

**THE OTHELLO OF
TOMMASO
SALVINI**

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The Othello of Tommaso Salvini by Edward Tuckerman Mason & Robert Frederick Blum

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EDWARD TUCKERMAN MASON & ROBERT FREDERICK BLUM

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THE
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OF
TOMMASO SALVINI

DESCRIBED BY

EDWARD TUCKERMAN MASON

WITH PORTRAITS BY

ROBERT FREDERICK BLUM

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G. P. Putnam's Sons

TO

THE GOOD FRIEND

WHO HAS CHECKED AND HELPED ME FROM THE BEGINNING TO
THE END OF MY WORK

I GRATEFULLY AND AFFECTIONATELY
INSCRIBE THIS BOOK

PREFACE.

THE aim of this book is to describe, fully and accurately, a great theatrical performance—perhaps the greatest of our time. (As Shakespeare is to other dramatists, so is Salvini to other actors;) and therefore I have tried to tell how he plays Othello. The work is purely descriptive, and makes no claim to literary or critical worth. As far as possible, I have withheld all expression of personal opinion, and have simply told what I saw and heard; for my only object has been to secure fulness, clearness, and accuracy of statement.

The value of the book depends wholly upon its authenticity: thus it is necessary to tell, at greater length than would otherwise be warrantable, how the work has been done.

In May, 1881, I began to make notes of the impersonation; and, after having seen it several times, in November, 1882, I wrote down my impressions, for future use. My object was to make a full record, by the aid of which I could afterwards prepare a careful description. These notes were translated into Italian, and were

then submitted to Signor Salvini, by a friend of his. They were returned to this friend, in March, 1883, enriched by many valuable comments, together with a letter in which Signor Salvini said :

“I have finished amending the few inexact things I found in the analysis of the character of Othello as represented by me. I do not know if I have done well or ill, but I have thought to benefit the task, not a light one, undertaken by your friend. . . . If there were many persons in the world who occupied themselves with the unhappy art of acting, little cared for, and ill appreciated by many, it would be very much the better for it!”.

There the matter rested for several years. In the autumn of 1889, after having seen the performance several times, I wrote an account of it, adding largely to my original notes, and availing myself of Signor Salvini's criticisms, which I either incorporated into my text, or inserted as foot-notes. It must be understood that Signor Salvini's sanction does not cover the whole of my work, as now printed—for his comments refer only to the notes of 1882. Believing that my manuscript was now nearly ready for the press, I took it to my friend, Mr. George Becks, whose thorough knowledge and

large experience render him an authority upon all matters pertaining to the stage. Mr. Becks went through the manuscript with me, line by line, and the work was greatly benefited by his searching criticism. During Signor Salvini's recent engagements in Brooklyn and New York, I saw the performance three times, and gathered a great deal of fresh material. I then made a final revision of my work, and put it into the form in which it now appears.

The description is, probably, free from serious errors of misstatement; but as I write—one week after the great actor's last performance in New York—that majestic presence is again before me, and I am dissatisfied with all I have done. For I know how slight and inadequate must be every attempt to describe a consummate work of art. Many details will always elude observation or memory, and many delicate and subtle beauties cannot be described. I can only plead that I have done what I could, and have not grudged time or labor. It has been a work of love, and I hope it may be useful to students and lovers of theatrical art.

E. T. M.

March 22, 1890.