

**HOURS WITH THE
PLAYERS. IN TWO
VOLUMES. VOL. I**

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Hours with the players. In two volumes. Vol. I by Dutton Cook

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DUTTON COOK

**HOURS WITH THE
PLAYERS. IN TWO
VOLUMES. VOL. I**

HOURS WITH THE PLAYERS

BY DUTTON COOK

AUTHOR OF

"A BOOK OF THE PLAY," "ART IN ENGLAND," "PAUL FOSTER'S DAUGHTER,"
"LEO," "HOBSON'S CHOICE," ETC., ETC.



IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London

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1881

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P R E F A C E.

THE blower of his own trumpet is usually rather a suspected sort of soloist, a disparaged musician. Yet some measure of self-assertion is often necessary: traders must advertise their wares, and it behoves authors now and then to bespeak a favourable estimate of their efforts. Soliciting approval of this book, therefore, I presume to claim on its behalf that it contains more precise and complete memoirs of sundry of the performers it deals with than have previously been submitted to the public, or could be forthcoming without considerable diligence, search, and study. I permit myself this assertion with the less reluctance, because my labour in the matter has been of the kind which physics pain; has been, indeed, as Macduff says, "a joyful trouble." For the transactions of the stage and the adventures of its professors have always been to me curiously interesting and entertaining. Histrionic art at its best I hold to be intellectually valuable and delightful.

It may be that a book of this character, an assemblage of biographies, can hardly pretend to much distinctness of plan. And yet I hope to show that I have not worked wholly without method.

Will the reader for a while combine with me in imagining that, having entered a Gallery of Theatrical Portraits, we are tempted to pause now here, now there, to contemplate and to discourse upon certain of the pictures and the personages they represent? The collection is not complete, or we may be supposed to proceed somewhat capriciously: passing by, possibly, some more eminent and therefore more familiar examples, to regard the effigies of players less noted and yet possessed of genuine titles to consideration. Handsome WILL MOUNTFORD, with the narrative of his troubled end, first engages us; and then we pass to the animated canvas from which appeals to admiration and enthusiasm the beautiful MRS. WOFFINGTON. We dwell for a little while upon the seamy-sided romance of the life of the fair and frail MRS. MARY, otherwise PERDITA, ROBINSON; and next find ourselves confronted by the brilliant group of artists concerned in the first performance of the immortal "School for Scandal:" the original personators of the TEAZLES and the SURFACES, of SIR BENJAMIN BACKBITE and his uncle CRABTREE, of MRS. CANDOUR, and even of little MR. MOSES, the money-lender.

From these counterfeit presentments, after lingering a little over the fortunes of LADY SUSAN and her player-lover and husband, WILLIAM O'BRIEN, we invade the present century and approach performers of a comparatively modern date, beginning with "the gentleman of the name of BOOTH," as Hazlitt wrote of him,—including "OLD FARREN" and MRS. GLOVER, RACHEL FELIX and CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN, and some one or two more,—to close, rather sadly perhaps, with a slight sketch of the departed French-English most pleasant and accomplished actor, CHARLES FECHTER. Of living tragedians and comedians it has not been my cue to speak upon the present occasion.

Need I urge further in advocacy of these pages? The reader will quickly discover for himself which of the persons portrayed and studied here pertain altogether to the past, and are only narrated of "at second hand," and which are players I have myself seen play, and concerning whom I can step into the box and tender legitimate evidence. Of course, I was in some cases rather a juvenile witness, and not by any means an expert; yet, to pursue the figure, I knew the nature of an oath, and I trust my testimony as far as it goes may be accepted, therefore, as credible and trustworthy. For as to certain of the subjects of these biographies the witnesses are decreasing in number, recollections are dimming

rapidly, and Cibber's grandiloquent regrets gain new application: "Pity it is that the momentary beauties flowing from an harmonious elocution cannot, like those of poetry, be their own record: that the animated graces of the actor can live no longer than the instant breath and motion that present them; or, at least, can but faintly glimmer through the memory or imperfect attestation of a few surviving spectators."

One word more. I must beg indulgence in regard to the iteration both of facts and phrases that may be discovered in the course of the book. This defect was hardly evitable: because of the nature of the subject, the necessity of often traversing the same ground, and because of the conditions under which the papers here collected originally appeared.

DUTTON COOK.

69, Gloucester Crescent, Regent's Park,
October, 1881.

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