

**SEYMOUR HICKS:
TWENTY-FOUR YEARS
OF AN ACTOR'S
LIFE. [LONDON-1910]**

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Seymour Hicks: Twenty-Four Years of an Actor's Life. [London-1910] by Seymour Hicks

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OF AN ACTOR'S LIFE

BY
HIMSELF



LONDON: ALSTON RIVERS, LIMITED
BROOKE STREET, HOLBORN BARS

1910

DEDICATION

THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

- To that half of my profession who think I can't
act, and
To the other half—who *I* am certain can't.
To my enemies who say nice things of me.
To my friends who never do.
To those many critics who know nothing and
think I'm excellent.
To the few who know anything and think I'm not.
To the Patrons of the Drama who never pay.
To the one man who laughed at me and is now
under lock and key.
To the brave man who has parted with his
money for this book, and
To those who would always help me if I was
never in distress.

“Early to bed and early to rise,
Ain't a bit of good unless you advertise.”

INTRODUCTION

WHEN a man sits down to write a book about himself, generally he does so from one of four reasons: sheer impertinence; a lack of humour; the hope of advertisement; or because he knows that while writing little about himself it gives him an opportunity to say a great deal about other people. I frankly plead guilty to the last two; and having gone thus far on the road of truth, let me push on yet another milestone.

You know my face, no doubt. I am not extraordinarily proud of it. Is it possible that I know yours? How often, I wonder, have you paid good money to see me make a fool of myself? How often have I seen you do the same thing in the stalls for nothing! Perhaps we have never met, pictorially or otherwise; well, whether we have or not, Seymour Hicks is now yours for two-and-six; but in surrendering myself to you, you must not imagine I am going to lay bare a great soul for thirty copper tokens. As I have been working for twenty-four years, that would only work out at a little over a penny a year, and artist though I be, I know that the commercial value of the body I am condemned to drag through musical comedy after musical comedy (the titles alone of which differ) is worth more than this.

But I do want to interest you; and I feel that even if my story is not an epoch-making one and does little good, it will certainly do no harm, as a well-known actor remarked when he was met by his friends, riding on a half-a-crown-an-hour horse through the streets of Manchester on a Monday afternoon, having hired two little boys to point at him at intervals, and in audible asides say: "Look! if that ain't Mr. Burns who opens to-night at the Theatre Royal!"

Not being gifted with the pen of a Gissing, or the introspective descriptive powers of a Ryecroft, I will endeavour in all cases to come to "my horses" as quickly as possible and without too much over-elaboration, as Samuel Phelps was never tired of advising the youth of his day to do. For a long time I have pondered of what I could write that might serve as a lyric to the music of a railway train—or haply save you buying a bromide at the nearest chemist's. Anecdotes of others perhaps? Misfortunes to myself? For have not the misfortunes of others always been greeted with a smile of satisfaction from an assembled and uninvolved multitude, even from the day when that Jewish humorist Noah christened his one son Ham so as to give the other brothers a lifelong laugh? But there, I don't even know if Noah was a Jew—perhaps he wasn't, as we don't hear of him living in the West End of any particular city. All I know about him is that he had a yacht which he used instead of the then uninvented umbrella.

Misfortunes to myself or anecdotes of others or not—I have determined that these pages shall be covered with