Dramatic and Sporting.

THE VENERABLE DEAN OF THE AMERICAN STAGE.

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When a boy is all but born in a theater, when for generations back his forbears had lived the absorbing life of the play actor and when the very playground of his childhood is in dusty

JOSEPH JEFFERSON.

nooks among those strange piles of theatrical "properties" which occupy the back of almost every stage, it is little wonder that he himself should take kindly to the buskin and the mask.

Such indeed was the childhood life of Joseph Jefferson, the uncrowned king of our world comedians, or, to use the more familiar phrase, "the venerable dean of the American stage."

For four generations back his forefathers had been actors. His great-grandfather was an eminent English player and manager. His grandfather, who was born in Plymouth in 1774, came to the new world and when but 22 years old made his appearance in New York on the stage of the old John Street theater.

In the same way the father of this man who has immortalized "Rip Van Winkle," was born in Philadelphia in 1804, and in his time also was esteemed a very excellent actor, especially in "old man" parts. In addition to his histrionic ability Joseph Jefferson, Sr., possessed a great deal of artistic talent, being a skillful scene painter. Often in the early days when business was bad the actor would while the hours as a painter of signs and thereby replenish the exhausted family coffers. This artistic ability was inherited by his son, who has found time to produce a number of paintings for above mediocrity.

The younger Jefferson—our own Jefferson of the genial heart and the mobile face—has given some charmingly ingenuous glimpses of that empty theatrical life, with its mingled vicissitudes, disasters and pleasures.

Speaking of his childhood memories, Mr. Jefferson in his autobiography whimsically says of the theater under whose shadow he passed his first years: "It was a rickety, old, frame building with a broad gable, facing on a wide avenue and situated in the city of Washington. The door from our back entry opened upon the stage, and as a toddling little chap in a short frock I was allowed full run of the place. So 'behind the scenes' was my first playhouse. And what a playhouse! It was filled with all sorts of material for the exercise of my youthful imagination!"

The great actor thus humorously recalls those early influences which decided what should be his future life work. In that rickety, old Washington theater the youthful Jefferson played his childish games among quaint properties of some of the last of Napoleon and a Roman palace, and the dismal tomb of the Capulets, and the cottage in which old Ali Baba used to lug the bags of gold he had stolen from the Forty Thieves. Here, too, he remembers meeting Fanny Kemble and Tyrone and Power, the Irish comedian, and many other great actors of the time.

"These," says Mr. Jefferson, speaking of the stage properties amid which he played, "were the kind of objects my childish eyes were wont to look upon, and in this huge and dusty treasure-house for children of a large growth, I spent my first years.

"I had seen many tableaux and sometimes got a peep at the play, having been taken on 'in arms' as a property child to grooms of happy memories. Naturally, therefore, I was stagestruck at an early age, and as I had a theater stocked with scenery and properties I could indulge my passion at a small expense, especially as my stock company were volunteers, consisting of two little boys and their sister, who used to play with me on Saturdays. * * * of course I was stage manager by the right of possession and had to console all of the plays. The plays were very simple and made to conform with what set pieces we could get at, or what properties we could secure and hide during the absence of the property man."

In such manner were spent the early days of Joseph Jefferson. Whenever a child was wanted on the stage little Joe naturally was appropriately dressed and decorated and brought forth. His first active appearance on the boards, however, was with that most illustrious knight of the burnt cork, T. D. Rice, who delighted our ex. Ex. there with his then famous Jim Crow sketches and dances. The little Joe had behind those wonderful dances and learned to imitate them. One day the comedian himself caught the child at his mimetic performance and straightway insisted on his appearance in public. The child was put in a big bag and carried on the stage by Jim Crow, where, shifting one of the comedian's jigs, he was dumped out head first before the eyes of the astonished house. Then the little chap of 4 years, covered and disguised exactly as the big comedian, danced and sang in turn with his large coadjutor. The experiment was a great success. Promptly, showers and shillings showered down on the stage, and little Joe secured some fun.

A short time afterward the little actor was taken to New York, where he appeared in a most wonderful conceit alone. This scene represented an American valley at sunsetting and showing the venerable Rip Van Winkle, in rags, in the same time exercising waving a star spangled banner above his own head.

Ireland's "Records of the New York Stage" contains the following notice of this dramatic performance, which, by the way, must have been the first scene efflorescence hatched upon the spacious young complex:

"Master Titus, whose songs and dances were much mentioned, took a benefit on the 19th, when he appeared with Master Joseph Jefferson in a celebrated combat, it being this lad's first appearance out of the juvenile supernumerary ranks. This little fellow was the grandson of the great comedian of the same name, and is the third Joseph Jefferson known to our stage. He was born at Philadelphia, Feb. 20, 1804."

In 1830, a few years after his New York "debut," little Joe, with his father and his mother, who was likewise a theatrical star, started out from Albany for a theatrical tour of the west. The family was in straitened circumstances, and in those days a journey from the east to Chicago was an heroic pleasure venture. During their adventurous trip to the west they left the site of the old fashioned English strolling players, giving performances in the different towns as they went through the country, sometimes with success and sometimes with dismal failure. At Buffalo the party embarked for Chicago, having been paid in part by specialty performances given in the cabin of the little steamer.

After storing a dubious success in the then small town of Chicago, the light hearted little band of players turned southward, giving popular performances in Dubuque, Galena, Memphis and other towns along the way. These performances were indeed the verriest "barnstormings," the plays being presented to the rather scanty audiences, houses in outhouses, in fact in any convenient building that offered and in which a stage could be put up. Sometimes the house was a loosing one and sometimes not. For a time, though, the elder Jefferson was forced to bring out his paint brushes to earn a few dollars painting signs and decorating outhouses. But before long a shadow fell on that family so lucky, hard-working family. The city of Mobile the goal, beside and affectionate actor and painter fell victim to the yellow fever, then raging in the south, and died in a few days. Little Joe's mother was confined, although bravely, toward a beautiful home in Mobile for a time to take them over a temporary entertainment, and then once more went on the road, making her way down the Mississippi and those mile-wide and flinty Rivers.

At this time the young actor had been earning a hard work and rough living that dramatic and theatrical experience which he was to turn to such good account in later years. He had already been in contact with Mr. Forrest, the elder Booth and Junius Wallack.

Fresh out from the run of the young merchant was rapid. In a few years he appeared in Philadelphia under the management of Burton and afterward established the dramatic performances of the Park museum in the Quaker City. After a season of this work he started out on his first star engagement. In New York he met and married in 1849 Miss Lockyer, an actress, and for the next decade was busily engaged in managing and acting, all the while unceasingly carrying on his dramatic studies.

At the age of 22 Joseph Jefferson had mastered the important role of Mordecai in "A New Way to Pay Old Debts" and as a young manager had produced with great success "The Son of Ireland" and "The Naiad Queen." These early days of struggle and poverty become a memory only. In 1856 he visited London and Paris. On his return he was engaged for the leading comedy parts in Laura Keene's theater in New York, making his first appearance as Dr. Pangloss in Coleman's comedy of "The Heir at Law." This was followed the next season by the remarkably successful play "Our American Cousin," on the triumph of which greeted the career of Jefferson. Laura Keene and Sothern. Mr. Jefferson's delineation of the keen and shrewd Yankee, Asa Trenchard, was an entirely original conception on the American stage and was a prompt and admirable character acting which this student of human nature was to give to the new world. "Our American Cousin" had a phenomenal run and its success established Mr. Jefferson at Laura Keene's theater. Here he played such parts as Newsom Nogg in "Nicholas Nickleby," Caleb Plummer in "The Cricket on the Hearth," Bob Acres in Sheridan's "Rivals" and Dr. Ollapod in "The Poor Gentleman." The continued careful excellence with which Mr. Jefferson did his work in these different parts not only gave him his well earned reputation, but molded the very character of his dramatic work.

In 1860 he visited California, and the following year sailed from San Francisco to Australia. At Sydney, Melbourne, Ballarat, Adelaide and Hobart Town his success was unconditional. It was not until May, 1863, that Mr. Jefferson sailed from Melbourne for England, after an Australasian tour that brought him both profit and fame.

It was while in London that he met Dion Boucicault, to whom he suggested his pet idea for some adequate dramatization of the story of Rip Van Winkle. The story, it is true, had already been dramatized several times, and Mr. Jefferson had produced a composite production by joining together portions of these different dramatizations. This production took place in Washington and was attended by but indifferent success. Years before this the actor had come upon the "Life and Letters of Washington Irving" in an old Dutch farmhouse in Pennsylvania, and the romantic tale for a Rip Van Winkle drama was the result. Boucicault took up this idea and did his work. The play was put on in London and ran 170 nights at the Adelphi, after which it visited the provinces.

Its unprecedented success in America is well known. Equally well known is Mr. Jefferson's career since that success. Today he is reported to be a millionaire, has estates in Louisiana and in New Jersey, and is the most venerable and deeply loved figure on the American stage.

ARTHUR J. STRINGER.

THE SIX DAY BICYCLE RACE.

Interest in the Contest at Fever Heat in New York. Splendid Galaxy of Riders Will Compete.

[Copyright, 1898.]

Interest in the great international six day bicycle race at Madison Square Garden, New York, has been gradually increasing during the past few weeks, until now, on the eve of the contest, it is the one topic of all who are in any way interested in cycling.

The contestants will start on their weary task at 12:05 a. m. sharp on Dec. 5, and the race will end 142 hours later. The fastest kind of a board track has been laid in the vast amphitheater, measuring ten laps to the mile. Great care has been taken in its construction, so that there may be no question afterward as to genuineness of the records because of the course being short, as was the case last year.

After last year's contest it was freely predicted by the experts that the records then made would stand for a long time, but the management hopes, if possible, to rival them in the forthcoming event. To that end the most notable long distance riders in this country have been secured, and James Kennedy, the representative of the American Cycle Racing association, who went abroad for talent, has secured a number of the best men that Europe can boast.

A more representative field of starters for an affair of this sort has never been seen. There will be about 25 contestants all told. It is the desire of the management to keep the entries within that number, as more would be unwieldy on the limited space necessitated by an indoor track and would cause frequent accidents. Among the riders will be Americans, Englishmen, Swiss, Irishmen, Germans, Swedes and Frenchmen. Several old favorites will attack, and much new and promising talent will be seen.

Notable among the starters will be Charles W. Miller, the winner of last year's contest, and Teddy Hale, the popular Irishman who scored a victory in 1896. Another crack from the Emerald Isle, with a big reputation on the other side of the water, has come over and is expected to give his countryman a great run for Irish, if not for premier, honors. His name is Pat O'Halloran. Etienne A. Stephane, the Frenchman who rode so well last winter until injured, will also start, as will Joyeux, the long distance champion of France. Frederick, the famous Swiss, who ran second to Miller when the latter won the 72 hour race in Paris last summer and who the American says is one of the greatest long distance cyclists in the world, will also try for a share of the purse. Rice, Brewer, Walls, Pierce, Louis Gimm, John Lawson, Bacon, Fred Forster, Julius and other public favorites have been training assiduously for the event, and hope to carry off some of the money.

Many dark horses have been picked for favorites, and there is the usual mystery of the winner. It is fearful, however, to make predictions on such an event as this, for so many factors enter into the result, any one of which may put a man in the front rank or place him at a very serious disadvantage. A bad spill, caused probably through no fault of his own, may cause a rider a leader to lose several laps, if it does not do sufficient damage to make him cease riding any longer. Another very important factor is the training of a rider. An experienced trainer will often pluck a man on the verge of collapse and pull him through among the leaders. The accommodations for the men while undergoing their hard task will be better this year than ever before.

The greatest trial of six day riders, of course, is the want of sleep. A man of the name of Grosse of Brooklyn, who has been a patient rider, though not a brilliant performer, in such races in years gone by and who is entered in this one, has occupied a night position during the past year and has accustomed himself to barely four hours of sleep a day. He says that he has grown fat lately and that six days with no sleep will not be hard on him, as he will be losing but 24 hours of it altogether.

There has been a good deal of opposition in many quarters to holding six day races by people who say that they are hurtful and liable to make the contestants physical wrecks, and that even if the strain does not become immediately apparent the after effects on their constitutions are bound to be baneful owing to the continued exertion, loss of sleep and the heroic methods sometimes resorted to by the trainers to induce their men to keep up with the work. In reply to these charges those in favor of such contests assert that the history of six day racing has yet to show a fatality and that no rider has ever died from the effects of one, for none of those who competed in the first of these events in the early eighties is yet dead. Hendee, Ashinger, Schock and many other old timers are still in the game, the three named having taken part in last year's contest in Madison Square Garden.

Good six day material is generally found among mature men, though many youngsters have successfully ridden in the contests. Major Taylor, the well known colored rider, finished in the 1896 race, and, far from being a physical wreck, his wonderful riding since then, and especially this season, has placed him among the first rank of racing cyclists. Despite the disadvantages under which he labored owing to his color, this really phenomenal youth was but one point behind Champion Dale when the circuit chasers made the break from the L. A. W. His victories over Jimmy Michael and others at various distances make many regard him as the virtual champion of 1898. Then there is Harry Elkes, the Saratoga lad, who holds the world's hour record on a bicycle. He went through the last race at the Garden doing over 1,000 miles in the week. Many other instances are cited by enthusiasts to show that six day races are not injurious. The veteran Schock, who has competed in more races of this character than any other rider in the world, having taken part in 26 long distance struggles, was examined the other day for life insurance and secured a 20 year policy.

Several of the riders have said that they will endeavor to beat the figures for the 142 hour contest set up by Miller last December. In that race the Chicago man, in six days of phenomenal riding, covered 1,383 miles 881 yards, counted measurement. During that contest he enjoyed only eight hours of sleep and was off the track a total of 3 hours and 41 minutes. He finished wonderfully fresh and showed practically no sense of his terrible ordeal at the end. Soon after the race was over he gave a two mile exhibition, paced by a tandem, covering the distance in 3:37, which was very creditable after such a task as he had just performed.

Those who have never witnessed a six day bicycle race can hardly imagine the scene presented. The constant rate circle the oval in their never ending routine, a rider now and then possibly falling asleep on his wheel and going right on in that condition only to suddenly fall off or run into the picket fence at the side of the track. Now and then the sleeping rider is awakened by his watchful trainer, who dashes a quantity of ice cold water in his face, only to be abused by the weary pedaler for rousing him. Sometimes, when a man falls off his wheel, either through drowsiness or a collision, he lies contentedly where he is and it is only with threats and force that he can be made to continue his task.

The riders often get queer notions into their heads. Sometimes they imagine that their handlers have conspired to make them lose, or they complain that the scorers are in league against them and are not chalking up the laps as rapidly as they ought to do. Again the monotony of the riding will be relieved by one of the riders suddenly starting out at a merry clip in the endeavor to outdo the lead of some rival. Inspired by his effort, the whole field then and the cheers of the spectators others will sprint along beside him, and for some time they will speed off miles as though they were trying for the hour record instead of jogging away in a six day affair.

Now and again the attendants will give hot drinks or fruit or water to their men, who eat it flying along and round on their wheels. At one end of the Garden a number of small tents are set up in which are cooking stoves and all sorts of utensils, extra tires, bicycles and tools for mending and fitting them, besides everything else that can possibly be needed. Here the riders come during the short absences from the track to take snatches of rest or be massaged or have their faces washed off after falls.

The last night is always one of great excitement, and the vast building, by thousands of electric lights, hazy with the smoke from many cigars, packed to the eaves with a shouting and waving crowd of 3,000 to 10,000 people, forms a strange and stirring spectacle. The riders, excited by the cries of the throng and the encouraging shouts of their personal friends and adherents and gladdened by the thought that the grueling is nearly over, make all sorts of sprints and indulge in courses with the onlookers and their fellows on the track. A band enlivens the scene with music whenever the din is hushed sufficiently for a note to be heard, and short races are held between even short distance riders for special prizes.

Some good race have been arranged to take place every afternoon and evening during the coming contest, in which well known amateur and professional riders will take part. More than $500 will be offered in prizes during the week.

A six day contest is necessarily a terribly hard undertaking, but the prizes won by the leaders are sufficient to induce them to try for them. Miller last year in winning the race earned, after deducting his expenses, a little more than $1 for each mile he traveled, not taking into account an arrangement he made with the management on the last night for a share of the gate money. He won the first prize, $1,500, and an additional $250 for breaking the record. From manufacturers of tires, wheels, saddles and handle bars he received bonuses amounting to $1,000 and he appeared at a prominent vaudeville theater for some days, getting $100 for so doing. His total gains thus amounted to $2,850, of which about $90 went in training and racing expenses, a pretty good showing for one week out of such hard labor.

CHARLES E. EDWARDS.

Strength Competition.

An agreement has been reached by the directors of all the college gymnasiums of the east relative to a competition in strength tests the coming winter. All the candidates must be registered in the American Athletic union. Uniform apparatus has been adopted and every college where the contests will be held. The tests agreed upon are strength of back, legs, right forearm, left forearm, lungs, upper arm (triceps) and chest, and upper arm (biceps) and chest. All tests must be made consecutively in the order mentioned and be finished within 15 minutes. By May 1, 1899, each institution will publish the records of the 10 strongest men contested this year, in the order of the superiority.

From these men the best six will again compete, and the student who makes the best record in this test will represent his institution against those of other colleges. In this contest the individual having the highest record will be deemed "intercollegiate champion." The institution having the 10 strongest men, as decided by the 10 best total scores, will receive the trophy for the next year. Systematic training for these tests has been begun in a number of colleges. At Yale they began some weeks ago.

PROMINENT SIX DAY PLODDERS.

TOPICS OF THE STAGE.

Mrs. Fiske has in store a big production of the dramatization of Thackeray's "Vanity Fair" now being prepared for her by Langdon Mitchell, who, by the way, is the son of Dr. S. Weir Mitchell of Philadelphia.

William Faversham is quoted as saying: "Mr. Frohman is going to star Miss Adams and me in 'Romeo and Juliet' next spring. We are to have the most elaborate production this play has ever had in this country."

The next comedy production by Charles H. Hoyt will probably be "A Day in the Moonlight," a piece written for the late Mrs. Hoyt.

There is a new French opera called "Madame." The name of interest about it is that its story is Marcel Richardson's "Clarisse, or, The History of a Young Lady."

"Charley's Aunt" has been translated for the benefit of the Athenian public, which is getting a little tired of "Pinafore" and "Iolanthe" in the original Greek.

The new opera house at St. Petersburg will cost $1,000,000. It will have a stolen cage and a concealed orchestra. An idea of the rise of the stage may be gathered from the fact that the proscenium arch will be 140 feet high.

Willie in Kansas City, the manager of "The Devil Train" Bakersfield, made an offer to Jesse James, Jr., son of the famous outlaw, of $100 a week to take a prominent part. He declined on the ground that he did not care for theatrical life.

There are Chinese, Hebrew and German clubrooms in New York.

Lottie Gibson will star next season in "A Sensational Girl" and John Kernell is a revival of "McFadden's Elopement."

New York lately entertained some sensations in the money melodramas way, such as "Buried Alive" and "Mustang Kate."

Victorien Sardou's play, "Uncle Sam," which necessitated great alarm in the government circles in Paris at the time M. Thiers was president, has recently been played again in Brussels. American manners are mercilessly lampooned in the piece.

Property men have their trials and tribulations, but the one that looks after that end of the performance of the new English comedy, "His Dying Hall," thinks his troubles are the most, as he has to secure three live babies in each town for use on the stage.

Creston Clarke will shortly produce a new comedy, entitled "The Ragged Cavalier," the scenes of which are laid in a picturesque period of French history.

Lillian Russell has been re-engaged to appear in comic opera at Berlin in the spring.

Minnie Seligman may star next season in the Garden plays that belong to the estate of Miss Dacosta.

Margaret Fuller, a niece of the chief Justice of the United States, is playing Princess Flavia in "The Prisoner of Zenda."