









## PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION.

This book, as I explained in the preface to its first edition, published in 1876, is designed to serve and entertain those interested in the transactions of the Theatre. I have not pretended to set forth anew a formal and complete History of the Stage; it has rather been my object to traverse by-paths connected with the subject—to collect and record certain details and curiosities of histrionic life and character, past and present, which have escaped or seemed unworthy the notice of more ambitious and absolute chroniclers. At most I would have these pages considered as but portions of the story of the British Theatre whispered from the side-wings.

Necessarily, the work is derived from many sources, owes much to previous labours, is the result of considerable searching here and there, collation, and selection. I have endeavoured to make acknowledgment, as opportunity occurred, of the authorities I stand indebted to, for this fact or that story. I desire, however, to make express mention of the frequent aid I have received from Mr. J. Payne Collier's admirable "History of English Dramatic Poetry" (1831), containing Annals of the Stage to the Restoration. Mr. Collier, having enjoyed access to many public and private collections of the greatest value, has much enriched the store of information concerning our Dramatic Literature amassed by Malone, Stevens, Reed, and Chalmers. Referring to numberless published and unpublished papers, to sources both familiar and rare, Mr. Collier has been enabled, moreover, to increase in an important degree our knowledge of the Elizabethan Theatre, its manners and customs, ways and means. I feel that I owe to his archæological studies many apt quotations and illustrative passages I could scarcely have supplied from my own unassisted resources.

Some additions to the text I have deemed expedient. The few errors—they were very few and unimportant—discovered in the first edition I have corrected in the present publication; certain redundancies I have suppressed; here and there I have ventured upon condensation, and generally I have endeavoured to bring my state-

ments into harmony with the condition of the stage at the present moment. Substantially, however, the "Book of the Play" remains what it was at the date of its original issue, when it was received by the reading public with a kindness and cordiality I am not likely to forget.

DUTTON COOK.

69, GLOUCESTER CRESCENT,  
REGENT'S PARK, N.W.

## CONTENTS.

Chapter I.

Playgoers

Chapter II.

The Master Of The Revels

Chapter III.

The Licenser Of Playhouses

Chapter IV.

The Examiner Of Plays

Chapter V.

A Bill Of The Play

Chapter VI.

Strolling Players

Chapter VII.

"Pay Here"

Chapter VIII.

In The Pit

Chapter IX.

The Footmen's Gallery

Chapter X.

Foot-Lights

Chapter XI.

"Come, The Recorders!"

Chapter XII.

Prologues

Chapter XIII.

The Art Of "Making-Up"

Chapter XIV.

Paint And Canvas

Chapter XV.

The Tiring-room

Chapter XVI.

"Her First Appearance"

Chapter XVII.

Stage Whispers

Chapter XVIII.

Stage Ghosts

Chapter XIX.

The Book Of The Play

Chapter XX.

"Half-Price At Nine O'clock"

Chapter XXI.

The Drama Under Difficulties

Chapter XXII.

Stage Banquets

Chapter XXIII.

Stage Wigs

Chapter XXIV.

"Alarums And Excursions"

Chapter XXV.

Stage Storms

Chapter XXVI.

"Doubles"

Chapter XXVII.

Benefits

Chapter XXVIII.

Thunders Of Applause

Chapter XXIX.

Real Horses

Chapter XXX.

The "Super"

Chapter XXXI.

"Gag"

Chapter XXXII.

Ballets And Ballet-Dancers

Chapter XXXIII.

Correct Costumes

Chapter XXXIV.

Harlequin And Co.

Chapter XXXV.

"Goose"

Chapter XXXVI.

Epilogues





# A BOOK OF THE PLAY.

## CHAPTER I.

### PLAYGOERS.

The man who, having witnessed and enjoyed the earliest performance of Thespis and his company, followed the travelling theatre of that primeval actor and manager, and attended a second and a third histrionic exhibition, has good claim to be accounted the first playgoer. For recurrence is involved in playgoing, until something of a habit is constituted. And usually, we may note, the playgoer is youthful. An old playgoer is almost a contradiction in terms. He is merely a young playgoer who has grown old. He talks of the plays and players of his youth, but he does not, in truth, visit the theatre much in his age; and invariably he condemns the present, and applauds the past. Things have much degenerated and decayed, he finds; himself among them, but of that fact he is not fully conscious. There are no such actors now as once there were, nor such actresses. The drama has declined into a state almost past praying for. This is, of course, a very old story. "Palmy days" have always been yesterdays. Our imaginary friend, mentioned above, who was present at the earliest of stage exhibitions, probably deemed the second and third to be less excellent than the first; at any rate, he assuredly informed his friends and neighbours, who had been absent from that performance, that they had missed very much indeed, and had by no means seen Thespis at his best. Even nowadays, middle-aged playgoers, old enough to remember the late Mr. Macready, are trumped, as it were, by older playgoers, boastful of their memories of Kemble and the elder Kean. And these players, in their day and in their turn, underwent disparagement at the hands of veterans who had seen Garrick. Pope, much as he admired Garrick, yet held fast to his old faith in Betterton. From a boy he had been acquainted with Betterton. He maintained Betterton to be the best actor he had ever seen. "But I ought to tell you, at the same time," he candidly admitted, "that in Betterton's time the older sort of people talked of

Hart's being his superior, just as we do of Betterton's being superior to those now." So in the old-world tract, called "Historia Histrionica"—a dialogue upon the condition of the early stage, first published in 1699—Trueman, the veteran Cavalier playgoer, in reply to Lovewit, who had decided that the actors of his time were far inferior to Hart, Mohun, Burt, Lacy, Clun, and Shatterel, ventures to observe: "If my fancy and memory are not partial (for men of age are apt to be over-indulgent to the thoughts of their youthful days), I dare assure you that the actors I have seen before the war—Lowin, Taylor, Pollard, and some others—were almost as far beyond Hart and his company as those were beyond these now in being." In truth, age brings with it to the playhouse recollections, regrets, and palled appetite; middle life is too much prone to criticism, too little inclined to enthusiasm, for the securing of unmixed satisfaction; but youth is endowed with the faculty of admiring exceedingly, with hopefulness, and a keen sense of enjoyment, and, above all, with very complete power of self-deception. It is the youthful playgoers who are ever the best friends of the players.

As a rule, a boy will do anything, or almost anything, to go to a theatre. His delight in the drama is extreme—it possesses and absorbs him completely. Mr. Pepys has left on record Tom Killigrew's "way of getting to see plays when he was a boy." "He would go to the 'Red Bull' (at the upper end of St. John Street, Clerkenwell), and when the man cried to the boys—'Who will go and be a devil, and he shall see the play for nothing?' then would he go in and be a devil upon the stage, and so get to see plays." In one of his most delightful papers, Charles Lamb has described his first visit to a theatre. He "was not past six years old, and the play was 'Artaxerxes!' I had dabbled a little in the 'Universal History'—the ancient part of it—and here was the Court of Persia. It was being admitted to a sight of the past. I took no proper interest in the action going on, for I understood not its import, but I heard the word Darius, and I was in the midst of 'Daniel.' All feeling was absorbed in vision. Gorgeous vests, gardens, palaces, princesses, passed before me. I knew not players. I was in Persepolis for the time, and the burning idol of their devotion almost converted me into a worshipper. I was awe-struck, and believed those significations to be something more than elemental fires. It was all enchantment and a dream. No such pleas-

ure has since visited me but in dreams." Returning to the theatre after an interval of some years, he vainly looked for the same feelings to recur with the same occasion. He was disappointed. "At the first period I knew nothing, understood nothing, discriminated nothing, I felt all, loved all, wondered all—'was nourished I could not tell how.' I had left the temple a devotee, and was returned a rationalist. The same things were there materially; but the emblem, the reference was gone! The green curtain was no longer a veil drawn between two worlds, the unfolding of which was to bring back past ages, to present a 'royal ghost'—but a certain quantity of green baize, which was to separate the audience for a given time from certain of their fellow-men who were to come forward and pretend those parts. The lights—the orchestra lights—came up a clumsy machinery. The first ring, and the second ring, was now but a trick of the prompter's bell—which had been, like the note of the cuckoo, a phantom of a voice; no hand seen or guessed at which ministered to its warning. The actors were men and women painted. I thought the fault was in them; but it was in myself, and the alteration which those many centuries—of six short twelve-months—had wrought in me." Presently, however, Lamb recovered tone, so to speak, as a playgoer. Comparison and retrospection soon yielded to the present attraction of the scene, and the theatre became to him, "upon a new stock, the most delightful of recreations."

Audiences have always been miscellaneous. Among them not only youth and age, but rich and poor, wise and ignorant, good and bad, virtuous and vicious, have alike found representation. The gallery and the groundlings have been catered for not less than the spectators of the boxes and private rooms; yet, upon the whole, the stage, from its earliest period, has always provided entertainment of a reputable and wholesome kind. Even in its least commendable condition—and this, so far as England is concerned, we may judge to have been during the reign of King Charles II.—it yet possessed redeeming elements. It was never wholly bad, though it might now and then come very near to seeming so. And what it was, the audience had made it. It reflected their sentiments and opinions; it accorded with their moods and humours; it was their creature; its performers were their most faithful and zealous servants.

Playgoers, it appears, were not wont to ride to the theatre in coaches until late in the reign of James I. Taylor, the water-poet, in his invective against coaches, 1623, dedicated to all grieved "with the world running on wheels," writes: "Within our memories our nobility and gentry could ride well mounted, and sometimes walk on foot, gallantly attended with fourscore brave fellows in blue coats, which was a glory to our nation, far greater than forty of these leathern tumbrels! Then, the name of coach was heathen Greek. Who ever saw, but upon extraordinary occasions, Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Francis Drake ride in a coach? They made small use of coaches; there were but few in those times; and they were deadly foes to sloth and effeminacy. It is in the memory of many when, in the whole kingdom, there was not one! It is a doubtful question whether the devil brought tobacco into England in a coach, for both appeared at the same time." According to Stow, coaches were introduced here 1564, by Guilliam Boonen, who afterwards became coachman to the queen. The first he ever made was for the Earl of Rutland; but the demand rapidly increased, until there ensued a great trade in coach-making, insomuch that a bill was brought into Parliament, in 1601, to restrain the excessive use of such vehicles. Between the coachmen and the watermen there was no very cordial understanding, as the above quotation from Taylor sufficiently demonstrates. In 1613 the Thames watermen petitioned the king, that the players should not be permitted to have a theatre in London, or Middlesex, within four miles of the Thames, in order that the inhabitants might be induced, as formerly, to make use of boats in their visits to the playhouses in Southwark. Not long afterwards sedans came into fashion, still further to the prejudice of the watermen. In the Induction to Ben Jonson's "Cynthia's Revels," performed in 1600, mention is made of "coaches, hobby-horses, and foot-cloth nags," as in ordinary use. In 1631 the churchwardens and constables, on behalf of the inhabitants of Blackfriars, in a petition to Laud, then Bishop of London, prayed for the removal of the playhouse from their parish, on the score of the many inconveniences they endured as shopkeepers, "being hindered by the great recourse to the playes, especially of coaches, from selling their commodities, and having their wares many times broken and beaten off their stalls." Further, they alleged that, owing to the great "recourse of coaches," and the narrowness of the streets, the inhabitants could

not, in an afternoon, "take in any provision of beere, coales, wood, or hay;" the passage through Ludgate was many times stopped up, people "in their ordinary going" much endangered, quarrels and bloodshed occasioned, and disorderly people, towards night, gathered together under pretence of waiting for those at the plays. Christenings and burials were many times disturbed; persons of honour and quality dwelling in the parish were restrained, by the number of coaches, from going out or coming home in seasonable time, to "the prejudice of their occasions;" and it was suggested that, "if there should happen any misfortune of fire," it was not likely that any order could possibly be taken, since, owing to the number of the coaches, no speedy passage could be made for quenching the fire, to the endangering both of the parish and of the city. It does not appear that any action on the part of Laud or the Privy Council followed this curious petition.

It seems clear that the Elizabethan audiences were rather an unruly congregation. There was much cracking of nuts and consuming of pippins in the old playhouses; ale and wine were on sale, and tobacco was freely smoked by the upper class of spectators, for it was hardly yet common to all conditions. Previous to the performance, and during its pauses, the visitors read pamphlets or copies of plays bought at the playhouse-doors, and, as they drank and smoked, played at cards. In his "Gull's Horn Book," 1609, Dekker tells his hero, "before the play begins, fall to cards;" and, winning or losing, he is bidden to tear some of the cards and to throw them about, just before the entrance of the prologue. The ladies were treated to apples, and sometimes applied their lips to a tobacco-pipe. Prynne, in his "Histriomastix," 1633, states that, even in his time, ladies were occasionally "offered the tobacco-pipe" at plays. Then, as now, new plays attracted larger audiences than ordinary. Dekker observes, in his "News from Hell," 1606, "It was a comedy to see what a crowding, as if it had been at a new play, there was upon the Acherontic strand." How the spectators comported themselves upon these occasions, Ben Jonson, "the Mirror of Manners," as Mr. Collier well surnames him, has described in his comedy "The Case is Altered," acted at Blackfriars about 1599. "But the sport is, at a new play, to observe the sway and variety of opinion that passeth it. A man shall have such a confused mixture of judgment poured out

in the throng there, as ridiculous as laughter itself. One says he likes not the writing; another likes not the plot; another not the playing; and sometimes a fellow that comes not there past once in five years, at a Parliament time or so, will be as deep-mired in censuring as the best, and swear, by God's foot, he would never stir his foot to see a hundred such as that is!" The conduct of the gallants, among whom were included those who deemed themselves critics and wits, appears to have usually been of a very unseemly and offensive kind. They sat upon the stage, paying sixpence or a shilling for the hire of a stool, or reclined upon the rushes with which the boards were strewn. Their pages were in attendance to fill their pipes; and they were noted for the capriciousness and severity of their criticisms. "They had taken such a habit of dislike in all things," says Valentine, in "The Case is Altered," "that they will approve nothing, be it ever so conceited or elaborate; but sit dispersed, making faces and spitting, wagging their upright ears, and cry: 'Filthy, filthy!'" Ben Jonson had suffered much from the censure of his audiences. In "The Devil is an Ass," he describes the demeanour of a gallant occupying a seat upon the stage. Fitsdottrell says:

To day I go to the Blackfriars playhouse,  
Sit in the view, salute all my acquaintance;  
Rise up between the acts, let fall my cloak;  
Publish a handsome man and a rich suit —  
And that's a special end why we go thither.

Of the cutpurses, rogues, and evil characters of both sexes who frequented the old theatres, abundant mention is made by the poets and satirists of the past. In this respect there can be no question that the censure which was so liberally awarded was also richly merited. Mr. Collier quotes from Edmund Gayton, an author who avowedly "wrote trite things merely to get bread to sustain him and his wife," and who published, in 1654, "Festivous Notes on the History of the renowned Don Quixote," a curious account of the behaviour of our early audiences at certain of the public theatres. "Men," it is observed, "come not to study at a playhouse, but love such expressions and passages which with ease insinuate themselves into their