

# **A GROUP OF COMEDIANS**

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A Group of Comedians by William L. Keese

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**WILLIAM L. KEESE**

**A GROUP OF  
COMEDIANS**





HENRY PLACIDE.

A  
GROUP OF COMEDIANS

BY  
WILLIAM L. KEESE



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## PREFACE

THE group of comedians treated of in these pages are actors of a past generation, but they still live in the memories of many playgoers. The thought will no doubt occur to many that the great Burton might well have been included, and so he would have been had he not been celebrated in my published volume of his life.

It does not seem needful to dwell here upon such comedians as Henry Placide, William Rufus Blake, John Brougham, George Holland, and Charles Fisher. Their achievements are well known to stage historians, and the rehearsal of them will recall many an hour of past delight, while to those of a younger generation it will be interesting to read a chronicle of the triumphs of what their elders call the "palmy days" of the drama.

WILLIAM L. KEESE.

BROOKLYN, October, 1901.







## Henry Placide

1799-1870

AMONG comedians of the past whose artistic achievements have conspicuous record in dramatic annals, there is none whose acting won more unqualified approval from the critics and the public than that of Henry Placide.

In general, every comedian has his limitations, and it is too much to expect that equal excellence will attend every impersonation. We know that there are times when the comedian seems to have ill chosen his part, or that the part is not suited to his gifts; we perceive that our favorite is a little out of his element; the conviction is brought home to us that there is a lack of affinity here, or the simulation is faulty, or perhaps it is that the acting is perfunctory, owing to lack of interest—at all events, whatever the cause, we are disappointed, and we are likely to recall certain other delineations of the comedian in which no such shortcomings could be detected. This is only another way of hinting that though *Bottom* could discharge *Pyramus*, he might not with equal felicity have discharged *Thisbe* and the *Lion*.

It was the happy gift of Placide that he never kindled disappointment and never failed to satisfy. Whatever the character, you felt it was in safe hands and could not be bettered. He was so emphatically an artist that all his embodiments bore the impress of a master hand. Of course, he had his famous parts and those of less renown, but as he never slighted anything, his artistic sense was manifested in the little as in the great. It was always his way, throughout his repertory, to present a finished picture. The same propriety was visible throughout his range of parts from the lowest to the highest. That anything that was worth doing at all was worth doing well seemed to be his feeling, and his appearance in any cast was a guarantee of thoughtful and painstaking effort. This fidelity to nature gave him enviable distinction, for his versatility was extraordinary. He could present the *Fat Boy*, in "Pickwick"; *Zekiel Homespun*, in the "Heir at Law"; *Doctor Caius*, in the "Merry Wives"; *Dogberry*, in "Much Ado"; *Doctor Ollapod*, in the "Poor Gentleman"; *Sir Peter Teazle*, in the "School for Scandal"; *Silky*, in the "Road to Ruin"—and as the eye and mind studied these contrasting pictures of life and manners, the marvel was that one actor was portraying them all, and doing it with such admirable discrimination that one seemed quite as meritorious as the other. This adaptability was due to exceptional powers of observation and a studious consideration of the