Thomas Apthorpe Cooper by Gilbert Stuart (presented by the actor's daughter), and one of Robert Palmer by Gainsborough.

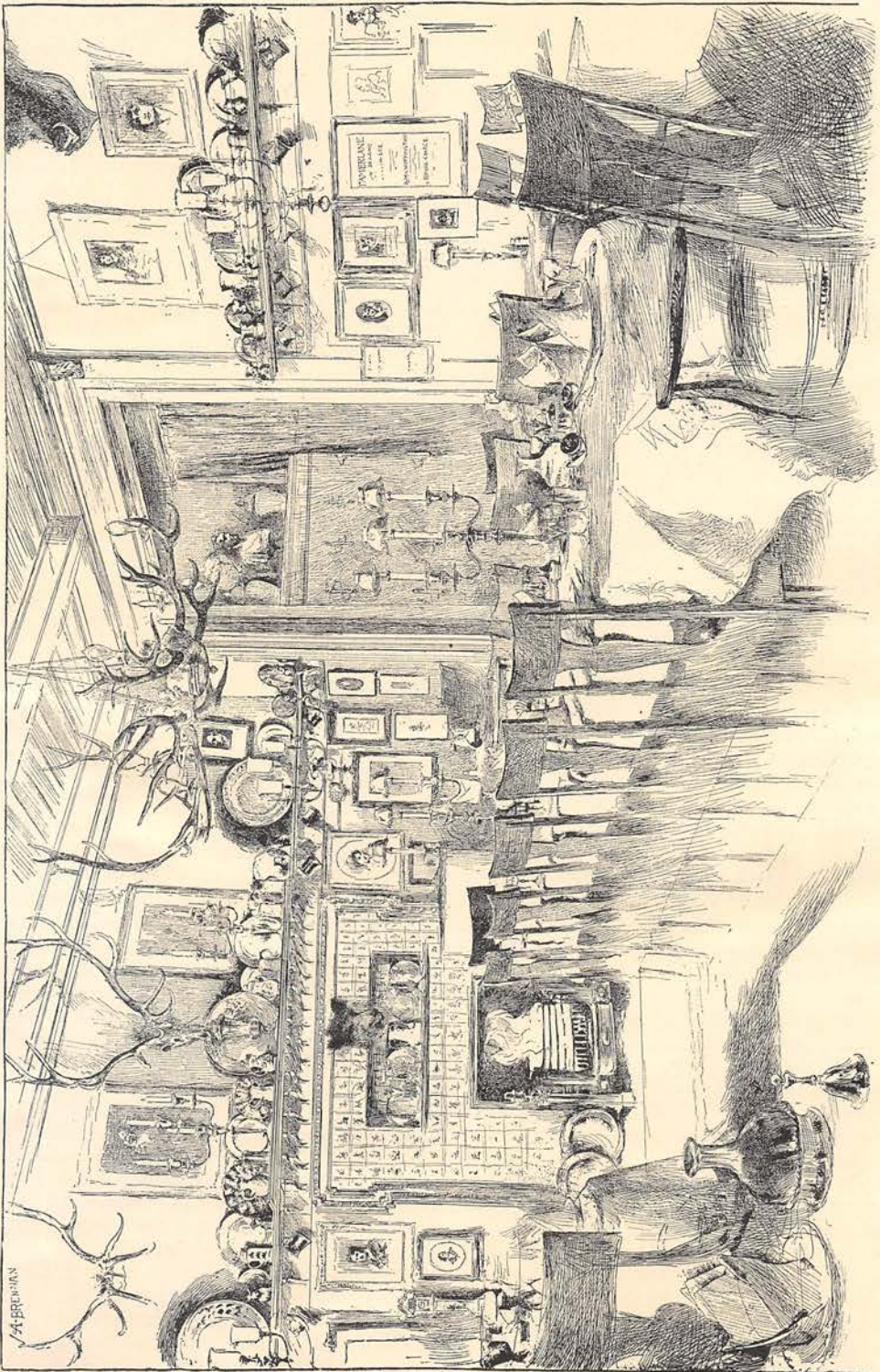
In the great central hall hangs an heroic picture of Mr. Booth in the character of *Richelieu*, painted by John Collier of London, and on the other side of the fireplace an excellent replica of Sir Thomas Lawrence's painting of John Philip Kemble as *Hamlet*. On the opposite side of the room hang two of Sargent's pictures—one of Joseph Jefferson in the character of *Dr. Pangloss*, the other of Lawrence Barrett in his every-day dress. Here also are a portrait of Mrs. Gilbert by Mrs. Dora Wheeler Keith, a portrait of Miss Fanny Davenport by Henry Peters Gray, one of Mr. W. J. Florence as *Sir Lucius O'Trigger* by Carroll Beckwith, and an ideal head of Beatrice painted by the president of the Century Club, Mr. Daniel Huntington.

Between the hall and the dining-room are huge safes to hold the relics and the stray curiosities which are beginning to accumulate. The treasures stored up do not as yet rival those in the Green Vaults of Dresden. Though one may seek here in vain for a wheel of the chariot of Thespis, for the mask of Aristophanes, for the holograph manuscript of a missing comedy by Menander, for the buskin worn by Roscius, and for a return check to the theater at Herculaneum, still there are not a few curiosities almost

as curious as these. There is the sword Frederick Lemaitre drew in the last act of "Ruy Blas." There is the crooked staff whereon Charlotte Cushman leaned as *Meg Merrilies*, when she foretold the fate of *Guy Rannering*. There is the blond wig which M. Fechter chose to wear as *Hamlet*, perhaps the most chattered about of all theatrical wigs; that it is, in reality, red and not at all blond is not surprising to those who have mused on the unrealities of life, as *Hamlet* himself was wont to do. There is a ring that once belonged to David Garrick, and a lock of hair that once belonged to Edmund Kean. There is a spring dagger, formerly the property of Edwin Forrest, the blade of which kindly retired within the hilt when the owner went through the motions of stabbing himself. There is a crucifix used by Signora Ristori in the character of *Sor Teresa*, and a ring of Mrs. Betterton's. Here also are the second, third, and fourth folios of Shakspeare's works, the first folio of Beaumont and Fletcher's, the first folio of Ben Jonson, and the first of Sir William Davenant with an autograph poem. Here are many autographs of high theatrical interest. Here, finally, are certain stately pieces of silver, among them a salver and pitcher presented in 1828 to Junius Brutus Booth and the loving-cup presented to William Warren a few years before he died.

Here and there throughout the house are to be seen Shaksperian mottoes, even in the most unexpected places. That which adorns one of the mantelpieces in the grill-room is, "Mouth it, as many of our Players do." It is into this grill-room that the passage opens which the safes with the relics guard on either hand. The grill-room extends the full width of the house, and it has a broad piazza whereon the tables are set on pleasant summer days that the members may lunch and dine in the open air. This grill-room, with its oaken beams overhead, its high wainscot, its branching silver candelabra skilfully adapted to the electric light, its novel chandelier of silver-mounted stag-horns, its blue tiled fireplaces at either end, its restful vista of a green garden beyond, its framed play-bills, and its many portraits, beneath which the walls are almost hidden, is the most beautiful room in the house and the most original.

It is seen to best advantage on Ladies' Day. The Players have but two annual feasts: one is Founder's Night, when the members assemble on New Year's Eve at midnight in commemoration of the opening of the club on the first day of 1880; and the other is Ladies' Day, when the wives and daughters of members are made welcome; this is on the afternoon of Shakspeare's birthday, the twenty-third of April. Then is the grill-room in its glory, with the fair greenery of spring outside, with deep red roses on every



THE GRILL-ROOM.

A. BREWSTER

table, with the moving groups of the ladies eager for the annual inspection of the paradise from which they are barred on every other day in the year. Such a gathering of beautiful and distinguished women as is seen on Ladies' Day at The Players is a rare sight even in New York.

From the evening when the club-house opened its doors, The Players have been well bestowed. On that first New Year's Eve, though the paint was scarce dry, so delicate had been the taste and so adroit the skill of the decorator, the house had no offensive air of raw newness. It appeared to be mellow from the very beginning; and as the members for the first time entered into their own, they found a fire crackling cheerfully in many a fireplace, pictures peopling the walls, and books ready to the hand, just as though the club had been in existence for years.

The books and a majority of the pictures are in the room which serves as library and as the chief portrait gallery. It is a long room, occupying most of the second floor. The book-cases rise to the height of a man's head and the books are ready to the hand. From the walls above the portraits of the great actors and actresses of the past look down upon their successors of the present. It was the intent of the founder that the home of The Players should be a center of light and a haven of rest for the active members of his profession. Here in the library, with its inviting arm-chairs, and its atmosphere of repose, one may keep the best of good company—that of the silent friends of the past which stand on the shelves on all sides rejecting no advances. It is an oasis where the most active of us may gladly loaf and invite his soul. "There were times," wrote Thoreau recalling his sojourn at Walden, "when I could not afford to sacrifice the bloom of the present moment to any work, whether of the head or of the hands: I love a broad margin to my life."

In the oaken cases which stretch from one fireplace to the other is the private collection of Mr. Booth, the working library of a Shaksperian tragedian. Beyond and between the farther mantelpiece and the rear window is a major part of the theatrical collection of Mr. Lawrence Barrett; and opposite are the dramatic books of the late John Gilbert, a welcome gift from his widow. Other friends have filled most of the other shelves; and the gathering grows apace. Among the treasures, for example, is a collection of some thirty thousand playbills, and over a hundred volumes of original editions of the elder dramatists, presented by Mr. Daly. In a shrine over a cabinet are half a dozen death-masks, from the unequalled collection of Mr. Laurence Hutton; and thus we may see how the author of "The School

for Scandal" looked after he had departed this life, and the author of "Faust," and the author of "The Robbers." There are death-masks also of David Garrick and of Edmund Kean, of Marie Malibran and of Ludwig Devrient, of Boucicault and of Lawrence Barrett, sad memorials of departed beauty, genius, and power.

Above the shelves where the dust settles on their biographies and on the comedies and the tragedies they acted, are the portraits of the players of the past. No other collection of theatrical pictures approaches this in extent or in importance save that of the Garrick Club in London. As the gallery of the Garrick was begun by the purchase of the pictures got together by Charles Matthews, so that of The Players had its germ in the portraits gathered by Mr. John Sleeper Clarke, a comedian who has acted with abundant success more than one of Matthews's characters. To the small collection of his brother-in-law, Mr. Booth added many others; and since the club has opened, and since the fact has become known that it will gladly accept and care for portraits of actors, not a few have been presented, as always happens when the public is aware that gifts of this sort are welcome. The two-score and more portraits in the library are all theatrical in their subjects—except that there is here a picture supposed to be by Rembrandt Peale of George Washington, who, under George III., was the active leader of his majesty's opposition. It was for this painting that Mr. Aldrich suggested the properly theatrical legend, "Our Leading Man."

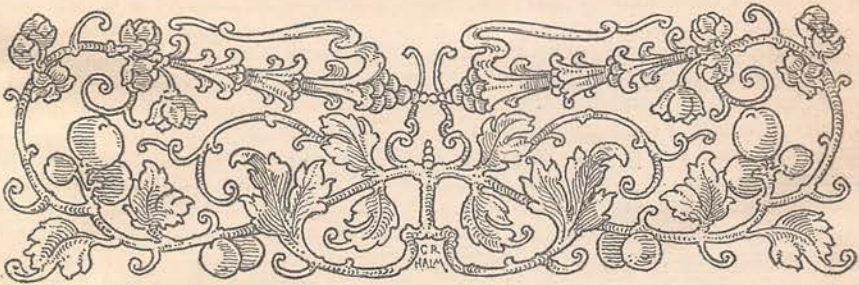
Among these pictures there are, as all dramatic collectors will be pleased to learn, at least a dozen of the portraits painted by Naegle to be engraved for the Lopez and Wemyss series of plays—Charlotte and John Barnes, for example, Mr. and Mrs. Francis, Mr. and Mrs. Duff, Wilson, Wood, and Kean. There is also a portrait of Kean by Naegle, painted at a single sitting, so the story goes, and under peculiar circumstances. Some admirers of the actor wanted him to sit to the artist for a picture as *Richard III.*, but he refused repeatedly. At last they invited Kean to supper after the play, and made him acquainted with Naegle, to whom he took a fancy before the feast was half over. When urged again to let the artist paint his portrait as the crookback, the actor craftily consented to pose at once, if the painter had his instruments and if he had his costume. Now these necessaries were secretly in readiness, Naegle having provided against good fortune, and his friends having bribed Kean's dresser to be in attendance with the royal robes and plumes. So it is that *Richard III.* gazes down on us now a little unsteadily, as though flushed with wine rather than with victory.

It was before this portrait of Kean that Mr. Joseph Jefferson placed himself one evening when he had a night off and wished to rest. He helped himself to a biography of Kean from the shelf, and he settled himself down in an easy chair; and there he read for two hours or more, glancing up now and again from the printed page, where the story of the wayward actor's life was told, to the painted canvas from which the man smiled back in full enjoyment of existence. Down in the grill-room there hangs a broad playbill of Drury Lane Theater announcing that David Garrick would play *Hamlet* on Wednesday, February 10, 1773; and there below the name of Garrick is the name of Mr. Jefferson, who is set down to play *The King*. The Joseph Jefferson who now delights us as *Bob Acres* once pointed with pride to this playbill, and remarked that the Joseph Jefferson who played with Garrick was his great-grandfather.

Among the other portraits in oil which fill the library, and overflow out upon the staircase hall, are those of Charles Mayne Young, Edwin Forrest, Mrs. Nesbit, and James Wallack by Middleton, of Henry Wallack by Inman, of E. S. Connor and R. C. Maywood by Sully, and of John Howard Payne by Wright. In the pri-

vate dining-room, which is on the same floor as the library, there are half a dozen landscapes, two of them being scenes in Louisiana, painted by Mr. Jefferson. From the windows of this private dining-room may be had a grateful glimpse of the grass and the shrubbery of the shaded garden of the Tilden Library next door. "The country is lyric," said Longfellow—"the town dramatic"; and of necessity the theater is urban, but The Players are fortunate in catching a breath of rusticity from Gramercy Park in front, and from the quiet gardens behind. In other respects, the club-house is much like other club-houses; upstairs there are the apartments reserved by the founder and a few chambers which members may occupy, and downstairs there is a billiard-room where an actor may fail to take his cue without fear of derogation. Upstairs and downstairs the home of The Players is seemly and comfortable, restful and satisfactory. It is interesting in itself, and for what it contains, and for those who frequent it. It is a place to delight all who can echo Horace Walpole's assertion: "I do not love great folks till they have pulled off their buskins and put on their slippers; because I do not care sixpence for what they would be thought, but for what they are."

*Brander Matthews.*



## INDIA.

SILENT amidst unbroken silence deep  
 Of dateless years, in loneliness supreme,  
 She pondered patiently one mighty theme,  
 And let the hours, uncounted, by her creep.  
 The moveless Himalayas, the broad sweep  
 Of glacial cataracts, great Ganges' stream—  
 All these to her were but as things that seem,  
 Doomed all to pass, like phantoms viewed in sleep.  
 Her history? She has none—scarce a name.  
 The life she lived is lost in the profound  
 Of time, which she despised; but nothing mars  
 The memory which, single, gives her fame—  
 She dreamed eternal dreams, and from the ground  
 Still raised her yearning vision to the stars.

*Florence Earle Coates.*