

**A JUBILEE
OF PLAYGOING**

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A Jubilee of Playgoing by Peter Hanley

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BY

PETER HANLEY.

"One man in his time plays many parts."

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1887.

Dedicated

WITH GREAT RESPECT

TO

PAUL JOHN KING, ESQ.,

SENIOR REGISTRAR

OF THE

SUPREME COURT OF JUDICATURE,

UNDER WHOSE ABLE DIRECTION I HAVE PASSED MANY HAPPY YEARS
OF OFFICIAL LIFE.



—* P R E F A C E . *—

THIS little work, which was originally written for private circulation, has passed through two editions. At the wish of many who did not obtain copies I have issued a Third Edition, carefully revised and corrected, and *written up to date*. I have endeavoured as far as possible (almost entirely from memory) to enumerate the various performances I have seen during fifty years. There were but few theatres at the west end of London when I first began to visit them, so that the playgoer of that time had not the advantage of much variety, but this was counterbalanced by the fact that the casts of the pieces were much stronger, as all the good actors were associated together. This was especially the case at Drury Lane and Covent Garden Theatres. I venture to hope that the book may prove interesting to the public, or at least to the playgoing portion. The compiling of it has been

a labour of love, as it has recalled many pleasant memories of the performers who have amused and instructed me in my youthful days. The majority of them have passed away, but I also record with pleasure the doings of the actors of the present day, to all of whom I cordially wish a prosperous career.

PETER HANLEY.





A JUBILEE OF PLAYGOING.



Y first recollection of a theatrical performance was when a child of five years of age, the piece was "Bob Roy"—the theatre, the Surrey. I have a distinct remembrance of the singing in the last scene, "Pardon now the bold outlaw," &c. I have been told that the *Rob Roy* was Mr. Osbaldiston, an excellent actor, whom I frequently saw in after years, and who subsequently became the lessee of Covent Garden, the City of London, and Victoria Theatres.

How delighted I was with my first pantomime, and what quaint questions I put to my father as to the seeming realities I had seen! I perfectly idolised the clown, and my vocal efforts to imitate that exalted personage in "Tipitiwicheh" and "Hot Codlins," must have been rather distressing to the household. I believe the clown is a prime favourite with most lads, even at the present time. I remember a few years ago, a little boy of seven who had been to see a pantomime, saying to me (after he had been sitting very thoughtfully for some time), "I should like to be a clown," and I could not help thinking that the same wish had occurred to me long years before.

My first visit to Astley's was a great event, the glories of that master of horsemanship, the great Andrew Ducrow, and the splendours of Widdicombe the renowned, who looked like

a field marshal as he stepped into the ring, was a sight indeed to be remembered.

The promise of being taken to a theatre on my birthday, as a reward for good conduct, was sufficient to put me on my best behaviour for at least three months, and as the long-looked-for time drew nigh my excitement was intense, and even interfered with my appetite, which is remarkable in a boy.

In my schoolboy-days, and indeed for years afterwards, the Surrey was my favourite house, as, like the majority of lads, I liked something stirring and exciting; consequently in those days I knew but little of the West End Theatres.

I remember a promise made by my father to take me on my twelfth birthday to the theatre, and his wishing me to go to the Adelphi, where "Rory O'More" was then being played, with the great Tyrone Power as the hero, John Reeve, the popular low comedian, appearing in the farce; but no, I must go to the Surrey in preference. Schoolmates had spoken so glowingly of Mr. and Mrs. Honner, and Mr. E. F. Saville, that I determined to see them, and my good parent yielding somewhat reluctantly, to the Surrey we went. The pieces were the nautical drama of "Wapping Old Stairs," some delineations of Grecian statuary, and "The Whistler; or, the fate of the Lily of St. Leonards." Saville as the nautical hero and Mrs. Honner as his sweetheart completely won my young affections, and they became prime favourites of mine for years following. Two years after this treat I had a great disappointment. It was Christmas time, and the Surrey announced a grand pantomime, preceded by a drama called "Martha Willis," in which Saville was to appear as *Walter Speed*, a highwayman. Having obtained permission, I went the second evening after Boxing Night, accompanied by a schoolfellow; we walked from Camden Town, having on the road invested the whole of our surplus cash in oranges, buns, etc. On reaching the theatre there was an immense

crowd at the pit door, and after having fought our way in we found there was not even standing room, and we had to console ourselves with tickets given us for another night.

Now this was a severe blow, but we managed to rally from it, and presented ourselves on the following Friday, but not quite so well provided with refreshments, which rather damped our spirits; however, in we went, and after a struggle managed to secure tolerable seats, and when the performance commenced and Saville came on attired in a scarlet coat and a complete highwayman's dress, we joined in the cheers which greeted his entrance, and were completely recompensed for our previous disappointment. About this time I saw for the first and only time the great comedian Downton, who played a starring engagement at the Surrey; he retired from the stage a few months afterwards. On the occasion of my seeing him he played *Dr. Cantwell* in the "Hypocrite."

In the "Barber of Seville" and other operas I heard the following vocalists: Mr. Weiss, Mr. Donald King, Mr. H. Corri, Mr. Romer, Mr. Travers, Miss Betts, and Miss Poole.

When the Surrey was under the management of Davidge, the company was a strong one for melodrama, comprising E. F. Saville, N. T. Hicks, Henry Hughes, John Dale, W. Smith, Heslop, John Neville, Mr. and Mrs. R. Honner, Mrs. Henry Vining, Mrs. W. Daly, and Miss Martin. T. P. Cooke also frequently appeared there; I have often been delighted with his life-like portrayal of a British sailor; his song and hornpipe roused the audience to enthusiasm. I once saw him play *Philip* in "Luke the Labourer," to the *Luke* of Mr. Samuel Emery.

One of my earliest recollections of the Surrey is the appearance there of "The Siamese Twins," Chang and Eng, who were at the time I saw them about nineteen years of age; these celebrated twins (who died old men only a few years ago) excited considerable curiosity on their visit to this