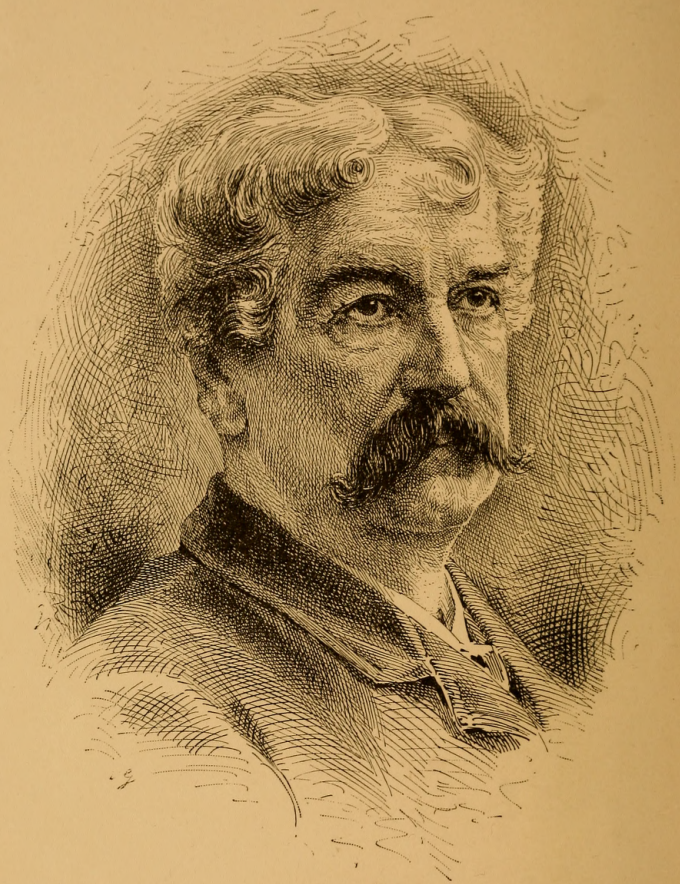


MEMORIES OF FIFTY YEARS



MEMORIES OF
FIFTY YEARS

BY
LESTER WALLACK

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
LAURENCE HUTTON

WITH PORTRAITS AND FAC-SIMILES

NEW-YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1889

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PREFACE.

The best talk, proverbially, is that which escapes up the open chimney, and cannot be repeated. The following papers are simply the result of an effort to catch and preserve the familiar talk of a veteran of the stage on its way to the fireplace of a certain front room in Thirty-fourth Street, New York: They do not pretend to be complete or consecutive; or even to be what is termed literature: merely the Social and Professional Memories of Half a Century, affectionately inscribed to the audiences the speaker had addressed in other days, and in other ways.

Too feeble in health during the last winter of his life to perform the manual labor of writing his reminiscences or even to attempt studied dictation, Mr. Wallack was able only to recount in familiar conversation with a responsive listener, and from time to time, these stories and incidents of his long

career, which were taken down by a stenographer literally and without omission. His sudden death left the work in its present fragmentary and unfinished state, and although he revised and corrected the greater part of it, certain portions he never saw after they were transcribed. The matter has been arranged as far as possible in chronological order, but in other respects it stands here as it fell from his lips.

The Biographical Sketch, the Illustrations, the Appendix, and the Index have been added by the Editor. The portraits of Mr. Wallack and of his friends and contemporaries are reproduced, with one or two exceptions, from original drawings and life photographs, nearly all of which have never before been engraved. The List of Characters Played by Mr. Lester Wallack—some three hundred in number—is believed to be complete. It has been compiled from the records of Wallack's Theatre and from many files of old playbills in different collections, and in its preparation the Editor has been assisted by Mr. Henry Edwards, Mr. John Gilbert, Mr. Joseph N. Ireland, Mr. Charles C. Moreau, Mr. William Winter, Mr. Charles E. Wallack, and Mrs.

Lester Wallack, to whom he wishes here to express his thanks.

How much of the charm of these papers has been lost in the transcription only those familiar with Mr. Wallack's powers as a story-teller can ever know. The warmth and the brightness of the narration have been preserved, but the accents, the modulations, the gesture and the expression—a very great part, if not the best part, of his talk—the open chimney has received and dispersed forever.

LAURENCE HUTTON.

“*The Players.*”

January, 1889.

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* * The portraits of actors and actresses are from rare life photographs
in the collection of the Editor.

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an American audience, but that at the Thalia Theatre, which is on the Bowery, and to which the uptown and west-side population of New York cannot be induced to go, he found he was playing to fine houses and to enthusiastic audiences, but that he might as well have been playing in Berlin. When Barnay saw me as *Young Marlow* in "She Stoops to Conquer," he came around to my room afterwards and was very enthusiastic. He pointed out to me the reasons why he liked it, and showed me clearly what it is to play before an artist; because, although his knowledge of English was limited and imperfect, he saw what not one person out of ten in an ordinary American or English audience in this period of ours would have seen. That is, he saw the *motive* of everything I did, the effect of the study of what I did. He saw the intellectual side of it. I have given this part a great deal of study, as I do everything I play, right or wrong, and all this he fully appreciated and understood with the sympathy of a close and intelligent student.

But to return to Manchester and my early experiences there. Charlotte and Susan Cushman,

with both of whom I afterwards became very intimate, played "Romeo and Juliet" at the Queen's in 1845; and were the cause of my going to London, that Mecca of all young English actors. Susan was the *Juliet*, and Charlotte said to Mr. Sloane, who was then the lessee of that theatre, "Who is your *Mercutio*?" Sloane re-



CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN.

plied: "There I think we shall be all right; I have got young Wallack." She asked: "Whom do you mean by young Wallack? I know Mr. James Wallack; I have played with him, and have the greatest admiration for him. I know he has a son; is he on the stage?"

"Yes," said Sloane. "I do not see his name here." "No, he calls himself Mr. Lester."

"Very inexperienced, I am afraid," said Miss Cushman. "Yes, very inexperienced, but he is said to have a good deal of promise about him."

At the end of the first rehearsal without books, Charlotte Cushman put her hand on my shoulder and said: "Young gentleman, there is a great

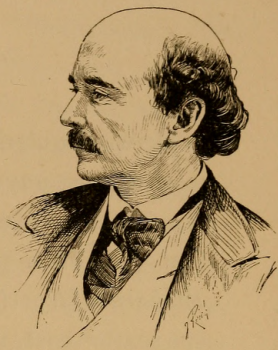
future before you, if you take care and do not let your vanity run away with you." After that we became great friends, and when she went to fulfil an engagement at the Haymarket she said to Mr. Webster: "Wallack is the coming young man of the day." As I had often seen my father in the part of *Mercutio*, I suppose, for a youngster, it was a better performance than they expected; and that was the commencement of my approach to London.

Mr. Webster thought that he would very much like to get a young man who would hit the public, because Charles Mathews had just left him to go to the Lyceum Theatre. Webster had the Adelphi and the Haymarket both, at that time. Miss Cushman's recommendation of me worked upon him, and he finally engaged me to play at the latter house. My first appearance in London was in a piece called "The Little Devil," a two-act play which Mr. Mathews and his wife had been very successful in. Mr. Farren, Mr. Webster and I consulted as to what would be best for my metropolitan début; and I said I had made some fame in this part of Mathews's at Liverpool,

but I had played in a different version from that of Mathews and Vestris. I wanted to play my own version, as I had my own little business, and all that; but Mr. Webster declared that I should play in his, which was very poor; and also that I should sing. I had never sung a note on the stage, and I told him it would in all probability kill my first appearance, by reason of the extra nervousness in singing a duet with Priscilla Horton (afterwards Mrs. German Reed), and particularly a drinking song, a thing I never dreamed of. Not only did Mr. Webster insist upon my doing this, which required a restudy (there is nothing so difficult as studying the rearrangement of a play you have already learned), but he insisted upon my singing the songs, and sent me on the stage after 11 o'clock at night, and after a five-act comedy. I was a good deal put out at this. I thought it would ruin my chances, and to a certain extent it did, the audience being tired and yawning, many leaving the theatre before I came on.

So well did somebody manage,—I won't say who,—that after a few nights of this I did not act

at all, and when I appeared again it was once more under unfair treatment, as I believe. Mr. Hudson, who was the leading comedian then, was taken ill and could not play *Dazzle* in "London Assurance," which had then been revived. Mr. Boucicault himself attended the rehearsal, and they cast me for *Dazzle*, a part I had never attempted, and which had all the prestige of Mr. Charles Mathews's great name. I had not been allowed to play for some weeks, and I was put on the stage with Mr. Farren, Mr. Buckstone and all these people around me who knew every turn and twist of the business of the comedy; and I naturally appeared under the greatest possible disadvantages. I think that is about all I did do.



DION BOUCICAULT.

Memories of fifty years, by Lester Wallack. With an introduction by Laurence Hutton. With portraits and fac-similes.

Wallack, Lester, 1820-1888.

New York, Charles Scribner's, 1889.

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