THE ACTOR AND HIS ART

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Not to be confused with
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THE ACTOR AND HIS ART.

BY

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BY

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The Actor and his Art.

For some time past, much attention has been devoted to the members of our profession; the actor and the theatre have been discussed again and again; an attempt has been made to prove that we are a race of beings set apart from the rest of the world, whether viewed from a social or an artistic point; some have even gone so far as to call us mere parrots. I shall now try to prove that the actor is an artist, and has the same title to a place in the state as any other citizen.

In the first place, what is *art*, and what do we understand by it, if not the interpretation of nature and of truth, more or less tinged by a peculiar light, which does not alter the proportions, but yet marks the salient features, heightens their colors, displays their fidelity to nature, so that our minds are more deeply and forcibly affected by them?

Is it not the actor's duty to cast this light?

The poet has for his material, words; the sculptor, marble or bronze; the painter, colors and canvas; the musician, sounds: but the actor is his own material. To exhibit a thought, an image, a human portrait, he works upon himself. He is his own piano, he strikes his own strings, he moulds himself like wet clay, he paints himself!

But you may say this is not work for an artist, because the idea that he embodies is not his own, and the characteristic feature of art is creation. Creation, indeed! Common-sense answers this objection at once, since the very word "creation" is the one which we use to express the first performance of a part; and the term is strictly correct. If you do not believe me, believe Victor Hugo, who says of Mlle. George, in *Marie Tudor*, "In the poet's own creation, she creates something which surprises and enchants the author himself."

I also find in the "Memoirs of Marmontel" (Vol. I., page 290): —

"[Mlle. Clairon] was yet more sublime in the character of *Electra*. This part, which Voltaire himself required to be declaimed like one long lamentation, acquired a beauty hitherto unknown even to him; for when he

saw her play it in his theatre at Ferney, he exclaimed, 'This is not my work, but hers; she has created her part!'"

Here we have the opinion of both Marmontel and Voltaire. Is not the poet's surprise significant? If he felt it, how much more must others experience it! Nor have they failed to do so; in proof, read their prefaces, postscripts, and dedications.

Allow me to quote a few such.

Written on a copy of "*Forbidden Fruit*":—

"*My dear Regnier*,—In offering you this little book, it gives me great pleasure to record upon the first page an expression of cordial thanks. I am your debtor not only for the precious assistance of your genius, but for invaluable advice and kindest encouragement.

"Receive in return, I beg, the gratitude which I owe to the artist, the co-worker, and the friend.

"CAMILLE DOUCET."

"To the great actor who created *Jean Baudry*. From his friend and admirer,

"AUG. VACQUERIE."

On a copy of "*Julie*":—

"To my dear, good Regnier, thanking him most heartily for his kindly, sincere, and ever-ready devotion to the work and the writer.

"O. FEUILLET."

In regard to "*As You Like It*," * Mme. Sand also wrote to my good friend and master: —

"Now that you have nearly finished your task of studying and mounting this dramatic effort, I desire to thank you for the vast amount of intellect, conscience, and heart which you have devoted to the *art* you love and the author who loves you."

And on a copy of a pretty little piece played at the Vaudeville, and rehearsed by M. Regnier, which was called "*Cabbage Soup*," we find the following lines: —

CABBAGE SOUP.†

Lo! my poor cabbage soup I view,
Served up in public as a play,
In pewter basin at three sous,
Before it has quite cooled away.

To you let me inscribe it, (who
Has better claim?) dear friend Regnier
What none had tasted but for you
Is, thanks to you, encored to-day.

Beneath your eye, your hand, I see
Alexis, Saint Germain, Chapuy,
With Thèse in noble kindness vie;
A mere spectator, I sit by;
Together you create my play:
Am I, or you, its author, pray?

MARC MONNIER.

* Not Shakespeare's comedy, but a work by Mme. George Sand.

† Translated by Rev. C. T. Brooks.

Victor Hugo also wrote, on the day after the first performance of "*The Burgraves*," this opinion of Geffroy:—

"M. Geffroy, who, as painter and actor, is twice an artist, and a great artist, gave to the personality of *Otbert* the predestinating physiognomy which such poets as Shakespeare know how to conceive, and such actors as Geffroy to embody."

A curious extract from the elder Dumas, in regard to "*Henry III.*," follows:—

"Michelot has been reproached by many for his conception of the part. I am the one to be blamed. I, in some measure, forced M. Michelot to play the part in accordance with documents which critics consider incorrect. Since then, he has taken another view of the part, — that which he first chose, — and has been much applauded: the case has been tried. . . . I was wrong."

Speaking of Firmin:—

"He finds in his part, not only delicate distinctions unperceived by the author, but those expressions of the soul which seize and shake the soul."

The dedication of "*Angèle*" is:—

"*To the actors who played in 'Angèle'*:

"My friends, we have had a family triumph; let us accept and share it."

("*Il ne faut jurer de Rien.*")

"To M. Got, for *his* priest.

"ALFRED DE MUSSET."

("*Les Caprices de Marianne.*")

"Thanks for *Tibia*, my dear Got.

"ALFRED DE MUSSET."

("*Duke Job.*")

"To Duke Got.

"LÉON LAYA."

("*Souvent Homme Varie.*")

"To the author of *Troppa*,

"From his debtor,

"AUGUSTE VACQUERIE."

("*Maître Guérin.*")

"*My old Friend*, — Creation such as *Maître Guérin* is a collaboration; I take pleasure in acknowledging it.

"ÉMILE AUGIER."

The expression "collaboration" is used again in a charming letter from Ambroise Thomas to Faure, which I take occasion to quote: —

"*My dear Faure*, — The tremendous success won by you in *Hamlet* is already widely known; the future, I hope, will blazon it yet more broadly.

"I embrace the first opportunity of sending you the

score, and am anxious to tell you how much pleased and touched I am by the marks of loving devotion which you have unceasingly lavished upon our work, during your prolonged study of it.

"*Our* is the right word; for I consider in the light of true collaboration the testimony of your talent, the advice of your long experience, and the constant care which you have given, not only to the splendid *creation* of your own part, but to the general effect of the whole opera.

"I, who played so active a part in your first triumphs, and who have followed with such interest every phase of your brilliant career, now rejoice to see my name joined with yours in your recent double victory as marvellous singer and great actor.

"Always, dear friend, your very affectionate and devoted

"AMBROISE THOMAS.

"MARCH 16, 1868."

I also find in Halévy's memoirs:—

"In 1835, Nourrit played the part of the Jew *Eleazar*. In the account given me by M. Scribe of the plot of '*The Jewess*,' and of the way in which he intended to treat the subject, the part of *Leopold*, the Christian, lover of the Jewess *Rachel*, was meant for Nourrit; the father was to fall to the share of Levasseur, and the cardinal to Dabadie. But when I examined the score, I was struck by the new meaning which a tenor voice would impart to the music, Nourrit's voice to the part

of father. This also gave me the voice and talent of Levasseur for the cardinal, who is a father as well.

"M. Scribe agreed with me, and with one accord we gave the poem to Nourrit to read, leaving him free to choose his own part. A few days later, he said, 'My choice is made; I feel the instincts of a father.' Nourrit, in thus falling into our plan, was moved by a sincere love of his art. The tenor usually clings to his prerogatives as a *lover;* he dreads lest he should lose the fascination of youth forever, should he make himself up as an old man, — fears to leave with his audience, especially the feminine portion of it, a lasting memory of an ugly mask, and the premature marks of that fatal age which the actor's art is so skilful in concealing: but Nourrit was young enough, and felt himself strong enough to confront this danger, and he generously sacrificed himself for the common interest. He also gave us excellent advice. There was a *finale* in the fourth act, for which he begged us to substitute an aria. I wrote the appropriate music, and Nourrit asked M. Scribe's permission to write the words himself. He desired to choose the most sonorous syllables, as well as those most favorable to his voice. M. Scribe, generous because he was rich, readily consented to the singer's request, and Nourrit shortly after brought us the words of the air, 'Rachel, quand du seigneur la grâce tutelaire.'" — HALÉVY, "*Last Souvenirs.*"

You see that he, too, was both collaborator and creator.

And of Frédéric Lemaître, Lamartine wrote in his preface to "*Toussaint l'Ouverture*," —

"that a great actor had veiled the imperfections of the work beneath the splendors of his genius."

I do not deny that these dedications may contain a spice of exaggeration, caused by the friendly feeling resulting from long labors in common, and by a certain benevolent impulse arising from a joyful success, — we are most amiable when we are happiest; but I feel sure that the portion of truth is large enough to make them an important testimony from those best calculated to give it.

Yes, the actor creates, even when interpreting the dreams of a genius like Racine, Corneille, or Hugo; even, stranger yet, when the character is one conceived and executed by one of those rare masters who were themselves actors, like Shakespeare and Molière.

This is because there is always a considerable distance between the type dreamed of and the type actually living and breathing: because it is not enough to create a soul,— a body must be provided for it as well; and not only must this body be its complete and living expression, but it must have its peculiar manner of coming and going, of

laughing, crying, walking, breathing, talking, and moving; and all these modes of being, doing, and suffering must fit together, — form a real individuality, such a person as we meet every day, recognize, love, and greet affectionately: and this habit which the character needs is furnished by the actor, and the actor alone.

This outer shell which the actor provides for a character, even for one of Shakespeare's conception, ends by becoming so thoroughly its own that there are certain bits of stage action, certain make-ups, invented by Garrick or by Kean, which are now appropriated by every *Hamlet* and *Othello;* there are certain traditions at the Théâtre Français, unmentioned by Molière, without which Molière is never played, and which the spectator, becoming a reader, mentally supplies as he sits by his fireside, as one supplies omissions in an incomplete copy.

Further yet, there are certain masterpieces — somewhat antiquated, it is true — which are greatly admired when read, but which all agree in pronouncing impossible of representation, — let us be bold: which all would call stupid if performed, and which would be so if intrusted to ordinary actors. But let a man of talent come forward;

let him take possession of the work buried beneath the dust of indifference, — or respect, which sometimes produces the same results as indifference; let this man step in, lavish his powers and his genius upon it, and behold the mummy bursts its cerements, is once more fresh and blooming, and the mob rushes to gaze and goes wild with enthusiasm, and the forgotten masterpiece draws crowded houses! In this case, art is not content with creating, it brings the dead to life!

Let us add that there are but few masterpieces so perfect that the actor cannot find something to add to them, if so willed. Much more frequent are the parts wherein an author of second, third, or any rank leaves his interpreter everything or almost everything to do. What remains to us of all the classic dramas of the Empire or the Restoration, — "*Leonidas*," "*Marius*," "*Charles VI.*," etc.? Nothing but the memory of Talma. Only try to read them through. You come to the passages where you know that Talma was sublime, and you puzzle your brains with the question, "But how the mischief did he do it?" The answer is simple: he turned creator. You read the scene, — you find naught save the words of *Arnault* or *Pichat*, and it is meaningless; he put the spirit

of Talma into it, — it was vivid, it was great, it was sublime! And you tell me that this is not art? Pray tell me what it is, then.

I hold that it is an art; analogous to that of the portrait-painter, for instance. The type which the actor must reproduce (and this is a difficulty unknown to the painter) is not always set before him: he must begin, as we may say, by conjuring it out of empty air like the magician. The author, if he have talent and genius, holds up a perfect image before the mirror of his mind; in other cases — most frequently, as I said before — he has but a sketch, a rough model to work from; yet again, he is forced to borrow from the common fund, — that is, human nature, — and to paint in imagination, by dint of observation and reflection, the figure to be realized later on.

Very great actors sometimes have the splendid good luck to create all plays, almost in spite of their authors; to invent types which will live side by side with the offspring of Molière's brain. Every one must know that I refer especially to Frédéric Lemaître and his immortal creation, *Robert Macaire.*

I will let Frédéric speak for himself, quoting from a volume recently brought out by Ollen-

dorff, the publisher of the Rue de Richelieu, an account of the first performance of "*L'Auberge des Adrets*":—

"The story of this gloomy melodrama, transformed into a burlesque, after being written in all due earnest, has been so falsified that it may not prove uninteresting to give the true origin of this odd fancy, which proved to be but the prologue to a comedy destined ten years later to wound to the quick more than one susceptible and office-holding *Robert Macaire*, or order-bearing *Bertrand*.

"When the reading, which took place at the theatre, ended, I went away deeply discouraged at the thought that this part of *Macaire* was to be my first creation.

"How could I make the public accept this mysterious and melancholy plot, which was wrought out in a style nothing less than academic? Without appearing ridiculous, how could I portray a character so grossly cynical? a highway assassin, frightful as the ogre of any fairy tale, and carrying his impudence to the extent of curling his whiskers with a dagger, while he ate a bit of Gruyère cheese!

"This was not even the gradual descent of the

worn-out, old-fashioned melodrama into oblivion, whither the laws of nature irrevocably drag everything; it was its sudden plunge into the waters of Lethe.

"I really did not know which way to turn; when one evening, as I sat poring over the pages of my manuscript, I began to see how excessively farcical all the situations and speeches of *Robert Macaire* and *Bertrand* might appear, if taken jocosely and acted accordingly.

"I at once shared with Firmin—a clever fellow, who, like me, felt ill at ease with a serious *Bertrand*—the wild, crazy idea which had crossed my brain. He thought it superb! But we had to beware of suggesting this change of base to the authors, who were convinced that they had produced another '*Cid*.'

"Firmin and I firmly resolved to execute our plan, let it cost what it might; arranged all our stage effects together, without breathing a word of our secret to any one, and on the night of the first performance we made an entrance at which we had not even hinted at the rehearsals.

"When the audience saw the two bandits take up their station in the foreground, in the attitude so often copied since, muffled in costumes which

have become traditional, — *Bertrand* in his huge gray coat, with its inordinately long pockets, both hands crossed over the handle of his umbrella, erect, motionless, face to face with *Macaire*, who measured him with a swaggering stare, his crownless hat on one side of his head, his green coat flung back, his red trousers covered with patches and darns, his black bandage over one eye, his lace cravat and dancing shoes, — the effect was overwhelming.

"Nothing escaped the eager shrewdness of a public excited to the utmost by so new and unforeseen a spectacle. The kicks lavished upon *Bertrand*, *Macaire's* squeaky snuff-box, — every allusion was seized with the more hilarity, from the fact that the rest of the piece was played by the other actors with all the gravity and earnestness which their parts required.

"Mlle. Levesque devoted the same conscientious study to the character of *Marie*, the unfortunate wife of *Robert Macaire*, which was apparent two years before in her creation of '*Thérèse, or the Genevese Orphan*'; and honest Baron was most felicitous in the rôle of the luckless *Germeuil*.

"Audinot and Sénépart, our managers, attained a success which they were far from expecting;

for they frankly confessed, some time after, that they had had but little confidence in the piece.

"The authors, Benjamin Antier and St. Amand, who were later to become my collaborators in '*Robert Macaire*,' resigned themselves to their fate like sensible men, and were easily consoled for their failure to melt their audience to tears as they had dreamed, without shedding any on their own account, when they saw the nightly receipts mount up to a figure hitherto unknown in the annals of the theatre.

"But their third *accomplice*, a certain Dr. Polyanthe, — a dramatic author through the force of circumstances, who, if he had not most fortunately stopped short, might have managed to murder as many melodramas as he did patients, — vowed eternal vengeance against me. He went about everywhere, declaring that I had slaughtered his play! He, at least, had paternal instincts."

And again, how much help did Frédéric Lemaître have from the authors of "The Merry Andrew," or of "The Old Corporal," in which he played the part of a deaf-mute, or of countless other parts? We must remember that the same man who invented *Robert Macaire* was also the mar-

vellous interpreter of *Ruy Blas;* we can then comprehend the full force of the expression used by Victor Hugo in giving an account of the evening of Nov. 9, 1838, on which he says Frédéric made the part, not a performance, but a *transfiguration.* This is the right word; this is the supreme effort of the actor's art.

And may we not apply this fitting title, "transfiguration," to Regnier, when he played in "*Kerry*," * "*Gabrielle*," "*The Adventurers*," or "*Romulus*"; to Samson, as the peer of France in "*Comrades*," the *Marquis de la Seiglière, Bertrand de Rantzau,* or *Sganarelle* in "*Don Juan*"; to Delaunay, when he plays *Fortunio, Perdican,* or the enchanting *Horace* of the "*School for Women*"; to Got, whether he be *Duke Job, The Hunter,* or his incredible priest in "*Il ne faut jurer de rien*"; to Dumaine, in "*Our Country*"; to *St. Germain,* in "*Baby*"?

I should never end were I to quote the creations of so many artists of such great merit.

The memories which I have evoked recall another of the arguments often used against our guild. The actor does not create, it is said,

* "La Joie fait Peur," known in England and America as "Kerry," through Dion Boucicault's version of the play.

because he leaves nothing of himself behind after death. This is indeed the great misfortune of our art. Talma deplored it on his dying bed. And yet it is not an absolute truth, since Frédéric, as we have just seen, left behind him a type which is still vigorous and strong. But even were it rigorously true, why should we hesitate to exercise an art because the creations of that art are perishable? Is the actor the only sufferer from a similar cause? What is left to us of Apelles, and all the great painters of antiquity? A memory, as of the actor Callipides, the contemporary of Phidias. How long do the creations of art usually endure? Alas! that is a question of greater and less. How many sublime works of poets, painters, and sculptors have vanished forever! Creation is one thing; durability another. Marble is more lasting than canvas, verses more enduring than marble, but time devours them all. Suppose that, as the result of a natural and fatal law, at the moment that Michael Angelo died, by the same stroke of an invisible hammer, death had reduced to powder all his works, from "Moses" to the "Last Judgment": because the work and the workman perished at the same instant, should you say, "Michael Angelo was no artist; he did not create"?

The actor is in a similar predicament. His statues perish with him. Nothing remains of them, as of those of Praxiteles, but traditions, — sometimes too flattering, but more often not sufficiently so. I repeat it, this is the misfortune of our art: it cheats us of that supreme consolation of unappreciated genius, the appeal to posterity. However, misfortune though it be, it is no degradation. We are to be pitied for it, that is all. Love us the more for it, dear, charitable public, since you are at once our present and our future, and our immortality dies with the echo of your applause!

I have used the word "tradition." It is through this, in fact, that we survive, as well as by the occasional shock which some one of us, more powerful than the rest, — a sort of artistic leader, — imparts to a whole era. A great actor calls forth plays. Witness Burbage in the time of Shakespeare; witness Frédéric or Bocage. Others may create a school, revolutionize the traditional costume, delivery, and the general rendition of the masterpieces of the age, and thus apparently renovate and renew them.

"The actor is an artist, then? And now tell us his aim."

Good heavens! We might say, in a very general way, that it is the same as that of all women, — to please.

Only, with an actor ambitious for himself and his art, it is to please by satisfying the nobler or more delicate instincts of the public; by charming with a display of the beautiful; by transporting with the spectacle of grandeur; by rousing healthy laughter or reflection through the representation of the truth.

If we come to the question of the utility of actors, — that is, whether the pleasure which they procure mankind, and which I have just defined, be profitable, — it is plainly a question of the utility of the theatre itself; and I would refer my reader to what has been written on the subject by masters interested therein, like Corneille, Molière, Shakespeare, and in antiquity, Aristotle, in his chapter on this question.

To me, I must own that it seems puerile to question the utility of an institution which responds to so manifest a want on the part of humanity.

In the age of stone, rough or polished, this want generated savage pantomimes, mock challenges, and combats. After the Deluge, — let the reader

observe that I pass directly on to this point, — we find it once more among religious orders, inspiring those mysteries* which were veritable dramas, such as the "*Death and Resurrection of Adonis.*" Every primitive race has had similar performances. Wherever society exists, there we find the theatre; and it is always at the moment that the nation leaves barbarism triumphantly behind, that the theatre assumes its complete and final form, and wings its flight proudly upward. It is pre-eminently a peaceful and super-civilized art; and it is among races especially amiable and social, like the Greeks and the French, that it attains its highest degree of splendor, and from among whom it sends its most brilliant rays to gild the ancient or modern world.

What does the theatre actually do? It sets man face to face with himself. It paints his destinies for his own inspection. For, the theatre being a thing of many sides, its utility is of diverse kinds, and extends from mere amusement and simple physical relaxation to the highest lessons of morality. A pleasant comedy by Labiche, which makes us as cheery as the author for the time

* Plays of the Middle Ages, somewhat similar to the Miracle Plays.

being, is profitable in quite another way from "*Cinna*" or "*The Horatii.*" And as I have alluded to the works of Corneille, let me say that it seems to me difficult to deny that they contain as much and more that may be usefully applied, as the finest treatise on duty, and that their repertory must ever be a national reserve of patriotism and dignity in moments of trouble or of danger. But, finally, if the utility of the theatre be not always so great, — if it do not correct our vices, as it claims to do, by showing us our common weaknesses and infirmities, by making us laugh or cry over them, — it at least teaches us to bear with one another, to forgive one another ; in a word, it makes us more sociable, it makes us more human.

The theatrical world is divided into two opposing camps in regard to the question whether the actor should partake of the passions of his rôle, — weep, to draw tears, — or whether he should remain master of himself throughout the most impassioned and violent action on the part of the character which he represents ; in a word, remain unmoved himself, the more surely to move others, which forms the famous paradox of Diderot.

Well, I hold this paradox to be literal truth ; and I am convinced that one can only be a great actor

on condition of complete self-mastery and ability to express feelings which are not experienced, which may never be experienced, which from the very nature of things never can be experienced.

And this is the reason that our trade is an art, and this is the cause of our ability to create!

The same faculty which permits the dramatic poet to bring forth from his brain a *Tartuffe*, or a *Macbeth* armed and equipped, although he, the poet, be a thoroughly upright and honest man, permits the actor to assimilate this character, to dissect and analyze it at will, without ceasing to be for an instant distinctly himself, as separate a thing as the painter and his canvas.

The actor is within his creation, that is all. It is from within that he moves the springs which make his character express the whole gamut of human consciousness; and all these springs, which are his nerves, he must hold in his hand, and play upon as best he can. I do not say that this can be done without difficulty and fatigue: it may be carried to utter exhaustion; that is a mere matter of temperament. But each must regulate his own expenditure of force.

The actor makes up his personage. He borrows from his author, he borrows from stage tradition,

he borrows from nature, he draws on his own stock of knowledge of men and things, on his own experience and imagination; in short, he sets himself a task. His task once set, he has his part; he sees it, grasps it, — it does not belong to him, but he inhabits its body, is fairly it!

This is why the true actor is always ready for action. He can take up his part, no matter when, and instantly excite the desired effect. He commands us to laugh, to weep, to shiver with fear. He needs not to wait until he experiences these emotions himself, or for grace from above to enlighten him.

Talma was playing *Hamlet* one night. While waiting for his cue he was talking at the wing with a friend; the call-boy, seeing him smiling and apparently thinking of anything but his lines, came up: "M. Talma, your entrance comes directly!" — "All right, all right, I am waiting for my cue." His scene, the scene with the ghost, began at the side entrance, the spectator hearing Talma before he saw him. He went on with his conversation very gayly; the cue came, he pressed his friend's hand, and — a smile still on his lips, that kindly hand in his — exclaimed: —

"Angels and ministers of grace, defend us!"

and his terrified friend started back, and a shudder traversed the hall!

Did this prevent him from being natural? By no means. But the artist's brain must remain free, and all emotions, even his own, must expire on the threshold of his thought. These are two very different regions. Is the actor the only person in whom these phenomena occur? Allow me to quote a fact, although it may seem foreign to my subject.

A friend of M. Victor Massé assured me very recently of the truth of a story which I had frequently heard: it was at the bedside of his mother, whom he adored, of his mother suffering from the disease destined to be fatal, all hope of recovery being lost, — it was then and there that the master, inspired, despite the most poignant grief, composed — what music do you think? The lively, gay, and tripping airs of "*Les Noces de Jeanette!*"

And examples abound of this mutual independence of head and heart in the artist. One more shall suffice me.

Talma is again my hero. It is said that when he learned of the death of his father, he uttered a piercing cry; so piercing, so heartfelt, that the

artist always on the alert in the man, instantly took note of it, and decided to make use of it upon the stage, later on. This characteristic trait shows us the artist looking down upon his own emotions and studying them, as it were from a superior plane, yielding to them that he might store them up for future use and reference. And just as their sorrows often serve great poets as the inspiration of their best verses, so ours may serve us in the creation of great rôles.

We find the same trait in this man when on his death-bed: regretting not life but art, which was the interest and the honor of his life, he studied with an artist's eye his poor, emaciated body, and said to a friend, plucking at his withered neck, "That would have been fine in *Tiberius!*" The fact of the matter is, that had he been able, he would have dragged his perishing frame to the theatre to incarnate the tyrant. There he would have used just that amount of sickness and suffering required by his part, and would have commanded the remainder to cease to exist. In the same way, — to go back, — in repeating his cry of orphaned woe upon the boards, he would have ruled his own emotion: what do I say? he would have experienced none! In both cases he would

have been the actor, and nothing but the actor, master and monarch of all of humanity within him; a sufficiently great actor to imitate, without the aid of disease, the sharpened features and withered neck of *Tiberius*, as well as to discover for himself, by the sole light of his genius, without the loss of a father, the cry which nature wrested perforce from his lips.

Therefore the actor needs not to be actually moved. It is as unnecessary as it is for a pianist to be in the depths of despair to play the "Funeral March" of Chopin or of Beethoven aright. He knows it; he opens his instrument, and your soul is harrowed. I would lay a heavy wager, on the contrary, that if he should give way to any personal emotion, he would play but ill; and by analogy, that an actor who regarded his own emotions otherwise than as material to be utilized, or made the passions of his part absolutely his own, would be likely to fare badly. Emotion sobs and stammers, alters and breaks the voice. He would cease to make himself audible. The natural effect of passion is to destroy all self-government. We lose our head; and how can we be expected to do well rather than ill, when we cease to know what we are doing?

A certain degree of excitement may not be injurious, but I should never place great value on the intellect or the affection of a man who only displayed those qualities after partaking of champagne or truffles.

It is therefore, in my opinion, a mistake to trust to inspiration: it may, like the Holy Ghost in Béranger's song, decline to descend, and all the cries in the world and all the most frantic gestures will prove unavailing.

I do not intend to deny the existence of what are called strokes of genius, but I think that genius is displayed far better by an entire and enduring mastery of self than by intermittent flashes, — sublime, if you will, but incoherent and incomprehensible; a species of trumps, only turned up by mere chance.

And then, nothing is more likely to produce inspiration than good hard preparatory work; and, to return to my former comparison, to insure the descent of the Holy Ghost, one must bring himself into a state of grace, — that is, fertilize his brain by meditation, and constant rehearsal of his parts.

The opinion which I maintain has been upheld by all truly great actors: Talma, Rachel, Samson,

Regnier, and even Mme. Dorval. The opposite opinion is a prejudice of the crowd. It is in virtue of this prejudice, that this same crowd which will not suffer — with great show of reason, indeed — that the actor should show so much as a glimpse of his own feelings, his household cares, through his assumed character, and which permits, nay, commands us to play side-splitting farces when we feel more like crying our eyes out, — it is in virtue, I say, of this simple prejudice, that this same crowd waits at the theatre door for the villain of the piece, to greet him with a warm reception. When M. Provost played the character of *Sir Hudson Lowe*, at the Porte Saint Martin, he was obliged to have a strong body-guard to escort him from the theatre every night.

I ought to drop this subject here; but while repeating the anecdote of Talma, I was reminded of another, and a very painful one to my mind, which I cannot refrain from telling because it is so charming. One morning, in the spring of 1849, a father was crossing the Pont des Arts with his little daughter, a most attractive child; and as she had a fancy for running, he, like another child, ran after her, and catching her in mid-career, raised her to his lips and kissed her with the

delightful impulse of happy paternity. "Bravo!" gayly cried a voice behind them, and a pair of hands clapped as heartily as at a play. It was Émile Augier who applauded; the father was Regnier: and Regnier, recalling the famous speech of Henry IV. when surprised at play with his children, laughingly asked, "Are you a father, Sir Ambassador?"

Three months later, the father and his illustrious friend journeyed sadly back from the cemetery, where, alas! they left the child behind them; and on returning home, Augier, who was then rewriting the fifth act of "*Gabrielle*," added the following lines: —

> "We do not truly live but in these little ones,
> Who in our heart of hearts hold their despotic thrones.
> They take our life in gay and all unconscious mood,
> And only need be glad, to prove their gratitude." *

And these verses, as charming as they are true, were recited shortly after by the father himself upon the stage. As an artist, he commanded his grief to be still; or rather, by a kind of courage peculiar to our art, he mingled his own pain with the sorrows of the part to make a perfect whole. And to thank him for his creation of the part, as

* Translated by Rev. C. T. Brooks.

well as to consecrate these memories, Augier, sending him a copy of the play, inscribed these lines upon the first page: —

GABRIELLE.*

To my Friend Regnier:

Rememberest thou the hour I met you, one fair day,
Father and daughter both? Methinks in balmy May,
Or tender April weather.

You danced along the bridge like school companions dear,
Whispering in tender words into each other's ear,
What bliss to be together.

In sweet unconsciousness that any soul was nigh,
I saw you suddenly, heedless of passers-by,
Locked in a fond embrace.

That outgush of a heart too full to hold its bliss,
That radiant burst of joy and that ecstatic kiss,
Made earth a heavenly place.

The image of a bliss, alas! so soon withdrawn,
Like sunset's lingering gleam, — nay, like a heavenly dawn,
For you here burns and shines;

Proving, poor desolate heart! our friendship is henceforth
In your sweet angel's charge, who, ere she fled from earth,
Inspired my grateful lines.

Émile Augier.

To return to my subject. This brings us to the hotly contested question of conventional stage forms, as opposed to realism, — to naturalism, as it is now called.

* Translated by Rev. C. T. Brooks.

To my mind, nothing is great, nothing is beautiful, which is unnatural; but here again I feel obliged to repeat, the theatrical profession is an art, and consequently nature can only be reproduced by it with that species of lustre and relief without which there can be no art.

I may say further, that nature pure and simple would produce but a slight effect upon the stage.

And this is very easily understood. Multiply your scenic devices, produce miraculous effects, ruin yourself in absurdly accurate details, in costumes fitted to drive a Benedictine or a collector mad with delight, and you cannot make the scene upon which the stage action occurs, a real one.

You are at the theatre, and not in the street or at home. If you suppose the scene to occur in the street, or in a private house, the effect is somewhat similar to that produced by setting a life-sized figure up on a high column; it no longer appears life-size.

You have a special and peculiar medium; you must use it in an appropriate manner.

Let us take an example, — the voice. Should I speak on the stage as I do in a parlor, in the same friendly tone with which I inquire for your health, I should not be understood, nor even heard. Your

room, which I can cross in a few strides, is quite a different thing from the vast space where from fifteen to eighteen hundred people are hanging on my words, each having an equal right to hear me. To produce an effect equal in value to that produced within the four walls of your room if I were talking alone with you, I should raise my voice, accent my words more strongly, and to be clearly understood, should introduce tones and expressions which in private I should not require to use, because in private you would be thoroughly conversant with my character.

This is a necessary conventionality. It entails similar concessions in regard to gesture; and these, taken as a whole, are the result of optical laws. Given this background, the stage, — isolated, elevated, brightly lighted, — and that collection of conventional properties, the footlights, wings, scenery, the actors themselves, — for an actor is a stage property, — we must absolutely modify the conditions of real life to suit this background, if we would produce the illusion of real life upon the spectators.

I can scarcely enter into the details of these important conventionalities; their study would be too special, too technical: but I must note

one essential point, and that is, that as a life-like effect is to be produced on these fifteen or eighteen hundred people assembled together, whom we call the public, we must take into account their intellectual status and their degree of culture. The Parisian public is not to be deceived by the same illusions which would suit an audience of savages. A crowd of children is content with the very rude apparatus required by a Punch and Judy show, nor was much more skill required to amuse an audience in the time of Shakespeare; we are far more difficult to please nowadays. In a word, the law of enhancement, of setting things in relief, is eternal, because it is an artistic law; but stage effects change with the progress of time and civilization.

The ruder morals of our ancestors possibly made fierce rollings of the eyes and the r's a theatrical necessity. The gentler morals of the present day render this kind of exaggeration superfluous. The pitch has been lowered.

I am not in favor of the sing-song style, and I detest bombast: but if, for example, a general intellectual disturbance should occur to-morrow, as it did in 1830; if the nation, being overwrought, became passionate, violent, and unreasonable, — I

think it probable that a similar revolution would follow in the theatrical world, and we should be obliged to raise the pitch to keep ourselves in tune.

In treating this question thus passingly, I assume, as is evident, the peculiar point of view of the actor. If I were to examine the matter more closely, I should refer to the very beautiful preface which the younger Dumas has just added to his play of "*L'Étrangère.*" I have the satisfaction to hold the same opinion as that master, son of another master mind, from whom he has inherited so much, — I mean in a theatrical way. M. Alexandre Dumas, it seems to me, gives us an admirable definition of our art, and a clear explanation of the reasons which render an absolute fidelity to truth and nature impossible upon the stage.

To sum up my assertions: we must not destroy all truth in the theatre by too great conventionality; but neither must we destroy the theatrical illusion by too great fidelity to truth. And by theatrical illusion I mean the pleasure in search of which people go thither; that theatrical pleasure, partly composed indeed of the illusion that they are seeing a reality, but mingled with

a feeling of personal safety and a sincere conviction that they are only assisting at an illusion.

This sense of security must never be destroyed. If by dint of realism or artifice you succeed in making your spectator forget absolutely that he is witnessing a mere spectacle, he ceases to be amused; he becomes an actor instead of a spectator, and what is worse, a well-gulled actor, for he is the only sincere one.

Theatrical joys are analogous to the pleasure of the wise Lucretius, who loved to watch a storm at sea from the shore. If this philosopher had been forced to embark, his pleasure would have speedily vanished.

Therefore, try to produce an apparent truth; but let it be true only in seeming. There is a whole class of sentiments and sensations which it is never well to excite at the theatre, for the irrefutable reason that they would prevent people from frequenting it. What are they? That is for you, actors or authors as the case may be, to discover; for it is generally a matter of delicate shades and distinctions. But I will name an example of an opposite kind: *Paulin Menier*, in the *Courier of Lyons*.

Here we have a creation worthy of a master hand.

With what supreme art this knavish figure was drawn! The gestures! the facial expression! and the inimitably vulgar accent! Do you remember?

Was n't that nature itself? But it was real, it was not repulsive; it was alarming, but not frightful. This was art, and excellent art, too. There was the stroke of genius, the little touch which makes a picture by Teniers or Jan Steen a masterpiece. The spectator, amused or terrified, was never disgusted; he never felt impelled to rise and leave the hall. Mark that, I beg; we must never make our audience feel anxious to leave. What I say may be commonplace; but I, for my part, fail to see how a theatre can be maintained without an audience.

But, cry the purists, is that the only object of the theatre, — amusement? Then make it an exhibition of women!

I do not say so. Not that I am opposed to exhibiting women, if art is to find a profit in it; that is to say, if, by exhibiting them, we excite a purely theatrical pleasure in the spectator's breast, and not a pleasure of a lower, I might say, more shameful kind. But I do not forget the maxim, *Castigat ridendo mores;* only I would not omit one jot or tittle of it.

Yes, the theatre corrects our morals, but by ridicule and laughter. Suppress that tiny gerund *ridendo*, and you suppress the theatre; you change it to a penitentiary. Now a stage box, even a closed box, is not a confessional: if the theatre were such, are you very sure that we should find eighteen hundred people ready to go there every night? Rigid moralists assure us that men, and women too, sometimes seek the pleasures of the play-house at church; but I never heard them say that men, or women either, ever sought for ecclesiastic instruction at the play-house.

And let it be thoroughly understood that I use the word *ridendo* in its broadest sense. It not only means laughter, but in a more general sense, pleasure, — that which I call theatrical pleasure: a kind of gratification, I repeat, compounded of truth and deception, blended in unequal proportions, according to the nature of the play; a pleasure, in fine, which is but one variety, a very special and lively variety, of that delight always produced by art, of whatever kind.

I have tried to establish the fact that the actor pursues an art; that this art has its difficulties, its utility, and its grandeur. Let me close by an attempt to establish the actor's proper position in modern society.

Among the Greeks, the true forefathers of the stage, the actor was held in very great esteem. We recall Callipides, who commanded the fleets of Athens, without therefore being obliged to renounce the buskin and the lyre.

This was partly because theatrical representations then partook of a religious and patriotic character. They were the results of Bacchic worship, and the priest of the god always presided over them.

At those splendid competitions, where Æschylus and Sophocles vied with each other, all Greece eagerly hastened to gather and applaud in the vast amphitheatre, and it was like the international exhibitions of the present day, — at least, like those held in France on the first of May and the thirtieth of June.

The chorus in these ancient tragedies was composed to a certain degree of the people themselves; and through the mouth of their leader, in the parabases of Aristophanes, they deliberate upon affairs of state, in language worthy of Athens, — that Athens which was formerly what our Paris now is, the admiration of philosophers and the distraction of all men.

In the Middle Ages, the theatre still retained

somewhat of these characteristics, without the same poetic worth.

In the church, too, the theatre was born with mysteries and miracle plays; and our brothers of the Passion Play are the direct ancestors of the Théâtre Français.

In the immense length of the dramatic performances, which sometimes lasted for weeks at a time, in the public stages erected in the market-place, in the vast crowds of people which thronged thither, we discover a rude resemblance to the dramatic festivals of Athens; as we also find the coarse witticisms of Aristophanes, with cruder, I was about to say more realistic tints, in the loose language of these old compositions, licentious in form and often audacious in thought as they are.

In those days, church and theatre fraternized. The scenic directions prove it: heaven above, with its different divisions parted off in true hierarchic order, and the awful gulf of hell yawning below.

How does it happen, then, that the church, so maternally inclined towards mysteries and miracle plays, has picked so bitter a quarrel with us since?

I greatly fear that the quarrel only dates back to the time of the old farce; to the days of that dear Jack Pudding, with whom I must have been

hail-fellow-well-met in some previous state of existence.

Yes, I fear me that the quarrel began then with the daring dramatic satires of that excellent but unfortunate fellow who, as we all know, ventured to put upon the stage our Mother Church herself in the guise of a foolish parent, and his Holiness the Pope under the transparent title of the obstinate man.

The trouble began then ; but it was not until later on, in Molière's time, that all reconciliation became impossible ; and in the antipathy lavished upon us, it is not difficult to distinguish a rankling resentment against *Tartuffe*. We share in the proscription of Molière. Nor would I complain of that.

There, methinks, in the rancor aroused by that immortal work, lurks the explanation of the long road traversed from the days of the actor Genest, whom the church canonized, to the actor Molière, whom she refused to bury in consecrated ground.

Still we must acknowledge that Mother Church has become somewhat appeased since then. She sometimes allows us to enter her precincts ; she consents to bury us, — perhaps with pleasure. But there still exist traces of the excommunication

pronounced against us in days of yore; that stigma of inferiority which has so long weighed down the actor still remains an article of faith to many people, even among the most enlightened classes. In a word, the prejudice exists, it prevails, softened only and subdued by the progress of civilization in France since the Revolution.

And in fact, it is natural enough that a form of thought so vivid and of such wide circulation as that employed by the theatre should be regarded with anxiety and suspicion by all those old constitutional bodies, easily alarmed by an increasing degree of intellectual life and animation. Even now, nearly one hundred years after its first performance, I doubt if the magistracy would leave a representation of the "*Marriage of Figaro*" in any very indulgent mood.

But how happens it that this prejudice has still such weight with even a liberal public? for many receive us in their homes — nay, invite us thither — who are yet vaguely disturbed and distressed by any suggestion of perfect equality. We are petted, we are admired, — I speak of actresses now; but if we pass certain limits, if we let fall the slightest claim to certain rights, lo and behold! the prejudice rears its snaky head, and darts forth

as fierce and forked a tongue as in the good old times.

I have no desire to refer to the rights which the public considers that it holds over us. I shall not inveigh against the hiss, which is assuredly the most odious of all noises, but which is a means of showing their displeasure to which the audience certainly has a right, — a right placed under the sacro-saintly guard of one of Boileau's verses.

Nor against the throwing of onions and eggs, that waste of good victuals being now of rare occurrence, even in rural districts.

Nor against the apologies which an audience, sometimes more despotic than the laws of Christian charity or even simple justice would allow, occasionally exacts from some ill-fated actor, or what is still worse, from some nervous, suffering actress who may perhaps have lost her lines or her patience.

Nor against cabals. And here I pause; but what does all this prove, if not the species of subjection under which the public, often unwittingly, still desires to hold the actor, the more or less favored slave of its good pleasure? a subjection more apparent in the provinces, where the old customs are kept up, prejudices included; where,

furthermore, the actors, being but birds of passage, can scarcely have those regular relations with the public which a little talent on the one hand, and good-will on the other, so readily transform into friendly intercourse.

And finally, let us suppose Molière to be born again among us. Undoubtedly, in consideration of the masterpieces which he would give you, you would forgive him for appearing on the stage. Assuredly the president of the Republic, no prouder in this particular than Louis XIV., would be charmed to add a leaf to his dinner table for him, were it merely as an elector, and would hand him a chicken's wing with the same engaging gesture as the sun of royalty did formerly; but would there not be many among the most fervent admirers of his genius, among those who most warmly applauded the actor and author in the character of *Alceste*, who would deem it a great mistake ever to allow the man with the green ribbons * to become the man with the red ribbon? †

It may be said that in our days Molière would never play in comedy. How can we tell? Who

* An allusion to *Alceste* in Molière's "*Misanthrope.*"

† The badge of the Legion of Honor, a distinction refused to the actor in France.

can say, and why might not the same fate which made him a comic actor before it made him an author, play him the same romantic trick to-day? For we know the strength of his passion for our art, and his noble reply to Boileau, who urged him from respect for his own play, "*The Misanthrope*," to throw off the sack of *Scapin** and abandon the stage: "What are you thinking of? I am honored by remaining." Honored! think of that! Molière honored! This phrase is worth pondering. Men like Molière are not to be numbered by legions!

It is a strange thing, — painful, indeed, to my vanity as a Frenchman, a vanity which does not exceed decent bounds with me, although an actor's vanity is usually represented as overweening, — it is a painful thing, I say, to know that this prejudice, strong as it is in France, is already abolished in other countries.

There is no trace of it in England, where — not to mention Shakespeare, because comparisons are odious — Garrick's name is graven in Westminster Abbey side by side with those of the most illustrious men. It does not exist in Germany, nor in

* A character in Molière's play "*Les Fourberies de Scapin*," who ties his father in a sack and then beats him.

Italy, nor in Russia, nor in Belgium, where actors receive the honorable distinctions denied them in France; nor in Sweden, where Mme. Ristori experienced as royal honors as if she had been a Rosa Bonheur; nor even in Austria, where I know a certain old actor in retirement, who occasionally returns to tread the boards with his wonted fire despite his eighty years, and who has received a patent of nobility: nor does Austria stop there, for she has recently sent the order of Francis Joseph to two French artists, one of whom is the dean himself of the Comédie Française.

Thus monarchies, even those whose aristocratic traditions are world-renowned, have ceased to consider actors as a class set apart in the social world: and France — what do I say! the French Republic persists in regarding them as such; and it is in this classic land of liberty, equality, and fraternity that this Heaven-crying inequality is carefully embalmed in the most pious arguments.

Add to this a yet stranger fact: namely, that our repertory is universal; that the theatres of foreign countries feed and flourish upon it; that their actors may be made members of various orders, simply for the way in which they interpret

our works, and this, while the French actor, the creator of those very works, is declared in France *non dignus entrare!*

Another reason constantly alleged has always struck me as utterly absurd, although it is most frequently employed, — probably because, like *Figaro's* precepts, it sounds like a profound piece of thought. It is impossible, it is said, to confer on an actor the red ribbon in question, because he would be obliged to lay it aside at the very time that he exercised the art by which he gained it. Oh! ho! But can we yield to logic which would force a man who rescues another from drowning, to retain his cross of honor in taking the heroic plunge? And not to make another odious comparison, although the servants of the house of Molière are sometimes reproached with executing their office with a shade too much solemnity, do not priests of the gospel, who have been decorated, remove their orders and decorations before they kneel at the altar?

Then what are the real reasons for the supposed inferiority with which certain people desire to brand the actor?

The blows across the shoulders, the kicks and cuffs? But this is a mere question of occupation;

and why extend the sentence of ban to a knight like Delaunay, a commander like Maubant, or an emperor like Ligier?

Is it because these artists discharge their duty in person, and expose themselves to hisses and hoots as well as to applause?

Well, are they the only ones who do so? I spoke of volleys of onions and eggs just now; but learned professors have felt the same ere now, and M. Rénan was assailed with copper pence.

And do not orators address themselves directly to the public as well, and do they not employ in their marvellous art — Heaven forgive me, but I was going to say tricks, very nearly akin to our own? I speak not only of political orators, for the pulpit has also its tribunes!

Is it because the actor, in fulfilling the duties of his profession, although exempted from the antique mask, is nevertheless forced by age and long use of paint (forgive the word!) to make a mask of his face? What, such a show of wrath for the red and white, and the little pots in which our ladies keep such pretty pomades and ointments! Where will you draw the line, if you so sternly proscribe cosmetics and dyes; and are there not a few wigs

which will tremble on the heads of our grave judges?

In reality, all the objections, whether serious, specious, or simply ingenious, which have been made to the social elevation of the actor, to his enjoyment of the mere rights of citizenship, — all these reasons, I say, may be reduced to a single one, which is purely instinctive, and which I will now attempt to solve.

It is due to the fact that the renunciation by the actor of his own personality, to assume the character of one, ten, or twenty other people, is apparently a renunciation of his own dignity, and a denial of the dignity of mankind.

My words are high-sounding; but if you refuse to assent to them, what charge can you bring against a Talma, or a Le Kain? It is not because the actor may assume the guise of a *Jocrisse** that you refuse to yield him the same consideration which you would accord any other artist, for in that case, you should, you ought to yield it to him who puts on the imperial purple of *Augustus*, or the soul of the antique *Horatius*. No, it is merely because he assumes a character which is not his

* A familiar character in plays of the sixteenth century, — a sort of foolish, harmless busybody.

own, and because in ceasing to be himself, you feel that he ceases to be a man.

To this objection — the only serious one, in my opinion — I have two answers to make: first, that it is false; second, that were it true, the actor is not responsible for it, and consequently ought not to suffer for it.

Yes, even were it true, the actor would not be responsible for this abdication of his dignity, since it is commanded by his poet-author; and if there be a degradation in the fact, it is not he who should be blamed, but the form itself of the art which necessitates the degradation, and the whole theatre; and you should exempt from your excommunication neither the dramatic author who exposes us poor minors to such corruption, nor the manager who lends us his house in which to give ourselves over to vice, — in your company, sirs.

But I deny that there is degradation, since there is no true abdication of personal dignity. The actor may indeed assume a disguise, — I have said so too often to refuse to repeat it now, — and it is this assumed character, not his own, which receives the blows and mockery, if need be: but this disguise, which he will doff erelong, he enters into with heart and soul, with all his mind,

with all his courage, — for on the night of a first performance, he is like a soldier under fire; he enters into the character with his personal individuality, directive and creative. It is with this individual *self* that he makes you by turns shiver, weep, or smile, the noblest shudders, the most melting tears, the humanest smiles. He does not abdicate the throne: he reigns supreme. He may surrender to a certain point: he does not resign!

Consequently, his dignity is intact; he is no less a man, and he is an artist.

Before I close, allow me to quote a few paragraphs from a letter written by Voltaire, in the form of a dedication to his tragedy of "*Zaire*":—

"*To Mr. Falkener, Ambassador to Constantinople:*

"My dear Friend (for your recent ambassadorial dignity only renders our friendship the more respectable, and does not prevent me from using here a title more sacred than the title of minister: the name of friend is far higher than that of 'Your Excellency'), I dedicate to the ambassador the same work which I dedicated to the mere citizen, to the English merchant.

"Those who know how highly trade is honored in your country cannot be ignorant of the fact

that a merchant there is sometimes a legislator, a good officer, or a public minister as well.

"Certain persons, vitiated by the unworthy custom of paying homage to grandeur alone, have striven to cast ridicule upon so novel a thing as a dedication to a man who had naught to recommend him save merit. In a theatre consecrated to slander and bad taste, some have ventured to insult the writer of that dedication, and him to whom it was inscribed: his trade was thrown in his teeth. And yet the French nation should not be blamed for a piece of rudeness and insolence so disgraceful that the most savage tribes might blush for it. The magistrates, who preside over our morals and who are constantly at work to repress scandal, were taken by surprise; but the public scorn and horror of the well-known author of this insult are but another proof of French good-breeding.

"The virtues which make up the character of a nation are often belied by the vices of one man. There were some few voluptuaries in Lacedæmonia; there have been frivolous and low-minded men in England; there were boors, vulgarians, and Philistines in Athens, as there are in France.

"Forget them as they are forgotten by the

world, and receive this second act of homage: I owe it to an Englishman the more that this tragedy has recently been beautified in London; it was translated and played there so successfully, my name has been spoken in your theatres with such kindness and civility, that my public acknowledgments are certainly due to your nation.

"It is a fact which will strike the French as most singular, that a gentleman of your country, a man of fortune and consideration, did not disdain to play the part of *Orosmanes* on your public stage. Nor is this the first example among your countrymen of a citizen improving his talent for declamation; the only surprising thing in the matter is our astonishment. We ought to reflect that everything in this world depends upon custom and opinion. The court of France has danced upon the stage with actors from the opera-house, and no one thought it strange, until the fashion for such diversions died out. Why should it be more amazing to recite than to dance in public? Is there any other difference between these two arts, than the fact that the one is as far above the other as talent and intellect are above mere physical accomplishments? I repeat it again, and shall always maintain it, —

no one of the fine arts is to be despised, and the only true disgrace lies in attaching dishonor to the exercise of talent."

It seems to me that it would be a worthy action nowadays to lift from the actor, once and for all, the ban pronounced against him by monarchical society, which affected to consider him as a mere instrument of pleasure.

I see only advantages for every one in permitting the actor to resume the position in the French Republic which he held in the Athenian Republic.

And what may that be? Lord high admiral, like Callipides? Well! I don't say that; and whatever may be the inclination of modern artists and men of letters to invest themselves on every occasion with the rights and privileges of the priestly office, I, for one, will never lay claim to a pontificate.

Yet it seems to me that the actor might be profitably employed in matters of education, — by means of essays like the present, for instance, by which he might render such real service to art, — and that at the periodical festivals held to commemorate our national anniversaries,

there would be a place which he might worthily occupy.

The public recitation of a fine ode or an epic poem could not fail to produce, on a people so gifted as the French, an impression as invigorating and as wholesome as the performance of any choir or orchestra, however melodious.

Let my readers recall to mind the success achieved by Rachel with the "Marseillaise," and they will better appreciate my meaning.

A movement in this direction is already on foot, and I sincerely hope that it may strengthen and increase in extent as time goes on.

When a common emotion unites men, — be it patriotic, artistic, or a feeling of religious recognition of some past glory, — how effective would be the recitation of some fine poem filled with living thoughts, to rouse the best that there is in humanity, and what profit might not a nation derive from similar solemnities, devoted to the nurture of its native genius!

In rendering to the actor the honor due him, in setting him on an equal footing with his fellows in the eye of the law, we should but spur him on to such noble efforts; we should thus contribute to that elevation of art so often discussed in

recent times, and which must be effected simultaneously with the elevation of morals and manners.

I can hear the reader jestingly exclaim, "You are in the trade, M. Josse!"* Yes, I am, and I am pleading for my house; but what else has been the custom of the world for these many ages past? And could I be expected to underrate the importance — I may say the necessity — of what some may call accomplishments, and many might call useless?

Ah, me! The body requires the necessities of life, but it is the superfluous for which the spirit cries aloud.

I recall a charming poem by that excellent, delicate, and profound author, Sully-Prudhomme. The subject is the revolt of the flowers. They are seized with a fit of the spleen. Man, the world, the frightful monotony of fate, sadden and annoy them, and they decide to give over blossoming. All the roses disappear. There are no more lilies, to the grief of the young girls who love them; no more violets, — such an injury to the month of May! no more poppies, — and how forlorn the wheat-fields look! In short, there is an end of the spring. But what is the use of having any

* A quotation from Molière's "*L'Amour Médecin.*"

flowers? say the philosophers. 'T is but another bit of frivolity; that 's all. Yes, but in this frivolity lies the grace of the year, the charm of life. All has faded; color and perfume, delicacy and beauty, are gone! Then what will become of the women? and of love? and consequently of pleasure and joy? It 's of no use to talk about it, every one feels bored, envy and malice spread abroad; evil passions spring into life once more. Give us back the flowers; we must have flowers! And I fairly believe there would have been a regular revolution, barricades and all, if the tender heart of the rose had not been melted by the universal distress.

Well, without pushing the comparison too far, just fancy all the actors and actresses striking work, like Sully-Prudhomme's flowers!

I ask you on your word of honor, can you deny that there would be a somewhat similar reversal of the order of nature? Would it be long before Paris, the Paris now so bright and so gay, became utterly uninhabitable? Why, people would drop dead in the streets from sheer *ennui!* If it lasted for any length of time there would certainly be a general return to a savage state of existence.

Ah! it was once said that if there were a dearth

of strawberries, Paris would rise in revolt. Gentlemen, during the siege there was a terrible dearth, not only of strawberries, but of a great many other good things, and Paris did not rise in revolt in consequence. Her citizens waged a holy warfare, suffered bravely; but there were actors who took the place of strawberries.*

Was it a trifling thing, then, during those days of gloom and depression, to keep up those performances at the Comédie Française and elsewhere, when the inspired words of the poets dropped warm from our hearts into the public heart? And those performances of Victor Hugo's "*Chatiments*," of moving and consoling memory, what of them? and of so many others, whither your actors, for lack of other laurels, brought you the laurel leaves of art, which never fade upon the radiant brow of France? Ah! how every bosom beat! What transports! What unity! Were it but for the memory of those hours, I assure you, I fail to see how any one can say that the actor is a useless and inferior being. And here let me pause; for nothing can be better fitted to impress

* An allusion to those actors and actresses who courageously remained in Paris, and played during the siege, hoping thus to keep up a spirit of cheerfulness.

me with the conviction — a proud one, perhaps, but correct, I think — that we actors are entitled to hold honorable rank, not only in the art whose soldiers and followers we are, but also in the annals of our country.

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