

PART TWO

Reminiscences of the Salt Lake Theatre

By Alfred Lambourne.

From the Scene Painter's Gallery

Actors and Actresses of the Past Viewed Through an Artist's Eyes.

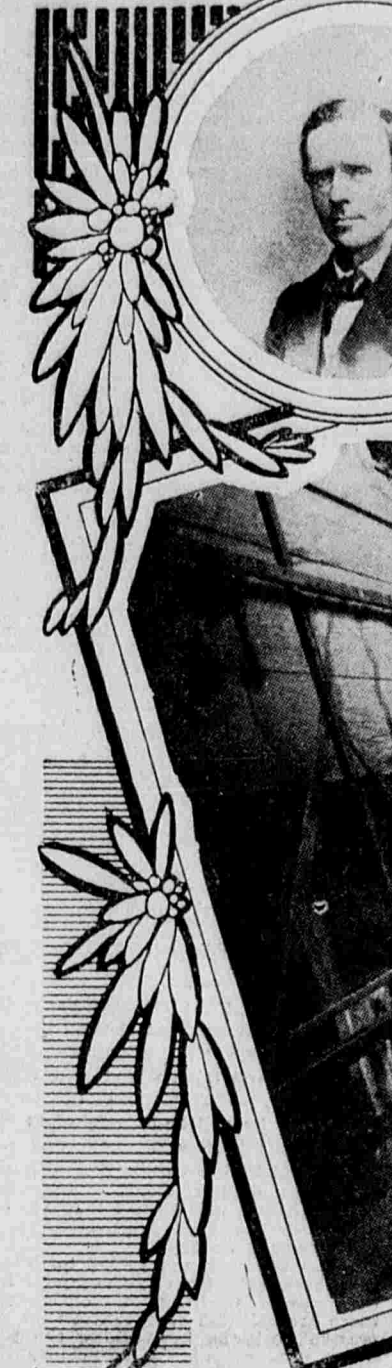
THE Salt Lake theatre is the theatre with a history; that is, it has an exceptional history. Name me its fellow! It is a place of amusement, a theater in every sense of the word. From the very first all classes of plays were put upon its boards—classical, romantic, domestic, farcical—and yet it was opened with prayer. Its every adobe, board and nail was blessed by special invocation. The early settlers of New England would have looked upon it as an institution of the devil, and yet it was built by pioneers, religious pioneers, those who were to build a new commonwealth in the wilderness.

Such as I may tell about this now historic building—the happenings therein and the standpoint from which I saw them, are so mixed with my own life that it is impossible for me to write without, at least, a seeming show of egotism. Yet the reader must please pardon this, for I mean to follow in this little task the lines of least resistance.

The first time that the writer of these reminiscences put scene-painter's brush to canvas was under the tutelage of J. Guido Methua, a German artist and husband of Madame Scheller, the actress. The scene itself was to be the opening one in the spectacular, fairy drama of Cinderella. My second master was George Tirrell, of the Globe theatre, Boston, a stately, almost austere man, and my last teacher in the scenic art, for in spite of the short time and the conditions under which I worked with the man, I still consider him one of my life teachers, was that erratic genius, that Bohemian of Bohemians, Henry C. Tryon. At the outset of these slight memories, I feel called upon to mention these names.

While I write, there lies before me a letter, dated from New York City and ending with the autograph of J. Guido Methua. The letter dwells upon the ephemeral nature of the scene-painter's fame and the writer of the letter also advises the present writer to abandon the art of the stage and go to Berlin or Munich (those schools were the fad, then, for landscape students) and to think of Claude and Rosa, and those artists who, since their day, have loved and glorified nature. That is the key. Scene-painting is indeed an ephemeral art, and yet it is a difficult and exacting one. He who would be a successful scene-painter must have his art based upon sound knowledge, no room for guesswork, no making believe, no wishy-washy work, no scene-painting. Those artists who work upon a smaller scale, and who believe that scene-painting is a sort of play-ground of art, are much mistaken. There are very few artists of light and shade, color, and perspective among the drops, sets, wings, etc., which the scene-painter must subvert generally at very short notice. He is often as it were, in the midst of a life.

Hiram B. Clowson  
Pioneer Painter  
and Actor



John T. Pioneer Painter and Actor

Nonsense again! Such things do not happen in these days. Very well. But at the western end of the scene-painter's gallery there is a room, or rather there once was a room. In it once sat gray-bearded men in solemn conclave. From that room the expanding world was done that put to rest the restless spirits which made night unbearable to the first watchers in the Salt Lake Theatre.

At last, so it was said.

The theatre is the home of the unreal, of the make-believe. And yet it is something more. The old Greeks knew the power of the theatre, and so have the practical English. To live in a theatre for any length of time has a peculiar effect upon the mind. Everything around is sham, but one learns the power of ideas over facts, how facts may become ideas. Wander through a theatre by daylight—there you shall see the sham scenes, shorn of their glamor. In the property-room what an accumulation of shams! Shams of every kind. There are the sham thrones, set with glass jewels. There are the sham crowns and sceptres of make-believe kings and queens. There is the great sword which Richard shall try in vain to wield. There are the sham coffin and the flowers for poor Ophelia. And yet all this make-believe moves toward the making of a real effect.

For a thousand years the stage has been a teacher for good or for bad.

A HAPPY FAMILY.

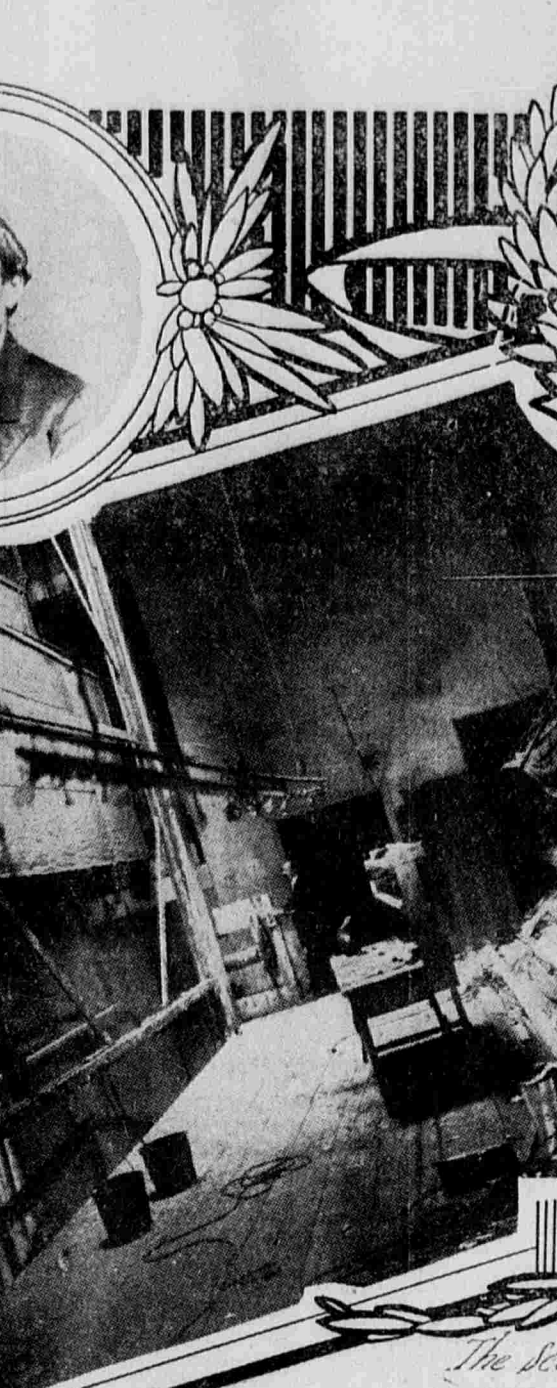
In the early days the actors and actresses, of the Desert Dramatic association, I mean, and the attaches of the theatre, the stage carpenters, property men, scene painters, etc., formed one family. Never in the world's history. I may repeat, there was such another theatre. That is, one existing under like conditions. A Puritan playhouse, if that combination be possible, and conducted under religious censorship. When would Shakespeare, Massinger, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, and all the other old dramatists, whose plays were presented on the boards, have thought of it? O what jolly times! The writer lives them over again as he pens these lines. There was the fun of the rehearsals, the benefit nights; there was the room and the barbers, the property room and the paint gallery. Then came the lighting up, the warming of the bell-boy—the half hour! The half hour! The half hour! The overture, and lastly, the fun in the wings as the play progressed. Everybody knew everybody. Fun certainly did not play a second part in our temple of the drama in those days.

David, the Joe Witch, Under the Gas Light, the Lost Ship, After Dark, Cherry and Fair Star, Lottery of Life, No Throughfare, Bee and the Orange Tree—these were among the plays. Yes, money was scarce then. When the writer was first employed in the theatre, all actors and actresses and attaches received one-third of their pay in thing scrip, one-third in store pay and the remaining one-third in cash. The scene painter was quite proud, for he was then a boy, to send home the first hundred weight of flour that he had earned. Laugh, if you will, but he was very, very proud, when he knew that there were 10 sacks of flour in the cellar—the grasshopper war had taught him that easily could be. But these things have been told before, and I wish now to tell some special little reminiscences about the Salt Lake theatre.

SOME REMINISCENCES.

I once had the temerity to collect, in person, a small bill which was due me from the great Januscheck. It was before the rise of the curtain, and, horror! Could one believe it?—there was a "poor house." "For what is this?" Never did the terrible tragedienne append her name to any stage document with more tragic action. With what fury she dashed her wonderful and masculine autograph to that bill of mine! Yet in the action, there was wonder, too, and pathos and virtuous indignation. How mean man could be to have collected that money! It was rightly mine, yet

"But O for the touch of a vanished hand And the sound of a voice that is still."



The Home of the Scenic Artist



The Home of the Scenic Artist



The Home of the Scenic Artist

Side-Lights Upon the Stage and Votaries of Clio, Thalia and Melpomene.

tioned. He was the author of those striking dramas, "Arrah Na Pogue" and "The Colleen Bawn." It used to be a common saying around the theatres that he could read dramatics everything with the exception of Webster's dictionary, but he would soon try that. He made a big figure in the dramatic world in the '70's.

One musician I must recall, the Norwegian Ole Bull, was not only a delightful listener to the tones which he brought from his violin, but it was also a delight to look at the man, as he stood on the stage, his tall slender and erect figure, his wonderful eyes and cloud of snowy hair.

A FAMOUS MEETING.

"The thing done avails," thought Lander, "and not what is said about it." In one sense, he was right. It is most true that the drama-dramatists have said about the men of action, "I love the play, but I love reality better." And yet what the dramatists have said about the men of action, I love the play, but I love reality better. I have always thought that the most interesting sight which I ever beheld on the stage of the Salt Lake theatre, was the meeting of Brigham Young and Henry Ward Beecher. That famous man of thought of the east, and that famous man of action of the west—they looked steadily into each other's eyes for a moment. Henry Ward Beecher was a wonderful mimic. I had both seen and listened to his skill in that line in the tabernacle. But now they were impressive. One might just as well have attempted to read the riddle of the Sphinx as to read from the faces of those two great men, what they thought of each other.

This has been noted before, I think, and put into print—the wonderful similarity of the men. In build they might have been twin brothers. Only the face of Beecher was more pleasant of the two. There was something more of benevolence upon it, more of the kindly and paternal. Brigham Young's face was the more stern, the expression more determined. But otherwise they were very, very much alike.

There are recollections in my mind of Newman, chaplain of the United States senate, sent here by President Grant; also of Talmage, the eminent Brooklyn divine, and of the great Charles Kingsley, the English divine, and author of Hypatia and other wonderful books. Perhaps these revered gentlemen wished to see a theatre, owned and controlled by a church.

The benefit of John T. Calne, who with H. B. Clowson, was less than a manager, also stands out from the past. Those two men were peculiarly fitted as actors and business men for the trust Brigham Young so long reposed in them. Clowson was a famous actor-playhouse. The play presented on that occasion was "The Octoroon," and the house was packed to suffocation. But the play was something else which made that night so memorable. A banner on the theater front hung a long banner, and on it was inscribed a legend: "The Atlantic and Pacific—East and West—Clio, Thalia and Melpomene." That was the night of the day on which was driven the last spike which completed the Union Pacific and the (then) Central Pacific railroads.

HARD WORK.

"The Season" of 1873-4 is memorable to the writer from the fact that during that season, he did not enjoy a single holiday. It was work on Christmas day, and on New Year's day, and on every day during every performance, too. That was a busy season indeed on the paint gallery. Sunday work was against the general order, but Mr. Tirrell, who was then head scene-painter, was an imported article, and made laws of his own. The writer was assistant scene-painter. The assistant was paid for his services, a series of 60 pictures of American scenery was a panorama painted immediately after that vacation. The writer and his partner afterwards sold that panorama to Mr. Tirrell, a series of 60 pictures of American scenery was a panorama painted immediately after that vacation. The writer and his partner afterwards sold that panorama to Mr. Tirrell, a series of 60 pictures of American scenery was a panorama painted immediately after that vacation. The writer and his partner afterwards sold that panorama to Mr. Tirrell, a series of 60 pictures of American scenery was a panorama painted immediately after that vacation.

A STANLEY EPISODE.

Poor Annie Ward! Everybody around the theatre loved Annie Ward. Poor little butterfly, how she could sing and dance! And dance! Who would have thought that such a little sunny-eyed, little creature could almost have wrecked the life of such a man as Henry M. Stanley? But it was whimsical that she did.

It was also whispered that Stanley, then unknown and poor, had sat in one of the circles in the theatre and gazed upon the girl as, in gauze and tinsel, she went through one of her burlesque parts. When, in after years, Stanley gave his lecture, "How I Found Livingstone," at the theatre he stood on the selfsame spot as that on which the little danseuse capered and sang. As, in his almost stern, measured voice the great explorer told of "Parked Africa," his perils and toils in the interior, how he had been compelled to abandon his luggage, piece by piece, carrying at last, besides absolute necessities, only three books, Shakespeare, Carlyle's Sartor Resartus and the Bible—I thought then and again, wonder if the poor, dead and gone, little girl was in his mind?

THE DAY OF THE LEGITIMATE.

Theater-going was theater-going from the '60's to the '80's, which was the time of the legitimate, of great actors and actresses. Even the people isolated in Utah became connoisseurs. When a new star came along he was expected to show his quality in the Shakespearean or other legitimate drama, "Inglorious," "Lady of Lyons," "New Way to Pay Old Debts," "Richard III," "Hamlet," "Othello," and the like pieces were those in which he was put to the test. The man who went up the canyon after a load of wood, during the day, became a critic at night. "Hamlet" was played over and over again. On the bill boards, by the Council house corner, the Eagle Gate, the Tillinghouse, the meat market and the wood yard, how many times did they announce the presentation of Shakespeare's masterpiece? People would go to the theatre, not to see a new play, but to see a new actor in an old part. How many times did the writer see "Hamlet" played? I recall Pauncefote, Edwin Adams, McCullough, Davenport, the dainty Miss Evans, and she played "Hamlet," "Richard III," "Othello," "King Lear," "Macbeth," and lastly the greatest of all, Edwin Booth. I am not writing these reminiscences to give my personal opinion on the merits of actors, but only one actor whom I have seen seemed actually to live his parts. In all other actors I could detect the care and study, scholarly though it may have been, but Edwin Booth seemed to be the living reality. And O, what a privilege to hear him in private conversation, and to see him schooling a young actor who was a lesson indeed. I have forgotten who it was who played the part of Mary Antony to Booth's Brutus, but I watched the great actor between the scenes while he would school the younger and ambitious actor, for the next scene that would come on. That was one Edwin Booth and one only. "Take him for all in all, we shall not look upon his like again."

Dion Boucicault has not been mentioned.

THE MORMON THEATRE.

Is there nothing to say about the old, local stock company? What of those men and women who were all, or with few exceptions, members of the Mormon Church? Much might be said. But that which is of general interest has already been told. The few members of the Desert Dramatic association who are still living, can tell some capital stories. When a community is so compact as these isolated out in this wilderness were, there was, I believe, much rivalry existing among the theatres. When a community is so compact as these isolated out in this wilderness were, there was, I believe, much rivalry existing among the theatres. When a community is so compact as these isolated out in this wilderness were, there was, I believe, much rivalry existing among the theatres.