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VOLUME II PP. 221-399**

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**FREDERIC EDWARD MCKAY & CHARLES E. L. WINGATE**

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CHARLES R. THORNE, JR.

FAMOUS AMERICAN  
ACTORS OF TO-DAY

EDITED BY  
FREDERIC EDWARD McKAY  
AND  
CHARLES E. L. WINGATE

*Illustrated with Portraits*

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## CHARLES R. THORNE, JR.

BY A. M. PALMER.

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THE career of Charles R. Thorne, Jr., in the full development of his powers, and exercising the best natural methods of dramatic expression, began and ended with the Union Square Theatre; and the full identity of the actor with the house under my management for pretty much the whole period has left with me an abiding and tender recollection of him. His genius involved a good deal of brusqueness, and, it is not unfair to say, moments of perversity; and his individuality was strong enough to leave behind him a store of anecdotes. I am quite sure that no leading actor of a stock company in New York was more impressive in his time, or is better remembered in the records of the stage.

Charles Thorne came of a theatrical family; and, imbued with the traditions and training of the old school, he continued to act under their influence up to the time he manifested himself in a new power and under other conditions at the Union Square Theatre. He was born in New York City, March 10, 1840. When quite young he was apprenticed or engaged to a Mr. Boyce to learn the trade of the silversmith, and served for about six months. The desire to become an actor getting strong in him, his father took him to San Fran-



cisco, where he had assumed the management of the American Theatre.

Thorne's education had been obtained, with others of the young members of the family, at the Cathedral School in Montreal, and for a while at St. John's College in New York. His schooling, therefore was not very extensive, yet he showed no lack in after years of that information and accuracy that belong to the adequately trained man. In point of fact, he was fond of discussing questions of moment in literature, history, the drama, and the like. Being a man of independence, he naturally had views of his own, views that were marked at least with vigor. He loved to gather about him, at his home and his table, men of thought, and in this way formed intimacies with Robert Ingersoll and others. It is worth while noting that he was so strong in his likes and dislikes that there was no concealment of either with him. He was absolute and peremptory in this respect, and had no compromise with people that did not please him. It may be a trifling detail to record, but it was one of the curious points in his character that he was easily bored; and yet, like the severe Edwin Forrest in his intimacy with the minstrel Christy, he would find diversion at times with ordinary but volatile people.

Thorne had certain good qualities in his relation as an actor with the public. He was not a poser. He was domestic. He cared little for criticism, and was never aroused but once, when the critic of the *Herald* became personal, whereupon he administered a very severe physical rebuke to the offender. So little theatrical was he that it was not always that he could be got to rehearse in detail. He was not conventional in his

habits of study, did not resort to the looking-glass as an aid. He was not in the habit of talking at home of his parts, and in every way preserved an individuality and domesticity apart from the boards. This had its bearing on his naturalness and on the strength of his reserve power. It is proper to say that with all his brusqueness — owing in large measure in his latter days to the encroach of his subtle disease and the approaching and really unexpected collapse — he was a generous man. It is told of him in his family that he more than once brought unfortunate fellow-actors to his house; and when his shabby guest would emerge, he would be transformed in raiment belonging to the more fortunate actor, and with some money in his pockets in keeping with his new state. Such are a few details that may help to show the value in a player of genuine qualities and a strong individuality as possessed by Charles Thorne.

In the volumes of manuscript, photographic and other valuable and minute material that I have preserved in the Record of the Union Square Theatre, may be found many interesting anecdotes of Thorne. These volumes, ten or twelve in number, contain autobiographies in the manuscript of all those concerned under my management of the theatre, the whole inlaid after the best method in vogue, and constituting as minute and unique a history as it has been the fortune of any period of dramatic history to have. After leaving my possession they will serve in some public institution — The Actors' Fund perhaps — to preserve the memory of the old Union Square Theatre.

Thorne's first appearance is established as Master George Shelby in "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in 1854. In

a letter written to me concerning him, his father says that he displayed but small ability at first, and relates an anecdote of his confusion in delivering a simple message in the "Hunchback," a case of ordinary stage-fright. Indeed, Charles Thorne's earlier efforts furnished a good deal of good-humored chaffing in the family.

A little later his name appeared in the bills of Purdy's National Theatre in New York; and in 1858 he travelled with George Pauncefort's Company, a well-known organization, through the New England States. In 1860 he was at Niblo's Garden in the stock, and in the next year ventured to the West Indies in the company of J. W. Lanergraff. Two years were then spent under Maguire in San Francisco, during which time, in 1864, he took a company of his own to China and Japan for a short tour. It was only in 1866, at Maguire's, that he established himself as leading man; and from 1866 to 1869 he maintained himself in that capacity at the Boston Theatre, going from there to Selwyn's, from which theatre he was brought to play Tom Broughton in "Formosa" in New York. In 1870-1871 he was the leading man with Mrs. Scott-Siddons, playing Courtenay in "Twixt Axe and Crown," Orlando, Romeo, and Claude Melnotte. For a while he was at the Varieties in New Orleans, and from 1871 to 1873 at the Chestnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia. As an instance of his sturdy independence, it may be mentioned that in 1872, in a play at Niblo's entitled "Black Friday," he threw up his part after one performance, upon hearing that his character was aimed at Edward S. Stokes, then fresh in his notoriety in New York.