

**THE "QUEEN OF THE
DRAMA!" MARY
ANDERSON: HER LIFE
ON AND OFF THE STAGE**

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The "Queen of the Drama!" Mary Anderson: Her Life on and Off the Stage by Henry L. Williams

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HENRY L. WILLIAMS

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DRAMA!" MARY
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THE
"QUEEN OF THE DRAMA!"
MARY ANDERSON:

HER LIFE ON AND OFF THE STAGE.

TOGETHER WITH

SELECT RECITATIONS

FROM ALL THE GREAT PLAYS

IN WHICH SHE HAS DELIGHTED TWO CONTINENTS.

BY HENRY L. WILLIAMS.

*Translator of "The Wandering Jew," "The Hunchback of Notre
Dame," "Theodora," etc.*

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LIFE OF MARY ANDERSON.

"The Advent of the Star."

On the 28th day of July, 1859, Mary Anderson was born at Sacramento, California. She was left a half orphan, by her father being killed in the Confederate States service at the destruction of the defenses of Mobile, August 5th and 6th, 1861, the child being but little over her second year.

"Old Kaintuck's" Claims.

Only six months after her birth, little Mary was taken by her mother to Louisville, where she was being brought up under maternal care. Both father and mother had some dramatic talent, and even as a tiny child, Mary showed more than the usual proclivity of the juvenile for mimicry in snatches of verse and declamation. When her mother married again, there arose no bar to this innate tendency, as her stepfather, Dr. Hamilton Griffin, ex-surgeon of the Southern army, was similarly fond of the stage.

The Budding Propensity

thus fostered, "Mimi" (as the household caressingly styled her) imbibed Shakespeare till so surcharged

that it was not sufficient relief to repeat "Richard III." to admiring friends of the family in the "Back Parlor Theatre" but all over the house literally; the colored servants being often startled by fiercely thrilling outbursts from the same tyrant "King Dick" or petrified by blood-curdling passages of "Hamlet."

To feed this rising flame, the girl from her tenth year had been liberally taken to the play, and her imitations of entire scenes with the mannerisms of the performers, were generally considered, making due allowance for the ease with which the gallant Kentuckian is kindled to enthusiasm by young womanhood, to prove much retentiveness of memory and ability to reiterate in clearness and fidelity. A good ear for music accompanied these gifts, and enhanced the accuracy of the repetition, where the piece had been melodramatic.

In the midst of these gropings, not assisted by any one of *professional* experience, the round of characters played by Edwin Booth at the Louisville theatre witched the girl and directed her inclination to the intellectual school of acting as contradistinguished from the muscular division of Forrest and McCullough. Edwin Booth remains her ideal of Roscius, and she still believes him unequalled in the Shakespearian walk.

He was then no longer the youth who delighted, at the Winter Garden, the first worthies of New York; but he had worn away much of the peculiarities of his father and his father's type whom Edmund Kean had eclipsed just as they had the Kemble tribe. He was, therefore, a glass of fashion which the aspirant had fortunately set before her.

She returned home, particularly fired in fancy by Booth's melancholy Dane, and with a determination to figure upon the boards where such an ornament was becomingly enframed.

Her mother, with the Southern's pride, objected to a public exhibition of what she had commended pleasantly within closed doors, but she was prevailed upon by her husband to bow to the girl's instance.

Hence, in 1873, Miss Anderson began to study seriously for the stage under Mr. George Vandenhoff the veteran actor and well-famed teacher of elocution.

There was hardly a better professor to have been selected for a pupil intended to tread the higher plateaux of Parnassus. Not merely was this gentleman a thoroughly inured comedian and tragedian whose name is entwined with the most sunny season of the British poetic drama, but to moral grandeur he has inestimable claims. We may cite one memorable example when at the foremost comedy playhouse in London, he indignantly broke his engagement rather than approve the foisting upon the classic boards of a notorious woman, not merely unworthy but incompetent, solely because her introducer was a money-lender to the embarrassed manager. With such an instructor, there was no fear, it follows, for the scholar to entertain a mean opinion of her chosen class.

This tuition went on some two years, relieved by that in dancing and gymnastics, giving half a day to all.

In 1875, the declining glory of the American theatre, Miss Charlotte Cushman, that monument of devotion to sisterly affection, almost dying of an incurable malady, was at Cincinnati, purposing a visit for health to California's bracing climate.

Mr. Vandenhoff had played with her "long time ago," and as she had acquired a great deal of stage knowledge from his god Macready, he thought it excellent to have her opinion and counsel upon the jewel that he was polishing. Miss Cushman came to the Griffins, and after a brief interview with Miss Anderson, and hearing her recite, approved and predicted that with a continuance of this judicious training and some five years practice, she would rank among the first if not be the foremost, of her profession in the United States.

We should like a faithful picture of that momentous interview: the grave Yankee veteran, hallowed by the fadeless memory of her conquering the plaudits of stubborn England, smiling serenely with the consciousness of a deserved meed eternal for her self-sacrifice and patient sufferings—and the daughter of the Golden State, at sweet shrinking yet glowing fifteen, her auburn hair shining with the reflection of the splendid aureole which the grey-head wore.

Such was the impression upon the novice that a dream ensued: she thought that she beheld the old actress, on whom the hand of death so ostensibly lay, already dead, and on her bier, covered with the flag of the country and her well-earned laurels. As she gazed spellbound, she heard the moving voice, as the tragedienne rose from her casket, thunder, "Play 'Medea!'" But it will be many years before the slight, gentle successor of "Our Charlotte" attempts a character of that antique iron mould, and of the strict Cushman repertoire, the gipsy crone in "Guy Mannering" is the sole one she annexed and that prematurely.