EDWIN BOOTH

BY

LAURENCE HUTTON

HARPER'S BLACK & WHITE SERIES

To
Laurence Hutton
from his friend
Edwin Booth, 1890

The best fellow I think, ever I knew of me.

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ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
1893

ILLUSTRATIONS

EDWIN BOOTH

YOUNG man, the only son of his mother and she a widow, sat alone with his dead one awful night a good many years ago, when there entered the room a dear friend of them both. The newcomer, placing his warm hand upon the cold hands of her who was gone, laid his wet cheek against the wetter cheek of him who was left, and said simply, "My poor boy, my poor boy!" There were volumes of sympathy and affection in the words and in the action, and even a little comfort. They both knew that it was merely the natural, unaffected expression of a very warm feeling of pity for the mourner, and of genuine, almost filial, love for her whom they thus mourned together. The man of tender heart and more

than kindly nature was Edwin Booth; "the poor boy" is the man who pens these lines.

The friendship between them, of many years' standing, cemented if possible more strongly by what is here for the first time narrated, was never broken until Mr. Booth himself laid down the burden of his life, and went — by no means unprepared — to solve the great problem of the future; carrying with him, perhaps, a direct message to the mother from the son.

Only those who have known Edwin Booth in trouble and in sorrow have known Edwin Booth at all; and even his few intimate friends, and the members of his own immediate family, have not known of half the good he has done. He never made any public expression of his personal feeling. He gave lavishly with both hands, concealing from the left hand the gifts of the right; and, if possible, keeping even the right hand itself ignorant of its own well-doing. I have known him to pay all the funeral expenses, and to attend the funeral, of a woman he

had never seen, simply because her daughter was a member of his company, and without means or a friend. I have seen him receive in his own home, and on a footing of perfect social equality, the black servant who had called to pay her respects to him, and deny himself, during her visit, to men and women of the highest social distinction, who were permitted only to leave their cards at his door. I have discovered accidentally, and from outside sources, of his unbounded generosity to superannuated actors, who had no claim upon him whatever, except that they were old and poor. I have heard him say that a certain worn-out comedian had a fixed income for life, and that a certain broken-down tragedian's mortgage had been paid, without the expression of the slightest hint that he himself had taken up the mortgage or had bought the annuity. I have seen him blush like a girl at the receipt of a letter of thanks, and run away like a coward from the gratitude of those he had helped.

A story which Lawrence Barrett used to tell upon himself may not be out of place here, as illustrating what I have tried to say. The wreck of a brilliant actor came to Mr. Barrett once at the stage entrance of a Western theatre and asked for the loan of half a dollar. His miserable condition was entirely his own fault. He had lost his self-respect, if he had ever possessed any, and he was utterly ruined by liquor and by the results of a bad life. Mr. Barrett, who had by hard work, by untiring industry, by close study, and by uniform good conduct raised himself from nothing, had but little patience with those who had fallen from high estates down to nothing because of their lack of the qualities which he himself possessed, and he refused the beggar money to buy the drink he craved. "If Mr. Barrett could not and would not help him to a pittance, would Mr. Barrett cash the check in his ragged pocket, received that day, and useless to him where he was not known?" The check was produced, and bore the signature of Edwin

Booth. "And so," said Mr. Barrett one evening in Mr. Booth's presence, and to Mr. Booth's great distress, "to the wretched creature to whom I had refused fifty cents Edwin had given fifty dollars!"

It must not be inferred from this incident that Mr. Barrett was not himself a man of sincere soul and of large bounty. Few members of an ever-generous profession have been more ready and more willing to help those who could not help themselves. The long association existing between the two men was as intimate in a personal as it was in a business way. A few years Mr. Booth's junior upon the stage of the world, Mr. Barrett was his excellent support at the very outset of Mr. Booth's career as a star performer, and for many seasons, and in many parts of the country, have they played together, under all conditions, and in every variety of tragedy and comedy, going home together many hundreds of nights to a simple supper of bread and milk in some provincial hotel, or to an equally frugal repast

of tea and toast in the grill-room of The Players, in New York. Mr. Barrett's affectionate care of his companion was touching and unceasing, not only during their professional engagements, but during the bright holiday seasons spent in Mr. Barrett's summer house at Cohasset, on the Massachusetts coast, where they talked together for long hours of old times, and laid the plans for a long future together, upon the stage and off. Their reminiscences then related, grave and gay, could they have been preserved by the fortunate listeners, would have made a book of theatrical history and anecdote unrivalled in the whole literature of the drama. Mr. Barrett's death, for which Mr. Booth was entirely unprepared, was a terrible shock to the survivor, and a blow from which he never fully recovered. The gentle spirit of "The Man of Airlie" seemed to haunt, in the most pleasant way, his old apartments, adjoining those of Mr. Booth, at The Players; and more than once, after Mr. Barrett had passed away, when some heavy truck

in the street below had jarred the building, and caused the strings of the automatic harp upon his closed door "to play sweet music," Mr. Booth has turned his sad face towards it, and has said, with a half smile, "There comes poor Lawrence now!"

Mr. Booth's great gift of a Club to the members of his profession, and to those who are in sympathy with it, was the last crowning act of his life, and The Players, as was his own wish, is his most enduring monument. He had long cherished the plan of founding a home for the more deserving of his fellow-workers, and the idea culminated, after much discussion, on the deck of the steam-yacht *Oneida*, sailing along the coast of Maine, in the summer of 1887, when The Players was conceived. The history of the association is part of the history of the great city in which it stands, and part of the history of the drama in America, and therefore it need not be repeated here. Mr. Booth presented the building and its contents, including his own rich dramatic library and

his own collection of rare dramatic portraits, to its members on the night of December 31, 1888, and thereafter it was his only home. He showed the greatest interest in everything concerning it. When he was in town he never missed a business meeting of its governing body, of which he was president. He scanned carefully the list of candidates for membership, giving his vote always for the younger men upon the stage, who he felt would be a help to the organization, and gainers themselves by its quiet, healthful influence; and to the last The Players and their welfare were ever uppermost in his mind. It is not often that a man is wise enough and thoughtful enough to enjoy the results of his own beneficence. This was Mr. Booth's happy and well-merited lot. Upon Founder's Night, the anniversary of the club's inauguration, the foremost men in every walk of life gathered within its walls to do him honor. He was loved and respected by every man whose name was upon its rolls. When he entered a room with a

pleasant word of greeting to each person present, there was a universal stir and murmur of response. Many of the members rose unostentatiously, and remained standing until he was seated, and even the few—very few—of the younger men who habitually wore their hats in the building, instinctively uncovered at his approach. The passing of the "loving-cup"—once the property of the elder Booth—upon Founder's Night, and on other rare and festive occasions, was a revival, or survival, of an old custom, beautiful in its observance, and very dear to Mr. Booth's own heart. After wetting his lips with its contents, he gave it with a bow to his nearest neighbor, and as it passed from hand to hand, each man in his turn rose in his place, no matter where he was or what his present occupation, and standing, he bowed and drank to "The Founder." Alas! and alas! we can only drink to his memory now.

Concerning Edwin Booth in his domestic relations—as son, as husband, as brother, as

father—this is not the time nor the place to speak. His sorrowing daughter, with whom all the world grieves to-day, knows well how tender and how perfect was his love for her, for her mother, and for her children. His devotion to the memory of his father he has himself put on record in enduring form, and his filial affection for the mother whom he buried only a few years ago was as sacred and intense as such affection can ever be. He was not a perfect man. He was only human, and very human at that. But he was a credit to humanity, an honor to his country, and the foremost figure in the whole history of the American stage.

Edwin Booth was born on the 13th of November, 1833, upon his father's farm, in Harford County, Maryland, a quiet, picturesque old place, full of mellow sunshine, but shut out from the world by miles of unbroken and primeval woodland. He was called Edwin Thomas Booth, after two of his father's most intimate associates, Edwin Forrest and Thomas Flynn.

MR. BOOTH'S MOTHER.
(From an old painting.)

Mrs. Asia Booth Clarke, who has carried the life of her brother down to the date of his second visit to England, in 1880, tells us how on the night of that 13th of November the negroes of the neighborhood were so impressed by the brilliancy of a meteoric shower that they fell to making prophecies concerning the brilliant future of the newcomer, who was to be a see-er of ghosts all his days, and to be guided by a lucky star. One recalls this scene with curious interest—the dense woods, the old whitewashed cabin, still and spectral in the darkness, and those groups of awe-struck negroes, busy with portents for the new-born child's after-life.

To the elder Booth, as his daughter has shown us, this old farm, buried as it was in the heart of the Maryland forest, had been, since its purchase in 1822, both a refuge and a pleasure. Though lying but twenty-five miles from Baltimore, it was almost inaccessible. The mounted post-boy passed by but once a week, tossing the mail-bags over the fence. Few travellers went that way.

From the gate that opened on the rough and stony highroad a crooked horse-path led through a quarter of a mile of woodland to the primitive cottage, which once, to the great wonder of his neighbors, Mr. Booth had moved from a distant site to where, under massive trees, a spring of cool water bubbled all day. About this spring he had built granite ledges and steps, and, to the delight of his children, a great green bull-frog was encouraged to dwell in peace and comfort within its depths. Near the door of the cabin Mr. Booth had planted a cherry-tree, which, as it grew and blossomed, lending its branches to the children in their romps, became, as years went by, more and more closely identified with their family traditions.

Within-doors all was quaint, sweet, and primitive. There the hum of the spinning-wheel was a constant sound, it being "the farmer's pride that all his blankets and woollen goods came from the backs of his own sheep, and were spun at home." Brass fenders, old-fashioned mirrors, and polished

pewter plates made up the details of its simple furnishings, and Shelley, Coleridge, Tasso, Racine, and Alighieri looked out from among the few books of the well-chosen library.

The earliest of Edwin Booth's recollections, however, were not of the cheer and charm of this quiet sunny life, but of his being lifted late at night over a crooked snake-fence, Junius Brutus Booth, as he placed him upon the other side of it, exclaiming, "Your foot is on your native heath!" As the boy stood there in the dense darkness of overhanging trees he could hear the dull sound made by the hoofs of the horses as they galloped away into the night, and the impression made upon him he never afterwards forgot.

Edwin and his father had travelled all day, reaching home at a late hour, for even at this early age, the mother's health being delicate, it was to this tender and dutiful child, grave beyond his years, that the guardianship of his father had been given. And so

was inaugurated for Edwin Booth those long wanderings by night and day, and that close and intimate companionship with that strange wild genius, which were to lend at once the gloom and radiance to his life.

Edwin Booth's education began under a Miss Susan Hyde, who kept a school for boys and girls in the neighborhood of "Old Town." By her he was thoroughly grounded in all those rudiments which go to form the basis of a sound mental training. Miss Hyde, who afterwards became the secretary of the Peabody Institute in Baltimore, never ceased to follow with affectionate interest the career of her brilliant pupil, and between the two the old friendship was never broken.

He was next placed by his father under the care of an old West-Indian officer, a Frenchman, Louis Dugas, who had about him a few young persons in their teens. He went also at one time to some university, the name of which Mrs. Clarke does not mention. He studied at intervals afterwards with a Mr. Kearney, a pedagogue, who wrote his own

school-books, and encouraged dramatic performances among his pupils. It was in Mr. Kearney's crowded establishment that the elder Booth, entering once unobserved, saw Edwin on a platform, in black jacket and white trousers, playing with J. S. Clarke, who was similarly attired, the quarrel scene between Brutus and Cassius. These sudden and quiet appearances of his father were by no means infrequent in Edwin Booth's life, and the boy was able to recall many of them, although in all instances it was one of the father's peculiarities to ignore them and to have them ignored.

A clever self-taught negro taught Edwin the banjo, and under Signor Picioli he became a proficient on the violin. But of other instruction he knew none, except the world as it schooled him, experience as it taught him, or as the brilliancy and charm of his father's daily conversation helped to guide and form his tastes.

As to his personal appearance in those days, we have only this testimony from Mr.

John H. Jewett: "He was a comely lad, as I remember him, dressed in a Spanish cloak (among the first to display that style), giving promise of the man he has turned out to be."

Mr. Edwin Booth, according to Mrs. Clarke, made his first appearance on any stage on the night of September 10, 1849, and at the Boston Museum. He played on that occasion Tressel. The story of his undertaking it is an old one, but one that is much too characteristic of both father and son to be omitted here. Mr. Thoman, prompter and actor, annoyed at some detail, shouted to Edwin, standing near him, "This is too much work for one man; *you* ought to play Tressel," which, after a little hesitation, the lad was persuaded to do. "On this eventful night the elder Booth, dressed for *Richard III.*, was seated with his feet upon the table in his dressing-room. Calling his son before him, like a severe pedagogue or inquisitor, he interrogated him in that hard laconic style he could at times assume.

"'Who was Tressel?'

"'A messenger from the field of Tewkesbury.'

"'What was his mission?'

"'To bear the news of the defeat of the King's party?'

"'How did he make his journey?'

"'On horseback.'

"'Where are your spurs?'

"Edwin glanced quickly down, and said he had not thought of them.

"'Here, take mine.'

"Edwin unbuckled his father's spurs, and fastened them on his own boots. His part being ended on the stage, he found his father still sitting in the dressing-room, apparently engrossed in thought.

"'Have you done well?" he asked.

"'I think so,' replied Edwin.

"'Give me my spurs,' rejoined his father, and obediently young Tressel replaced the spurs upon Gloucester's feet."

The very rare bill of this performance, perhaps the only copy in existence, for no one but the débutant would be likely to

preserve it, was given, among so many other treasures, by Mr. Booth to The Players, and it hangs in the dining-room there, one of the most cherished possessions of its members.

In his beautiful and affectionate tribute to his father, published in the third volume of *Actors and Actresses*, Edwin wrote in 1885: "After my début in the very small part of Tressel, he 'coddled' me, gave me gruel (his usual meal at night when acting), and made me don his worsted nightcap, which, when his work was ended, he always wore as a protection for his heated head, to prevent me from taking cold after my labors, which were doubtless very exhausting on that occasion, being confined to one brief scene at the beginning of the play! At that time there seemed to be a touch of irony in this over-care of me; but *now*, recalling the many acts of his large sympathy, it appears in its true character of genuine solicitude for the heedless boy who had drifted into that troublous sea, where, without talent, he would either sink,

EDWIN BOOTH.

(From a photograph taken in St. Louis in 1856.)

or, buoyed perhaps by vanity alone, merely flounder in its uncertain waves.

"To comprehend the peculiar temperament with which my father charmed, roused, and subdued the keenest and the coarsest intellects of his generation, one should be able to understand that great enigma to the wisest —'Hamlet.'

"To my dull thinking, Hamlet typifies uneven or unbalanced genius. But who can tell us what genius of any sort whatever means? The possessor, or rather the possessed, if he is, as in Hamlet's case, more frequently its slave than its master, being irresistibly and often unconsciously swayed by its capriciousness. Great minds to madness closely are allied. Hamlet's mind, at the very edge of frenzy, seeks its relief in ribaldry. For a like reason would my father open, so to speak, the safety-valve of levity in some of his most impassioned moments. At the instant of intense emotion, when the spectators were enthralled by his magnetic influence, the tragedian's overwrought brain

would take refuge from its own threatening storm beneath the jester's hood, and, while turned from the audience, he would whisper some silliness, or 'make a face.' When he left the stage, however, no allusion to such seeming frivolity was permitted. His fellow-actors who perceived these trivialities ignorantly attributed his conduct at such times to lack of feeling; whereas it was extreme excess of feeling which thus forced his brain back from the very verge of madness. Only those who have known the torture of severe mental tension can appreciate the value of that one little step from the sublime to the ridiculous. My close acquaintance with so fantastic a temperament as was my father's so accustomed me to that in him that much of Hamlet's 'mystery' seems to me no more than idiosyncrasy.

"While not his favorite, my presence seemed necessary to him when at work, although at other times he almost ignored me, perhaps because his other children were more vivacious and amused him more.

"Reserved and diffident, almost bashful, when away from home, my father behind his locked doors and bolted shutters was as gleeful as a child. Soon after sunrise he would dig in his garden, whistling as he worked. .... Contented within his family circle, he could not appreciate the necessity for any extraneous element there; hence his wife and children became isolated, and were ill at ease in the presence of other than their own immediate relatives."

The young actor had made so successful a hit as Tressel that various managers tried to induce the elder Booth to allow his son's name to appear on programmes with his own. To every offer of this character Junius Booth held out a stubborn resistance. Lawrence Barrett has told this story of that time: "On one occasion an old friend, then managing a Western theatre, asked Mr. Booth to allow him to bill Edwin with his father. He was met by the usual curt refusal, but, after a moment's pause, and without any sense of the humor of the suggestion, Booth said that

Edwin was a good banjo-player, and he could be announced for a solo between the acts."

With no greater encouragement from his father, and being, as he was, still so much absorbed in unremitting care of him, it is hardly to be wondered that Edwin made so few of those early bows before the curtain of which the history of theatrical families is so full. His next public appearance, in fact, was not until Saturday, August 2, 1850, when he and J. S. Clarke gave by invitation a dramatic reading in the court-house at Belair. The story of it is an old one, but well worth repeating. Mrs. Clarke shows us the ride of these two enthusiastic young fellows the day before over twenty-five miles of rough country road and under a hot midsummer sun to order in Baltimore printed programmes for the performance; the eagerness of the rustics, who expected nothing less than a circus; the pasting by an old negro, to whom the task had been intrusted, of all their bills upside down; then the decorum of the audience, the men and women separating at

the door of the building; and, finally, the unbroken calm and silence during their selections from *Macbeth*, *Richard III.*, the *Merchant of Venice*, during the quarrel scene from *Julius Cæsar*, which had made the fame of the young striplings in their school-days, and even during the singing, with blackened faces, of negro melodies (not down on the programme) to the music of banjo and bones. A grim experience, surely, but one, happily, in which the humor of the situation was all that was afterwards remembered. Those printed programmes lay among their possessions for years.

Probably nowhere on any stage was ever a more curious entrance seen than that made by Edwin Booth in *Richard III.* It was at the National Theatre in Chatham Street, New York, in February, 1851. The elder and the younger Booths were at that time housed in some dingy, inconvenient quarter of the town, the father having always a fondness for the old places he had known in his youth, those that had, through cir-

cumstance of poverty perhaps, shrunk from joining in the march of new improvements. Here on one occasion, when the stage trunk with its properties for *Richard III.* had already been strapped to the waiting carriage before the door, and while the theatre, some distance away, had been for some time astir, Junius Booth suddenly announced that nothing would induce him to play that night. All the entreaties, the arguments, the despair, of his son failed to move the obdurate father. "Go play it yourself," was all he answered, in that quick curt way of his that was one of his strongest characteristics. Seeing the hopelessness of further effort, the boy drove to the theatre. "No matter," said John R. Scott, the leading support, whom he met; "you act it," making the very suggestion which the elder Booth had made. While the audience that filled the house waited before the curtain, the company behind it, in the wildest excitement, hurried Edwin into his father's costume, one member listening during the process to his reci-

tation of the soliloquy. These clothes hung like bags about Edwin, and the applause which greeted his appearance entirely died away when the audience, who had been informed of no change, suddenly found itself confronted with a stranger. Yet, in spite of the almost overwhelming difficulties, the young actor won from them all repeated applause, and at the close of the performance a prolonged call. Mr. Scott then first made his explanation, introducing Edwin Booth as "the worthy scion of a noble stock," adding, under his breath, "I'll wager they don't know what that means." At the hotel, on his return, Edwin discovered his father in apparently the same position and mood as when he had left him, vouchsafing no remark, except a cold question in regard to how he had succeeded. Yet he always believed that as his father had once before seen his performance of Tressel, so now he had witnessed the entire tragedy of *Richard III.*, having been really very much pleased with his success on both occasions. Edwin

was at that time barely seventeen years of age. In his later life, in referring to those early days, he wrote:

"Thenceforth he [the elder Booth] made no great objection to my acting occasionally with him, although he never gave me instruction, professional advice, or encouragement in any form. He had doubtless resolved to make me work my way unaided; and though his seeming indifference was painful then, it compelled me to exercise my callow wits; it made me *think!*"

Under Theodore Barton, of Baltimore, at a salary of six dollars a week, Edwin played, shortly after, an unimportant engagement in still more unimportant rôles. And it is a curious fact that this young actor, who was able to satisfy in Richard III. an audience awaiting his father, should have utterly failed in minor parts, Madame Ciocca, with whom he essayed pantomime, openly abusing him for his *gaucherie.*

It was about this time—he was uncertain of the date—that Edwin, as he was in after-

years very fond of telling, played Titus to his father's Brutus one night in Washington, and in the presence of the author, John Howard Payne. During the same engagement, in the same city, he remembered playing Young Norval—the Old Norval of his father—in a gown borrowed from the leading lady's costume of Helen Macgregor, using the skirts as a kilt, and wearing the bodice, as he expressed it, "hind side before." These are but poor examples of the curious and interesting experience of his early life which his friends have so often heard him relate.

In 1852 the father and son undertook that memorable journey to California which brought so many changes into their lives. They crossed the Isthmus on mules. Each man as he slept held a pistol in his hand. To the one lady of the party a hammock was given. The men lay on wine casks and barrels, over which blankets had been thrown. Edwin kept silent watch through the long hours, hearing but not understand-

ing the low whispers of the natives, who sat sharpening great knives near by, while rats, undisturbed by the intruders, ran about the hut.

After two weeks in San Francisco the Booths went to Sacramento, but affairs in California were at that time in so deplorable a condition that the elder Booth insisted on returning East, and on leaving Edwin behind him to gain an experience which the father felt would be of inestimable value to him. It had been at the solicitation of Junius Brutus Booth, Jun., that the journey was originally planned. Brilliant results had been hoped for, but a period of great depression had begun in California for those early settlers, who, a few months before, had been elated beyond measure by belief in the prospects of enormous wealth. The promised theatre in San Francisco had not even been started, and men were too frightened or too poor to make serious financial ventures of any kind.

There certainly could hardly have been a

MR. AND MRS. BOOTH AND DAUGHTER.

less propitious time for a young and inexperienced actor to face the world alone. And there now began for Edwin Booth a long and strange series of vicissitudes, such as would have tried the nerve of many a veteran, and which can hardly be repeated in the life of the newer generation of to-day. It was not alone that he was absolutely penniless, but that, being penniless, he had to carve his way to success through almost insurmountable difficulties, in mining camps, in half-settled and wholly new communities, and this in the cold of winter nights, and after having been snow-bound upon the mountain roads sometimes for days together.

It was in one of the dreariest of all these places, as Mrs. Clarke tells us, that the news of his father's death reached him. "There is a mail, and a letter for *you*," said some one who recognized him by the light of a lantern, as he walked in the slush and mud of a miserable little town, where gold diggers had undermined the houses, and left deep

and yawning gulches in all the roads. A courier, long delayed by the snows, had at last broken through the great banks and brought the mail. "What news is there?" Edwin had asked, but knew in a moment what his old friend Spear was afraid to tell him. The blow was crushing; and this loyal, hypersensitive son found it difficult to forgive himself for what he imagined to be the desertion of his father.

Financial straits of greater severity settled down upon this sorrowing youth and his friends. They walked for fifty miles through snow-drifts for engagements, only to disband at their destination—Marysville. With a borrowed ten dollars in his pocket, Edwin started for Sacramento, to find when he reached there that fire and flood had nearly destroyed the town. From Sacramento he went at once to San Francisco, with no prospects and in utter despair. There some friend returned him twenty dollars, lent and forgotten long before, and for the first, last, and only time in his life he walked into

one of the gambling saloons, too common in those days, and lost it all!

It may be fitting in this connection to say a word here concerning a very serious charge, the public discussion of which caused the subject of it much unhappiness. Edwin Booth was *not* a drinking man. During a long and intimate friendship with him of nearly twenty years' standing, in all kinds of society and under all circumstances, some of them the most trying that man can endure, I have never seen him touch brandy, whiskey, or spirits of any kind, and I do not remember his drinking even the lightest of table wines half a dozen times during all that period. And in this I will be heartily supported by the testimony of those who have been associated with him in any way. He was subject to attacks of vertigo long before his first slight stroke of paralysis upon the stage at Rochester in 1889, and his occasional feebleness and unsteadiness of speech and of movement were entirely attributable to that cause. It is safe to assert

that any temperate man with an ordinarily strong head for such things could drink at a single sitting, and without showing or feeling its effects, all the wine and liquor put together which Mr. Booth consumed during the last five years of his life.

But to return to those early days in California. About this time, Fairchild, a scene-painter in San Francisco, induced Booth to play Richard III. at his (Fairchild's) benefit, which he did with such success that the managers, departing from their original intention—that of devoting their theatre to comedy—proposed to Booth the production of certain tragedies. He then played Sir Edward Mortimer, Shylock, Richard III., and Othello. At his own benefit, which followed, he assumed the part of Hamlet for the first time. According to Mrs. Clarke, Booth's choice of Hamlet on this occasion was made for reasons he held sacred. Long before, during that unproductive stay at Sacramento, Edwin, playing Jaffier to his father's Pierre, had, while in the black dress of that charac-

ter, come suddenly upon his father on the steps of his dressing-room, to be greeted by him in his characteristic way: "You look like Hamlet. Why did you not do it for your benefit?" and Edwin had answered, "If I ever have another benefit, I will."

After his father's death these words, though carelessly spoken, had assumed for him the solemnity of a promise. And his promise he always kept. He did not remember in after-years the date of this memorable first performance of Hamlet, and the bill of that night was lost, unfortunately, with his other treasured Penates, at the time of the destruction of the Winter Garden Theatre in New York.

This benefit was followed by precarious days. Booth found himself gradually forced into the position of a stock star on a miserable salary. His name was used to draw when the names of others failed. He played secondary parts to Mrs. Catherine Sinclair, who had come to open the new theatre. James Murdock followed, and then came

Laura Keene, who ascribed her failure to "Edwin Booth's bad acting"! Mr. D. C. Anderson and Booth at that time were living in a little hut on the outskirts of San Francisco, cooking their own meals, and washing and mending their own clothes.

Booth was persuaded by Mr. Anderson to go with him to Australia, actors returning from that country having given glowing accounts of the prospects and possibilities there. He played, when at Sydney, Shylock to Miss Keene's Portia. His Richard III. was received with great applause. But the unfavorable conditions existing at Melbourne induced this wandering band of players to return home. On their way to California their vessel stopped at Honolulu, where Booth put all his money, fifty dollars, into the rent for one month of the Royal Hawaiian Theatre, and where Mr. Roe, a short, thick-set German, doubling his parts, played both the Duke and the Duchess of York.

The Hawaiian court was at that time in mourning. The King of the Sandwich Isl-

ands as a child had seen the elder Booth as Richard III. in New York, and not wishing to miss the performance of the son in this same rôle, he went to the theatre, attended by two escorts, and sat on an armchair in the wings. When in the coronation scene this chair was needed as a throne, the King, with perfect amiability, yielded it to the uncrowned monarch of the stage.

Another benefit was given him before sailing, when he played King Lear for the first time.

On his return to San Francisco, Booth played, at the Metropolitan Theatre, Benedick to Mrs. Sinclair's Beatrice. A short and successful engagement followed at the American Theatre, and then once more Booth went to Sacramento, where the manager, for economical reasons, dismissed him. With Mr. Sedley, Mrs. Sinclair, and a Mr. Venua, he then leased a shabby theatre, and for the first time in America *The Marble Heart* was produced, Booth creating the part of Raphael. The success of this play was

enormous there, but on the road it proved so great a failure that the company disbanded ; and Booth was again obliged to make new overtures. He went next to San Francisco, and from there, with eight or ten persons, he started on a tour through the mining towns—Booth on horseback ; the manager, his wife, and the stage properties in a large covered wagon. Stops were made at settlements of only a few huts, and *The Iron Chest* and *Katherine and Petruchio* were on the standard bill.

The profits from this journey were not great ; and Booth, having left his horse in payment for a debt, arrived in a penniless condition in Sacramento. Here meeting Mr. Butler, an architect, he was made by that gentleman to see the importance of his return to the East, where other men were trying to fill the place left vacant by his father. Two benefits having been arranged by Mr. Butler, Booth left Sacramento free from debt, and carrying with him various testimonials from the public.

ON THE YACHT "ONEIDA."

Those who welcomed his return to his old home in Maryland found few changes in his appearance. "He had come back older in experience only," says Mrs. Clarke, "for he looked like a boy still, and very fragile; his wild black eyes and long locks gave him an air of melancholy. He had the gentle dignity and inherent grace that one attributes to a young prince, yet he was merry, cheerful, and boyish in disposition, as one can imagine Hamlet to have been in the days before the tragedy was enacted in the orchard."

Booth opened at the Front Street Theatre Baltimore, in the character of Richard III. Under J. T. Ford he played a short engagement in Washington, and at Richmond, Virginia, where Joseph Jefferson was at that time stage-manager. It was here that he met Miss Mary Devlin, who afterwards became his wife, and who was then a member of Mr. Jefferson's personal and dramatic family.

In the spring of 1857, Booth, having ac-

cepted an offer from Thomas Barry, played Sir Giles Overreach at the Boston Theatre. His success was instantaneous. He followed this character with a round of others, and on May 4th he made his bow before a New York audience as Richard III., at the Metropolitan Theatre, afterwards the Winter Garden, and then managed by William E. Burton. It had been entirely in opposition to the expressed wishes of the star that announcements of his appearance as Richard III. had been made. A character so closely identified with the great successes of his father was hardly the one in which this son cared to present himself. Everything in his sensitive nature was offended at the whole proceeding. It was with a feeling of outraged mortification and indignation that on his arrival in New York he read the flaming posters announcing him as "The Hope of the Living Drama!" "Son of the Great Tragedian!" and adding, "Richard's himself again!"

The actors who played with him, to whom

rumors of his fame had come, were not altogether prepared for the manner of man he was. Lawrence Barrett, who was Tressel on that opening night, thus describes his first appearance at rehearsal: "A slight pale youth, with black flowing hair, soft brown eyes full of tenderness and gentle timidity, a manner mixed with shyness and quiet repose. He took his place with no air of conquest or self-assertion, and gave his directions with a grace and courtesy which have never left him." In the company on this occasion were many famous players—John Gilbert, Daniel Setchell, Mark Smith, Charles Fisher, and Lawrence Barrett.

During the next few years Booth played in Baltimore, Richmond, Charleston, Savannah, Memphis, Mobile, Montgomery, St. Louis, and Louisville. In the winter of 1857 he was at the Howard Athenæum, in Boston, under the management of E. L. Davenport, with Lawrence Barrett and John McCullough in the company. While in Boston he began that careful revision of his plays

which finally resulted in the *Edwin Booth's Prompt-Books*, edited by William Winter in 1878.

In 1860 Booth married Miss Devlin, who had retired from the stage the year before.

During this year (1860) he played at the Arch Street Theatre, Philadelphia, under the management of Wheatley and Clarke, giving for the first time his new interpretation of Bertuccio, in Tom Taylor's *Fool's Revenge*.

On December 10, 1860, Booth and Miss Charlotte Cushman began ten performances at the Academy of Music, Philadelphia, playing Wolsey and Queen Katharine in *Henry VIII.*, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, Shylock and Portia, Katherine and Petruchio. Booth's Macbeth, full as it was of fine intellectual quality, failed to please Miss Cushman, who begged him to remember that "Macbeth was not the father of all the Bowery villains!"

In September, 1861, Mr. and Mrs. Booth sailed for England. A series of accidents

and misunderstandings made their visit almost a failure. In London he was met with what bordered closely upon open hostility. He opened at the Haymarket Theatre as Shylock, and played during this engagement Sir Giles Overreach. *Richard III.* was produced at the request of E. H. Sothern, but the support was so bad that the performance became almost a farce. After much hesitation, Mr. Buckstone, Booth's manager, consented to his appearance as Richelieu. Groups of men had gathered before and behind the curtain to hiss the performance, but the spell of Booth's magnetic acting roused the house to the wildest pitch of excitement, and adverse demonstration was impossible. Unfortunately, just at this moment, when his triumph was complete, Booth was obliged to leave London. He played for three weeks at Manchester, Henry Irving being a member of the stock company. He afterwards went to Paris, where the sword worn by Frédéric Lemaître in *Ruy Blas*, now the property of The Players, was pre-

sented to him. On his return to England, finding that Fechter was monopolizing the Shakespearian drama, Booth sailed for America. During the early part of his visit to England his only daughter was born, at Fulham, in the month of December, 1861.

On September 2, 1862, he began a successful engagement at the Winter Garden Theatre, Mr. and Mrs. F. B. Conway supporting him. In Philadelphia he played Macbeth to Miss Cushman's Lady Macbeth, for the benefit of the Woman's Branch of the United States Sanitary Commission. On February 9, 1863, his wife, Mary Devlin Booth, died at Dorchester, Massachusetts, where she had gone in failing health.

Booth did not appear before the public again for some months after the death of his wife, that loyal friend Lawrence Barrett playing for him Richard III. and Ruy Blas.

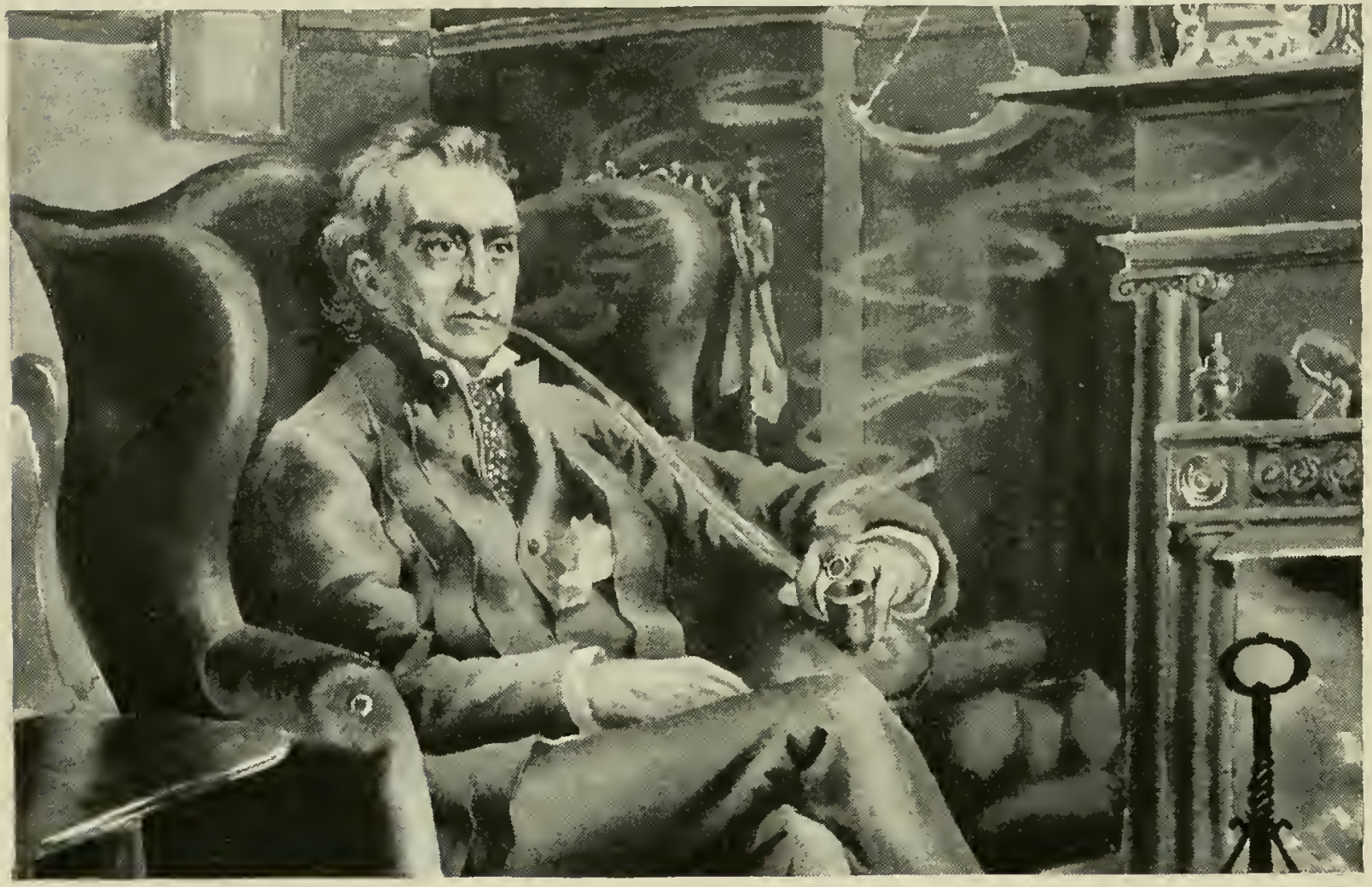
With Mr. J. S. Clarke, the friend of his school days, and his sister's husband, Booth, in October, 1863, purchased the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia. On March

28, 1864, having dissolved partnership with Clarke, he played *The Fool's Revenge* at Niblo's Garden, and for the first time in New York. On August 18, 1864, the Winter Garden Theatre was opened by Booth, John S. Clarke, and William Stuart. Mr. Stuart was known as the manager, but the leasing of the theatre had been undertaken in order to give Booth an opportunity for his own arrangement and setting of the plays. He occupied a suite of rooms in the theatre, narrowly escaping from them with his life when the building was burned in 1867.

Booth voted but once in life, and that was for Abraham Lincoln, in November, 1864. Not many days after this, on November 25, 1864, the three Booth brothers appeared in *Julius Cæsar*—Junius Brutus Booth as Cassius, Edwin as Brutus, and John Wilkes as Marc Antony. "The eldest," writes Mr. Clarke, "powerfully built and handsome as an antique Roman, Edwin with his magnetic fire and graceful dignity, and John

Wilkes, in the perfection of youthful beauty, stood side by side, again and again, before the curtain." The aged mother of the Booths sat looking at them from a private box.

Following quickly upon this performance, and on the night of November 26, 1864, Edwin Booth began his hundred consecutive nights of *Hamlet*. The play was mounted with a magnificence unknown in the history of the American stage since the days of Charles Kean at the old Park Theatre, and enjoyed a longer run than any other play of Shakespeare had done up to that time. "I remember well," says Mrs. John Sherwood, "in the first year of our war, when we were profoundly miserable and frightened, what a relief it was to go and see Booth in *Hamlet*." "He is altogether princely," wrote Mr. George William Curtis in those days. "His playing throughout has an exquisite tone like an old picture.... It is not any particular scene, or passage, or look, or movement, that conveys the impression; it is the consistency of every part with every



MR. BOOTH IN HIS ROOM AT "THE PLAYERS."

other, the pervasive sense of the mind of a true gentleman sadly strained and jarred."

A romantic interest attaches to the skull used by Booth in the graveyard scene in *Hamlet.* During one of his father's visits to Louisville, years before, the horse-thief Lovett, then lying in jail, was pointed out to him. The elder Booth, being at all times a man of ready sympathy, and hearing that Lovett had no means of obtaining counsel, employed a lawyer for his defence, though he understood from the first that Lovett had no case. Lovett, out of gratitude, bequeathed his skull to Junius Booth to be used in *Hamlet,* "that he might think when he held it in his hands of the gratitude his kindness had awakened." After Lovett's death this skull was sent to the elder Booth. Edwin used it for some time, but finding that the grave-diggers injured it, he substituted for it a property skull. Lovett's skull is now carefully preserved on a bracket in the corner of the apartment at The Players which

Mr. Booth reserved for himself, and occupied during the last years of his life.

Booth played Sir Edward Mortimer at the Boston Theatre on the night of April 14, 1865. The next morning the news of the great calamity which had befallen the country reached him. Resolving to leave the stage at once and forever, he retired, overwhelmed with sorrow and shame, to his home in New York, where he lived in the strictest retirement and the deepest dejection for many months, supported by the kindly sympathy of Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Launt Thompson, and other old and trusted friends.

Many urgent reasons made Booth's return to the stage both a necessity and an obligation, and at last he reappeared at the Winter Garden Theatre as Hamlet on January 3, 1866. In the streets, as the crowds gathered, angry threats were heard, though, for the most part, a kind and temperate spirit prevailed, while inside the theatre men from every part of the country had assembled. Nine times they cheered him as he entered.

Showers of flowers fell upon the stage, and the house was shaken with the tumult of applause. In Boston, Philadelphia, wherever he appeared after this momentous return, the same generous welcome was accorded him.

During the engagement at the Winter Garden Theatre the presentation to Booth of the famous "Hamlet Medal" was made. After the performance of the tragedy on January 22d, Booth, still in his stage dress, received a notable group of men. Admiral Farragut, Major-General Robert Anderson, John T. Hoffman, George Bancroft, Charles A. Dana, Judge Daly, S. R. Gifford, Launt Thompson, Jervis McEntee, were among the number. William Fullerton made the presentation speech.

In January, 1866, Booth, with J. S. Clarke, leased the Boston Theatre. After his engagement in Boston he appeared in Philadelphia on the 23d of April, 1866, to commemorate the anniversary of the "Birth and Death of Shakespeare." During the fifty-

one nights which succeeded he played Othello, Romeo, Shylock, Richard III., Ruy Blas, Don Cesar de Bazan, Hamlet, Richelieu, Petruchio, The Stranger, Bertuccio, Sir Giles Overreach, and Pescara. *Hamlet* ran for twenty-one nights. Booth produced *Richelieu* at the Winter Garden on February 1, 1866. On the 29th of the following December he played Iago to the Othello of Bogumil Dawison, Othello speaking German, Iago English, and Desdemona (Madame Methua Schiller) German to Othello and English to the rest of the company. The event of this season (1866–7) was the production of the *Merchant of Venice* on January 28, 1867, this play running for seven weeks. On the 22d of March, *Brutus, or the Fall of Tarquin*, was given. On the 23d of March the theatre was burned, Booth losing all his properties, including many articles once belonging to Edmund Kean, John Philip Kemble, and Mrs. Siddons.

The destruction of this house led to the building of Booth's Theatre. To raise money

for this enterprise Booth travelled for two years. In Chicago Miss Mary M'Vicker, whom he afterwards married, made her first appearance as Juliet to his Romeo. In Baltimore he played Sir Giles Overreach, Miss M'Vicker playing Margaret. Owing to an unfortunate sword thrust while playing Pescara in the *Apostate*, he was obliged to act in *Hamlet*, *Richard III.*, and *Othello* carrying his right arm in a sling, fencing with his left. After his engagement in Baltimore he made a tour of the Southern and Western States.

Booth's Theatre was opened on the 3d of February, 1869, with the production of *Romeo and Juliet*, given for the first time in America in the original text of Shakespeare. The house of Juliet in the second act was sixty feet in height, and had two balconies, one above the other. Romeo's ladder was thrown over the balustrade of this solidly constructed building. Fifty men were required to set and draw the "loggia scene" above the flies. The play ran for sixty-eight

nights, Booth playing Romeo, Miss M'Vicker Juliet, and Edwin Adams Mercutio.

The Moor of Venice was produced on April 19, 1869, Edwin Adams and Edwin Booth alternating as Othello, Miss M'Vicker playing Desdemona. On June 21st *Enoch Arden* was given by Adams, the theatre remaining open during the summer. Booth and Miss M'Vicker were married June 7, 1869, the lady retiring permanently from the stage. She died on her husband's birthday, on the 13th of November, 1881.

Among the plays produced by Booth at his theatre were *Romeo and Juliet*, *Winter's Tale*, *Hamlet*, *Richelieu*, *Julius Cæsar*, *The Moor of Venice*, *Macbeth*, *Lady of Lyons*, *The Iron Chest*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Richard III.*, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, *Fool's Revenge*, *The Fall of Tarquin*, and *Don Cesar de Bazan*. When Booth travelled, other "stars" filled the time at the theatre, Miss Neilson, Joseph Jefferson, Miss Bateman, and J. S. Clarke appearing there at intervals.

Edwin Adams was Booth's leading man,

and had the privilege of producing his own plays on Saturday nights. With Lawrence Barrett the same arrangement was made the season following.

Booth's Theatre, which had taken two years in building, had cost him in its construction over a million of dollars. But the nervous strain of managing so vast an affair, together with his acting, proved too great. In 1873 the theatre was leased to J. B. Booth, who met with little success, and Booth found himself suddenly bankrupt. He surrendered to his creditors all his personal and private property, including his books, and retired to Cos Cob, Connecticut. So perished one of his fondest hopes.

Booth on October 25, 1875, opened at Mr. Daly's Fifth Avenue Theatre. At this time he produced for the first time his own adaptation of Shakespeare's *Richard II.*, a play once acted by both Edmund Kean and the elder Booth, but afterward allowed by them to fall into disuse.

During this engagement Booth played

King Lear from the original text. With J. T. Ford he travelled through the South, giving fifty-two performances. With Mr. M'Vicker he travelled in the West, his engagement closing in June, 1876.

John McCullough, understanding the extent of Booth's bankruptcy, urged his going to California. On the 5th of September, 1876, Booth arrived in San Francisco, twenty years to a day since he had left the city. His old friend D. C. Anderson was still there, but all traces of their former haunts had disappeared.

Booth's success in San Francisco was overwhelming. During the same season he was again, however, at the Lyceum Theatre, New York, under the management of Mr. M'Vicker. At the Academy of Music in Brooklyn, while still under Mr. M'Vicker's management, Booth played to enormous houses, although the panic caused by the burning of the Brooklyn Theatre, with a loss of more than three hundred lives, had almost destroyed the business of every other

company. He then went to Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Cincinnati, closing his long engagement on the 19th of May, 1877, with three weeks at the Globe Theatre in Boston On September 10, 1877, he was again at work under Mr. M'Vicker, in Chicago, Cincinnati, Louisville, Cleveland, St. Louis, Buffalo, Lockport, Rochester, Syracuse, Utica, and Albany. In January, 1878, he rented Booth's Theatre, playing for six weeks under his own management. Later he played at the Park Theatre, Boston, for three weeks, then at Pittsburg for two, for two at Baltimore, and for three weeks at Clarke's Broad Street Theatre, in Philadelphia. For five weeks he appeared at the Fifth Avenue Theatre, and later he went to Detroit and Chicago. In Chicago, on the night of April 23d (Shakespeare's birth-day), he was fired at from the pit by a lunatic named Gray. At the third shot he rose and walked to the foot-lights, pointing out the would-be assassin to the startled audience. The excitement naturally was intense. One

of the bullets missed him by a few inches. Had he left his chair at the proper and expected moment in the play—*Richard II.*—he could not have escaped. This bullet he preserved as a talisman, wearing it on his watch-chain, having engraved upon it "From Mark Gray to Edwin Booth, April 23, 1879." From every part of the country expressions of congratulation reached him, when, as his sister observed, he particularly "needed such sympathy to stimulate him in the pursuit of his profession, for so many adverse circumstances seemed to conspire to enervate and overcome his powers."

At the close of his Chicago engagement Booth rested till October 6th, when he began a two weeks' engagement in Baltimore, going from there to the Broad Street Theatre in Philadelphia, and for four weeks playing at the Grand Opera-house in New York. Under Mr. Abbey's management he began a brilliant engagement at the Park Theatre, Boston, in March, 1880. Under Mr. Abbey again he played, in April, 1880, for four

MR. BARRETT'S LIBRARY AT COHASSET.

weeks at Booth's Theatre. After an engagement in Brooklyn, Booth played Petruchio at the Madison Square Theatre, New York, for the benefit of the "Edgar Poe Memorial Fund," this being his last performance before sailing for England. On the 15th of June a public breakfast was given to him at Delmonico's, New York. The speeches were made by Judge John R. Brady, Judge Charles P. Daly, Algernon S. Sullivan, Edmund C. Stedman, Rev. Robert Collyer, Rev. Ferdinand C. Ewer, Lawrence Barrett, Lester Wallack, Joseph Jefferson, and William Warren, and a poem was read by William Winter.

Booth, with his wife and daughter, sailed from New York on the 13th of June, 1880. After a few months' travel on the Continent he opened the new Princess Theatre, London, on the 6th of November, as Hamlet. He afterwards played at this house Richelieu, Bertuccio, Othello, Iago, Petruchio, Shylock, and King Lear. At the Lyceum Theatre the next season, under Henry Irv-

ing, he played Iago and Othello, alternating the parts with that gentleman. And during the summer of 1882 he was at the London Adelphi. His last professional visit to Europe was made in the summer of 1883, when he played in English with a German-speaking company in the capital cities of Germany, often prompting the persons who supported him, although quite unfamiliar with their language. These engagements were, in an artistic point of view, enormously successful.

Between 1881 and 1886 he played during the winter seasons throughout the United States with all his old fire and skill. It was not until a year or two later that his waning physical powers and his own wishes led him to retire. That he remained, perhaps, too long upon the stage he was fully aware, but he could not resist the appeals of his old comrade, Mr. Barrett, nor his own inclinations to help his fellow-players when they needed his personal support.

In combination with Mr. Barrett, there-

fore, and under the business management of that gentleman, he began, at Buffalo, New York, in 1887, a series of brilliant seasons, which ended only with Mr. Barrett's death in 1891. They played together in *Hamlet*, *Julius Cæsar*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, and *Richelieu*, Mr. Barrett taking the parts of Claudius, Cassius, Antonio, Othello and Iago, and Du Mauprat, when they attracted the largest audiences, at an increased scale of prices, ever seen, for so many consecutive nights, in the history of the theatre in the United States. In 1890 Mr. Booth, supported by Madame Modjeska, still under Mr. Barrett's management, but not in connection with him, played a limited engagement throughout the country; and in 1891 the two stars were again seen in conjunction at the Broadway Theatre, New York, until Mr. Barrett's sudden death in March brought the season to a close. Booth's last appearance upon any stage was at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, at the matinée performance on Saturday, April 4th, of that year;

and his last public utterance, in a short speech made after the fall of the curtain on that occasion, is worth quoting in full. It is taken from the report written for the *Tribune* of the next day by Mr. William Winter. "Ladies and gentlemen, I scarcely know what to say; and, indeed, I can only make my usual speech—of thanks and gratitude. I thank you for this kindness. It will never be forgotten. I hope that this is not the last time I shall have the honor of appearing before you. When I come again I trust that I shall be able to give greater attention than I have ever given to whatever part I may play. I hope that my health and strength may be improved so that I can serve you better; and I shall always try to deserve the favor you have shown."

The last words of Hamlet, however—the last words which Mr. Booth, as an actor, ever uttered—are much more significant and much more touching—"The rest is silence!"

Edwin Booth lived in quiet, happy retirement at his home in the house of The Play-

ers, watched and cheered by his loving daughter and a few old friends, until, at last, early on the morning of the 7th of June, Death beckoned him away, and he passed to his reward.

THE REST IS SILENCE!

THE END.