STAGE FOLK.

VERSATILITY OF ACTORS.

Mr. Wilton Lackaye's Opinions.

GOOD WORK BY AMERICANS.

The Original Svengali Writes on the Earnest Endeavors of Our Best Players.

[Copyright, 1898.]

New York, Feb. 17.—It is a very curious thing that while American actors are constantly reproached by foreign critics with the lack of versatility, which is alleged to constitute the main difference between foreign and American artists, the New York writers do not seem to remember the exhibitions of that quality furnished by artists of their own country.

Mr. Mansfield's versatility is much heralded, but that is because most of his appearances in new parts have occurred since he was a "star" and he was not dependent upon the New York critical fraternity for publicity, having always had his own press agent, who called the attention of the public to the wide diversity of the roles in which he appeared.

Mr. James Hearne, Mr. W. J. Le Moyne, Mr. William H. Thomson, Mr. W. J. Ferguson, Mr. E. M. Holland and the late Mr. C. L. Davey have all played a number of roles which were widely different in character, conception and "make up."

The "make up," as we call the dressing of the part, the painting (sometimes modeling) of the face, effective though it may be, is the slightest part of the change in "character." Often the walk, the gesture, the manner, the eyes, the voice—nay, the very feelings—must be changed so as to merge completely the individuality of the actor in the identity of the characterization. This is the hardest task—the accomplishment of this the real test of the artist, for if acting be "to assume a virtue that does not belong to us or our nature, but to present the form and feature to the vision and give tangible reality to the imaginary creation of the author," as Colley Cibber defined his art, the players who go about the country exhibiting a comically gifted pair of legs or a handsome face in a play written to exhibit their peculiar selves have no more right to be called actors than Mrs. Langtry or the vanished man.

Not that I would cast the "tricks" of character acting above the magnetism of the individual, but I insist that, to make it effective, it must be more powerful than the actor's "personality" with his audience. "Magnetism" or whatever you may choose to call it, unless he confounds himself to the character he is to be the artist. The Pygmalion method of cutting off the head of a piece of sculpture to fit the body is the true infelicity of an actor's "personality" is a brutality to art which is not condoned by the fact of its sometimes commercial success.

It is the contention of many who are concerned in the "business" of the theater that an actor who "constructs his character is harder to establish in the knowledge of the public than one who is always the same in different settings. Whether this be true or not, it has no bearing upon the question to which foreigners have put us on the defense. The question of commercial advantage has no place in a discussion of art than art is a convention of stage believe.

It is undoubted that many of our successful stars are exhibitors rather than artists. But even in their case we will often discover that if we trace them back a little they have deserted their natural quality of versatility to prosecute a specialty which has met with unusual public favor. I don't think there is any such thing as a "straight" part.

If there isn't some salient point in a character, it isn't worth playing. We are perhaps all alike in big things, but in "nonessentials," perhaps as to immediate effect, but very essential in formation of character or side lights upon it, we are as different as the marks on our thumbs.

And if Bertillon can find such power in his detail not only for identification, but for scientific criminology, how important to us that detail who have but the muscles and the outward seeming to express not only the physical characteristics of the man, but the operation of his very soul!

I saw a prominent actor play in three weeks in New York a jockey, a poet and—Romeo.

They were all "leading parts—straight parts, in the language of the theater—and he played them all alike.

He entertained his audience, too, but he was not "in the skin" of his characters; he had only stolen their clothes. The value of versatility in broadening one's art is incalculable. Any one can play Romeo better for having played a negro or an Irishman.

You will find in nearly every case of a sudden hit by an unknown actor that he has been working for years in road companies in some out of the way place, storing up a "bit of business" here, an idea of "make up" there, a trick of elocution in another part until he has a fund of experience from which to draw when a metropolitan opportunity offers.

Mind you, I am not underrating genius. Some great general said that "Providence was usually on the side of the best equipped army." I find that genius usually perches on the banner of the man who works hardest and most intelligently, and who gets up earlier and goes to bed a little later than anybody else. This was the case with Maude Adams, who "suddenly" made a hit in New York after having been on the stage with western companies since early childhood.

Ada Lewis opening into fame in a single night, after having played in Prince of Pears.

Julia Arthur made a sudden sensation one day in New York at a matinee after having toured the world with Handmann, playing every conceivable kind of a part.

There are many other cases, but in almost every instance the "sudden hit" in New York is somebody who has been playing for years somewhere else.

In fact, but for the numerous clean stock companies which have sprung up recently we might despair of actors for the coming decade. As it is now, their tuition, though rather hard on the audiences of the present, bids fair promise for the audience of the future, which will perhaps estimate its amusement at something over 10 cents in value.

In answer to the question how to attack a part I can only say:

I don't know what plan of study other actors have, but the keystone of any success I have had is work, and again—work!

I cannot study from a "part." I must know the whole play, the relation of the characters, not only in their bearing upon my part, but in their attitude to each other.

I then try to saturate myself with the form of expression of the man and to surround myself in imagination with his conditions and environment.

Then he begins to take a form before my eyes. I can see how he walks, how he dresses, how he sits down and gets up, and all of these physical manifestations are governed by the nature and feeling of the man. He is always before me, an "addition," a real character whom I am attempting to imitate.

Very often at rehearsal an actor says of his own conduct of a scene, "Not a bit like it."

Not a bit like what? What does the actor mean when he says this?

He means that he has created out of the intention of the author a phantom which he is always pursuing and which is constantly eluding him, and when he finds for the moment that his utmost art cannot reproduce this image that is before him he says, "Not a bit like it." And that is the exception to the rule in which actors refer when they are speaking of their own work. Of course when they are criticising some other actor for that, as Mr. Kipling would say, is "another story."

In my mind the only excuse for being on the stage is to prove it with a love which cannot be denied.

In many respects it is heartbreaking, for unfortunately in this, as in other arts, success is not always in the ratio deserved, and we have not the revenge of more enduring arts, judgment of posterity. Perhaps the actor's fame is a fitting, least substantial when it looks most brilliant.

But there is only one consolation for which any earnest worker may be sure. Remember the lines of Longfellow in the "Building of the Ship."

The only heart was in his work,
And he toil'd not alone to every art

Wilton Lackaye

A woman whose dress was accidentally torn on a seat at Proctor's Pleasure Palace in New York city, recently sued the management for damages and got judgment for $1.

MONUMENT FOR ABBEY.

Plan Proposed by Mme. Melba.

HER DEBT OF GRATITUDE.

Under Abbey's Management the Well Known Opera Star Made Her First American Tour.

It is said that Mme. Melba intends to solicit a subscription for the purpose of erecting a monument to the memory of Henry E. Abbey. Under his supervision the prima donna appeared in the United States, and in grateful recognition of the fact and believing his services for the advancement of musical and dramatic art should be honored she intends to devote both her influence and time to the successful accomplishment of this object.

Henry E. Abbey, the operatic impresario, was born in Akron, O., in 1846 and died suddenly, while burdened with domestic and financial troubles, on Oct. 27, 1896. In early life he started as a successor to his father—whose reputation was said to be "18 carat, refined gold"—in the jewelry business and for amusement played the cornet in the Akron City band, of which he was the "star" member. A photograph in existence shows him in the midst of his brother musicians with his favorite instrument. He was also the ticket seller at the opera house, employed by the manager, Wile Holdman.

Lotta frequently visited the town, playing a week's engagement at a time, under her mother's management. Mrs. Crabtree became interested in Mr. Abbey on account of his evident business energy and commercial instinct and secured his services as manager of her daughter's company. As such he was very successful, and his career in life was determined.

After that he had Lawrence Barrett and, among other famous artists, Sarah Bernhardt—when he made his first great "hit" as a manager—Patti, Christine Nilsson, Henry Irving during his first tour, Mrs. Langtry, Edwin Booth, Mary Anderson, Mme. Rejane, Coquelin, Monnet-Sully, Jane Hading and Anton Rubinstein. A lucky venture gave him control of little Josef Hofmann, the wonderful child pianist. His energies, however, were not alone confined to great actors. Bellini knew him for a fellow time as manager of the Academy of Music, New York city accepted him at the Old Park theater, near Twenty-second street, on Broadway, which was buried down the night Mme. Langtry was to make her American debut. For a brief term he had Booth's theater, and the Grand Opera House was his until T. Henry French supplanted him. Then he became manager of Wallack's theater, in 1881. His interest in the Park theater, Boston, lasted many years.

In 1883 the Metropolitan Opera House was opened to the public under his administration with the most brilliant operatic company ever assembled in America, but the experiment cost him no less $250,000. Less than nine years later he had settled every dollar of his indebtedness with interest, the last installment of this large obligation being paid in December, 1891. At that time he was a member of the Abbey-Schoeffel firm—Mr. Grau being admitted later—of Lotta's to the amusement loving public.

It cost him on one occasion $1,000 to raise the curtain at an initial performance of opera, and, with his partner, he had $250,000 in the succeeding four months, but he was the calmest man in the theatrical profession in the hour of adversity. Two Patti concerts, which he immediately gave, netted him a profit of $18,000. Then he imported the famous Jean Lorraine Lassalle, at a salary of $500 nightly and staged "L'Africaine." Lassalle was a great singer, a great actor and a great mascot. The ailing members of the company suddenly regained excellent health, enthusiastic audiences "packed" the house, and the season finished in an artistic and financial triumph.

In 1891 his salary list was a formidable one. Miss Van Zandt received $1,000 a performance, Miss Eames $800, Mme. Albani $800 and five other singers from $400 to $500. There was a chorus of 80, averaging $20 a week, or $1,600, and an orchestra at an expense of $2,000 a week—that is, the opera was presented for almost $3,000 a performance. The German production the season before had necessitated the expenditure of only $2,000.

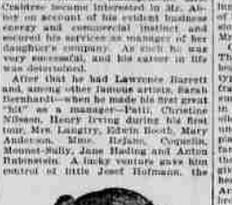
But he had introduced to the American public a long list of musical celebrities—German, Italian and French—and also renowned actors and actresses from several European countries. In 1896 came his second and great financial embarrassment, the suit of his wife for divorce, his illness and untimely death.

Mrs. Henry E. Abbey was a Miss Florence Gerard. She was favorably known as an actress in England and this country for a long time previous to her marriage and is still well remembered as the original Mrs. Mortimer Mungbelord in John Stetson's production of "Confusion" at the Fifth Avenue theater. She was a tall, striking looking woman, noted for the magnificence of her toilets. She retired from professional life immediately on becoming Mrs. Abbey.

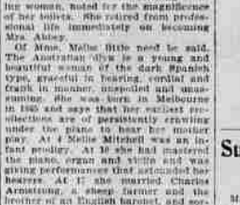
Of Mme. Melba little need be said. The Australian diva is a young and beautiful woman of the dark Spanish type, graceful in bearing, cordial and frank in manner, unspoiled and unassuming. She was born in Melbourne in 1865 and says that her earliest recollections are of persistently crawling under the piano to hear her mother play. At 4 Nellie Mitchell was an infant prodigy. At 10 she had mastered the piano, organ and violin and was giving performances that astounded her hearers. At 17 she married Charles Armstrong, a sheep farmer and the brother of an English baronet, and sorrow. She determined to go on the stage, studied with Mme. Marchesi, made her debut as La Scala, in Milan, in 1889 and came to this country in November, 1892.

At the time of his death there was apparently but little remembrance of Mr. Abbey's generosity and enterprise by the famous operatic artists, but possibly now, inspired by Melba's example, they will be aroused to a grateful and enthusiastic sense of what the late impresario did for them, their profession and their fortunes. But ingratitude is the most common of vices.

ALBERT P. SOUTHWICK.



HENRY E. ABBEY.



MME. MELBA.

Sunday Theatricals in New York.

New York is discussing the subject of opening the theaters on Sunday nights, as an amendment is to be introduced to the charter of the new city authorizing the innovation. The majority of managers and actors generally are reported to be opposed to it. One manager who represents it does not profess to theorize on the subject, but takes the strictly business ground that some people would rather go to the theater on Sunday than to church and that theaters ought to be open for them. Miss Laura Dart and Miss Bijou Fernandez, with others, are preparing a petition to the legislature to reject the amendment. Miss Irwin says an actor ought to have a rest once a week, and that she would never act on Sunday, no matter how the law arranges things.

Success of Foreign Stars.

Mr. J. W. Morrissey, than whom few people are better posted on affairs of the stage, is authority for some interesting data concerning the "takings" of foreigners in America. "Take, for instance, the Swedish singer Christine Nilsson," says Mr. Morrissey. "On her first season in this country she received $1,000 a night and a percentage of how the receipts surpassed a certain amount, which often made her earn as high as $2,000 in an evening. This was under the direction of Maurice Strakosch. Nilsson invested largely in real estate, both in New York and Chicago, principally in the latter city, where the amount invested exceeded $100,000.

"In strong contrast to Miss Nilsson might be cited Adelina Patti. Patti was the idol of the operatic stage, and $5,000 a night was what she received, in some cases receiving $6,000 a night. She never left a cent in this country outside of what it cost her to live while here and other necessary expenses.

"Mme. Modjeska followed the example of Nilsson. A considerable portion of her earnings were invested in this country, and she owns real estate in Chicago, Omaha and other cities.

"Pauline Lucca received $1,000 a night while in this country and made a lot of money, but she didn't leave any of it here. She paid her hotel bills and the like and packed the rest away and carried it home to the fatherland.

"Charles Wyndham, the famous English comedian, made a success of it in the United States and showed his good sense by investing some of the money earned before he returned home. Western real estate and western ranch lands he considered good property, and much of his money went in that direction.

"Henry Irving has taken hundreds of thousands of dollars away from this country and as far as known has never invested a cent here. He usually clears up on each American tour something like $200,000, packs it away in his trunk, turns up his nose as he boards the returning steamer and smiles at the ease with which it all comes to him.

"Sarah Bernhardt takes away from us every time she comes here $100,000—often more—never investing even in a cord of American manufacture.

"Mrs. Langtry deserves praise for her patronage. She owns real estate in New York, Chicago and Long Branch. She has big accounts at all the first class dry goods stores, milliners' and dressmakers' establishments in almost every city she visits and spends her American made money in this country to a very great extent.

"Then there is Paderewski, of whom it is said on the best of authority that he received from the late William Steinway, who directly managed his tours, nearly $500,000 for the two seasons he played in this country. On his last trip he did not draw one cent from Steinway until about to take his departure for Europe, when he was handed by his manager drafts for $250,000. He spent practically nothing in this country. He even brought his cigarettes over here with him, and all his wearing apparel was purchased in Europe. Of course he had to eat, and as he couldn't have his meals sent over he bought them here.

"Teresa Carreno, who came over from Berlin last season, played at about 75 concerts and earned something over $50,000, all of which she is now spending in Berlin.

"Marsick and D'Albert, the famous violinist and pianist, received $750 a night between them while here, participating altogether in about 25 concerts. They also took their money with them.

"Melba and Calve, both of whom received $1,000 a night and sometimes more, never spent a cent more than they had to in this country. The gowns worn by these charming divas all came from across the sea, and they did not condescend to open an account with any of our American dry goods firms."

A Close Shave.

Manager McCallum of Blaney's "A Boy Wanted" company had a unique experience in Cincinnati. All the arrangements were complete for the play, and it was only a few hours before the house was to open, when two of the principal members of the company met with a serious accident and were unable to perform. The manager was about to close the house for the night, when he thought of the "A Boy Wanted" company No. 2, then on its way to Anderson, Ind. He communicated with the second company by telephone, and the two actors in the second company who play the parts which were made vacant were hustled to the depot and, taking a special train, made the run to Cincinnati in three hours, arriving just in time to fill the places of the injured actors.

A Memorable Chorus.

One of the finest choruses ever heard was that selected from all England for the production of Gounod's "Mors et Vita" at the Birmingham festival of 1885. Every singer was thoroughly competent, and, though it numbered only 450, these possessed all the power necessary for the Town hall, where the performance took place. Richter led, Albani, Patey, Lloyd and Santley were the soloists. It was a memorable occasion, only surpassed by a second performance of the work at a later date in the same festival.

STORIES OF THE STAGE.

Anecdotes That Are Really New.

LIFE AMONG THE MUMMERS.

Tales Worth Telling of Actors and Actresses—Yarns From Behind the Scenes and From the Rialto.

In his memoirs Joseph Jefferson tells of how he narrowly escaped the wrath of a country humpkin while barnstorming through the south early in his career. He was then playing heavies and confesses that he was as ranting a melodramatic villain as ever trod the boards of a country schoolhouse. Of course he conducted what would have been a happy marriage and was gloating over the fact in a vigorous aside when the countryman in the audience arose and declared if he "did not let that girl marry her feller he would settle with him after the show was away."

That was many years ago, of course, and in the wilds of the south, but in Philadelphia recently a similar event occurred. In the presentation of "The Man-o'-war's Man" the villain is a Spanish naval officer, Captain Hernando. The part is played by Henry Testa, who has been with Mr. Stek for several years. He takes a despicable part in the play, and the Cuban sympathizers in the gallery hissed him off the stage time and again.

When his scheming were finally thwarted and the lovers happily reunited the curtain fell. Not so the wrath of the gallery boys. They gathered about the stage entrance and awaited the coming of Mr. Testa, anxious to revenge the injuries of the man-o'-war's man. It was only by summoning a squad of police that Mr. Testa finally was enabled to reach his hotel.

Theatrical folk are telling a story of Paul Potter, the witty, cynical, but always fascinating playwright. It happened during the rehearsals of Mr. Potter's new play, "The Conqueror," according which the final curtain has been raised. One of the actors had just finished an especially difficult speech which was not entirely to his taste.

"Mr. Potter," he said to the author in the author's box, "do you really think the scene will go?"

"I don't see why it shouldn't," was Mr. Potter's imperturbable answer "it always has gone."

Sir Henry Irving, like most players, has never had any great confidence in the ability of his son Lawrence either as a player or a playwright. Apropos of this, a story is told of the first production of "Godefroi and Yolande," a play written by Lawrence Irving and first produced in Chicago.

Sir Henry did not approve of the play and for some time absolutely refused to allow his company to present it. Finally Miss Terry, who has always been very fond of Lawrence, determined that it should have a chance and, calling the stage manager to her assistance, got all things ready for its production without the knowledge of her nearly a month before Sir Henry was positively just what was going on. At last the day for the dress rehearsal arrived and Sir Henry, growing a bit uneasy, said:

"See here, Ellen! I think I shall come around today and have a look at your work and see what the promise is."

"You will do nothing of the kind," replied Miss Terry.

"But," said Sir Henry, "the play, you know, is to be produced and I am not responsible for the entire affair and I certainly must be permitted to have at least one glance at it before the curtain goes up on it."

"It is too late now," answered Miss Terry. "You refused to give Lawrence a proper hearing. I volunteered to do this thing myself and I know what I do and know his talent. We have progressed thus far quite satisfactorily without your aid, and we shall from as we begin."

"But," remonstrated Sir Henry, "the public"—

"Ah, the public," replied Miss Terry, "yes, that is your business. I ask so saying she brushed out of the room with a laugh, and Sir Henry was obliged to content himself, for the pleasant woman was as good as her word, and the distinguished gentleman was never permitted to see the play until it was placed before the public and the critics and the public invited in together.

During the time George H. Broadhurst was traveling through the south with Donald Kerr, giving the finishing touches to "The Wrong Mr. Wright," he happened to attend a camp meeting in Texas where the revivalist Sam Jones was conducting the services. The grounds were near Tyler, Tex., where there are a good many saloons. In his first sermon Sam Jones announced that he would be on the ground every morning at 5 o'clock and unless he had good audiences at every session he would pack his trunk and go home.

For one morning session the horn sound regularly at 5 o'clock and at each occasion nearly every seat in the big tent was filled. The fifth or sixth morning Jones said: "I suppose that I should make some sort of an explanation as to why I have called you. If I got you until 8 or 10 o'clock I thought you would be so full of Texas tea and whisky that it would take somebody bigger's Sam Jones to get next to you. I have tackled you at 5 when stomachs were weak, and as you go on you have joined the church I think my system has worked pretty well."

The remark impressed the author as so unique that he decided to cover some idea of it in the play he was then writing, and that is the way in which the play "What Happened to Jones" received its name, for its original title was intended to be "The Dear Bishop."

Eleonora Duse is to return to Paris this spring to appear in D'Annunzio's "La Gioconda," which was written for her.

THE PLAY AND THE PLAYERS.

Nathaniel Goodrich has produced the play written by Clyde Fitch on the life of Nathan Hale, and it has excedently met popular approval in spite of the contrary reports of its shortcomings. It is described as "vaudeville drama" and as the same time "lacking in vitality." It closes, as "The Devil's Disciple" does, with a gallows in view. Mr. Goodrich's personality is said to be admirable for the role of the young and ardent lover depicted in the play.

Paul Potter has bought Guy de Maupassant's "Mlle. Fifi," which he utilized as the first act of "The Conquerors." He will at least own that portion of the piece in one sense of the word. It is said that he will also secure the English rights to Berkoh's "La Horde," which is the original work from which he drew the rest of his drama, "The Conquerors," will be produced in London this spring.

Geraldine Ulmar, who was to have come to this country, is still seriously ill from an accident last September. She has recently become reconciled to Tom Carroll, the musical composer, from whom she was divorced several years ago. Miss Ulmar grew stout and then by dieting recovered her girlish figure. That recaptured her husband, and they reconciled.

Mrs. Patrick Campbell is soon to act with Forbes Robertson in Maeterlinck's "Pelleas and Mellisande."

Joseph Jefferson will continue next season in "The Rivals," and Rose Coghlan may act Mrs. Malaprop. Elsie Leslie, who was an ideal Little Lord Fauntleroy, will be the Lydia Languish. Miss Leslie has spent the interval in school.

Sarah Bernhardt is to direct a theater in Brussels as well as in Paris. None of her productions this winter has met with success.

Jules Lemaitre has provided a play for Rejane in which she has refused to appear, as a new Jacques drama will occupy her time during the rest of the winter. Jane Hading may be seen in the role written for Rejane.

Mme. Rohmer, who is said to have aspirations to tragedy, has had herself photographed as the Angel of Death.

Modjeska steadfastly refuses to play in "Magda" in New York because that city rejected it when she appeared in its first English production six years ago. "Measure For Measure," "Hamlet" and "Macbeth" will be her plays.

James K. Hackett will next year be the youngest of the "stars." Daniel Frohman will present him at the head of a company as Nisel in "The Tree of Knowledge" and possibly in Gerald Hibbard's "Marlborough," which Edward Rothery has also under consideration.