

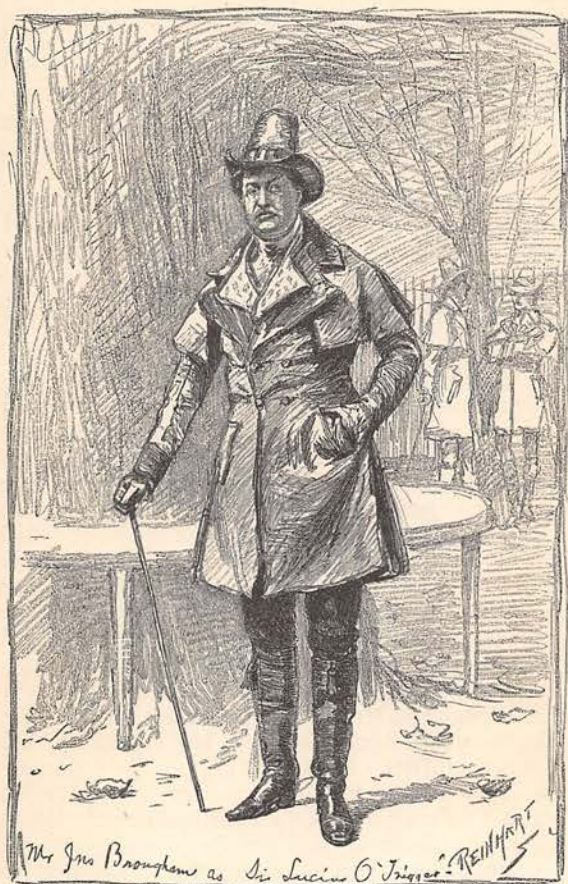
# SCRIBNER'S MONTHLY.

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## ACTORS AND ACTRESSES OF NEW YORK.



ACTING was the first art in which America was able to hold her own or even to make headway in any contest or comparison with the more mature life of Europe. There are as good actors in America as there are in France, or Germany, or England. Since the success in London of Miss Cushman in 1845, and of Mr. Jefferson in 1865, the quality of the best American dramatic art has not been doubtful.

VOL. XVII.—61.

Some of the most popular and skillful of the favorites of the British public have received their professional training on this side the Atlantic. Foremost among these is a comedian of admirable art, Mr. Sothern. There are probably now not only as good actors, but as many good actors in the United States as in France. "There is abundance of bad acting to be seen in Paris, as elsewhere," wrote Mr. George H. Lewes in

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1865, and the remark is as true now as it was fourteen years ago, as a study of the Parisian stage during the last summer has abundantly convinced me. Many of the secondary companies there are but little, if any, better than companies of corresponding position here. I certainly saw one performance in Paris as bad as any I ever saw in New York. And the provincial theaters of France are said to be in a deplorable state. In an article describing the incomparable Comédie-Française ("A Company of Actors," SCRIBNER'S for October, 1878), it was pointed out that, owing to the centralization, which is the great curse of France, the capital monopolizes the best actors and gathers them into a few—a very few indeed—strong and select stock companies. The stranger, seeing that these few theaters in Paris give finer and fuller performances of comedy than any theater in London or New York, not unnaturally infers that the whole stage of France is just so much better than the whole stage of England or America. Theatrically speaking, Paris is France; but New York is not the United States. I doubt whether there are better actors in France than in the United States—although Paris presents many more than New York. I doubt whether there are any actors in France who, in their respective lines, are more richly gifted or better trained than Mr. Joseph Jefferson, or Mr. Lester Wallack, or Mr. John McCullough, or Mr. John Gilbert; although, on the other hand, we have no M. Got, no M. Coquelin, no M. Delaunay. But M. Got and M. Coquelin and M. Delaunay are all in one theater, and at times are cast in one play, and have for years been in the habit of playing together; while Mr. McCullough and Mr. Jefferson and Mr. Wallack often play a thousand miles apart. The French are not cursed with the "star" system; they will not tolerate a single planet set in a fading cloud of star-dust. And thus centralization and the habit of having stock companies combine to help Paris to good playing, while the broad extent and well-diffused wealth of our land unite with the star-system to prevent good players from massing together here in New York. This is the reason why we have here no theater equal to the Gymnase or the Vaudeville, not to mention the Comédie-Française. This is the reason, and not any lack of good actors.

It would doubtless be difficult, even if possessed of autocratic power, to gather from all the United States a company better than

the Comédie-Française—better, that is, than the male half of that admirable assemblage of picked comedians; the female half, in spite of several personalities of strange and pungent flavor, is not at all on the same artistic level. It would certainly be impossible, in the United States, to compose, off-hand and at once, a company which should immediately begin to work together as smoothly as the traditions and restraints of two hundred years of existence enable the comedians of the Théâtre-Français to work. But from the theaters of New York, from out of the stock companies of this one city, could readily be chosen a company which, after it should have time to get into working order, would compare not unfavorably with the Odéon—the junior Théâtre-Français—or with any of the better of the court theaters of the smaller German states.

Custom has created, in comedy and drama, certain recognized classes of characters. An actor who devotes himself to one line of parts expects to receive all the parts of that line. In a very full company there would be a pair of "leading men," a "light comedian," an "old man," a couple of "low comedians," an actor of "character," or eccentric parts, a "heavy man,"—the villain of the piece,—and a "walking gentleman." There would be a pair of "leading ladies," a "juvenile lead," an "*ingénue*," a "chamber-maid," an "old woman,"—perhaps two. These are the more important people which a full and first-rate company would require. The Théâtre-Français, it may be noted, has twenty-two associates, each sharing in the profits and playing the best parts in his or her line.

This classification is not rigid. It often happens that, owing to special circumstances, the "low comedian" takes the part of an old man, or the "character" actor is cast for a "heavy" part. No hard and fast rules can be laid down. All precedent yields before the diversity of talent exhibited by the different actors holding technically the same rank and the same line of parts. In the Théâtre-Français, M. Coquelin is one of the "low comedians," but in the "*Étrangère*" of M. Dumas *fils*, M. Coquelin created the part of the *Duke of Septmonts*, the aristocratic villain of the piece; and when the play was adapted to the American stage this same rascally *Duke* was played here by Mr. Coghlan, the "leading man" of the theater. And again, in the "*Fourchambault*" of M. Emile Augier, the greatest success of the Exposition year and an honest and hardy

play, the two strongly contrasted and pivotal parts of the piece are played by M. Got and M. Coquelin. Now, M. Got and M. Coquelin are both technically "low comedians"; they both act, or have acted, the intriguing serving-men of Molière's comedies,—the *valets de Molière*, as the parts are called; and these were the parts Molière wrote for himself, and to play them in Molière's own house is no small honor. Indeed, one well-known French actor is said to have refused an engagement at the Théâtre-Français, because he did not wish to enter a house where the valets were the masters. Before MM. Got and Coquelin, the parts were held by M. Samson, the tutor of Rachel, and by M. Regnier, the teacher of both of his successors. And no one of these four remarkable comedians limited himself to the parts which came strictly within his technical line. M. Coquelin—to cite again the actor of at once the greatest promise and the finest performance on the French stage of to-day—acts, outside of his own line, the villains in the "Fourchambault" and the "Étrangère," the suffering and hungry ballad-maker in M. Théodore de Banville's beautiful "Gringoire," and the revolutionary hero of "Jean Dacier."

The "leading lady" has, in some respects, the most important position in the company, and it is a position which there is now great difficulty in getting competent actresses to fill. It is no easy matter to find a lady young enough to look *Lady Teazle* or the belle whose stratagem the comedy sets forth, and old enough to know how to play it. It is no light task to discover an actress capable of rattling off the empty chatter of *Lady Gay Spanker* one night and of filling the far different and more difficult part of *Clara Douglas* the night after. It is hard indeed to find a nature flexible enough to present a picture of simple English maidenhood, calm and trustful and devoted,—an *Esther Eccles* in "Caste," for instance,—and the week after to portray with adequate warmth the fiery and voluptuous Creole of "Article 47," one of the most unhealthy of French fictions. It is not only difficult to discover any one woman capable of giving full effect to all these different dramas—it is impossible; and in a company of unusual strength, two, if not three "leading ladies" must needs be included.

In certain characters compounded—not always very skillfully—of gorgeous apparel, of an easy wit (not to say free and easy), of vigorous animal spirits, of exuberant

womanhood and of suggestions of a sort of superficial satire of some of the more glaring aspects of American society, Miss Fanny Davenport has been deservedly popular. She comes of good theatrical stock; her father, the late E. L. Davenport, was one of the foremost actors of America, excelling in some parts and good in all; and through her mother Miss Davenport is related to several of the leading theatrical families of England. She has youth and beauty and she sets these off with much lavishness of raiment. A story is told of a French actress who excused herself to the author of a new comedy of fashionable life for her tardiness at rehearsal on the plea of a prior engagement with his *collaborateur*.

"But I have no *collaborateur*, Mademoiselle," said the dramatist; "the play is wholly my own."

"You forget the dress-maker," quietly answered the actress.

Now all the plays in which Miss Davenport appears have two authors, a dramatist and a dress-maker; and sometimes the latter deserves as much credit for success as the former. But although many of her earlier parts were of this sort, characters of no real depth, and, indeed, of only superficial vitality, she has shown herself capable of better things. Her *Lady Teazle* is an admirable picture of a buxom country girl thrust into the midst of fashionable frivolity; to the screen scene she lent a pathos most affecting, while it did not leave the key of comedy on which the whole performance of the play ought always to be pitched. And in melodramatic parts she has her full share of the ability of her father and mother. Miss Davenport has youth and beauty, she has intelligence and training; she lacks but a touch more of taste and a somewhat finer and more delicate nature to be able to play *Rosalind* and the more poetical parts of the higher comedy. Poetry, indeed, seems altogether beyond her reach. She is a realist, rather than an idealist, and what is *Rosalind* without poetry, or *Viola*?

In the appreciation of poetry, in the possession of the poetic spirit, in the suggestion of the existence of an ideal realm, removed wholly from the sordid baseness of this lower life, lies the great merit of Mrs. Booth. She is a child of the stage, having made her first appearance at the age of twelve. She was born in Australia whence she came to California; fourteen years ago she first acted in New York. She was once

known as Agnes Perry and is now the wife of Mr. Junius Brutus Booth, jr., the eldest son of the "little giant" of our early stage history. Mrs. Booth has a slight, graceful, girlish figure, fitted for the heroines of poetic comedy. Her voice is one of unusual beauty. In her acting, a certain

ferent thing from knowing the business! They pay laudable attention to one supremely important point recklessly disregarded on our stage, namely, elocution. They know how to speak—both verse and prose: to speak without mouthing, yet with effective cadence,—speech elevated above



severity of style suggests Mme. Favart of the Théâtre-Français, but her remarkable gift of rhythmic utterance recalls the poetic delivery and *diction* of Mlle. Sarah Bernhardt. Mr. Lewes in his essay on the German stage describes certain of the actors of the better court theaters in words which can be applied with exactness to Mrs. Booth: "They are thoroughly *trained*: they know the principles of their art—a very dif-

ferent thing from knowing the business! They pay laudable attention to one supremely important point recklessly disregarded on our stage, namely, elocution. They know how to speak—both verse and prose: to speak without mouthing, yet with effective cadence,—speech elevated above

This thing Mrs. Booth can do, as any one will witness who saw with what delicate art she played the part of *Mrs. Brownlee* in Mr. Bronson Howard's "Old Love Letters." This little one-act comedy is not far from being the very best play ever written in America. It has a *finesse* and a fineness to which our stage is unaccustomed. It recalls the "Postscriptum" of M. Augier and the "Sweethearts" of Mr. Gilbert, and makes a worthy third with that admirable pair of plays. The idea of the piece is simple,—a couple of young lovers have parted in a huff; each marries, and after many years, by the death of husband and wife, each is left alone. At last they meet again, for the first time since their hasty anger parted them. They meet to exchange the old love-letters which each has cherished,—the result is evident. The story is simple, but Mr. Howard has treated it with praiseworthy skill, delicacy and depth. The widow, *Mrs. Brownlee*, gives Mrs. Booth occasion for a most beautiful and artistic piece of work; it is no wonder that the author in his delight made her a present of the play. The part abounds in adroit turns and dainty little touches of poetry, to the execution of which Mrs. Booth brought training and a poetic sympathy. *Mrs. Brownlee* would not have been better acted on the French stage. It marked with the utmost emphasis Mrs. Booth's position on the American stage.

In as marked a contrast as may be to Mrs. Booth stands Miss Clara Morris. I have always held it to be arrant nonsense to talk about two schools of acting; I only know a good school and a bad school. But there are certainly two kinds of actors. You have all, at some time, seen an actor who played a sympathetic part with alert intelligence, nowhere deficient in look or act or tone, brimful of deft touches of delicate art, an actor with whose acting no fault can be found, save that it fails absolutely to move you. And you have seen another actor who, in a similar part, would be crude and harsh, careless of detail and uncultured in intonation,—an actor, in short, whose acting set your teeth on edge half the time, but who, when the supreme moment came, carried all critical reflection before his force and truth, and played upon your heart-strings far more effectively than the fingering of more delicate and more skillful art. All actors—excepting only the very greatest—belong to one or the other of these classes or are somewhere along the line which divides

them. The very great actor combines the best qualities of both classes, and is great because of this combination.

Of these two types of actor, the one ruled by his head and the other governed by his heart, Miss Morris belongs to the second. Her art is unfinished, but no one who has seen her can doubt her power. She projects her personality into all her parts and by sheer weight of self moves her hearers. She is most satisfactory when at war with society, when expiating a wrong done to society; she is at her best then as the fiery Creole in "Article 47," as the illegitimate daughter in "Alixé," as the repentant wife in "Miss Multon." As the keenest and best-trained critic of the acted drama in the city, Mr. William Winter, has said: "Her power lies in the capacity to depict a shattered emotional nature, in wild conflict with itself and its circumstances, and to do this with minute physical denotements. To look at her, in 'Miss Multon,' is to see a vivisection of the nervous system. The effect is strong but terribly painful." And Miss Morris makes this strong effect despite all disadvantages of early training, in spite, for instance, of a voice marred by hopelessly Western intonations. But as Heine once said: "The critic's judgment is of little value when his eyes are bedimmed with tears." Another poet has paid more direct tribute to Miss Morris's dramatic power; two years ago Mr. Stedman attached these lines to a bunch of flowers he threw to her feet:

"CLARA MORRIS.

"Touched by the fervor of her art,  
No flaws to-night discover!  
Her judge shall be the people's heart,  
This western world her lover.  
The secret given to her alone  
No frigid schoolman taught her:  
Once more returning, dearer grown,  
We greet thee, Passion's daughter!  
"NEW YORK, Nov. 20, 1876. E. C. S."

"Juvenile lead" is the name of a line of parts next in importance to the "leading lady," and at times even surpassing her in its demands. "Juvenile lead," as the term itself suggests, imperatively calls for youth, or at least the appearance of youth. We can forgive *Lady Teazle*, married to the uxorious old bachelor, *Sir Peter*, if, perchance, she seems not so young as the text would indicate; but *Maria*, the flame of *Charles* and *Joseph*, *Maria* must be a fresh, fair maiden with whom we can readily conceive *Charles* to be in love, and for whose sake *Joseph* dares to enter on the course of

duplicity which ends in his downfall. And it is no easy matter to find young ladies who are ladies and who look young and who can act with simplicity and directness.



The difficulty of filling these parts is of late added to, for, owing to the frequent drafts made upon the fund of French dramatic literature, our stage has gained a new occupant, the *ingénue*, that half impossible and quite improbable embodiment of ignorant innocence which French play-makers delight in introducing as a foil to the witty and wicked knowingness of the rest of the *dramatis personæ*. The best performances of this sort of part—no easy one to play—seen here have been those of Miss Kate Claxton in the alteration of M. Feuillet's "Tentation," and of Miss Sara Jewett in the adaptation of M. Sardou's "Seraphine."

Miss Sara Jewett—whose *Maria* in the "School for Scandal" is certainly the most graceful performance of that ungrateful part and the most adequate of late seen in this city—is a lady of unbroken American lin-

eage, related by blood to more than one family whose names are well known in the annals of American literature; her acting, deficient at times in physical force because she cannot always save her strength for the vital point, ever suggests the possession of wide culture and alert intelligence. Characters requiring simple dignity and gentle pathos are well within her grasp; but she has, unfortunately, had assigned to her a series of parts filled to overflowing with a sort of semi-maudlin sentimentality with which it is hopeless to expect any healthy American woman to make an effect on any healthy American audience. Better than the suffering heroine of this type or than the often as sickly *ingénue*, would Miss Jewett play the typical American girl of good breeding, quick-witted and full of tact, clever, self-possessed and well able to take care of herself; for this is a character with which she would have many points in common. Miss Jewett, it may be noted, has musical gifts of no mean order; the little song she sang in the "Danicheffs" was of her own composing.

Miss Kate Claxton is the granddaughter of Spencer H. Cone, who, when a babe, was blessed by George Washington; who, when a youth, was recommended by an Episcopalian bishop to go on the stage; who made his first appearance as an actor in 1805; became a Baptist preacher in 1813, and was made chaplain to Congress in 1815. He had been a member of the company at the Richmond theater not long before its awful destruction by fire in 1811. With a theatrical fire far more calamitous than the Richmond fire is his granddaughter's name inseparably linked. On the evening of Tuesday, December 6th, 1876, when "The Two Orphans" was in course of performance at the Brooklyn Theatre, and was rapidly nearing its close, the scenery took fire. The audience began to be alarmed, and Miss Kate Claxton, fearing the fatal effect of a panic-stricken rush for the door, came down to the foot-lights and cried, "Be quiet! We are between you and the fire; the front door is open and the passages are clear." She said this while the stage was a burning mass, and it was not until the spectators were seized with fear and began to flee from the building that Miss Claxton and the other actors with her on the stage at the time thought of flight themselves, and then it was only by means of a private passage under the auditorium that they were able to escape. A few months later, in April, 1877, she was in the

Southern Hotel at St. Louis when it was burnt to the ground, and here again she came within an inch of death. Since then, several times while playing "The Two Orphans" has an alarm of fire been raised, but fortunately without fatal result. In consequence of this awful experience and these narrow escapes the actress was, for a while, the butt of the newspaper "wits"—to give them a courtesy title. These jests and all allusions to the fire were wholly distasteful to the actress, and finally at her formal request they have been discontinued. Her first great success was made in an *ingénue* part in "Led Astray," an adaptation from the French of M. Octave Feuillet. The character was M. Feuillet's stock young woman, but in Miss Claxton's hands it took on a freshness and a frankness and a freedom most charming. In *Henriette*, the blind orphan, she touched deeper chords and simulated suffering in a way to move even the most stout-hearted.

The *soubrettes* or "chamber-maids" are a line of parts which are closely akin at times to the "juvenile lead"—at least, in plays of recent date. In Mr. Robertson's comedies it is almost doubtful whether the honest, plain-spoken, and rather "cheeky" young women he delighted to draw belong to one line of parts or to the other. In the older comedies there is no such doubt; there we find full-fledged the rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed, impudent domestic, knowing all that is going on and taking a hand in all that is mischievous, partly from pure love of the thing, partly from liking for her young mistress, and partly, no doubt, from the sordid bribe tendered by the young mistress's favored gallant.

Of these pert, not to say malapert, serving-maids of classic comedy, as well as of the lively-minded girls of Mr. Robertson's teacup-and-saucer dramas, there is no better representative than Miss Effie Germon. She comes of one of the oldest theatrical families in this country—the same which has given us in succession during the past hundred years three Joseph Jeffersons. Miss Germon is one of the rare women who have a genuine sense of humor; and she is one of the still rarer few who having the sense can make their possession of it manifest to a miscellaneous audience. Actresses who can give due point and dash to a part sparkling with wit and lightened by fancy are not many, but they are far more in number than the actresses who can depict a character, rich and juicy with humor. Miss Effie Germon

can do this: she is simply that white black-bird, a "low comedian" in petticoats. Her *Naomi Tighe*, her *Polly Eccles*, her weeping widow in the "Romance of a Poor Young Man,"—these are at once refined and rollicking portrayals of humorous characters, informed with healthy life and bubbling over with vigorous animal spirits. It is scarcely possible to recall them without a smile; it is wholly impossible to see them without laughter. It is this quality of appreciating humor as distinguished from wit which is so unusual. There is no actress now on the stage in England who has it in so high a degree as Miss Germon; and, in France, I



MISS CLAXTON AS "HENRIETTE" IN "THE TWO ORPHANS."

can only now call to mind one woman, Mlle. Alphonsine, who is in this respect her equal.

In a French sale catalogue, not long ago, I saw the title of a book which deserves to be recorded as one of the curiosities of literature. It was the "Plays of M. Ronsin, printed for the profit of his mother-in-law, Paris, 1786." A later French dramatist, M. Théodore Barrière, improved on this by acting, taking his mother-in-law for his literary partner: one at least of the plays they wrote together, the "Comtesse de Somerville" is well known to the American play-goer as



"Alixé." I cite these two instances to show that the mother-in-law may take part in a play, without of necessity appearing as a terrible bugbear. But of late we have had a long line of farces in which the mother-in-law is practically the protagonist. She is drawn in the darkest of colors; she is shown with her nose in every crack and with her fingers in every pie, and the audience are only too delighted when she gets the one pinched and the others burnt. This vivacious and virulent vixen must needs be cast to the "old woman" of the company, and in New York the type is identified with Mrs. G. H. Gilbert, an actress of excellence, who has within a few years served up the mother-in-law with every possible sauce. Like Mrs. Charles Kemble, the mother of Fanny and Adelaide Kemble, Mrs. Gilbert was a dancer before she was an actress. Born in England, where she first appeared, it was in America, in 1857, after she had been here eight years, and at the early age of thirty-five, that she began to act "old

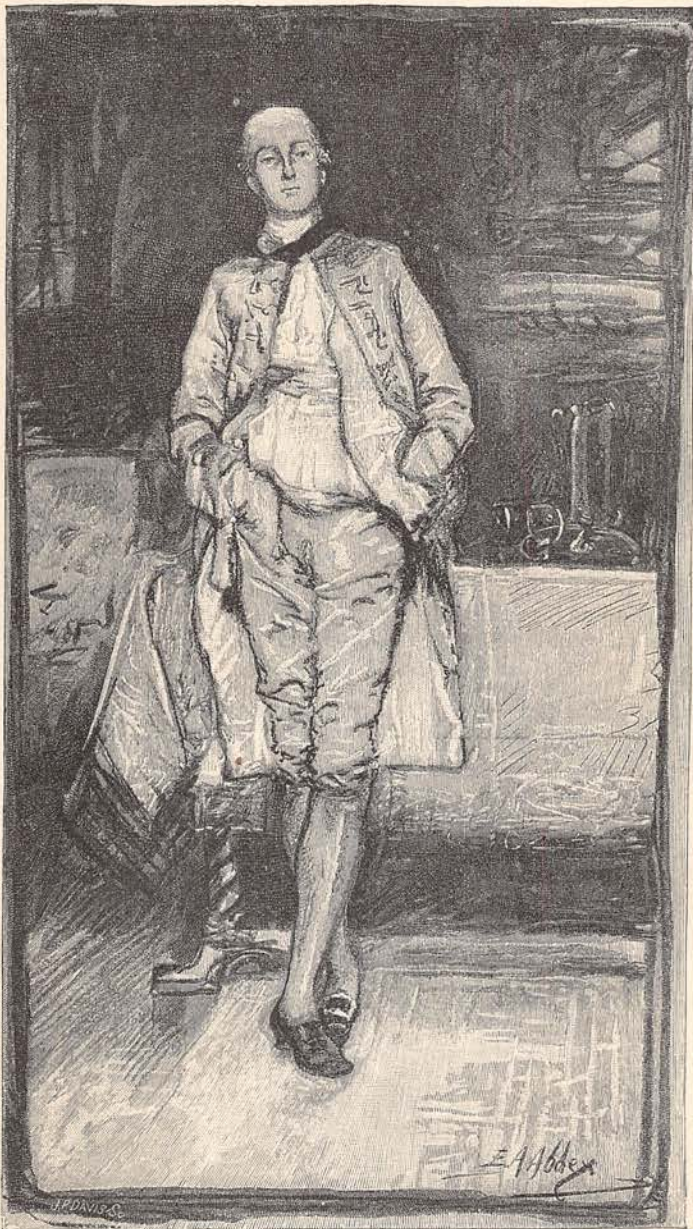
women's" parts. Fifteen years ago or so, she came to New York to the Broadway Theatre, and, about ten years ago, when Mr. Daly took the Fifth Avenue Theatre, Mrs. Gilbert at once joined his company as "first old woman." There she played a range of characters indicating unusual versatility; it included the old comedy parts on the one hand, and the lively *Infant Phenomenon* on the other. And most of all did it include that most marvelous performance of *Hester Dethridge*, the dumb woman in Mr. Daly's skillful adaptation of Mr. Wilkie Collins's "Man and Wife." This play, which first revealed the remarkable ability of Miss Clara Morris, gave Mrs. Gilbert opportunity to do work of the utmost effectiveness, artistic from its absolute simplicity and impressing itself upon the mental retina so vividly that after the lapse of years it is still easy to call up a vision of the slim, slight, silent figure entering mysteriously through the suddenly opened and before unknown aperture. Opportunities like this, alas, do not come often in any



artist's career. He succeeds best who makes best use of those he has. This Mrs. Gilbert has done. More than one trashy play owed no small part of its apparent vitality to the skill which Mrs. Gilbert showed in parts of

fate of the theater,—saying: "If you don't get a call for this act, the play's doomed!" And at night she got a triple call.

Turning now to the sterner sex, the "leading man" first demands consideration.



CHARLES COGHLAN AS "CHARLES SURFACE," IN "THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL."

little more than verbiage and exaggeration. It was to her and to Mr. Lewis that Mr. Daly turned at the final rehearsal of the "Big Bonanza,"—a play, on which depended the

Although in plumage less magnificent, he is almost as rare a bird as his mate, the "leading lady." And yet, New York is now fortunate in having a fair share of "leading

men,"—of gentlemen who can look like gentlemen and act like gentlemen, and, at the same time, give full effect to wit or wisdom, or love or fury, or whatever else it may please the dramatic poet to put into their hands to do. Of Mr. Lester Wallack, there is no space here to make adequate mention; his work as author, actor and manager calls for more elaborate treatment than is possible in this paper. As an author, he has scored success after success, and I fancy there are few towns in these broad United States where hearts have not been held during the gypsy scene of "Rosedale," and where joyous laughter has not been called forth by "Central Park." As an actor, although more modern and more robust, he suggests M. Delaunay of the Comédie-Française. Mr. Wallack is, in some sort, a New York and nineteenth century Delaunay; for the Parisian artist, delicate and charming as is his work, breathes freely only in the fanciful air of the Forest of Arden, or of the Bohemia which is a desert country by the sea. As a manager, Mr. Wallack has done that for the dramatic art which cannot well be overestimated; he has kept alive healthy traditions; he has trained many an actor of promise; and he has given us a theater where there is a greater chance of finding the intellectual entertainment which the intelligent seek, than anywhere else in this city or this country.

Like Mr. Wallack, Mr. Charles Coghlan is also a dramatic author; indeed, it is curious to count how many dramatists there are attached to Mr. Wallack's theater in one capacity and another. Mr. Coghlan is the author of "Lady Flora" and "Brothers," both acted at the Court Theatre, in London, and it was to him that the present Lord Lytton confided the completion and revising of his father's play, the "House of Darnley," produced posthumously at the same theater. As none of these comedies have as yet been acted in America, comment on them here is needless. They seem, like their author's acting, to be marked strongly with the influence of France, where Mr. Coghlan was educated. Mr. Coghlan's acting is as free as possible from all rant or undue tumult. Colley Cibber, when praising the justness of Betterton's judgment as a performer, has this remark: "While the million are so apt to be transported when the drum of their ear is so roundly rattled; while they take the life of elocution to lie in the strength of the lungs, it is no wonder that the actor, whose end is applause, should be also tempted, at this easy rate, to excite it." However great this

temptation may be, it is one which Mr. Coghlan always resists. His art is quiet, cool, self-possessed and self-restrained, seeking to bring out the hidden beauties of the character he is acting, and aiming always to present a picture, rounded and complete, of the whole part, in which no portion is unduly exaggerated at the expense of another. And the suggestion of pictorial art reminds us that all arts are more or less akin, and Thalia feels kindly toward her sister Muses. Like Mrs. Siddons, Mlle. Sarah Bernhardt is a sculptor; and, like his associates in the same company, Mr. Brougham and Mr. Beckett, Mr. Coghlan is something of a painter, having at one time studied under M. Cabanel.

In the "School for Scandal," Mr. Coghlan plays *Charles Surface* with a witty delicacy and an airy grace worthy of high praise. The performance abounds with neat strokes of art: the tender affection, for instance, with which *Charles* goes to his uncle's picture and gazes into it, and the quiet and undemonstrative manner in which he indicates that any attempt to get it from him is hopeless. And in the screen scene Mr. Coghlan is a gentleman; many a *Charles* seems to remember that *Tom Jones* was the real father of Sheridan's hero, and therefore mocks at the plight of *Sir Peter* and *Lady Teazle* and *Joseph* with a rough gayety, boisterous even to brutality. Mr. Coghlan's *Charles Surface* was a gentleman with a keen appreciation of a joke, even if it told against his friend; but a gentleman who never let his jest run away with him. But, fine as Mr. Coghlan's *Charles* is, it is to be hoped that he will some day attempt the far stronger part of *Joseph*, really the best in the play, and far more worthy of Mr. Coghlan's skill in developing a character than the comparatively simple nature of *Charles*.

Mr. Charles Thorne, the "leading man" of the Union Square Theatre, comes of a widely spread American theatrical family; his father, Mr. C. R. Thorne, senior, was one of the earliest of California favorites. And it was in California, if I mistake not, that Mr. Thorne himself made his earlier appearance. It was certainly from California that he went on a voyage prolific in many perilous adventures, and including visits to Yokohama and the Sandwich Islands. Some ten years ago Mr. Thorne began to be prominent in this city, and when the Union Square Theatre was opened he almost at once became its "leading man." For this position he has great natural advantages: a tall and firm figure, a

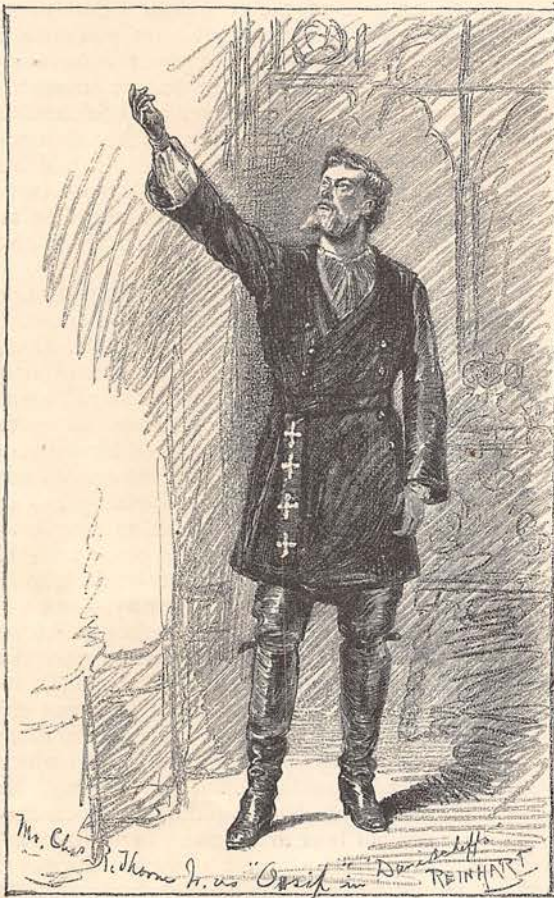
rich and resonant voice, and an air of fine manly vigor—all these are precious gifts for the adequate presentation of heroic char-

acter. It is in the broad sweep of the romantic drama, akin to the picturesque plays of cape and sword of Spain, that Mr. Thorne made his first marked success. But he has qualities better than these mere physical adjuncts, and beyond them in value, necessary as they are; he has the gift of the dramatic temperament,—in short, he is a born actor. For a while in the earlier part of his career he was not a made actor at all: he was unduly "robustious" at times. But Mr. Thorne has since become an artist, governing himself, developing his ability with certainty, and excelling especially in seizing and presenting with startling force the predominant note of the situation. As *Rudolphe* in "Led Astray," there was such a suggestion of virile force in his very manner that the issue of his dispute with the

philandering poet was in no wise doubtful, and the gift of life which he makes his opponent appeared almost royal in spite of the seeming insignificance of the gift. In "Conscience," however, in the final act and crowning situation of this well-constructed and workmanlike play, Mr. Thorne had better opportunity than ever before, and his *Eustace Lawton*,—the murderer walking in his sleep and doing again before the eyes of all the deed which he had striven hard to conceal,—this is a picture few can forget who once have seen it.

If, on leaving a theater after seeing a good comedy well acted, an audience could be polled and an honest expression of its opinion taken to determine to which individual it owed the most pleasure, I think it scarcely doubtful that the performer of the funny characters, or creatures of broad humor, would receive a majority of suffrages. The "low comedian," as the actor is called who appears as the valiant *Bob Acres*, or the learned *Tony Lumpkin*, he is the genuine favorite of the many-handed and open-mouthed multitude who flock to the theater for a night's diversion. He it is who receives tribute of laughter almost before he says a word. A smiling ripple of humorous expectation runs around among the pleased spectators when a few words of dialogue from the stage announce his coming. And this meed of hilarity paid before his entrance

and repeated again and again till his exit;—this is the snare and the stumbling-block in his path. He gets used to the calling forth of jocularities, and if perchance his part give him small occasion for causing laughter he is only too likely to make opportunity despite the author—will he, nill he. And the temptation is no slight one, as whoso has seen the "School for Scandal" acted will acknowledge; this by far the finest modern comedy in our language has really no "comedy" part; the first "low comedian" is usually cast for *Moses*, a character of slight importance, and appearing late and infrequently. Now when the entrance of *Moses* is announced, and the audience find by the programme that a favorite "comedian" is *Moses*, the hush of humorous expectancy is heard and high anticipa-



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tion of a humorous treat becomes evident. If the play before has been comic, what will it be now the professed comedian is come? And small wonder is it that the comedian, knowing there is naught in *Moses*



with which he can meet this expectation, endeavors to satisfy it as best he may,—in rank disobedience to the behest of Prince Hamlet: "And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them."

In first-class theaters, "gagging," as this interpolation is termed, is strictly forbidden, save in certain of the older comedies, where tradition has accumulated "business" and bits of dialogue, all tending toward the elaboration of the effect. The leading low comedians of the stock companies of New York are Mr. Harry Beckett, Mr. James Lewis, and Mr. J. H. Stoddart. Mr. Beckett is rich and broad; Mr. Lewis is "peart and chipper and sassy"; Mr. Stoddart is

grim and saturnine. Although technically a comedian, Mr. Stoddart is at his best in parts of melodramatic vigor, of harsh and cruel and cowardly wickedness, like *Pierre Michel*, one of the strongest of Mr. Stoddart's performances. It is worthy of remark that the sources of comic power and of melodramatic strength must lie not far apart; more than one comic actor has been known for his melodramatic ability. In the "Shaughraun," for instance, Mr. Beckett had an opportunity to rise from the depths of a rather cheap comic villain to a height of tragic terror, wholly beyond and above any ordinary exhibition of fear.

Both Mr. Lewis and Mr. Beckett first made their mark in New York in burlesque, now more than a decade ago. Mr. Lewis made his first appearance on the stage almost by accident. Over twenty years ago he was teaching school in Troy, when an actor friend, called out of town, asked him to take his part for a night. Mr. Lewis was pleased with the idea; he took his friend's part,—in more senses than one,—and, as the friend did not return, he took his place as well. Then followed ten years of hard work in small towns all over the country,—years in which an actor gets the schooling which no profession demands as rigorously as the stage. When Mr. Augustin Daly took the Fifth Avenue, in 1869, Mr. Lewis was engaged as his comedian, and bore his share of the many plays of all kinds which Mr. Daly produced. In "Divorce" he played *Mark Meddle*, although the character did not bear that name; in "Saratoga" he attempted a "light comedy" character, and acted the engaging and much engaged hero; in the "Big Bonanza" he appeared as the *Professor*, who, in the midst of his studies, gets suddenly entangled in the meshes and mysteries of stock speculation. Marvelous in make-up, queer and odd in externals, simple-minded at bottom, Mr. Lewis built the *Professor* into a distinctly recognizable and well-marked type of farcical comedy. But, while the experience thus had at Mr. Daly's theater was in many ways invaluable, the playing of character after character of absolute emptiness could not but in time have its effect on the actor's style. The real field for comic study is the broad one of human nature; eccentricity may serve a temporary purpose—it can but be temporary at best. Amusing as Mr. Lewis is in flighty and inconsequent parts, all thinking theater-goers will be glad when he has a chance to revert to characters of more

breadth, with more meat in them, tougher of fiber and stronger in sinew.

Mr. Harry Beckett is by birth an Englishman and an actor. Once on a time all theatrical babies made their first appearance on any stage as the child who is suspended over the raging torrent in "Pizarro." Now, "Pizarro," in spite of Sheridan's rhetoric and Kotzebue's sentiment, has been dropped out of sight, and the infant of "Mr. and Mrs. Peter White" is the part in which young dramatic ability has the first chance to assert itself. Mr. Beckett's father died young; his mother—who was an actress—had him educated as a violinist; but the theatrical blood was too strong, and he was soon on the stage in Manchester, playing anything and everything,—a "utility" man, as the stage phrase goes. Here he was a great favorite of Charles Mathews, who, whenever any small part in one of his pieces required to be done with neatness and certainty, would cry, "Where is little Beckett?" After this he went on the old Exeter circuit, and got his old comedy training under Frank Belton, an excellent instructor. Then, after other wanderings, he went to Birmingham, whence he came to this country in 1868, making his first appearance in New York in "To Oblige Benson," a performance of remarkable and instantly recognized merit. After playing in farce and burlesque for half a dozen years throughout the country, he came to Wallack's Theatre, where he has since remained, holding his own with the able comedians by whom he has there been surrounded. There are those who think breadth—not brevity—the soul of wit, and who like a joke better the broader it is—Burton, for one. Mr. Beck-

ett never descends to this; his work is broad in another and more artistic sense. He is a hard student of his profession; possessing fully the traditions of the old comedy parts, he thinks for himself and invents his own business. An actor whose range of parts extends from burlesque to melodrama, including farce and comedy old and new, is obviously a performer of unusual powers of personation; and Mr. Beckett adds to his mimetic faculty a remarkable skill in dis-

guising his identity—in "make up," to use the technical term; he is not, like Cerberus, three single gentlemen in one, but more,—a whole regiment of gentlemen, single and married, young and old, bearded or bald, or what not, all as unlike each other as may be.

A class of important characters, the *Sir Oliver Surfaces* and other uncles from India, the *Sir Lucius O' Triggers* and other gentlemen from Ireland, are held at Wallack's



Mr. Harry Beckett as "Bob Arto" in "The Rival"

Theatre by the gentle and genial John Brougham. For more than thirty years the name of John Brougham has held a high place in the play-bills of America,—as author, or actor, or manager, or as all three at once. When he made his first appearance in New York in 1842 as the "Irish Lion," he was at once accepted as the successor of the lamented Tyrone Power, who had been lost in the steamer *President* the year before. Like that fine actor whose "Impressions of

America" to-day remain readable, although I fear me, unread, Mr. Brougham intended a book about us. Writing books about the Yankees was a popular sport among English authors thirty and forty years ago; and the great Mr. Murray had commissioned Mr. Brougham to prepare him a book on the Americans. "But I couldn't do it," said

and amusing little two-act comedy. He was many times a manager, too, with varying fate; twice, at least, the theater he founded grew under other hands into fame and favor; his Lyceum in Broadway near Broome street became Wallack's Theatre; and the little theater in Twenty-fourth street, behind the Fifth Avenue hotel, had an event-



Mr. Brougham, several years ago. "I couldn't do it; the country was too great and the people, too. It takes a Titan to write about Titans—and I was not tight enough." But if he did not write a book about us he wrote a many for us—comedy, drama, burlesque; "Romance and Reality," and "Pocahontas," and others "too humorous to mention." And he acted in all the old Irish parts and in new one after new one; he was the *Murphy Maguire* when the "Serious Family" had its long run under Burton; and he was the "Gentleman from Ireland" in FitzJames O'Brien's admirable

ful career under the management of Mr. Daly after Mr. Brougham had been forced out of it by the treachery of the owner, James Fisk, jr.—a man who, as the dispossessed wit remarked, "would rather give you ten dollars than pay you five." But of this and of his other adventures we hope to find full account in the autobiography to which he has given of late as much time as failing health would permit.

With the parts known as "old men" all New York involuntarily connects the name of Mr. John Gilbert, who began to play them at the early age of nineteen. Mr.

Gilbert was born in Boston, February 27th, 1810, in the house next to the one in which occurred the birth of Charlotte Cushman, with whom he often played in childhood, and whose life even, if report is to be credited, he once saved when she fell from the dock near their dwellings. In Boston, November 28th, 1828, Mr. Gilbert made his first appearance on the stage as *Jaffier* in "Venice Preserved." On the 28th of last November, therefore, Mr. John Gilbert completed a half-century of useful life on the stage, an event duly celebrated by a public dinner to him at a literary and art club and by a testimonial benefit the next week,—the actual anniversary falling on Thanksgiving Day,—on the afternoon of the fifth of December at Wallack's Theatre, with which he had been connected for sixteen years. During these fifty years of theatrical experience he has acted in Boston, in New Orleans, in Philadelphia, in London and in New York. And his range of parts has been almost as wide as his geographical wanderings. Beginning with leading tragic characters and afterward wisely starting anew at the bottom of the ladder, he has played all the parts in "Macbeth," save the Thane's strong-willed wife and her waiting woman, and all the male parts in "Julius Cæsar," except the boy *Lucius*. In Mr. Gilbert's first theatrical trip West and South, as he said in his speech at the dinner given to him,—“still aspiring to first tragedy parts, when, on one occasion, imagine my disgust and indignation to find myself cast as an old man—at the age of nineteen. However, there was no help for it. I did it, and received applause. I played a few more old men, and found at last that that was my strong point.” And a very strong point it was indeed, as the long list of Mr. Gilbert's "old men" abundantly shows. He is the only *Sir Peter Teazle* the play-goers of the metropolis are willing to accept; and as *Sir Anthony Absolute* he is if anything even finer. The uxorious and sorely tried *Sir Peter* and the peremptorily irascible *Sir Anthony* are presented with full-bodied flavor and well-rounded vigor, while at no time do they leave the domain of comedy to trespass on the manor of melodrama—a fault with only too many *Sir Peters*. Not only in Sheridan's two comedies, unlike in subject and style and equal in power alone of amusing, but in all the many and varied old gentlemen of old comedy, *Lord Duberly*, *Lord Ogleby*, *Hardcastle*, and many another lord and baronet and commoner of high and low degree.

“The drama is everywhere in Europe

and America rapidly passing from an art into an amusement, just as of old it passed from a religious ceremony into an art,” wrote Mr. G. H. Lewes in 1867. “Unless a frank recognition of this inevitable tendency cause a decided separation of the drama which aims at art from those theatrical performances which only aim at amusement of a lower kind (just as classical music keeps aloof from all contact and all rivalry with comic songs and sentimental ballads), and unless this separation take place in a decisive restriction of one or more theaters to the special performances of comedy and the poetic drama, the final disappearance of the art is near at hand. \* \* \* It is only by a rigid adherence to the principle of specialization that such a scheme could have a chance. The theater must be mounted for the sole purpose of performing works of art, for an art-loving public. \* \* \* It must have one small company of well-trained and art-loving actors (what a condition!) not a large miscellaneous company attempting *all* kinds of performance.” Mr. Lewes then points out that a model may be found in the Théâtre-Français, and in some of the better of the Hof-Theaters of the German capitals—all of which are aided by the state; and remarks that no English government would ever think of contributing a penny toward the elevation or the preservation of dramatic art. Now certainly no American government should be allowed to have aught to do with a theater. Our civil service is not an instrument delicate enough to do all it ought for trade; it could only touch art to defile it. Heaven help the drama if public servants gain right to enter the theater through any appropriation of public money! Even in France the record of state aid is a list of petty scandals and petty tyranny. But fortunately there is no more likelihood of the state's interference in America than there is in England. Our only way toward a permanent and self-governing theater devoted to the higher drama is by private endowment. The same public spirit which has covered the country with colleges and with schools of science and of art, and with museums and music-halls—this same public spirit may some day give us the spectacle of an American theater, constituted in some measure like the Comédie-Française, and containing the most of the admirable actors and actresses whose lives I have in these pages endeavored to sketch, and whose art I have here tried briefly to characterize.