

ELLEN TERRY

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Ellen Terry by Clement Scott

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ELLEN TERRY
AN APPRECIATION

IF it be a gift to think of lovely girls and women whom we have worshipped in early life, only in their first youth, only in the pure charm of their earliest influence, only when they were “queen roses of the rosebuds, gardens of girls” — then this happily is a gift that I for one possess, and which I studiously endeavour to cultivate.

Women who have inspired men with love, or loyalty, or homage, or respect, should never be allowed to grow old.

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Why is it that we remember the impressions of yesterday far more distinctly and vividly than the casual excitements of to-day? The page of childhood is bright and clear; the manuscript of middle or old age is blurred, blotted, and indistinct. My first play, my first Hamlet, my first Juliet, my first Sir Peter and Lady Teazle, are cut like cameos on the memory. But with ease I forget the name of the play, of the actor and the actress that I saw last week. I have to invent for the first time in my life a "memoria technica" to recall them. I close my eyes as in a reverie, and am in fancy escorted miles and

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miles back on the tempestuous journey of life.

I am in a humble dancing Academy in a North London suburb, presided over by an ugly little man bearing the unromantic name of "Jenks." He wears pumps with bows, and he plays to the children on a diminutive little fiddle known in those days as a "kit." But the then grassy and flowered suburb, the mean little Academy fellow with his tiny fiddle, and all the details of an unaccustomed scene sink into insignificance beside the still vivid picture in my mind of a fair-haired child with a cream-white face, sitting on an uncomfor-



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table bench in a blue silk frock, dangling her little legs encased in white silk stockings ending in white sandalled shoes. How I worshipped that little Elsie; what a thrill it gave me when I was allowed to choose her as a partner in baby valse or childish cotillon; how my heart seemed to break when I was dragged home; how I seldom slept at night and kept my devotion religiously to myself, for fear that the purity of my love might be soiled by ridicule or ribaldry; how it all ended in a dream, as dreamlike it began! Well, let me dream again! It is a child's party on Twelfth Night, for we

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angel I bestowed all the wealth of my youthful imagination. But I fear she was a very material angel ; for when we were out of church, and away from anthems and Kyrie Eleisons and chants and hymns, and found ourselves side by side as Twelfth Night King and Queen, I remember as distinctly as if it were yesterday, that during the very darkest scene of a magic lantern show I felt a tiny pair of arms around my neck, and heard a whisper, " Kiss me, my King, you may, you must ! "

Fancy leads me to Ilford in Essex, then, as it seemed to me, in the heart of the country, and to a huge