

**THE
GARRICK CLUB**

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The Garrick Club by Percy Fitzgerald

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PERCY FITZGERALD

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W. M. THACKERAY.

From the original by Sir John Gilbert in the possession of the Garrick Club

THE GARRICK CLUB

BY

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Preface



HE setting forth the history of those agreeable places of meeting—the CLUBS—has always been found an enjoyable task for the readers as well as for the chroniclers. These “second homes” for so many men, when they are well established and in possession of traditions, offer dramatic associations owing to the important and brilliant personages who used to frequent such places: to the gay and agreeable atmosphere, and almost irresponsible conditions that prevail. Accordingly we find all the leading Clubs, such as Brook’s, White’s, the Reform, the Athenæum, Grillon’s, the Dilettanti, and others equipped with histories. That of the Athenæum was prepared by the late Rev. Francis Waugh—most faithful and enthusiastic of friends—and devoted as a child to his much-loved Club. It is contained in a very small volume, but **one** so packed with condensed information that it would have legitimately filled a fair-sized quarto. His modesty would not allow him to adopt that pretentious guise. At the time of his death he had just prepared a new and enlarged edition, which it is to be hoped will see the light later on.

Of all Clubs, perhaps the Athenæum and the Garrick have the most interesting and dramatic associations. They seem like stages across which all that has been distinguished in drama, letters, music, and art generally, have passed or streamed through their chambers. Many have belonged to both institutions, and when they

would sumptuously regale their friends, which there is little facility for doing at the Athenæum, have passed over to the Garrick, where they have a special guest-chamber, a rare *cuisine* of choice wines. Such was the practice of the late Sir Edward Hamley, a brilliant soldier, professor, military historian, and most successful novelist—a combination of gifts not likely to be found outside of either these singular institutions.

The Garrick, in its early days, had been well stored with wits and humorists of the first class, leavened also by the more "Bohemian" members of the theatrical profession, pleasant soldiers and jovial peers. But in these later times it has become more like the usual type found in Clubland. Its theatrical influence has been more extended, and the choice *fin fleur* of the profession belongs to it. If not now so much the "haunt of Momus," and engenderer of wit and humour, it is because convivial humour itself has died away and is somewhat out of fashion. We "take our pleasures sadly," even in Clubs. But its influence has extended, and the fact of its not being a Club merely, but also a very remarkable Picture Gallery, has given it a place among London attractions. In this it is unique, for what other Club can boast of a Portrait Gallery of actors—the work of the first artists—nearly all admirable and spirited likenesses—unique, too, in being described in enraptured panegyric by Elia—choicest of humorists—that is, by Charles Lamb *lui-même*. Nowhere has this accomplished writer exhibited his descriptive talent and vivacity so vividly as in these essays. Here he *peint* in his own colours! One would surely like to see his picture or bust in the collection. It would be only a fitting tribute, for these two papers of his have spread the fame of the Club over all English-speaking regions. As we gaze on the speaking lineaments of these portraits, no "make-up" being interposed, the scenes in which they figured, the strange, adventurous, often grotesque incidents of their lives, rise before us.

There is no profession which has given us so many original or entertaining characters as the stage. No other is so richly stocked

with personal memoirs, recollections, adventures, sayings and doings. Mathews the Elder, Colman, Garrick, Tate Wilkinson, O'Keefe, Foote, Planché, Edmund Yates, Sir F. Burnand, and dozens more—what agreeable chroniclers all these have been. How many humours, jests, and ludicrous situations have they furnished! Exuberant as are the old dramatic memoirs, no one can say that the succession has not been kept up and the narrators of our day are not as amusing.

The traditions of Thackeray alone, who loved and haunted the place, and identified himself so fondly with it, is a precious asset for any Club. "Boz," alas! had but disagreeable associations with the place, but even this episode makes a part of its history. Mathews, Poole, Theodore Hook—these are names to conjure with. Any one familiar with the dramatic memoirs will find that each face will remind him of some droll story or interesting illustration. The striking scenes from dramas, such as that of Garrick and Mrs. Pritchard in *Macbeth*, are of serious importance in the history of acting, and of *mise en scène*.

No words can sufficiently describe the interest and value of these theatrical scenes, particularly those limned by the admirable and brilliant Zoffany. They are the next thing to the living thing. But the moral is that the faces and figures, *i.e.*, the acting, dominate all. The humanity, the action is the one prominent thing; background, dress, furniture are as nothing. There is something fascinating in them, and we are drawn back to them again and again.

These portraits are the highest tribute conceivable to the merits of the players of a century or so ago, and a corresponding reflection on the expressionless nature of the acting of our time. The portraits so thoughtful and brightly intelligent prove that the old comedies in which they were trained were stones on which they *whetted*, as it were, their observation and characters. Any one who has carefully read over Elia's criticism will feel this as he passes from face to face. Therefore it is that no one at the Garrick Club can ever lack company—and the best of company. He may find his mates dull or humdrum, but he has all these great folk to fall back upon.

As the Club does not permit any of its portraits and other treasures to be copied or reproduced, it may be necessary to mention that the illustrations which are described as being "after originals" in the possession of the Club, are really from engravings made of those very originals, and already in possession of the Public.

