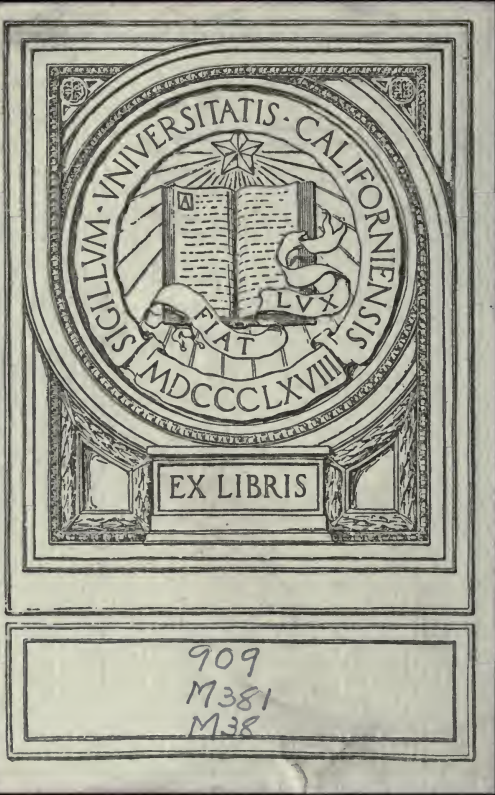


HELENA FAUCIT

LADY MARTIN



SIR THEODORE MARTIN, K.C.B.



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HELENA FAUCIT

(LADY MARTIN)



UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA



*Helen Fawcett*  
*From a drawing by Miss Clara Lane.*

# HELENA FAUCIT

(LADY MARTIN)

BY

SIR THEODORE MARTIN

K.C.B., K.C.V.O.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS

EDINBURGH AND LONDON

MDCCC





*IN MEMORIAM*



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# LIFE OF HELENA FAUCIT

## (LADY MARTIN).

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### CHAPTER I.

HELENA SAVILLE FAUCIT, the Helen Faucit of the theatrical world, came of a theatrical family on both father and mother's side. Her maternal grandfather, Mr Diddear, of French origin, had been a merchant in the East Indies, but, after heavy losses there, came to London, purchased the freedom of the City, and commenced business as a silk-mercant. Again proving unsuccessful, he became an actor, and remained upon the stage for several years. An accident, by which he broke one of his legs, made him abandon the active exercise of his vocation, but he continued his relations with the drama by becoming the manager of the Norwich, Margate, and other circuits. Mr Saville Faucit, while a member of his company at Margate, persuaded Mr Diddear's daughter Harriet, to whom he had often played the lover on the stage, to become his wife, and they were married at the church of St George the Martyr, Southwark, on September 2, 1805. The consent of the lady's parents to the marriage had not been sought, but after a short interval they became reconciled, and Mr and Mrs Faucit were reinstated in Mr Diddear's company.

They both attained distinction in their profession, Mr Faucit as a dramatic author as well as actor. Mrs Faucit's reputation in



the provinces attracted the notice of Mr Harris, the proprietor of Covent Garden Theatre, and on the 7th of October 1813 she made her first appearance there with success as Desdemona. In Juliet, her next part, this success was confirmed, and thenceforth Mrs Faucit, down to her retirement from the stage in 1824, continued to represent the leading characters both in tragedy and comedy at Covent Garden, and subsequently at Drury Lane. She was tall and singularly handsome, and her fine figure and distinction of manner appear to have given a special charm to her varied accomplishments as an actress.

The Faucits had a large family, four sons and two daughters, of whom Helena, born in 1817, was the youngest. The three elder sons were all actors, of more or less distinction. The youngest, educated as a doctor, died in Australia. The eldest girl, Harriet, was eight years older than her sister Helena, but they were from the first bound together by ties of the strongest affection. This was, no doubt, cemented by the fact that in their early years they were almost wholly separated from their parents, who were actively engaged in the exercise of their profession—the mother in London, the father in the provinces. The girls were therefore sent to be educated and trained at an excellent boarding-school in Greenwich, in which they found a home, where they were thoroughly happy, and where they were brought up with an exemplary care, of which they always spoke with gratitude. Here the younger sister remained for several years after her sister Harriet, having finished her education, went, after a short period of study, upon the stage. She appeared with success at the Haymarket in 1828 as Letitia Hardy and Ophelia, and became a favourite actress there and also in the provinces. What the two sisters were to each other we see from the fact, that from their first youth “Birdie” was the pet name by which Helena was called by her sister.

Left alone at the boarding-school after the departure of her sister, Helena felt deeply the want of the companionship which, in the absence of a mother's care, had satisfied the demands of a clinging and affectionate nature. She was thus early thrown upon the resources of her own always grave and thoughtful nature. Of her mother she had only rare glimpses, and then she

appeared to the wondering child only as a great lady, beautifully dressed, who repelled rather than wooed the daughter's demonstrations of affection. Her father she never saw; for by this time he had separated from his wife, taking upon himself the care of their sons, and leaving to her the care of their daughters. It was no small compensation for the lack of parental tenderness, that she was beloved by her teachers as well as by her companions. "Fairy" was the name by which they expressed their feeling of the charm of her disposition, and the even then conspicuous unconscious grace of her movements.

Her health, always delicate, broke down while she was still at the Greenwich boarding-school, where, being an apt pupil, she had acquired, although still very young, a full share of what were in those days deemed the appropriate information and accomplishments of a young lady. Rest and change of air were prescribed, and she was sent away, often for months, to the charge, as she herself writes, of kind but busy people at Brighton, who, finding her happy with her books on the beach, left her there long hours by herself. She had begged from home an acting edition of Shakespeare by John Kemble.

How dear was this book and the *Arabian Nights* to me! Then I had the *Pilgrim's Progress* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Satan was my great hero. I think I knew him by heart. His address to the Council I have often declaimed to the waves, when sure of being unobserved. I had also a translation (poor enough, but good enough for me then) of Dante's *Inferno*, some lines of which sank deep into my heart. I have not seen the book for years, but they are still there—

"Up, be bold!  
Vanquish fatigue by energy of mind,  
For not on plumes or canopied in state  
The soul wins fame!"

How often since, in life's hard struggles and trials, have these lines helped me. My books [she adds] were a strange medley, . . . but I found them satisfying. They filled my young heart and mind with what fascinated me most—the gorgeous, the wonderful, the grand, the heroic, the self-denying, the self-devoting. Like all children, I kept, as a rule, my greatest delight to myself. I remember on some occasions, after I had returned to my usual studies, when a doubt arose about some passage, which had happened to be in the little storehouse of my memory, being able to repeat whole chapters and scenes of my favourites to the amused ears of those about me. But I never revealed how much my life was wrapped up in them, even to

my only sister, dear as she was to me. She was many years older than myself, and too fond of fun to share in my day-and-night dreams. I knew I should only be laughed at.<sup>1</sup>

It was thus that the shy, sensitive girl was unconsciously preparing herself to be the interpreter of what Shakespeare and lesser dramatists had dreamed of ideal womanhood.

Even in her school-days the dramatic instinct showed itself. Again to quote her own words:—

Imogen had been one of the great favourites of my girlhood. At school we used to read the scenes at the cave with Belarius, Arviragus, and Guiderius; and never can I forget our getting them up to act as a surprise for our governess on her birthday. We always prepared some "surprise" on this occasion, or what she kindly took as one. The brothers were arrayed in all the fur trimmings, boas, cuffs, muffs, &c., we could muster,—one of the muffs doing duty as the cap for Belarius. Then the practisings for something suggestive of the Æolian harp that has to play a *Miserere* for Imogen's supposed death! Our only available means of simulating Belarius's "ingenious instrument" was a guitar; but the girl who played it had to be apart from the scene, and, as she would never take the right cue, she was always breaking in at the wrong place. I was the Imogen; and, curiously enough, it was as Imogen my dear governess first saw me on the stage. I wondered whether she remembered the incidents of our school-girl performance as I did. She might very well forget, but not I; for what escapes our memory of things done or thought in childhood? Such little matters then appear eventful, and loom so very large to young eyes and imaginations!

The dreaming girl was not allowed through the years of childhood and early girlhood to learn the fascinations of a theatre, for it was the wish of her mother and her grand-parents that she should not follow the dramatic profession. Only, therefore, from her Shakespeare volume could she form her ideals of his characters, which fortunately, as the event proved, was never warped by the impersonations of the actresses of the day. And so it was that, as she herself writes, "I had lived again and again through the whole lives of many of Shakespeare's heroines long before it was my happy privilege to impersonate and make them, in my fashion, my own."

<sup>1</sup> This quotation, and all subsequent quotations mentioned as written by Miss Faucit are, except when otherwise expressly stated, quoted from her book, *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters*, by Helena Faucit, Lady Martin. Sixth edition, 1899.



Although not allowed to visit the theatre, she must, however, when home from school, have heard not a little about it from the other members of her family, especially from her sister, when they met at the summer holiday times, which she has recorded were always spent at Richmond, and where "every step of the Green, the river banks, the fields round Sion House, the Hill, the Park, and Twickenham meadows, were all loved more and more as each summer enlarged my sense of beauty." Of these holiday hours she always cherished a loving remembrance; and in after years, in our frequent drives to Richmond, she rarely failed to turn aside to look at the small house upon the Green where they were passed, and which even then, she said, looked to her like a home.

Opposite to this house, upon the Green, stood the Theatre which was destined afterwards to have for her very memorable associations. But not the least impressive of her remembrances was her meeting there with the elder Kean, then fast drawing to the close of his brilliant but troubled career.

One of my earliest and most vivid recollections—I was then quite a child—was a meeting with "the great Edmund Kean," as my sister called him. He was her pet hero. She had seen him act, and, through friends, had a slight acquaintance with him. Wishing her little "Birdie," as she called me, to share all her pleasures, she often took me with her to the Green for the chance of seeing him, as he strolled there with his aunt, old Miss Tidswell. The great man had been very ill, so that our expectations had been frequently disappointed. At last, about noon one very warm sunny day, my sister's eager eyes saw the two figures in the far distance. It would have been bad manners to appear to be watching, so in a roundabout way our approach was made. As we drew near, I would gladly have run away. I was startled, frightened at what I saw,—a small pale man with a fur cap, and wrapped in a fur cloak. He looked to me as if come from the grave. A stray lock of very dark hair crossed his forehead, under which shone eyes which looked dark, and yet bright as lamps. So large were they, so piercing, so absorbing, I could see no other feature. I shrank from them behind my sister, but she whispered to me that it would be unkind to show any fear, so we approached, and were kindly greeted by the pair.

Oh what a voice was that which spoke! It seemed to come from so far away—a long, long way behind him. After the first salutation, it said, "Who is this little one?" When my sister had explained, the face smiled—(I was reassured by the smile, and the face looked less terrible)—and he asked me where I went to school, and which of my books I liked best.

Alas ! I could not then remember that I liked any, but my ever good angel-sister said she knew I was fond of poetry, for I had just won a prize for recitation. Upon this the face looked still more kindly at me, and we all moved together to a seat under the trees. Then the far-away hollow voice,—but it was not harsh,—spoke again, as he put his hand in mine, and bade me tell him whether I liked my school-walks better than the walks at Richmond. This was too much, and it broke the ice of my silence. No, indeed ! Greenwich Park was very pretty—so was Blackheath, with its donkeys, which we were, on occasions much too rare, allowed to ride. But Richmond ! Nothing could be so beautiful ! I was asked to name my favourite spots, and whether I had ever been in a punt—which I had,—and caught fish—which I had not. My tongue, once untied, ran on and on, and had after a time to be stopped, for my sister and the old lady-aunt thought I should fatigue the invalid. But he would not part just yet. He asked my name, and when it was told, exclaimed, “Oh, the old ballad !—do you know it ?—which begins—

‘Oh, my Helen,  
There is no tellin’  
Why love I fell in ;  
The grave, my dwellin’,  
Would I were well in !’

I know now why with ‘my Helen, love I fell in’ ; it is because she loves poetry, and she loves Richmond. Will my Helen come and repeat her poetry to me some day ?” This alarming suggestion at once silenced my prattle, and my sister had to express for me the pleasure and honour I was supposed to feel.

Here the interview ended. The kind hand was withdrawn which had lain in mine so heavily, and yet looked so thin and small. I did not then know how great is the weight of weakness. It was put upon my head, and I was bid God-speed ! I was to be sent for some day soon. But the day never came ; the school-days were at hand ; those wondrous eyes I never saw, and that distant voice I never heard again.

How vividly some things remain with us ! I can shut my eyes and recall the whole scene,—see and hear all that passed, and thrill again with my old fright and pleasure ! The actual words I have mentioned, and many more that passed, doubtless would not have remained with me, if I had not heard them repeated often and often by my sister. She was as proud of this little episode in my young life as if a king had noticed me ; and she spoke of her great hero’s kind words to me so constantly,—telling them to all our friends,—that they became riveted in my memory. A day or two afterwards my sister met Miss Tidswell, who told her that Mr Kean had not suffered from his walk, and had often spoken of the little sweet-voiced maiden, who could be dumb, and yet full of talk when the right note was struck. He was very fond, she said, of children, and would like the little sister to pay him an early visit. But this was not to be. He must have recovered from the illness which prevented him from sending for me, for I heard of his acting in London afterwards, and felt all a child’s pride in



having once attracted the attention of a distinguished man. And who so distinguished, so invested with charm for a girl's imagination, as the tragic hero of the day?

I cannot remember if the house into which I saw him go was the small house attached to the Richmond theatre, which I have heard belonged to him at the time of his death, and in which he died. With that little house are linked remembrances of mine very deep and lasting. In the parlour I dressed, not many years afterwards, for the part of Juliet, to make my first appearance on the stage. How this came about was somewhat singular. We were, as usual, in our summer quarters at Richmond. At this time a Mr Willis Jones was the lessee of the little theatre: he was, it was said, a gentleman of independent fortune, who had a great desire to be something more than an amateur actor. The performances took place about twice or thrice a-week. The stage-door of the theatre was always open, and on the off days of performance we sometimes stole in and stood upon that, to me, weirdly mysterious place, the stage, looking into the gloom of the vacant pit and boxes. How full of mystery it all seemed! so dim, so impenetrable!

One hot afternoon my sister and myself, finding it yet too sunny to walk down to the river—we had to pass the theatre on the way—took refuge in the dark cool place to rest awhile. On the stage was a flight of steps, and a balcony, left standing no doubt after rehearsal, or prepared for that of the next day. After sitting on the steps for a while, my sister exclaimed, "Why, this might do for Romeo and Juliet's balcony! Go up, birdie, and I will be your Romeo." Upon which, amid much laughter, and with no little stumbling over the words, we went through the balcony scene, I being prompter; for in the lonely days by the sea-shore, of which I have spoken, with only the great dog of the house as my companion, I had, almost unconsciously, learned by heart all the scenes in which my favourite heroines figured.

My sister and I went away to the river, leaving the shadowy gloom of the stage empty as we had found it. To our surprise and consternation we learned, some little time after, that there had been a listener. When our friends arrived some days later, the lessee told them that, having occasion to go from the dwelling-house to his private box, he had heard voices, listened, and remained during the time of our merry rehearsal. He spoke in such warm terms of the Juliet's voice, its adaptability to the character, her figure,—I was tall for my age,—and so forth, that in the end he prevailed upon my friends to let me make a trial on his stage. To this, at my then very tender age, they were loath to consent. But I was to be announced simply as a young lady,—her first appearance. At the worst, a failure would not matter; and, at any rate, the experiment would show whether I had gifts or not in that direction. Thus did a little frolic prove to be the turning-point of my life.

No words so well as her own can recount the incidents of this tentative essay of the impersonation of what was to prove one of the greatest triumphs of her future career.

It was a summer evening, and the room was given me to dress in, which, I was told, had been Mr Kean's parlour and dressing-room. There was a glass case there in which were preserved as relics several articles of his toilet, brushes and things of that kind. How these brought to my mind that interview—the frail figure which seemed buried in furs, the large eyes so intense in their lustre, the dark hair straggling over the forehead, the voice coming from so far away, and the kind quaint manner! I could now see how he had humoured the shy child by pretending ignorance, in order to draw forth her opinions and explanations. It was very sweet to look back upon, and I could almost believe that his spirit was there in sympathy with mine; had not his parting words to me been—a God-speed? Very wisely, no one had ever mentioned in my hearing the word “stage-fright.” I had thought of the performance only as another rehearsal, with the difference that it was at night and not by day, and with the great additional pleasure of wearing a new dress of white satin, which was so soft and exquisite to the touch, and—oh the dignity of this!—with a small train to it. It had no ornament, not even a flower; for when I heard that I must not wear real flowers, for fear of their dropping on the stage and some one slipping upon them, I would not have any others. As the time for the play to begin approached, and I heard the instruments tuning, and a voice cry out that “the overture was on,” I felt a most unaccountable sensation stealing over me. This feeling grew and grew until it nearly overcame me. I saw my mother looking very anxiously at me, and I could not hide from myself that I felt good for nothing. I begged her to leave me to myself for a few minutes. At first she did not gather what was in my mind, and tried to rally my courage; but again I begged to be left, for I knew well that when alone I could more freely seek the help which all so suddenly I seemed to need more than I ever could have guessed. My wish was granted. They did not return to me until I was wanted for the stage. I remember being asked if I had left anything behind, when I turned to give a last look at the relics in the glass case. It was a sort of farewell—a feeling as if life were ending.

My sister, to give me comfort, was to be the Lady Capulet. Poor darling! she was so agitated that they could hardly persuade her to appear on the scene; and when the nurse had called out for the “lamb,” the “ladybird,” the Juliet rushed straight into her mother's arms, never to be lured from them again during the scene by all the cajolings of the nurse. How the lights perplexed me! All seemed so different! I could see faces so close to me. It was well I could see *one* whose agitation was apparent to me on the instant. I felt I must try to please him, this dear friend of all my young life, my constant helper and instructor, who, though he was no blood relative, always called me “his child.” He it was who taught me much of what I learned, after my delicate health took me from school and sent me to the sea-shore, and to him and him only could I confide, with the assurance of perfect sympathy, all my devotion for the heroines of Shakespeare. He taught me the value of the different metres in blank verse and in rhyme, as I recited to him many of Milton's poems, the “Lycidas,” large portions of “Paradise Lost,” and Byron's “Darkness,” which I knew by heart. He

made me understand the value of words, nay, of every *letter* of every word, for the purposes of declamation. Nothing was to be slighted. This true friend—a man of varied and large acquirements, a humorist, too, and a wit—never refused, although most delicate in health, to give me largely of his time. How grateful I was, and am to him! His death, which happened far too soon for my advantage—though not for his, it released him from a life of constant pain—robbed me of my first and truest guide and friend. It was *his* face I saw. Should his “child,” his darling, give him pain—disappointment? No! Gradually he and Juliet filled my mind, and I went on swimmingly, until the fourth act.

Here, with all the ardour and all the ignorance of a novice, I took no heed that the phial for the sleeping potion, which Friar Laurence had given me, was of glass, but kept it tightly in my hand, as though it were a real deliverance from a dreaded fate which it was to effect for me, through the long impassioned scene that follows. When the time came to drink the potion, there was none; for the phial had been crushed in my hand, the fragments of glass were eating their way into the tender palm, and the blood was trickling down in a little stream over my pretty dress. This had been for some time apparent to the audience, but the Juliet knew nothing of it, and felt nothing, until the red stream arrested her attention. Excited as I already was, this was too much for me; and having always had a sickening horror of the bare sight or even talk of blood, poor Juliet grew faint, and went staggering towards the bed, on which she really fainted. I remember nothing of the end of the play, beyond seeing many kind people in my dressing-room, and wondering what this meant. Our good family doctor from London was among the audience, and bound up the wounded hand. This never occurred again, because they ever afterwards gave me a wooden phial. But oh, my dress!—my first waking thought. I was inconsolable, until told that the injured part could be renewed.

So much for my first Juliet! I repeated the character several times in the same little theatre—each time trying to make it more like what I thought would satisfy my dear master. I sought no other praise.

On the last occasion he was there. When I saw him at the end of the play I was sure something was wrong. He was very silent, and when I begged to have his opinion, whatever it might be, he told me I had not improved,—that I had disappointed him. I was not *in* the character throughout, and he feared I had not the true artistic power to lose myself in the being of another. Oh the pain this caused me! The wound is even now only scarred over. I would not let him see my grief, but I knew no sleep that night for weeping. My generous sweet sister thought I had been cruelly treated, and tried to comfort me and heal my wounds, but they were far too deep for that.

Next day my dear friend was deeply pained to see that I had taken his censure so sorely to heart, and had forgotten how, here and there, it had been tempered with approbation. After some talk with my mother, it was decided that Juliet and all other heroines were for me to pass once more into “the sphere of dream.” I was quietly to forget them and return to my studies. My friend confessed that he had expected too much from my



tender years—that an English girl of the age which Shakespeare assigns to Juliet was in every respect a different creature. Development must come later; I certainly was never a precocious child. So until I appeared about three years later on the London stage, my life was very studious and very quiet.

The friend here alluded to was Mr Percival Farren, brother of the celebrated comedian William Farren. He had himself been an actor, but for some years had been compelled by severe attacks of asthma to quit the stage. “He saw and helped me,” she writes, “in every other character I acted until his too-early death (in 1843), which was the first great sorrow of my life;” and she never spoke of him but in terms of the warmest gratitude and affection. There can be no doubt that it was a matter of conscience with him to speak to his favourite in all sincerity what he thought of her first performances, and even perhaps more dispraisingly than he really felt. He had expected too much of her immature powers. Much had still to be learned and felt before she could rise to the high level which he had marked for her and believed she could attain. He would hear of no half successes, and it was for her good to be thus early taught the lesson, which she set before herself through life, that triumph in art is never to be lightly won, but must be reached and maintained by lifelong aspiration and endeavour. His severe judgment upon these early efforts was not, however, generally shared. The Richmond performances became widely talked about in the theatrical world, and in such a way as to encourage his pupil in cherishing the ambition to make the stage the arena on which she was to find expression for the poetic emotions that were stirring in her own heart. Accordingly, while completing the studies for her general education, and particularly in music and the cultivation of a rich mezzo-soprano voice, she prepared herself, under the tutelage of her “guide, philosopher, and friend,” for the performance of the characters which in those days were regarded as the equipment for a leading actress.

A period of upwards of two years, “spent in quiet study, had widened my views,” she writes, “about many things, Juliet included. Still I remained true to my first love, and when it was decided that I should submit myself to the dread ordeal of a

London audience, to ascertain whether I possessed the qualities to justify my friends in allowing me to adopt the stage as a profession, I selected Juliet for my first appearance." Charles Kemble, who was then at Covent Garden taking leave of the stage, attended, unknown to the *débutante*, during the rehearsals, and upon his judgment and that of one or two others the manager was to decide whether, having no experience in the actor's art, she was fit to make an appearance before a London audience. The judgment was favourable, and Mr Kemble agreed to appear on the occasion as Mercutio. "How sympathetic," she writes, "and courteous, and encouraging he was! He, to use his own words, was making his final bow to his art, as I my first curtsey." In the young timid girl it is evident that he saw the promise of a great future.

The terrible anxieties of a young girl, on the eve of a first appearance, before the most critical of audiences, upon the stage of the great Covent Garden Theatre, were greatly aggravated on its being found at the last moment that no actor could be had who was young enough to play Romeo to her Juliet, and that the play must be changed. Accordingly, the announcement in the playbills of 29th December 1835 that "on Tuesday the 5th of January will be acted *Romeo and Juliet*, the part of Juliet by a young lady, her first appearance," was followed on the 31st by an intimation that "on Tuesday, January 5th, will be acted Sheridan Knowles's play of *The Hunchback*, the part of Julia by Miss Helen Faucit, her first appearance."

The most experienced actress would have been put to a severe trial by so sudden a call upon her resources. What must it have been to a novice, who was thus unexpectedly compelled to throw herself into all the fluctuating moods and violent emotions of Knowles's heroine, at the moment when she was looking forward to the hope of realising her long-cherished dream of Shakespeare's Juliet, at a performance on the success of which her after-life would depend! "I was almost heartbroken," she writes in 1881; "and how much this added to the terrible tension of feeling with which I approached the trial, none but myself can ever know." But the characteristic courage, which never would suffer itself to be conquered by difficulties, did not fail her upon this occasion.

To repine was futile. Julia must be played, and on the 1st of January she went to the first rehearsal of what she was to play on the 5th. In a little Journal begun on that day she writes:—

“1836. *Jany.* 1st, *Friday*.—Went to my first rehearsal this morning. Felt very strange and nervous at first, but soon got better. I very much fear my *action*. I am sure I am very awkward. *I feel so.*

“*Saturday, Jany.* 2.—Went to rehearsal again this morning. Spent the evening at Mr and Mrs C.’s. They and my dear Mr Percy Farren were so sanguine about my success. *I dare not suffer my mind to dwell upon it, but all will be for the best.*

“*Sunday, Jany.* 3rd.—Went to church this morning. Cried the whole time; but I feel much happier than I did, and have more confidence in the assistance and support of the Almighty in my approaching trial, for without this what could my humble efforts achieve! Oh, how *sincerely I pray it may be given to me!*

“*Monday, Jany.* 4th.—Went to my last rehearsal. All confusion, not the slightest service to me. Kate” [the friend under whose care she had lived at Brighton] “dressed my hair this evening to see which style suited me best. How unfortunate I am in having such a face! It never could have been intended for the stage, the features are so—well, I won’t worry myself any more about it. I am as nature made me, that is one comfort; and I will go to bed with the pleasant conviction that, whatever they may do to me, *I shall be sure to look a fright.* Heigho! *Oh, to-morrow—to-morrow!* What a fearful sound it has! *I hope* I shall sleep, but I don’t feel as if I could close my eyes. My stupid little mind is *all in a whirl.* I cannot compose my thoughts for an instant. Oh, how I wish my darling Harry” [her sister Harriet] “was with me. But no! that is selfish, for I know what she would suffer. I must leave off this scribbling, for Kate is scolding very much to find me not in bed.”

The dreaded “to-morrow” came and went. The strength she prayed for did not fail, but bore her triumphantly over all her fears. The inspiration of genius was recognised by an enthusiastic audience, and, little as she herself thought of what she had

done, there, in their loud acclaim, was the assurance that she had within her the power to move the heart and to quicken the imagination, which justified her in the choice she had made of a career in life. It was still ringing in her ears, as in the retirement of her own chamber she gives vent to her emotion in her Journal.

“*Tuesday, Jan. 5th.*—IT IS OVER, IT IS OVER, this as yet the most important day of my life, and, *I thank God, well over*—at least I hope and trust so. It seems even now like a dream to me. I can remember nothing, think of nothing, but that it is over. Oh, happy, happy girl! and most of all happy in making those I love happy. Oh that some bird could whisper to my Harry!” (her sister), “but she cannot hear until to-morrow. I can remember *seeing nothing*, but my dear old grandfather with his white head and streaming eyes looking at me, oh so anxiously, from the orchestra. I will now bless the Almighty for having supported me through my (I must say it, because I felt it so) *fearful trial*, and try to go calmly to sleep. *Again, and again, thank God that it is over!*”

How she passed through her “fearful trial,” she recorded in a letter in 1881 to Mrs S. C. Hall, one of her earliest and, to the last, one of her most valued friends:—

You, my dear friend, were there, as you have told me, and you know, as a spectator, what a fearful ordeal I had to pass through. On this occasion I had no loving sister’s arms to rush into; but I remember gratefully how kind Miss Taylor was to me; she was the Helen of that evening, as she had been the original Helen of the play. At the rehearsals she had given me valuable advice as to the stage directions, &c., and during the actual performance she comforted and supported me with all her might, and with all the fine tact of a sympathetic heart.

How well I remember that awful moment when called to the side-scene to be ready for my entrance with Helen! Seeing my agitation, Miss Taylor set herself to divert my attention by admiring my dress. She liked, she said, the yellowish whiteness of it; she could not endure a harsh dead white. Where had mamma, who was standing beside us, got me such dainty mittens? Then she showed me her own—said how fortunate I was to have such long wavy hair that curled of its own accord, and did not need dressing,—wished hers was the same, and how she had to curl and pinch and torture it and herself, in order to get the same effect,—anything to take off my attention. But as the dreadful moment drew nearer, this talk, all on one side, would no longer help. With sympathetic tears in her own eyes,



she begged me not to let those big tears fall so continuously and spoil my pretty cheeks; and when the terrible moment came for our entrance, she put her arm round my waist and propelled me forward, whispering to me to "curtsey to the applause—again! again!"—when, but for her help, I could hardly stand. It must have been plain to the audience how good she was to me; and they, no doubt, favourite as she was, liked her all the better for it.

At the end of the first act some of the kind actors came about me, saying that it was "all right." I had only to take courage and speak louder. But, alas! I felt it was "all wrong." I could not control my fears and agitation. In my dressing-room they gave me *sal volatile*, which I gave mostly to my dress. My mother looked sad and disappointed; the dear old dresser very pitiful. My sister, alas! was not then with me. I thought all was over, and did not see my way at all to getting through the play. Then came a knock at my dressing-room door, which my mother answered, and I heard the dear accustomed voice of my friend and master say, "Have you given the poor child anything?" I cried out for him to come to me, but the voice answered, "Not now, my child; take all the rest you can." There was, I fancied, such a trouble in the tone, that it added to my own. It was evident he could not trust himself near me. He had been among the audience, but in that enormous theatre only a sea of heads was seen. No one could be distinguished; so this time he had not helped me. I felt despairing. Never can I forget that half-hour. While I write, it comes back upon me with all its hopeless anguish.

When we met at the side-scene for the second act, kind Miss Taylor again went through the admirer's part; she liked my hat and feather, and my whole dress,—thought them very charming, very becoming,—reminded me that now we were to change characters—that I was to be the gay fine lady, and she only the listening astonished one. A very watery smile was, I am sure, all that answered her. When we entered upon the scene, and during the pause at the long kind reception which again awaited me, my eyes lighted on a familiar face raised above all the others, and close before me in the orchestra. Long white hair fell on each side of it, and I saw the handkerchief wiping tears from the eyes. Again a face saved me! I knew it was that of my dear grandfather, who, because of his deafness, was, during the play, allowed to occupy the leader's seat. In an instant the thought flashed into my mind of the sad disappointment that was in store for these dear grand-parents, who had been real parents to me in all my earliest years,—the one present, and the other, the beloved Quaker grandmother, who had never in her life been inside a theatre. She was waiting in an agony of suspense, as I knew, at home, and her blessing had been the last thing on my heart as I left it. Oh, I could not endure to pain *them!* The help I needed, which I knew was even then being invoked for me, came. In a moment, as it seemed, my agitation calmed. My voice gained tone, and when the point arrived where I had to say "I'll shine, be sure I will," the kind audience interrupted me with a shout of applause. From this time I never faltered, always keeping the dear and now smiling face before me.



At the end of the third act I was told the manager (Mr Osbaldiston) had requested to see my friends to consult them about a three years' engagement, which, as I was much under age, was signed by them for me the next morning, and attached me for that period to the theatre as the leading actress. Thus was I bound to the art which has been the delight of my after-life, and the way opened for me to clothe—oh happy privilege!—with form and motion the great creations of poetical genius over which my girlish imagination had so long brooded.

Of Mr Charles Kemble's good opinion of me I have already spoken. When it was decided that the play should be changed to *The Hunchback*, he offered to resume his original part of Sir Thomas Clifford to support me. Never can I forget his rendering of it. What a high and noble bearing! What tender respect in his approaches as a lover! What dignified forbearance and self-respect in his reproof afterwards, and in his deportment as the Secretary! All this made the heroine's part more difficult to act; for what girl, even the most frivolous, could for a moment have thought of the title or the fortune of such a man in comparison with himself?

The success of the night was echoed in the criticism of the press. Next day the *Times* wrote:—

Nature has bestowed on this young lady many requisites towards attaining eminence in the profession she has selected. Her figure is good—her features expressive—her voice full and clear. Her enunciation is remarkably distinct, her carriage graceful, and her action, though sometimes bordering on extravagance, is generally "well suited to the word." . . . Miss Faucit's bearing in the first act, while she is yet the retired country maiden, was simply playful, and when her first visit to town has converted her into a fine lady, Julia's determination to shine as a star of the first magnitude in the hemisphere of fashion and dissipation was given with becoming spirit. In the third act the performance of Miss Faucit demands very warm praise. She described with much ability the struggle between female pride and an affection, checked indeed, but not extinguished. Her delivery of the exclamation, "Helen, I hate you!" with which she assails her giddy cousin, when rejoicing in the falling fortunes of her quondam lover, Clifford, was distinguished by energy and feeling. It created a strong sensation, and was most loudly applauded. The highly dramatic interview in the fourth act with Clifford, now reduced to the humble situation of secretary to his proud rival—the best wrought and the most difficult scene in the play—was sustained with great talent by Miss Faucit. Her whole performance was received in a highly flattering manner by an audience crowded from the pit to the slips. She is, we understand, only in her eighteenth year, and will, we are of opinion, if she devote herself thoroughly to the study of her profession, become in time no mean ornament of it.

Another leading journal wrote :—

Washington Irving, in his History of New York, uses a singular phrase when he says that "expectation stood on stilts." Thus was it on Tuesday evening when Miss Helen Faucit made her *début* at Covent Garden as Julia in Knowles's admirable play of *The Hunchback*. During the whole course of our theatrical experience we have never known a case in which such sanguine hopes were entertained, and we can safely say that in no case have those hopes been more amply realised. Energy, pathos, and grace are the essentials of a tragic actress, and we never saw them more beautifully combined than in the person of the fair *débutante*. Her figure is excellent; her face is moulded for the stage, and she possesses all the discrimination of an experienced actress, while she evinces all the freshness of incipient genius. If we may be pardoned the metaphor, she is ripe though young, and mellow though in bud. We never were so completely in want of a leading lady, and we "praise the Fates and are thankful" that the blank has been filled up. Miss Helen Faucit is manifestly destined to do great things in the truly legitimate school of acting, and to be an instrument in working out that proud consummation—the regeneration of the British drama.

Again, the correspondent of an American journal writes :—

Of the fair *débutante* fame had spoken well, but not loudly. I knew pretty well that she would *take*, for I had seen her eighteen months ago at Richmond as Portia, and never witnessed a more exquisite performance. I was afraid, I confess, that fear might palsy her energies, but it had quite a contrary effect.

Helen Faucit has a fine form—graceful, tall, commanding; it reminds me of what Miss O'Neill was. Her voice is exquisitely clear—full and mellow in its intonations, and audible in its lowest whisper. But the audience were so enthusiastic that they spoiled much of its effect by applauding her so as to make her pause. When Miss O'Neill made her *début* the applause was nothing like what Miss Faucit received.

Miss H. Faucit has succeeded better than did Fanny Kemble. Her Julia differs from Fanny's, which was *shrewish*. Perhaps Fanny could not help this, for her temperament is somewhat that way. But Julia was a woman and no shrew. When Clifford harshly and unexpectedly checked her for too much preference for the pleasures of a town life, Fanny Kemble replied as if she would have bitten off his head for his impudence. Miss Faucit, while galled by the rebuke, felt that she deserved it (though not so bitterly), and loved the man more than ever who gave it.

Again, Fanny Kemble was violent and rugged in her exclamation to Helen when disparaging Clifford. She gave it, "I hate you, Helen!" Miss Faucit's was thus: "Helen!" (a pause of a moment, and then, as if she gulped down what she would have said) "I hate you!" in a tone half serious, half badinage. 'Twas a new reading, and it told. In the celebrated "Do it! nor leave the task to me!" methinks Miss Faucit was too

commanding. The words should have been spoken as if life and death depended upon their issue.

I went behind the scenes, and met Helen Faucit coming from the front. She was trembling with the excitement of her success, and before she could reach the green-room was obliged to lean against a scene until nature found relief in tears.

The playbill of next day speaks of "the brilliant success that crowned the *début* of Miss Helen Faucit," and announces her second appearance that evening. Again her Journal may be quoted:—

"*Wednesday, January 6th.*—The morning passed in receiving notes and calls and all sorts of congratulations from my very kind friends. All this is very delightful, and I am most grateful for it; but I have missed, oh how sadly! to-day, that dear and kind friend of my childhood, who, had she lived till now, how proudly and how fondly would she have exulted in every word she heard in favour of her dear little god-child! I shall never forget her goodness to me.

"The papers, I hear, are all very kind to me,—much more so than I expected or indeed deserve. This is a great relief, for I know how severe they can be, and I expected to be cut up most frightfully, for I have no friend in the world to influence them. But I must not think much of this, for it" [the cutting up] "will come *all in good time, I have no doubt.* Repeated Julia this evening—the house very great again; my reception *beautiful.* Called for at the end again. I was a *little* more aware to-night of what I was doing; but, oh! so tired and exhausted—quite worn out with excitement. Oh! what I have suffered for a length of time no one but myself can tell! From *sheer exhaustion* I am sure I shall have such a cry before I go to sleep."

Night after night this most fatiguing part was repeated to crowded houses with growing success, and every night the young actress was called for after the fall of the curtain, a distinction in those days rarely accorded, and full of significance. Not till Sunday the 17th was the arduous task intermitted. By this time she had become so fond of it as to doubt "if she could ever get a character into which she could enter with all her heart and soul as she did into this." In her Journal she writes:—



“*Sunday, January 17th.*—Went to church this morning. Oh! how happy I felt; and, I trust, how truly grateful. I think I ought to feel happy, and yet I rejoice in fear and trembling, for I remember that my trial, although favourably begun, is but begun, and, oh! who can tell what may follow! But the same goodness that has guided me through this will, I hope and trust, lead me through every succeeding trial.”

Next day she went to her first rehearsal of *Belvidera* in Otway's *Venice Preserved*. “I wish,” she writes, “this was not to be my second part. I don't know why, but I have always dreaded it. I think in many parts it is an overdrawn and unnatural character,—one that you are obliged to force your feelings to go along with.” The dread did not diminish on further rehearsals. “How I wish,” she writes on the 26th January, “the first plunge were over. My dear Mr Percy Farren says and does everything he can to assure me of my being able to do it, and to give me confidence. I must seem most ungrateful, not to feel more convinced by his kind arguments, but I fear he thinks too well of me. How very good and kind he is! What should I do without him?”

Well might a young girl view with apprehension the demands of a part with which the greatest actresses, from Mrs Cibber downwards, had alone been thought fit to grapple. The shadow of their great reputation seemed to overhang her. How they had dealt with the character she had no means of knowing. Thus she had to create it for herself, and in her audience there must be hundreds who would be on the look-out for the familiar effects produced by her great predecessors in the important passages of the play. The character of *Belvidera*, great as it afterwards became in her hands, is not one to move the sympathies of a young woman, while it demands a measure of passion and tragic force, especially in the concluding scenes, with which, as one reads the play, it seems unfair to tax the powers of any young and inexperienced actress. Well, therefore, might she approach it with fear and trembling. Apart from these fears, little did the crowded audience, who had assembled, all impatience, to witness the performance, know what the poor heroine of the night had to

go through before she could appear upon the scene. This her Journal places vividly before us.

“*Wednesday, Jany. 27th.*—Acted Belvidera to-night. Began the evening badly by that tiresome mistress of the wardrobe keeping me waiting for my dress long after the curtain should have risen, and then, when it did come, *oh, such a thing!* They tugged and tugged and could not get it on me, too small in every part. Such a scene! I shall never forget it. In the first place, the manager knocking every second at the door to know if they might not begin, for the audience, tired with waiting, were hissing most vehemently; then my dear Mr Farren, in such a passion at my being served so, and declaring that no curtain should rise until I was ready, and that they might go forward and tell the audience the reason, and how shamefully I was treated; and poor mamma all but in hysterics, and trembling so she could scarcely stand. This was a pleasant situation for so young an actress, and on the first night of her second part, and that a part so feared! However, I think I bore it *manfully*, and kept as quiet as possible, and by dint of squeezing and screwing I was at last sent upon the stage like a stuffed turkey, with the delightful reflection that all this could not last, and that I should certainly drop to pieces on the stage. I am sure if any one had asked me, in my first scene, whether I was on the stage or in my dressing-room, I could not have told them, all my ideas being in such a state of confusion. I was able to recover myself a little before my second scene, and I think on the whole I got on *pretty fairly*, at least my friends tell me so, and Mr Kemble, who led me forward at the end. I scarcely know myself *anything about it*. I trust I shall never have to pass such an evening again—such frights as these are more than mortal can bear. Heigho! I am so tired.”

It was well for the actress that Belvidera's first two scenes could in no way tax her powers. But from her third scene onwards the strain upon her emotions rises and rises until it culminates in sudden madness and death. The young actress obviously reached the hearts of her audience, for, according to the *Morning Chronicle* of the day, Mr Kemble gave out the play for

repetition "amidst a tumult of applause; and when Miss H. Faucit afterwards came forward, obedient to a universal call, the whole house rose—pit, boxes, and galleries—and evinced the most unqualified satisfaction."

The remarks of the same critic are interesting, as indicating in the actress the dawning revelation of the qualities which found their perfect expression when years of thought and practice had made her mistress of her art:—

In Julia, Miss Faucit certainly exceeded our expectations, and in Belvidera, which is a part of a higher grade, she has risen still higher in our estimation. What we mainly and most of all like in Miss Helen Faucit is the fearlessness with which she throws herself into the passion of the part: she plunges into it at once like the Diver in Schiller's ballad; she trusts to that, and to her own power of depicting it; she has faith in the poet and in herself; she relies upon human nature and its capabilities, and she does not care a straw about making unbecoming or even what might be called ugly faces, if by an ugly face she can accomplish what she wishes better than by a pretty one. Her features in repose have a beautiful tranquil expression, which must, of course, disappear in the storm of passion. The contrast is like that of the ocean, lulled by zephyrs or lashed to fury by winds. Looking at the calm sea, who would dream that in a few hours it could be wrought to such limitless turmoil; and, looking at the calm expression of Miss H. Faucit's countenance, one would hardly suppose it capable of such powerful and varied character. In the two first acts Belvidera has comparatively little to do, Pierre and Jaffier engross the eye and ear; but in the third act she comes out, and never recedes, excepting in the scene before the Senate. In all the great situations and passages of the three last acts, she very nearly came up to any of her predecessors of late years. . . . On the whole, Miss H. Faucit has proved herself equal to one of the noblest and ablest tragic parts, and has shown that her strength has increased in proportion to the demand upon it.

By another critic a characteristic which was signally conspicuous in all Miss Faucit's subsequent impersonations is thus happily noted:—

The great charm in this young lady's acting is its *freshness*. Without seeming to avoid imitation, she is strictly original. She plays less at *points* than any *débutante* we have seen for years, and consequently there is an air of *identity* about her style which brings the character *itself* before us, instead of losing it in some *individual* feature. She does not save her strength for particular passages, and "slubber others o'er in haste," but preserves an idea of uniformity which makes us love the component parts in the harmony which pervades the whole.

Another leading journal writes :—

Miss Faucit threw herself heart and soul into the body of the part. She identified herself with the spirit of the character—*she acted as if she were not acting*. There was no *mimini primini* settlement of the features—no studied attitudes ; she had faith in the part, trust in what human nature could prompt, and a firm confidence in herself. She grew upon the public, for in the earlier part of the play *Belvidera* has little to do. But in the third act commenced her avalanche of passion—she was the fond, warm, winning woman, indignant at being made the pledge of faith to conspirators, but never losing her deep and intense love. The death scene was superb—you could have heard a pin drop in the house, which was crowded to the ceiling. Miss Faucit was called for after the play, and as a tribute of respect and admiration, the whole house—boxes, pit, and galleries—simultaneously arose and cheered her. Poor thing, she was affected very much, and burst into tears the moment she went from public gaze.

A success, which at once placed a young and untried actress in the topmost rank of her profession, could not fail to be unwelcome to some of its members, whose position was threatened by the favour with which her appearance had been received. They had their friends in the press, who were not likely to join in the general chorus of approbation, and this appears to have led to a series of very severe notices of her *Belvidera* in some of the minor journals. These should never have been allowed to be seen by one who, as her friends knew, was already prone to great distrust of her own powers. How much pain they cost her appears from the next entry in her Journal :—

“*Thursday, Jan. 28th.*— Oh, these horrid newspapers, they tell me, have cut me up in fine style. I amused myself with fretting the whole morning, until I could scarcely see out of my eyes. This was very wise, knowing I had got this part to act again at night. It was very silly, I know, for they have written against a thousand times better actors and actresses than I can ever hope to be ; but I felt weak and ill, and could not help it. I wish I had made up my mind to do what Mr Kemble asked me to promise him before I appeared, which was *not to look at or think of a newspaper*. He said I should save myself a great deal of annoyance, and that no good could be attained by it ; for, put them all together, and see how generally the one contradicts the other, and condemns you for what the next you take up very



likely praises you for. Which are you to be guided by? In the end you must fall back upon your own resources and judgment.

"I was so rejoiced to find this evening that the audience did not seem prejudiced against me from the newspaper reports, but received me, oh! so kindly, that I felt the sudden revulsion of feeling almost too much for me, and as I leant my head upon Mr Kemble's (Jaffier's) shoulder to recover myself, he whispered most kindly in my ear, '*Do you hear, my poor little child? Does that sound as if the papers had done you much harm?*' I looked up at him, and, smiling through my tears, blessed him in my heart for giving me a small portion of what I *then so sorely needed, confidence in myself.* I felt a new creature, and entered into my part with all my heart. 'Don Felix' (in *The Wonder*) says, 'What wondrous magic lies in one kind look?' What wondrous magic lies in one kind word! At least I always feel it so. I certainly acted much better to-night than last night. No doubt there was a great deal of truth in what was said against me, but still I think it is rather hard that critics should see and judge you so severely on a *first* appearance, when young people, most particularly, from their over-anxiety and nervousness, cannot have that coolness and self-possession which are so necessary in embodying a character. Why not go on the second?"

"But why do I not go to bed instead of scribbling nonsense, when I am so thoroughly tired and worn out with one thing and another? Mr Kemble took me on again at the end of the play. How very good and kind he has been to me! I wrote to Harry [her sister] this morning and told her all my troubles."

Whatever her own misgivings about her powers might be, each successive performance of the two parts in which she had hitherto appeared strengthened her hold upon the public favour, and confirmed the confidence of Mr Kemble and other competent judges in her power to justify and to maintain that hold. She had to act almost every night, and in her Journal occur many such passages as this: "I feel very tired. I hope I shall sleep to-night. My nights are very wretched, but my mind is so anxious I cannot calm it enough to sleep. It seems as if it would never let me rest." The production of a musical drama at the theatre happily set her free now and then for a night, and she finds dis-



traction and rest in her piano. "Practised the piano three hours this morning," she writes (January 30), "oh, wonderful!" But brief, very brief, were the snatches of enjoyment which she was allowed to seize from a return to her old musical studies. The interest of the public had to be kept up by her appearance in new parts, and she was next called on to appear in that of Mrs Haller in *The Stranger*, a character little to her taste, overcharged as it is with sickly sentiment and unwholesome pathos. But it fitted the taste of the time, and having been made popular by Miss O'Neill and other leading actresses, it had become a sort of assay piece for all aspirants to eminence in the tragic drama. So, with only two rehearsals, Miss Faucit appeared in the character on the 8th of February. "Was very much overcome," her Journal of the night records, "with this heart-breaking, hopeless, miserable part, but I think I got through pretty well."

Mr Kemble, who played the counterpart, thought well of the performance, but the critics who had run down her Belvidera, her Journal records, "Cut me up frightfully. They say it is the worst thing I have done, even worse than Belvidera. Ah me, ah me! what am I to do? I am sure I strive hard enough to please; but there is one thing certain—if I continue fretting at this rate I shall be in my grave in a very short time, and then there will be an end to my troubles. I have most surely found that there *are* thorns among the roses in this weary world, that prick and sting *most deeply*. Now to try and sleep—it is just four o'clock—and, I hope, forget it all."

Those who had formed their ideas from the acting of a former day of how the character of Mrs Haller should be treated were very likely to take exception to any change. Miss Faucit had never seen the play performed, and they would miss the traditional effects for which they had been accustomed to look. This is a result which original genius in all departments of art must be prepared to expect. Her own mother had often played the part, and seems to have joined, to the daughter's great disquiet, with other critics, in the harsh judgment to which her Journal alludes.

But these critics must have been in a minority, for the popu-

larity of the young actress continued to grow.<sup>1</sup> No stronger proof of this could be given than by the fact that she was now called upon to play the principal part in Joanna Baillie's play, *Separation*. The name of Joanna Baillie was even in these days thought to be one to conjure with in the theatre. It had somewhat declined in pre-eminence since the time when Sir Walter Scott spoke of her as the "highest genius of the country." But her *Plays of the Passions* still found a place upon the shelves of every good library, where now they rest in a repose that is very rarely disturbed. One of the best of them is *Separation*. On the 15th of February it went into rehearsal. Miss Faucit had formed a high idea of the heroine's part, but Mr Kemble, she records, was doubtful of the play's success upon the stage,—a doubt which to a reader of the present day seems most natural, having regard to the want of dramatic movement and of vivid expression; the want, in short, of the freedom and force of style essential to good dramatic composition.

"I trust," Miss Faucit writes, "his fears are groundless, not only on account of Miss Baillie's fine play, but for a more selfish reason, as I should much wish the play, in which I have my first original part, to have a long run. The character of Margaret is a very fine one, very noble and beautiful, but a very trying one. It requires a lofty and yet gentle bearing, a decision of manner and carriage, oh, so far different from my nervous trembling and uncertain gait!<sup>1</sup> Oh that some fairy, if she could not make me clever, would make me think myself so! I am getting worse and worse, and go on the stage under a sort of

<sup>1</sup> These and similar experiences were, doubtless, in Miss Faucit's mind when in her "Letter on Desdemona" she wrote: "Very often I meet people now who tell me they saw my first performances, and speak of them as though they were great triumphs. They were better satisfied than I was, because I knew that I could do far better with encouragement and practice. But ah! how my heart ached when the critics flung great names at me! A Siddons, an O'Neill—what could I know of them? How they thought about my heroines—for they were mine, a part of me—I could not tell. Did they look at them with the same eyes, think the same thoughts about them, as I did? No one could tell me that. I was only told with what grand effect one spoke certain lines, how another looked and sobbed and fainted in a certain situation. Fortunately for me, then as now the critics did not all agree."

almost dread that the first thing I shall hear will be a shower of hisses. Ah me! I wonder if my enthusiastic love of my profession will give way under what I am suffering now. I hope and trust not, as if so I would not care a rush for it. I must remember those favourite lines of Cowper's that I have so often conned over:—

“ ‘ If hindrances obstruct thy way,  
*Thy magnanimity display,*  
*And let thy strength be seen,*  
 But oh ! if fortune fill thy sail  
 With more than a propitious gale,  
 Take half thy canvas in.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

While *Separation* was being prepared, Mrs Haller alternated with Belvidera. On one of her free nights Miss Faucit goes to Drury Lane, to see Lovell's play of the *Provost of Bruges*, and it is interesting to read her impressions of the acting of Mr Macready, with whom she was to become afterwards so intimately associated.

“ *Tuesday, Feb. 16.*—Saw the *Provost of Bruges* this evening, a very pretty play indeed, and I think some of the poetry most beautiful, but oh, how splendidly did Mr Macready act in it! I think I liked him better to-night than ever, but somehow he always carries my heart and soul along with him, there is such an earnestness and meaning about everything he does, even the most trifling word or action, that carries such *truth* with it. I hear a great many talk of his faults of declamation, pauses, and so on, but I don't know how it is, he never gives me time to see them. He may not be, and certainly is not, so graceful in his manner and bearing as Mr Kemble (but then how very, very few are!), but his overpowering earnestness makes amends for all, and leaves no fault that I can see.”

She goes on to speak with great admiration of the performance of Miss Ellen Tree in the same play.

Night by night, as we have seen, boxes, pit, and gallery were rising from their seats to cheer the young actress, when she was led on at the end of the play in answer to their call, and yet this is how she closes the record of the day:—

“ Another night of worry! My eyes are so swollen I can

<sup>1</sup> Translation from Horace, Book II. Ode x.

scarcely see to scribble, but anything to take my thoughts from the one channel, and, if possible, to make me sleepy, for 'tis time—near three o'clock. Oh, what would I not give if my darling Harry were with me to comfort me! It is so hard to be separated from her. I should not feel my troubles half so much had I her kind voice to encourage and urge me on to surmount them."

In these days, when many weeks are devoted in our Metropolitan theatres to the rehearsal of plays, which make comparatively slight demands upon the intelligence of those who have to act in them, one reads with surprise that only five rehearsals were given to an important tragedy like *Separation* between the 15th and 25th of February, when it was produced. Besides studying Lady Margaret, the leading character, "the difficulty of which," she writes, "grows upon her more and more," making her fear that "all her study and thought will not enable her to make the part anything like what it ought to be," Miss Faucit had to perform Belvidera and Mrs Haller on the intermediate nights.

Well might she have misgivings as to her ability to give life to a character so unlike any she had previously acted or even studied. The story turns upon a wife's hearing that her husband, before their marriage, had killed her brother. The play opens with the wife's learning the terrible truth, just as the tidings reach her that her husband has returned safely from battle, and is close at hand. Of course the *Separation* ensues.

Expectation was on tiptoe to see how the new favourite would call into life a character of such importance. The success was such as might well have dispersed her apprehensions.

This [wrote one of the leading journals] is by far the most important play in which Miss Faucit has yet taken part; some portions were scenes of extreme difficulty, and required the highest taste and discrimination both in the conception and acting, and it is but small praise to say that Miss Faucit surpassed the most sanguine expectations we had ever formed of her. She entered most cordially into the calm dignity of her part; her action was graceful and appropriate, and the tones of her voice were at times exquisite. The soliloquy in the third act was beautifully given, and especially the fine passage—



“ I'll go to him myself, and tell my wretchedness.  
 Oh ! if his kindling eye with generous ire  
 Repel the charge ; if his blest voice deny it,  
 Though one raised from the dead swore to its truth,  
 I'll not believe it ! ”

The subsequent scene, in which she tells Garcia they must part—by far the most difficult passage in the whole play—was an admirable performance, and wonderfully sustained, when it is considered how young Miss Faucit is, both as an actress and in years. . . . At the close of the piece Miss Faucit was received with continued cheers, and must have been highly gratified with so unqualified and flattering a testimony.

Here is her own modest record of the triumph of the evening :—

“ Thank goodness, this night is over ! The play has gone off very well indeed. Mr Kemble took me forward so kindly at the end ; indeed, he has all along been most kind to me—so considerate in pointing out my faults, and taking such pains in explaining how I could mend them. I am sure I shall never forget his goodness to me. I cannot tell how I have acted to-night, for I felt so ill the whole evening that all my anxiety was to keep sufficiently well to enable me to get through, *but I shall be sure to hear all about it to-morrow.* The chamber scene in the third act is most trying.”

Of one notable incident of the performance the Diarist makes no mention, but it finds a place in her later recollections (“ Letter on Juliet ”). She was, she there writes, herself very nervous and anxious “ on attempting the leading character in a play never before acted, and one, moreover, with which I had little sympathy. During the first performance Mr Kemble also appeared very nervous, and at times seemed at a loss for his words. He was deaf, too—not very deaf, but sufficiently so to make the prompter's voice of no use to him. Happily I was able on several occasions, being close to him, to whisper the words. How I knew them I can hardly tell, because we had not copies of the play to study from, but only our own manuscript parts. But I had heard him repeat them at rehearsal, and so they had fixed themselves in my memory. Naturally, I thought nothing of this at the time. The next morning, when we met upon the stage to make some little changes in the play, Mr Kemble spoke openly of the help I had been to him, making very much more

of it than it deserved, and above all, marvelling at the self-command of the young novice, coming with so much readiness to support an old actor, who should have been on the look-out to do that office for her. I was much ashamed to be praised for so small a thing. But how quietly glad was the little mouse when she found that she had helped, ever so slightly, her good friend the noble lion!"

Little as she thought of the incident at the time, it is interesting to those who knew her in later life as an indication of the self-command, the readiness of resource, the thoughtfulness for others in any emergency, great or small, for which she was remarkable.

*Separation* was repeated two days afterwards, and she records:—

"*Saturday, Feb. 27th.*—Much better to-day, all but a nasty ear-ache, that teases me dreadfully. Acted in *Separation* again this evening, felt much stronger, so I suppose got through better. Mr Kemble took me on again at the end of the play. The papers, I hear, are more indulgent to me than I expected. Got a letter to-day, and certainly by the handwriting and style from a lady, although a tiresome anonymous one, such a kind nice letter, so full of the best wishes for my prosperity and happiness. How I wish I knew the lady's name, that I might write and tell her how grateful I feel for her good wishes! It is so provoking not to know to whom you are indebted for kindness."

Of the countless letters of congratulation which Miss Faucit received during the early part of her career, she preserved scarcely any. But on this letter she set such great store that it is found folded into her Journal. Who the writer was she never learned.

Will you deem it presumptuous, it says, in one of the most fervent and enthusiastic admirers of your talents to dare to address one line to you? Believe that the admiration I feel is far too respectful to permit me to write anything that could in the remotest way annoy or offend you. Let it then suffice to say that from the night of your first appearance (that most triumphant night for you) I have carefully watched your talented and most interesting performances. Your intense feeling in "Julia," your bright flashes of genius in *Belvidera*, and, to crown all, your brilliant and most successful personation of the heroine of to-night (which, let me add, no woman now on the stage but yourself could have rendered so interesting)—

each and all of these are sufficient, amply sufficient, to show the public what you *can* do; and that public can, I think, estimate your worth. I hope they will prove themselves worthy of you! Go on and prosper, noble, intellectual, and most interesting Helen! And if young, very young as you are, you are capable of producing the effects you *now* do, what may not be hoped and expected of you *hereafter*?

Let any one have the patience to read the play of *Separation* and he must come to the same conclusion as the writer of this letter, that the genius was indeed great which could infuse into it dramatic life and interest. One marvels how the young actress, with such sorry materials to work upon, could charm and thrill her audience in the part of Margaret, as she obviously did.

To her delight her sister, her "darling Harry," arrived at home the day after the production of *Separation*, "looking so well," and she goes to the repetition of Lady Margaret in high spirits, sure at least in her of a sympathy which never failed. But at the theatre she found, to her great disappointment, that owing to the death of a relative Mr Kemble could not act. "I am very sorry for his loss," she writes, "and selfishly sorry on my own account, for it will so spoil the play his being out of it." What a trial to have to play with his substitute without even a rehearsal! She was suffering, too, from the pain of an ulcerated throat. "I was so grieved that I acted so ill to-night, for it is the first time of my Harry's seeing me; but I need not fear *her* censure. She is most conveniently blind where the affections are concerned. I never remember her saying that I did anything ill. She is like Virginius and his daughter: 'Few things do I as I ought, yet everything is well done with my father.' My own dear sister, God bless her for her love for me! I feel as if I wanted nothing now she is with me, she is so kind, so thoughtful, and above all so indulgent to me."

For the next two days she is suffering "dreadful pain" with her throat. "My doctor says it all proceeds from weakness. I wish to goodness he could make me strong then, but I fear even he is not clever enough for that." That night *Separation* was repeated. "Felt a little better—acted middling. Very much surprised this morning to find myself announced for Juliet next Monday. Surely it will be almost impossible to do it on so short a notice."

In a letter from her sister to a friend at this time, the following interesting passage occurs :—

She [Helen] looks so beautiful and acts so beautifully, so simply, so feelingly, and so powerfully. Could you read one-half the letters my bird has received from our first literary people, you would think it enough to turn her brain. But she has such fine sense. I wish she possessed as much strength of body as of mind, but she is very delicate. She has been very ill since this new part. How I wish you could see her in it! I have not seen the new play from the front. I went with my sweet bird the first night I was in town, and would go with her every night, but I am not strong enough. It is dreadfully cold, too. My darling suffers from this,—the fatigue is so great,—and though we wrap her up when she leaves the stage, yet it is impossible to help a chill. [She then alludes to her being surrounded by admirers.] *But she thinks of nothing but her art, and appears unconscious of all the admiration she excites.*

To excel in her art, to clothe with life the forms which filled her young imagination, was an absorbing passion, with which no personal feeling was allowed to interfere. The truth of her sister's remark has been confirmed to me by those who knew her best at this period of her life. By this time her popularity, although she would not admit this to herself, was assured. A little incident illustrative of this is recorded in a note to her "Letter on Juliet" :—

I shall never forget my surprise when, on going into the Soho Bazaar one day, during the run of *Separation*, and coming to the doll-stall—a not-forgotten spot of interest for me—I saw a doll, labelled "Miss Helen Faucit as the Lady Margaret in *Separation*." Such things were very unusual then, and I felt just a little—not proud, but happy. The doll's dress was exactly mine—copied most accurately. I am sure, had I not thought it would look like vanity, I should have liked to buy my doll-self. Moreover, my funds at that time might not have permitted such extravagance, and I felt too shy to ask the price. It was a grandly got-up lady; and although my salary was the largest ever given in those days, I was, as a minor, only allowed by my friends a slight increase to the pocket-money which had been mine before my *début*. Happily for me, both then and since, money has ever been a matter of slight importance in my regard. Success in my art, and the preservation of the freshness and freedom of spirit which are essential to true distinction in it, were always my first thought.

Although *Separation* continued to be well received, these were not the days of long runs. A general desire, too, had arisen to



see Miss Faucit in the character for which she had originally been announced. The difficulty which prevented its being produced for her *début*—the want of a youthful Romeo—still existed; but the young actress had already established so strong a hold upon the public that she might be trusted to carry the play through successfully by her own attraction. Mr George Bennett was still found to be the only Romeo available for the occasion. “He was,” she writes, “an excellent actor in his way, but very vehement,—so much so that, when he played Romeo, my sister would never trust me in the tomb alone. He shook it so violently with the crowbar, that she used to declare, if she had not been there to play the part of a caryatid, and help to hold it up, the frail fabric would have dropped to pieces on my head. Oh! if I had not had a very different Romeo in my imagination, it would have been hard indeed to make one out of such an unromantic spluttering lover!” Not then alone must she have had to make a similar call upon her imagination for her Romeos.

On the 10th of March *Romeo and Juliet* was produced. Every hour that could be spared from the performances of Lady Margaret and Belvidera was devoted by Miss Faucit to a re-study of Juliet. Since she had played Juliet at Richmond, her mind had greatly expanded, she had made an elaborate study of the whole play, and gained a deeper insight into the nature of “the child-woman, raised by love to heroism of the highest type.” “But even then,” to use her own words, “how little could I know! Although the torch had been put into my hand, I could only see what my small experience showed me. The wonderful proportion, the harmony, the loveliness and the pathos, grew upon me only with my mental growth, and could not be grasped in unripe years. Besides, I needed above all things the practice in my art, which to the artist is the greatest help towards developing the poet’s meaning, and throws lights upon it that no study, however close, can give. In certain moods of mind the poet’s intention may be read in this way as plainly as in an open book. The inspiration of the scene makes clear what before had not been even dreamed of, but which, once shown, is never to be forgotten or neglected.”

However little satisfactory to herself her performance of Juliet

at this period may have been, it had the effect of raising her in the estimation of the public and of the critics, who saw in it an originality of conception and the suggestion of beauty and power in the development of the character, which in after years placed it in the foremost rank of her Shakespearian impersonations. Her Journal says nothing on the subject, for she has now her sister to share her thoughts with, and it is only resumed when her "darling Harry" returns to her own duties at Liverpool. "How very much I miss her. I am afraid she spoils me, and that may be partly the reason everything in my little room looks so different now she is gone." When the Journal is resumed (April 1846), all she can remember is that in the interval she has acted Juliet five or six times, Belvidera, and Lady Margaret, and at Mr Kemble's particular request made her first appearance in comedy as Lady Townley in *The Provoked Husband*, for his benefit. She has also spent the holiday Passion Week at Brighton, where "it had not ceased raining for half an hour together the whole week, when we wanted to blow off the oil and gas of the theatre."

On the 4th of April she records that she acted Juliet that evening "pretty decently." On the 6th she writes: "What a week's work I have got before me! It frightens me to think of. Played Margaret to-night. My dear Mr Percy Farren went to see me. He says I improve every night. I am so glad of it, for oh, how ardently I strive and long to do so! Was at the reading this morning of a little three-act piece, which is to be called *Don Juan of Austria*—a translation from the French, but I think not very well done. They seem to make such a point of my playing in it, that I suppose I must oblige, but it is a poor stupid part."

Next night, when acting Belvidera, in the midst of her struggles in the parting scene with Jaffier in the second act, her foot got twisted, and she was so much hurt that for a time she could not stand. The injury proved to be serious. Lame as she was, however, next night she plays Mrs Haller, "better, I think, than I have ever done it before; but I was in such dreadful pain with my foot that I cried all through it with real agony." In acting Lady Margaret the following evening her foot was in such pain "as scarcely to allow me to put it to the ground and hobble

about, completely (in spite of all my efforts to the contrary) taking my whole attention and thought from the part. Oh for the respite to-morrow (Sunday) will give me!" Little, then, as so very often in her after-career, did the audience surmise, when they thought her acting at its best, over what physical pain she was triumphing all the time. It is obvious she could not, though suffering in the same way for several weeks, be spared from the bill. Accordingly, next day she rehearses *The Hunchback* with a new Sir Thomas Clifford, Mr Kemble not being any longer available; then rehearses Florinda in *Don Juan*, and plays Julia at night, "at all of which my poor foot is grumbling most sadly, and promises to keep me awake for spite the whole night."

On studying her part in the new play she finds it bombastic. She reads it over with Mr Percy Farren, "who says it is great trash, and I don't think he is very far from the truth. My spirits," she continues, "(goodness knows why), have been up in the skies all day. I only have wanted a pair of wings to carry me quite away. What would I not give for them? for this earth seems sometimes much too heavy for me to tread on." A rehearsal of the new piece, with the performance of Julia at night, was well fitted to damp by that time this "unaccustomed spirit," that lifted her, like Romeo, "above the ground with cheerful thoughts."

After only three rehearsals *Don Juan of Austria* was produced (April 16th), and with success. "Bravo!" she writes, "Donna Florinda! I fear you will trouble me for many nights to come, you poor injured innocent!" The next evening the play "went off again very well. What trash it is! but the last scene, I dare say, may be very interesting." The run of the piece continues for several nights, giving her foot and ankle no time to rest. On April 22 she writes: "Acted Florinda to-night, and, I think, really very well. But the language in some parts is so affected and ridiculous that I have scarcely patience to repeat it. I hope soon to have done with it." Next night "The audience would not be pacified without my making my curtsy to them. I suspect my friends the Jews did me this good turn. Considering how very interesting a representative I make of one

of their race, they ought to be grateful to me, and I have no doubt they are!"

Very probably this was one of the cases where the actress did more for the part than the author. It was a remark of Mrs Jordan's that "many a character one has to perform is in itself insipid; it all depends upon what you can put into it." And of Mrs Montfort, Colley Cibber writes, that she "often made an author vain of his work, that in itself had but little merit." Of Miss Faucit this was frequently said, and said truly, in after years.

The next day (April 24) she writes: "Went to church this morning through the pouring rain,—a very wise thing to do, considering I have a very bad cough; but I had not been for so long that I had set my heart upon going. The sermon as gloomy as the day. Surely our beautiful religion was never meant to make us feel so dispirited and miserable. I like to look at it as the bright green spot of our existence, to which we turn in all seasons of trial and difficulty, with a firm conviction of finding comfort and strength that will enable us to bear up against all we may have to encounter—a blessed, blessed oasis in our desert. I may be wrong, but I should be miserable to feel otherwise."

"*Friday, 29th April.*—The Queen was at the theatre this evening." The play was *The Hunchback*. "I was very anxious to be smart, and left off the bandage from my foot. But I suppose from the want of support it gave way in the middle of my best scene, and not being prepared for this I was all but on the ground. It must have looked so very awkward and stupid. I had it bound up when the scene was over. But I was in great agony with it all the night, and hobbled about like an old woman. I did not act well. It is very tiresome; something is sure to happen when I want to do my bit of best."

Meanwhile it had been decided to produce Joanna Baillie's play *Romero*, which Miss Faucit thought "a very pretty play, but hardly powerful enough for the stage." It had even been several times rehearsed; but it was put aside to give room for the engagement of Mr Macready, an event which was to become an important turning-point in Miss Faucit's professional career. Under



circumstances of great provocation he had, a few days before, assaulted Mr Bunn, his manager at Drury Lane, an assault for which he never forgave himself, although the public did. Mr Osbaldiston had thereupon seized the opportunity to offer him an engagement at Covent Garden, for a limited number of nights, at £20 a night, terms which in those days were regarded as unusually high.

## CHAPTER II.

ON the 8th of May Miss Faucit notes in her Journal that Mr Macready "is announced to act next Wednesday. He is to open, I hear, in *Macbeth*, and they have sent to beg of me to act Lady Macbeth,—a very likely thing on such a notice,—a part that will require weeks, ay, months to study. I always look upon that part as hallowed ground, upon which I dare not tread. I must have a great deal more confidence than I now have, if I ever attempt it."

Mr Macready's performances gave her a few days of comparative rest. But on the 18th she was called upon to play Mrs Haller, rehearsing it with him only once, and that on the morning of the performance! This, she writes, was "the first time of my meeting Mr Macready. He came up to me and congratulated me very kindly upon my success, but with all this I feel very much afraid of him, there is something so cold and distant, and almost repulsive in his manner. I don't think I shall ever like him. Mr Macready took me on after the play, but how different his manner of doing it was to Mr Kemble's! I felt that he thought it a great bore. I may be wrong, but his manner gave me that impression." In his published Diary he mentions that, when called for, "he would not go on without Miss H. Faucit." His manner of doing so was obviously unfortunate. It might have been different, could he have divined that he was soon to be deeply beholden to the genius of the young enthusiast for his success as a London manager. When she played Mrs Haller again with him, ten days afterwards, he does not seem to have been a whit more gracious.

To fill up the off-nights of his engagement Miss Faucit was now



called upon to appear as Mariana in Sheridan Knowles's play of *The Wife*, after a single rehearsal! It was a part pretty enough in its way, but too slight to create any interest in the actress. This was only the prelude to a fresh demand upon her powers; and this at the time when she was playing twice or thrice a-week such characters as Julia, Juliet, and Belvidera, of which last she says: "I think this part tries me more than any, but perhaps not more than Juliet."

On the 24th of May she writes: "I had a long letter from Mr Osbaldiston asking me to do the part of Clemanthe in Serjeant Talfourd's new play [*Ion*]. My friends say decidedly I *shall not*, nor do I think he ought to ask me. The part is very bad, I hear; but that is not the worst part of the story. Miss Tree is to play it the first night, and get what little credit there may be in acting the part, and I am to be made a convenience of, and take what she leaves. It hurts and annoys me so much when I think of it that I had best not think of it any more. I suppose in the end I shall feel obliged to do it, but I leave it to older and wiser heads to decide for me."

By the terms of her engagement Miss Faucit was entitled to choose or refuse any part in any new play produced at Covent Garden. The part of Clemanthe was one which she would herself never have chosen. But although to be asked to take it up under such circumstances was quite unreasonable, great pressure was put upon her by Mr Macready and his friends, and she gave a consent, which if she had not given, the play could not have been produced. It was a great concession, the first of many which she afterwards made to Mr Macready for his advantage.

*Ion* was produced on the 26th of May, and Miss Faucit went to see it. She writes: "Very much pleased and delighted with the play. It is not so interesting as it is chaste and classical. Mr Macready acted most powerfully and beautifully. What a splendid voice he has! How much nature has favoured him there. You hear with distinctness his lowest whisper. But Mr P. Farren tells me it is not only the voice that causes this, but the clear and open articulation. I suppose the want of this is a great fault among us all, for there are very few who speak so that I can hear half of what they say. I hear the voice, but that is

all. How much I wish I could acquire this rare qualification." That she did acquire it to a perfection unexampled in her time is well known. The fault of which she complains grows daily more apparent, even in the lighter dramas of the present day, where no great power of voice is called for. It is no less conspicuous in general society.

"Miss Tree," she continues, "looked and acted most sweetly. *It is a very bad part*, but she made a great deal more of it than I shall be able to do." Next day she writes, "Have been studying Clemanthe. The part does not improve upon acquaintance. She seems to me to be always thrusting herself on the stage when she is not wanted. Certainly the play would do just as well without as with her."

Next morning she meets Mr Macready at the rehearsal of the play, and writes: "How foolish it is of me to feel so much afraid of Mr Macready! My voice actually trembled this morning in going through my scenes. I know I always feel stupidly nervous and diffident with strangers, but there is something about Mr Macready that is quite awful. I wonder if I shall ever get over this silly feeling? I fear not; for I think, if I may judge from the freezing and proud coldness of his manner, *he dislikes me*, and if so, he is not likely to be more agreeable in *my eyes*. I am sorry I should feel so towards him, for I most warmly admire and appreciate his great talents as an actor, and also everything I have heard of his character as a man. I don't yet like him, nor do I think I ever can. Still there is something about him that commands one's respect, and I should say (in spite of what some few would wish to hint just now<sup>1</sup>) it would be impossible for him to commit any act that would be derogatory to the high character of a gentleman. So much for Mr Macready. My stars! how I have been scribbling about him!"

Next day she has her second and last rehearsal, and plays Clemanthe in the evening. From Mr Macready, to oblige whom and the author she was playing the part, she received no encouragement. She returns home "very, very low spirited; will

<sup>1</sup> Because of his assault on Mr Bunn.

go to bed and try to forget all about it, only hoping that there may not be many more Clemanthes in store for me." A letter from Sergeant Talfourd received at the theatre next day restores her spirits. "A nice, kind letter: it almost reconciles me to the part, for he expresses himself so much obliged by my doing it. I shall certainly go to it to-morrow night with greater goodwill, though, I must say, that I tried to do my best on the first night, as much—ay, quite as much—as with the finest part I have ever acted."<sup>1</sup> Here is the letter, full of the kindly courtesy of the man—one of the very few she preserved:—

Mr Serjeant Talfourd presents his best compliments to Miss Helen Faucit, and, in requesting her acceptance of the accompanying copy of the unpublished edition of *Ion* (which contains the Preface and Sonnets omitted in that given to the world), begs leave to express his cordial thanks to her for illustrating its heroine with her grace and pathos, and his pleasure in seeing the character in the hands of one capable of far more arduous personations. An engagement of long standing and imperative obligation prevented him, to his great regret, from witnessing more of her performance that night than the opening scene; but from the power and beauty of that opening, as well as from the testimony of his nearest and most anxious friends, he is aware of the gratitude which he owes to a lady whom he hopes to see embodying the works of far nobler authors, and in far worthier parts, than that which she has so kindly accepted in his play, written without the hope of being so adorned.

TEMPLE, 2nd June 1836.

The play was a success. Mr Macready in his Diary mentions that Mr Osbaldiston would "gladly have engaged him for a succession of nights to continue the run of *Ion*." But he was under engagements elsewhere, and, much to Miss Faucit's satisfaction, it was acted on the 11th of June for the last time. The season was drawing to a close. On Miss Faucit devolved the burden of carrying it on by a renewal of the severe work of her most important characters, and it closed (20th June) with her

<sup>1</sup> In the preface to the published edition of the play Serjeant Talfourd says, "The drama was indebted to the zeal and good nature of Miss Helen Faucit for accepting the part of the heroine, and studying it within a few days, and to her talent for giving it an importance which the author could not hope for from the faintness of its outline."

benefit and performance of the character of Mrs Beverley in Moore's tragedy of *The Gamester*, to the Beverley of Mr Charles Kemble. On that evening she also made her first appearance as Katherine to his Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew*.<sup>1</sup>

The interval until the reopening of Covent Garden in September was spent by Miss Faucit in quiet study, and in seeking in fresh country air to recover from the exhaustion produced by the labours and anxiety of the last six months. Within the first two months of the winter season she was called upon to appear for the first time in three of Shakespeare's heroines—Portia, Desdemona, and Constance of Bretagne. In her study of these characters she was influenced by none of the traditions of the stage, having never seen them performed, but took her inspiration direct from the text of the poet. She would have been sorry in after years to be judged by what she then achieved in the impersonation of these characters, knowing as she did how far it fell short of what maturer thought and the practice of her art had shown her could be done with them. One reads, however, in the journals of the time that her impersonations were marked by the same originality of conception which had previously distinguished her treatment of all her characters, and also by a great increase of power. Great, indeed, must have been the expectations she had raised, before she would have been entrusted with the character of Constance of Bretagne,—a part

<sup>1</sup> In looking over the playbills of Covent Garden Theatre of this season, one is struck by the contrast which they present to those of the present day. The prices of admission are: Boxes, 4s., Pit, 2s., Lower Gallery, 1s., Upper Gallery, 6d. The performances began a quarter before 7. Again, there are always two, frequently three, pieces given—for example, on the first night of *Separation* it was followed by the farce of *The Irish Tutor*, and *The Grand Operatic Romance of Quasimodo* by Fitzball. Quantity as well as quality was given for the money, for besides such actors as Kemble, Macready, Sheridan Knowles, and Helen Faucit, the names of Tyrone Power, the great Irish comedian, and Miss Romer, a singer of great charm, appear in the after-pieces. The scenery, too, was excellent and varied. Next season stalls at 7s. were introduced. The same liberal allowance of entertainment was continued. Thus, on 12th December, after *King John*, with Mr Macready as the King, Charles Kemble as Falconbridge, and Miss Faucit as Lady Constance, Colman's five-act comedy of *The Clandestine Marriage* was given, with Mr Farren as Lord Ogleby.



which, it is well known, makes a call upon the mental as well as physical powers of an actress, which very few in the history of the stage have been able to meet. How great the part became in her hands will appear hereafter. But what it was even then may be seen from the following notice in one of the leading journals:—

We almost expected a failure, and were certainly quite unprepared for a triumph. We could hardly have believed that so young an actress, and one, too, of such apparently fragile and delicate *physique*, could have approached the high and proud indignation of the queenly woman, the deep and stormy grief of the bereaved mother; but we are delighted to report that we were most agreeably disappointed. Miss Faucit not only approached, but mastered the high feeling of the character. She grasped it unshrinkingly—there seemed to be no misgiving—no mental staggering under her burden; she threw herself heart and soul into the feeling of the character; and if her physical powers were not equal to the perfect execution of her conceptions, they seemed to gather strength and expansion by the power of her moral energy. The deep despair and honest indignation with which Constance received the intelligence of the conduct of the temporising Princes in entering into that league by which the rights and claims of her beloved boy are compromised, were portrayed with unerring truth and spirit. Her casting herself on the ground, and the exclamation—

“ Here I and sorrow sit,  
This is my throne, let kings come bow to it ! ”

were conceived and executed with feeling, grace, and dignity; and the whole of this fine scene, particularly her bitter taunting of that unhappy butt of the play, Austria, was acted by Miss Faucit so as fully to realise the spirit and intention of the text, and amply to deserve the enthusiastic and reiterated bursts of applause with which the audience responded to her exertions. We consider this performance as one of Miss Faucit's greatest triumphs, inasmuch as it not only displayed the compass of her genius, but showed her power of overcoming personal disadvantages for this particular class of character, which genius alone could even partially surmount, and time alone can wholly remove.

It strikes one as strange, that only four nights before such a performance the same young actress had achieved a great success in a first performance of Lady Teazle in *The School for Scandal*. It was a theory of Socrates, as we learn from Plato's *Symposium*, that “ the genius of comedy is the same as that of tragedy, and that the writer of tragedy ought to be a writer of comedy also.” This is no less true of the actor. He will never reach the highest point in his profession unless he possesses the



double gift of tragic passion and of humorous expression. The combination, possessed by Garrick in a remarkable degree, is by no means common. The want of it is painfully perceptible when an actor, excellent for passion and pathos, but whose gifts are limited to the expression of the graver emotions, attempts the playfulness, the lightness of touch, the elasticity which come spontaneously to him who is at ease in expressing the humorous as well as the sterner aspects of human nature. He is constrained, awkward, and unnatural, and what is meant for airy lightness of manner degenerates into vulgarity. The Lady Teazle of Miss Faucit confirmed the opinion of Mr Charles Kemble, who was then acting at Covent Garden in a series of farewell performances, in the view which he had always expressed, that there was in Miss Faucit the germ of a performer of the higher comedy. Still she was greatly surprised when he singled her out to play Beatrice to his Benedick on the night when he was to bid adieu to his profession. What she says on this subject is not the least interesting of the autobiographical passages in her "Letter on Beatrice":—

"That I, who had hitherto acted only the young tragic heroines, was to be thus transported out of my natural sphere into the world of high comedy, was a surprise indeed. To consent seemed to me nothing short of presumption. I urged upon Mr Kemble how utterly unqualified I was for such a venture. His answer was, "I have watched you in the second act of Julia in *The Hunchback*, and I know that you will by-and-by be able to act Shakespeare's comedy. I do not mean now, because more years, greater practice, greater confidence in yourself, must come before you will have sufficient ease. But do not be afraid. I am too much your friend to ask you to do anything that would be likely to prove a failure." This he followed up by offering to teach me the "business" of the scene. What could I do? He had, from my earliest rehearsals, been uniformly kind, helpful, and encouraging—how could I say him "Nay"? My friends, too, who acted for me, as I was under age, considered that I must consent. I was amazed at some of the odd things I had to say,—not at all from knowing their meaning, but simply because I did not even surmise it. My dear home instructor [Mr Percy Farren] said, "Child, have no fear, you will do this very well. Only give way to natural joyousness. Let yourself go free: you cannot be vulgar, if you tried ever so hard."

And so the performance came and went off far more easily than I had imagined, as so many dreaded events of our lives do pass away without any of the terrible consequences which we have tormented ourselves by anticipating. The night was one not readily to be forgotten. The excitement

of having to act a character so different from any I had hitherto attempted, and the anxiety natural to the effort, filled my mind entirely. I had no idea of the scene which was to follow the close of the comedy, so that it came upon me quite unexpectedly.

The "farewell" of a great actor to his admiring friends in the arena of his triumphs was something my imagination had never pictured, and all at once it was brought most impressively before me, touching a deep, sad, minor chord in my young life. It moved me deeply. As I write, the exciting scene comes vividly before me—the crowded stage, the pressing forward of all who had been Mr Kemble's comrades and contemporaries, the good wishes, the farewells given, the tearful voices, the wet eyes, the curtain raised again and again. Ah! how can any one support such a trial? I determined in that moment that, when my time came to leave the stage, I would not leave it in this way. My heart could never have borne such a strain. I could not have expected such a demonstrative farewell; but, whatever it might have been, I think it is well the knowledge we are doing anything for the last time is kept from us. I see now those who had acted in the play asking for a memento of the night—ornaments, gloves, handkerchiefs, feathers one by one taken from the hat, then the hat itself—all, in short, that could be detached from the dress. I, whose claim was as nothing compared with that of others, stood aside, greatly moved and sorrowful, weeping on my mother's shoulder, when, as the exciting scene was at last drawing to a close, Mr Kemble saw me and exclaimed, "What! My Lady Baby Beatrice<sup>1</sup> all in tears! What shall I do to comfort her? What can I give her in remembrance of her first Benedick?" I sobbed out, "Give me the book from which you studied Benedick." He answered, "You shall have it, my dear, and many others!" He kept his word, and I have still two small volumes in which are collected some of the plays in which he acted, and also some in which his daughter, Fanny Kemble, who was then married and living in America, had acted. These came, with a charming letter on the title-page, addressed to his "dear little friend."

This was the letter:—

11 PARK PLACE, ST JAMES'S.

MY DEAR LITTLE FRIEND,—To you alone do these parts, which once were Fanny Kemble's, of right belong; for from you alone can we now expect the most efficient representation of them. Pray oblige me by giving them a place in your study, and believe me, ever your true friend and servant,

CHARLES KEMBLE.

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<sup>1</sup> "Baby," Miss Faucit writes, "was the pet name by which Mr Kemble always called me. I cannot tell why, unless it were because of the contrast he found between his own wide knowledge of the world and of art, and my innocent ignorance and youth. Delicate health had kept me in a quiet home, which I only left at intervals for a quieter life by the seaside, so that I knew, perhaps, far less of the world and its ways than even most girls of my age."

Mr Kemble continued his interest in his "baby Beatrice," on several occasions reading over new parts with her, and giving her his advice and help. "One thing," she writes, "which he impressed upon me I never forgot," and certainly never does the suggestion more require to be laid to heart by actors than in the present day. "It was, on no account to give prominence to the merely physical aspect of any painful emotion. Let the expression be genuine, earnest, but not ugly. He pointed out to me how easy it was to simulate distortions—for example, to writhe from the supposed effect of poison, to gasp, to roll the eyes, &c. These were melodramatic effects. But if pain or death had to be represented, or any sudden or violent shock, let them be shown in their mental rather than their physical signs. The picture presented might be as sombre as the darkest Rembrandt, but it must be noble in its outlines; truthful, picturesque, but never repulsive, mean, or commonplace. It must suggest the heroic, the divine in human nature, and not the mere everyday struggles or tortures of this life, whether in joy or sorrow, despair or hopeless grief. Under every circumstance the ideal, the noble, the beautiful should be given side by side with the real."

Continuing, Miss Faucit dwells upon the happy circumstance it was for her shy and sensitive temperament that her first steps in her art were guided and encouraged by a nature so generous and sympathetic as Mr Kemble's. "He made me feel that I was in the right road to success, and gave me courage by speaking warmly of my natural gifts, and praising my desire to study and improve, and my readiness in seizing his meaning and profiting by his suggestions. How different it was when, shortly afterwards, I came under Mr Macready's influence! Equally great in their art, nature had cast the men in entirely different moulds. Each helped me, but by processes wholly unlike. The one, while pointing out what was wrong, brought the balm of encouragement and hope; the other, like the surgeon 'who cuts beyond the wound to make the cure more certain,' was merciless to the feelings, where he thought a fault or a defect might so best be pruned away. Both were my true friends, and both were most kind to me, each in his own ways of showing kindness. Yet it was well for my self-distrustful nature that the kindness came first."



Immediately after Mr Kemble's retirement, Mr Macready returned to Covent Garden for the production of Bulwer's play, *The Duchess de la Valliere*, from which a great deal seems to have been expected. In this Miss Faucit was the La Valliere, and she produced so great an impression that when called for at the end of the piece, Mr Macready did not choose, as he mentions in his Diary (vol. ii. p. 57), "to go on without Miss Faucit, whom I led forward." The play, certainly a weak one, found no favour either with the critics or the public, and was withdrawn after a few performances. Mr Macready then left for Dublin. During his absence Miss Faucit formed the chief attraction of the theatre. She repeated the character of Constance of Bretagne, and was even called upon to appear as Queen Catherine in *Henry VIII.* She has described to me with much humour the devices resorted to by her mother and others to give her some semblance of the matronly aspect which the character required. It argues remarkable confidence in the hold she had established upon her audiences, that her friends and the manager should have pressed her to perform a part which her own good sense would never have let her choose, and with which the commanding presence of Mrs Siddons was all but universally associated. It appears by the journals of the day that her distinction of manner, and the power as well as pathos of her acting, triumphed over the disadvantages of her youth, which no ingenuity of dress could conceal.

The work thrown upon her just at this time must have caused a quite undue strain upon her strength. While acting in the great Shakespearian characters just mentioned, she was studying and rehearsing two new characters—Erina in Knowles's play of *Brian Boroihme*, and Lucy Carlisle in Browning's *Strafford*. The latter of these was produced on the 1st of May 1837, and *Brian Boroihme* on the 4th. Finely acted as it was by Mr Macready and Miss Faucit, *Strafford* had only a *succès d'estime*. Under any circumstances it could scarcely have commanded more; but there are in it several characters which required high intelligence and skilful acting, and in their representatives these were found to be wofully wanting. It was in the preparations for the production of this play that Miss Faucit made the acquaintance of Mr Browning, which ripened into a friendship that lasted through



his life. She was quick to recognise his genius as a poet. His *Paracelsus* had long been a favourite with her, and he was no less quick to recognise her genius on the stage, and the singular charm of her personal character in private life. Speaking of *Brian Boroihme*, the *Times* critic, while admitting that it contains poetic passages of great beauty, condemns it as a work by no means worthy of the author. "All the passages," he adds, "capable of being rendered effective, were well delivered by Miss Faucit."

Between this performance and the end of the month Miss Faucit had to appear in two more of Shakespeare's heroines—Imogen in *Cymbeline*, and Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*. *Cymbeline* was produced on the 18th of May for her benefit, with Mr Macready as Posthumus, which he records himself<sup>1</sup> to have "acted in a most discreditable manner, undigested, unstudied. . . . The audience applauded, but they knew not what they did; they called for me with Miss Faucit. I refused to go on, until I found it necessary to go in order to hand on the lady." Of what "the lady" did as Imogen, he, as usual throughout his Diary, says not a word. But she struck a chord in the hearts of her audience, which was even then felt deeply, in a character in which she was later on to make one of her greatest triumphs. Only four nights afterwards she appeared as Hermione, and her name, although the performance, being no less remarkable in so young an actress, helped to raise her in public opinion, is passed over by Mr Macready in entire silence.

He was not, however, blind to the importance of securing her services, as his leading lady, in the venture which he was at this time arranging for becoming the manager next season at Covent Garden, from which Mr Osbaldiston had determined to retire. She held from the proprietors of the theatre an engagement for three years at £30 a-week, with a right to claim or to refuse the leading characters in the plays produced. He could only take the theatre subject to these conditions. To both → he demurred. With such a control as to the choice of parts, he represented to her that she and not he would be the manager of the theatre; neither could he afford to pay so large a salary. On

<sup>1</sup> *Reminiscences*, vol. ii. p. 68.

both points she gave way ; for she was personally most desirous to help in establishing in the hands of a man of ability and character a theatre in which the higher drama should be worthily represented. She could not, being still under age, cancel her engagement, but she gave him her personal assurance that she would not stand upon its terms as to choice of parts, but would lend him her loyal co-operation in making his venture a success, and as to salary would reduce it to £15 a-week.<sup>1</sup> His mention of this change of conditions is thus noted in his published Diary :—  
“July 14th. Received an answer from Miss Faucit, expressing the best spirit, so far as she is concerned.”

Before the close of Mr Osbaldiston's season, she added, on the 21st of July, to her new parts that of Marion in Sheridan Knowles's now long-forgotten play of *The Wrecker's Daughter*.

<sup>1</sup> It is due to Mr Macready to state that at the end of the season, although it had been a losing one, he paid Miss Faucit, and others, who had made similar concessions, their full salaries.

## CHAPTER III.

AFTER the excessive fatigue of the last six months, Miss Faucit spent the summer in seeking entire rest, and the refreshment of a life in the country. It was well she did so, for the strain upon her powers, mental and bodily, during the following nine months was enormous. During this period her name was scarcely ever out of the bills. She acted in all 110 times, appearing in no less than nine new parts, and on the other nights in the important tragedies and comedies in which she had already given proof of her powers.

Mr Macready must by this time have seen how important an element of success she was likely to prove in his scheme for raising the tone of the performances in his theatre. Whether she had by this time overcome her awe of him, or he had relaxed his haughty coldness of manner towards her, we have no means of knowing, for her Journal was discontinued for more than a year, and in his published Diary her name is scarcely mentioned. This much, however, is certain: he seized every opportunity of turning her popularity, which by this time was very great, to his advantage, by placing her before the audience almost nightly in parts of the highest importance.

The season was opened (30th September 1837) with *The Winter's Tale*, in which he played Leontes to her Hermione, "artist-like," his Diary says, "but not, until the last act, very effectively." Of what he was in that act Miss Faucit has left in her letters a very striking picture.

My first appearance as Hermione [she writes] is indelibly imprinted on my mind by the acting of Mr Macready in the statue scene. Mrs Warner [who had been in the habit of playing Hermione to his Leontes] had rather jokingly told me, at one of the rehearsals, to be *prepared* for something extra-

ordinary in his manner, when Hermione returned to life. But prepared I was not, and could not be, for such a display of uncontrollable rapture.

After describing herself as descending from the dais which led up to the pedestal, advancing slowly, and pausing at a short distance from Leontes—

Oh [she continues], can I ever forget Mr Macready at this point! At first he stood speechless, as if turned to stone, his face with an awe-struck look upon it. Could this, the very counterpart of his queen, be a wondrous piece of mechanism? Could art so mock the life? He had seen her laid out as dead, the funeral obsequies performed over her, with her dear son beside her. Thus absorbed in wonder, he remained until Paulina said, "Nay, present your hand." Tremblingly he advanced, and touched gently the hand held out to him. Then, what a cry came with, "Oh, she's warm!" It is impossible to describe Mr Macready here. He was Leontes' very self! His passionate joy at finding Hermione really alive seemed beyond control. Now he was prostrate at her feet, then enfolding her in his arms. I had a slight veil or covering over my head and neck, supposed to make the statue look older. This fell off in an instant. The hair, which came unbound, and fell on my shoulders, was reverently kissed and caressed. The whole change was so sudden, so overwhelming, that I suppose I cried out hysterically, for he whispered to me, "Don't be frightened, my child! don't be frightened! Control yourself!" All this went on during a tumult of applause that sounded like a storm of hail. Oh, how glad I was to be released, when, as soon as a lull came, Paulina, advancing with Perdita, said, "Turn, good lady, our Perdita is found!" . . . It was the finest burst of passionate, speechless emotion I ever saw, or could have conceived. My feelings being already severely strained, I naturally lost something of my self-command. Of course I behaved better on the repetition of the play, as I knew what I had to expect and was somewhat prepared for it; but the intensity of Mr Macready's passion was so real, that I never could help being moved by it, and feeling much exhausted afterwards.

A few nights after this performance Miss Faucit appeared as Clotilda Lilienstein in a piece called *The Novice*. It had a brief career of only three nights; but the *Examiner*, of which Mr Macready's friend, Mr John Forster, was the dramatic critic (15th October), speaks of Miss Faucit's performance as being "as natural and unaffected as her Lucy Carlisle in *Strafford*, with passages of quiet power. It was really a charming piece of acting."<sup>1</sup> The part of Jane Carlton, in another short-lived piece called *The Parole of Honour*, must have been welcome as a relief

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller account of the production of *Strafford*, see letter from Lady Martin to Mrs Richmond Ritchie, dated April 30, 1891, p. 242, *postea*.



from a long succession of performances of Hermione, Desdemona, Belvidera, Julia, Mrs Haller, Jane Shore, and Lady Townley, and still more welcome the opportunity of playing Cordelia to Mr Macready's Lear. In Lear Mr Macready was in later years certainly seen at his best. Miss Faucit always spoke of it with admiration. During this season it was only performed for a few nights. But after Mr Macready became manager at Drury Lane, she was very often his Cordelia, delighting in the part, and clothing it with all the charm which this exquisite creation of the poet demands.<sup>1</sup>

The success of the season came with the production, on the 27th of February 1838, of *The Lady of Lyons*, by Bulwer. During the rehearsals, Miss Faucit writes in her letters, this had been thought very doubtful. "The defects of the play, from a literary point of view, seemed obvious to those who were capable of judging, and its merits as a piece of skilful dramatic construction could not then be fully seen. My master and dear friend [Mr P. Farren] thought the character of Pauline, when I was studying it, very difficult and somewhat disagreeable. I remember well his saying to me, 'You have hitherto, in your Shakespearian studies, had to lift yourself up to the level of your heroines; now you must by tone and manner and dignity of expression lift this one up to yourself.'" This, by universal consent, she succeeded in doing, making the character her own by putting into her impersonation qualities of mind and heart which are not to be found in the author's text.

The cast of the piece was very powerful. Every character was in strong hands, and on the first night the play gave every promise of assured success. But for some nights afterwards the audiences were so scanty that Mr Macready talked one day at rehearsal of withdrawing it. Against this Mr Bartley, his stage manager, the Colonel Damas of the play, and himself a fine actor, protested. "Could you see, as I see," he said, "the effect upon the audience of the cottage scene, you would never dream

<sup>1</sup> J. H. Foley, the eminent sculptor, executed two fine statuettes, one of Macready with Cordelia lying dead in his lap, the other of Prospero and Miranda, suggested by Mr Macready and Miss Faucit. Both are in my possession.



Walker & Co. New York, N.Y.

*Pauline in the Lady of Lyons*  
*From a painting by Miss. Myra Drummond.*



of such a thing." His remonstrance prevailed, and night after night the play drew increasing crowds, and took a firm hold upon the public. Mr Macready was perhaps mortified that it was more attractive than his *Coriolanus*, which he had interposed in the middle of the first run of the new piece, to a house which, he records, was very indifferent. "This," he adds, "was a blow. The reputation of this theatre for producing Shakespearian plays ought to have commanded more attention. I give up all hope!" To abandon the victor of Corioli for Claude Melnotte must naturally have caused him many pangs, not to be wholly assuaged even by the augmented receipts.

His performance of Claude was admirable. The feeling that he was too old for the young gardener was forgotten after the first act, and Miss Faucit always maintained that no other actor with whom she had played ever reached the same level.

Though in appearance far too old for Claude Melnotte [she writes], Mr Macready had a light, elastic figure, and so much buoyancy of manner that the impression of age quickly wore off. The secret of his success was that he lifted the character, and gave it the dignity and strength which it required to make Claude respected under circumstances so equivocal. This was especially conspicuous in a critical point early in the play (Act ii.), where Claude passes himself off as a prince. Mr Macready's manner became his dress. The slight confusion, when addressed by Colonel Damas in Italian, was so instantly turned to his own advantage by the playful way in which he laid the blame on the general's bad Italian, his whole bearing was so dignified and courteous, that it did not seem strange he should charm the girlish fancy of one who was accustomed to be courted, but whose heart was hitherto untouched. He made the hero, indeed, one of nature's exceptional gentlemen, and in this way prepossessed his audience, despite the unworthy device to which Claude lends himself in the first frenzy of wounded vanity. Truth to say, unless dealt with poetically and romantically, both Claude and Pauline drop down into very commonplace people—indeed I have been surprised to see how commonplace.

Mr Macready's record of the first night is that he acted Claude "pretty well; the audience felt it very much, and were carried away; the play in the acting was completely successful. Was called for, and, leading on Miss Faucit, was well received." Such divided honours were at no time, by his own account, agreeable to him. But, as we have heard from many who were present on the occasion, it was not so much by the Claude as by the Pauline



that the audience were "carried away," and not to have shared them with her was simply impossible.

Miss Faucit struck out in outline on this first performance the main features of the heroine's character which marked her treatment of it to the last. Of course it was far from being the masterpiece which it grew to be in her hands. But the germ of all those subtle *nuances* of expression in which her performance was rich, of the development of the light-hearted, thoughtless girl into the woman whose love once given triumphed over suffering and wrong, was there, and blinded her audience to the poverty of the language and the improbability of the story. In the preface to the first edition of the play, Bulwer speaks of "the power and pathos which Miss Faucit's acting infused into language that will seem comparatively tame and cold to the reader." It would have been nearer the truth to have said of her what Lamartine said of Frederic Lemaitre in the part of Toussaint L'ouverture, that she had "voilé sous le splendeur de sa génie les imperfections de l'œuvre."

Some of the situations afforded scope for the display of intense emotion. She had already become sufficiently mistress of her art to be able to yield to the impulses which came with the action of the scene, as if its incidents were those of real life. This gave a freshness, a truthfulness, and warmth of tone to her impersonations, which formed a great part of their charm. In this she presented a marked contrast to Mr Macready, who so settled every detail of his impersonations that he left no room for the inspiration of the moment. This was a point on which Miss Faucit and himself often were at variance. An instance of this occurred on the first night of this play, which she mentions in her "Letters."

As I recalled to Claude, in bitter scorn, his glowing description of his palace by the Lake of Como, I broke into a paroxysm of hysterical laughter, which came upon me, I suppose, as the natural relief from the intensity of the mingled feelings of anger, scorn, wounded pride, and outraged love, by which I found myself carried away. The effect upon the audience was electrical, because the impulse was genuine. But well do I remember Mr Macready's remonstrance with me for yielding to it. It was too daring, he said; to have failed in it might have ruined the scene (which was true). No one, moreover, should ever, he said, hazard an unrehearsed effect. I

could only answer that I could not help it; that this seemed the only way for my feelings to find vent; and if the impulse seized me again, again, I feared, I must act the scene in the same way. And often as I have played Pauline, never did the scene fail to bring back the same burst of hysterical emotion; nor, so far as I know, did any of my critics regard my yielding to it as out of place, or otherwise than true to nature. Some time afterwards I was comforted by reading a reply of the great French actor Baron, when he was blamed for raising his hands above his head in some impassioned scene, on the ground that such a gesture was contrary to the rules of art. "Tell me not of art," he said. "If nature makes you raise your hands, be it ever so high, be sure nature is right, and the business of art is to obey her." When playing with Mr Macready the following year at the Haymarket, I noticed a chair placed every evening at the wing as I went on the stage for this scene. On inquiry, I found it was for Mrs Glover, the great actress of comedy, who afterwards told me that she came every night to see me in this scene, she was so much struck by the originality of my treatment of it. She said it was bold beyond anything she had ever known; and yet it was always so fresh and new, that each time it moved her as if she had not seen it before. Nature spoke through me to her—no praise to me.

It was nature speaking through her interpreter, nature controlled and regulated by the art begotten of constant study and an instinctive sense of simplicity and truth,—nature which is itself art, which pervaded and inspired Helen Faucit in all her work. On the first performance of *The Lady of Lyons* a lesson in histrionic art was taught her, which she never forgot. ✓

In the scene in the third act—where Pauline learns the infamous stratagem of which she is the victim—on the night the play was first acted, I tore my handkerchief right across without knowing that I had done so, and in the passion and emotion of the scene it became a streamer and waved about as I moved and walked. Surely any one must have seen that this was an accident, the involuntary act of the maddened girl; but in a criticism on the play—I suppose the day after, but as I was never allowed to have my mind disturbed by theatrical criticisms, I cannot feel sure—I was accused of having arranged this as a trick in order to produce an effect. So innocent was I of a device which would have been utterly at variance with the spirit in which I looked at my art, that when my dear home master and friend asked me if I *had* torn a handkerchief in the scene, I laughed and said "Yes! At the end of the play my dresser had shown me one in ribbons." "I would not," was his remark, "have you carry one again in the scene, if you can do without it;" and I did not usually do so. It was some time afterwards before I learned his reason, and I then continued to keep my handkerchief mostly in my pocket, lest the same accident should happen again; for, as I always allowed the full feeling of the scene to take possession of me, I could not answer but that it might. There

would have been nothing wrong in acting upon what strong natural emotion had suggested in the heat of actual performance; but all true artists will, I believe, avoid the use of any action, however striking, which may become by repetition a mere mechanical artifice.

Growing nightly in public favour, *The Lady of Lyons* went on to the end of the season with little intermission. Only three other new pieces were produced. One of these was Byron's *Marino Faliero*, with Miss Faucit as Marina. It was performed for only three nights. *The Athenian Captive*, by Serjeant Talfourd, produced on the 28th of April, had no better fate; but in his preface to the published play, in speaking of Miss Faucit's performances of the heroine Creusa, he makes a grateful acknowledgment of "the sacrifice made by her to the common cause, in consenting to perform a character far beneath the sphere in which she is entitled to move; and which, even when elevated and graced by her, will, I fear, be chiefly noted for her good nature in accepting it." But a better fate awaited the third venture, Sheridan Knowles's *Woman's Wit, or Love's Disguises*, which was produced on the 23rd of May 1838, and ran for thirty-one nights. The piece was got up with great care, and the cast brought into play Mr Macready and all the best actors of his powerful company. In reading the play it is impossible not to feel that its success was due to this more than to its own merits. Fine acting obviously blinded the audience to the absurdly improbable incidents by which *Woman's Wit, or Love's Disguises*, were illustrated. Hero, the heroine (Miss Faucit), shocks her unavowed but admiring lover, Sir Valentine de Grey, by waltzing at a ball in the opening scene with Lord Athunree, the high-bred *roué* and villain of the piece. The surrender of the lady's waist to her partner, and her obvious enjoyment of the undulating movement of the waltz, seem to him immodest, denoting a want of maidenly dignity in Hero. On this he breaks away from her with a speech which indicates as much, and stings the high-minded girl to the quick. She being herself too much in love with the prudish baronet to part with him thus lightly, resolves to bring him to her feet, and make him own how grievously he has misconstrued her.

Her device is to assume the dress and manners of a Quaker

maiden, and to get him to visit her in a house of her own at Greenwich, in the belief that she is Hero's sister. He comes, and is at first amazed at the marvellous likeness to her sister—but soon becomes fascinated by her artless simplicity and refinement of manner, and plunges into a rhapsody of love-making, which she treats as madness, reminding him in Quaker fashion: "Friend, dost thou know thou talkest to a worm?" A very amusing scene follows, in which the actress, whom her audiences had been accustomed to associate only with the high strains of tragic pathos, surprises them with the refined and playful badinage of comedy. In this scene her keen sense of humour revelled in the equivoque of the situation, and her performance marked a valuable advance in her profession.

Needless to say how this masking ends.

The morning after the first performance of the play brought the following letter from Mrs S. C. Hall, who had watched Miss Faucit's public career from the first, and had formed an enduring affection for her from what she had seen of her in private life.

*Thursday, 24th May 1838.*

I congratulate you most affectionately, my dear Miss Helen; and my critical husband, finding nothing to blame and all things to praise, congratulates you most sincerely on the greatest of your triumphs. I have seldom seen him so delighted. I am not ashamed to tell you I wept for downright joy. I was deeply anxious on Sheridan Knowles's account. I trembled from head to foot till the curtain drew up on that brilliant scene, and then, as the play went on, and I saw all was safe, oh, how happy I was!

I have said I was deeply anxious on Mr Knowles's account. I was sure, from what I heard, you would do a great deal. I was not at all uneasy about you—but I never enjoyed your triumph so much, because you never deserved it so gloriously before. How you have improved! Your first Quaker scene was the most perfect thing I ever saw. Carter was surrounded by critics, and yet they were all delighted. . . . I could write for hours on the points you made so effective. Altogether *you* were quite a Hero.—Ever yours most affectionately,  
A. M. HALL.

If Mrs Hall had read Knowles's work, she might well feel anxious about a play in which there were two plots, each of which must have tried the credulity of an audience to straining-point. But, as has often happened, fine acting saved the piece,



and secured for it a long run to the end of the season. Still, successful though it was, it then passed from the stage altogether.

The season had been a losing one ; but there were symptoms which encouraged Mr Macready to persevere in his attempt to raise the national drama to a level worthy of the country and its literature. In this he was loyally supported by the strong company which he had drawn together, and by none more cordially than by Miss Faucit. By this time her awe of him had somewhat diminished, while her admiration of his powers as an actor had increased. He, too, had learned to respect her gifts and her enthusiasm for her art, and it would have been strange if, when he came to know what she was in herself and in her private life, he had not thrown off the austerity of manner which had at first repelled her, and shown to her the amiable side of his character, for which, unhappily, he seems to have gained little credit in the theatrical world. He had begun to feel that without her assistance he could not carry out his desire to present the leading plays of Shakespeare with such an impersonation of the heroines as was essential for their success. She by this time occupied a prominent place in the favour of the public, and the zeal and persistent study with which she devoted herself to her art inspired him, as will be seen hereafter, with confidence that she would go on steadily improving, and as steadily rising in popular favour.

On the second night of the winter season (26th Sept. 1838) she appeared as Imogen in *Cymbeline*. This, as we have seen, had been one of the favourite heroines of her girlhood. Although since then she had given much thought to the character, she could only regard her first impersonations of it as an experiment, which opened up to her a vista of what might be done with further study and practice in the part. There is in it so much that was congenial to her own nature and disposition, that it became in time one into which she threw her whole soul and all the resources of her art. She had never before had occasion to appear in a page's dress. The necessity for this perplexed her in a way which will scarcely be understood by the present generation of playgoers, who are accustomed to see anything but shyness shown by actresses in the wearing of doublet and hose.

I cannot [she writes] quite remember who acted with me first in *Cymbeline*, but I can never forget Mr Macready's finding fault with my page's dress, which I had ordered to be made with a tunic that descended to the ankles. On going to the theatre at the last rehearsal, he told me, with many apologies and much concern, that he had seen my page's dress, and had given directions to have it altered. He had taken the liberty of doing this, he said, without consulting me, although he could understand the reasons which had weighed with me in ordering the dress to be made as I had done; he was sure I would forgive him when he explained to me that such a dress would not tell the story, and that one-half the audience—all, in fact, who did not know the play—would not discover that it was a disguise, but would suppose Imogen to be still in woman's attire. Remonstrance was too late, and, with many tears, I had to yield, and to add my own terror to that of Imogen, when first entering the cave. I managed, however, to devise a kind of compromise, by swathing myself in the "franklin housewife's riding-cloak," which I kept about me as I went into the cave; and this I caused to be wrapped round me afterwards, when the brothers carry in Imogen—the poor "dead bird, which they have made so much on."

During this season *Cymbeline* was repeated only once. Mr Macready's thoughts were at this time absorbed in preparing for the production on the 13th of October of *The Tempest*. But it is significant of the arduous duties of actors under his regime, that between the 3rd and 11th of that month both he and Miss Faucit played twice in *The Lady of Lyons*, twice in *Othello*, and once in *The Winter's Tale*,—this, with daily rehearsals from ten in the morning to late in the afternoon. *The Tempest*, splendidly put on the stage, was received with enthusiasm. Next day (Sunday) Mr Macready's Diary records: "Could not recover myself from the excitement of last night. The scenes of the storm, the flights of Ariel, and the enthusiasm of the house were constantly recurring to me." He was repaid for all the thought and expense he had given to the production by the hold it took upon the public. It was played down to April 1839, not consecutively, for Mr Macready had too much consideration for his actors, as well as for his audience, to doom them to the miserable monotony of the same piece for indefinite periods; and during the run of *The Tempest* standard plays were interposed: *The Lady of Lyons*, *Cymbeline*, *Venice Preserved*, *Ion*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and others. It was a relief to Miss Faucit to be Miranda, for the part, exquisite in

beauty as it is, and demanding the greatest delicacy of treatment, is short, and was peculiarly suited to her style, while imposing no great strain upon the emotions.

During the run of *The Tempest* her little Diary was resumed :

“*Jan. 1st, 1839.*—Called on dear Mrs Braysher this morning. She has given me such a beautiful little riding-whip for a New Year’s gift.” She had, during the summer recess, been riding much with this friend at Scarborough. They were both excellent horsewomen. Miss Faucit delighted in the exercise, and for the next few years indulged in it whenever she could. The Journal proceeds: “Heard some news this morning! The first piece of intelligence announced my immediate marriage with a Mr ——. I forget his name (and no wonder, having never heard it before), a member of Parliament. The second stated my having made an engagement to visit America professionally in the spring. How much more other people know of your affairs than you do yourself! God grant this may prove a happy, most happy and prosperous year to all I love and regard!

“*Jan. 2nd.*—Played Pauline to-night. The house very crowded, and in parts of the play very noisy. I did not act well. *I wonder when I do.*

“*Jan. 3rd.*—Acted Miranda to-night, and pretty well. My cough was most troublesome.

“*Jan. 4th.*—Dined with Dr Ure and passed a very pleasant evening. His daughter, Mrs Mackinlay, plays most beautifully and with much taste and expression. Mrs Adams [Sarah Flower Adams<sup>1</sup>] sang two of her Scotch songs with all her usual feeling and sweetness. We had no dancing. I wish all people were as fond of it as I am, they would be capering eternally. The party was very large, almost too large. There were but few of them I knew. I wore my white crape dress, and for the first time my pearls. They looked very pretty, I thought.

“*Saturday, Jan. 5th!!!*—This day three years!! Oh, what a host of thoughts and feelings, full of most deep anxiety and pain, come crowding upon my mind when I look back to it! But I trust the most powerful are those of true and humble gratitude

<sup>1</sup> Authoress of the fine hymn “Nearer, my God, to Thee,” and of “Vivia Perpetua,” a drama of great beauty.

to that great and all-merciful Power which has so far sustained and supported me in my anxious and difficult task, and at times, too, when deep mortifications, and perhaps merited but at the same time most bitter censures, have made my steps falter, and quenched every spark of energy and strength within me. *How then* have I felt there was but one hand to lift me up, but one Power I could look to for support and succour! God grant to me in His great mercy a continuance of that support and protection, and His guidance and direction in ALL THINGS!

“*Sunday, Jan. 6th.*—I did not go to church to-day. Oh, most wicked girl! I was so very late last night, that I overslept myself. Let me remember the Psalms for this morning, they are so beautiful.

“*Jany. 7th.*—Went to the theatre this evening with mamma and the boys, and saw *William Tell* and the Pantomime. Delighted with Mr Macready. The Pantomime is showy and noisy, without a bit of fun in it; but perhaps I am doing it injustice, for I was half asleep best part of the time. It certainly made some impression upon me, for my poor head is aching terribly.

“*Jany. 9th.*—Acted Pauline to-night. It had been bitter. I really *suffered* from the *cold* all the evening. My dear, kind Mrs Braysher’s flowers,<sup>1</sup> though, seemed to defy the weather, for they were most beautiful. She has spoilt me. I should feel now as if I could not act without them.

“*Jany. 12th.*—Such a lovely day, like spring,—so warm and mild;—a day that makes one feel that one has not an anxious thought or care in the world, and all is as sunny, calm, and peaceful *within* as nature looks *without*; and with all its calm there is still so much of almost joyful excitement in it, that I always fancy heaven must be something like it, only all sensations magnified to an extent now far beyond our powers of conception. . . . Oh, such a day for a ride! Did I not long?

“*Sunday, 13th.*—I liked the sermon very much indeed this morning. The tone and manner of the delivery, in strict accordance with the simple and beautiful truths brought forward, and all placed before you so gently and so plainly, that you only

<sup>1</sup> This kind friend supplied Miss Faucit every night she acted Pauline with the “beautiful flowers” of which she speaks in the first scene.



wondered how you could ever do wrong, ever wander from the path that lay so directly before you. How different the effect of such discourses to the effect of those (and I have heard several of them) which seem only intended to threaten and frighten their hearers, as if they were a parcel of naughty little children!

“*Tuesday, 15th.*—Went with Mrs Braysher to Miss Drummond this morning. She proposes taking a full-length portrait of me in Pauline. This will put my patience to the test, I think, as well as hers; but it is not half so bad for the artists as the sitter, for they are naturally anxious and interested in their work, and their time passes quickly. Acted *Miranda* to-night.

“*Jany. 16th.*—At home all the morning, feeling very poorly and languid. [She had been vaccinated two days before.] Acted *Pauline* this evening—such an effort to exert myself at first. But I soon shook off the feeling, and so I think I should do, if I were to die an hour after. It is extraordinary what excitement, combined with a feeling of *duty*, can get you through, and with that dreaded dreadful audience, too, before your eyes. And yet I ought not to say so, for they have always been most kind and encouraging to me. I don't know what would have become of me but for them. I always feel most grateful when I make them my best curtsy. My new part (*Julie de Mortimar*) was sent me to-night. I should not at all wonder if it is the vaccination that is making me feel so poorly and drooping. I never thought of this before—oh! I hope it may be.

“*Jany. 17th.*—Acted *Miranda* to-night. I like this part, because it gives me so much time to read between the scenes. Am getting on capitally with Lockhart's *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, and am very much interested in it. What a gifted and truly great and good creature he was! How much I should have liked to have been his daughter-in-law; how proud I should have been of that kind, petting, and sweet letter from him after her marriage to his son!

“*Friday, 18th.*—Gave Miss Drummond a sitting of I am sure at least two hours. Patience, what a virtue art thou! But I must not begin to talk of patience yet awhile.

“*Saturday, 19th.*—Have promised John [her eldest brother, then manager of the Brighton Theatre] to play for his benefit

at Brighton on the 30th. He wishes me to act in two pieces, and as I can only go down [by stage-coach] in the morning, I am afraid I shall find it a dreadful fatigue. But never mind, it is in a good cause. . . . Had to ask Mr Macready's permission to-night to make use of my *Lady of Lyons* dresses for the occasion. I was almost afraid to venture; he seemed to have had something to ruffle him very much indeed—(oh, this management must be a dreadful trial to the temper!)—but he was very kind and gentle, and gave me leave directly. Acted *Miranda* to-night.

"*Sunday, 20th.*—Mr Smith [miniature painter] has been talking to me almost all the evening about Italy, and advising me by all means to go there, as I should find the sight of so much classical beauty and grace would greatly improve my style. No doubt it would, and I should like it of all things, but he forgets that young ladies cannot travel about alone. How easy it is to talk and advise! Mr White was very much pleased with an air of my composing, and wrote it down.

"*Jany. 22nd.* — At rehearsal this morning. Do not very much like my new part. It is pretty, it promises a great deal, and ends in doing nothing. Acted *Miranda* to-night. The house very great.

"*Wednesday, 23rd.* — Acted *Pauline* to-night, and I think better on the whole than any night this season. Miss Drummond came to my dressing-room after the play to sketch my dress. There is an earnest truthfulness about her that I like very much. She is not at all a common person, and I think very clever in her art. I do hope she will succeed, poor thing, she seems so anxious to do so.<sup>1</sup> The house was very great. I am *very, very tired*.

"*Thursday, 24th.*—Acted *Miranda* to-night—very, very cold. Felt chilled to the heart, with sitting and standing about, and nothing to do, no excitement to keep me warm, or, rather, to make me so.

"*Saturday, 26th.*—Oh, such a bitter day. That wicked east wind is taking its pleasure. Shivered through *Miranda*. I thought there would have been nothing but a lump of ice left on

<sup>1</sup> The picture proved to be excellent. A mezzotint engraving of it was published and had a large sale. The picture was bought by Miss Faucit. It is now in my possession. See the accompanying photogravure.

the stage at the end of the play, being all that was left of me. Very busy all the time I was off the stage arranging about my dresses for next Wednesday. Mr Macready tells me the Queen commands *The Lady of Lyons* next Friday. Oh, joy! I am so pleased! I am afraid, though, after going through so much fatigue, I shan't be in full feather—it affects my voice so much. But never mind, I know I shall do my best, and the rest we none of us can answer for.

“*Jany. 29th.*—That tiresome east wind is still frolicking away. No gambols are they to us poor mortals. What shall I do to-morrow? I shall be like an icicle when I get to my journey's end, and it will take the whole evening to thaw me. How I dread it! Acted *Miranda* to-night.”

The journey she so much dreaded was to Brighton, where she had promised to play on her arrival as Pauline for her eldest brother's benefit. This was before Brighton had been linked to London by railway, and the fifty-one miles by stage-coach, in bitter winter weather, was a serious undertaking. The pain, she writes, from the intense cold in going and returning, “was so sharp that I really could have cried had it not been for shame.” The theatre was crowded, despite “a frightful night, with gusts of hail and sleet driving in your face enough to blind you, and the cruel east wind, too, cutting you to pieces. I acted most vilely, and no wonder. I was like marble, although my face flushed and my head ached.”

She was due next night at Covent Garden for the performance of *The Tempest*, and did not reach London till between five and six—the play beginning in those days at seven. There was nothing for it but to drive at once to the theatre. But the driver of the Brighton coach, who had probably often seen her on the stage, was of a truly chivalrous nature, and would not set down his passenger at the usual halting-place. “Such a gallant coachman!” she writes. “He would insist on putting me down at my journey's end. I asked him to call a coach for me when we got into town, when he said, if I would allow him, he would much rather take me to the stage door, as it would be so cold for me changing coaches. A nice, kind-hearted man, I am sure, whoever he may be.” It never occurred to her that his motive was

most likely one of gratitude for what she had shown him of beautiful womanhood in his visits to the theatre.

Miss Faucit, we have seen, was looking forward with pleasure to performing Pauline before the Queen on the 1st of February. But, as she herself wrote years afterwards, "like many pleasures long looked forward to, the whole of this evening was a disappointment. The side-scenes were crowded with visitors, Mr Macready having invited many friends. They were terribly in the way of the exits and entrances. Worse than all, those who knew you insisted on saluting you; those who did not made you run the gauntlet of a host of curious eyes—and this in a place where, most properly, no strangers had hitherto been allowed to intrude." In her Journal the next day she makes the same complaint: "The Queen's box," she adds, "looked very beautiful. How calm and self-possessed she seems! It is wonderful in one so young. I almost pity her when I think of the high responsibility her lofty station brings with it, and she almost a child. She must be a little more than mortal if she fills it as she ought. Acted very ill—my throat so sore, it was painful for me to speak at all. Oh, how glad I was to turn my back upon the bustle and excitement of the night! When you are feeling very ill, to see nothing but gaiety and show about you appears to aggravate your own suffering. I have taken a dreadful cold, and it is making me heavy and utterly stupid. I have to act Miranda to-night. Oh for to-morrow's [Sunday's] sweet calm and rest!"

Ill as she was, and racked by a torturing cough of which her Journal tells, she had for the next fortnight no intermission of her duties at the theatre, performing every night, and rehearsing Bulwer's *Richelieu* almost every morning. After a blank of many days in her Journal, she writes (25th March): "A long long gap in your Journal, Miss Helen. I have no notion now of what I have been doing, save and except that my time has been so occupied one way or another, that I have not had any to throw away in recording what about. I have been to some seventeen or eighteen rehearsals of *Richelieu*, and, when spared from these, giving a great many sittings to Miss Drummond, and also to Miss Gillies and Mr Lane. The new play, *Richelieu*, came out, I think, on the 7th of this month, and has been most



successful and attractive. My poor Julie, I don't like you a bit, or at any rate but a very little bit better than I did. I suppose, nevertheless, you must be put up with for some time to come." This it had to be—down, in fact, to the close of Mr Macready's management at Covent Garden. The part is in itself so trivial that Miss Faucit might have exercised her right to refuse to play it, but for her wish to show to Mr Macready, by her compliance with his request, that she was ready to assist in what she regarded as his heroic determination to illustrate every play which he produced with the best resources at his command. She made more of the part than any one else has ever done, and in a long letter to her on the morning after the first performance, Bulwer writes to "express his great gratification at the spirit, grace, and delicacy with which you so charmingly animated the part of Julie."

The only fresh part which Miss Faucit was called upon to play during this season was *Rosalind*. As this was one of the characters with which in succeeding years her name was specially identified, her own account of her first performance, in the "Letter to Mr Browning on *Rosalind*," had best be referred to.

I need not tell you [she writes] that when you first saw my *Rosalind*, I was too young at that time to value her, and could not enter so fully into her rich complex nature as to do justice to it. This was no more possible than it would have been for Shakespeare to have written, before the maturity of manhood, a play so full of gentle wisdom, so catholic in its humanity, so subtle in the delineation, so abounding in nicely balanced contrasts of character, so full of happy heart, so sweetly rounded into a harmonious close, as *As You Like It*. His mind had assuredly worked its way through the conflicts and perplexities of life, within as well as without, and had settled into harmony with itself, before this play was written.

In my first girlhood's studies of Shakespeare this play had no share. Pathos, heroism, trial, suffering—in these my imagination revelled, and my favourites were the heroines who were put most sorely to the proof. Juliet, Desdemona, Cordelia, Imogen, I had brooded over until they had become, as it were, part of my life; and, as you will remember, in the more modern plays, in which I performed the prominent parts, the pathetic or tragic element almost invariably predominated. When, therefore, I was told by Mr Macready that I was to act *Rosalind* for my benefit at the end of a season, I was terrified. I did not know the words, nor had I ever seen the play performed, but I heard enough of what Mrs Jordan and others had done with the character, to add fresh alarm to my misgivings. Mr Mac-

ready, however, was not to be gainsaid; so I took up my Shakespeare, determined to make the best of what had then to me all the aspect of a somewhat irksome task. Of course I had not time to give to the entire play the study it requires, if Rosalind is to be rightly understood.

The night of trial came. Partly because the audience were indulgent to me in everything I did, partly, I suppose, because it was my benefit night, the performance was received with enthusiasm. I went home happy, and thinking how much less difficult my task had been than I had imagined. But there a rude awakening awaited me. I was told that I had been merely playing, not acting, not impersonating a great character. I had not, it seemed to my friends, made out what were traditionally known as the great points in the character. True, I had gained the applause of the audience, but this was to be deemed as nothing. Taken in the mass, they were as ignorant as I was, perhaps more so, as probably, even in my hasty study, I had become better acquainted with the play than most of them. It was very necessary, I have no doubt, and wholesome for me, to receive this lesson. But oh, what a pained and wounded heart I took with me that night to my pillow! I had thought that, upon the whole, I had not been so very bad,—that I had been true at least to Shakespeare in my general conception, though, even as I acted, I felt I had not grasped anything like the full significance of the words I was uttering. Glimpses of the poet's purpose I had, no doubt, for I do not think I ever altered the main outlines of my first conception; but of the infinite development of which it is capable I had no idea. It was only when I came to study the character minutely, and to act it frequently, that its depths were revealed to me.

It was well that in this case, as in that of all the other characters in Shakespeare which Miss Faucit was called on to impersonate, she had never seen them acted, and was hampered by none of the stage conventions. The importance of this will be understood by those who are conversant with the history of the English stage, and who know the air of hoydenish audacity heretofore given to the character of Rosalind, aggravated by the introduction into the mouth of the heroine of the Cuckoo song from *Love's Labour's Lost*, which even in Shakespeare's day would have been regarded as unseemly in a woman's mouth. ✓

The "traditional points" which her friends at home missed in Miss Faucit's acting were, no doubt, the very things of which she found no suggestions in the Rosalind whom Shakespeare drew. What Rosalind really was, as he had seen her in his mood of inspiration, Miss Faucit's sympathetic genius dis-

covered, as she pored over "the leaves of his unvalued book," and this ideal she clothed with a life that gladdened the hearts of thousands down to the close of her theatrical career. Imperfect as her first development of the character may have been, it could not have been without charm, for within the short period that remained of the season Mr Macready selected it for performance again and again.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE season closed on the 9th of July 1839. It had been brilliant in what had been done by Mr Macready in the illustration of Shakespeare and other dramatists, not only by means of his powerful company, but also by the admirable framework in which the business of the scene was set, yet it had yielded him a very inadequate financial return for his exhausting labours. He therefore declined to renew his lease, and entered into a lengthened engagement to appear at the Haymarket Theatre. He was by this time well aware that without Miss Faucit's assistance he could not produce with effect the plays with which she had been associated with him at Covent Garden. Of this Mr Webster, the manager, was no less strongly convinced. Accordingly she was engaged by him for the season on the same high terms as she had received at Covent Garden. On the 19th of July, only ten days after the closing of that theatre, she appeared at the Haymarket as Desdemona to Mr Macready's Othello. Her growing popularity brought with it a serious penalty, in the incessant strain of having to act fatiguing parts such as this, Mrs Haller, Mrs Oakley, and Pauline, five nights in every week. Pauline was most frequently called for, and the more it came to be known, the greater was the enthusiasm it excited. Innumerable tributes of admiration poured in upon Miss Faucit, and it was generally acknowledged that but for her the play would never have taken the hold of the public which it did.

To Miss Faucit it was a delight to be for the time called away from Bulwer's heroine to Shakespeare's Portia. On the 4th of October *The Merchant of Venice* was produced, Mr Macready's



Shylock, we gather from his Diary (vol. ii. p. 153) was in his own opinion "An utter failure. I felt it." As usual with him, he says nothing about the other actors. But the general performance could not have been an utter failure, for, had it been so, the manager would not have repeated the play eight times within the ensuing fortnight.

Meanwhile, Bulwer's *Sea Captain* was under rehearsal, in which the part of the heroine, Violet, was assigned to Miss Faucit. The play was produced on the 31st September, and ran to the 23rd of November. It did not, however, make its way with the public, owing what success it had less to its own merits than to the life put into it by the actors. Bulwer was exuberant in his gratitude to Miss Faucit for what she had done for his heroine. "The sweetness and grace," he writes in the preface to the published play, "with which Miss Faucit embellished the part of Violet, which, though only a sketch, is most necessary to the colouring and harmony of the play, were perhaps the more pleasing to the audience from the generosity, rare with actors, which induced her to take a part so inferior to her powers." It was at this time that he wrote the following lines in her album:—

"Thou canst not slight the wreath I lay before thee,  
 Since thou hast given wreaths, not mine, to me ;  
 Sweet Violet, passionate Juliet, bright Pauline,  
 Lending a Helen's shape to words of air,  
 As Faustus called from air the shape of Helen :—  
 So ever thus art has exchanged with art,  
 Each still by each inspiring and inspired ;  
 As thou hast given thy own fair form and voice  
 To many a dream by poet's heart conceived,  
 So from that form and voice may poets yet  
 Take dreams for future Helens to embody."

During the run of *The Sea Captain* Miss Faucit was suffering from a cold in the chest, aggravated by a violent cough, which continued to grow worse during the month of December. The excessive fatigue of mind and body which she had undergone during the last three years had begun to tell upon her constitution. Absolute rest was enjoined by her physicians, and a complete change of air and scene. Brighton was first tried, then

Hastings. Thither she went, accompanied by her friend, Mrs Braysher, who remained with her until her health was so far restored as to enable her to resume her place at the Haymarket.

During her absence Mr Macready was in constant correspondence with her. It must have struck many readers with surprise, that nowhere throughout his published Diary is a word said to indicate what he thought of her as an actress, or a hint given of the value of her assistance in the production of the plays which, during his management, chiefly won the favour of the public. This silence is calculated to give a false impression as to her position in the theatre, and in the estimation of the public. Miss Faucit herself could never understand it, remembering, as she did, the intimate friendship into which their professional intercourse had expanded, and the warm personal regard he had constantly shown her. How great this was, and how important he deemed her presence to the success of the theatre, will be seen from the following letters. Thus, on the 9th of January 1840, he writes:—

MY DEAR MISS FAUCIT,—Your note of to-day has reached and makes us, Mrs Macready and myself particularly, most anxious to know that you are *beginning* at least to improve. . . . I only hope to God that whatever you try may give you back to us in strength and health. Mr Wilmot [the Haymarket stage-manager] and I groan under your absence; but if you return in March or April well—for I hope your kind Mrs Braysher will not let you come until perfectly re-established—we will compound for our disappointment in the interim.

We can scarcely expect that under this biting weather you can make much advancement, but we hope to hear of your comfortable settlement at Hastings and of its beneficial effect upon you. I hope you will remember that it is the *business* of an invalid to let *no consideration* stand between herself and the enjoyment of what is most comfortable, enlivening, and restoring to her. Pray regard this as a duty, or you may make your change of place dull and unprofitable to you, instead of what I hope you will find it—invigorating and salutary.

Be assured that you take with you our most earnest wishes, and with the kindest regards of Mrs Macready, believe me, my dear Miss Faucit, always and sincerely yours,

W. C. MACREADY.

The dangerous symptoms of Miss Faucit's chest affection had increased. She must have been ill, indeed, before she entertained the thought of giving up the stage. But this, it appears from

the following letter of Mr Macready's, she had seriously done. This intention might well alarm him, not only for his own plans for the future, but also by the reflection that her illness was due in a great measure to the heaviness of the tasks which he had exacted from her. Ill as she was, he had suggested to her the perusal of a play, which he had made up his mind to produce, of which she was to be the heroine. She was, however, not in a state to bear the fatigue and excitement of studying a new character. On the 26th March he writes:—

MY DEAR MISS FAUCIT, — Your letter gave me much pain and uneasiness, impressing me with the idea that it was written under depression of spirits, and increasing apprehension for your health, about which I am already sufficiently anxious. From a note which Mrs Braysher sent me in the afternoon, I was happy to learn that you had been able to make a beginning of horse exercise, and I must hope that these cutting winds will soon subside, and leave you the opportunity of resuming what I trust you will derive so much benefit from. . . .

You grieve me very much in throwing a doubt upon the resumption of your art, for independently of the strong personal interest which I must always take in you, I have looked on you as one in whom I could hope to see left a surviving specimen of the purer style of the theatrical art, which seems now rushing to decay. I look around and perceive no intelligence or sensibility among those engaged in our theatres to lend the least encouragement to hope beyond yourself. The prospect before you is one to allure you, and to give an impulse almost to your system. How much I wish it might be so! But still I would not have you suppose that I would recommend to you any subject of thought that in its stress upon your mind, or in its excitement of your feelings, should disturb what I have so much at heart—the happy progress of your recovery. I will not send you at present the copy of the play I have mentioned to you, but will reserve it till next week, in the hope that you will then be more anxious to see it, and be more certain of your power to give attention to it. . . .

I have no more for you from the theatre, except that we are standing still, or worse, for *you*. We have — in *Portia*, and — rehearsing *Julie* in *Richelieu*. I spoke to Mr Webster last night, urging him to put off the production of the play till your return, for I am “in a strange land” with such unsympathising people about me; but he thinks the risk of a defeat is better than the slow process of wasting away that we are likely to undergo. . . .

I hope your next letter will entirely dissipate the painful doubts that your last brought with it, and that I shall have the happiness of believing you are diligently getting well. . . . Be sure you can send no news more grateful than those which tell us of good to you.—Ever and always, my dear Miss Faucit, yours most sincerely,

W. C. MACREADY.



Her next letter brought him more hopeful news, as we see by what he wrote to her on the 3rd of April.

MY DEAR MISS FAUCIT,—Rather than not send any acknowledgment of your letter just received, I choose to write in the violent hurry of the present moment. . . . I cannot describe to you the excessively painful change from the sanguine state of hope, in which your very pleasing reply to my last letter had placed me, to the despondency attendant on that which followed. I was reckoning with confidence on seeing you at Easter, and anticipating your rapid improvement when able to resume your duties. But about this *you must not be precipitate*. Much as the theatre wants you (and oh, powers of patience, and ye genii of the — and — class!), and gloomy as it is to proceed as we are now doing, you must not think of venturing on exertion until you feel yourself fully equal to it. . . .

I must not omit to tell you that I was *extremely pleased* with your letter received on Monday. As to your want of confidence, there is *nothing you may not do*, if you will not allow yourself to be spoiled, and look truths, when they are disagreeable, in the face. You will certainly then be a *first-rate* player—or actress—or artiste. Does the thing alter with the name? . . .

If you could know how anxious I am to hear that you are well! It is very selfish to say so, but I look round and see no prospect of making a Haymarket season if you do not soon declare yourself “able and effective.” Still, do not, I beg of you, vex yourself about it, but wait God’s good time. You do not know that every education, in so far as its real value is taken into account, is for the most part self-acquired. We merely gain a certain start by early tuition, but we teach ourselves most rapidly, and learn most, after our minds have “grown up.” You convince me by your letters, and they very much gratify me, that you only require direction, and very little of that, to regain every ground you may suppose yourself to have lost. . . .—Yours, most sincerely,

W. C. MACREADY.

One cannot read without a smile Mr Macready’s enforcement on Miss Faucit of the truism, that real education is for the most part self-acquired. Who knew this better than she? What had she been doing from her girlhood onward but practically proving this truth, by training her mind upon the works of the best writers, and by putting her conceptions of female characters the most diverse to the proof before the most critical of theatrical audiences? By this time Mr Macready must have seen much to satisfy him that she possessed in an eminent degree

“The intuitive decision of a bright  
And thorough-edged intellect,”

as well as that “courage to endure and to obey,” which is one



of the surest marks of a spirit schooled into self-reliance by the knowledge wherein lies both its weakness and its strength. She was always learning, always striving to get nearer to the true expression of natural emotion and passion, to the utterance of the thought and feeling, which the dramatist had put into beautiful words, not only with the exquisite rhythmical cadence which gave them their fullest effect, but also in such a way that every word seemed to spring from the inspiration of the moment. Her own ideal of what her art should be, and should achieve, was, then and always, so high that she was little likely either to shrink from facing truths, however disagreeable, or to be spoiled by admiration, however warm. Under the unpretending gentleness and modesty of her manner there lay an energy of will, a power of high endeavour, a clearness of aim, a determination "to give the people of her best," that needed no direction but from those "high ideals" which were the "inward light, that made the path before her always bright." It was this which Caroline Fox meant when, in her interesting *Diary* (p. 296), she said of her, upon the report of Mrs Derwent Coleridge, that "she is full of strength and grace, and, though cold in surface, there is burning Etna beneath."

The "direction" which Mr Macready suggests was needful to her he was always somewhat too anxious to give, and to this her tendency to self-distrust made her yield more than was for her good. Still, not even he could make her surrender her own conception of any character she was called upon to play. And however their views might differ on points either of conception or execution, it is obvious that Mr Macready felt there was in her a soul of genius struggling for perfection of expression, which, with the views he entertained of reviving the higher drama, he had the strongest interest to cherish and develop.

Still less could he be insensible to the personal charm of a nature which, while it never laid itself out for admiration, won it by the soul of goodness, truth, and purity which beamed in the face and vibrated in the voice. How it impressed his cold and somewhat austere nature may be seen in the following lines, which, about this time, he surprised and gratified her by writing in her album :—

“Tis not the dove-like softness of thine eyes  
 My pensive gaze that draws, however fair;  
 A holier charm within their beauty lies,  
 The unspotted soul, that’s mirrored always there.

There every thought of thy young heart is seen,  
 Radiant and pure, by truth and genius given,  
 As, on the surface of the lake serene  
 Reflected, gleam the perfect lights of heaven.”

By this time, too, Mr Macready was well aware of the circumstances of what her friend Mrs Braysher calls “the sad uncherished youth” of this young artist, and of the ungenial home surroundings under which she had risen to celebrity. This knowledge intensified his interest in her. What these surroundings were may be inferred from a passage in a letter to her from Mrs Braysher in December 1882, in which she writes, in reference to this period of her life—

Oh, how you needed care and love at that time, brighter and brighter though that fame was growing which you could not fail to reach! Do you chance to remember some poor verses which I wrote to you after reading a “Journal” that you permitted me to see? [The Journal from which extracts have been given above.] They began—

“Transcript of innocent and holy thought,  
 Such as Heaven’s youngest cherub might have penn’d,  
 Rich in the love with which their souls were fraught,  
 Who make in early youth their God their friend.

Oh, strong and tender, firm and gentle heart,  
 To ache and bleed, and yet bear up through all,  
 How dost thou tell of that still nobler part,  
 The soul that woke to life at Genius’ call!

And, though most humble, kept its glorious way  
 And with unconscious strength still struggled on,  
 When even Hope too oft withheld her ray,  
 And chilled affection left it sad and lone.”<sup>1</sup>

I refer to the lines only to show how entirely I am in accord with you when you say, with sad truth, that “your early youth was certainly not the happiest part of your life.”

As a friend, Mr Macready endeared himself to Miss Faucit by his sympathy and advice. Stern and exacting as a

<sup>1</sup> This poem bears date June 1, 1839.

manager, yet, she writes, referring to her illness at this time—

How tender-hearted he was in the case of illness! All knew that, for the great exertion of my lungs in my first girlhood, Nature revenged herself by inflicting on me a cough which harassed me night and day. Often, often has Mr Macready said to me, "My poor child, your cough goes to my heart. How I wish I could spare you!" And when at last, in my third winter, I was ordered to give up my work, and go to a milder climate for a year, he never omitted writing to me week by week, advising me what books to read, and encouraging me to write and give him my criticisms upon them; sending me news of the theatre; and, best of all, bidding me get well soon, as I was greatly missed and asked for, and he could not revive or bring forward certain plays without my help. This was my only drop of comfort; for, despite the love and care of a dear friend who left her home to tend and watch over me, it was a weary time, this banishment—this separation from the art which was all in all to me; from which I had derived almost the only happiness in my hitherto rather lonely, little-cared-for life. I could not but see, too, that my friends did not expect I should grow better. I do not think I very much cared. By the very young I believe life is not highly prized. But oh, the inaction, the enforced care and thought for myself, the wearing cough by night, the sameness of the dreary days! Had my life not been just before so different, so full of work, of imaginative excitement, doubtless my spirits would not have sunk so low. Happily, the dreary winter and trying spring gave way at last to summer: summer and youth triumphed over my illness, and before another winter I was well again.

Take him away from the autocratic exercise of his art, and Mr Macready had all the playfulness and courtesy of a gentleman. As Miss Faucit writes, "He could joke, and had 'pretty things to say' upon occasion. I always did my best to be punctual [at rehearsals]; but I had to drive three miles to the theatre—a distance which, if I had acted the previous night, I found rather trying in the early winter mornings. I remember well one morning when I was a little late, I found that I had been already 'called' for the stage. On reaching it, I made my apologies, but said that if they looked at the time they would find I was but ten minutes after the hour, and I understood that ten minutes' grace was always given. 'Ah,' said Mr Macready, turning gravely to me, 'not to you! We all agree that you do not require it; you have enough already.' A rebuke so pleasantly given who would not again willingly provoke?"

These and suchlike courtesies and friendliness made Miss Faucit tolerant of his dominating desire to mould her per-

formances to his own ideas, under which, sensitive and self-distrustful as she was, she often winced. It was his disposition, she writes to Mrs S. C. Hall,

To take exception to everything I did which was not in accordance with his own notions. "My dear, you are entirely wrong in this conception," was a phrase constantly in his mouth. The young girl was expected to take the same view as the ripe artist, who had great experience, no doubt, but who had also confirmed habits, and whose strong masculine mind had in it but little of the feminine element. But I believed in him, and could not act by his side without being moved and influenced by his intense earnestness and power. I tried hard to do what he advised—too much perhaps; for you may remember, I was accused of having caught his manner and expression. It was almost impossible to do otherwise, considering the many hours we had to pass under his direction. Rehearsals began at ten in the morning, and usually went on until three or four. When reviving an old, or bringing out a new play, these rehearsals were as a rule continued daily for three weeks at least, sometimes for four or five.

Mr Macready ought to have known that treatment such as this was calculated to crush all individuality out of an artist. The woman who had by her own force of genius, without previous stage experience, found adequate expression for many of Shakespeare's heroines, and proved the spontaneous fertility of that genius by her conception of Pauline and many other characters, which she had in effect created, had surely established a right to treat in her own way whatever new characters she might be called upon to impersonate, and to be spared that importunacy of "direction" which could not fail to fetter the freedom essential for carrying out the well-considered conception of a competent and conscientious artist.

The months of enforced repose from the labours of the theatre were to Miss Faucit months of anxious reconsideration of what she had done, and of study how best to turn to account the experience she had gained. Under the date of the 20th April 1840, I find among her papers the following memorandum of rules which she had formulated for her guidance. They are headed by the word "Remember":—

Be always in earnest, though seldom emphatic.

Passion does not require a loud tone of voice, nor wide, nor violent gesticulation.

Let passion have full possession of the bosom before attempting to speak its language.



Passion should not disturb the grace of the deportment. There should be no *moving* or *jerking of the head*, the noblest part of the body. If the figure be elevated, it must not be strained. In all preserve a *smoothness*.

Passion facilitates the delivery, except when choking with emotion.

In sorrow not to stop too long or too much between the words, nor let the weeping be too much upon the voice,—now and then heard on a word, but rarely more, except when under an abandonment of grief.

Distinctly mark the necessity for *time* in the transition from one passion to another.

Declaim always with a free open mouth, and pay particular attention to every individual letter—yet not to lean upon the voice, which gives hardness of manner.

Most watchful care required in articulation, particularly vowel sounds.

Along with this memorandum she had placed a copy in her autograph of Hamlet's advice to the players, which, in her opinion, was in itself a compendious manual of instruction, which every actor should keep ever before him.

Miss Faucit made a quicker recovery from her illness than she had anticipated, and summer had not set in before she was able to resume the practice of the art which was "all in all" to her. She was announced to play Pauline on the 25th of April 1840, "her first appearance since her severe indisposition." Her reception was of a kind to quicken the healing effect of nature in her progress towards recovery. The crowded audiences were as much delighted to hail her as she was to come before them again. She was called upon to repeat the same character frequently during the following month. But no time was lost in producing the play to which Mr Macready had referred in his letter of March 28, 1840. This was Serjeant Talfourd's *Tragedy of Glencoe, or the Fate of the Macdonalds*. It was produced on the 23rd of May, with Miss Faucit as the heroine of the play, Helen Campbell. In reading this play now, one marvels at the patience of an audience which could have borne with so many long speeches, where the author seems to have been more anxious to speak, in "trope, metaphor, and figure," pretty pseudo-poetical things, than to make his characters say what they had to say in the terse straightforward language proper to the action of the drama. No wonder that Mr Macready mentions (*Diary*, vol. ii. p. 160) that he felt in the second act "that the persons in the front were disposed to be ill-natured." Happily, in the succeeding acts there were some

strong situations, vigorously treated, which, acted as they must have been by him, being well suited to his finest qualities, made the success of the piece,—a moderate one at the best, for it was acted only at intervals for twenty nights. The character of Helen Campbell is an ungracious one. It is impossible to make a heroine of her. She has grown from childhood to womanhood in the society of two brothers, not her own, to the elder of whom, a man of a superior nature, she has clung throughout with every sign of loving him as he loved her. His younger brother, of a nature sprightlier but quite inferior, coming home after a long absence, pays to her addresses to which she at once responds. On this the elder brother, in a scene written certainly with considerable power, so satisfies her that she has done him wrong, that she agrees to wed him forthwith. Then, when he presently finds out that she has done so not from love, but to expiate her own fault in letting him believe she loved him, he magnanimously resolves to withdraw his claim on the marriage-day, and hand her over to his brother—a sacrifice which she gratefully accepts! What was to be made of a character so contrary to nature, so utterly insipid? Miss Faucit naturally disliked the part, and never referred to it with pleasure. Her task must have been to keep its weakness from being felt, and to give to it a charm which the author had failed to give. This, it appears from the journals of the day, she seems to have done.

It must have delighted Miss Faucit to turn from Helen Campbell, as she did presently, to Portia, Pauline, Julie de Mortimar, and Violante, till she was called upon to create the character of Lady Dorothy Cromwell in the play of *Master Clarke*, by Mr Serle. It was produced on the 26th of September, and had a brief existence of only ten nights. Here again she was called upon to “create a soul under the ribs of death,” which she apparently did, being, according to the *Times* critic, “much applauded,” and called, with Mr Macready, at the end of the play.

After *Master Clarke* was withdrawn, Miss Faucit continued to perform the characters just mentioned, with the addition of Mrs Haller, Desdemona, and Lady Teazle, down to the 8th of December 1840, when Bulwer's comedy of *Money* was produced. No pains had been spared by Mr Benjamin Webster, the manager of the

Haymarket Theatre, to ensure the success of this excellent comedy. All the characters were in the hands of experienced and able actors, and every individuality was given to them which the author could desire. "The acting," the *Atlas* critic writes, "was admirable throughout, and it would be difficult to detect a single fault. Miss Faucit threw a beautiful delicacy and depth of sentiment into Clara Douglas, that quite justified all the sacrifices of her somewhat wilful lover."

The character of Clara Douglas, in other hands, has always been singularly unimpressive. It afforded little scope for the display of Miss Faucit's peculiar powers; but in one scene she raised the tone of the play to a height which kindled the enthusiasm of the audience, not only on the first night, but also on every night during the more than three months' run of the piece. The *Times* writes (December 9): "Miss Faucit had not much to do as Clara, but one speech in which she excused herself for rejecting Evelyn in his poverty by recounting the life of her own father, who had suffered from a marriage under similar circumstances, was impressively delivered." So impressively, that Miss Faucit, who had only agreed to undertake the part, on the urgent representation of Mr Webster, for a few nights in order to start the piece, was besought to continue the impersonation as essential to its attraction, and agreed to do so.

In the character of Evelyn Mr Macready was not happy. He calls it "an ineffective inferior part," and he went to its performance full of misgivings. "Acted the part of Evelyn," he writes (*Diary*, vol. ii. p. 166)—"not satisfied. I wanted lightness, self-possession, and, in the serious scenes, truth. I was not good. I feel it. In the last scene, Miss Faucit, as I had anticipated, had quite the advantage over me; this was natural." The last scene was that referred to by the *Times* (Act v. sc. 4), where the "advantage over him" was certainly not given by the inherent weakness of Evelyn's situation, but by the intensity of genuine feeling and conviction thrown by the actress into the simple narrative of two lives wrecked in the hopeless struggles of a poverty-stricken marriage. In situations of this description Miss Faucit needed no "direction" beyond the inspirations of her own intelligence and her own heart.



This power of lifting scenes which go for nothing in ordinary hands was strikingly shown by Miss Faucit in her performance of Julia in *The Rivals*, in which she appeared on the 15th of March 1841. The occasion was the benefit of Mr Webster, and her appearance in the part was in accordance with the kindly courtesy, prevalent in the theatres of that day, when leading performers would agree to play characters, out of their usual line, in order to give strength to the bill. That a manager of Mr Webster's sagacity selected Miss Faucit for so slight a part as Julia is conclusive evidence of his conviction that she would make a success, by putting into the character something akin to what she had been nightly putting into that of Clara Douglas. Nor was he mistaken. The next day the *Times* writes—"Miss H. Faucit and Phelps, by acting Julia and Falkland with earnestness and feeling, rendered these characters, which are generally looked upon as a kind of infliction, the most interesting in the piece." The public obviously thought so too, for Miss Faucit was called upon to repeat the character both at the Haymarket, and again and again during Mr Macready's management at Drury Lane.

It was a character altogether too slight for a leading actress, and she never afterwards played it, except for the Farewell Benefit of Mrs Glover, the best of Mrs Malaprops, at Drury Lane on the 12th of July 1850. That evening was a memorable one. Mrs Glover had long been a chief favourite of the London public. She was known to have fallen upon evil days, and to be seriously ill. The best actors gave their services, and the theatre was crammed in every corner from floor to ceiling. The play went well; but when it reached the scene at the opening of the fifth act, where Julia—her patience worn out by Falkland's morbid doubts of her affection, and by the unmanly deceit as to his personal danger to which he had resorted in order to test it—renounces him, in words that show what a treasure he has lost, the enthusiasm to which she had raised the audience by her look, and the earnest thrilling tones of a voice that vibrated with the pains of a heart wounded to the core, burst into such a storm of acclamation as I have never heard in any theatre. She could not, she has told me, understand the extraordinary burst of applause,



and, as she went off, asked Mrs Glover, who was seated at the wing, what it meant. "It is you, my dear," she replied, "that they are calling for." But in accordance with her rule never to answer a call in the middle of a scene, Miss Faucit would not appear. The shouts continued, and Mr Leigh Murray, the Falkland, was unable to finish the scene. It was an occasion to bring home the truth of Madame de Staël's saying, that "a great actor becomes the second author of his part by his accent and his physiognomy."

In April 1841 Miss Faucit availed herself of a temporary cessation of her labours at the Haymarket Theatre to visit Paris in company with her elder brother. Mdlle. Mars was then on the point of quitting the stage, and Mdlle. Rachel had quite recently shown manifestations of genius, of which all Paris was talking. Miss Faucit was anxious to see these great actresses, and to profit, if she might, by what she saw in them. She carried with her an introduction from Mr Macready to his old and valued friend, M. Marcellin de Fresne, who, under the Restoration, had been Secrétaire-General of the Prefecture of the Seine. A man of great personal accomplishment, he was moving in the best official, literary, and artistic society in Paris. He formed a warm and lasting friendship for the young English artist, and under his auspices she was introduced not only to all the leading artists and literary men there, including, among others, Chateaubriand, Delaroche, as I find by their letters to her, but also to the best society of the Quartier St Germain. At the house there of old Lady Elgin she then made the acquaintance of Lady Augusta Stanley, which ripened into a friendship broken only by that lady's death.

Paris, under the guidance of so accomplished a companion as M. de Fresne, was full both of delight and instruction. The Louvre and the Luxembourg opened a new world of art to her—but above all the sculpture-gallery of the Louvre, with its crowning glory, the Venus of Milo, which to her was ever after the ideal of female beauty at its best. She saw Mars once at the Théâtre Français, and, while she admired her beautiful voice and grace of motion, was not otherwise greatly impressed. Rachel she saw in all her leading parts. She also met her at

the houses of some of the best families in the Quartier St Germain, where the actress, who up to this time had retained a spotless character, was a much sought after and honoured guest. Being both young actresses, who had suddenly sprung into a foremost position, there was a natural bond of sympathy between them. Of Rachel as an actress Miss Faucit thought most highly. She was also greatly attracted by her great charm of manner, and gratified by the warm interest in herself, in the expression of which Rachel was profuse.

The young French actress, as Miss Faucit then knew her, was, she told me, perfectly described by Madame Lenormand in her *Memoirs of Madame Recamier*.—

Whoever has not heard and seen Mdlle. Rachel in a *salon* can have only an incomplete idea of her feminine attractiveness and of her talent as an actress. Her features, a little too delicate for the stage, gained much by being seen nearer. Her voice was a little hard, but her accent was enchanting, and she modulated it to suit the limits of a *salon* with marvellous instinct. Her deportment was in irreproachable taste; and the ease and promptitude with which this young girl, without education or knowledge of good society, seized its manner and tone was certainly the perfection of art. Deferential with dignity, modest, natural, and easy, she talked interestingly of her art and her studies. Her success in society was immense.

The two great actresses never met afterwards. When Miss Faucit returned to Paris in 1844 to act with Mr Macready, Rachel, who, she learned, was among the warmest admirers of her acting, was anxious to renew their acquaintance. This was a cause of no little regret and embarrassment, as M. de Fresne and her other friends told her that to renew it was impossible, Rachel's conduct having for some time excluded her from the circles in which they had formerly met.

On the reopening of the Haymarket Theatre on the 3rd of May, Miss Faucit reappeared there as Clara Douglas, and continued to act the character down to the 8th of September, varying it upon occasion with Pauline and others of her more important characters. The part of Clara Douglas was then transferred to Mrs Sterling, Miss Faucit having fallen ill with another of her bad chest attacks. On the 16th of October she made a "first appearance since her late severe indisposition" as Julia in *The Hunchback*, and played throughout the month in various char-

acters, including Clara Douglas. Her benefit, on the 1st of November, was signalled by the production of *Nina Zforza*, a play by Mr R. Zouch Troughton. The character of the heroine is one peculiarly fitted for the display of womanly tenderness and devotion, rising under wrong to a height of tragic passion, which were "the haunt and main region" of the power by which Miss Faucit was wont to enlist the sympathy and the tears of her audience. There will be occasion to speak in detail of her treatment of the character, at a later period, when she played it in the provinces, and was more fully mistress of her powers. But the journals of the day speak of her performance as a fresh example of the way in which she enriched the author's conception by glow of feeling, by beauty of action and of speech, and by the abandonment with which she lost her own identity in that of the heroine. "The weight of the acting," the *Atlas* critic writes, "falls on Miss Faucit." In one of her principal scenes he is reminded of Miss O'Neill, "a memory which never before crossed him in witnessing Miss Faucit's performances. The conception was admirable, and she only wanted the physical capacity to render it fully. The death scene was marked by the same quiet beauty which pervades the earlier and happier scenes of the gentle Nina's life, all of which were inspired by much sweetness and chaste beauty in the representation." So also the *Times* records, that "Miss Faucit did all in her power, and often more" than her physical strength was equal to in sustaining "a most arduous character. At the fall of the curtain the greatest delight was exhibited, the actors were called for, the fair *bénéficiaire* was honoured with bouquets, and the drama was announced for four nights a-week, till further notice, amid loud applause."

While the burden of this fine play undoubtedly falls upon the heroine, it contains two other powerfully drawn characters, Prince Raphael Doria, Nina's lover and husband, admirably played by Mr James Wallack (after Charles Kemble, the best of Benedicks in Miss Faucit's estimation), and Ugone Spinola, a vindictive Italian, the Iago of the piece, played by Mr Macready in his very best manner. Of the success of the play he, however, has only this to mention: "Acted Spinola well. Was called for, and very warmly received." What of the others, upon whom the



weight of the acting fell, and who, as we have seen from the *Times* report, were also called for?

The play ran for eighteen nights, to the 2nd of December 1841, and would have run longer but for the close of Mr Macready's engagement. No representative for Spinola could be found, and, after playing Claude Melnotte for two nights to Miss Faucit's Pauline, he retired to take up the management of Drury Lane, opening there on the 27th of that month.

Miss Faucit remained down to the 15th of December 1841 at the Haymarket Theatre, playing Mrs Haller, Julia in *The Hunchback*, Rosalind, and Desdemona, her concluding performance being Beatrice (again for her benefit). Mr Webster was so anxious to retain her services for his theatre, that he offered to place it practically at her disposal, and upon terms as to salary far beyond what she had hitherto received or could hope to obtain elsewhere. But no offer, however brilliant, could weigh with her against the opportunity which she considered she would have, under Mr Macready's management at Drury Lane, of working out her own ideas in the higher drama, which it was his avowed aim to establish on a solid foundation. She considered that he had the first call upon her services for a purpose which no one was so well qualified as he to carry out.

Her health demanded an interval of rest. Accordingly she did not join the Drury Lane company until the 14th of February 1842, when she appeared as Belvidera. The extreme delicacy of her health, tried as it had been by the excessive strain of exhausting performances, almost without intermission, for the last four years, was apparent not only to her friends, but to her audiences. She was constantly carried away by the inspiration of the scene to efforts beyond the limits of her strength, as in the scenes referred to in the criticisms above cited of her Nina Zforza. Those who knew her personally were well aware, that hers was the fiery spirit "that o'er-informed the tenement of clay," and that, while acting, all thought of self, of health or strength, was forgotten under the impulse of the feeling to which she had to give expression. They saw that in her impersonations she was giving them of her very life. Something of this her audiences also felt and sympathised with. For it was not only the actress who commanded their



admiration. She had also inspired them with a strong personal regard. Of this there are many proofs in the letters that were showered upon her from every side. It finds expression in the following graceful lines, written at this time (9th January 1842) by Serjeant Talfourd in her album :—

TO MISS HELEN FAUCIT.

“ There is no heart of those that share  
The charm your powers renew,  
That does not own a friendly care,  
Beyond the scene, for you.

Fain would the cordial wish preserve  
That frame, by passion wrought,  
Which trembles now through every nerve  
With feeling and with thought.

Yet vainly would that care forbid  
Emotion's regal sway,  
Or check the tear on quivering lid,  
Or rapture's force allay.

You cannot bid a fainter scorn  
Be flashing from that eye,  
Or breathe a sorrow less forlorn,  
Than in that hearted sigh.

If Nature's struggles to express  
That world must kindle still,  
May she, in sweet requital, bless  
With strength to match the will !

And may the calm of private life  
The artist's toils assuage,  
And sad reverse and passion's strife  
Felt only on the stage.

For scenic fortunes still employ  
Grief's deep or piercing tones ;  
But may no voice, save that of joy,  
Be wakened by your own !”

Mr Macready lost no time, after Miss Faucit joined his company, in placing a new and important part in her hands. He had purchased for £300, from the executors of Mr Gerald Griffin, the

acting rights for five years of his *Gisippus*, believing, as the merits of the play fully justified him in doing, that it would well repay the cost of production. There are no signs in it of its being the work of a youth of twenty. On the contrary, of all the poetic dramas produced by Mr Macready, except Bulwer's, none bear more clearly the marks of the genius of a true dramatist. It is full of strong situations, the characters are drawn with a firm hand, and the blank verse is flowing, yet full of nervous force. The story is well sustained throughout, and gives scope for fine acting on the part of the principal characters. These are Fulvius, a noble Roman, Gisippus, a distinguished Greek, and Sophronia, a wealthy lady of Corinth. The play opens on the eve of the marriage of Gisippus, who is a man of distinguished position, but broken fortunes, with Sophronia, an heiress of great wealth. Some years before she had met with Fulvius. He had touched her heart, and she had encouraged his addresses, with something more than a formal acknowledgment of a return of his affection; but he had gone away without declaring himself. In his absence, Gisippus, after a three years' suit, has persuaded her to become his wife; a consent which, with the memory of Fulvius ever haunting her, fills her with unrest. At this crisis Fulvius returns to Athens, and suddenly meets Sophronia in her garden. They soon find out the state of their hearts, and Fulvius is aghast at discovering that it is his dearest friend Gisippus to whom Sophronia has pledged her hand. In an angry and petulant speech he betrays the secret of his heart to Gisippus, while sarcastically congratulating him on his success. A fine scene follows, in which Gisippus urges Sophronia to deal frankly with him, offering to give her up, to master every selfish impulse, if only he can "bring content into her bosom." Touched by his generosity, she resolves to vie with him in it, and to fulfil her pledge, telling him he "has waked her heart to duty and to honour." Her assurances satisfy him, and he goes away to complete the arrangements for the marriage ceremony. He has scarcely retired when Fulvius enters, to Sophronia's surprise, "to take his leave for ever." Gisippus, entering at the back of the scene, listens to a long interview between the lovers, which, while plainly indicating their mutual devotion, ends with Sophronia's

rousing in Fulvius a sense of what is due to friendship and to honour, telling him—

“ I had rather lose you (aye, my first,  
My idolised affection !) than behold you  
Second to any in your own esteem.  
. . . Forget me and be happy.

*Fulvius.* It must be  
My solace to remember you, Sophronia,  
But only as a rightful sacrifice  
To honour and to friendship. Dear Sophronia,  
Let me be careful of his peace, to whom  
The gods have given you now. He knows not yet  
Of our affection. Let him never know it.  
Time, absence, and the change of circumstance  
May wear me from your memory (never drop  
Your head to hear it), and you may yet be  
To Gisippus—all ; but away with that—  
Farewell, at once, for ever !”

As they part, Gisippus advances. After some parley, in the course of which he gains firmness for the sacrifice he has resolved to make, he says :—

“ Come this way, Fulvius ! Sweet Sophronia !  
(I must no longer call you *my* Sophronia)  
Give me your hand too. As you gave this hand  
To me even while your heart opposed the deed,  
I give it now to one who loved you dearly,  
And will not find that heart against him. There !  
You are one. And may the gods who look upon  
Those plighted hands shower down upon your heads  
Their dearest blessings ! May you live and grow  
In happiness ; and I will ask no other,  
Than to look on and see it, and to thank  
My fate, that I was made the instrument  
To bring it to your bosoms.”

How great a field there was for fine acting in these scenes is very apparent. Mr Anderson, Miss Faucit has told me, never showed to more advantage than in Fulvius ; and both in these scenes and in those that follow, where the generous nature of Gisippus is turned by misunderstanding and misadventure into a cynical bitterness akin to that of Shakespeare's Timon, Mr Macready was in the element of cutting sarcasm and fiery pas-

sion, in which he shone. It was not to be wondered at, that in acting for the first time a part, with so much to say, and such a variety of contending emotions to depict, he was not satisfied, as he says (*Diary*, vol. ii. p. 184), with his own performance. "The actor," he says, "was lost in the manager." It might well be so, where he must have had more than enough to do in getting up, so soon after entering on management, a play of this importance, with all that completeness in classical costume and scenic accessories which it demanded and received at his hands. "The success of the drama," according to the *Times*, "was of that decided character of which there can be no doubt. The audience were vociferous at the fall of the curtain, when Macready, Anderson, and Miss Faucit were summoned to appear." "Was called for and very warmly received," writes Mr Macready. As to the others, called with him, he is silent.

"The Sophronia of Miss Faucit," writes a leading journal, "is full of beauty. Perhaps it is of too sad a character, but still it is beautiful and inspiring. The touching way in which she played it gave us much reason to regret its brevity." A natural regret, for after the second act Sophronia has little to say or do; but that little makes a demand for the silent action of deportment and facial expression, which ever played so large a part in Miss Faucit's impersonations.

*Gisippus* held its place in the bills at intervals for nearly two months, and was always well received. But it failed to attract paying audiences. "Here," Mr Macready writes, "is a defeat of all my calculations. I thought it a material object in opening a theatre to have such a play. It has produced nothing, and been well spoken of. There is some weakness in it which I have not yet exactly pointed out." The weakness was certainly not in the acting. If there was weakness anywhere, it was in the concentration of all the interest after the second act upon one character, that of Gisippus, and the curdling of his blood into bitterness against Fulvius and Sophronia, by incidents for which he thought they were to blame, but for which the audience knew they were not. Despite this, the play was undoubtedly a work of youthful genius, which deserved a longer theatrical life.



Mr Macready was indeed unfortunate in the selection of his next production, *Plighted Troth, a Dramatic Tale*, by Mr George Darley, in five very long acts. It was produced on the 26th of April, and, down to its actual performance, Mr Macready thought it had the chance of a brilliant success. Acute and experienced critic and scholar as he was, he must have been blinded by the poetical beauty of much of the writing to the absence of both dramatic situation and character. This defect was quickly felt by the audience. In the words of the *Atlas* critic, "The inconsistency between the incidents of the scene and the atmosphere of poetry by which they are surrounded became at last so apparent, that the most pathetic parts of the action produced only ludicrous effects. Mr Macready died amidst the most uncritical laughter we ever heard in a theatre." Such a verdict was not to be resisted. The play was at once withdrawn;—and all the long hours and thought expended by Mr Macready on the hero, and Miss Faucit on Maddalene the heroine, were found to have been utterly wasted.

The only new character which Miss Faucit was called upon to embody down to the end of the season, on the 23rd of May, was Angiolina in Byron's *Marino Faliero*. It was produced for Mr Macready's benefit on the 20th of that month, and was so warmly received, that it took its place upon the standard roll of plays repeated from time to time at Drury Lane during Mr Macready's management.

## CHAPTER V.

ON the close of the Drury Lane season, Miss Faucit accepted an engagement to play with Mr Macready for a few nights in Dublin, beginning on May 28. She was a stranger, and the Dublin public seem not then to have been aware of the distinguished position which she held in London, and to have concentrated their attention upon Mr Macready, who had long been a favourite there. At all events it was not till she came among them three years afterwards that they awoke, and awoke enthusiastically, to the consciousness that a great actress had been among them, and they did not know it. She carried to Dublin in 1842 an introduction from Mrs S. C. Hall to Mrs Hutton of Elm Park, a lady of exceptional accomplishments, who occupied a prominent position in Dublin society. In this lady's house she made the acquaintance of some of the Professors of Trinity College and other leading literary and scientific men, who were afterwards to become her warmest admirers. Here also she was introduced to Dr William Stokes, the eminent physician, who afterwards became a most attached and valued friend, and who at once recognised the woman of genius in her performances. To her the Dublin visit was chiefly memorable from the circumstance of her being called upon to play *Lady Macbeth* for the first time. It was not the first time by many that she had been suddenly required to play important characters without the time for the necessary previous study and rehearsal. But here she was put forward before a notoriously critical audience to play this most difficult character *with only one rehearsal*. In speaking of this performance, she writes, that she is reminded

How little the public knew of the disadvantages under which, in those days, one used sometimes to be called upon to play important parts. To an

artist with a conscience, and a reputation to lose, this was a serious affair. After the close of the Drury Lane season, in June, I acted a short engagement in Dublin with Mr Macready. Macbeth was one of his favourite parts, and to oblige the manager, Mr Calcraft, I had promised to attempt Lady Macbeth; but in the busy work of each day, up to the close of the London season, I had had no time to give the character any real thought or preparation. Indeed the alarm I felt at the idea of presuming to go upon the stage in such a character made me put off grappling with it to the last possible moment.<sup>1</sup> The mere learning of the words took no time. Shakespeare's seem to fasten, without an effort, upon the mind, and to live there for ever. Mr Macready at our *one rehearsal* taught me the business of the scene, and I confided to him the absolute terror I was in as the time of performance drew near. He kindly encouraged me, and said from what he had seen during the rehearsal he was sure I should get on very well. At night, when it was all over, he sent to my dressing-room to invite me to take the call of the audience along with him. But by this time the poor frightened "Lady" had changed her sleep-walking dress with the extremest haste, and driven away home. I was rather scolded the next day by Mr Macready, who reminded me that he had asked me to remain, feeling assured the audience would wish to see me. This I had quite forgotten, thinking only of the joy of having got over my fearful task, and desirous of running away from and forgetting it as quickly as possible.

I have no remembrance of what the critics said. But Mr Macready told me that my banquet and sleep-walking scenes were the best. In the latter, he said, I gave the idea of sleep, disturbed by fearful dreams, but still sleep. It was to be seen even in my walk, which was heavy and unelastic, marking the distinction—too often overlooked—between the muffled voice and seeming mechanical motion of the somnambulist and the wandering mind and quick fitful gestures of a maniac, whose very violence would wake her from the deepest sleep—a criticism I never forgot, always endeavouring afterwards to work upon the same principle, which had come to me then by instinct. Another remark of his about the sleep-walking scene I remember. He said, "Oh, my child, where did you get that sigh? What can you know of such misery as that sigh speaks of?" He also said that my first scene was very promising, especially the soliloquy, also my reception of Duncan, but that my after-scenes with him were very tame. I had altogether failed in "chastising with the valour of my tongue."

The only criticism I remember on this my first attempt, besides Mr Macready's, was that of a most highly cultivated and dear lady friend [Mrs Hutton], who said to me a day or two afterwards: "My dear, I will never see you again in that terrible character. I felt horror-stricken. Lear says of Cordelia, 'So young and so untrue!' I should say of your Lady Macbeth, 'So young and yet so wicked!'"

Hurried as her study was, she never, as she has told me, saw

<sup>1</sup> It was played as the last of six performances, preceded by Virginia, Sophronia, Mrs Beverley, Pauline, and Angiolina.

cause afterwards to deviate from the general conception of the character, as it revealed itself to her from her then perusal of the play. Of what that conception was, a more fitting time to speak will arise hereafter, when dealing in detail with her impersonations of the character, and with the commentaries of many of our best Shakespearian scholars, both English and foreign, to which it gave occasion.

On her way back to London, she played for a few nights in Birmingham with Mr Macready. A vacant day enabled them to visit Trinity Church in Stratford-on-Avon, where Shakespeare lies, and the house where he was born. Their names, inscribed on a beam in the principal room there, though faint, are still discernible, and are eagerly sought for by countless visitors. Close by them Robert Browning has, in later days, placed his bold autograph,—well pleased, no doubt, that it should be near to those of the two artists to whom he had owed much.

A welcome and sorely needed three months' rest from the labours of the theatre now followed. It was taken at Scarborough and elsewhere in the country. How scanty and inadequate a preparation it was for the work before her may be judged from the fact, that from the 5th of October 1842, when she reappeared at Drury Lane, onwards to the 13th of June 1843, when Mr Macready retired from management, she was performing week by week in every important play, old or new, which he produced.

She found him, on her return from her holiday, busily preparing for the production of *King John*, in which he had allotted to her the part of Constance of Bretagne. The play was produced with a completeness of effect, in costume and *mise en scène*, never surpassed by the most elaborate of the Shakespearian so-called revivals with which the London public has since been familiar. But what was of more importance, Mr Macready was able to enlist in its performance a body of accomplished actors such as no English stage has since been able to bring together. The result was a triumphant success, toward which, by general consent, the Constance of Miss Faucit mainly contributed. The only drawback to the completeness of her performance was the want of physical power to give full force to her conception in



some of the more violent passages. Thus, the critic of the *Atlas* writes :—

Miss Faucit, as the high-souled Constance, attracted well-deserved applause of more than usual vigour. It is no derogation from her merit, that she lacks the physical power necessary for this most arduous character, although this consideration prevents her reaping the full reward of her admirable performance. What could be effected by energy, skill, and taste she did, and if occasionally her words failed of the force of blighting execration, the want of such extra power leaves room only for regret.

What wonder if a woman so young, and whose strength had been for years taxed to the uttermost, should here and there have fallen short of the physical power needed to give effect to her own conception of what Shakespeare meant Constance to be, in the great first scene of the third act, where she is torn by grief and, from the first words she speaks, strung up to the height of imaginative passion, ending in the great cry of anguish, in which her grief culminates as she passes from the scene? And it was only at this point that the want of power was felt by any of her audience. They little knew, that, as she left the scene, she was generally carried fainting to her room.

What she might have been as Constance at a later day, when her powers were more mature, and her health stronger, she never had sufficient opportunity to show; for with the dissolution of Mr Macready's Drury Lane company, the adequate production of *King John* became all but impossible either in London or the provinces; and Constance had therefore to be omitted, much to her regret, from her list of parts.<sup>1</sup> But, fortunately, her impersonation has been so well described by those who saw it at Drury Lane, that it is possible to form a very clear idea of what it must have been.

Of what it was a lasting record exists in a masterly analysis of the performance by the late George Fletcher, which originally appeared in the *Athenæum*, in 1843, in a series of papers on *The Female Characters of Shakespeare, and some of their present Representatives on the Stage*.<sup>2</sup> No one had a better right to deal with

<sup>1</sup> She played Constance during one engagement in Dublin, and one in Glasgow, but nowhere else.

<sup>2</sup> Subsequently published, along with several additional papers, as *Studies of Shakespeare*, by George Fletcher. Longman, 1847.

such a subject, for he surpassed all the Shakespearian students of the day in thorough knowledge of his author, and in subtle analytic power. He was a man of very recluse habits, but had yielded to the solicitation of friends to go and judge for himself of Miss Faucit as an interpreter of Shakespeare. Her performances threw such a world of new light upon his favourite studies that he felt impelled to express his sense of obligation by dealing in detail with her impersonations of Constance and Imogen. He was afterwards introduced to Miss Faucit, and it is within my own knowledge that in his subsequent studies of *Rosalind*, *Macbeth* and *Lady Macbeth*, *Juliet* and *Beatrice*, he owed much to what he learned from her conversation as well as from her acting. As already said, a feeling of gratitude for the light thrown by her upon the subject of his favourite studies prompted him to write an acknowledgment of what was done upon the stage

in rendering to us so much of what is most delightful in the most delicate beings of the poet's creation. The greater the variety of powers in the actress, the more should this feeling be deepened in our hearts. Some few weeks ago, for instance, we beheld the same young performer, who the very evening before had shaken us with the passionate indignation, melted and thrilled us with the awfully beautiful despair of Constance of Bretagne in that stately historical play, infuse into the part of *Rosalind* all the tender though lively grace which the poet has made its principal attribute and most exquisite attraction, breathing the soul of elegance, wit, and feeling through that noble forest pastoral. Reflecting upon this, we said to ourselves, truly there is something in female genius and female energy—something worthy of Shakespeare, worthy to be cherished with the holiest of all sacred feelings, that of affectionate veneration.

This feeling, we know, grew deeper and deeper in him the more he came to be personally familiar with the fine intellect and noble earnestness and simplicity of the young actress's nature.<sup>1</sup>

After a very careful and searching analysis of the character of Constance, and of its treatment on the stage by Mrs Siddons,

<sup>1</sup> Mr Fletcher, much to the regret of all who had hoped his great qualities as a critical interpreter of Shakespeare might have been applied to others of the most important dramas, died a very few years after the publication of his book.

and by Mrs Jameson and other commentators, Mr Fletcher proceeds :—

What strikes us first of all in Miss Helen Faucit's personation is her clear and perfect conception that *feeling*, not *pride*, is the mainspring of the character—that the dignity of bearing natural to and inseparable from it, and which the advantage of a tall graceful figure enables this actress to maintain with little effort, is at the same time an easy unconscious dignity, quite different from that air of self-importance, that acting of majesty, which has been mistakenly ascribed to it by those who have attributed to the heroine an ambitious nature. She makes us feel throughout not only the depth, the tenderness, and the poetry of the maternal affection dwelling in a vivid fancy and a glowing heart, but is ever true to that "constant, loving, noble nature," which is not more sensitive to insult from her foes and falsehood from her friends than it is ever ready to welcome with fresh gratitude and confidence the return of better feelings in any who have injured her.

That intimate association, in short, of gracefulness with force and of tenderness with dignity which this lady has so happily displayed in other leading characters of Shakespeare, is her especial qualification for this arduous part—the most arduous, we believe, of all the Shakespearian female characters—for this plain reason, that while it is one of those exhibiting the highest order of powers, the range of emotions included in it is the widest ; and the alternations, the fluctuations between the height of virtuous indignation and contempt and the softest depth of tenderness, are the most sudden and the most extreme. The principle of contrast, in fact—that great element of the romantic drama, as of all romantic art—which Shakespeare delighted to employ not only in opposing one character to another, but in developing each character individually, is carried to the highest pitch by the trials to which the course of the dramatic incident subjects the very sensitive, passionate, and poetic, the noble and vigorous nature of Constance.

Here, again, we turn for an illustration to Mrs Siddons's performance of the part. It seems well established by the concurring testimony of all who preserve distinct recollections of her acting that, on a general estimate of her tragic powers, it was in gracefully commanding *force* that she so wonderfully excelled, and in the expression of *tenderness* that she was often felt to be deficient—a defect which must have been especially apparent in her personation of those Shakespearian characters wherein exquisite feeling is combined with extraordinary vigour. It has not surprised us, therefore, in conversing with persons on whose judgment and candour we can rely, and who have repeatedly witnessed the great actress's representation of the Lady Constance, to find that in the passages of melting tenderness which abound in the part a want of adequate expression was very sensibly felt. Majestic and terrible, then, as her performance of the indignant scenes undoubtedly was, yet it must have failed, for want of sufficient contrast, to derive all that startling boldness of relief which the dramatist himself has given to those electric passages.

Labouring, too, under the misconception already pointed out as to the essential qualities of the character, it would be but natural that, in the scenes where Constance and her son stand alone, deserted and betrayed, amid their treacherous friends and their triumphant enemies, Mrs Siddons, properly making the impulse of resentful scorn the immediate spring of her vituperation, should have failed to clear its expression wholly from her brow in those passages wherein the action requires her to turn it upon her child. We think it one of the most notable merits in the representation of the part by the lady who now personates it that, so far from letting the indignant excitement cast for one moment the slightest shade upon her brow or harshness into her tone when turning to the child, she follows undeviatingly the poet's indication; and in like manner as he has made the first effusion poured out by Constance on hearing her abandonment one of maternal grief and tenderness only, so amidst her subsequent bursts of indignant reproach and fiery denunciation, in every look and word which the present actress addresses to Arthur, the afflicted mother seems to find relief from those effusions of bitterness, as repugnant to her nature as they are withering in their power, by melting into double tenderness over the beauties and misfortunes of her child.

This, we repeat, seems to us to be one of the very happiest features in Miss Faucit's personation of the Lady Constance. Thus it is, for example, that in the first scene with Elinor she renders with such perfect truth and beauty the exquisitely characteristic passage:—

“ His grandam's wrongs, and not his mother's shames,  
 Draw those heaven-moving pearls from his poor eyes,  
 Which heaven shall take in nature of a fee;  
 Ay, with these crystal beads heaven shall be bribed  
 To do him justice, and revenge on you.”

Again, in her scene with Salisbury, where Constance is informed of the peace made between the two kings, and where the emotions that agitate her are deeper and more conflicting, we can conceive nothing in acting or in reality more exquisitely touching than the expression which she gives to the passage—

“ But thou art fair, and at thy birth, dear boy,” &c.

The faltering pauses, more eloquent than the finest declamation, must have gone directly not only to every mother's heart, but to every heart present alive to any touch of sympathy. Indescribably sweet, too, in her utterance, are the words—

“ Of Nature's gifts thou may'st with lilies boast,  
 And with the half-blown rose.”

In those brief accents she breathes to us all the inmost soul of Constance, the idolising mother, delicately sensitive and richly imaginative. Nor can anything be more beautiful in itself, or more true to nature and to the poet, than the graceful fondness with which, after throwing herself on the ground



in the climax of her grief, she looks up and raises her hand to play with the ringlets of her boy as he stands drooping over her.

We must speak rather more at large of Miss Faucit's acting in the following scene, the most difficult of all in so difficult a part. Undoubtedly the dramatist conceived of his heroine as of one endowed with the most vigorous as well as exquisite physical powers. Only such a person could rise to the adequate expression of that towering sublimity of virtuous invective and religious invocation which was indispensable to this part of his dramatic purpose. Equally certain it seems to be that these solemnly appealing and witheringly scornful passages, demanding above all things the display of what is commonly meant by *tragic force*, were the most successful parts of Mrs Siddons's personation of the Lady Constance. Not having had the advantage of witnessing those majestic efforts of the great actress, we are not enabled to compare the force of delivery shown in those particular sentences by Mrs Siddons and by the present actress respectively. But we *have* the means of comparing the force of execution in the present performer with what we conceive that the part absolutely demands, and in that view we find her personation adequate. The force which Shakespeare exhibits in the eloquence of Constance is not the hard force of an arrogant imperious termagant, such as we see in his Queen Elinor, but the *elastic* force that springs from a mind and person having all the vigour of a character at once so intellectual, so poetical, and so essentially feminine as that of Constance. To the expression of this highest and most genuine *tragic force*, we repeat that Miss Faucit shows her powers to be not only fully equal, but peculiarly adapted. She has that truest histrionic strength, which consists in an ample share of physical power in the ordinary sense, combined with exquisite modulation of tone and flexibility of feature—by turns the firm and the variable expressiveness of figure, voice, and eye. We say this after much attentive study of her acting, especially in her Shakespearian parts; and as regards the performance of the Lady Constance in particular, however perfect Mrs Siddons may have been in certain other Shakespearian characters, as Lady Macbeth, &c., yet, considering her very decided deficiency in tenderness, we cannot hesitate to regard the present personation of the heroine of *King John* as truer to that spirit of bold and beautiful contrast which, we have already observed, is in the very essence of its development, as it is in that of the whole Shakespearian drama.

Thus it is that the caressing of her boy, while seated on the ground, according to the true Shakespearian conception of the part, at once deepens the impression of the preceding words and action which make that sublime enthronement of her grief, and gives bolder effect to her majestically indignant contradiction of the French king's speech in glorification of that "blessed day,"—

"A wicked day, and not a holy-day," &c.;

and yet more to the personal invective against Philip,

"You have beguiled me with a counterfeit  
Resembling majesty," &c.

And in like manner her action and tone, in bending down to clasp her son, with the words—

“And our oppression hath made up this league!”

while they speak all the beautiful nature of Constance, make us the more strikingly and sublimely feel its energy when, as if drawing from her child's embrace the strongest stimulus of which the wronged and sorrowing mother is susceptible, she rises, as it were, to more than the natural height of her noble figure, and lifts high her hands to heaven in the majestic appeal—

“Arm, arm, you heavens, against these perjured kings,” &c.

It is this exaltation of the figure—this aspiring heavenward of the whole look, and tone, and gesture—that gives, and can alone give, adequate effect to the flashes of scorn that burst, in her glances and her accents, upon the despicable and devoted head of Austria, when he interrupts her invocation, in its highest fervour, with those very characteristic words of his, “Lady Constance, peace!” This it is, as given by the present actress, that makes her piercing and scorching reproaches seem to be drawn down like the forked lightnings from above, searing and blasting where they strike, and sharpened to their utmost keenness by the practical sarcasm which she finds in the bodily aspect worn by the object of her indignation—in the “lion's hide” upon “those recreant limbs.” This, in all the part, is the passage most requiring the display of physical energy—yet of an energy richly and variously modulated, as remote as possible from monotonous loudness and vehemence. Miss Faucit, in her whole manner of rendering this passage, shows how well she comprehends this distinction. By the fluctuating look and intonation, by the hesitating pauses—at a loss for expressions adequate to the intensity of her unwonted bitterness, and giving keener force to the expressions when they come—she makes us exquisitely feel the stung spirit of injured, betrayed, and insulted confidence and tenderness, more terrible and blighting far than that of mere exasperated pride.

And after this climax of her indignation, when the legate appears, as if sent from heaven in answer to her call, most affectingly and impressively beautiful, to our minds, is the expression of the noble nature of the heroine which her representative gives to the kneeling appeals which Constance makes to the virtuous and religious feelings of the dauphin. Already, in speaking of Mrs Siddons's acting of the part, we have fully expressed our opinion as to the true reading of this important passage. We have here only to add that Miss Faucit gives that reading, as it seems to us, with admirable effect; delivering, especially, with all that noble and generous fervour which we conceive belongs to it, the unanswerable answer to Blanch—

“That which upholdeth him that thee upholds,  
His honour; oh, thine honour, Lewis, thine honour!”

We shall not attempt to speak in detail of this lady's acting in the terrible despairing scene. She renders its anguish-born poetry with a delicacy of expression yet more overpowering than its force. The looks and tones and gestures of a performance like this are not things to be described, but to be seen and heard, felt and wept over. For our own part, long shall we be

haunted by those accents, now piercingly, now softly thrilling, now enamoured of death, now rushing back to the sweet and agonising remembrance of her child, now hurrying forward to anticipate the chasing of "the native beauty from his cheek," till her last lingering ray of hope expires, and reason totters on the verge of frenzy. All these emotions are rendered to us by the actress, in all their varied beauty and their trembling intensity. In the concluding exclamation—

"O Lord! my boy, my Arthur, my fair son!  
My life, my joy, my food, my all the world!  
My widow-comfort, and my sorrows' cure!"

her voice, it is true, rises almost into a scream. What, however, we would ask, are the whole three lines in themselves but one long scream of intensest agony? The immediate effect upon the feelings of the auditor is doubtless painful, as the shrieking accents are to his ear; yet both are necessary to the full dramatic force and beauty of the passage. . . . An exclamation like this, in justice to the actress, can only have its due effect from being delivered, not with the harmonious modulation of tone appropriate to even the most impassioned words of Constance while her self-possession yet remains to her, but rather like the death-shriek of a spirit violently parting."<sup>1</sup>

With such an analysis before us, one feels how much was lost to all lovers of Shakespeare, when the state of the theatrical profession became such, that the Constance of Miss Faucit could never be repeated, even in London. Of all the characters she played, no one so severely taxed her imagination as well as her physical strength; but it was a sore pain to her to have to lay it aside after playing it once or twice in Glasgow and Dublin.

The success of *King John* was so great, that it continued to hold a prominent place down to the close of Mr Macready's management. But the principle of varying the performances, which then prevailed, is signally illustrated by the interposition of the play of *Othello* in the middle of the very first run of this piece, although in producing it all the resources of the theatre in scenery and stage appliances had been called into play. Mr Macready knew well that no actress, equal to the true impersonation of Constance, could go on playing it night after night.

<sup>1</sup> In speaking of the Constance of Mrs Susannah Cibber, obviously one of her finest impersonations, Davies (*Dramatic Miscellanies*, vol. i. p. 55) says, "When going off the stage, she uttered the words—

"O Lord! my boy, my Arthur, my fair son!" &c.

with such an emphatical *scream of agony* as will never be forgotten by those who heard her."



Accordingly an interval of two days was always allowed between the performances. Desdemona was no doubt selected as a relief, because it made a comparatively light demand upon the strength of the actress; still, as conceived by Miss Faucit, it involved no slight strain upon the imagination and the feelings. As in all her Shakespearian performances, her treatment of Desdemona was original, founded upon an independent study of the play. With the public it added to her reputation.

Hitherto the character had not been understood by those into whose hands it had fallen.

Desdemona [she writes] is usually considered a merely amiable, simple, yielding creature, and she is generally so represented on the stage. This is the last idea that would have entered my mind. To me she was in all things worthy to be a hero's bride, and deserving the highest love, reverence, and gratitude from the noble Moor. "Gentle" she was, no doubt (the strong are naturally gentle), and Othello in one place calls her so. But he uses the epithet in the Italian and old English sense, implying that union of nobility of person and of disposition which shows itself in an unconscious grace of movement and of outward appearance. This was what I imagine was in Wordsworth's mind when speaking of "the gentle lady married to the Moor"; and when he discoursed on that favourite theme on which he says, "right voluble I am," I can fancy that he drew his heroine in much the same lines as those in which she presented herself to my young imagination. I cannot think he would have singled her out in his famous sonnet had he not thought her as brave as she was generous, as high of heart as she was sweet of nature, or had he regarded her as a soft, insipid, plastic creature, ready to do any one's bidding, and submit placidly to any ill-usage from mere weakness and general characterless docility. Oh, no! Such creatures do not win the love of the purest and noblest, the attachment and admiration of all.

Treated from this point of view, Miss Faucit's impersonation was welcomed, as she herself writes, "as rescuing the character out of the commonplace, and lifting her into her true position in the tragedy." This view was specially pressed upon her by Mr Elton, a principal member of Mr Macready's company, "an accomplished rather than a powerful actor," but "thoroughly well read, and of fine taste."

He told me [she writes] that my Desdemona was a new creation for him; that, to use his own phrase—and I remember it well—it restored the balance of the play by giving her character its due weight in the action, so that, as he said, he had then seen the tragedy for the first time in its true *chiaro-oscuro*. Words no less encouraging fell from Mr Macready, my Othello.



He told me my brightness and gaiety in the early happy scenes at Cyprus helped him greatly, and that, when sadder, I was not lachrymose, and, above all, that I added intensity to the last act by "being so difficult to kill." Indeed I felt in that last scene as if it were a very struggle for my own life. I would not die with my honour tarnished without the chance of disabusing my husband's mind of the vile thoughts that clouded it. I felt for *him* as well as for myself, and therefore I threw into my remonstrances all the power of passionate appeal I could command.

What she adds on this subject shows how completely her individuality was merged in the woman that Shakespeare had drawn.

How [she asks] could I be otherwise than "difficult to kill"? I *would not* die dishonoured in Othello's esteem. This was bitterer than fifty thousand deaths. Then I thought of all his after-suffering, when he should come to know how he had mistaken me! The agony for him which filled my heart, as well as the mortal agony of death which I felt in imagination, made my cries and struggles no doubt very vehement and very real. My whole soul was flung into the entreaty but for "half an hour!" "but while I say one prayer!"—which prayer would have been for *him*. Then, when she hears for the first time that Cassio is the supposed accomplice in her guilt, it was as though I spoke for myself in uttering the swift rejoinder, "Send for the man and ask him!" . . . When Desdemona hears that Cassio has already lost his life, and that "his mouth is stopped," she naturally weeps the loss of the innocent man, both for his own sake and because he alone could, she thinks, prove her guiltless. All things conspire against her—her very tears, her prayers, her asseverations, give countenance to her guilt. She is hurled headlong down the precipice, but, alas! not killed at once. The strong young life *will* not leave its tenement—the mortal agony is prolonged—even the dagger's thrust, which is meant in mercy that she may not "linger in her pain," is not enough. The soul *cannot* away until it asserts the purity of the sweet casket in which it has been set. It lingers on in pain until the poor lips can speak, not, as before, to deaf ears that will not listen, but to those of a sympathising woman. Then, with bitter moans and broken breath, Desdemona stammers out with her last gasp of life, "A guiltless death I die!"

Such a Desdemona must to any actor of Othello have been an inspiration. It apparently was such to Mr Macready. He was, Miss Faucit writes,

Very fine in this scene. There was an impressive grandeur, an elevation even, in his ravings—

"Whip me, ye devils,  
From the possession of this heavenly sight!  
Blow me about in winds! roast me in sulphur!  
Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!—  
O Desdemona! Desdemona!—dead! dead! dead!"

As I lay there and listened, he seemed to me like a soul in hell—whirling in the Second Circle of the Inferno. And there was a piteousness, a pathos, in his reiteration of the loved one's name that went to my very heart. Then one felt how wisely Shakespeare had made the penultimate syllable long and not short, as in Italy it is, bringing into it a prolonged moaning sound, which at this point of the play seems so much in accordance with Desdemona's doom. Oh, how my heart ached, too, for Othello, when his eyes were opened, and he could see and trace the paltry threads by which his soul and body had been ensnared, and when I heard the broken accents of his shame at having sunk so low as to conspire in Cassio's death!

“*Lod.* Did you and he consent in Cassio's death?”

*Oth.* Ay.

*Cass.* Dear general, I never gave you cause.

*Oth.* I do believe it, and I ask your pardon.”

I remember many years ago to have heard an actor of good position in Mr Macready's company say, that he went to the theatre every night, in time only to see this scene as it was played by Miss Faucit. He was not alone in his admiration. For example, Lady Martin met Mr Carlyle one evening at Mr Froude's in November 1873, more than thirty years afterwards, and in her Diary next day she writes: “It was a great pleasure to me, when, talking with Mr Carlyle about Mr Macready's revivals, which he spoke of very warmly, he referred in glowing terms to my Desdemona. Amid much else, he said he had never felt the play so deeply before. One phrase especially struck me—‘It quite hurt me to see the fair, delicate creature so brutally used.’ Would that I could give an idea of his tone and accent, gentle and tremulous, as if a suffering living creature were there before him!”

After the Drury Lane company broke up, Desdemona, like Constance, had unhappily to be dropped from the list of Miss Faucit's impersonations, and for the same reason

During the first run of *King John* she was called on (November 12, 1842) to play Angelica in Congreve's *Love for Love*, a part the sole attraction of which for her lay in the relief it gave her from more serious work. The *Times* speaks of her performance as “ladylike and delicate, and the actress had the merit of giving an interest to the unfeeling damsel, which we never feel in reading Congreve's play.” She alternated Angelica and Rosalind with Constance until the production (December 10, 1842) of Westland Marston's *Patrician's Daughter*.

From this play much was expected, and among others by her valued friend Mr Percival Farren, who writes to her,

MY DEAR HELEN,—If the literary merit of *The Patrician's Daughter* be the criterion of its success, the author's highest wish will (in my poor mind) be fully accomplished. Mr Marston has chosen a bold, but, I hope for the sake of the art, a safe road to dramatic fame by exciting the hearts of his audiences, not their mere evanescent feelings. I say audiences, for his play will and ought to be often acted. The characters are well suited to the chosen actors, and will add another proof of Mr Macready's good taste in bringing forward such a production. *Your* part appears to me the most difficult to act; but your best property is overcoming difficulties, not sinking under them. . . . Bless you, my dear girl! P. FARREN.

The difficulties of Miss Faucit's part were obviously overcome, for on the first and every other night the play was performed, she carried off, according to the verdict of the press, the honours of the evening. The *Atlas* critic writes:—

She made her Lady Mabel a living thing. It would be difficult indeed, in the whole range of the drama, to instance a more happy example of complete identification with assumed character. Replete with feminine grace and sensibility, tinged with a pardonable pride of station, and amply endowed with the better impulse of a refined nature, the Lady Mabel, or Miss Faucit—we know them not apart—is another gem in the rich treasury of womanhood which genius has bequeathed to the British dramatic repertory.

More interesting is the following letter from Mr R. M'Ian, the historian of the *Tartans of the Highland Clans*, a painter as well as actor, and a friend who had watched her progress from the first:—

MY DEAR MISS HELEN,—Will you deem it impertinent if I, your *oldest* professional friend and one of your most strenuous ones, whether *on* the stage or *off*, write to congratulate you upon your success of last night? Pray do not misunderstand me. I do not mean that your Lady Mabel was better than Constance, or Pauline, or Rosalind, &c. But it was the last of the beautiful pictures which you have painted, and I was fortunate in seeing it. . . .

I am egotist enough to assert that I know good acting when I see it, and that Helen Faucit's acting of Lady Mabel last night was *perfect*. I'll see it again and again, though it harrows and distresses me more than anything I have seen for years. I can't tell you how I liked you—I saw nothing wrong (in *you*). I wish I knew how to tell the truth with an extra flourish, but indeed I do not. *I hope you are in better health?* Take care of *that* at all events. I was afraid your last scene was too *real*: was it? . . . Health and a continuation of prosperity to you!



There will be occasion hereafter to speak more fully of this play. It was carried by Miss Faucit into the provinces, and acted there with great success. But remembering what her last scene, as I have seen it there, was, it is easy to understand Mr M'Ian's apprehension that it was too real—so true to nature, so awe-inspiring, producing the impression that it was no mere mimic semblance of a beautiful sorrow-stricken woman fading into death. ✓

When the attraction of Mr Marston's play began to wane, the play of *Cymbeline* was produced (January 21, 1843), with Miss Faucit as Imogen. Of her performance Mr George Fletcher wrote in the *Athenæum* with the same fine power of observation and analysis as he had written of her Constance. From this essay, as well as from the opinions of all the best critics of the day, professional and unprofessional, it is obvious that it raised her even higher than before in general estimation, by the deep and indelible impression which it made upon the minds of her audiences. Leaving a fuller treatment of the subject to critics of a later date, I must find room for one passage of Mr Fletcher's essay, in which he dwells upon the actress's great power of silent acting, for which she has herself told us Shakespeare finds more room, and demands it more, than any other dramatist,—a quality, however, very rarely to be met with on the modern stage.<sup>1</sup> He is speaking of the passage in the last scene of the play, where Iachimo confesses the monstrous artifice by which he has aroused the jealousy of Imogen's husband, and overthrown the happiness of both.

From the beginning of Iachimo's confession the countenance and gesture of the present performer express to us, in their delicate variation, what Shakespeare's text can but dimly suggest even to the most thoughtful and imaginative reader. In them we trace, in vivid succession, the intensely fixed attention of the heroine to the commencement of Iachimo's narrative—the trembling anxiety as it proceeds; the tenderly mournful delight on receiving the full conviction of her husband's fidelity; and then the grateful, tearful, overpowering joy on seeing him so suddenly alive, and hearing his repentant exclamations; and that most difficult, perhaps, as it is the most pathetic stroke of all, the coming forward, forgetful of her male disguise, to discover herself to him, and relieve him from that intolerable anguish which her generous heart can no longer endure to contemplate. We might dwell

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<sup>1</sup> In Madame Duse's acting it is conspicuous.



upon the charming expression given to the words, "Why did you throw your wedded lady from you?" &c., but that we regard as a higher merit in this actress her power of entering so thoroughly into that affectionate nature of Imogen, which makes even her sudden restoration to conjugal happiness but cause her bosom to overflow with grateful benevolence towards every one who has any claim to share it. Many a woman, we are persuaded, would be found capable of adequately representing to us, in such a scene, the gratified feelings of the lover or the wife for one that could render, with a truth at once so genial and so delicate, the passage, for instance, where Imogen goes up to her brothers and expresses her delight at their restoration to her:—

"Oh, my gentle brothers,  
Have we thus met? Oh, never say hereafter  
But I am truest speaker. You call'd me brother,  
When I was but your sister; I you brothers,  
When you were so indeed."

We cannot call to mind anything more full of affectionate grace, than the tone and gesture with which these lines are delivered by this heroine's present representative.

Miss Faucit was presently called upon to create another new character—Mildred Tresham, in Browning's *Blot on the Scutcheon*. A combination of unlucky circumstances told against the success of the piece. It was brought out in a great hurry (February 11). Mr Macready had undertaken to play the part of Lord Tresham, but afterwards handed it over to Mr Phelps. Mr Phelps, it appears from Mr Macready's *Diary* (vol. ii. p. 204), fell ill, and Mr Macready understudied it, and would have played it, but to this Mr Browning demurred, thinking it unfair to Mr Phelps. Then the reading of the play to the actors, an office usually performed by Mr Macready, was intrusted to the head prompter, "a clever man in his way," according to Miss Faucit, "but unfitted to bring out, or even to understand, Mr Browning's conception. Consequently the delicate, subtle lines were twisted, perverted, and sometimes even made ridiculous in his hands. . . . Unhappily the mischief proved irreparable; for some of the actors during the rehearsals chose to continue to misunderstand the text, and never took the interest in the play, which they must have done had Mr Macready read it first—for he had great power as a reader. I have always thought that it was in a great measure owing to this *contretemps*, that a play so thoroughly dramatic failed, despite its powerful story, to make the great success, which

was justly its due. . . . As it was, the play, though well received, was only performed a few times. Had it been strengthened by Mr Macready's personal aid, the result would most probably have been different."

The play found more favour with the press than with the public. Of the Mildred Tresham, the *Times* writes, "Miss Faucit acted, as she always does, with tenderness and feeling, but the character, excepting in the strong situation in the second act, did not tell much with the audience." Her performance more than satisfied the author. A few days afterwards (March 4, 1843) he returned her album to her, to which, in compliance with her wish, he had made a long and important addition, with a note saying, "I wish from my soul it were in my power to find some worthier way of proving the admiration and gratitude with which I remain, my dear Miss Faucit, yours ever faithfully, Robert Browning." She attached much value to his rhymes, and this she might well do, for they concluded with a compliment infinitely precious as coming from such a pen.

" I will strain my eyes to blindness,  
Ere lose sight of you and kindness.  
'Genius' is a common story!  
Few guess that the spirit's glory,  
They hail nightly, is the sweetest,  
Fairest, gentlest, and completest  
Shakespeare's-Lady's, ever poet  
Longed for: few guess this; *I* know it."

Singularly enough, the same tribute was paid by the late Mr F. A. Leo, the celebrated German Shakespearian scholar, in his review, in volume xxi. of the *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* (April, 1886) of the book on *Some of Shakespeare's Women*: "Wir lernen in dem Buche acht entzückende Shakespeare Gestalten keunen; Ophelia, Portia, Desdemona, Juliet, Imogen, Rosalind, Beatrice und—als Shakespeare-Gestalt 'by her own right'—Helena Faucit, Lady Martin." Mr Leo knew Miss Faucit only as her nature revealed itself to him in her book, but she was in herself a "Shakespeare-Lady" to many in her social life, as well as upon the stage. Thus, one of the ablest women of her time writes to her in January, 1883, "Of all Shakespeare's creations Imogen

resembles you most. She is yourself. Were I to describe you for an historic portrait, I would take Imogen and say 'Eccola!'

No manager at any time in the history of our stage deserved better of the public than Mr Macready. He chose the best plays, put them on the stage in the best style, enrolled in his company actors of ability and experience, treated them fairly by leaving them comparatively free to show the best that was in them, diversified the entertainments and lightened the work of his actors by the production of good musical works, such as Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, *Sappho*, *Der Freischütz*, and *Somnambula*, in a style worthy to take rank in point of finish with his purely dramatic productions. In Milton's *Comus*, played for his benefit on the 24th of February, 1843, the combined resources of his two companies were brought into play with admirable effect. In splendour of spectacle, full effect was given to the suggestions of the poet. What it was, even as seen from the stage, Miss Faucit tells us:—

As I acted "the Lady," I can, of course, speak only of the scenes in which she took part. These impressed me powerfully, and helped my imagination as I acted. The enchanted wood was admirably presented, with its dense bewildering mass of trees, so easy to be lost in, so difficult to escape from, with the fitful moonlight casting deep shadows and causing terrors to the lonely bewildered girl, whose high trust and confidence in Supreme help alone keep her spirits from sinking under the wild "fantasies" that throng into her memory, "of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire." It seemed to me the very place the poet must have pictured to himself. Not less so appeared to me the Hall of Comus—so far as I could see it from the enchanted chair in which the Lady sits spellbound. It was a kind of Aladdin's garden, all aglow with light and colour. And then the rabble-rout, so gay, so variously clad—some like Hebes, some like hags; figures moving to and fro—some beautiful as Adonis, others like Fauns and bearded Satyrs. Add to this the weird fascination of the music, the rich melody, the rampant joyousness, the tipsy jollity! All served to quicken in me the feeling with which the poet has inspired the lonely "Lady," when she sees herself, without means of escape, surrounded by a rabble-rout full of wine and riot, and abandoned to shameless revelry. I lost myself in the reality of the situation, and found the poet's words flow from me as though they had sprung from my own heart. The blandishments of Comus's rhetoric, enforced with all the fervour and persuasiveness of delivery of which Mr Macready was master, seemed as it were to give the indignant impulse needed to make the lady break her silence:—

"I had not thought to have unlocked my lips  
In this unhallowed air, but that this juggler  
Would think to charm my judgment, as mine eyes,

Obtruding false rules pranked in reason's garb.  
 . . . To him that dares  
 Arm his profane tongue with contemptuous words  
 Against the sun-clad Power of chastity,  
 Fain would I something say ; yet to what end ?

Enjoy your dear wit, and gay rhetoric,  
 That hath so well been taught her dazzling fence :  
 Thou art not fit to hear thyself convinced ;  
 Yet, should I try, the uncontrollèd worth  
 Of this pure cause would kindle my rapt spirits  
 To such a flame of sacred vehemence,  
 That dumb things should be moved to sympathise,  
 And the brute earth would lend her nerves, and shake,  
 Till all thy magic structures, reared so high,  
 Were shattered into heaps o'er thy false head !”

I could never speak these lines without a thrill that seemed to dilate my whole frame, and to give an unwonted fulness and vibration to the tones of my voice. Given, as they were, with intense earnestness, they no doubt impressed the actors of the rabble-rout, and made them feel with *Comus*, when he says—

“ She fables not ; I feel that I do fear  
 Her words set off by some superior power.”

It was somewhat difficult for me to speak the lines with my whole frame thrilling, yet unable to move a muscle, for the Lady is bound by a spell that paralyses all her limbs. It was a good experience for me, for at that time I was rather given to redundancy of action. One of the most difficult things to acquire in the technical part of the actor's art is repose of manner—to be able, in fact, to stand still, and yet be undergoing and expressing the strongest mental emotion. What the effect may have been upon the audience I do not know ; but the revellers near my chair upon the stage told me, the night after the first representation, that they were struck with awe, that my whole appearance seemed to become so completely transfigured under the influence of my emotion that they would not have been amazed if the chair with the Lady in it had been swept upwards out of sight to some holier sphere.

The press were unanimous in their praise of the impersonation of the Lady, and the next morning's post brought her the following letter from Mrs S. C. Hall :—

I was greatly delighted, my dear Miss Helen, last night. Your acting and elocution were really perfect, and you should be painted in that chair—you looked so pure and holy in it, as I delight to see.

That *Comus* is charming. The people, I imagine, expected a fireworky finale ; but Mr Macready's pure taste is right. The elevated character of the sublime poet requires that it should end as it did. I must tell you the



observation of an enthusiastic young Irishman, who sat on a line with Mr Hall (a gentleman gave me up a front seat). He was determined you should come on, and exerted himself *con amore* with my *sposo*. Then looking at the battered remnants of his white kid gloves, he exclaimed, "Well, God bless her, anyhow! She costs me a fortune in gloves, to say nothing of the skin of my hands!"

And now a word about your dear self. I want to say, in as few words as possible, that if at any time, or in any way, I can be of the least service or comfort to you, in sickness or in health, under any circumstances, you will find me a sincere and steady friend. If at any time you were not strong, I would go with you to rehearsals. You may need none of these "little attentions," but if you do, I will leave my desk cheerfully; and I do, without any cant or affectation, pray most earnestly to Almighty God to strengthen and stablish you, as He has hitherto done, in the right and holy path, which, when all the gaud and glitter of life is past, will, I trust, enable us all to meet when the heart-beats and small vexations of this world are over.—My dear Helen, your sincere friend,

ANNA MARIA HALL.

It may here be noted that Miss Faucit was in the habit of writing on the blank pages of her parts passages which struck her in the wide reading, which her commonplace books show she was somehow able to keep up, even when most busy at the theatre. Her part of *Comus*, still preserved, is covered with these—all of a kind not uncongenial to the character of the Lady. Thus a memento as to the mode in which her language should be spoken appears in this extract: "Greek Deputies. They spoke without confusion or interruption, in a time of commotion, though at the same time *firm*, measured, and *harmonious*." Again, in a more serious vein—"To understand the past without useless regret, to bear with the present, endeavouring to ameliorate it, to hope for the future by making preparations for it—such is the rule of wise men and beneficent institutions." There are others touching on very solemn matters of religious belief and action.

Finely acted throughout, complete in detail, and costly as it must have been to put on the stage, *Comus* was played only twelve times, taking a place alternately with Shakespearian plays, *Virginus*, in which Miss Faucit was the Virginia, and *The Lady of Lyons*. While engaged almost nightly in these plays, she was called upon suddenly to appear (April 17th) as Lady Macbeth. Hitherto this part had been played by Mrs Warner, who held the place of performer of the heavy tragic parts, of which Lady Macbeth, according to stage usage, was one. Mrs Warner be-

came suddenly ill, and Miss Faucit was solicited by Mr Macready to take her place. Having only played it once before, she yielded, yet with great misgiving as to the result. But how successfully she acquitted herself of the very onerous task we gather from the following letter to her, written after the play by her friend Mr M'Ian :—

I cannot go to sleep without first writing to tell Mrs M'Ian how completely you have realised all our wishes and hopes. . . . Surely you are glad *now*, and very *proud*, are you not? It will be an affectation of you to say "No," for you hold that Lady Macbeth is the most difficult of Shakespeare's female characters, and yet you made quite a new thing of it. It was different in feeling and effect from any one else's I ever saw. The banquet scene, strange to say, was *terribly pathetic*. Your endeavouring to assume the courtesy of the hostess, to draw the attention of the guests from the raving of the king, was quite appreciated. But the sleeping scene, I maintain, was better than it has ever been acted before. People rave still about Mrs Siddons. . . . Was she more than a woman? Had she a *fine* and *interesting* figure? Could she do more than fully understand the character, and make her audience understand her? You did all that in a most poetical and Shakespearian manner. I *must* not be accused of flattery—indeed I speak, or rather try to write, the truth. Nor was I by any means singular in the appreciation of your acting. You must have felt how much you had hold of our very souls, especially in the sleeping scene. The only fault all through was one, which I sincerely wish you could never eradicate—youth. . . .

Did Macready encourage you last night? What did the players generally say to you? . . . Forster (*Examiner*) watched you very attentively—whether he *dare* say what of course he felt, I don't know. R. R. M'IAN.

*Macbeth* was played only once again, and this on the last night of Mr Macready's tenure of Drury Lane (June 14). On this occasion Mrs Warner resumed the part of Lady Macbeth.

Although the season was now approaching its close, *The Secretary*, a new play by Sheridan Knowles, was produced on the 24th of April. The heroine, Lady Laura Gaveston, was played by Miss Faucit. It was a long part, and one that required delicate handling, as the lady, the daughter of a Duke, has to be foremost in the avowal of her love to a man who, having saved the life of her father and herself, loves her passionately, but, believing that although the son of a nobleman, as he has been led to believe, he has been born out of wedlock, declines very persistently to marry her, and thereby, as he thinks, lower her in the eyes of her

family. This self-imposed bar to their union is removed by its turning out, in a manner not unfamiliar in melodrama, that his mother was duly married, and that he is in truth the rightful heir to an earldom usurped by a wicked uncle. The play is, for Sheridan Knowles, unusually good, and is in many respects brilliantly written. It was received with great favour, and, according to the *Times*, "all the honours followed the descent of the curtain." Mr Macready as Colonel Green, and Mr Anderson as Wilton the Secretary and lover, were both well fitted with their parts; but all Mr Macready has to record of the performance in his Diary is, "Acted Colonel Green—I know not how—called for, and well received." Of Miss Faucit's Lady Laura, the *Atlas* critic writes:—

The Lady Laura, played by Miss Faucit with her wonted delicacy and feeling, required the skill of this admirable actress to prevent it from being unpleasant to those who make little allowance for the high and generous impulses of lofty natures. Perceiving the struggles of a loving but humble heart, she should, according to the laws of convention, have repressed her right to step down from her elevated pedestal to gather the happiness full-spread at her feet. She follows the stronger law of her stronger nature; and her affection-directed will, which had hitherto never "brook'd suitors," has now to raise her humbler preserver to the level of equalising love. She has communed of him with her heart, has felt his studied absence as an injury to her abounding gratitude; her share in the contract of love is performed before the opportunity of mutual ratification. When, therefore, with the unflinching accuracy of womanly perception, she "believes the heart that's in her breast throbs in his," she feels it is signed, sealed, and delivered, and yields to the delicious conviction of "love for love."

The play was deservedly a success, yet it was only twice repeated. Apart from the mortification to the author, how disheartening must it not have been to Miss Faucit and others to have devoted days and nights of rehearsal and study to their parts, all of them good and involving much consideration, and then to find their labour thrown away! Whatever the cause, Mr Macready fell back on *Julius Cæsar* (in which Miss Faucit was the Portia), on *Comus*, and *King John*.

The season of benefits had set in, and on the 18th of May, Mr William Smith's *Athelwold* was produced for Miss Faucit's benefit. It furnished an even more signal instance of the hardship to actors of having to study an important play for the performance of only

a few nights. I see by her copy of the play from which she acted, that so many of its most vigorous and poetical passages were found to be so unfit for the stage, that it was cut down to nearly half its original size,—an operation involving the labour of anxious hours, which was, no doubt, performed by Mr Macready himself. Even thus curtailed, the dialogue, and especially the soliloquies, were very long, those of Athelwold and of Elfrida in particular. Great as was the tax in this way put upon the memory, it was nothing to the fatigue of hours of study spent in mastering the author's conception of two very intricate characters, and determining how to clothe them with life. And all this, as it turned out, for a performance of two nights only.

Whatever the defects of the work may be, its two principal characters certainly afforded abundant scope for powerful acting. The story may be briefly told. The English King Edgar has heard of the great beauty of Elfrida, a high-born Devonshire lady, and commissions Athelwold, his favourite thane, to visit the lady's father, and report upon her charms. They are such that Athelwold loses his heart to her, woos and wins her, and, returning to the king, informs him that the rumour of the lady's beauty is wholly a mistake. The king finds out the falsehood; so does Elfrida, who feels doubly wronged, inasmuch as not only has her beauty been belied, but also because but for the false report she would have been Edgar's queen. The king comes to Olgar's house to judge for himself, and Athelwold has to tell Elfrida the fraud he has practised. All her love for Athelwold is at once chilled by the baffled dream of ambition of being England's queen. "Oh, give me back," she says—

" My maiden state, and let me play the game  
Of life out fairly ! What had'st thou to come  
'Twi'xt me and England's monarch ? It was mine  
To choose or to reject. But justice now,  
Redress's restoration of my rights  
You *cannot* give—'tis folly to demand.

*Ath.* Let the king come ! Throw wide the doors for him !  
I have no wife. She whom I took for mine,  
She is already Edgar's. Vanity  
Has seized at once each passage of thy heart :  
O God ! and did I give my very soul  
To this mere mask ?"



Thenceforth his heart is steeled against her. The king comes, sees her, will make her his queen, to which she assents, and he takes the usual kingly resolution in such cases to have Athelwold disposed of. Made aware of this, something of Elfrida's love for Athelwold—*veteris vestigia flammæ*—returns. She seeks him out, and in a scene which must have tried all the actress's force of impassioned appeal, endeavours to persuade him "not to discard, disown her,"—ultimately telling him that if he will forgive and take her to his heart again, Edgar shall die by her hand that night—"Thy death, or his." He answers—

"My soul recoils in horror, shrinks from thee.  
Take, if thou wilt, this for an answer!"

On this Elfrida throws open the doors of the hall, the king's guards enter, and Athelwold is struck dead.

How Elfrida was acted, let the *Times* critic tell:—

Elfrida is the character of the piece, and therefore it is no wonder that it should have been selected by Miss Faucit for the night of her benefit.<sup>1</sup> Her acting of it deserves high commendation. She had evidently studied carefully, that she might not miss the ample occasion of rendering the Saxon heroine effective. The part can scarcely be said to begin till Athelwold reveals his fraud; and she completely carried out the purpose of this (the best) scene in the play by the gradual coolness with which she receives his endearments, affection growing less and less until it sinks into absolute insensibility. The last act, with its whirl of inconsistencies, still seems to keep up an excitement; and the despairing fondness with which Miss Faucit flung herself at the feet of Athelwold, the utter disbelief that anything she could say would move him, and yet the determination to catch at the least slight chance, was admirable. Strange to say, though the audience were raised to a high pitch of sympathy by Elfrida's supplications to her husband, directly the guards stabbed him by her orders a reaction took place. At the fall of the curtain all their energies were renewed; they called for the *beneficiaire*, and bestowed on her a bouquet.

As acted on the first night, the last scene was needlessly protracted after Athelwold's death by the entrance of Edgar,

<sup>1</sup> A mistake here. It is a character she would never have chosen. Mr Macready pressed her to adopt it for her benefit, as this would give it a certainty of being heard by a large and kindly disposed audience. It cost her very hard work—work, too, against the grain.

Dunstan, and Olgar. It appears from Miss Faucit's copy of the play, that on the next performance the curtain fell upon his death, and no opportunity was given for the reaction of which the critic speaks. Of the performance of this undoubtedly very remarkable play, Mr Macready has nothing in his Diary to say but this: "Acted, or rather scrambled through, *Athelwold*; was called for." [Again no mention of any one else being called.] "I have acted against my own judgment in taking this part, but I did it for the author's interest."

A few days after the performance of *Athelwold*, a great sorrow befell Miss Faucit. Her constant friend, Mr Percival Farren, had gone to see her in *Elfrida*, but was then so ill that he had almost to be carried to his private box, and he died about ten days afterwards. Preoccupied with her stage work, Miss Faucit had not seen Mr Farren for some days. Among other things, the task had been assigned to her by Mr Macready of delivering the Address to be spoken on the 29th of May, on the occasion of a performance for raising funds for the monument to Mrs Siddons, now in Westminster Abbey. "I was very ill, and tired," she writes, "so that my memory, usually quick enough, seemed to fail me. I grew nervous, and even by sitting up at night I feared I could not be ready at the time he wished. This engrossing study accounted for my not seeing my dear friend for some days together, only sending to inquire after him. During one of those nights that I was spending in study—the night before its results were to be made public—he died. This was kept from me, but word of the sad event was sent in the morning to Mr Macready." He knew well how dear a friend Mr Farren was, and that, if it were known to Miss Faucit, she could not execute her task. So he sent her a note, begging her to come at once to the theatre, go quietly over what she had to speak, and share his little dinner there. "I accepted his invitation, and his gentle kindness I shall ever remember with gratitude. As the afternoon wore on, he sent for my dresser, and told her to make me lie down for an hour or two before I thought of dressing for the stage. I had a lurking feeling all through the day that something was happening, for all about me looked at me so earnestly and kindly, but what trouble was hanging over me I could not

even guess, because the last news given to me of my dear friend before I left home had been reassuring."

When the task of the night was over, Mr Macready met her as she was leaving her room, and put a letter into her hand, telling her that, as she was tired, the morning would be the best time to read it. But as on her way home she had to pass her friend's house, she alighted from the carriage to make her own inquiries. "The surprised and frightened look of the servant who opened the door told me everything, and I saw at once why all had combined to keep me in ignorance through the day. Then I understood how thoughtful Mr Macready had been. His letter was most kind. He gave me some days' rest to face my trouble, although, as the close of the season was near, he must have been put to extreme inconvenience by my absence."

The rest was indeed brief, for on the 5th of June she appeared as Portia in *Julius Caesar*, and must have done so with a further sorrow in her heart, for in the playbill of the night Mr Macready announced, "that in pursuance of arrangements with the proprietary of this theatre he will relinquish its direction upon the close of the present season." If instead of "pursuance of arrangements" he had said "by reason of failure of arrangements," he would have been more exact. The proprietary, selfishly desiring to profit by the prosperity he had brought to their theatre, demanded an increased rent. Naturally irritated by their attitude, Mr Macready declined to renew his lease. Although he had not lost by his tenure of the theatre, his gains had not been adequate to his expenditure of thought and energy. With an increased rent, gain might have been turned to loss. At any rate, it was only by his personal influence and exertions that prosperity could have been maintained. A sorry return this "proprietary" made him for having done so much for two years to restore the prestige of their theatre, and to raise the tone of the metropolitan stage to a worthy level.

During the few nights of the season that remained Miss Faucit played Pauline, Hermione, Desdemona, and Rosalind (performance by command of the Queen), winding up with Beatrice on June 13, 1843.

This sudden and unexpected breaking up of Mr Macready's enterprise was a public loss.

To me [Miss Faucit writes] it was a heavy blow indeed. Severe as my labours had been, the delight in them far more than outweighed the fatigue. Drury Lane Theatre, conducted as it then was, was an arena in which every gift I had found scope for exercise. My studies were all of an elevating character: my thoughts were given to the great types of womanhood drawn by Shakespeare's master-hand, or by the hands of modern poets—Browning, Marston, Troughton, Bulwer Lytton, and others—anxious to maintain the reputation of the national drama. My audiences, kind from the first, grew ever more and more kind to me, and I felt among them as among friends. Now an end to all this had come—"the world seemed shattered at my feet." Engagements were offered to me in many theatres; in one case I was even asked to assume the office of directress. But I shrank from the responsibilities of such a position, and felt that, for my own interests as an artist, it was not well to allow myself to be hampered by them.



## CHAPTER VI.

FULL of difficulty as Miss Faucit's position was on finding herself thus unexpectedly flung upon her own resources, her conclusion was a wise one, and it was proved to be so by the result. From the hour of her first appearance until then the whole weight of every leading female character had rested on her shoulders. She had won her way to the hearts of her audiences, and left indelible impressions there. But for her assistance and power of attraction, Mr Macready could never have made his management of Drury Lane the success it was. But from him this fact never received any adequate recognition; and his predominating influence, while it pressed upon her spirits, cramped and hampered her freedom in working out the impulses of her own genius, and even her own methods of expression. "Now at length her soul had elbow room," and it only wanted a free field to win from the public elsewhere, as, under much embarrassing restraint, it had already done in London, a cordial recognition of its quality.

This she quickly found. She tells us, "It was with a sad heart I started on my first engagement out of London—for Mr Macready had always told me that it was in London I must make my home, as no provincial audience could care for or understand my style." Of his own style this was true enough, for in the provinces his popularity had for some time been on the wane. But how unjustly he rated the intelligence of provincial audiences, and their appreciation of fine acting, was very soon conclusively shown. Miss Faucit took Edinburgh first. "I had gone," she writes, "as I afterwards made it my rule to go, wherever I went, without any heralds in advance to proclaim my coming or to sound my praises." Her name even was unknown,

save to a very few, for Edinburgh being then a two days' journey from London, either by sea or road, travellers between these cities, except for business or from necessity, were few indeed. She even brought no personal introduction. Unknown to her, Charles Dickens wrote to his friend Sir William Allan, President of the Royal Scottish Academy, calling his attention to her in the following letter :—

DEVONSHIRE TERRACE,  
YORK GATE, REGENT'S PARK, 13th November 1843.

MY DEAR ALLAN,—I am very anxious to bespeak your kind offices in behalf of Miss Helen Faucit : a young lady who is a much esteemed friend of ours, and whose great abilities I hold in high regard. She is coming to Edinburgh to fulfil an engagement with Murray. If you and Miss Allan can come to know her in private, I will answer for your having real pleasure in her society, and for your not taxing me with overrating her excellent qualities. I am “very fond” of her, which I think—and as an Edinburgh citizen I *ought* to know—is good Lowlan' Scotch.

Kate unites in this, and in kind loves to Miss Allan and yourself.—Always,  
my dear Allan, faithfully your friend,  
CHARLES DICKENS.<sup>1</sup>

Sir William having the *entrée* to the stage of the Edinburgh theatre, lost no time in introducing himself to Miss Faucit, and welcoming her as a guest to his house. Dickens's letter, and one from her friend Mr M'lan to an intimate friend of my own, requesting him to call and show her what attention he could, was the medium of my own introduction to her.

Thus unheralded and unknown, she made her first appearance on the 14th of November 1843 as Pauline in *The Lady of Lyons*, and had, as she writes, “a sufficiently cold reception from a house far from full. However, the lessee and manager, Mr Murray—a man of great dramatic ability and many accomplishments, who acted Colonel Damas to my Pauline, the first night of my experience there, told me not to be disheartened. He felt sure, he said, I had taken hold of my audience, and that this was the only indifferent house before which I should ever have to act there. The event proved that he knew his public, for neither there or elsewhere did I ever play to an indifferently filled house. Of want of enthusiasm or of constancy in my provincial audiences

<sup>1</sup> Of this letter Miss Faucit was not aware, until I bought it a few years ago at an auction at Sotheby's.

no one could have had less reason to complain, nor had I ever occasion from that hour to be reminded of what Mr Macready had predicted."

The impression which she produced on Mr Murray himself was very great. He was in many ways a remarkable man. As "Will Murray" his name is a familiar one in Sir Walter Scott's Letters and Diaries. John Kemble said of him, "If you want information about anything special, ask Will Murray. If he cannot give it you himself, he will tell you where you can get it." He had treated me for years as a familiar friend, and, young as I then was, from him I learned much, that has been of great use to me, of human life and character, as well as of general literature, of which he had a fine and much-studied library. In speaking to me of Miss Faucit's Pauline, he told me the most remarkable thing he had ever known in his theatrical experience was the manner in which she responded to Damas's remark in the last scene of the *Lady of Lyons*, "You ought to be very happy." The one word "Happy!" is all she has to say, but the tone and look with which she said it so took his breath away the first time he played with her, that he had some difficulty to recover himself before he could reply. "Nothing," he said, "that I ever saw in Mrs Siddons or Miss O'Neill was so fine." Mr Murray had seen all the great actors of the century. He was a severe critic, and measured his praises very carefully. He placed Miss Faucit at the head of all the interpreters of Shakespeare's female characters. In one of the sparkling rhyming addresses, in writing which he was a close second to Garrick, he said of her—

"And Faucit realised what Shakespeare thought."

His remark as to her Pauline naturally struck me very forcibly, and whenever I saw the play, the piteous pathos of tone and look brought back to my remembrance what my old and most critical friend had said of its effect upon him.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> An anecdote which Murray told me of Scott is worth recording. Scott was in the habit of coming to the theatre once or twice a-week. One night after the play he came, as usual, to Murray's dressing-room. They had been playing some strong melodrama, in which a miser, creeping at midnight by stealth into his guest's bedroom, stole from his table a purse, or casket, or something of that kind. Scott was greatly excited, and dwelt upon the

It is difficult for me to speak of the effect produced by Miss Faucit on the Edinburgh audience on her first appearance among them. I had seen her act before, but only twice, at the Haymarket Theatre in September 1840, as Pauline and Rosalind. Having from my boyhood loved the theatre, and seen every star, male and female, that visited Edinburgh, from Edmund Kean onwards, I had standards in my mind by which to judge of acting, and even then I felt Miss Faucit's superiority to any actress of my time. But seeing her again after an interval of three years, the advance she had made in the mastery of her art filled me with surprise. She was no longer merely possessed by her genius, she possessed it thoroughly. There was no trace of effort anywhere. In each character the keynote struck at starting was developed with consistency throughout, and wound up into a perfect and harmonious close. One other conspicuous characteristic was this, that, whether speaking or silent, the impression she wished to convey of the character was quietly and steadily deepened. She was always *in* the part, always giving heed to what was being said or done. What she had to say was not something learned by rote. It seemed to come direct from her own brain, her own heart. Add to this a voice which could answer to the call of every emotion, from the most delicate feeling to the stormiest passion—a voice that bubbled up into the airiest playfulness, or deepened into the tenderest pathos. Nor less noticeable were her features, eloquent in all the variety of expression which the situation demanded; and, to complete all, a figure of perfect symmetry, that, when it moved, did so with an unconscious grace, which one felt no study could have produced. Beyond this, there was a charm in her personality, that spoke of a pure and lofty spirit, something so “pure womanly” that it filled men with reverence, while women were grateful for it, as showing to the world a fascinating type of what a woman could be. ✓

splendid effect of this incident. Not many months afterwards *The Fortunes of Nigel* appeared, in which Trapbois carries off the gold coin which Nigel had left upon his table, when brought back to him by Trapbois's daughter, and which Trapbois had seen lying there with other things that were of importance to the story. “I never had much doubt before,” said Murray, “who the Great Unknown was, but after that I had none.”



I was not long alone in so construing the gifts of the young artist, who had come among us a great surprise. Soon her reputation spread, and every night greater crowds flocked to the theatre, and went away to spread abroad the tidings, that something was to be seen there of a higher order than they had ever seen before. Admiration warmed into enthusiasm. Scholarly men, who had thought they knew their Shakespeare well, admitted that his creations had a light thrown by her upon them far beyond what they had dreamed. The usual theatrical criticisms of the journals were superseded by eloquent expositions of Miss Faucit's art, from pens accustomed to higher work, and, instead of the usual commonplace newspaper notices, one read in criticisms of her Juliet and Rosalind such passages as this: "Miss Faucit completes and illuminates the poet's conception. The singularly acute and subtle sympathy by which this complement is given to the work of the great dramatist produces an effect like that of sunlight upon some fair landscape—beautiful before the delicate and generous light flows over it, but, after, glowing with the very perfection of heretofore unimagined loveliness." Not only in her treatment of Shakespeare's women was this quality felt and recognised, but also in the heroines of modern writers, more especially in the Julia of *The Hunchback*, and in the Lady Mabel of Marston's *Patrician's Daughter*. How much, for example, the creative power of the actress enriched the play, was shown by the way in which her performance of the latter character reconciled her audience to all the defects of the author's work. How the play was received when first produced has already been mentioned, but I am tempted to deal with it more in detail by my remembrance of the profound effect which it produced upon the Edinburgh audience.

The characters are a diplomatic Earl, Lady Lydia Lynterne, his sister, a lady proud of her Norman descent, holding puddle-blood in the profoundest contempt; Lady Mabel, the Earl's daughter, a high-souled girl, whose nature is too sincere and strong to be governed by the conventional regard for rank and title in which she has been nurtured; Mordaunt, a rising politician, sprung from the middle ranks, a great orator and writer on the Liberal side. Mordaunt has been invited by the Earl to his country seat, with

the view of gaining him over to the Conservatives, to whom he is becoming rather troublesome. Here he meets Mabel, and is thrown much into contact with her. The usual result follows. They fall deeply in love with each other. The scheming aunt determines to defeat the possibility of marriage. With this view she shows Mordaunt a letter, which she tells him is written by Mabel, making confession of her love, and urges him, upon the strength of this avowal, to appeal to the Earl for his consent to their union. She then proceeds to inform Mabel, that Mordaunt has been making a boast of his easy conquest, and has gone to the Earl to claim her hand as the price of his apostasy from his political party. Mabel is stung with hurt pride at this "presuming arrogance" and audacious chaffering for her hand. While in this mood she is sent for to the library of the Earl, where, upon Mordaunt declaring his love and the encouragement she had given it, she replies :—

"This is too much ;  
Whate'er my kindness meant, it did not mean  
To foster your presumption, though perhaps  
Suspecting it, and lacking at the time  
Better employment, I allowed it scope—  
Did not repress it harshly, and, amused,  
Rather than angered, failed to put a bound  
To its extravagance."

His reply gives the keynote to the tragedy :—

"You had no other toy, so took my heart  
To wile away an hour. The plaything broke,  
But then it was amusement."

Needless to say, the course this scene takes is, in the last degree, improbable. A word, which in real life must certainly have been spoken, would have shattered Lady Lynterne's flimsy artifice. This, however, was soon forgotten as one watched Miss Faucit in the powerful scene which succeeds, where Mabel's momentary disdain gives way before an eloquent appeal by Mordaunt. Not a word was spoken by her ; but the expression of haughty scorn softening into the consciousness of injustice, and thence passing into the despair of hopeless contrition, was more eloquent than words.

Five years elapse. Mordaunt is now a baronet, and high in office. In some unexplained way he is about to be married to Lady Mabel. The marriage party is assembled, the bride ready, when Mordaunt declares he will not wed, and in a long grandiloquent speech gives as the reason for his decision the slight he had suffered five years before, ending with these words :—

“As for this lady—she has never loved me,  
Nor have I lately sought to win her love ;  
I would not wreak on her such wretchedness  
As she caused me for pastime ! I have done,  
My mission is fulfilled.”

The author, no doubt, meant his Mordaunt to pass as a very superior specimen of the Radical of that time ; but every right-minded spectator, Radical or no Radical, must have thought him utterly contemptible. The author himself, Miss Faucit told me, owned to her he felt his mistake, when he marked the expression of her face, as she sat by the table listening to this monstrous avowal from the man to whom she had given her heart. He had meant Mordaunt to command sympathy ; it now flashed on him, that all the sympathy was for the woman.

In the fifth act Mabel is dying, broken in heart and abased in spirit. Her aunt, stricken with remorse, confesses her fiendish device. The Earl, in the hope that a reconciliation may save his daughter's life, repairs to Mordaunt to explain all, and beg him to come to her. What follows may be divined. The lovers, whose lives have been blighted by pride and a fatal mistake, understand each other only on the verge of the grave ; and Mabel dies in Mordaunt's arms with the words, “I am happy—very happy.” The performance was thus summed up by the *Edinburgh Observer* (November 28, 1843) :—

The play has many merits, and many grave faults, but the beauty of the last act atones for all. As to Miss Faucit's performance we feel how inadequate our pen is to approach the subject. Fine throughout, in the last act it becomes magnificent. It took the house by storm. They seemed to forget that it was but acting ; and, for ourselves, the feeling that possessed us was “too deep for tears.” There was not one heart in the house that did not bow down before the resistless power of the actress. Who that has seen the gradual wasting of a beloved form—the fitful smiles passing across a beloved cheek—or felt the agony of waking from a delusion that has immolated the

love of years, but must have felt a choking and tugging at the heart in witnessing the awful truth of the two last scenes—for awful they certainly were in their terrible truthfulness? The genius that could produce such results—for the author has small share in the matter—is undeniably of the highest order, and akin to that of a true poet. True, her inspiration may not be penned; her influence will die with the generation that sees her. But that she has the poet's creative gift was well shown in the electrical cheers in which the highly wrought feelings of the audience found vent at the end of the play. There was not a person, from the front of the pit to the back of the gallery, but sprang to his feet in homage to the rare talents of the actress. What better tribute could be offered?

Gladly would Mr Murray have extended Miss Faucit's engagement, but Glasgow, hearing of the sensation she had produced, had obtained her promise to go there early in December. The metropolis of the West was very early stirred by her to an enthusiasm quite as great as she had awakened in Edinburgh. The theatre was crowded nightly, and the more the actress was seen, the warmer was the recognition of the freshness and originality of her conceptions and the infinite variety of her impersonations.

Increased familiarity [says the *Glasgow Herald*] with her beautiful delineations of female character, instead of satiating the mind by a monotonous uniformity, has only deepened the original impression of her genius, by exhibiting the versatility of its range as well as the nicety of its discernment. In most of the characters she has yet personated there has been a certain degree of similarity, inasmuch as they have been composed of nearly the same feelings and passions—as peace, love, honour, pride, despair—the one merging naturally in the other, and all developed by the same process of simple, chaste, dignified, and earnest acting. To *The Lady of Lyons*, *The Hunchback*, and *The Wife*, this remark is more particularly applicable; and yet we cannot conceive anything more entirely distinct than were the characters of Pauline, Julia, and Mariana in Miss Faucit's hands. In each we recognised the same elevation of soul, distinguishing the heroine as one of Nature's gentlewomen; but there was an individuality in the entire conception and development of each, which rendered it a perfect and distinct portrait.

Again, the *Constitutional*, speaking of her Julia in *The Hunchback*, writes:—

If ever the author found a fitting representative of his pure and high-souled creation, it was, without doubt, in Miss Faucit. No other actress we have seen attempt it *sustained* (if we may so speak) the character throughout, as we saw it delineated on Tuesday evening. All was real, all was faultless. From her introduction to the audience as the innocent and gentle May-day



Queen—through the giddy scenes of the metropolis—till the *dénouement*, we see exhibited the self-same loving, faithful, trusting Julia. Nothing seemed too trifling or to be omitted in giving effect to the character. Her cultivated and flexible genius discerns as much in a look, a sigh, a movement, as in the loftiest points of declamation. The ardent gaze and deep-drawn sigh bestowed on the frittered remains of the letter of the discarded Clifford were admirably introduced, and brought down the rapturous approbation of the entire theatre. No less effective was the manner and tone in hurling the withering denunciation at the devoted Helen, “Helen, *I hate you!*” It is in these minor incidents, heightened as they are by high poetic feeling, that Miss Faucit so pre-eminently succeeds in absorbing the attention—kindling the fancy and enlisting the sensibilities. Her acting in the two last acts was powerfully grand. The scene with Clifford, where she renews her allegiance to his affection, was thrilling in the extreme; while her fierce and imperative command to the Hunchback to devise some speedy means to set aside the impending nuptials, was given with a power of action and utterance we have never seen equalled.

Of this appeal to the Hunchback—always, in Miss Faucit’s treatment, on the highest level of impassioned declamation—another journal (the *Glasgow Citizen*), after an elaborate analysis of the whole performance, writes: “The high clear tone of nervous passion, the emphasis given to every word, and the grandeur of the concluding burst, presented a magnificent picture of distraction and desperate resolve.”

Miss Faucit, however, does not aim at detached points. Her bursts of passion, in which feminine delicacy is combined with intense power, arise naturally, and are always in harmony with the general picture. The details of her acting are studiously regulated by the conception she has formed of the character represented; and the oneness with which each impersonation is thus invested, constitutes, it will be found, its lasting charm. Above all, she is in earnest. She has attained that point in her profession, reserved only for the highest talent, at which the audience seems to be wholly forgotten, and the actor *feels* rather than *imitates* the varying emotions depicted.

The story of Miss Faucit’s early career shows that this was, from the first, the great distinction of her impersonations. They spoke to others’ hearts, because to herself they were living realities. “From the heart to the heart!” wrote Beethoven at the opening of his first Mass, when he had finished it,—an aspiration that was always hers, in the exercise of her art. Another Glasgow critic writes of her: “It is because Miss Faucit’s acting, not only as a whole, but in all its minor and minute

parts is *true to nature*, that she carries the feelings of all along with her, so that we really imagine we are spectators of a real scene, whether that scene be gay or grave, one of sweet and sparkling artlessness, or lofty and terrible sublimity." He then alludes to the scene of Lady Mabel's death, and asks, "Who that has looked upon this, but has thought he beheld a real scene—it was indeed appallingly true to nature, and can never be forgotten." As it struck her friend Mr M'lan the first night she played it in London (see p. 102 *ante*), so it struck all her audiences elsewhere.

Already Miss Faucit must have pretty well seen how mistaken was Mr Macready's discouraging assurance that her acting would never be understood in the provinces. But further proofs of his mistake were crowded upon her, not only by her warmly appreciative audiences, but also by such passages as the following, which are quoted from others of the Glasgow journals:—

With a countenance expressive of intellectual power—and flexibility of feature for all the exquisite shades of evanescent thought—she unites grace and witchery of movement, that steals upon the audience, and seals their eyes and ears to all but the living, breathing character which she at the moment represents. There is an originality and purity in all she does that stamps her with the die of genius, and leaves her incomparable with aught save her own excellences. The rich thrilling notes of her voice harmonise admirably with the graces of her person and the intellectual beauty of her countenance, and altogether one is apt to rejoice over this ennobled specimen of humanity, and to feel thankful that he has been permitted to witness the bright creations of a Shakespeare's fancy realised in the person of Miss Helen Faucit.

The same writer, in another notice, calls attention to a moral influence, over and above mere admiration, which her impersonations exercised, in wakening up the souls of her audience to a sense of higher aims and higher duties. "There is," he writes, "a contagious elevation of thought and purity of sentiment proceeding from this young lady, which, next to devotion itself, tends powerfully to confirm man in the paths of virtue, and to secure him a great boon—a greater love of his species—by contemplating the unscathed portions of female character, brought to the eye and mind with all the fascination of genius." This was undoubtedly the case. People saw in her not only a great

actress. They felt themselves in the presence of one who was in herself the ideal woman of whom poets had written, and some of them had dreamed, who had "wedded herself to things of light," and whose power to move them was felt to spring from the habits of earnest thought and a pure and noble life. Unconsciously to herself, she had worked upon the principle expressed by Milton—a principle which is no less applicable to actors than to poets—"that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem, that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things."<sup>1</sup> Thus it was, that into all her impersonations she infused a tone of refinement and distinction, which indicated a life devoted to the pursuit of "the best and honourablest things," and which acted as a stimulus to those who came under her influence, either on the stage or in private life, to look into their own hearts, and to obey the impulses of their higher nature. There were not a few, within my own knowledge, the tone and tenor of whose lives were changed for the better, from seeing her then, and in her subsequent repeated visits to Scotland. Among young men especially the effect was conspicuous. For example, a dashing handsome man of some three-and-twenty said to me about this time, "Martin, I did not know I had a soul, till I saw Helen Faucit."

Her Rosalind not only delighted, but surprised her audiences in Edinburgh and Glasgow—surprised, that she who had thrilled them in tragedy could gladden them to the core in comedy; and delighted, because she showed them a Rosalind—Shakespeare's very own—which all their reading had never led them even to surmise. "Sir," an old St Andrews Professor said to me, when long years after I, then Lord Rector, sat beside him as she gave a reading of "As You Like It" to the students of the University—"Sir, she *discovered* Rosalind!" To myself, as to others, it was a discovery, my sense of which found its way into some verses, which, having been published at the time, have been often

<sup>1</sup> It would not be amiss were the actors of the present to take to heart the words, much in the same sense, of the great French tragic actress Clairon: "L'acteur tragique doit s'approprier dans sa vie habituelle le ton, le maintien dont il a plus besoin au theatre; rien n'est aussi puissant que l'habitude."



referred to since, as being in a manner prophetic. They were written the morning after I had seen the play in Glasgow. The original MS., dated 23rd December 1843, lies before me. It shows they were written with a flying pen, without the correction or alteration of a word, just as they are here given:—

TO ROSALIND.

Blessings on the glorious spirit, lies in poesy divine !  
 Blessings, lady, on the magic of that wondrous power of thine !  
 I have had a dream of summer, summer in the golden time,  
 When the heart had all its freshness, and the world was in its prime ;  
 I have been away in Arden, and I still am ranging there ;  
 Still I feel the forest breezes fan my cheek, and lift my hair ;  
 Still I hear the stir and whisper which the arching branches make,  
 And the leafy stillness broken by the deer amid the brake !  
 Where along the wood the brooklet runs, upon its mossy brink,  
 Myself a stricken deer I've laid me, where the stricken came to drink.  
 There be Amiens and his co-mates, up, yon giant stems between,  
 Yonder, where the sun is shining 'neath the oak upon the green.  
 Hark ! the throstle-cock is singing ! And he turns his merry note,  
 Carolling in emulation of the sweet bird's joyous throat.  
 Lightly let them troll their wood notes, fleet the careless time away !  
 What know they of love's emotion ? No sweet Rosalind have they !  
 I will down by yonder dingle—none shall steal upon us there—  
 Heavenly, heavenly Rosalinda ! Thou art with me everywhere !  
 Ever is thy voice beside me, ever on thy brow I gaze,  
 One such glorious dream about thee all the world beside outweighs.  
 See, young Ganymede awaits me. Blessings on that roguish boy,  
 How he lightens my love's sadness with a sweet and pensive joy !  
 Yet the charms, the playful graces, that show bright in him, I find,  
 Only cluster round the image of my heavenly Rosalind.  
 So would Rosalind have won me,—so have look'd and so have smiled,  
 With such blithe and open spirit me of all my heart beguiled.  
 Ever deeper grows my passion, restless more my eager heart—  
 "I can live no more by thinking,<sup>1</sup> from my Rosalind apart !"  
 "Then to-morrow thou shalt see her, see her, wed her, if you will !"  
 Oh, ye gods, let that to-morrow shine in golden numbers still !  
 For it gave her to my bosom, and, at length, when there reclined,  
 By the proudest name I claim'd her as my own, "my Rosalind !"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "*Orlando*. I can live no longer by thinking.

"*Rosalind*. I will weary you, then, no longer by talking. . . . If you do love Rosalind so near your heart as your gesture cries it out, when your brother marries Aliena, shall you marry her."—*As You Like It*, Act v. sc. 2.

<sup>2</sup> "*Orlando*. If there be truth in sight, you are my Rosalind."—*As You Like It*, Act v. sc. 4.



Such, dear lady, was the vision, such the passion strong and deep,  
Which thy magic wrought within me, laying meaner thoughts to sleep.  
I have been the young Orlando, and, though but a dream it were,  
Never from my heart shall vanish what hath struck so deeply there !

Little could I have imagined, as I wrote, that what was then a young man's dream was in time to become a blessed reality. The poem has no value, except as showing that I had divined the idea which inspired Miss Faucit's treatment of the character. From her "Letter on Rosalind" this is very clear:—

No one can study this play without seeing that, through the guise of the brilliant-witted boy, Shakespeare meant the charm of the high-hearted woman, strong, tender, delicate, to make itself felt. Hence it is, that Orlando finds the spell, which "heavenly Rosalind" had thrown around him, drawn hourly closer and closer, he knows not how, while at the same time he has himself been winning his way more and more into his mistress's heart. Thus, when at last Rosalind doffs her doublet and hose, and appears arrayed for her bridal, there seems nothing strange or unmeet in this somewhat sudden consummation of what has been in truth a lengthened wooing. The actress will, in my opinion, fail signally in her task, who shall not suggest all this, who shall not leave upon her audience the impression, that, when Rosalind resumes her state at her father's court, she will bring into it as much grace and dignity, as by her bright spirits she had brought of sunshine and cheerfulness into the shades of the forest of Arden.

During the winter of 1844 Miss Faucit was engaged and re-engaged both in Edinburgh and Glasgow, for the houses she drew were so great, that the managers were naturally reluctant to let her go. To the characters performed in her first engagements she added Imogen, Portia, and Nina Zforza, all of which were received with no less enthusiasm than their predecessors. In the play of *Nina Zforza* she had the advantage—no slight one—of being supported by Mr Glover, son of his celebrated actress-mother,<sup>1</sup> and he had seen in London, and profited by having seen, Mr Macready as Ugone Spinola. She selected Mr Leigh Murray, then in his novitiate as a member of the Edinburgh company, to play Raphael Doria,—a part for which he was well fitted by his youth and handsome presence. It was the first important part of this nature he had ever played, and he was grateful to her for giving him the opportunity of playing it, and

<sup>1</sup> See p. 79, *ante*.

not less so for the pains she took in showing him how to treat it. He played it well, and this performance helped to open up for him the career in which he afterwards excelled.

In the character of Nina Zforza the range of emotions is very great, from the joyousness of a happy bride, through disillusion and suffering, to a tragic close. Miss Faucit's appearance in it was thus spoken of by an Edinburgh journal (March 6, 1844):—

The trustful innocence, the deep fondness, and the purity of Nina could nowhere have met with a better representative; and the contrast between the feminine softness of her native character, and the withering scorn that flashed from her eye, and seemed to dilate her frame, as she denounced the traducer of her husband, was—not effective, that is a weak word—but positively appalling. We dare hardly trust ourselves, even now, to dwell upon the last scene, the excitement of which was so great that the audience rose *en masse*, and continued cheering until Miss Faucit appeared before the curtain to acknowledge their applause.

The Glasgow journals were equally warm in its praise. They had also to speak of her Belvidera, then played there for the first time, of which the *Citizen* (April 24, 1844) writes: "It was a touching and very forcible picture. Indeed, the closing scenes struck us as almost too terrible. The madness of Ophelia is beautiful, that of Lear sublime, but Belvidera's madness appeared to us too literal and painful a portraiture of mental wreck and prostration." How strangely true it was to nature there will be occasion hereafter to show, when dealing with the performance of Belvidera in Dublin, and yet Miss Faucit had never at any time seen real madness.

Before she left Scotland she played for two nights in Dundee.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> When in the neighbourhood of Dundee in September 1899, I met an intelligent old Scotch lady of the middle class, who had then seen her. This lady's parents were of the number of those to whom theatres were dens of wickedness; but her brother and herself heard so much of the young actress, that they went by stealth to see her play. She had laughed her friends to scorn, when they told her, that she would be moved to tears. "But," said the good old dame, "I wasna lang there before the tears were running down my cheeks in streams," and then she passed into glowing praises of Miss Faucit's voice, her grace of movement, and the beauty of her expression, as if she had seen her within a week. What she saw in 1844 had become a cherished memory of her life.

On leaving Edinburgh, where by this time she was much courted in the best society, she was under promise to return soon. Meanwhile she had to seek rest in the South, and returned to London, playing a few nights in Newcastle on her way. The fatigue of acting in Scotland had been greatly augmented by the long and laborious rehearsals. Hitherto these had been superintended by Mr Macready, and others of great experience. The actors of Covent Garden, the Haymarket, and Drury Lane were also among the best in the dramatic profession, and accustomed to the performance of the higher drama. In the provincial theatres this was not the case. Consequently, the burden of preparing at rehearsal for the performances of the evening devolved greatly upon Miss Faucit, for it was, then and always, her desire to bring those who acted with her up to the highest point their abilities could reach. To do this she spared no pains, and a rehearsal was thus often more exhausting than the actual performance.

She returned, however, to London with a much lighter heart than she had left it, for she had proved that the audiences of the North were no less kind to her than had been those of London, and that she had herself made material progress in her art. After a short stay in London she accepted an engagement in Cork, for the month of August. Here the Scottish successes were repeated. Crowds filled the theatre, and the natural eloquence of the Irish overflowed into poetry as well as excellent criticism. Here, for the third time, she played Lady Macbeth. The *Cork Examiner* speaks of it as

A terrible embodiment of a terrible conception. From the first sudden murderous impulse to the last scene, in which remorse achieves a victory over her undaunted soul, the character was sustained boldly, powerfully, truthfully. It was a grand performance. We cannot avoid mentioning one fact creditable to the fine taste of Miss Faucit. In the last scene, where Lady Macbeth walks in her sleep, revealing her blood-stained soul, Miss Faucit totally avoided "points," even where they could have been most effective; and perhaps it was this chasteness of delineation which so chilled the horror-stricken audience. For ourselves, we felt as if a being of another world stood before our corporeal senses; and we acknowledged its presence by an all-over chill, as if a cold wind passed through the very heart.

The Cork public had also the good fortune to see her in the character of Ophelia, which she never had an opportunity of re-



peating on this side the Channel. She had a special reason for playing this character, as well as that of Lady Macbeth, by way of rehearsal, as she had undertaken to perform both in Paris in the course of the following autumn. Mr Macready, who was then in America, had been engaged by Mr Mitchell of Bond Street to give a course of performances at the Salle Ventadour, upon the understanding that Miss Faucit was to appear in each of the plays selected, he, on the other hand, playing in two of the pieces in which she played the leading parts. She looked forward with pleasant anticipation to acting again with her former manager and friend, believing the pleasure would be mutual.

Among the characters she had consented to play were Lady Macbeth and Ophelia. Lady Macbeth she had only played twice. She naturally wished to feel more at home in the part before appearing in it before a Parisian audience. Ophelia is a part which no English manager would ever have dreamed of asking a leading actress to play, it having been for years thought only good enough for the singing lady of the theatre.<sup>1</sup> But entertaining, as Miss Faucit did, a very different idea of what Shakespeare intended, she at once consented, when asked to play Ophelia to Mr Macready's Hamlet. She had, indeed, long before made a careful study of the character. It had a peculiar fascination for her, because of the injustice which she thought had been done to it, not only on the stage, but also by commentators and critics. She therefore gladly availed herself of the opportunity, when in Cork, of making trial of the part, and so preparing herself for the anxious ordeal which awaited her in Paris. "I played Ophelia last night," she wrote to me on the 13th July, "as an experiment. How I wish you had been present! I can form no idea of the impression it made. I have no one to tell me of my failures. How sadly I miss a discerning and analytic critic. Those who may be so here I know nothing of. Mr —— thinks it all good, and that is so tiresome. I was terribly frightened, and my voice trembled excessively. Still I might perhaps get over this, and

<sup>1</sup> For example, in John Kemble's farewell performance of *Hamlet*, Miss Stephens, best of ballad-singers, afterwards the Countess of Essex, was the Ophelia. Charming as she was then and to the end of her long life, one could never imagine her as having ever been Shakespeare's Ophelia.



then I think I could do something with it. I think I told you how anxious they were for me to do it in Paris, but it would be a sad thing to make a failure there, would it not?" It will be seen presently how groundless were her fears.

From Cork Miss Faucit went to Limerick, and, after playing a few nights there, she spent her holiday-time at the Killarney Lakes, and afterwards in the neighbourhood of Cork, until she had to return to London to prepare for her Paris engagement.

## CHAPTER VII.

THE performances in Paris were originally announced to begin on November the 18th, 1844, but, owing to Mr Macready's absence, they were postponed to the end of the month, by which time he was expected to arrive from America. Miss Faucit, accompanied by a lady friend, arrived in Paris on the 26th. Four hours of a stormy crossing from Folkestone, and twenty-four hours in a diligence, in weather of unusual severity, developed a cold in her always delicate chest, which lasted throughout her stay in Paris. Owing to some personal accident Mr Macready did not arrive there till late in December. "He called upon me," Miss Faucit wrote to me, "the day after his arrival, made all sorts of inquiries, and expressed much pleasure at the reports he had heard of me when I was in Scotland. He said, Mr Mitchell had made a great mistake in engaging us together,—that we should have played in separate engagements. He is very gentle and subdued, and at present exceedingly amiable to all." At no time was Mr Macready tolerant of a rival attraction, and what he had, no doubt, heard of the reputation Miss Faucit had made for herself in Scotland was well calculated to make him uneasy. This uneasiness must have been greatly increased, as night after night Miss Faucit roused the enthusiasm of the French audience; and his "gentleness and amiability" seem to have been soon succeeded by "a desire to keep everything and everybody else down, and to submerge all things into that important centre, Self." Regarding Mr Macready, as Miss Faucit did, with high and almost affectionate esteem, he must have completely lost control of his overbearing temper in the course of this engagement, to make her write thus at its close: "Either Mr Macready has grown more

selfish and exacting, or I am less capable of bearing with such ungenerous conduct. In either case I am far better away from him."

It could not have been pleasant to him to find, that, speaking of Othello, the first play in which they appeared together, the most authoritative of French critics, M. Edouard Thierry, should say in the *Messenger*, "Before the close of the evening, the public divided its attention between Othello and Desdemona. It had become aware, that London had sent it something more than a great tragedian, and that it had also sent a great *tragédienne*." Miss Faucit's appearance had been heralded by no newspaper paragraphs, by none of the highly coloured panegyrics, by which the French were accustomed to have their attention called to actresses of any distinction. But as M. Thierry writes, "True talent has no need of these editorial and managerial prelusions; unknown before the performance, Miss Faucit was so no longer from the fourth act onward. After the fifth, she was recalled with Macready. She had become as one of our own actresses—a truly French actress." He finds in her a voice like that of Madame Mars. Higher praise in that direction no Frenchman could give. Her singular grace of movement reminds him of Fanny Ellsler, and, when she speaks, "the voice," he says, "is specially in accord with this grace, the sweetness of the organ fits in well with this harmony of demeanour and of the whole person." He is struck by the contrast of her declamation to that of Macready. His he finds to be over-elaborate and over-accentuated, in what he calls the English manner, by the stress laid upon every syllable, while Miss Faucit speaks simply, naturally, the sentences flowing from her lips fluently and without a break. The Parisian press generally wrote of her in the same strain. The charm of her movements was so great, that the audience wanted to see her, even when she had not to speak. Thus, a writer in *Blackwood*<sup>1</sup> says she remembers "Jules Janin's indignation at Macready's standing before her during the appeal made by Desdemona to the Senate, so that with his ample robe he completely hid the beautiful kneeling figure behind him. I remember, that Jules Janin

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in a paper on "Helen Faucit" in *Blackwood's Magazine* for December 1885, by Miss Margaret Stokes.

called him, in his review of the performance in the *Débats*, ‘Ce grand *paravent* de Macready!’ I also remember,” the same writer adds, “her dresses as Desdemona were highly praised, and declared to be the correct historical costume.”

Here is her own modest account of the evening in a letter to me (December 22, 1844): “On Monday I was too ill to attend rehearsal, and many doubts my doctor had, if I could act at night. Still, Desdemona is so easy, that I managed very well, and my share of the play went off very successfully, they tell me. I am sick with hearing of costumes and coiffures. The people here seem to think and dream of nothing else. I am surprising everybody with my comparative indifference to these matters. I hear I satisfied them on Monday night in this respect—nay, indeed, that men and women agreed that (to use their own expression) I looked like an angel.”

The next play produced was *Hamlet*. In the letter just quoted she writes: “Mr Macready saw me rehearse Ophelia yesterday morning, and expressed great admiration at my original feeling and conception of the part, but, alas! alas! goodness only knows what it will be like to-night. I will not close this till the morning.” In the morning she adds: “The mad scenes went off very well, the singing part of them especially. . . . There are some new thoughts in it, that were particularly felt, but which I cannot now describe. If we ever meet and talk it over, I can make you feel with me. It is extraordinary how I felt my strength when left alone. I was ill with fright beforehand, but away it went when I faced the enemy—at least it was overborne by the necessities of the scene.”

Writing of this first performance in August, 1880 (“Letter on Ophelia”), Miss Faucit says:—

Oh how difficult it is, however much you have lived in a thing, to make real your own ideal, and give it an utterance and form! To add to my fright, I was told, just before entering on the scene, that Grisi and many others of the Italian group were sitting in a private box on the stage. But I believe I sang in tune, and I know I soon forgot Grisi and all else. I could not help feeling that I somehow drew my audience with me. And what an audience it was! No obtrusive, noisy applause; but what an indescribable atmosphere of sympathy surrounded you! Every tone was heard, every look was watched, felt, appreciated. I seemed lifted into “an ampler ether,



a diviner air." . . . I learned afterwards that, among the audience were many of the finest minds in Paris; and some of them found "most pretty things" to say of the Ophelia to which I had introduced them. Many came after the play to my dressing-room, in the French fashion, among them Georges Sand—to say them, I suppose; but, having had this ordeal to go through before, after acting Desdemona, my English shyness took me out of the theatre as soon as I had finished. All this was, of course, pleasant. But what really gratified me most was, to learn that Mr Macready, sternest of critics, watched me on each night in the scenes of the fourth act; and among the kind things he said, I cannot forget his telling me that I had thrown a new light on the part, and that he had never seen the mad scenes even approached before.

The correspondent of the *Illustrated London News* (December 28, 1844) writes:—

Miss Faucit's Ophelia is a remarkable performance. She cannot, of course, sing the music with the finish of a *prima donna*—Shakespeare never intended that it should be so sung. The snatches of tunes are the components of tragic and of lyric passion, and so Miss Faucit used rather than executed them. But her voice is sweet and plaintive, and fully serves her to do what she requires. For the acting, nothing more true or tender has been given on the stage since the highest triumphs of Miss O'Neill—accordingly, though many heartily applauded, more as heartily wept. A critic in the *Charivari* gives us the best account of her powers in saying that it would be impossible to produce effect with less effort; and this is, beyond all doubt, the perfection of art.

The writer in *Blackwood* already quoted says:—

The last time I ever saw Alexandre Dumas we talked of Miss Faucit, and the tears stood in his eyes as he recalled her Ophelia, and her farewell to the company in the mad scene: "*Ah, madame, cette sortie! cette sortie! jamais je ne l'oublierai de ma vie.*" He was not gifted with perseverance, and yet he went to every performance, and could recount the emotions of every scene in which Miss Faucit appeared. "*Elle me fait rever—elle m'inspire toujours des créations nouvelles!*" was the reason he gave to his friends, who wondered at what they called the *bonhomie* with which he would spend whole evenings in listening to what he could not understand. . . . Dumas did not understand a word of English; but he asserted that he could follow the artist through every phase of emotion by her wonderfully expressive play of feature alone.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dumas was so deeply impressed by the genius of Miss Faucit that he was extremely anxious to write a play for her. "The subject was to be the intrigue to prevent the marriage of the Duke of Orleans with the daughter of Charles I.—Henriette d'Angleterre—a rôle admirably fitted for Miss Faucit. Dumas, in his enthusiasm, once exclaimed in my hearing, "There

This reminds one of what was said of Barton Booth, "The blind could see, and the deaf hear him"; and of Garrick, that "his face was a language."

The critic of the *Révue Britannique* writes :—

Quelle tragédienne simple et vraie que Miss Helen Faucit ! Quelle tendresse à la fois passionnée et pure ! Que d'abandon et de pudeur ! Comme elle vous fait aimer et plaindre la naïve innocence de Desdemona ! Comme elle vous révèle tout ce qu'il y a de poésie dans la démente d'Ophélie ! Dans ce dernier rôle, la pantomime, l'expressions du visage et les intonations de la voix en disent plus que les vers et la prose de Shakespeare ! Aussi les spectateurs les plus étrangers à la langue Anglaise ont pu y apprécier une tragédienne qui était tout-à-fait inconnue en France. Sans blesser l'amour propre d'aucune actrice de Paris, il est permis de leur dire à toutes : Allez voir et étudier la folie d'Ophélie.

In speaking of the Ophelia, M. Edouard Thierry notes that avoidance of anything like personal prominence, that quality of the subordination of self to the development of the scene, which was always paramount with Miss Faucit :—

On n'avait imaginé Ophélie ni plus touchante, ni plus gracieuse. Notre parterre Français est demeuré surpris devant cette pantomime pleine de sens, pleine d'idées, pleine de bonté, pleine de tendresses, pleine de passion même, mais surtout pleine de mesure et pleine de modestie. Car c'est là une qualité rare ; aussi je reviens sur cet éloge ; il y a dans Miss Faucit, et à un degré éminent, ce que j'appelle la modestie de l'artiste, ce désintéressement précieux par lequel l'artiste préfère l'art à lui-même, et le succès du drame à son propre succès. Quel que soit le rôle, quelle que soit la scène, Miss Faucit prend sa place dans la perspective du tableau, dans l'ensemble de l'œuvre, et cette place elle la garde jusqu'à la fin, sans chercher à sortir de la demi-teinte nécessaire ; disparaissant même au besoin dans l'ombre que le poète a ménagée.

This characteristic must have been especially conspicuous in Miss Faucit's Virginia in the *Virginus* of Sheridan Knowles, which was the next character performed by her in Paris. "It is one of those parts," writes M. Thierry, "which none of our artists would willingly accept. Written, it contains scarcely sixty lines. Acted, it assists the duration of the first four acts, to disappear

is not an actress on the French stage—no, nor yet among the great ladies of the Court—whose voice, look, and gesture could represent the royal princess so well as Helen Faucit. Her very tread is that of royalty."—(Writer in *Blackwood* already cited.)

in the fifth, and, while present to the action, it serves only to furnish to the other characters their dramatic effects." But even under these circumstances Miss Faucit, he says, found one of her most legitimate triumphs.

No contrast more marked to the gentle, hapless Virginia could be imagined than Lady Macbeth, in which she was next announced to appear. Writing to me (January 5, 1845) she says, that "the last performance will be on the 17th, and *Macbeth*, which is done to-morrow, the last play produced. My *own* parts, therefore, which were to be of my own selection, we shall not arrive at. Well! Imperfectly as I shall be known here, I hope not to leave an unfavourable impression." How little, when she wrote this, could she have known of what all the Paris journals were writing about her! She goes on to say:—

"My sweet old friend and adorer, M. de Fresne, seems enchanted with his 'sweet pet lamb,' as he calls me. But he is horrified that his lamb should be converted into the wolf, 'Lady Macbeth,' and I am sure that he has made up his mind not to admire me in it. You would smile to hear of the 'adorable' sweetness and beauty of my nature, as it impresses him. It seems really painful to him, that even in a fictitious character I should for an instant forsake it. . . .

"I waited until after last night's performance to tell you how I got through, and to-day I have been so beset by visitors, that it was impossible to finish my letter in time for post. I had my usual amount of fear last night, and, I suppose from not having acted with Mr Macready for some time in any important part, I had more than my usual amount of depression; but, in spite of all his, what I cannot but feel, desire to keep everything and everybody down, and subordinate all things to that one important centre, self, I have every reason to think, that I made a good impression on the audience. My reception at the end, for he never offered to take me on with him, was much greater, they tell me, than his, and I hear he is in great disgrace with the Parisian public for his, to say the least, discourtesy. They received me with cheers, a miracle for the French public."

All that Mr Macready has to say of the performance in his published *Diary* is: "*January 6.*—Acted *Macbeth*, in my opinion



better than it has ever been done before. The house was deeply attentive, but did not give the quantity of applause which such a performance would have elicited in England." Two days afterwards, the play having been repeated, he writes, "The audience applauded Miss Faucit's sleeping scene more than anything else in the whole play."

Her Lady Macbeth produced a profound and lasting impression on the Parisian audience. The surprise was general, that the same actress, who had charmed them in Ophelia, Desdemona, and Virginia, should rise to the tragic height, which the character demanded. How strong the feeling was and how deep the impression, may be seen from what M. Regnier of the Comédie Française, a fine actor himself and most accomplished critic, wrote to me more than thirty years afterwards:—

Je n'ai jamais revu ou relu *Othello* ou *Hamlet*, sans me rappeler ce que Lady Martin fût dans Desdemona et dans Ophelia ; et toujours j'ai conservé dans mon esprit, comme un de mes plus frappants souvenirs dramatiques, la représentation où, pour la première fois (à Paris du moins), elle joua le rôle de Lady Macbeth. Elle sût y montrer une autorité, une maturité de talent, qui cadrait peu avec ses jeunes années, et je fus heureux alors, comme il me semble qu'elle en dût être flattée, de lui voir recueillir des éloges si justes et si éclatants, tant de la part du public qui sent, qui de la part du public qui juge.

This view is thus confirmed by the writer in *Blackwood*, who lived in the midst of the leading literary circles in Paris:—

The Paris public were most of all moved by Miss Faucit's performance of Lady Macbeth. The whole conception was new to the critics. The reading of the letter first claimed attention, and became the cause of controversy. I rather think it was Madame Émile Girardin, in her husband's journal, who gave the most popular account of the performance. The last time I ever saw her at her own house, she spoke of the Lady Macbeth ; and described the retiring from the banquet scene, when Lady Macbeth leads Macbeth from the table, but never once looking at him, turning aside her head, as if in dread of meeting his glance. "What a splendid inspiration ! No French actress would ever have thought of that," she exclaimed ; and she then attempted to imitate the wonderful grace with which Miss Faucit bent her neck. "*Quelle grâce, et surtout quelle souplesse !*" she exclaimed. "*Jamais nous n'avons eu cela ici !*" And then she went on to speculation—whether Shakespeare had inspired Miss Faucit, and whether Miss Faucit would have inspired Shakespeare with the movement, had she been consulted.

M. Edouard Thierry shared the general surprise that the same



actress should be able to represent with equal truth two natures so different as Virginia and Lady Macbeth. "Mais le sentiment du vrai," he adds, "supplée dans un artiste à bien des conditions physiques, et Miss Faucit, dans la scène du sommeil, s'est élevée jusqu'aux effets les plus saisissants de la terreur. On se rappellera toujours le geste impatient et inquiet avec lequel Lady Macbeth appelle son mari absent, et se retire elle-même en lui disant, 'Au lit! au lit!'" The greatness of the performance reconciled even her old friend M. de Fresne to an impersonation so unlike her personal self. "The wolf," she writes to me, "it seems, was as attractive as the lamb. Only, he says, I am scarcely to be pardoned for making him in love with so wicked a person."

There was yet another surprise in store for the Parisian public in the performance of Juliet. In her engagement with Mr Mitchell, Miss Faucit had stipulated, as the condition of performing Ophelia and Virginia, that one or more plays should be produced which were more particularly identified with her name. One of these was *Romeo and Juliet*. But when Mr Macready arrived in Paris he put aside the plays which she had selected, and substituted for them others of his own. This was a breach of Miss Faucit's engagement, and was so deeply felt by her, that she even thought of returning at once to London. Had she stood upon her right, which, out of regard to her professional position, she might well have done, the whole scheme would have collapsed. Mr Mitchell represented this to her so strongly, urging in his distress, that all his labour and expense would be thrown away, unless she waived her right, that she consented to go on with the engagement. When the series of plays was concluded, Mr Mitchell chose *Romeo and Juliet* for his benefit, so that she might have the chance of acting one character of her own selecting. "That," she writes ("Letter on Rosalind"), "was a happy night to me, for the audience went with me enthusiastically throughout the performance. The success, indeed, was so great, that Mr Mitchell was most anxious I should renew my engagement without Mr Macready; but he could not get the use of the theatre for a longer period." In a letter to me, written a few days after the performance, she writes:

"Juliet went off immensely. I was fortunately in the humour, and created quite a *furor*; if, at least, I may judge by noise and showers of flowers—rare things even in Paris at this season."

"The performance produced a sensation," says the writer in *Blackwood*, "almost surpassing that of her Lady Macbeth." A general regret was expressed, that it could not be seen again. M. Thierry, in common with all the leading journalists, was enthusiastic in his praise, and entered into an elaborate analysis of the performance. In what he says of Miss Faucit in the balcony scene, one sees how it was that, without knowing a word of English, the elder Dumas had no difficulty in following the purpose of the author or the actress: "C'est un des caractères du talent de Miss Faucit, sa physionomie explique tout, raconte tout, apprend tout; c'est un livre ouvert, un livre merveilleux, si vous voulez, ou chacun peut lire dans sa langue. J'en appelle aux souvenirs de ceux qui assistaient à la représentation de *Roméo*, aux souvenirs de notre public qui ne sait pas l'anglais: Est-il un seul mot de cet admirable dialogue, un seul mot de ce charmant aveu de Juliette, qui n'ait été entendu, comme s'il eût été dit dans une langue universelle, au sortir dès lèvres de Miss Helen?"

Disheartened and disappointed as she had been at what, in a letter, she calls "the many stumbling-blocks put in her path," she plainly had no reason to regret having yielded to Mr Mitchell's entreaties.

It was a delight [she writes, "Letter on *Rosalind*"] to play to audiences so refined and sympathetic, and to learn, from the criticism of such men as Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, Edouard Thierry, and Jules Janin, that I had carried them along with me in my treatment of characters so varied. I remember well, how strange they seemed to think it, that the same actress should play Juliet, Ophelia, Desdemona, and Lady Macbeth—impressing each, as they were indulgent enough to say, with characteristics so distinct and marked, as to make them forget the actress in the woman she represented.

Miss Faucit had indeed every reason to be gratified by her reception in Paris. Writing to me at the end of the performances she says: "I wish some one else would tell you of what they *tell me* is the general impression about my performances here. All the critics and connoisseurs place me far

above Mr Macready. They say he is great by effort, I succeed by spontaneous and natural impulses. I could tell you many more fine things, but I spare you and myself the recital. . . . I am told I have admirers among all the first literary lady-writers here, —the celebrated one, going by the title of Georges Sand, is among the warmest. I do love to attract women, do I not?" This was especially true. To influence them, to make them see and feel with her as to her heroines, was at all times her highest pride.

Her success in Parisian society was wellnigh as great as upon the stage. Everywhere she was the star of the evening, imperturbed by expressions of admiration, from which her retiring nature shrank, and which were unwelcome to her own severe estimate of her own powers. "There was a soirée at Madame Ancelot's," says the writer in *Blackwood*, "where all literary and diplomatic Paris was invited to meet Miss Helen Faucit. Guizot and Lady Byron were there, and people were much amused at Lady Byron's jealousy. She had expected to be the *lionne* of the soirée. I well remember Guizot's exclamation, as, on being introduced to Miss Faucit, he kissed the artist's hand, '*Mais c'est une enfant! c'est une enfant!*' He could not conceal his surprise to see in the fair gentle girl before him the Lady Macbeth about whom everybody was raving, 'almost a *pensionnaire*,' as he afterwards said to me."

It was hard to say "No" to the social courtesies that were pressed upon her. But they robbed her of the rest of which she had extreme need. "My doctor," she writes to me (January 13, 1845), "thinks my health from childhood has been cruelly neglected. He says the mind has been suffered to prey upon the body in a cruel manner, and that, instead of perpetual delicacy of health, he only wonders I am alive. God grant he may save me, and then I shall ever bless my visit here." This being her state, well might she write some days after, "I am longing to get away. This gaiety is killing me." Two days afterwards she left Paris for London, where pressing requests for fresh engagements awaited her, although, as she writes, "I am scarcely fit for much mental anxiety. My cough has made me sadly thin and worn, and then the gaiety! but I must turn sober and mend."

Before returning to her career at home, we may find place for



the following further extract from one of her letters to myself : “ We went to Notre Dame on Christmas day, but I was too ill, not to admire, for that, I trust, I never could be, while I have a bit of life in me, but to stay for the music, which is particularly grand on that day. We were at several churches during the day, and also in my pet of all places, the Gallery of Ancient Sculpture in the Louvre. They have the glorious Venus of Milo there, which to my mind far excels in beauty the Venus dei Medici. Never was anything so simply grand, and quietly yet eloquently graceful. The attitude, if so you may call it, is perfection. The figure is much larger than life, and yet loses nothing in delicacy and chasteness. I am so delighted to find that my enthusiasm for all great things *increases*. When I was here last, I should have thought this impossible, for it was so abundant then, but I have now less of wonder and more of positive and appreciating enjoyment. If it did not seem presumptuous, I could say that I was conscious of a kindred spirit, which makes me open my heart to all beauty and nobleness, as I should to a dear relative and friend. Do not laugh at my folly. I am so quiet at these times, that it jars me beyond all expression, when courtesy obliges me to listen to the poor and ever-repeated sameness of expression which is applied to such subjects. Looks, hearts, can alone speak here.” Some years afterwards she told her friend Miss Margaret Stokes, that after following her friends out of the hall in which the Venus of Milo then stood, she managed to slip away from them, and return for a few moments of solitude before the statue. Then, looking cautiously round to see that she was not observed, she knelt down and kissed the cold marble foot of the sublime work. In after years this statue was the first work we went to see whenever we visited the Louvre.

The impression left by Miss Faucit in Paris was a very lasting one. For thirty years and more she was talked of in literary and theatrical circles there as Mademoiselle Helène, and she is still recognised among them as one of the greatest actresses of the century. Of this I had myself a striking experience.

In the summer of 1875 I had occasion to call at the Bibliothèque d’Arséna], of which M. Edouard Thierry was then the librarian, in search of some publications which M. Regnier had



told me might be found there. No sooner was M. Thierry aware who was my wife, than his eyes kindled, and he broke into an enthusiastic panegyric of her histrionic triumphs. To us all, he said, "*elle était une véritable révélation,*" something of a kind they had never seen, or even dreamed. This was at least thirty years after he had written the criticisms, from which passages have been cited above.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE report of Miss Faucit's triumph in Paris quickly spread, and, before she left it, offers of engagements from all quarters poured in upon her. She gave the preference to Dublin, and agreed to appear there toward the end of the following month. Mr Calcraft, the Dublin manager, she writes from Paris, "is to be in town next week to see *Antigone* with me at Covent Garden, and, if I approve the part, he is to get it up in good style for me—this will give me hard work."

What she saw of the Covent Garden performance made her decide to undertake *Antigone*. Her studies had never led her in the direction of Greek tragedy; but she was not long in making herself generally acquainted with some of its masterpieces, and also with Greek costume and the arrangements of the Greek theatre. What these preparations resulted in will best be understood from the records of her impersonations.

She made her first appearance in Dublin, on February the 17th, 1845. Before performing *Antigone* she played Mrs Haller, Belvidera, Julia in *The Hunchback*, and the Lady Mabel. Her previous appearances with Mr Macready in Dublin in 1842 were recalled by some of the journals, and spoken of as having been then only full of promise. Now, in the same characters she had then played, she is found to be "indeed perfection," and the genius they had not before recognised was acknowledged in the warmest terms. Thus *The Saunders' News Letter* (February 22) writes :—

It is plain that in Miss Faucit's mind there exists a deep conviction of the dignity and worth of her own sex, and hence to every passage which bears on this point she gives a force and earnest truth, not intentional,

but rather instinctive. We might instance several of the speeches in the character of Belvidera, and that in *The Hunchback* where Julia calls upon Clifford to be "the jealous guardian of her spotless name," in which the voice of nature and of virtue vibrates to the heart, and one forgets the actress in the instructor.

The critic then proceeds to note the singular faculty, which Miss Faucit, who had herself never seen mortal illness nor mental alienation, evinced of depicting both, always keeping within the limits of art, with a startling reality.

There is one faculty possessed by Miss Faucit which must be noticed—namely, the power of depicting disease, whether of the mind or of the body. We might refer to her representation of Belvidera's madness, and to the closing scenes in *The Patrician's Daughter*, where slowly and gently the victim of a broken heart fades from the scenes of her sorrows and her wrongs. In the first character the transition from sanity to sudden fury, and then to a subdued and melancholy madness, was painfully true; and (in Isabella) when the image of her husband appears to her eyes, when she calls him to come to her, then loses, and again beholds him, her histrionic art must be felt by every one who has ever witnessed the hallucinations, where optical delusions come and go, to be fearfully and medically true.

"Medically true,"—so much so, that many, seeing her Belvidera, would not believe she had not studied madness from actual life. To this opinion they held more resolutely, when they afterwards found that the growing madness of Isabella, in Southerne's play of that name, was depicted by her with equal truth. The distinction was so marked, and the truthfulness so vivid, that her friend Dr Stokes has told me he used to tremble as he watched her acting, lest the simulated madness should become reality. He knew that what he saw was the result of a marvellous intuition, for he was well aware of Miss Faucit's creed, that, if an actor's imagination does not enable him to portray the phenomena of mental or physical maladies, the study of them from life will produce results feeble in themselves, and also incompatible with the freedom of true art.

Belvidera was for many years included in Miss Faucit's list of parts, and elicited much admirable commentary both in Ireland and Scotland. To avoid recurring to it hereafter, I will quote a good description of it, which appeared shortly after this time in the *Edinburgh Scotsman*.:—

Miss Faucit's *Belvidera* is perhaps one of her finest parts, affording, as it does, the fullest scope for the display of devoted tenderness and womanly dignity, and all those intense passions which follow upon the wrongs of both. The yearning fondness of a wife was never perhaps more perfectly expressed than in the first scene. The indignant remonstrance with Jaffier for leaving her in the custody of Renault—the exquisite delicacy of the parting adjuration to Jaffier, “Remember Twelve!”—the bound from the earth into his arms, when he offers to kill her, recur to our memory particularly amid the general excellence. Anything finer than the expression and attitude of Miss Faucit, when the death-knell of Pierre sounds, it would be hard to conceive. The vacant eye, prophetic of the unsettling brain, the dropt jaw, the death-like cheek, the dilated throat, the nerveless rigidity of the extended arms, would have immortalised a sculptor could they have been fixed in marble. The whole of the last scene of *Belvidera*'s madness is a development of tragical power, carried to the utmost limits of which art admits. Its truthfulness becomes appalling, especially in the scream which bursts from the breaking heart of *Belvidera*, when, with the fine instinct which often attends madness, she knows that in the whispers of the officer and her father they are speaking of Jaffier and Pierre, both dead.

The spirit in which Miss Faucit pursued her art was very early felt by her Dublin critics. Thus, for example, the following passage in an article in the *Evening Packet* (February 30) sums up eloquently and briefly the qualities which then and always inspired and distinguished her impersonations:—

Miss Faucit's appearance in those characters her performance has made celebrated, affords the educated mind a treat of the purest and most exalted description. . . . Impressed evidently with a high opinion of her noble art, she seeks to raise it in the estimation of the world, and with its elevation to ascend the difficult path leading to immortality. We admire her for the ardent spirit, with which she seeks to exalt her profession to a pinnacle of greatness, such as in the time of *the Siddons* it attained. We love and reverence her, because she never descends to any trickery,—never indulges in any mannerism by which momentary plaudits might be gained. She despises, in fact, the practices resorted to for mere effect, “to split the ears of the groundlings”; and seeking, in her knowledge of human nature, the secret sources of its joy, its anguish, its hope, its fear, its rage, despair, remorse, she enters with her whole heart into their representation, casting at her feet the models that others have set up, and relying on her own bright genius alone. Yes, Miss Faucit is no copyist. The rarest charm of her acting is its complete originality, an attribute that of late years has almost left the stage. Those who admire the sudden and startling effects by which modern tragedians win hastily given and ill-considered applause, will not be enamoured of the acting of Miss Faucit; but the judicious few, made kin the world over by “one touch of Nature,” will bow down in



✓ homage before her. She is energetic without ever overstepping the modesty of Nature,—calm without a touch of coldness,—elegant without a trace of study. It is amazing, sometimes, how loftily she soars, her yielding and graceful frame swelling with the passions she so powerfully expresses, her mellow voice acquiring a sonorous fulness, and her soft expressive features lit up, with “the mind, the music” beaming from within.

In the sympathetic appreciation of her general performances the Irish were not behind those of Scotland. But when she appeared as Antigone (February 23) the whole literary ability of Dublin seems to have been called into play, to tell how the grandest of the female characters of Sophocles had been brought visibly before them, and had shown, to use George Fletcher’s words, that the “women of old Greece were not framed of marble, but of sensitive, imaginative, and impassioned, as well as intellectual and heroic flesh and blood.” Amid so much that is excellent both for scholarship and critical analysis, it is difficult to make a selection. The notices written by some of the ablest men in Dublin run into a length that makes quotation impossible. The following, from the *Dublin Times* (February, 1846), states the general verdict more briefly:—

✓ Were Miss Faucit hitherto without reputation, we feel assured that her performance of Antigone would at once raise her to that rank which she already indisputably holds, of the greatest amongst the tragic actresses of the day. She possesses that, without which no one, and above all no dramatist, ever attained eminence, thorough devotion to her profession, a sense of its dignity, and a determination to dignify herself and it together—a concentration of intellect, genius, time, talents—everything to achieve the greatness that made a Siddons and an O’Neil—names familiar to the tongues of all men—to be admired in their own age, and transmitted to those that succeed. To a fine person, and most dignified carriage, Miss Faucit unites a chasteness and simplicity of action and gesture, that make her at once natural and effective in every situation. Her perception of all the finer shades of human feeling is as delicate as it is distinct—her intonations of voice are full of power, suggestive, by times, of the high-born princess, of the scorn of the virtuous and pure-minded maid—of tenderness, and love, and grief, and horror, that unsettles even reason itself; and she holds us intent and breathless, suspended on her every word and moving with her every motion. The high admiration with which both the literary journals of England and France have spoken of Miss Faucit’s performance prepared us to expect much, but we confess our expectations were more than realised. It is impossible to conceive anything finer than the attitude and gesture in which she stands before Creon, when taken in the act of giving the rites of sepulture to Polynices; the downcast head betraying

no abject fear, but the sense of helplessness and hopelessness. The arms crossed on her bosom, not in submission to the Tyrant, but resignation to Fate—the form averted in scorn, not shrinking in fear, as she listens to the story that accuses her—and, more than all, as Creon says—

“Speak thou—uplift thy bending head and say  
If thou deny, or own this flagrant charge.”

The instant uplifting of the head, the slow turning of the form, the fixing of that proud calm eye, as she answers—

‘All he asserts I do confess I did,’

seize upon every sympathy of the heart, and stir the soul with the profoundest emotion.

To the fierce demand of the Tyrant, why she had dared to spurn the edict, Miss Faucit looked all the queen in her reply—

“Because thy mandate was opposed to Jove’s,  
And all the sacred dictates men revere.  
Thy power is mortal ; and thy stern decrees,—  
The offspring of a fleeting breath of time,—  
Are far too weak to supersede the laws  
Impressed by all the Gods upon our hearts ;  
By nature sealed unmoveable they stand.  
Shall man’s capricious will be more revered  
Than their commands? No ! not by me, O King !  
I will not draw their vengeance on my head.  
Thy law may take its course, for being doomed  
By heaven to die, it can but expedite  
The period of those woes that weigh me down,  
And render life a burthen to my soul.  
’Tis better far to die than live afflicted—  
Laden with self-reproach for having left  
A brother’s corse unhonoured with a tomb.  
Esteem my actions, follies—call my words  
Unwise ;—you deem them then as I deemed yours :  
In this respect alone we both agree.”

The greatest effort of dramatic power was reserved for the last scene in which Antigone appears. She has been doomed, and is now led on by the guards. We shall not readily forget the deep emotion with which we listened to the lamentations of the dismayed girl.

“Oh dreadful tomb !—oh dreary bridal bed !  
Dungeon of death !—thou everlasting home.  
Where I must sojourn with my kindred friends,  
Who swell the gloomy train of Proserpine,  
To whom I go, the last, the most unhappy,  
Cut off from nature’s period ! Yet still,  
Hope whispers me, I shall be dear to thee,  
My father—thee, my mother, most of all—  
To ye, my brothers, whose pale corsers I,

With sacred rites and cleansing lavers bathed,  
 Pouring libations duly on thy tomb,  
 Eteocles, and on thy earthy mound,  
 Beloved Polynices. And for this—  
 This holy deed—I am to die! lauded,  
 Lamented only by the wise and just!  
 For this—am I forsaken by my friends,  
 And doomed in life to linger with the dead!  
 Immortal Gods! say, how have I transgressed?  
 What honours due to ye have I withheld?  
 Yet, why invoke ye, when for deeds of good  
 Ye pay me thus with evil?  
 If this be justice, Heaven, then I have erred,  
 And, erring, let me die for those offended!  
 If they are guilty, may they never share  
 The doom of guilt I guiltlessly must bear!”

And then her wild and heart-touching appeal to the chorus.

“O my country Thebes! Home!  
 And ye who from her bosom come,  
 Behold my forced, my dreadful doom?  
 Ye Theban rulers, see in mine  
 The last blood of your regal line!  
 Behold the dire, unjust decree  
 For what was just and good in me!”

Few survive of the many distinguished men who came nightly to the theatre to see this noble impersonation. But by one of those few, Sir Frederic Burton, the late Director of the National Gallery, I was favoured in 1890 with the following notes, dealing with it more particularly from an artist's point of view. One aspect of what she looked as Antigone has happily been perpetuated by him in a noble drawing, now in my possession.<sup>1</sup> It gives, of necessity, only one aspect, but what it does give is full of suggestion as to what was in the soul of the actress, when her own identity became merged in that of Antigone:—

“To have seen Helen Faucit play the part of Antigone in the tragedy of Sophocles, so named, was an experience to leave an ineffaceable impression on the mind. Her interpretation of that character, the capability she showed of throwing herself at once into the spirit of Greek art—so different in many respects from that of the more modern drama—has always seemed to me to afford the most striking proof of her genius. In an English play,

<sup>1</sup> Called by Sir Frederic “The Greek Muse,” and is represented in the photogravure opposite.

the actor, whatever his peculiar gifts, may and must study his part as it was written in his own native tongue ; and we who listen to his delivery may at least hear the words of Shakespeare as the poet himself penned them. Merely to hear them uttered goes far with us to compensate for even indifferent acting. But Miss Faucit, with no knowledge of the Greek original, with nothing better to inspire and guide her than a paraphrastic 'Imitative Version' (as the 'adapter' called it) of the tragedy, intuitively divined the Attic poet's intent, and revealed to our wondering mind and eye the heroic figure he had created. We witnessed that reserved force, that restrained passion, which distinguishes the higher productions of Hellenic art in all its forms. No loud voicing or unneeded gesticulation disturbed the rhythmic movement of the action throughout. All the deeper was the pathos. We were elevated into an ideal region. We were made to feel the existence of an inexorable Fate, whose doom is indeed inevitable, and yet powerless to daunt the human soul that is true to itself.

"It must at the same time be noted that, besides the imaginative faculty, which is the one indispensable element in a great actor, Miss Faucit was endowed with pre-eminent physical advantages. Her height ; a length of limb surpassing the common proportions of the female form, and, in the arms, united with an equally unusual straightness, lent a natural dignity to her gait, and an inborn grace to every movement and gesture, such as no training could have improved, and the want of which no study or artifice could supply. Her head was nobly balanced on a pillar-like neck. Seen in profile, the remarkable expanse between the front of the face and the finely set ear, the length from the chin to the throat, the beautiful outward curve of the full and pliant lip, all called vividly to mind the Greek ideal known to us in sculpture and in designs on the finer Athenian vases. To those mobile lips was largely due the rich and distinct articulation of a voice of singular sweetness and depth, which had in it, beyond all else, the undefinable, but heart-stirring quality of sincerity.

"Here, then, was a form altogether fitted by nature for the embodiment of the Theban maiden of royal race ; and within it a soul that could feel and make manifest the exalted sense of



duty, the inflexible resolve, and the pious self-sacrifice of Antigone.

“My own recollections of Miss Faucit’s performance in *Antigone* are naturally in great part those of an artist. And in fact, after the first time of seeing her in that *rôle*, I found myself on subsequent occasions very much occupied in watching the plastic beauty of her movements and attitudes, and their marvellous expressiveness. Such an unlooked-for opportunity of practical study was not to be thrown away. It could scarcely recur in a lifetime. For in general the stage, with its stereotyped traditions and conventions, is about the last place where painter or sculptor could expect to find natural and spontaneous expression of the emotions. Far greater would be his chances amongst an unsophisticated peasantry. Now it was peculiar to Helen Faucit that her action was never conventional, or regulated by previous drill, but was the unconscious result of the feeling which swayed her at the moment. How genuine, how utterly unpremeditated were her actions and gestures was proved by their never being exactly repeated on any two similar occasions. She was far too true an artist to dream of posing, or ‘making points.’ She abandoned herself confidently to the inspiration of her part—the proper action would not fail to follow. But this very opulence of æsthetic capacity in her was apt to disconcert me in my desired studies. For example, when forcibly struck with the artistic completeness of some momentary pose or action, and its capability of being reproduced and perpetuated, without any change, in the art of design, but by reason of its transientness difficult to seize and fix in the memory, I ardently hoped to see it repeated on a future occasion. Herein I was doomed to disappointment. What took its place was doubtless equally appropriate and effective in its way, only it may have chanced to lack just that happy formative character, that completeness of *motif* which had so surprised and charmed me in the first instance.”

What is here noted of the infinite variety of movement and expression in Miss Faucit’s *Antigone* was equally to be found in every part she played. However often one may have seen her in a character, its treatment always seemed the result of a fresh inspiration. The general outline might be—was, indeed—the



Walker & Co. engravers

*Antigone*  
*From a drawing by Sir Frederic Burton.*



same, but there was constant variety in the details. Of what these were, and how they arose, she was herself unconscious.

I had myself the good fortune to see *Antigone* in Dublin. The play was admirably put upon the stage, which was large enough to admit of an adequate representation of a Greek stage. In an article, which I was urged by Dr Stokes to write for the *Dublin University Magazine*, upon "Acting as one of the Fine Arts," I recorded thus the impression made upon me at the time:—

The great actress's versatility is not confined to the romantic drama. Her *Antigone* stands out in the roll of her triumphs, simple and majestic in severe beauty—consummate in its kind, as her *Imogen* or *Constance*, but that kind, how different! Here, twenty-three centuries after the poet who conceived it has gone to his rest, it is presented to us fresh and beautiful, like some magnificent statue dug up from the ruins of Time, perfect as when it left the sculptor's hand. The joy of the

" Watcher of the skies

When some new planet swims into his ken,"

is a type of that, which every scholar and student of Greek life and literature must have experienced when he first saw in the person of Miss Faucit the embodiment of this the noblest heroine of the Greek drama. It was the opening of a new world, or more truly perhaps to such a man, the vivifying of a dead but familiar one, when she first entered on the scene, "with face resigned to bliss or bale," and declared her determination to obey the dictates of nature in defiance of her uncle's decree. He saw before him the type of those beautiful forms which sculpture has made immortal, in the majestic form, the simple drapery, the serene and noble features of the actress. She looked as one that had been long familiar to the sad thoughts of the destiny that hung upon her race, and under which her father had perished strangely before her eyes. And, when she spoke, her voice, in its earnest tenderness, made richer music than the flowing numbers of the Grecian bard. Simple, noble, royal in her bravery of heart, she proclaimed to the Tyrant the supremacy of the great law of nature, on which she had acted, in a manner which gave to the sublime thoughts of the poet all and more than all they lost in the feeble language of the translators. But it is in the concluding scene that the powers of the actress rise to their height. The sisterly love that had sustained her until now is absorbed in the contemplation of the fearful doom that awaits her. Here the fervent imagination and wonderful power of Miss Faucit inspire her audience with a sympathy for the Greek girl, lively and intense as for the sufferings with which modern life is familiar. Dirce's clear-flowing stream, its many-coloured meadows, the rays of "golden Helios," all rise before our eyes, and we share the passionate ecstasy with which the young girl in the fulness of her life gazes on them for the last time. How shall we describe the tone, the gesture, with which her whole heart vents itself in



the exclamation in which is expressed the remorseless, inevitable doom that pursued the race of Labdacus?

“ Oh fate ! the curse that fell on the maternal bed,  
That gave my father's, mother's, children birth,  
Was theirs, is mine ! ”

“ Ariadne passioning,” Niobe with her slaughtered offspring around her, Cassandra in her prophetic mood, are the images that spring most readily to the mind. A sculptor that could have fixed the attitude in marble, though the deep pathos of the tremulous lip and the eye that seemed to look through Fate must have escaped him, would have earned lasting fame. The Greek stage could boast of no such acting—from its very character, such acting was impossible. But the spirit of Sophocles, speaking the voice of Nature, that was, and is, and ever shall be the same while the world endures, has found a home in the heart of an English girl, and thrills on English hearts with a force greater than could ever have been contemplated by the bard himself. Beautiful Antigone ! beautiful to us now in form and feature, as thou hast ever been in thy noble martyr spirit and great woman's heart.

What was written by De Quincey, who saw the *Antigone* a few months afterwards in Edinburgh, was much to the same effect. In a paper on ‘The Antigone of Sophocles,’ published in *Tait's Magazine* at the time, after expressing extreme dissatisfaction with Mendelssohn's overture to the play, he adds—“The most villainous things, however, have one merit ; they are transitory as the best things, and that was true of the overture : it perished.”

Then suddenly—oh heavens ! what a revelation of beauty !—forth stepped, walking in brightness, the most faultless of Grecian marbles, Miss Helen Faucit as Antigone. What perfection of Athenian sculpture ! the noble figure, the lovely arms, the fluent drapery ! What an unveiling of the ideal statuesque ! Is it Hebe ? is it Aurora ? is it a goddess that moves before us ? Perfect she is in form ; perfect in attitude ;

“ Beautiful exceedingly,  
Like a ladye from a far Countrie.”

Here was the redeeming jewel of the performance. It flattered one's patriotic feelings to see this noble young countrywoman realising so exquisitely, and restoring to our imaginations, the noblest of Grecian girls. . . . One thing I regretted—viz., that from the indistinctness of my sight for distant faces, I could not accurately discriminate Miss Faucit's features ; but I was told by my next neighbour that they were as true to the antique as her figure.

Further on De Quincey says : “To see Helen—to see Helen of

Greece—was the chief prayer of Marlowe's Dr Faustus ; the chief gift which he exacted from the fiend. To see Helen of Greece? Dr Faustus, we have seen her! Mr Murray [the Edinburgh manager] is the Mephistopheles that showed her to us."

By evil chance, Miss Faucit told me long afterwards, she had a bad cold, and was consequently hoarse on the night De Quincey saw her. It was one of those misfortunes to which a great actor is liable, which often leads to misappreciation of his gifts by those whose opinion he would most value. So upon this occasion Miss Faucit was vexed to find De Quincey dwelling thus upon a passing and purely accidental failure in her voice.

Miss Faucit's voice is fine and impassioned, being deep for a female voice, but in this organ lay also the only blemish in her impersonation. In her last scene, . . . her voice grew too husky to execute the cadences of the intonations ; yet, even in this scene, her fall to the ground, under the burden of her farewell anguish, was in a high degree picturesque through the whole succession of its stages.

During her stay in Dublin, Miss Faucit created an impression in private life no less warm than upon the stage. She made many friends, none dearer than Dr Stokes and his family, and often drew round her at his house in Merrion Square all that was brightest and most gifted in Dublin society. Unspoiled, one might almost say untouched, by her brilliant successes, her presence was marked by the same unassuming modesty which had charmed her French friends. Miss Margaret Stokes, in her essay in *Blackwood*, already referred to, says:—

She won her way to the hearts of all by a gentleness and sweetness of aspect and demeanour, that spoke of the modesty and absorption of the true artist, who thought only of the work it was given to her to do, and was filled with humble gratitude for the power which enabled her to show to the eyes and ears of her audience, with all the charm of breathing passionate life, the beings whom our great dramatic poets had imagined. . . . How well does the present writer remember the enthusiasm which the young actress aroused in all the ablest men, and no less markedly, in all the accomplished women, in which Dublin society was then rich! They were all at her feet ; and, off the stage, she moved among them with a quiet unconscious grace, that deepened the enthusiasm which grew there night by night, as she placed before them some fresh illustration of her remarkable powers. . . . It was hard to say whether in those days we

women or the men were most in love with Helen Faucit. The women were all gratitude to her for the noble pictures of her sex which they owed to her. The men were, no doubt, animated by a more mixed feeling, and by not a few of them we were reminded of Goethe's words—

“Wen Helena paralyzirt,  
Der kommt zu leicht nicht zu Verstande.”

Who could wonder at this who ever came under the charm of that most gracious nature?

Nowhere in Dublin, then, and for many years afterwards, was Miss Faucit so happy as in the family circle of Miss Stokes's distinguished father. In a memorandum now before me, Miss Stokes writes: “He at once recognised in her the true painter of human nature, his knowledge of which made him the great physician that he was, and he saw in her impersonations the noblest realisation of woman, as he had always conceived her—‘Woman, the depository of all that is pure and delicate and moral in this life.’” The friendship then contracted lasted through his life, and, when he died in 1880, Lady Martin, as she then was, wrote to Miss Stokes, full of grateful remembrance of what he had done to instruct and encourage her at the very time when, if the plaudits of a theatre could have sufficed, she ought to have been full of self-satisfaction, and not, as she says, of self-distrust.

“MY DEAR MARGARET,—I wish I could express in words what I owed to your dear father. When I first knew him, I was young in my art and in years. I knew little of life, and that little was often sad and discouraging. Entirely distrustful of myself, often wondering how I found courage, when all was so exhausting, to persevere, he felt with me, seemed to guess how my heart asked for sympathy, and, without my telling of a trouble, he gave me the sweet rain of encouragement, for want of which my heart felt dried up and withering. His taste was so fine, his judgment so deep, his sympathy so large, and yet so fond and tender in all things.

“I seemed to have been fumbling in the dark before. I knew well what I wanted, but did not know how to reach it. He revealed me to myself, at least he discovered what I was feeling and wanting to bring forth in my art. He showed it to me, and

by a word I felt I had a light thrown on my way, a torch to encourage and guide me upward.

“He gave me credit for such good inspirations, that I felt my courage grow and expand towards them. Shall I ever forget seeing him and your dear mother, and half a box full of children, in the same place, night after night of *Antigone*, and indeed of almost all my characters? He thought I had intuitions about things, natural instincts. Do you remember in the madness of Belvidera and Isabella the difference which he noticed that I made in each,—how right he said it was, mentally and physically, the suddenness of the one, the slow going and coming of the reason in the other, how it tottered before it gave way. How I wish I could have given him my notion of Ophelia’s madness. But, then, there never was an actor he could have borne in Hamlet!

“How keen his sensibility was! It seemed to hurt him to see a Shakespearian part wrongly felt. I never asked his advice. He was so modest, he would have said he knew nothing about it, and yet, by the way I could turn the talk, and by a casual word, I could pick up what I wanted from him.”

Before she left Dublin Miss Faucit received a remarkable recognition of the influence for good which her performance of the *Antigone* had been. It came in the form of the following Address from the heads of the University, the leading men of science, physicians, lawyers, painters, and literary men of the city, thirty-five in number.

TO MISS HELEN FAUCIT.

MADAM,—We beg to give expression to the unalloyed and sustained satisfaction which we have derived from your late performances at our national theatre.

We have each and all endeavoured to promote the cultivation of classic literature and the study of ancient art in this our city; and we feel that your noble representation of *Antigone* has greatly advanced these important objects, by creating a love and admiration of the beauty and grandeur of ancient Greece.

With the writings of the Grecian dramatists, it is true, we have long been familiar; but their power and their beauty have come down to us through books alone. “Mute and motionless” that drama has heretofore stood before us; you, madam, have given it voice, gesture, life; you have



realised the genius and embodied the inspirations of the authors and of the artists of early Greece; and have thus encouraged and instructed the youth of Ireland in the study of their immortal works.

We offer the accompanying testimonial to the virtues and talents of one whose tastes, education, and surpassing powers have justly placed her at the summit of her profession.

The testimonial consisted of a large golden fibula,<sup>1</sup> in itself an exquisite specimen of the goldsmith's art, designed by Sir Frederic Burton. Within an outer chaplet of olive leaves, it presented the Cadmean serpent, which includes in its folds masks of Creon and Antigone, wrought in gold, and within the central coil, upon a white enamel ground, the figure of Antigone kneeling over a cinerary urn. Three large pear-shaped emeralds, skilfully disposed, relieve the chasing of the groundwork. Everything but the emeralds—gold, design, and workmanship—was Irish. On the reverse side is the Theban shield, with the inscription:—

ΕΛΕΝΗ  
ΜΟΥΣΟΛΗΠΤΩ  
ΤΗΣ ΑΝΤΙΓΟΝΗΣ  
ΕΠΑΘΛΑ.

From Dublin Miss Faucit went to Edinburgh, where she was received with even greater enthusiasm than before. The advance she had made in her art in the interval of her absence is strongly noted in the journals. Thus, in speaking of her Pauline, the *Observer* (April 2, 1845) writes:—

To all the truthfulness, the grace, the power of passion and emotion which always characterised the performance, there is now added a finish of execution, a mastery of the elements of passion, which the admirers of this great actress feel only to have been wanting before, on seeing their splendid results now. . . . We observe in her the same decision, and severe simplicity of execution, which are seen in the disciplined eye and firm hand of a great painter. She has gained repose, without losing anything in strength or in fascination.

On this visit she played Lady Macbeth in Edinburgh, where I then lived, for the first time; and it at once took its place, there and throughout Scotland, as one of her most powerful impersona-

<sup>1</sup> This fibula, along with the Address, is now, by Lady Martin's desire, deposited in the Dublin Museum.

tions. An incident worth recording in connection with its performance in Edinburgh recurs vividly to my remembrance. Coming into the box lobby, at the close of the play, I met Professor Wilson (Christopher North). He accosted me in his usual cordial way, and I could see he was in a state of great excitement. "We have all been wrong," he exclaimed, speaking of what he had just seen. "This is the true Lady Macbeth! Mrs Siddons has misled us." Knowing how strongly he had again and again extolled Mrs Siddons as the ideal Lady Macbeth, I could only listen in quiet surprise, as he went on, enlarging on his new view with characteristic emphasis.

The conclusion he had come to proved not to be transitory, for not long afterwards, in No. 5 of the series of papers in *Blackwood's Magazine* called "Dies Boreales, Christopher under Canvas," he went into an elaborate study of the play, in which his old and often expressed estimate of the character of Lady Macbeth underwent a complete change. She was no longer, in his opinion, the "fiendish woman," which Mrs Siddons conceived and portrayed, self-centred, and remorseless, to the last. The complexity of her character was there carefully worked out. The force of will that screwed her husband's courage "to the sticking place," when his will faltered in seizing the opportunity to kill Duncan, for which he had longed,—the resolution that could seize the daggers, and smear the sleeping grooms with blood, contrasted with the womanly weakness that makes her faint, when Macbeth recalls, in his address to the Thaness, the picture of Duncan lying, "his silver skin laced with his golden blood"—her misapprehension of Macbeth's character as "too full of the milk of human kindness," from which she is terribly awakened by his subsequent ruthless wading through blood for the purposes of his ambition,—her early experience, that with "the golden round and top of sovereignty" all peace of mind by day or night was gone, told in the lines "Nought's had, all's spent," &c.—her silent shudder, when he talks of the dreams that "shake him nightly," himself unconscious and heedless of what she has begun to suffer—the magnificent courage with which she goes through the trials of the banqueting scene,—the hopeless sadness of her demeanour when the guests have been dismissed, and of

the words wrung from her own woful experience, "You lack the season of all natures, sleep"—a prelude so significant of the troubled sleep-walking scene, in which she next appears,—all these features, brought out with such impressive effect by Miss Faucit, had wrought the change in Christopher North's views, which made him say, "We have all been wrong. This is the true Lady Macbeth!" Accordingly in his essay, he dwells upon these points—but, oddly enough, forgets—for an old man's forgetfulness it must have been—to own his indebtedness for his new critical exposition to the young actress, who had struck out the reading of the character from her own unaided study of Shakespeare's text.

It was no small triumph to have shaken Professor Wilson's long-cherished belief, that the Lady Macbeth of Mrs Siddons was the true interpretation, and to have sent him back to his Shakespeare, to find, in a closer study of the text, the Lady Macbeth whom Miss Faucit, heedless of tradition, had found there for herself.

From Edinburgh Miss Faucit went to Glasgow, and deepened there the impression which she had left the previous year. Before quitting Scotland, she fulfilled short engagements in Perth, Dundee, and Aberdeen, where, with every disadvantage of small, ill-appointed stages, and weak companies, she seems, if one may judge from the journals of the day, to have produced effects as vivid as if she had acted under the most favourable conditions. Thus, for example, *The Perth Constitutional* (May 28) speaks of her:—

In the calmer passages Miss Faucit's acting, in voice, manner, and enunciation, is delicate and refined to a degree; but in the impassioned parts her energies break forth with tremendous effect, yet so true to nature, that it is the very negation of rant. . . . Indeed, her impersonation is scarcely like *acting*. It is nature itself—it seems the impression of the position in which she is placed operating upon the most delicate yet subdued sensibilities—and not a hair-breadth does her emotion or passion exceed or fall short of what we should expect to witness in a refined mind *actually* under the influence of the circumstances in which it is placed, and amid the associations connected with them. Some talented actors almost always speak, and accompany that speech by action, as if they were constantly under the impression that they *are* acting. Miss Faucit never does, and therefore hers is the perfection of the art.

The same view is admirably expressed by *The Aberdeen Herald* (June 14): "It is not to act, but to be in earnest, that Miss Faucit comes upon the stage. It is to be, not to seem." This truth to nature was from the first, as we have seen, recognised in Miss Faucit. To express it without exaggeration or distortion was her constant aim. Of Raphael it was said by Michael Angelo, "Non ebbe quest' arte da Natura, ma per lungo studio." Of her this was equally true; but study alone would not have perfected art, unless it had the inborn gift of fine sensibility and strong imagination to work upon. Lord Tennyson's words are surely true of all genuine art: "Perfection in art is, perhaps, sometimes more sudden than we think." Poets, painters, actors, in short, have inspirations. "But then," he continues, "the long preparation for it, the unseen germination, that is what we ignore and forget."

Before taking her summer holiday, Miss Faucit played in Manchester for the first time, beginning on the 14th of July. This was the forerunner of many visits, at each of which she was made more and more welcome, and found more cordial recognition and subtler critical appreciation. Of the latter quality the following passage from *The Manchester Times*, on her first visit, was an encouraging foretaste. In it the writer obviously draws upon his remembrance of her acting, as he had seen it at Drury Lane.

Miss Faucit's nature is not so much that of a woman, as that of WOMAN. She infuses, so to speak, the *personality* of the feminine character into every delineation. In every embodiment she seems to raise the veil from a shrined feeling in her individual heart. The range is certainly wide, which includes equally the Antigone of two thousand years ago, and the heart-breaking pangs of contemporary suffering, and makes both equally ideal—which places the hand of a Rosalind in that of an Imogen—which shows the sweet sisterhood in contrast of a Beatrice and a Juliet—which artlessly pleads in Desdemona, pierces in the accusing agony of Constance, or freezes in the ominous terseness of Lady Macbeth.



## CHAPTER IX.

HOWEVER fêted and idolised elsewhere she might be, Miss Faucit always yearned towards the London audience, who had cheered her earliest efforts, and had never wavered in their faith in her. Accordingly, although overweighted with prospective engagements for the provinces, she yielded to Mr Webster's request, that she would appear for twelve nights at the Haymarket Theatre. The engagement opened on the 20th of October with *The Lady of Lyons*. Her Pauline had lost none of its attraction for the London public. On the contrary, they found it had gained greatly in the qualities for which they had long admired it; and at the close of the play, according to the *Morning Chronicle*, she appeared "in obedience to the repeated calls of the audience, when she was greeted with a shower of bouquets, and all the usual honours." *The Athenæum* (October 25) notes that the removal from the predominating influence of Mr Macready had been of essential benefit to her, adding—"High as was our previous opinion of her, our present estimate of her histrionic talent stands rather in contrast than in comparison with the past; for such is the change of style that, with the same person, she is another actress. She has evidently been taught by self-dependence to think, to feel, to act for herself." There was no one now to be continually telling her that "she was quite mistaken in her conceptions," and that by attending to his "direction" she might ultimately hope to excel. Of her Pauline the same critic remarks, that she has not only "learned to correct the author's mistakes in execution, but to supply his deficiencies of conception. She rightly conceives that the character is but a sketch, to be filled up by the genius of the performer, and has

studied the appropriate by-play with a fidelity and fulness of which we have few examples. She has aimed at the ideal of the character, and has reached it,—so successfully indeed, as to demonstrate that she has now assumed an independent position on the national stage, and is entitled to keep it. To point out the beauties of her playing were to go through every scene of the drama, and to discriminate between what the author has not done, and what the actress supplies.”

It is interesting to note how her early friends, Mr and Mrs S. C. Hall, were impressed by the advance she had made in her art. Mrs Hall writes (November 18):—

MY DEAR HELEN,—I cannot tell you how you fascinated us last night. Carter said this morning, when he was going to his chambers, that he would write and thank you, and truly you deserve our thanks. I never felt so much intense pleasure in my life at any performance. . . .

May God protect and bless you! You are gifted far, far above all I know, but I love you more, for that I know you capable of generous acts and right noble deeds. You have, to my knowledge, more than once had the prayers of the afflicted, whom your bounty relieved silently, and you little thought it would be told—even to me. God bless you! Your very affectionate,

ANNA MARIA HALL.

The same day Mr Hall wrote :—

MY DEAR MISS HELEN,—I never until last night regretted my having ceased to be a public critic, for I should have rejoiced to give to the public even a small portion of the true and unmixed enjoyment I derived from your representation of Pauline; and I cannot forego the pleasure of communicating this feeling to you, trusting you will pardon my presumption.

I have not seen you act for about three years, and I had not seen you in this character since the memorable evening when you made it your own. I was prepared for that improvement which results from time and study, but I certainly was not prepared to find it so great. I cannot conceive a finer, purer, or more accurate personification; I cannot believe that acting has ever surpassed it. It was in all respects admirable, carrying away the auditor, or rather the spectator, for your expression, the expression both of face and figure, effected fully as much as the intonations of your rich and melodious voice. Your tenderness was truth itself; your passion a very reality.

To say that it moved me deeply and excited me powerfully is saying little—except that the admission comes from one whose business has been the very reverse of that which teaches to be “pleased we know not why, and care not wherefore.” I thank you, therefore, for a most intellectual treat—I may safely say, the truest treat I have ever enjoyed in a theatre. . Permit me to subscribe myself your sincere friend and fervent admirer,

S. C. HALL.

In a note (November 8) from Mr Westland Marston, he says :—

I long to add my congratulations to the many you have doubtless received on your progress in a glorious career. Knowing all that you were, I was not easily to be surprised by any new demonstration of your power ; but I was surprised. That declination of the head when Claude describes the lake, as if too much happiness had wrought a trembling modesty of feeling, was a poem in itself. Did you think of Coleridge's *Genevieve*? [She did not ; but she made many do so.] That third act of Pauline is as great as if it were the third act of a Greek tragedy, so fine it is in its silent sculpture.

After Pauline, Miss Faucit appeared as Julia in *The Hunchback*, and appears to have strengthened the recognition of her increased power. The morning after the first performance (November 1), Mrs S. C. Hall writes :—

MY DEAR MISS FAUCIT,—It is not yet 8 o'clock, and yet I cannot resist expressing not only my delight, but my astonishment at your performance last night. You were, and you were not the same that I have seen, and yet you were evidently more *yourself*. You gave no new readings, as they are called, which frequently disturb both the text and the audience, but added by the force of your judgment, as well as by the delicacy of your taste, both strength and tenderness to the character, giving it both depth of love and intense *passion*, without taking one atom from its woman's tenderness and purity.

My mother, with tears streaming down her face, asked me if I remembered Fanny Kemble's acting, the first night of *The Hunchback*—and how superior you were in everything. She, you know, remembers all *the great ones* ; but, instead of going back to them, as almost all old people do, she said last night that her memory could recall nothing finer than your last scene, even when "thinking over Mrs Siddons."

In proportion as my wonder and admiration of your power of mind and strength of imagination increased, so did my fault-finding with the construction of the play progress. I never felt before how ill-used "Julia" is, from first to last,—how tried and tortured—for nothing, except to draw her forth,—just as people are said to give slow poisons to test how they can be borne ; and, more than this, I became angry with Master Walter's reasons. Yet why should I write this ? It is more than likely to be all your fault. You have enriched the character of "Julia" with so much that is *your own*, that, until I read the play again quietly and endeavour (I fear in vain) to divest it of you ! I can form no just idea of the composition. At present the whole play is one "Julia." . . .

Well, God bless you and prosper all you do ! Your faithful and sincere,  
A. M. HALL.

The only other character played by Miss Faucit during this

engagement was Rosalind, of which the *Observer* (November 9), echoing the general verdict of the journals, says, "that, taken for all in all, Rosalind is one of Miss H. Faucit's most perfect parts" ["*most perfect!*" Alas, what English!] "in her whole dramatic repository." London criticism was, however, in these days very far behind that of the provinces in critical appreciation of her Rosalind.

After a brilliant engagement of six nights in Glasgow, Miss Faucit went to Edinburgh, where very able pens were obviously taken up anew to draw attention to her performance of *Antigone*, which was the chief feature of this engagement. The following passage in the *Courant* (December 27) dwells upon the high purpose with which she prosecuted her art, and the difficulties under which this was done:—

This accomplished and charming actress evidently aims at elevating her noble art to its loftiest, most chastened, most purifying object. Endowed by nature with all the graces of female fascination, capable, as her exquisite delineation of Rosalind and Beatrice demonstrates, of the happiest combination of archness and attraction of manners with unvarying maidenly refinement of demeanour, she is yet content to forgo them all to personate the more sad and serious characters, in which courage rises superior to danger, and duty gains the victory over weakness. She feels of what the histrionic art is capable, what a mighty engine for good or for evil its powers of attraction qualify it to become. She has taken her part accordingly, and taken it in the right spirit. Her lot has been cast in an age of transition, in which, under the cravings of a people insatiate for something new, the drama has been wellnigh turned aside from its greater objects, and converted into the mere handmaid of the lighter arts of singing and dancing. She is bending her great powers to restore it to its more elevated destiny, to render it the means of moral elevation, the instrument of general good. And, if any can effect that salutary change, it is herself.

This is most true; but it is not easy to estimate how hard was the struggle, how resolute the courage required to adhere to the purpose she had set before her. It was a battle which she had to fight single-handed, and from which she would have shrunk but for a paramount sense of duty. The gift which she had of moving men's hearts, she believed, was not given to her for nothing. It was, she thought, the one sole talent she had, "a talent which 'twere death to hide," and that must not be "left with her useless." For the due use of it she considered herself



✓ responsible, and this use she conceived to be, to put in living form before her audiences the types of noble womanly nature as they had been revealed by our best dramatic poets, and especially by Shakespeare. In this way she might hope to enlarge and elevate ✓ the sympathies, to quicken the imagination, to purify the tastes, and awake the nobler feelings, which were apt to be overlaid and deadened in the commonplace vocations of daily life. But her spirits sank at times, despite the acclaim of gratitude and applause with which she was everywhere greeted. This finds expression in the following letter, to a lady friend, from Edinburgh at this time (January 21, 1846):—

“DEAR FRIEND,—I have so little to expect in the way of heart and soul sympathy to lighten the very heavy engagements now before me, that my spirits flag (weak things!) more than I would choose to confess to every one. Oh, dear friend, you do not know, you cannot tell what my profession is, when you are forced to deal only with the mechanical matter-of-fact side of it! How I wonder sometimes at the vain dreams I have of it! If you could sit by and listen to the insipid things that I am obliged to hear, generally summed up by praise or dispraise of a dress, or a bunch of feathers or what not, you would not be surprised that my heart sinks into a very deep pit now and then. It may be all an illusion; and my art may not be the instrument for good and the help of all high and noble things I believe it, and have ever felt it in myself. If so, how gladly would I be undeceived! I would leave it at once without a pang or regret. As it is, I feel like a person suffering a slow death by pincers, each night taking a little fragment of life out of me,—and for what end? Must I use art only as a means for gaining wealth? What a pitiful thing to subside into!”

For that end she never did use it, but always as an instrument of good. That it was such, happily for her own peace of mind, she had in the end the strongest reason to feel.

The “heavy engagements” to which allusion is made in Miss Faucit’s letter extended without intermission to the end of May. Belfast, Dublin—where she added the *Lady in Comus* to the

parts she had previously acted there—Plymouth, Exeter, Nottingham, and Derby were visited in succession. After these came her holiday time, and part of it was spent in a visit to the family of Sir Archibald Alison, the historian, at their country quarters at Lamlash Bay in the island of Arran. They had made her acquaintance the previous year; and some of the most elaborate notices of her acting in the leading Glasgow journals were, to judge by their style, written by Sir Archibald Alison. The record of this visit in the following extracts from his published Autobiography will be read with interest:—

In the early part of this summer (1846) I had an opportunity of forming a friendship which was a source of the greatest pleasure to me, and which exercised a material influence on the direction of my reading in future years. Miss Helen Faucit, the celebrated tragic actress, had been introduced to us the preceding year, and we had witnessed with admiration most of her admirable performances, and enjoyed the happiness of forming her acquaintance in private. This year she returned, and we not only repeatedly saw her performances, but had her often out at Possil for several days together. In June we went down to Arran for a few weeks; and as Miss Faucit had promised to visit us there, I returned to Glasgow on the 13th June, and accompanied her to that romantic isle on June 16. From that time till the end of the month we were constantly together, and I had ample opportunities of observing the great strength of her understanding, and extraordinary force of her genius, and delicacy of her taste. The forenoon, till two, was devoted by each to study or composition, but after that we passed the remainder of the day together. In the afternoon, accompanied by my daughter and her governess, we walked to some sequestered vale, or some elevated summit, where Miss Faucit charmed us by reading the finest poetry, rendered doubly impressive by the splendid intonation of her voice and the beauty of the surrounding objects. *Comus*, the finest passages of the *Paradise Lost*, Coleridge's *Wallenstein*, and *Piccolomini*, and many other *chefs-d'œuvre* were read in this manner by this great performer with incomparable effect. The impression produced by hearing the finest poetry recited by a lady of such genius and taste, gifted with all the charms of beauty and grace of manner, in the finest weather, and amidst the most beautiful scenery, was greater than can well be imagined.

In the evening we again walked out, and on returning home after sunset, Miss Faucit read *Antigone*, *Wallenstein*, or *Hamlet* aloud, and the effect of her rich sonorous voice and admirable intonation in adding to the power of the lines of Sophocles and Shakespeare was truly surprising. In the course of these delightful walks and excursions we conversed on almost every imaginable subject of poetry, the drama, and the fine arts; and many of the ideas which I afterwards worked out in my *Essays* or *History* were derived from her conversation. Miss Faucit wanted many of the acquire-

ments which so often in other women supply the want of, or improve, natural talents. Thrown early in life upon her own resources, she had at this time not been able thoroughly to master foreign languages. She was an enthusiastic admirer of Dante, Schiller, and Calderon, but she knew them only through the dim light of an English translation. But she possessed from nature that powerful mind and high enthusiasm which, when they exist, seldom fail to overcome all the deficiencies of fortune or education. She had a mind alive to all the beauties of nature and art; a heart susceptible of the most elevated and generous impressions; a soul animated with the purest and most lofty ambition. She aimed at elevating the stage by her genius; at improving the world by her representation of its most moving incidents. Her enthusiasm, and the elevation of her thoughts, realised all that Schiller has so beautifully conceived of Joan of Arc. In the course of our many conversations I discovered that she was familiar with all the principles of the fine arts; and I found with satisfaction, but without surprise, that she had arrived at the same conclusions from the study and practice of the drama, which I had reached from a long acquaintance with painting, history, and composition; and that our ideas on all the higher branches of literature and the arts were identical. I discovered with equal pleasure, that, such was the force of native genius, a young woman of twenty-five, without any advantages of fortune or situation, was not only fully equal, but in many respects superior, in conversation to a man of fifty, whose life had been spent with the aid of far greater facilities in the constant study of literature and the arts.

An animated account follows of an ascent of Goatfell, on a day of unusual brilliancy, and of the magnificent view of sea and sky from that noble peak, where the party lingered until the shades of evening reminded them of the necessity of returning, when they descended, "each doubting much whether life would again furnish an hour of equally pure and ethereal enjoyment."

Miss Faucit returned with us to Possil, but set off early next morning for Carlisle, to perform an engagement at the Theatre Royal there. I have seen little of her since, though we have occasionally corresponded: our respective walks in life are far asunder, and we are both too much engaged in the realities of the world to be able to repeat at pleasure its imaginative enjoyments. But intellect and genius such as hers are very rarely to be met with: the recollection of the charming fortnight we spent together at Lamlash will never fade from my recollection; and if these lines should meet that accomplished lady's eye, after I have been called to my long home, she may, perhaps, be gratified to learn that to the last hour of my life my sentiments of esteem and regard for her remained unchanged.

That visit was one of pure pleasure to Miss Faucit, and the island of Arran and the grandeur of its scenery was endeared to her



memory by the recollection of the constant friends with which it was associated. Sir Archibald Alison has left an elaborate sketch of her acting in the third volume of his printed essays.<sup>1</sup> But she valued more than his praises of her there the inscriptions in all the numerous books he sent her, of which the following on a copy of Macaulay's *Essays* is one:—

I hope you will value this Macaulay, not so much as a testimony of my admiration for the genius of the actress, which I share with all the world, as a mark of respect for the mingled dignity and sweetness which characterise the woman, and which none but those who, like myself and my family, have long had the good fortune to be intimate with these qualities can duly appreciate. . . . I indulge the hope, that the happy days with the lambs playing round the trees at Possil will yet return, and that we shall again hear "Oriana" read under the tree, which still bears the name of "Helen Faucit."

On her return to London Miss Faucit rested for some time, performing only once (August 3), at the Haymarket, for the benefit of the elder Farren. The play was *Antigone*, and, although the *mise en scène* and the general acting fell far short of what was to be desired, she seems to have triumphed over these disadvantages. The *Times* says, "she was most triumphantly successful in her performance," and the *Morning Post* that "she was most rapturously applauded throughout, and was called before the curtain at the conclusion, when she was greeted with a storm of plaudits, and greeting of hats and handkerchiefs."

She then went for rest to her favourite Brighton, but was there for some time prostrated by a serious inflammatory attack, the consequences of which affected her health for many years. She had scarcely recovered from this attack, when she went to fulfil an engagement in Dublin to which she had been pledged before her illness. There she opened with *Antigone* on the 24th of October 1846. Her Irish critics seem as if they could never say enough of what they called "this faultless impersonation of the Greek heroine." But they were no less eloquent over the new characters to which she introduced them — Rosalind, Lady Macbeth, Jane Shore, Mrs Beverley, Lady Teazle, Hermione,

<sup>1</sup> On *The British Drama*, in *Essays, Political, Historical, and Miscellaneous*. Edinburgh and London, 1850.



Imogen, and Isabella in *The Fatal Marriage*. The last named powerful, but most painful, tragedy being the work of an Irishman, the national feeling was not a little excited by its performance. One reads of its having been the fashion, when Isabella was played by Mrs Siddons or by Miss O'Neill, for ladies to faint and be carried out of the theatre. Fainting, one learned from contemporary novels, was the fashion with ladies in those days. Their successors were less demonstrative of their emotions, but we have heard stifled sobs, and seen women's faces as well as bearded men's streaming with tears under the spell of Miss Faucit's Isabella. The tragic sadness of the story calls for great power of both pathos and passion in the actress, a power which would be in vain looked for on the British stage of the present time. Isabella, who has mourned for seven years a husband killed, as she believes, at the siege of Candy, reduced, along with her son, to the depth of extreme poverty, has at last, chiefly to save her child from dying of starvation, agreed to marry Villeroy, a noble gentleman, who has accepted her hand, although she frankly tells him,

“ My pleasures are  
Buried, and cold in my dead husband's grave ;  
And I should wrong myself, my truth, and you,  
To say, that I can ever love again.”

When they have been for some time married, Biron, her first husband, having escaped from slavery in Candy, returns, and, after a brief period of ecstasy, she awakens to the full horror of her position. “Two husbands! Married to both, and yet a wife to neither.” Of Miss Faucit from this point the *Dublin Evening Packet* (12th November) writes:—

The prolonged struggles of this unhappy woman—the sudden joy at her husband's return—sustained while she is in his presence, but followed by as sudden a relapse, as she becomes awakened to her state—these rapidly changing passions, in a mind sensitive as that of Isabella, shake reason on its seat ; and although we had a prescience that, sooner or later, it must fall, we were not prepared for the first flash of insanity, which crossed her features with the rapidity of the lightning. And yet reason has but tottered ; it comes again, and flickers for a while—mixing by starts with the madness into which it finally sinks.

It is, in our minds, this very peculiarity that renders the character of

Isabella so very difficult faithfully to portray. In Belvidera (with which it has been often compared) we see reason passing away from her before our eyes, never to return—in a few minutes she is irrecoverably mad; but with Isabella it comes and goes several times before it finally resigns its seat. In this there is no law of nature outraged. Southern evidently studied to produce an effect difficult for the reader of the play quickly to apprehend, but presented to us in Miss Faucit's impersonation of the character, so true to life, that it was harassing to witness it. Thought, expression, gesture, voice—all bespeak the maniac with a power we have never beheld but in her acting—exhibiting the highest range of dramatic genius. In her Isabella there is an intensity of expression that is beyond the telling.

In the mad ravings which here follow, she attempts to stab Biron, and shortly after is prevented doing violence to herself by Villeroy, who rushes in and snatches the dagger from her. Biron is set upon in the street, and mortally wounded, but rescued by Villeroy, who brings him into Isabella's house, where, dying and bloody, he appears before his wife. The limits of a newspaper critique prevent our attempting to follow or describe the scenes which succeed, particularly where Isabella throws herself upon Biron's dead body, and clings to it till dragged thence by the attendants.

Of this last scene the *Dublin Warder* writes:—

The agony and despair of voice, look, and gesture—the frantic supplication—the desperate struggle—by times terrified, appalled, and subdued the heart; and when we again beheld her in the ravings of distraction, ending her own existence, a feeling intense and indescribable, as if compounded of all those emotions which had just shaken and harassed us, kept us, long after the curtain had fallen, unable to give utterance to our sensations.

It was in seeing this performance of Isabella, followed a few nights afterwards by Miss Faucit's Belvidera, that Dr Stokes noted the terrible truthfulness of her representation of the different forms of growing and sudden madness.

The enthusiasm which her *Antigone* had aroused the previous year, especially among the *literati*, was now quickened into new life by her performance in a version of the *Iphigenia in Aulis* of Euripides. The sacrifice of her young life for purposes of state brought her nearer than *Antigone* to the sympathies of a general audience. As noted by the *Evening Mail* (November 30)—“The busy action of the play, its dialogue, its character, full of human feelings, the fine scenic situations—all fall in with the requirements of our own age and notions—and to the charm of the beautiful *Antigone* superinduce the attractions of those sentiments of daily life, and the extrinsic aid of scenic embellish-

ment." Pity, writes Miss Margaret Stokes, in the *Blackwood* article already cited :—

Pity that De Quincey did not see and describe to us Helen Faucit's appearance in the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, which made all Dublin wild with admiration ! A thrill of delight used to vibrate through the audience, as robed in a "light cymar" fretted with silver, and wearing a wreath of blush roses, she entered, as the betrothed of Achilles, on the car by the side of her mother Clytemnestra. But the hushed silence that always followed Miss Faucit's entrance on the scene grew intense, as the passionate pleading of Iphigenia to her father to spare her life rolled on with that beautiful articulation in which not a syllable was lost, while every word seemed the spontaneous utterance of the moment.

The "passionate pleading" here referred to is dwelt upon by the journals of the day in every variety of panegyric. "We never heard," says one, "any music more sweet than the measured tones of Iphigenia's voice, and the beautiful cadences in which the rhythm was marked, just enough to make us feel the versification without offending by an undue prominence." The verse—of which a few lines will bear quotation—lent itself in a measure to the peculiar skilfulness of Miss Faucit's elocution :—

"Had I the tongue of Orpheus, O my father,  
 If by the magic of my voice I could  
 Constrain the rocks to follow me, and by  
 My words could melt all bosoms to my will,  
 Now would I summon this my skill to aid me.  
 But all my eloquence is only tears,  
 And these I freely give. Around thy knees,  
 A suppliant branch, I twine. Oh, slay me not  
 In the sweet spring and blossom of my life !  
 This sun, it is so bright, so beautiful !  
 Oh, doom me not to view before my time  
 The gloomy phantoms of the world below !  
 'Twas I, first called thee by the name of father,  
 'Twas I, thou first didst welcome as thy child,  
 The first that play'd on thy paternal breast,  
 And gave thee kisses to be kissed again !

Life ! Grant me life ! All is comprised in that !  
 There is no sweeter thing, than to behold  
 This glorious light—it shines not in the grave.  
 A brain distraught alone can wish to die :  
 Better a life of scorn than death."

Thereafter a change of feeling comes over the clinging, wailing

girl; she resolves to stifle her tears, and to forgo life for the good of her country, and she exclaims—

“Let me be slain—I give my blood for Greece!  
Be this my monument to after times,—  
My marriage—children—immortality!”

And in this spirit she passes from the scene with the words:—

“Farewell, beauteous orb of day!  
Farewell, bright ethereal ray!  
Other regions me await,  
Other life, and other fate!  
No lingering tears shall make me pause—  
I own, I feel the hallowed cause!  
Freely I go, by death to crown  
Of Greece the glory and renown.”

The effect must indeed have been great, to have inspired an “irresponsible, indolent reviewer,” to write of it thus: “It would be impossible for any language of eulogy to exaggerate in describing Miss Faucit’s truly superb delivery of the above eloquent passages. The enthusiasm of the audience knew no bounds—peal upon peal of the most rapturous applause resounded through the house, and the fashionable occupants of the boxes were as loud in their demonstrations of approval as the less fastidious and usually more clamorous gods.” Successful as the piece was, it was only natural that Miss Faucit should say, that “the *Antigone* gave her greater pleasure, both for itself and because of Mendelssohn’s music.” Sophocles demanded a higher order of power for his heroine than Euripides, and she always delighted in the parts that made the greatest demand upon their interpreter.

Dublin was apparently insatiable, during this engagement, in its desire to see every variety of Miss Faucit’s power. Her Lady Teazle delighted them, her Rosalind was rapturously welcomed, but they were not content until her Hermione, Constance of Bretagne, and Lady Macbeth were successively presented to them. Here, as elsewhere, the extreme beauty of her treatment of the statue scene in *The Winter’s Tale* produced a profound impression. Never, says the *Evening Mail*, “have we beheld an audience so struck with admiration, as at the first drawing of the curtain, which revealed an effigy, of which it might with truth be said, ‘So stands the statue that enchants the world.’ . . . The progress



from death to life, from stillness to motion in the statue, was marked by one of those master touches of art which none but the highest genius can reach." From the further description we pass on, as there will be occasion to deal in more detail hereafter, not with this scene only but also with the rest of the play as treated by Miss Faucit.

The merits of her Constance, as distinguished from that of Mrs Siddons, seem to have been fully recognised by the Dublin audience. The power and volume of her address to Austria are much dwelt upon by the journals, contrasted as its delivery was with all the sweetness of "the silvery voice" of her Iphigenia, "of Juliet, like the nightingale of her own pomegranate tree— or of Lady Mabel dying upon her lover's breast."

The burning words, "War! war! peace is to me a war!" [says the *Freeman's Journal*, 18th December 1846] sounded like a trumpet-call, her tongue was in the thunder's mouth. We could not have believed that a woman's voice could have, we will say, such terrific power, for we know no other epithet. The whole of this speech was given with great effect, voice, look, gesture, and action—all expressive of the bitterest scorn. We have seen or heard nothing on the stage comparable to this extraordinary scene.

No trace remained of the want of force, due to delicate health, —the only flaw of which a few of her London critics had complained some three years before.

Miss Faucit's *Lady Macbeth* came upon the Dublin critics as a surprise, and provoked some very noticeable criticism, when it came to be fully understood.

It may be well here, before giving details of this performance, to call attention to what Miss Faucit has herself written about *Lady Macbeth*. She was frequently urged to write upon the character with the same fulness as she had written on others of Shakespeare's heroines; but this she could never be persuaded to do, preferring to leave the subject in the hands of those who had seen her act the part. It is, however, to be regretted, that she did not elaborate, by a full analysis of the play, the view of *Lady Macbeth's* character as she illustrated it upon the stage. No one could do this so well as herself. But this much she does say of it in her "Letter on *Rosalind*," and it gives the clue to her conception of the character:—

To the last time of my performing the character I retained my dread of it, and to such a degree, that when I was obliged to act it in the course of my engagements (as others did not seem to dislike seeing me in the character so much as I disliked acting it), I invariably took this play first, so as not to have it hanging over my head, and thus cleared my mind for my greater favourites. Not that, in the end, I disliked the character as a whole. I had no misgivings after reaching the third act; but the first two always filled me with a shrinking horror. I could not but admire the stern grandeur of the indomitable will, which could unite itself with "fate and metaphysical aid" to place the crown upon her husband's brow. Something, it seemed to me, was also to be said in extenuation of the eagerness with which Lady Macbeth falls into his design, and urges him on to catch that crown "the nearest way." If we throw our minds into the circumstances of the time, we can understand the wife who would adventure so much for so great a prize, though we may not sympathise with her. Deeds of violence were common; succession in the direct line was often disturbed by the doctrine that "might was right"; the moral sense was not over-nice, when a great stake was to be played for. Retribution might come, or it might not; the triumph for the moment was everything, and what we should call, and rightly call, murder, often passed in common estimation for an act of valour. Lady Macbeth had been brought up amid such scenes, and one murder more seemed little to her. But she did not know what it was to be personally implicated in murder, nor foresee the Nemesis that would pursue her waking, and fill her dreams with visions of the old man's blood slowly trickling down before her eyes. Think, too, of her agony of anxiety, on the early morning just after the murder, lest her husband in his wild ravings should betray himself; and of the torture she endured while, no less to her amazement than her horror, he recites to Malcolm and Donalbain, with fearful minuteness of detail, how he found Duncan lying gashed and gory in his chamber! She had faced that sight without blenching, when it was essential to replace the daggers, and even to "smear the sleepy grooms with blood"; but to have the whole scene thus vividly brought again before her was too great a strain upon her nerves. No wonder that she faints. It was not Macbeth alone, as we soon see, whose sleep was haunted by the affliction of terrible dreams. She says nothing of them, for hers was the braver, more self-sustained nature of the two; but I always felt an involuntary shudder creep over me when, in the scene before the banquet scene, he mentions them as afflicting himself. He has no thought of what she, too, is suffering; but that a change has come over her by this time is very clearly indicated by her words at the beginning of the same scene (Act iii. scene 2):—

"Nought's had, all's spent,  
Where our desire is got without content:  
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy,  
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy,"—

words which must never be lost sight of, pointing, as they do, to the beginning of that mental unrest brought on by the recurrence of images and

thoughts which will not "die with them they think on," which culminates in the "slumbry agitation" of the troubled nights that were quickly followed by her death, of which, in the sleep-walking scene, we have a glimpse.

It required no common courage in so young an actress to set aside the traditional conception of Lady Macbeth's character, and to bring it within the compass of nature and probability, from which not only Mrs Siddons and her followers but hordes of æsthetic critics also had, in sheer neglect of Shakespeare's text, withdrawn it. It has been seen how Miss Faucit's acting flashed upon Christopher North the startling truth, that the genius of a great actress had misled him, practised critic as he was. The same effect was produced by Miss Faucit's performance in Paris, and wherever in her after-career she appeared in the character. This was notably the case in Dublin, and it found expression in the following interesting letter from William Carleton, the author of *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, to his friend Dr Stokes,—a letter which Miss Faucit herself always said she valued as a correct exposition of the character she intended to portray.

2 CRESCENT, CLONTARF, *November 27, 1846.*

MY DEAR DOCTOR,—When I saw you yesterday, I inadvertently proposed a task to myself during our conversation about Miss Faucit, which I now feel to be one of great difficulty, and, I may add, of humiliation. In accordance with my promise to you, I went last night and witnessed for the first time her performance of Lady Macbeth. I went, certainly, without any prejudices existing against her powers as an accomplished representative of those brilliant creations of female heroism and tenderness which have emanated from the imaginations of our great dramatists, but, in this particular instance, with a very different theory upon the subject of that histrionic impersonation which I have hitherto conceived best calculated to portray those elements which constitute the character of Lady Macbeth. You, from our conversation of yesterday, understand what I mean. In plain terms, I thought Miss Faucit's reading of Lady Macbeth's character, as detailed by you, and as I had heard before, at variance with the terrible inhumanities which are bodied forth in it. . . .

Be this as it may, I promised to give you a true account of the impression which her delineation of the character might make upon me, and I proceed now to keep my word as well as I can, premising that I fear I may still be too much under the influence of the impressions she produced, to take what I say as the result of cool and purely judicial opinion. It is not an easy thing to call in philosophy to our aid when we are glowing with the emotions of enthusiasm and natural partiality, which the genius of such



a woman is certain to excite. Philosophy is a very good old fellow in his way, but I have always found that whenever I stood most in need of his guardianship and aid,—whenever my feelings or my heart were likely to run away with my judgment, the faithless old villain has uniformly neglected his post and abandoned me. But seriously, whether Miss Faucit's conception of the character be right or wrong, she has, so far as I am concerned, most signally triumphed by the impression which I carried home from her impersonation of it. I know it has been said that the heart does not reason; but although this may be true in a general sense, I am conscious that there is in the operation or exercise of our feelings some nameless principle of truth which instinctively teaches us what is right, and upon which it is a thousand times safer to rely than upon the cooler codes of conventional opinion, by which we are too often unwittingly influenced. After all, this is no more than nature simply recognising herself in the human heart through the medium of her own sympathies.

The first thing that began gradually to creep upon me last night was an unaccountable yet irresistible sense of propriety in Miss Faucit's management of the character. This argued, you will tell me, neither more nor less than the force of truth. Perhaps it is so; but, be it what it may, it soon gained upon me so powerfully, that I began to feel as if I had never seen Lady Macbeth's true character before. I said to myself: this woman, it seems to me, is simply urging her husband forward through her love for him, which prompts her to wish for the gratification of his ambition, to commit a murder. This, it would appear, is her sole object, and in working it out she is naturally pursuing a terrible course, and one of singular difficulty. She perceives that he has scruples; and it is necessary that she should work upon him so far as that he should commit the crime, but at the same time prevent him from feeling revolted at the contemplation of it, and this she effects by a sanguinary sophistry that altogether hardens his heart. But this closes her lessons of cruelty to him. In such a case it is not necessary that she should label herself as a murderess, and wantonly parade that inhuman ferocity by which she has hitherto been distinguished. Her office of temptress ceases with the murder, and the gratification of what she had considered her husband's ambition. This, as I felt it, is the distinction which Miss Faucit draws,—the great discovery she has made. It unquestionably adds new elements to the character, and not only rescues it from the terrible and revolting monotony in which it has heretofore appeared, but keeps it within the category of humanity, and gives a beautiful and significant moral to the closing scenes of the queen's life.

Indeed the character from this forward is represented by Miss Faucit with wonderful discrimination and truth. I felt this strongly, for I had never before observed the harmony between her acting and the language of Shakespeare. In this, however, I have only laboured, with the public, under the disadvantage of being misled by the authority of Mrs Siddons as to the true estimate of Lady Macbeth's character; and I do not know a greater triumph than that achieved by the fair and great reformer of bringing us back to Shakespeare and to truth.

In another point of view, it appears to me that Miss Faucit stands alone,



proving that she possesses the grand and original simplicity which belongs to true genius. She has dared to cast aside all the antiquated forms of the stage—all those traditionary appendages to character, which in acting were common property, and are still too much so. It is evident that all her motions on the stage result, naturally and without effort, from such a full and glowing conception of the character as occasions, without any such traditionary memories, the spontaneous and appropriate action only. It naturally follows, therefore, that she never moves or looks upon the stage without conveying some truth or sentiment, or expressing some passion.

This faculty is almost peculiar to herself. For instance, in following her husband after the supper scene: simple and without significance as this act has been in others, she exhibited in it an astonishing manifestation of genius, for in that act all might read the awful agonies that were at work in her heart. Her conduct in this scene was different from anything I have witnessed before. In others there was displayed the predominant passion or passions, now without a motive—namely, a hardened and bloodthirsty ferocity, mingled with a wish to conceal her husband's crime. In Miss Faucit's acting, there was visible the latter motive, which was indeed natural, together with the ill-suppressed anguish of a gentle spirit, and a perceptible struggle to subdue the manifestations of that guilt, whilst attempting to encourage and sustain her husband. All this I felt again to be the triumph of Shakespeare and of truth, and, let me add, of Helen Faucit.<sup>1</sup>

In the sleep-walking scene she crowned the performance of the night. To witness it is worth a thousand homilies against murder. There is in it such a frightful reality of horror—such terrible revelations of remorse—such struggles to wash away, not the blood from the hand, but the blood from the soul, as made me shudder from head to foot, and the very hair to stand upon my head. How the deadly agonies of crime were portrayed by the parched mouth, that told of the burning tortures within! And when you looked on those eyes, or those corpse-like hands, now telling their unconscious tale of crime, and thought of their previous energy in urging on its perpetration, you could not help looking fearfully for a moment into your own heart, and thanking God you were free from the remorse of murder. This scene is, indeed, beyond criticism—it is above it.<sup>2</sup>

Parting with regret from Dublin and the many friends, unknown as well as known, who had brightened her stay there,

<sup>1</sup> The German critic, F. A. Leo, reviewing Lady Martin's book on *Some of Shakespeare's Women*, in *The Shakespeare Jahrbuch* for 1886, vol. xxi, speaks of this letter as showing "dass auch diese Gestalt [Lady Macbeth] von der genialen Künstlerin wie von ihr edlen Frauen-natur richtig verstanden werden, und nicht so in den Sumpf der Unnatur hinabgezogen ist, wie Komödiantinnen und ästhetische Kritiker es mit Vorliebe bis in die neueste Zeit hinein gethan haben."

<sup>2</sup> It will later on be shown, how profoundly her hearers were awed by her presentation of this scene in a drawing-room, even under the broad light of day, and without accessories of any kind.

Miss Faucit now went to Scotland, where a reception no less warm awaited her. On her way she performed a few nights in Belfast, and received a cordial welcome from many friends there, among whom were the families of Mr Robert Paterson, the naturalist, author of a delightful book on the *Insects of Shakespeare*,<sup>1</sup> and of Dr M'Cormac, father of Sir William M'Cormac, the eminent surgeon, and himself a man of remarkable ability.

On the 1st of February 1847, she commenced an engagement for twelve nights in Glasgow. Every night the theatre was crowded to excess to see her Pauline, Juliet, Rosalind, and Isabella. The following extract from a notice in the *Glasgow Courier*, obviously written by no ordinary critic, is interesting from its comparison, by an eyewitness, of her Juliet with that of Miss O'Neill—the part in which that lady is reputed to have chiefly excelled:—

The last time we saw the part of Juliet performed was by Miss O'Neill, now nearly thirty years ago. This lady had some personal qualifications which were superior to those of her successor. Her figure was grand and imposing, though perfectly elegant, and the features classically fine. She was a larger woman than Miss Faucit, and had, perhaps—what is not indifferent—more physical power; but after the magnificent display of ability which we witnessed on Wednesday evening, we must confess—notwithstanding a lurking prejudice in behalf of an early favourite—that Miss Faucit is fully her equal in intellectual capacity. The development of the character, speaking of it as a whole, was as complete in her hands as in those of Miss O'Neill; while in some scenes—the balcony scene, for instance—there was, to our taste, more tenderness, more nature, and more true woman's feeling than Miss O'Neill was wont to throw into it. Miss O'Neill acted; but, beautiful as was the acting, the art of the actress was too conspicuous. Miss Faucit, again, did *not appear* to act at all, but simply to follow the suggestions of her own feelings, and to communicate to the whole an irrepressible conviction of reality. The beautiful bye-play was seemingly no mimic representation of imaginary suffering, but a condensed expression of truth and nature, and of heavenly purity, with that slight allowance of humanity without which even virtue becomes repulsive. But the crowning effort of the night was the soliloquy in the Fourth Act,—“What, if it be poison?” &c.—than which it has never been our good fortune to see a nobler display of dramatic skill. In intonation, gesture, action, and look, it was complete and faultless. In this thrilling scene Miss Faucit's personal appearance was much in her favour, and she represented to the life the love-stricken, despairing, and heart-broken girl; while her singularly expressive

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<sup>1</sup> *Letters on the Natural History of the Insects mentioned in Shakespeare's Plays.* London, 1838.

face showed, in its rapid transformations, how entirely she had identified herself for the time with her part. It was the perfection of human art, and a triumph over vast difficulties, which we have a delightful pleasure in recording.

A critic in the *Glasgow Constitutional* (January 3, 1847), calls attention to the disadvantageous circumstances under which Miss Faucit had succeeded in recalling public attention to the higher drama :—

Her career [he writes], in one important respect, has been more trying, and her triumph more complete, than that of any of her great predecessors, male or female, on the British stage. Garrick, Kemble, Mrs Siddons, Miss O'Neill, brought their noble art to perfection ; but they did so with the aid of the public. They were borne forward on the flowing tide ; the public taste was entirely with them ; Drury Lane and Covent Garden contained the *elite* of the rank and talent of the realm. Miss Faucit's lot has been cast in an age of corruption, when the drama has been almost supplanted by the melodrama. . . . Alone, unaided, she has sustained the dignity of the legitimate drama in the midst of an age which has wellnigh become unworthy of it. Gifted with powers for the highest species of elegant comedy, which would have rendered her the idol of the metropolis, she has preferred a steady adherence, through every vicissitude of public taste, to the great models of the stage, to any triumph, how brilliant soever, in an inferior walk. She would rather personate the characters of Shakespeare and Sophocles in the provinces than win fortune and temporary fame by bending to the corrupted tastes of the metropolis. . . . She has never devoted her great powers to any but the greatest, the purest, and most exalted of purposes.

In these remarks one seems to trace the hand of Sir Archibald Alison, who had probably been led to his conclusion by his conversations with Miss Faucit at Lamlash Bay in the previous summer.

The only new character to which she introduced her Glasgow audiences during this visit was Isabella. The play is so steeped in the gloom of grief and agonising tragedy, that nothing but her remarkable powers could have reconciled them to a play, from which, under inferior treatment, they would have recoiled. Instead of doing so, however, great houses flocked to see it throughout Scotland, and it continued for years on Miss Faucit's list of parts. "However much we dislike the play," says the *Edinburgh Scotsman*, "it is impossible not to admire Miss Faucit's embodiment of the heroine. By a well imagined and well



executed effort of genius, she elevated the character of Isabella into the region of true tragedy, and stood apart in the serene majesty of grief."

Miss Faucit left Glasgow, under promise to return within a month, for Edinburgh. Here she appeared in two characters which were new to the Edinburgh public,—Lady Teazle, and Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*,—and added to her popularity in both. She always delighted in Lady Teazle as a relief from the severe strain of her tragic parts, and she fascinated her audiences by the piquancy of her playfulness, and by a grace and refinement of demeanour, which explained how Sir Peter was irresistibly captivated by her. A fine heart could be seen under all her coquetry and wit, and the real worth of her nature shone in the concentrated earnestness of her rejection of the excuses of Joseph Surface for her presence in his rooms, and in the deep contrition expressed for the wrong done to the husband whom she had undervalued.

The *School for Scandal* was followed next evening by *The Winter's Tale*. Hermione had not been played by Miss Faucit since the Macready days at Drury Lane, and she never played it again in London for want of opportunity. How much her friends there lost in consequence may be judged from the following account of her performance taken from *The Caledonian Mercury* (March 8, 1847). Her own account has already been given (p. 49 *ante*) of Macready's Leontes in the last scene of the play. We have here a description of her Hermione, which, beautiful as it was throughout, produced in the last scene an impression that was not likely ever to fade from the memory of those who saw it:—

Miss Helen Faucit has, in Hermione, given life to another of "Shakespeare's Women," in embodying whom her genius seems alone to find its full scope. Familiar as every lover of Shakespeare must be with Hermione, there is none, we are sure, who, in witnessing Miss Faucit's portrayal of the character, will not feel that he knows it, as it were, for the first time. Here, as in all Miss Faucit's delineations, while other performers force us back on our imagination to supply their imperfections, we feel that our imagination has been raised into a loftier region, and our critical apprehension widely expanded. The character is one with which only the most refined womanly nature can identify itself, at the same time that it de-



mands from the artist the most subtle powers of execution, and affords scope for touching the deepest chords of imaginative emotion. But it is one which should be dealt with only by a performer possessing the qualities we have indicated. Touched by a ruder hand, the fairest and finest hues of the character would be brushed away. The characteristic features of Hermione, as expressed by Miss Faucit in the early scenes, of confiding openness of disposition, frank in its spotless purity, and loving her lord so entirely, that she loves nothing else but for his sake, prepare us for the shock of his insane jealousy, and for the reconciliation at the close of the play, which, without a love so absolute, must have been impossible. In her worst agony this devotion to Leontes is apparent. Thus, how gentle is her reply to his first charge of infidelity—

“Should a villain say so,  
The most replenish’d villain in the world,  
He were as much more villain; *you, my lord,*  
*Do but mistake.*”

And again—

“How will this grieve you,  
When you shall come to clearer knowledge, that  
You thus have published me! *Gentle my lord,*  
*You scarce can right me thoroughly then, to say*  
*You did mistake.*”

There was in Miss Faucit’s delivery of these words the whole tenderness of the noble spirit, which even in the first assault of most cruel and unattonable wrong, found pity for the error of which it could even then too well anticipate the remorse. And this was expressed without the compromise of one jot of the dignity of insulted womanhood. “The crown and comfort of her life” was gone—how, she knew not—but it was gone, to all appearance utterly and for ever. The so lately happy wife rose at once into the forgiving martyr.

“This action I now go on  
Is for my better grace. Adieu, my lord,  
I never wished to see you sorry. *Now,*  
*I trust, I shall.*”

These were words to haunt the brain of Leontes for evermore.

The trial scene was throughout fine—grand and majestic, with a majesty consonant to the sweetness and mild dignity of the character as shown in the previous scenes. We can only advert to the striking effect produced by Miss Faucit’s expression and attitude, when she rises from the chair, forgetting all physical weakness in the earnestness of her emotion, with the words—

“If powers divine  
Behold our human actions, as they do,  
I doubt not, then, but innocence shall make  
False accusation blush, and tyranny  
Tremble at patience.”

Raphael’s pencil might have caught inspiration here. We were reminded

at first of his Saint Cecilia, but so great a variety of expression and perfect gesture succeeded, that all comparison or suggestion was quickly lost.

But the triumph of the performance, perhaps the crowning achievement of all Miss Faucit's performances, is the last scene. The thrill that passed through the audience, on the first raising of the curtain from the seeming statue, told how intensely the spiritual beauty of Miss Faucit's attitude and expression were felt.<sup>1</sup> It is not only no praise, it is altogether unfit, to say, that they were statue-like. What statue was ever like that form? What statue ever breathed out the soul which modulated that face? It was the realising of a sculptor's hopeless dream. There was there the symmetry of the most consummate statue, but, superadded to this, there were also the flowing outline and living colour which accompany only life. The spectator became an actor in the scene, and all

"Held their breath for a time."

The turning of the head and the earnest gaze of the full eyes, by which Miss Faucit, with the skill of a great artist, breaks the transition from repose to motion, was magical in effect, and made the suspended blood to throb. And when she descended from the pedestal, with a slow and gliding motion, and wearing the look of a being consecrated by long years of prayer and sorrow and seclusion, it seemed to us (and we cannot have been singular) as if we looked upon a being almost too pure to be gazed on with unveiled eyes. What words can paint the mingled expression of wistfulness, of regret, of forgiving sadness, with which she gazed on Leontes? The memory of all that fearful wrong—her slandered honour—her dead son—her outcast daughter—her long years of isolation and solitude—was to be read on that wondrous spirit-face, and with it a forgiveness which one felt to be divine. The penitence and "saintlike sorrow" of Leontes in "that wide gap of time," during which he had mourned

"The sweet'st companion, that e'er man  
Bred his hopes out of,"

had purified him again, so that even she might hold out her hand in token that he might approach her. He takes the outstretched hand—his touch brings back all the woman into her heart, and she falls upon his neck with a tenderness exceeding that of former days.

In the mingling of this strong human affection with an elevation so lofty and spiritual, there was a moral impressiveness, beyond all that we have

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<sup>1</sup> "Of all the great range of Miss Faucit's acting there is no single scene which thrills the heart and charms the imagination so completely as this does. Once seen, it is engraven on the memory for the whole of life."—*Glasgow Herald*, March 14, 1846.

"I fancy the most real *thrill* I ever felt in witnessing Shakespeare as played by great artists was when statuesque Hermione (*c'est vous, madame*) stirred on her pedestal and became a living presence."—*Letter to Lady Martin from the Rev. Francis Jacox*, October 17, 1871.

experienced. It seemed as if that stillness should never be broken—as if we could not bear, for a season, at least—to hear the utterance of a creature that looked and moved so—upon the earth, but not of it. The solemn tone of Hermione's own feelings appeared to communicate themselves to the audience, and they felt with what fitness and beauty Shakespeare confines her words to a blessing on her daughter. . . . How poor and meagre all words must be to express the exquisite beauty of this scene. Parts may be indicated, but how portray the continuous beauty of each phase of feeling, each modulation of gesture? Poetry, painting, sculpture—the best of each—and something more than all, were there. And yet this Hermione was the same creature whom we had seen the night before, all smiles and girlish playfulness, amusing her powers, for we can use no other term, with the archness and unschooled heart of Lady Teazle, and doing this with the same truthfulness and effect as if such a character were her peculiar forte. Much might be said on this theme, but Miss Faucit's versatility of genius is too well appreciated to need any commentary. Noble studies are all her characters, for where they are not so in themselves, Miss Faucit makes them so; and that Edinburgh holds itself fortunate in having again had them presented here, the brilliant and crowded audiences very plainly demonstrate.

On leaving Edinburgh Miss Faucit returned to Glasgow to fulfil a renewed engagement for twelve nights, in the course of which the only parts which she introduced for the first time to her admirers in Glasgow were, Lady Teazle, and Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, both of which led to much eloquent writing, and from that time grew year by year in popularity with them.

From Glasgow Miss Faucit went to Manchester, appearing there on the 3rd of May. Isabella, Rosalind, Lady Mabel, Pauline, and Juliet, were the characters presented during this visit. Her Rosalind, which was new to a Manchester audience, seems to have filled them with surprise at the originality of her conception, and delight at the infinite variety of beautiful detail in its execution. A writer in *The Examiner and Times* (May 8) says he went to criticise, but found that all his old ideas of the character vanished before the “thousand unexpected traits, as profound as they were charming,” which emanated from the one pervading idea of the character. “Her nature,” he says, “by virtue of its genial life, throws out its tendrils to every object it approaches. The plenitude of her goodness is at once the source of her exuberant joy, and of her

quick susceptibility. Those who have considered her sprightliness as the overflow of mere animal spirits will correct that impression from Miss Faucit's performance. . . . To enumerate all its innumerable and lovely details would be simply to repeat *Rosalind in italics.*"

The Manchester critics and the Manchester people were quick to distinguish wherein lay the quality in her acting, which made her impersonations always fresh and suggestive of reality, not of acting. Thus the writer just quoted remarks:—

There is one striking peculiarity in Miss Faucit's acting, which may, indeed, be said to be the invariable characteristic of the highest dramatic genius. She is always open to new conceptions of the poet's meaning. Her personations are not stereotyped. They overflow with vitality, freshness, and variety. Her genius impresses us with the idea of boundless affluence. We can never say beforehand that she will give precisely the same reading; and yet there is always present a pervading harmony, which fuses into a perfect whole all the details of the character she represents. We are thus led to recognise how open she must ever keep her soul to new and fresh impressions—how every succeeding day of life and study passes not away without leaving its impress upon her genius.

Miss Faucit's labours ceased for a time after a successful engagement in Liverpool in the latter part of May. She had well earned a long holiday, and this she determined to spend abroad. Leaving London with friends, in July, she visited Holland, and made acquaintance with the picture-galleries of the Hague and Amsterdam. A pleasant journey up the Rhine, by way of Düsseldorf, Cologne, and Coblenz to Frankfort, ended in a short stay at Homburg, where she found old friends, and made new ones, among others Archdeacon Manning, then in the throes of the mental agitation which ended in his secession to Rome, and his friend the Rev. John Moultrie, the rector of Rugby, with whom she formed a lasting friendship.<sup>1</sup> From Homburg she went to Switzerland, and spent some weeks in the Bernese Oberland, and then returned to London in September, to fulfil an engagement at the Haymarket Theatre. On the 4th

<sup>1</sup> Writing to Miss Faucit in December 1850, Mr Moultrie says: "I spent a month last summer at Homburg, which I did not find the pleasanter for your absence, and that of Archdeacon Manning (was ever such a juxtaposition?). In your stead I had my mother and Dr Hook."



of October she opened it with Pauline, which seems to have been hailed with even warmer favour than before.

One object of the engagement was to produce a new piece, *The Heart and the World*, by Mr Westland Marston. Great expectations from this drama were entertained by Mr Marston's friends. When the MS. of the play had, many months before, been submitted to Miss Faucit, its weak points both of structure and language had not escaped her notice, and she did what she could with Mr Marston to get them remedied. He jokingly called her, she has told me, his "wet blanket," because of the way she threw cold water on his pet poetical passages, which her practical experience told her would not help to make his play more palatable to an audience. The plot was feeble, and much of the language stilted and obscure; with the further disadvantage that the homeliest prose was here and there mingled in the same scene with the stateliest blank verse. The characters, with the exception of the heroine, Florence Delmar, created no interest, and what interest she did create was due more to the actress than the author. A noble-minded girl, with a feeble wavering lover, is over-taxed, who tries to carry upon her shoulders the weight of a five-act play. This, however, was what Miss Faucit had to do, and she did it by the force of her own personality, and the striking use she made of the only opportunities the author gave her. The first of these was in the reading of a letter in the first act, through which, after grave doubts caused by his long silence, she is persuaded of her lover's devotion, and is borne away by a burst of joyous emotion that drew from the audience long and rapturous applause. The second was in a fine scene, in the third act, and especially in the following passage, after the heroine has had the best reason for thinking Vivian Temple, her lover, to be wholly unworthy. It is the redeeming feature of the play:—

*"Florence.* The rights of love,

They are so easily phrased, so soon restored;  
Heart-strings a touch untunes, a touch repairs.  
Oh, sir, thou canst not love! Love hath no rights;  
It doth not know the word. Earth's substance ta'en,  
Earth's laws may give thee back. Thy fair repute  
Maligned, earth's laws may vindicate. But love,  
That in it hath no property of earth,—

Hath no appeal there. Rights it casts away—  
Is proud to be defenceless ; all its bond  
The nature it confides in. Break that bond,  
It feels its beggary—but pleads no rights.

*Temple.* Madam ! . . . I concede  
Your triumph here ! But show the vanquished pity.

*Florence.* Ay ; pity, pity ! There's the loss, that we must learn  
To *pity* what we worshipp'd ! Vivian Temple !  
What is the master-pang : there is but one—  
That wrecks a woman's future ? Pours the world  
Scorn on her chosen ? Well, she takes *his* hand  
And drops the world's. Is want that crushing pang ?  
I tell thee, when of nights her slender hand  
Smooths his brow's anxious lines, and soul-filled eyes  
Glorify pale, worn faces, she thanks Heaven,  
That taught her through her very penury,  
How love can grow by suffering. Is it death ?

*Temple.* No, no !

*Florence.* I say no, too. Then what ?

*Temple.* Oh, nothing, nothing !

*Florence.* Yes, *his fall from worth !*

Faith rides o'er mountain billows by one light  
We deem a star. Prove *that* a meteor, then  
We strand—we strand !”

In passages of this character, where her whole heart was in sympathy with her words, Miss Faucit particularly shone. So it was here. So great was the impression she produced, that at the close of the scene she was loudly called for, but, as usual with her, she refused the call until the end of the play. “Her brilliant and impassioned elocution concentrated wearied thoughts which had begun to wander,” said the *Morning Chronicle*, whose critic was then Mr W. J. Fox, the celebrated Unitarian minister, a man of no small mark in his day, and of whom Browning always spoke as his “literary father.” “Mr Westland Marston,” he also said, “may have written the drama, but Helen Faucit saved it.” This was the general verdict of the press and of the public, for the play survived only a few nights. She had done her best for it. This she would have done for any author whose work she had agreed to illustrate. But for Mr Marston she had a warm personal regard, and she was heartily sorry for the failure of a drama on which he had spent much labour—a failure, it is only fair to him to say, due in some measure to the commonplace acting of many of the characters. To her Mr Marston was full

of gratitude, and sent her the following letter, with a beautifully bound copy of the play :—

26th October 1847.

MY DEAR MISS FAUCIT,—I send you herewith the bound record of poor Florence's sufferings and virtues. I send you the chronicle in a book of what you have shown me and the public in life.

I earnestly, deeply thank you for all that you have done for this character. Even were it not my own, I should thank you for an embodiment which suggests more noble things to me than I suggested to you. It is a moral blessing to see such a being as you make Florence,—so wholesome, so genuine, so great.

This is the bright side of the picture ; and though with respect to the play there is another one, I will not advert to it now. I am not hopeless that the public may in this instance be attracted by the performance of a single character ; but time will show. The third act is already enrolled as one of the most magnificent achievements of histrionic genius, and the appreciation of the no less exquisite rendering of the fourth is growing.

Do you say farewell here to our connection in Art ? Not if my wishes can avail. There is yet one conception, for the sake of which I earnestly desire that we may again meet on the stage of the theatre. But if this hope should not be realised with regard to the last play (for representation) which I may ever produce—still in this short career how often shall I recall you with delight. Mabel, with her enthusiastic imagination, her patrician grace, her passionate struggles sublimated and glorified by a love stronger than death—Florence, with her generous elasticity, deep moral impulse, unshaken constancy, and divine forgiveness—these, *your* Mabel and Florence, I shall never forget. Long may you continue to illustrate for others higher creations of Dramatic Art ! Yours, dear Miss Faucit, always sincerely,

WESTLAND MARSTON.

The "connection in art" here spoken of was not broken off, but was renewed two years after, on the production of Mr Marston's fine drama, *Philip of France and Marie de Meranie*. He wrote several other plays, but this was his masterpiece.

On the close of her Haymarket engagement Miss Faucit paid a short visit to the Rev. John Moultrie at Rugby. Before she left the Rectory he wrote in her album an address to her, of which the following verses are a part :—

"STANZAS TO HELEN FAUCIT.

" For thy sojourn in our dwelling,  
For thy converse kind and true,  
Noble, pure, high-hearted Helen,  
Take our thanks, and so adieu !

Grateful prayers thou leav'st behind thee  
 For thy present, future, weal ;  
 Blessings—whereso'er they find thee,  
 May'st thou all their fulness feel !

God be with thee, gracious maiden,  
 In the paths thou darest to tread ;  
 From the shaft distinction-laden  
 Guard thy venturous heart and head ;

Keep thee pure and spotless ever  
 From all taint and touch of ill,  
 Striving, with sublime endeavour,  
 All thy mission to fulfil !

What if fond imagination  
 Bids thy fervent heart believe,  
 That there lies in thy vocation  
 Good—which thou shalt ne'er achieve ;

What if urged by fruitless duty,  
 Man's weak heart thou toil'st to win  
 To embodied Truth and Beauty  
 From its dream of sense and sin ;

Still midst sickening disappointment,  
 Be thy work its own reward !  
 Yea, its scent as precious ointment  
 On the altar of the Lord !

He, who best the purpose knoweth  
 Of the pure and truthful will,  
 E'en on bootless aims bestoweth  
 Store of heavenly blessings still."

Many more verses follow, all breathing the same admiring and affectionate spirit, concluding thus :—

"Thus,—with thanks that pass our telling,—  
 Which thou need'st not we should tell,  
 Once again, high-hearted Helen,  
 God preserve thee ! Fare thee well !

J. MOULTRIE.

RECTORY, RUGBY, Nov. 3, 1847."

"Fruitless duty," "bootless aims"! Who was the best judge of these? A cleric, a most worthy one, no doubt, or she who, with a humble heart, and a nature devout as his own, had



felt it to be a duty that had been laid upon her, along with the power with which she had been endowed, to use that power for aims, which her own experience up to this time had proved, and still more thereafter was destined to prove, not to be "bootless." Miss Faucit had a mind of her own upon these points. She might like, and she did like, and with cause, both Mr Moultrie and his poems, but her vigorous reason could see the weakness of his logic. Her master, Shakespeare, in the following passage in *Measure for Measure*, Act i. sc. 1, might have taught him a valuable lesson :—

"Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,  
Not light them for themselves ; for if our virtues  
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike  
As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely touched  
But to fine issues, nor Nature never lends  
The smallest scruple of her excellence  
But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines  
Herself the glory of a creditor,  
Both thanks and use."

Miss Faucit read to his family, while at Rugby, much of Shakespeare and other poets, and from her readings, I see by letters to her, they derived some idea of the fulness of meaning which her voice and expression could infuse into them. How much more might they have learned, had they seen her on the stage! She took a pleasure in sending Mr Moultrie every now and then a newspaper with some fine piece of criticism of her acting and mention of its influence for good. But he had not the courage to place himself under its spell. This he expressed in the following sonnet :—

ΕΙΣ ΕΛΕΝΗΝ  
ΤΗΝ ΜΟΥΣΟΛΗΠΤΟΝ.

" In sooth a very woman art thou yet,  
Helen the Muse-inspired, and well dost play,  
In Woman's most unconscionable way,  
The part of the tyrannical coquette ;  
Else why tempt *me* with yon well-penn'd gazette,  
Proclaiming how thy spells Man's nature sway ?  
Why lure forbidden appetite to stray  
Toward Egypt's flesh-pots with revived regret ?

Thus fasted the blind beggar at the board  
 Of the provoking Barmecide, and thus  
 Hunger'd and thirsted Barataria's lord,  
 'Midst savoury meats and wines multigenous ;  
 Thus shrank the water from the lips abhorr'd  
 Of poor bemock'd, desiring Tantalus."

In how high regard he held Miss Faucit is apparent from the inscription in a copy of his published poems—"To Helen Faucit, with the warmest good wishes and prayers of the author, who, not knowing, as such, the gifted and accomplished actress, offers this humble testimony of his regard and esteem for the woman."

Not long after her return from Rugby, one of the greatest, perhaps the very greatest, grief of her life befell Miss Faucit, in the death of her sister, the beloved "Harry" of her youth, at Boston in America, on the 5th of November. They had parted eighteen months before, the sister going with her husband, Mr Humphrey Bland, to fulfil theatrical engagements there. The blow went near to kill her; and it certainly made her for a time unfit for exertion of any kind. But to fulfil a duty she had undertaken for the evening of the 6th of December, she rallied for one night. As she herself writes (*Letter on Juliet*):—

The occasion was one of those unsatisfactory monster performances which had been arranged many weeks before, in order to make up the sum required for the statue of Mrs Siddons, now placed in Westminster Abbey. Mr Macready was requested to act in some scenes from *Henry the Fourth*, and I to give the fourth act in *Romeo and Juliet*. What the other performances were, I do not remember. The blow had fallen upon me only some ten days before, and it made me entirely unfit for exertion of any kind. But the committee wrote so pressingly to me, urging that to take my name from the programme would seriously affect the receipts, that at last I consented to make the effort, not caring much what became of me. How the whole misery of that time comes before me now! Mr Macready, who knew my sister, and therefore knew how grievous her loss was to me, sent, and came to my dressing-room door, several times during the evening, asking after, and pressing to see, and say a few words to me. We had not met for some time. He was fulfilling his farewell engagements in the provinces, and our paths were different. I felt that I could not bear his look of sympathy or words of kindness, and had to deny myself to him. Even the very sound of his voice heard at the door was all but too much for me. I had a duty before me, and I dared not break in upon the calm which I had forced upon myself. Over my Juliet's dress I threw a large flowing black veil, which I hugged to my heart as an outward proof of the mourning within it, and

which, in some measure, comforted me. Besides, it also hid from me the kind faces which, I felt sure, would meet mine at the side-scenes.

The greetings of the audience did not move me. They did not know my grief, so I could bear them. I got on very well in the scene with the Friar. There was despair in it, but nothing that in any way touched upon my own trial. My great struggle was in Juliet's chamber when left alone. Then her desolation, her loneliness, became mine, and the rushing tears would have way. Happily the fearful images presented to Juliet's mind of what is before her in the tomb soon sent softer feelings away; but how glad I was when the fancied sight of Tybalt's ghost allowed the grief that was in my heart to find vent in a wild cry of anguish as well as horror!

From Juliet's bed I was taken to my own, which kept me for many a long day. That is a night which I hardly dare to look back upon. Months and months followed, when the cry was ever in my heart for my loved one, whose loss was to me that of half my life.

The cry was in her heart, but her sense of duty not to waste her life in unavailing grief prevailed in time. In one of her little memorandum-books of this period are two quotations which tell of thoughts that weighed with her. The one is from Southey:—

“Not to the grave, not to the grave, my soul,  
Descend to contemplate  
The form that once was dear!”

the other a quotation from some biography: “He only rescued himself from the grief that had laid hold of his life by the most strenuous exertions of mind and body. Thus he conquered.” Thus, too, she resolved to conquer by throwing herself into the toil and stress, not unmixed with satisfaction to her artist spirit, of a series of provincial engagements. Of this she speaks in the following letter to her friend, Dr Stokes:—

“35 BROMPTON SQUARE, *Jan'y.* 5, 1848.

“MY DEAR DR STOKES,—I am so very glad to receive your kind letter, for although I felt assured of the sympathy you and all your friends felt for me in my affliction, still I so sadly wanted comfort, that kind thoughts and words, although giving no solace for my loss, still were very, very welcome to me.

“I am becoming a little more resigned, and yet while I say so, I feel my heart belies my words. I cannot write upon the subject. If you had ever seen us together, known *what we had been*

*to each other*, you would understand why all now appears a cheerless blank before me. I know such feelings are wrong and wicked to indulge in, and, believe me, I strive with all my might to conquer them, and I shall conquer them in time, no doubt,—and, in the meanwhile, to help myself, I am about soon to commence my professional engagements again. At the end of this month I hope to be strong enough, and I will seek in active duties support against a grief which, I think, if longer indulged in, will take my life away with it. You will think me weak in rebelling thus against the stroke that has in this life sundered us, but you did not know her,—so good, devoted, loving, generous a heart I never knew—never shall again. All loved her. Her poor husband wrings my heart with his letters, and, because of her great love for me, clings to me for comfort. Alas! I cannot yet find any for myself.

“Pardon me, dear friend! I did not mean thus to trouble you. But what my heart is so full of will vent itself when it can, and I have almost to give up writing, for I have nothing else to talk about.

“I act in Edinburgh the 31st of this month, and shall see you, please God! at Easter. God bless you all, dear friends, with many many happy prosperous years! And believe me always,  
your very attached  
HELEN FAUCIT.”



## CHAPTER X.

WITH a very heavy heart, and shaken in health, Miss Faucit started for Scotland, determined to fight against her great sorrow. The winter of 1848 was a severe one, and a journey from London to Edinburgh in those days had to be made under circumstances of discomfort, which those who only know what railways now offer in speed and in accommodation can scarcely understand, and would certainly not patiently endure. To break the journey, she played at her elder brother's theatre at Derby for a few nights. On her way thence to Edinburgh she suffered greatly from the intense cold, but her journey for part of the way was made more tolerable by the kindness of the man who was then all-powerful in the Northern Railway world. "Mr Hudson, the Railway King," she writes to me (January 30, 1848), "was in the carriage from Masborough to very near Newcastle, and took great care of me—got me my change of tickets at York, and showed me every attention. I was quite sorry to part with the old gentleman." In the days of his fall this act of kindness was not forgotten.

Despite a bad cold caught on the journey, Miss Faucit opened her engagement on the 31st in Julia in *The Hunchback*, following it up with Pauline, Lady Teazle, Juliet, Portia, and Beatrice. The engagement was even more successful than usual, and she was prevailed upon to extend it for a fortnight. The audience could see no traces in her performance of the agony which was in her heart. But what that was is shown by the following extract from one of her letters (February 10):—"I knew I had to meet a trial in coming here, but oh, I could not guess how terrible it was to be? It has made me quite ill, and my struggles to fight

against my grief have been almost too much for me. The battle is hardest in my comedy parts. I have felt sometimes that I could not longer control my feelings, and have been in constant fear lest a shriek should come in the place of a laugh. What an overwhelming thing is real grief! How it defies all opposition and sweeps every bulwark you may put up away before it! May God in His mercy take me to Himself before such another trial reaches me, for I fear that I should die the coward's death, and sink under the blow." From that blow she was mercifully spared.

To lighten her fatigue, she had before leaving London entertained the idea of acting the part of Anne Bracegirdle in a short piece called *The Tragedy Queen*, which had been adapted from the French of M. Fournier by Mr John Oxenford. Madame Dumesnil, the famous French actress, was the heroine of the original, which turned upon her being induced, upon the solicitation of the father of a young man, himself a poet, to try to cure him of his passionate love for the actress by disenchanting him with the woman. It was easy work for an adapter of that period to turn Madame Dumesnil into Anne Bracegirdle, and the old French lawyer father and his son into an old London solicitor and his son, and so to "have a play fitted."

On looking more closely into this slight piece, Miss Faucit writes, in the letter just quoted: "I hardly can make up my mind to do this *Tragedy Queen*. I am much disappointed in it. It is vulgarly written and clumsily conceived—a good subject spoiled. I should feel ashamed to speak or be spoken to in such a style, particularly as from my own position the audience might attach a significant and personal meaning to many of the sentiments. I am sorry I have given it to Mr Murray [the Edinburgh manager], for he is very anxious for me to do it, and will do the old man himself, or, to use his own words, 'deliver a message to please me.' In giving a sketch of the life of any actress of power, I would have wished, even in such a sketch as this, that the higher, the nobler motives influencing her should at least have been *felt* and *understood*, if not too seriously dwelt upon; but here there is no hint of the kind. She is merely shown to be graceful and attractive, and no more—nothing made out of *her own nature*." ✓

It is a poor thing, indeed, and quite beneath consideration. . . . Mr Murray is teasing me to give him the fourth week; but this must depend upon my health, and whether I play this little part. If I do, it might help me easily over a night or two."

The adapter could scarcely have done justice to the original drama, which is not marred by the faults Miss Faucit found in the English version. Unfortunately her copy of the adaptation is not among her papers, to tell what alterations were made upon the part to bring it more into accordance with her views. Material alterations must have been made, and no fitter man for work of this kind than Mr Murray could be desired, for no trace of vulgarity or of a shortcoming in self-respect and ladyhood was left in the part as I have seen Miss Faucit play it. A very clear indication, too, was given of the higher aspirations that underlay the character of the actress represented, of whose rare union of tragic power and womanly charm Colley Cibber has left a vivid record. One sentence of Anne Bracegirdle's, quoted in a newspaper notice, must have been freighted, as Miss Faucit spoke it, with a deep significance: "Ah, little do they know who watch our tears and smiles, how many a troubled heart and aching head we bring to our tasks!" Of the first performance of the piece an Edinburgh critic says:—

All the scenes have been composed in a manner that enables Miss Faucit to display in succession the most opposite qualities of her genius. The ease and skill with which she effected a transition from the highest tragic expression to the grace and humour of comedy formed a splendid triumph of the mimetic art, which was received with an enthusiasm that occasioned a slight interruption to the progress of the piece. The highest flight of the tragic muse, finely blended with a rich comic humour, and the contrast which was thus exhibited between the arts, was only rendered more broad and deep by the intermixture. The piece was throughout received with the greatest applause, and Miss Faucit retired amid the most hearty marks of approbation.

This verdict was confirmed wherever the piece was played by Miss Faucit. Thus the *Dublin Evening Post* (April 16, 1850) says of it:—

We cannot forbear a few words concerning one of Miss Faucit's performances, in which inattentive eyes, dazzled and satisfied by its sparkling wit and playfulness, may not really discern the deep meaning that lies

beneath. We mean Anne Bracegirdle—Anne Bracegirdle in Miss Faucit's personation—not coarse, vulgar, and unfeeling, but thoughtlessly yet kindly assuming a disguise which she wears with ill-concealed disgust, and atones for with bitter self-upbraiding. We cannot now particularise or dwell with more than a moment's attention on her appearance when, like the muse of our olden tragedy, with flashing eye and outstretched arm she recalled the days of our drama's glory, of our nation's unvitiated taste.

Again, the *Manchester Examiner and Times* (June 8, 1850) says that in Anne Bracegirdle Miss Faucit shows "that true and legitimate success in the dramatic art can only proceed from a graceful combination of many faculties; whilst, over all, delicacy and refinement must preside even in the midst of the wildest bursts of passion, elevating and adding even to energy and earnestness of purpose."

The effect of the piece, as far as I remember it, was that the young man, whom the actress had at first disenchanted by her simple matter-of-fact manner, was made to feel in the end that, sweet and cordial as she was, there was in her a measure of power and aspiration far beyond what he could hope to mate with, and that—

"Twere all one,  
That he should love a bright particular star,  
As think to wed her, she was so above him."

In her few vacant evenings in Edinburgh, Miss Faucit enlarged her circle of friends, and, among others, made the acquaintance of Emerson, who was introduced to her by my old school companion and friend, Dr John Brown, the author of *Rab and His Friends*, himself one of her most enthusiastic admirers. She had also the good fortune to hear Emerson lecture, and the remembrance quickened the pleasure and instruction she found in several of his books. Among her Scotch friends, for whom she always entertained a warm regard, were Mr and Mrs Robert Chambers. He used to say of her that her mere voice brought tears to his eyes, there was so much of tender heart in it. In this he was not singular.

In Glasgow, where she appeared on the 6th of March 1848, she introduced her public to her Anne Bracegirdle, and also to her Hermione and Imogen. The following extract from an elaborate analysis of her performance, which appeared in the *Glasgow*



*Herald*, has a special interest, as being written by some one who was familiar with the acting of both Mrs Siddons and Miss O'Neill, whom it has grown into a commonplace to speak of as unparagoned in their art. Very rightly, as it seems to me, the writer maintains that versatility of power is essential to make an adequate stage interpreter of Shakespeare. This versatility, he says, made Garrick supreme in his day. He might have added that up to now his supremacy in this respect remains unquestioned. The Kemble family were without it. "Lofty as were their ideas, magnificent their elocution, heroic their thoughts, there was a certain sameness in their conceptions. It was the Kemble race throughout; not the infinite variety of nature or her great High Priest." Then he continues:—

The great and peculiar excellence of Miss Helen Faucit's acting is the admirable power with which she has transferred to the stage the variety and peculiar features of human disposition. She has no mannerism in all her conceptions; she is equally perfect and yet entirely different in all her representations. It is this which makes her so peculiarly fitted for the delineation of Shakespeare's characters; it is this which has evidently made her so devout a worshipper of the Bard of Avon. She is Shakespearian throughout, with this difference, that her delicacy of taste and elevation of thought have succeeded in banishing from his characters, without the omission of any expression, all that, from the change of manners, sometimes in the hands of others, has become painful. Such is the atmosphere of purity with which she is surrounded, that nothing at variance with it can enter even her most playful conceptions. She dignifies Lady Teazle herself; she makes Rosalind sportive innocence. Her versatility of power and variety of conception not only keep pace with Shakespeare's imagination, but outstrip it. Her Beatrice and Juliet, her Imogen and Hermione, are cast precisely in the poet's mould; they are strictly an amplification of his conception; *but how much of the charming image, which is rivetted in the recollection of every one who has witnessed it, has been the creation of the enchantress who has embodied his thoughts.*

The writer says he has been led into this line of remark by having seen, for the first time, at an interval of a few days, Miss Faucit's Hermione and Rosalind. "No two characters could be more different from each other—none more at variance with the pathetic feeling and bursts of emotion with which this great actress so often thrills her audience." And he further illustrates his conclusion by saying, that you could scarcely recognise "the mournful Isabella, the heartbroken Juliet, the phrenzied Belvi-

dere, in the charming image, half marble, half life, presented in the last scene of Hermione; and, still less, the guilt-stained Lady Macbeth in the arch and enchanting Rosalind."

Till we saw her impersonations of Imogen and Hermione [he continues], we had no adequate idea either of the versatility of her powers, or the graphic accuracy of her conceptions. By long reflection she forms an idea, ever a correct one, of the poet's character, and then her acting is a copy of her conception. This is evidently the secret of her success. It never fails to be true, alike to nature and the sketch of the dramatist; but the picture is filled up, amplified and refined, by her own creative imagination. There are scenes and expressions in *Cymbeline* where Imogen might, in inferior hands, waken other ideas; but Miss Faucit's delicacy purifies everything; we see only the enchanting, truthful, and loving woman, arrayed in the silver robe of innocence. Even the scene in the sleeping apartment, when her beautiful arm with the bracelet hangs over the sheet, was rendered by her taste as delicate as the marble statue in Hermione. Nothing could exceed the tenderness she threw into her manner, as she pronounced the well-known words:—

"*Imo.* Then waved his handkerchief?

*Pis.*

And kissed it, madam.

*Imo.* I did not take my leave of him, but had  
Most pretty things to say; ere I could tell him  
How I would think of him, at certain hours,  
Such thoughts and such; or I could make him swear  
The shes of Italy should not betray  
Mine interest and his honour; or have charged him  
At the sixth hour of morn, at noon, at midnight,  
To encounter me with orisons, for then  
I am in heaven for him."

If a contrast to these beautiful words and entrancing thoughts were wanting, it would be found in the burst of virtuous indignation with which she hears the infamous proposal of Iachimo, or the ineffable disdain with which she repels the suit of Cloten. The scene, where she receives the cutting letter from her deceived husband—that in which she opens her bosom to receive the sword of Pisanio—that in which she appears in the boy's dress, with so different a visage from the arch smile of Rosalind,—were all represented with exquisite pathos, and exhibited in the highest degree the varied and flexible powers of the actress. Imogen is one of the most delightful, because the purest and most angelic, of Shakespeare's conceptions. It is consequently one in which Miss Faucit's representation of his idea is most faithful and yet amplified. It is more perfect, because more natural and varied, than that of either Mrs Siddons or Miss O'Neill, both of which are fresh in our recollection.

The wide range of Miss Faucit's power had, it has been shown, surprised and very deeply impressed the leading critics

of Paris. They saw her in tragedy only. What would they not have said, had they seen her in comedy also? Knowing, as all intelligent judges of the actor's art do know, how large an amount of creative power goes to fine acting, most certainly they would have said that the genius which could so fill up and vivify Shakespeare's conceptions of such diverse kinds was of a nature akin to his own. In the case of inferior dramatists she had again and again to draw largely on this creative power, and to put into the characters they had sketched a life, and fascination, which were not to be found, even in outline, in the language with which they had supplied her. Shakespeare, she always said, has of purpose left so much for the actor to supply, so much that is absolutely necessary to bring home to the mind of an audience what was in his own mind when he conceived the character, and the situations they were placed in, that no manipulation of his language, however skilful, was enough for the task. The actor's whole being must be so interfused with the conception of the character, that it becomes in him for the time a new creation, and the feelings which inspired the poet's words must be as vivid in the actor's as they were in the poet's heart and brain when he conceived them, and must find their expression as they would have found it in real life. In lesser dramatists, the suggestions with which Shakespeare's text teems are but rarely found, and there the imagination and invention of the actor has to supply what is wanting in the poet, and, in effect, to create the character by the force of his own personality. What, for example, gave the charm, of which the Glasgow critic speaks, to Imogen's words in Miss Faucit's mouth—what is it that rivetted them in the memory of those who heard her speak them? Not the exquisite cadence, the delicate and varied intonations of her voice, but a something in the presence and features of the actress, and the thrill of her utterance, which told of a soul as beautiful, as deeply loving, as pure and refined, as that of the woman whom Shakespeare had divined in his hour of inspiration—a something far beyond what mere mimetic art, however skilled, can achieve?

On the close of her Glasgow engagement Miss Faucit went on a visit of a few days to her friends Mr (now Lord) Armstrong



and Mrs Armstrong at their beautiful home at Jesmond Dene, near Newcastle. Fatigued and still suffering great depression of spirits, she found there the rest and satisfaction of mind which she greatly needed. "I was extremely unfit to travel," she writes (April 7), "but I am glad indeed I made the effort. The change for the better is beyond all description. This is quite a pattern house—most kind hosts, and all the appointments in exquisite order and perfection. Oh, the sweet quiet and unostentatious comfort! How the mind can be influenced by outward circumstances! I feel myself already tranquillised, and looking out on life with a calmer, happier spirit; while in any part of Scotland the greatest good that would happen to me would be alloyed by the inevitable surroundings. I fear I am like 'Angela,' and have a passion for order and fitness. You will perhaps say, this should not be a subject for regret, but I think it is, considering how small is one's regulating power through life, and the pain that the absence of harmony brings." Not till she had a home of her own, could she gratify her love for order and fitness in all that surrounded her,—but there it found full play, and with results that may be imagined.

With spirits and strength somewhat recruited, Miss Faucit proceeded to fulfil her promised engagement in Dublin, taking Belfast on the way and performing there for a few nights. Appearing in Dublin towards the end of April, she acted there down to the 15th of May in her usual Shakespearian characters, and also in Iphigenia in Aulis, Lady Teazle, and Anne Bracegirdle. During this engagement the counterparts were played by Mr Leigh Murray, a welcome change for the better from what usually fell to her lot in the provinces. Audience and critics were as enthusiastic as usual, and the necessity of rest alone prevented an extension of the usual twelve nights' engagement. She lingered on for some time among the many warm Irish friends, from whom she always parted with reluctance; and during this holiday gave Sir Frederic Burton sittings for a second full-length portrait—a masterpiece of his art. She had time also to read *Jane Eyre*, then just published. "I have devoured it," she writes. "What an enchanting book! I hear the people abusing it. But I confess I was charmed, and must



read it again, and borrow a pair of carping spectacles before I can see the least fault in it. This fortnight's rest has given me a new zest for acting. I almost wish I could feel a little bit tired of it."

Tired enough of it she was before she reached London, having acted for some nights on the way at her elder brother's theatres in Nottingham, Leicester, and Derby. The summer was spent in London, and later on in Brighton, where she had many friends, the chief of whom was the Rev. Henry Wagner, the rector, whom she had known for many years, and who in the days of her early London career had never missed an opportunity of seeing her on the stage. The only engagements she took in the early autumn were for a few nights in Norwich and Yarmouth, from which she returned to prepare for a promised engagement in Dublin, which commenced on the 22nd of November, with her appearance in Sheil's play of *Evadne, or The Statue*, at the urgent request of the Dublin manager.

The play had, on its original production at Covent Garden (19th of February 1819), a very great success. With a cast, in which were Charles Young, Charles Kemble, Mr Macready, Mr Abbot, and Miss O'Neill, this was only natural. Their parts were all good. In that of Ludovico, the villain of the piece, Mr Macready established his London reputation, and in *Evadne* Miss O'Neill appears to have been at her best. The play was founded on the plot of Shirley's *Traytour*, but it had been practically rewritten. Many passages were marked by great vigour, which afforded excellent opportunities for powerful acting.

The plot is somewhat complicated. The King of Naples, enamoured of *Evadne*, the sister of *Colonna*, one of his great nobles, is stimulated to gain possession of her by his favourite counsellor, *Ludovico*, whose own addresses have been rejected by *Evadne*, and who is secretly plotting for the overthrow of the king. She is on the eve of marriage with *Vicentio*. He has been absent for some time in Florence, and on the eve of his return *Ludovico* contrives, with the help of *Olivia*, who is herself in love with *Vicentio*, to substitute a miniature of the king for that of *Vicentio*, which she has asked *Evadne* to show her. This *Evadne*, in ignorance of the fraud, places in her bosom. Hav-

ing effected this part of his plan for arousing the jealousy of Vicentio, Ludovico meets Vicentio, shows him a forged amorous letter from Evadne to the king, and tells him that common rumour speaks of her as the king's mistress. The too credulous Vicentio—(what would so many of the older dramatists have done without such credulous imbeciles?)—rushes to Evadne, who is all rapture at his return, and charges her with dishonour in these unmeasured terms:—

“Confront the talking of the busy world—  
Tell them you are the mistress of the king,  
Tell them you are Colonna's sister, too ;  
But hark you, madam—pritheee, do not say  
You are Vicentio's wife !

*Evadne.*

Injurious man !

*Vic.* The very winds from the four parts of heaven  
Blew it throughout the city—

*Evadne.*

And if angels

Cried trumpet-tongued, that I was false to you,  
You should not have believed it.”

Thus answered, Vicentio has some misgivings as to the truth of the story he has been told, but, acting on an insinuation dropped by Ludovico, asks to see the miniature of himself, which Evadne used to wear, but has, in his absence, hidden next her heart. She draws from her bosom the king's miniature, which has been substituted by Olivia. Confirmed by this in his belief in her untruth, Vicentio breaks away from her, and anon we find him making straight for Olivia's house and engaging himself to her. Colonna, incensed at his sister's being thus cavalierly thrown over, challenges Vicentio, and wounds him, it is rumoured, mortally in a duel. Olivia, conscience-stricken, tells Evadne the trick she has practised upon her. But the confession comes too late to avert the duel. Colonna is thrown into prison, on Ludovico's suggestion to the king, that the only serious barrier to his designs on Evadne will thus be removed, and that, to escape death for killing Vicentio, her brother will place Evadne at the king's disposal. In Colonna Ludovico now sees a tool to work out his own design to have the king assassinated, and to secure the crown for himself. The king, he tells Colonna, will set him free—the price of freedom being his sister's honour. Maddened by the

suggestion, Colonna is persuaded to invite the king to a banquet, to be followed by introducing him to Evadne's chamber, and then doing him to death. Evadne, who has seen her brother in close conference with Ludovico, surmises mischief; she meets him as he is on his way to execute his purpose, and induces him to allow the king to come to her. This he does, with the words:—

“What, ho!

My liege, I bear fulfilment of my promise—

Colonna leads Evadne to your arms.”

The interview of Evadne with the king takes place in a hall lined with statues of the ancestors of the Colonna family. Among them is one of Evadne's father, who, on account of his nobility of character, had been entrusted with the training of the king during his early manhood. The scene that follows is finely conceived. After calling the king's attention to the founder of her race, Evadne says:—

“Look here, my lord,

Know you this statue? . . .

For I shall think but ill

Of princely memories, if you can find

Within the inmost chambers of your heart

No image like to this—look at that smile—

That smile, my liege, look at it!

*King.* It is your father!

*Evadne.* Ay!—'tis indeed my father,—'tis my good,

Exalted, generous, and godlike father!

Whose memory, though he had left his child

A naked, houseless roamer through the world,

Were an inheritance a princess might

Be proud of for her dower!

Who was my father?

*King.* One, whom I confess

Of high and many virtues.

*Evadne.* Is that all?

I will help your memory, and tell you first,

That the late king of Naples look'd among

The noblest in his realm for that good man,

To whom he might entrust your opening youth,

And found him worthiest. In the eagle's nest

Early he placed you, and beside his wing

You learnt to mount to glory! Underneath

His precious care you grew up, and were once

Thought grateful for his service. His whole life  
 Was given to your uses, and his death—  
 Ha! Do you start, my lord? On Milan's plain  
 He fought beside you, and when he beheld  
 A sword thrust at your bosom, rushed—it pierced him!  
 He fell down at your feet, he did, my lord!  
 He perished to preserve you! [*Rushes to the statue.*]

—Breathless image,

Although no heart doth beat within that breast,  
 No blood is in those veins, let me enclasp thee,  
 And feel thee at my bosom!—Now, sir, I am ready—  
 Come and unloose these feeble arms, and take me!—  
 Ay, take me from this neck of senseless stone,—  
 And to reward the father with the meet  
 And wonted recompense that princes give—  
 Make me as foul as bloated pestilence,  
 As black as darkest midnight, and as vile  
 As guilt and shame can make me. . . .  
 Come, in the midst of all mine ancestry,  
 Come and unloose me from my father's arms,—  
 . . . And in his daughter's shame  
 Reward him for the last drops of the blood  
 Shed for his prince's life—Come, if you dare!”

The king is smitten with compunction. Colonna, who, hidden among the statues, has heard all, swears anew his devotion to the repentant king, and in order to prove his loyalty, hides him behind the statues; and, seeing Ludovico coming, makes his sister withdraw. He tells Ludovico he has killed the king. “Fool! so thou hast slain the king?” is his rejoinder. “I did but follow your advice, my lord,” says Colonna. “Therefore I call you fool,” replies Ludovico; and after some further parley summons the royal guards to carry Colonna to execution “for the murdering of the king.” On this his Majesty advances, and directs the guards to seize the traitor. In fury Ludovico rushes towards the king with his open sword, is intercepted and killed by Colonna. It turns out that Vicentio's wound is not dangerous. His marriage to Evadne meets with the royal approval, “And the nuptials,” says Colonna,

“Shall at the pedestal be solemnised  
 Of our great father.”

In Evadne Miss Faucit seems to have added to her former



triumphs in the opinion of her Dublin critics. The *Freeman's Journal*, then the leading paper, writes (November 23, 1848):—

The character of Evadne is one of those embodiments of all that is high and noble in woman, which the genius of Miss Faucit appears really to grasp, as if to her was given a mission to reveal the greater attributes of her sex. In her last scene with Vicentio, the change from confiding love to indignant vindication of her honour was executed with extraordinary success, and told painfully on the audience. But when she casts her lover from her, and, meeting her brother, seeks by an affected levity to lull his suspicions, her gestures, voice, and maddening laughter produced an effect, of which none but those who witnessed it can form a conception.

In the third act Evadne parts from Vicentio, and was woman's superiority to injury and sorrow ever so portrayed? We hear the soft and silver tones still ringing in our ears [of a long passage quoted, which is in itself of great beauty].

To give a sufficient criticism of this performance would require that every speech of Evadne should be dwelt upon; but the crowning scene of all was that in which she recalls the king to shame and virtue at the foot of her father's statue. The force and power with which this scene was given has never before been equalled even by Miss Faucit.

For a year or two Evadne was included in her list of parts, and when she appeared in it, she always commanded the admiration of which this notice is an example. Naturally, wherever the remembrance still lingered of Miss O'Neill, comparisons were made, but these were certainly not unfavourable to Miss Faucit. Thus, for example, a critic in the *Dublin Evening Packet* (April 9, 1850) reports:—

That a friend in whose memory Miss O'Neill is almost religiously enshrined as a dramatic perfection, admitted to us reluctantly, that portions of Miss Faucit's Evadne (it would have been heresy to admit more) were fully equal to the best efforts of Miss O'Neill. Our friend, who was evidently wavering throughout the drama, and fighting lustily against that fulness of the eyes and throbbing of the heart, which combated so victoriously all his time-honoured prejudices, fairly surrendered at the last scene, where Evadne, after appealing to the nobility of soul that ought to be possessed by the king, rushes up to the pedestal bearing her father's statue and apostrophises his image [in the passage above quoted], when the writer's friend, he says, became absolutely frantic in his laudatory gesticulations. Indeed, we cannot wonder at our friend's coldness being warmed into enthusiasm, for nothing could have been more admirable than the Evadne of Miss Faucit. The pathos, the feeling, the sentiment, the purity of passion, that it was invested withal, alternated from the simple in beauty to the sublime in grandeur.

So also a writer in the *Manchester Examiner and Times* (May 25, 1850) says :—

We are old enough to remember Miss O'Neill in the part of Evadne, and cannot help expressing our opinion that even the dignity and pathos of that acknowledged great actress did not impress the audience with so truthful a picture of the woman as Miss Faucit. It was a fine display of the noble and impressive in art.

The play affords abundant room for such a display ; but it was not such as to induce Miss Faucit to continue long to act it. She could not, such was her nature, be much enamoured of a heroine who could restore to her affections a weak, impulsive lover like Vicentio, so ready to doubt her chastity, so unmanly in the language in which he expressed his doubts, and so prompt to fly from her into another woman's arms. The trust of a noble woman in the devotion and respect of her lover, once shaken and in such a manner, could, in her view, never be restored.

After a stay of some weeks in Dublin, to rest after her engagement there, throughout which Miss Faucit had contended with severe indisposition, of which no symptom appears to have been surmised by her audience,—so strongly did her spirit then, as indeed throughout her life, triumph over bodily weakness,—she proceeded, by way of Belfast, playing there a few nights, to fulfil her engagements in Scotland.

Before leaving Dublin, she had received from a friend a copy of a pamphlet by Mr Halpin on 'The Unities in relation to Shakespeare's Plays,' which was then creating considerable interest among the Dublin *literati*. It drew from her the following letter to her friend Miss Stokes, who had asked her opinion of the essay :—

GLASGOW, Feb. 20, 1849.

"MY DEAR MARGARET,—I have not read through Mr Halpin's pamphlet. I read a little of it, and a friend asked to look at it, with a promise to return it in a day or two, and I have not seen it since. But I am not sure my patience would have lasted through it.

"It seems to me like irreverence to try to bind Shakespeare down to any rules *we* know. He had rules, without a doubt, or

some peculiar harmony in his mind that answered for them. But to tie such a genius down to Greek or any other unities seems to me almost absurd. Shakespeare's Drama is his own invention. He was the *one* master in it, and he must be the greatest of all, because the most universal. The completeness, the grand significance of Shakespeare's art gives it an ever fresh and ever growing interest. The more we study, the more sure we feel that we are far, far away from a true appreciation of his greatness. 'Deeper than did ever plummet sound,' must have been the depth of that gifted spirit. Like all high things, we feel that he is greater than we can know. It is difficult to give expression in words when we feel intensely; but you will understand, dear, how little interest I can take in Mr Halpin's theory."

Miss Faucit was, as a rule, impatient of commentators and theorists where Shakespeare was concerned. They had never helped her, she said, to a clearer understanding of his works, and they had constantly encumbered his texts with annotations where no explanation was needed, and missed the indications which only a sympathetic imagination could observe, and the action of the stage could alone develop.

After performing in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Perth, and Aberdeen, during the winter of 1849, Miss Faucit appeared in Newcastle, South Shields, Derby, and Leicester, and ended her performances for the season at her brother's theatre in Nottingham, having refused engagements at Manchester and Liverpool, which the state of her health made it impossible for her to undertake. Her physicians had insisted on her taking a long rest, and seeking it at some of the German watering-places. Kreutznach was recommended, and she went there in the beginning of August. After a stay of a month with her friends, Dr and Mrs Bruce Joy, she accompanied them to Schwalbach, the air and waters of which she found beneficial to her health, and did not return to London till November.

During the summer of this year she was enabled, through the kindness of her friend the Rev. Mr Moultrie, who had helped to tranquillise her mind at the time of her great grief, to place a

memorial tablet to her sister, Harriet Faucit Bland, in the parish church of Rugby. It is inscribed as erected "in memorial of her many endearing virtues, near a spot intimately associated with the remembrance of her loss, by the grateful love of her only sister, Helen Faucit." These lines are added :—

"Gentle and good, affectionate and true,  
Love followed on her steps where'er she trod,  
And round her life a daily beauty grew,  
That brightened on into the peace of God."

Miss Faucit's grief grew calm in time, but the love thus recorded never waned.

As the London theatrical world was then constituted, Miss Faucit found no opportunity for appearing there, as she would have wished, and she therefore entered again into a series of engagements in the provinces. It was desirable to carry with her some new drama. With this view she had for some time had under consideration the Danish poet Henrik Herz's *King René's Daughter*, of which I had made a translation in 1846. Beautiful in conception as the main idea of this little drama is, and charmingly as it has been carried out, the poem naturally strikes the mere reader as wanting in movement and variety of character for the purposes of the stage. A genius, in the impersonator of the heroine Iolanthe, akin to that of the poet could alone, I was well aware, atone for this defect. When I translated the drama, I had Miss Faucit in view; for I knew well her power of lifting her impersonations into the region of the ideal, without losing hold of pure human character and emotion. Her performance fully justified my conclusion, for, in point of popularity, her Iolanthe took a place next to her Shakespearian impersonations.

The drama is a masterpiece of simplicity in construction and unity of interest. Iolanthe has been betrothed in childhood, after the fashion of the time, to Count Tristan of Vaudemont, as one of the conditions of a truce between her father King René of Provence and the Duke of Burgundy. Soon afterwards an accident deprived her of sight, and her father, in dread of being suspected of imposing a blind girl upon the Count, gives out that she has been sent to be educated in Spain, while in fact he



places her in a secluded valley among the mountains of Vaucluse, which he has indulged his love for the beautiful by converting into a garden of almost tropical beauty. Here Iolanthe grows up among her plants and flowers, and is admitted to intercourse with no one but her attendants,—Ebn Jahia, an eminent Moorish physician, whose skill is engaged in remedies for the restoration of her sight,—and some of her father's trusted guests. No word is ever allowed to reach her that has reference to the faculty of seeing, and so she grows up to womanhood without the shadow of a sorrow, happy as her birds, and beautiful as her flowers. She is now sixteen, the age which had been agreed upon for her marriage with Count Tristan, which the Moorish physician has from her horoscope ascertained to be the favourable period for an attempt to restore her lost sight.

Tristan and his friend Geoffrey of Orange, rambling among the mountains, come by accident upon the secret entrance to Iolanthe's retreat, and find her lying in a trance brought on by the physician, in the course of his cure, through the agency of an amulet laid upon Iolanthe's breast, from which she cannot waken until the amulet is removed. Tristan, struck to the heart by the beauty of the sleeping girl, is drawn away by his friend, who thinks there is some witchery at work in the place, but takes the amulet from her breast, intending to carry it away, a memorial of one who, he feels, is to be his fate. As the two friends are retiring, Iolanthe comes from the house into the garden, and calls for her attendant. Tristan advances to her. In the scene that ensues, he discovers that she is blind, and, from his words she, too, discovers that she wants a faculty of which she hears now for the first time. Her every word and movement deepen Tristan's admiration, and a passionate avowal of his love awakens the first pulsations of the master passion in a heart, to which the very name of love has hitherto been a stranger. How deep is the impression made upon Iolanthe is seen by their parting words:—

*Trist. (to Iolanthe)* Now, must I take my leave.

*Io.* Ah! no! no! Wherefore wilt thou go?

*Trist.*

I'll come

Again and soon—to-day I'll come again.

Wilt thou permit me with my hand to mark  
How high I am, that, when we next shall meet,  
Thou may'st distinguish me ?

*Io.*

What need of that ?

I know that few resemble thee in height,  
Thy utterance comes to me as from above,  
Like all that's high and inconceivable.  
And know I not thy tone ? Like as thou speakest  
None speak beside. No voice, no melody,  
I've known in nature, or in instrument,  
Doth own a resonance so lovely, sweet,  
So winning full and gracious as thy voice.

Trust me, I'll know thee well amidst them all !

*Trist.* Then fare thee well, until we meet once more !

*Io.* There ! Take my hand. Farewell ! Thou'lt come again—  
Again, and soon ? Thou know'st I wait for thee.

*Trist.* (*kneels and kisses her hand*) Oh, never doubt that I will come  
again !

My heart impels me hither. Though I go,  
Still of my thoughts the better half remains ;  
And whatso'er is left to me of life  
Years back to thee with evermore unrest."

Here follows a passage, which in Miss Faucit's treatment was of exquisite beauty. Tristan and his friend go off by the secret door through which they had entered. Miss Faucit passed towards the door, and, bending down, as if to listen to their receding footsteps, said :—

"Hark ! There he goes ! Among the hills  
Now echoes his light step. Oh, hush, hush, hush !  
*[Spoken as if the song of the birds disturbed her hearing,*  
I hear it now no more. Yes ; there again.  
But now 'tis gone !—Will he indeed return ?  
If he, too, like so many guests before,  
Should come but this one time ! Oh, no, no, no !  
Did he not promise me, and pledge his vow,  
He would come back to-day ? The dews are falling ;  
Already eve comes on.—Ah, no !—to-day  
He cannot come. Perhaps to-morrow, then ?  
But now it is so lonely here."

King René arrives with the physician and learns how Iolanthe has been made aware of her blindness. This was so far an advantage, for that she should be made aware of it is, in the physician's view, essential to the cure. He therefore insists on

the king giving her a full explanation of all that has been lost to her through her blindness, and all that she will gain by its restoration, before he will risk the operation by which he hopes to effect it. While Iolanthe and the physician are gone, Sir Tristan returns and breaks in upon the king with an armed force, bent on carrying Iolanthe away from what he considered to be imprisonment. To his surprise he finds that she is his destined bride. Her sight is restored, and the play concludes with their union.

No man who ever had the good fortune to hear his lines spoken by Miss Faucit could be an impartial judge, still less could he be so, if their utterance was enriched by the beauty of motion, and infinite play of expression, by which they were accompanied on the stage. I will not therefore trust myself to speak of her Iolanthe, but be content with recording the opinions of some independent critics.

After one trial performance in her brother's theatre in Sheffield, she played it for the first time in Glasgow. Of this performance the *Glasgow Herald* (January 25, 1850) says :—

From the first moment of Miss Faucit's entrance on the stage to the falling of the curtain, both eye and heart are filled to overflowing with the purest pleasure. It is difficult, where so much demands notice, to select particular passages for especial comment. Indeed it is in the growing development of the character, the fitness of each particular passage in itself, and in relation to the whole, that the charm of this performance, as in all Miss Faucit's impersonations, chiefly consists. She is the very creature the poet drew, a type of girlhood under its fairest aspect—guileless, affectionate, cultivated in the highest degree, without having lost one tittle of the heart-warm simplicity of a child—in her innocent frankness almost angelically pure. All things around her are in harmony with her own beauty of body and of mind; unconscious grace governs every movement—the king's daughter speaks in the unaffected dignity of her demeanour—she feels no distrust because she has known no sorrow. Miss Faucit's instincts have led her to portray the condition of blindness, such as Iolanthe's, with the most touching truth, by her unembarrassed freedom in moving about among the familiar objects of her garden. In this she is at once true to nature and to the purpose of the poet, who makes Tristan only discover the fact of Iolanthe's blindness after a considerable time by the fact of her presenting him with roses of different colours from those he asks for. The breathless suspense in which the audience hung upon this part of the performance was the best tribute to the performer's skill. Gladly would we pause over the remainder of this scene, where the attachment is cemented between the

lovers with a rapidity akin to that of Romeo and Juliet. But how different the two in all other respects! In the one the ardent unschooled boy dawning into manhood, the girl bursting, like the tropical flower, at once into a luxuriance fatal to its life. In the other the mature man, of ripened spirit and chivalrous worth, the poet and the warrior combined, fit to guide as well as love, to be revered as well as loved; and, on the other hand, a maiden unstained by contact with the passions or the vices of life, learning for the first time that there is an affection stronger than that which binds a father to his child. So strange is it to her that she does not herself understand the change. A new element is introduced into her being, for which she has no voice. Again, we cannot help adverting to the exquisite skill with which Miss Faucit expresses the confusion and pain of mind consequent on being informed by her father of the nature and consequences of her defect. All her past life we see is, as it were, broken up by the saddening announcement. Wanting that one faculty, she may well doubt the value of all others; and it needs her sympathy for her father's emotion to recall her to herself, and, in the effort to assure him, to find hope for her own future. We cannot close these hasty and imperfect remarks without adverting to the classical beauty of attitude which distinguished the performance throughout. It seemed as though some of Flaxman's most exquisite figures had taken motion, and were breathing and moving before our eyes.

The *Glasgow Examiner* of the same date winds up an equally elaborate criticism by alluding to the deep sympathy she created in her audience. "There was more than attention, more than excitement, more than enjoyment,—there were the inward stirrings of the best feelings, there were affection, pity, admiration, and love, all blended. Eyes unused to weeping dropped tears, and men of the sterner mould were melted with the extreme sweetness, delicacy, and grace of the personation."

In Liverpool, where Miss Faucit next appeared as Iolanthe, in passing from Glasgow to Dublin, tributes no less eloquent were paid by the leading journals. From the *Dublin Evening Post* (April 6, 1850) we extract a few passages:—

We cannot, with emotion yet unstilled, remark calmly on the general performance. Iolanthe claims our absorbed attention. Behold her as she advances, blind, yet moving free; the first stirring of love in her guileless heart—the varying amazement of her face when Tristan first speaks of sight—the touching earnestness with which she prays him to teach her what sight is—her wonder at the strangeness of his words—the deep impress of his voice upon her heart—and through all, her own voice, than which—

"No voice, no melody,  
Doth own a resonance so lovely, sweet."



. . . We have seen Miss Faucit ranging through almost all the conditions of human passion and infirmity. . . . But we confess we looked with awakened doubt for this new manifestation of an existence so widely removed from the ordinary conditions of humanity; of a being whose modified perceptions would seem to belong rather to an inhabitant of another world than to a creature of common sympathy with ourselves. The total absence of the perceptions of one sense, combined, as it is here, with an utter unconsciousness of imperfection in one who

“Does not know or dream that she is blind,”

is a case unreached by experience, and which baffles calculation; yet the same instinct of genius, so variously revealed in every human emotion, found here also a natural field for its expansion. We confess we were not prepared for what awaited us. . . . Criticism is scared. . . . Alone she stands —poet, philosopher, instructor, exalter of her race! Let no one, then, mistake the actor's mission, or think that Heaven's rarest gifts are prepared to while away a passing hour, or to form the occasion of frivolous conversation. Let us remember, too, that this high pinnacle of art can only be attained by a soul, single and sincere, earnest and pure—unstained by sordid desires—pressing onward through darkness, discouragement—enduring all, hoping all, to that perfect day, where alone it can expect the fruition of its strong desires.

Dublin at that time contained many men of high ability, who out of the fulness of their knowledge of Miss Faucit on the stage and in private life might have written this article. Who the writer was, I could never learn, but I cannot transcribe these words without deep gratitude to him for his perfect appreciation of the high motives with which Miss Faucit pursued her art, and of the beautiful woman-soul which, while it irradiated and ennobled her art, made her life as beautiful and noble as that of the ideals she had embodied.

Critics everywhere grew eloquent in speaking of Miss Faucit's Iolanthe, and although the performance of the drama occupied little more than an hour, it invariably drew crowded houses. In Manchester, to which Miss Faucit went from Dublin (April, 1850), it created the greatest interest. For the middle and working classes there it had so peculiar an attraction that she was led to ask among her friends if they could explain why. The answer was, that blindness was so common in and around Manchester, that the story of Iolanthe's unconscious blindness, the picture drawn of the loss of happiness which blindness implied, and the joy of her recovery of sight, touched their

hearts to the quick. Whether this explanation was true or not, it is certain that whenever Miss Faucit went to Manchester the little drama was eagerly demanded, and received with enthusiasm. The truth to nature of her look and movements, as the blind girl, must also have had not a little to do with this appreciation, where so many of her audience had occasion to observe them daily in their homes.

To the truth of these, striking testimony was frequently borne. It was never better expressed than in the following letter to the *Dublin Express* (May 1856), by William Carleton, the Irish novelist, whose appreciation of Miss Faucit's *Lady Macbeth* has been already quoted (p. 176 *ante*):—

SIR,—I need scarcely apologise to you for the privilege I am about to ask of offering a few observations upon Miss Faucit's impersonation on Saturday night of Iolanthe in the drama of *King René's Daughter*. I had read the story in more than one shape; I had read the play itself, but never for a moment imagined that it could be produced upon the stage. . . . When I saw in the papers that Miss Faucit was about to hazard the dangerous experiment of appearing in it, I felt as if she had been led, or rather misled, by her great successes, to encounter a difficulty which must be fatal to her. "This," I said, "is her campaign to Moscow; better stay at home and rest contented with the laurels she has won." Still I felt—and, I must confess, with fear and trembling—a peculiar interest in the result of this exhibition. The heroine is blind, and I myself had written a tale in which the hero is in a similar predicament. While writing that tale—*The Clarionet*—I made it a point to get into conversation with such blind persons as had never remembered sight. I studied them deeply, and observed both their sentiments upon topics involving the necessity of sight and the motions peculiar to their unhappy condition. From all this, you will perceive that I felt more than ordinary interest in watching the conduct of Miss Faucit in the character of the blind Princess Iolanthe. I mention these circumstances as a justification for the observations I am about to make.

After giving a sketch of the plot of the drama, Mr Carleton proceeds:—

This is a simple plot, almost a tame one, and, I must confess, I expected little from it. But what will genius not do?

At length Iolanthe enters, and here is the mystery. Although her eyes are bright and beautiful, yet such is Miss Faucit's exquisite perception of truth, and her profound impressions of what is appropriate and just and necessary to the character she undertakes, that, in spite of these bright and beautiful eyes, it was impossible for any one possessed of common observation to doubt for a moment that that radiant creature was blind. The

action—if action it can be called—resembles nothing else in the shape of character that ever appeared upon this or any other stage. It was not action, but some divine effusion that seemed to emanate from her whole person. There was no vehemence, for that would have been wholly out of keeping—the blind are never vehement—but there was that beautiful serenity of aspect for which the blind are almost uniformly remarkable. There was not, in fact, in her whole personation of the character—the most difficult that was ever undertaken—one single departure from its truth and propriety. It was one unbroken scene of tenderness and beauty from beginning to ending—an anthem of the heart, which fell upon the ear and sank into the spirit with a charm, the force of which no words can convey. And how admirably was the enunciation of the text adapted to its spirit and significance! The grace and fascination of Helen Faucit's attitudes are without any parallel on the stage; but in this instance they—even they—breathed of that innocence and purity which characterise Iolanthe. The expression of her love for Tristan ought to make the rudest country maiden blush; but how exquisitely pure and delicate did she, in her artless simplicity, make it! In fact, it gave a new and hitherto unknown phase to the passion. In any other hands its avowal, so much at variance with the conventional habits of life, would have excited laughter or disgust. From her lips it proceeded like the innocence of Eve in the garden of Paradise.

We will mention a fact, however, which may probably have escaped a portion of the audience. It is this. In approaching her father and others, there was not that direct line of motion which characterises those who are in possession of sight,—no, there was the slightest deviation imaginable, such as betrayed that everlasting sense of uncertainty which always attends the motions of the blind. This was beautifully and delicately exhibited, and struck me as one of the finest conceptions in the action of the piece. I have not time, nor perhaps have you space, to enable me to dwell upon the striking points of this inimitable personation. When Tristan wishes to test her want of sight, he asks her how many roses he has in his hand. She replies, "Give me them, then!" He says, "Nay, tell me without touching." "*How can I so?*" she replies. The melancholy beauty, the pathos—the unconscious pathos, with which she pronounces these few syllables were, in effect and power, beyond anything I ever heard, or perhaps ever *was* heard in dramatic representation. When Tristan leaves her, and she stoops down to hear his voice or footsteps as long as she can, there never was anything finer than her attitude, and the beautiful intensity of what she feels. It is not only her ear, but her heart, that is listening; and when she has recovered her sight, and kneels down to express her sense of the *now* perceptible radiance which surrounds her, nothing could surpass the exquisite and pathetic beauty with which she poured forth the appropriate sentiments upon the occasion.

Mr Carleton was a stranger to Lady Martin and to myself, but I had long admired his remarkable power both as a novelist and ballad-writer. His fine appreciation of the way the character of



Iolanthe had been made to live upon the stage, led me to write to him a few words of acknowledgment. In answering my letter he said, after referring to the misgivings with which he had gone to the theatre: "I am very glad, for my own sake, that I went, because in spite of my apprehensions I saw a new page of human genius opened to me, and I may venture to say that Iolanthe herself scarcely enjoyed the wonders that presented themselves to the new sense which had been restored to or rather conferred upon her, more than I did this wonderful and extraordinary manifestation of character. It was tender, beautiful, fascinating; and although I have read over the play since, in order for the sake of experiment to try its effect upon me again, still I must confess that in my study almost all the charm was gone, and had disappeared with the enchantress herself. This is strictly true, and probably the highest compliment I could pay her."

This recognition of the truth, that to the living interpretation of the actor we sometimes owe as much as to the genius of the author, is of especial value as coming from a man himself gifted with a power of imagination capable of finding in the text of a drama, far more surely than an ordinary reader can find it, what was present to the author's mind in the composition of his work.

Mr Carleton, who, as he says, had made a close study of the character and movements of the blind, did not fail to note how truthfully these were reflected in Miss Faucit's impersonation of Iolanthe. He probably thought that these were due to study similar to his own. In this he would not have been singular, for this was the impression that prevailed with many close observers. When Miss Faucit played Iolanthe for Sir Henry Irving's benefit at the Lyceum Theatre (June 23, 1876), Sir Henry called the next day, bringing with him the eminent oculist, the late Mr Critchett. Mr Critchett's object in calling was to learn how Miss Faucit had gained the knowledge of the tones, the movements, and generally of the accent and action of persons born blind, which had struck him in the performance of the previous night as true to the very life. Great was his surprise to learn, that she had never had any opportunity of watching blind people, and also that, as a rule in her art, she



had always avoided studying physical defects, or physical pains of any kind. She could always trust to her imagination for all that was necessary to portray these to her audience. In Iolanthe's case she imagined herself to be blind; her eyes, though open as usual, saw nothing, and if she moved, acted, spoke like a blind person, this was wholly due to the fact that for the time she was practically blind. Everything in her acting, which had impressed Mr Critchett so strongly as peculiar to blind people, was simply the spontaneous and unstudied result of what she conceived of the condition and character of Iolanthe. She always, however, suffered a certain amount of pain in the eyes after playing Iolanthe. When Mr Critchett saw her, she had not for more than five years played the part, or indeed acted at all except twice.

Before leaving Manchester Miss Faucit introduced her audience to another character in which they had not previously seen her—Beatrice, in *Much Ado About Nothing*. It was quickly appreciated there. The critic of the *Examiner and Times* (June 8, 1850) speaks of her performance as a genuine specimen of the refined and intellectual in comedy, approached by no modern acting with which he is acquainted.

On the close of her engagement in Manchester Miss Faucit went to Ireland, and spent the summer and autumn in a series of visits among her many warm friends there, visiting, among other places, the Giant's Causeway. She had determined to take a year's rest. But her purpose changed, when an opportunity presented itself of appearing in London in a new play by Mr Westland Marston, which had been for several years in her hands, and of which she thought highly. The play was called *Philip of France and Marie de Meranie*, and was produced (November 4, 1850) at the Olympic Theatre, then under the management of the elder Farren.

The story of the piece is this. Philip of France, affianced to Marie de Meranie, for political reasons espouses the Princess Ingerburge, sister of the King of Denmark. Unable to conquer his aversion to his bride, he procures a divorce from his pliant bishops, on the ground that the marriage is within the forbidden degrees, and weds Marie. Appeal is made by Ingerburge

to the Pope, who, glad to assert his supremacy over kingly power, adopts her cause and requires Philip to repudiate Marie, under pain of having his kingdom laid under interdiction. Philip refuses, and the ban is pronounced; but, after an interval of some months, Philip, moved by the disastrous consequences to his kingdom, and fearful of an adverse decision by the bishops, who have been appointed to try the cause, succumbs, and agrees to reinstate Ingerburge in her place of Queen. Marie retires into obscurity, and soon after dies.

In these incidents there were materials for an effective drama. The dramatist chiefly showed his strength in the character of Marie, and in it, as presented by Miss Faucit, the interest of the play wholly centred. The chance of seeing her, after an absence of three years from the London stage, was eagerly seized. The theatre was crammed to excess, and the *Morning Post* (November 5) records that she was "welcomed with an enthusiasm, such as is seldom, in these days, witnessed within the walls of a theatre. Loud and reiterated applause interrupted, on her entrance, the business of the scene for several minutes. As soon as the action was permitted to proceed the great tragedian amply justified the ardour of the audience. The inspired fervour of her eloquent utterance gave warmer life to the glowing lines with which the character opens, and, as the calm of her dreamy existence is changed for the turbulent strife of contending passions, her genius rose to the exigencies of the scene, mastering every difficulty by that noblest art which conceals itself, and is known and felt in its effects only. . . . From beginning to end it was one continued triumph. . . . The applause at the conclusion was deafening; but the tears, which had previously flowed in abundance, formed the most honourable tribute to the artist."

A similar strain of praise came from all the leading journals. Thus the *Sunday Times* says: "Miss Faucit's acting elevated the poet's loftiest thoughts, and gave new power and pathos to his most impassioned lines." "We can conceive nothing more gentle, feminine, and devoted," writes the *Morning Herald*, "than her portrayal of the affection which constitutes the theme of the play. In the great scene (of her resignation of her crown in order to avert the Papal anathema which threatens the man she

loves) she seemed animated by a supernatural strength, and produced an effect no less grand than absorbing." "In the final interview between Marie and Philip," writes the *Morning Chronicle*, "before her death, the acting of Miss Faucit is beautiful beyond description." "So truly, so gently, with such marvellous grace, and with such occasional terrible power," says the *Morning Post*, "was the character impersonated, that the play seemed to be this suffering woman, and Miss Faucit the entire tragedy. . . . She seems to have reached that point in her art, where the profoundest emotions are regulated and accompanied by grace and beauty—where the ideal seems actual, and we have the highest art with no apparent consciousness of its presence." Again, this is the testimony of the *Literary Gazette* (November 9):—

The engagement of Miss Faucit is a rich boon to the public, for since the days of Siddons and O'Neill she is the most worthy exponent of the lofty poetical drama. Her fine appreciation of the poetry is alone equalled by her powers of characterisation and the exquisite melody of her voice. All the phases of passion find in Helen Faucit a faultless interpreter; she seizes the most delicate *nuances* with a feminine yet firm grasp, and all the varying emotions of the scene pass before us truthfully as life, but exalted by the fine intellectuality and exquisite sensibility of the truly refined artist. And yet Helen Faucit has been absent from the Metropolitan stage for three years, and the managers whine forth their hypocritical complaints of the difficulties under which they labour from a want of dramatic talent.

The writer forgot that no more can one or two gifted actors make it possible to do justice to the higher drama, than one swallow can make a summer. It was the dearth of these, as much as anything else, that kept Miss Faucit so much out of London.

There were two scenes in this play of Mr Marston's that stand out vividly in the record of Miss Faucit's performances. One of these was the scene in which Philip comes to her, after having reinstated Ingerburge, and proposes that Marie, although not queen of his subjects, should live with him as queen of his heart. At his first suggestion of this she is bewildered, and when he tells her that Ingerburge is queen but in name, but that she, Marie, "Will retain the empire of his heart," she says, "Pray, repeat the words—the words you spoke but now."

*Philip.* I said, my love,  
Though Ingerburge might bear the name of queen,  
Thou only shouldst rule Philip.

*Marie.* Pause awhile.  
Though Ingerburge might bear the name of queen,  
I only should rule Philip. [*Signs to him to proceed.*]

*Philip.* Thou shouldst be. [*Hesitating and averting his head.*]

*Marie.* HIS PARAMOUR. Oh God, although his voice  
Was shamed from speech, this is the thing he means !

[*She turns from him.*]

*Philip.* Thou wouldst not go ?

*Marie.* I am already gone !  
We measure distance by the heart."

The burst of feeling with which these last words were spoken used always to electrify the house. A Manchester critic said of it, that "in times past it should itself have made an actress's fame." Urged by Philip to stay, Marie sits down, saying, "The Duke de Meran's daughter listens, sir."

"*Philip.* Oh, has this grief no remedy ?

*Marie.* None, none.  
The faith of love no hand can wound, but that  
Was pledged to guard it. *Then* what hand can staunch ?  
We strive no more with doom ; the sad mistake  
May be endured, but not retrieved. No, no !

*Philip.* By Heaven, you do me wrong ! 'Tis not in man  
To conquer destiny. I made you queen."

It is impossible to imagine anything nobler or more impressive than Marie's reply as given by Miss Faucit :—

"You made me queen. I made you more than king.  
When my eyes raised their worship to thy face,  
I saw no crown, I asked not if thy hand  
Closed on a sceptre ; but mine pressed it close,  
Because it rent the shackles of the slave.  
'Twas not thy grandeur won me. Had the earthquake  
Gulphed thine empire—had frowning fate  
Lour'd on thine arms, and scourged thee from the field,  
A fugitive—if on thy forehead Rome  
Had graved her curse, and all thy kind recoiled  
In horror from thy side—I yet had cried  
There is no brand upon *thy heart* ; let that  
In the vast loneliness still beat to mine ! [*Philip falls at her feet.*]  
Rise ! The feet  
By thorns on life's rough path so often pierced  
Are little like to spurn a stumbling brother."



The infinite tenderness of tone with which these words were spoken, and the quiet dignity of her parting from Philip under which the agony at her heart could yet be felt, made this scene one which must have lingered long in the memory of all who saw it. Even more affecting was the concluding scene of the play. Marie is dying. Philip, with his forces, is near the château to which she has retreated. "Crownless, perhaps, and vanquished," she says, "Oh, to see him once more!" The love for him has never left her heart. Anne de Vignolles, her faithful companion, says :

"Has not his treachery poison'd all thy joy ?

*Marie.* But then his love first taught me what joy was.

*Anne.* What canst thou give him more than life ?

*Marie.*

My death ;

The hope that I may bless him from the grave.

Have not some said our spirits minister

To those we loved on earth, guide them from wrong,

And draw them nearer heaven ? . . .

When all with me is over, seek the king,

Tell him that I passed

In peace from earth—that in my closing hours

I thought of those made precious by his love,

And shunned all harsher memories."

Philip, returning from a victorious campaign, passes near the château. French troops are seen advancing. This tells of victory. Marie rushes to the window. The troops halt. "Ha, look ! that knight !" Marie exclaims. "His visor's closed," Anne rejoins :—

"*Marie.* To thee.

My soul looks through it. 'Tis the king, the king !

Come ! . . . In my parting clasp

To fold him, with my parting breath forgive him."

Her strength fails her, and she falls back on her couch. Philip rushes in. She springs up, and throws herself into his arms :—

"*Marie.* I hold thee, see thee : thou art safe, victorious !

*Philip.* Three realms are at my foot. Thy throne is fix'd,  
Rocklike, for ever ; *thy* throne, Queen of France !

*Marie.* Use well thy power,

Dear lord, when I am gone. Be thy sway bless'd,

Thy memory revered !

*Philip.* When thou art gone !  
 What mean these cruel words ! . . .  
*Marie.* The angel tarried for thy coming. Now,  
 My head is on thy breast ;—I die.”

In this scene upon the stage everything depends upon the actress. For intensity of pathos it could never have been surpassed. It was well said of it by the *Manchester Examiner*, when she played it there, that it was “invested with a spiritual beauty that made the ‘sorrow heavenly.’ Death, in this instance, seemed to be not so much a disruption from the ties and affections of earth, as a translation to the peace of a purer and happier home. Pathos more profound, or more ennobling, the stage, in our time at least, has never produced.” All the London journals spoke of it in the same sense ; so, too, did the English and Scotch provincial journals. Much to Miss Faucit’s regret she could not show Marie to her Dublin friends. The strong language of Philip, in resistance to the Papal authority, made this impossible. How highly she herself thought of the character, will be seen from what she wrote to her friend Mrs Bruce Joy, when sending her a copy of the play :—

“GLASGOW, Nov. 14, 1850.

“I am sure you will read it with great interest for its own sake, and picture me at my work of an evening.

“You will see that Marie deserves to be a favourite with me, and this she has been for years. I think it must be five years since Mr Marston read the play to me. Marie is sweet, noble, womanly, and carries my sympathies with her more almost than any character out of Shakespeare. She is *great* only in her self-denial and endurance, therefore not so effective a character on the stage as many others. On this account, too, she is less exhausting to the powers, and with the exception of the Fourth Act, which is really trying, the part requires little exertion. . . . As for my Philip, I am obliged to make him for myself as usual, and this is a great drawback to all one’s responsive and impulsive feeling.”

Authors do not always, it is said, show much gratitude to actors, but in this quality Mr Marston never failed towards Miss

Faucit. To her he dedicated the play, which, in his own words, had been "illustrated and adorned by her genius," and he inscribed a beautifully bound copy of it to her "with the sincerest thanks and admiration." This copy was illustrated by an illuminated drawing of the arms and the tombstone of the Marie of history, bearing the following very interesting description, which seems like a tear dropped upon the page of history: "MARIE DE MERANIE, Fille de Berthold IV., Duc de Meranie, et d'Agnes De Rotlecks, mariée à Philippe Auguste au Mois de Juin 1196. Mourut de Déplaisir au Chasteau de Poissy en 1201 peu après sa séparation et Fut enterrée au même lieu."

*Mourut de déplaisir!* A tragedy in three words.

About this time Miss Faucit heard from the Rev. Mr Moultrie of a reading given (November 12, 1850) by Mr Macready, whom she had not seen since they parted in Paris. "On the day when I left home," Mr Moultrie writes, "Macready gave a reading of *Hamlet* to our natives. This is my wife's criticism on the performance — 'I liked Macready's reading much, but not half so much as Miss Faucit's. There was too much of the actor in it, too much rant, action taking the place of that intense beauty of intonation and feeling, which I felt so deeply in her reading.'" On intonation alone, as expressive of the shades of feeling and character, Miss Faucit relied in all her readings. Action she considered to be quite out of place, and yet she could give such perfect individuality to the various characters, that she had no occasion to name them more than once.

The following letter to Mrs Bruce Joy falls within this period. Her friend had written a poem and sent it for Miss Faucit's critical judgment, on which, as did all who had occasion to test it, she placed great reliance.

Those who are familiar with Goethe's views, as expressed in a conversation with Eckermann on the subject with which the letter deals, will be struck with the similarity between them and those expressed in this letter:—

"LONDON, Jan. 11, 1851.

"In the first place, I must confess that I have no great sympathy with allegorical subjects. Perhaps this is because

my pursuits have led me to deal with what is embodied in substantial forms, and so have unfitted me for doing justice to what is simply symbolical. Do not wonder, therefore, if you find me unjust to your poem, or at least more severe than I should otherwise be. Am I right in supposing it to allegorise the ultimate prostration of vice before purity and nobleness? If this be so, does the allegory run parallel to actual or probable experience, as it ought? For is not such a man as E—— more likely to have control over a nature like that of A——'s friend rather than A—— herself? She reads his character, sees his moral deformity from the first, and just as no direct wrong to herself can make him more repugnant to her, so no retribution can demonstrate his vileness more clearly to her eyes. The action, therefore, to my mind, wants probability and purpose; and while I think the poem possesses all the shadowy beauty of a dream, it has also all a dream's inconclusiveness.

“I think, too, you are at a disadvantage in making it run in the first person. Praises, however merited, lose all their grace when reported by their object; and what we should be very well pleased to hear said of A——, we are apt to think little of her for repeating. Do you remember a scene in Goethe's *Tasso*, where the two Leonoras converse together in a manner similar to your two friends? But if either were to repeat the dialogue in her own person, at once all the attractiveness and interest would be lost.

“I wish you would exercise your mind more in literary composition, for I am sure it would be a blessed good to yourself and a great pleasure to your friends. But I would not have you deal so much in mere abstractions. Take something real and earnest to grapple with. You may elevate a reality to the clouds, but it must be a reality in the beginning. You seek your ideals, it seems to me, too much in the spirit world, and do not sufficiently connect them with living human beings. There is no form or idea of worth or beauty of which the type may not be found, I believe, in actual life, or else we of this age are most shabbily treated. I found, I must confess, a deeper pleasure and a more instructive subject of contemplation in your touching, interesting, and graphic account of your old friend, who so nobly dedicated



his life to truth, than I could (forgive me) in a dozen allegories. This was a bit of actual life and truth—something to take to the heart and profit by. A life so lived is something *done*, and which, therefore, may be done again. How I wish you would try to work on themes of this kind! With your powers of observation you could be at no loss for subjects, and that you would treat them well I am certain.”

Goethe often spoke to Eckermann to much the same effect, as, for example :—

The world is so great and rich, and life is so manifold, that there will be no want of occasions for poems. But your little pieces must be, in the true sense of the word, *Gelegenheit's Gedichte*; they must arise from and have reference to an actual occasion of life—reality must afford both the origination of their existence and the materials out of which they are moulded. A special case requires nothing but the treatment of a poet to become universal and poetical. My poems were all motived by and have all their root and base in reality. *Of poems that are conjured out of the air I make no account.*

And again :—

Let me not be told that the actual world is destitute of a poetical interest. It is the great triumph of genius to make the common appear novel by opening our eyes to its beauty. Reality gives the motive, the hinging points, the kernel; but to create a beautiful living whole out of these rough materials, that is the work of the poet.

It is equally true of the great painter and the great actor. They can, and often do, glorify very ordinary materials,

“Clothing the palpable and the familiar  
With golden exhalations of the dawn.”

Before Miss Faucit's engagement at the Olympic closed, she appeared, in compliance with the desire generally expressed to see her in some other character than Marie de Meranie, as Julia in *The Hunchback*, with such success that her engagement might have been indefinitely extended, but for the provincial engagements to which she was pledged. Liverpool, Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Manchester were visited in succession, and in all these towns her reputation was increased by the addition of the character of Marie de Meranie to her list. Closing her provincial

tour early in May, she rested for two months before entering upon an engagement for four nights at the Olympic Theatre. This she did on the 14th of July (1851), with the intention of performing only Pauline, Juliet, and Rosalind. The public excitement produced by her performances of these characters, however, was so great that she was induced to prolong her engagement and add the character of Lady Macbeth to her original list. The leading journals were full of admiring criticisms. From these we select two analyses of her Lady Macbeth, as containing the first recognition in London of the truth of her conception of the character. Of these the *Morning Post* writes (August 5, 1851):—

The impersonation was characterised by careful study, original thought, and highly artistic execution. It was not the conventional stage portrait, but the Lady Macbeth of Shakespeare and of Nature. In the hands of Miss Faucit the daring ambition of the heroine o'erswayed but did not extinguish the sentiments of the woman. She appeared to be one who was, or rather who thought she was, prepared to sacrifice the life of her child, if need be, in obedience to her oath, but not one who would have "dashed out" an "infant's brains" for pure love of the action. Strong affections yielded in her breast to a still stronger passion—still the affections were there, and held their natural current. This rendering of the character is beyond all praise, inasmuch as it converts the traditional impossibility into a sublime and faithful portraiture of humanity. It has been deemed by some critics as well as actresses of high note, that the expression, "Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done it," is the only touch of nature in Shakespeare's delineation of Lady Macbeth. The notion is shallow and unjust. There is throughout a strong and passionate love for her husband, expressed in many tender and graceful passages. These Miss Faucit delivered with exquisite pathos. After the banqueting scene, for instance, and its terrible emotions, when the fiend of histrionic conventionalities would have visited Macbeth with a storm of vulgar indignation, how beautiful was the hearted sympathy with which Miss Faucit enunciated the line

" You lack the season of all natures, sleep !"

The mingled love and pity conveyed in these words revealed the real character of Lady Macbeth, and the elocution was faultlessly pure and charmingly musical. It came from the heart of the actress, and went directly to the hearts of the audience.

To our liking the great triumph of the evening was the celebrated sleep-walking scene. The conscience stricken with guilt expressed itself in every movement and intonation. The pervading idea of terror was absolutely appalling; and yet a solemn and sustained dignity elevated the whole to the highest standard of art.

Of the sleep-walking scene another leading journal writes:—

The sleep-walking scene was a perfect gem. With wandering and uncertain step she advances towards the spectators, and then in a low moaning tone, highly expressive of mental agony, she gives utterance to the remorse that is weighing her to the grave. There is not that ghastliness of expression which we have seen indulged in with a terrible and almost chilling effect; but her countenance is expressive of a shuddering horror at the past, and a deep sense of the enormity of the crimes which are heaped above her head, crushing her down beyond redemption. A heavy breath of relief was drawn by the audience when she glided from the stage, and they gave vent to their feelings in prolonged bursts of applause.

In the following notice from the *Literary Gazette* it is easy to recognise the hand of George Fletcher, who had from the first maintained, like Christopher North, that Miss Faucit's was "the true Lady Macbeth":—

Of late years our literary criticism of the poet, shaking off these theatrical conventionalities by which, more or less consciously, it had long been fettered, has applied itself to vindicate Shakespeare and nature from traditional perversions—and more especially to the character of *Lady Macbeth*. It is now generally admitted, as demonstrable from Shakespeare's own pages, that the true Lady Macbeth is not a woman inherently selfish and imperious, remorselessly determined to force her husband to the fulfilment of his own ambitious purpose,—but that far more interesting and impressive, because more natural character, a generous woman, deprived by her very self-devotion to the ambitious purpose of a merely selfish man.

They whom the most thoughtful and elaborate literary expositions of the leading characters in this play have led to this conclusion, find the most convincing, as well as the most interesting, confirmation of their view in the living comment presented to them by Miss Faucit's original personation, the result of her own womanly instinct thoughtfully working upon the lucid indications of the poet. And they who come to the performance under the full sway of conventional prepossession, find in the superior *nature* and *consistency* of the personation ample grounds for considering whether, in this instance as in so many others, the real portraiture of Shakespeare has not undergone essential distortion and degradation through the medium of our later stage.

It was, indeed, gratifying to find, at the two representations of the play last week at the Olympic, that this truer and more spiritual reading of the part made its way to the feelings and the understanding of the audience, as testified by their cordial reception of it throughout. We have no space for details regarding the exquisitely artistic execution of the several successive phases of the character, from its first appearance in all the pride and strength of ambitious affection and indomitable will—through the wasting struggle to hide her own remorse and calm her husband's feverish apprehensions—to her last spectral stage of despair and of exhaustion,



physically broken and spiritually tottering, yet true to the last to her queenly affection. Through each and all of these agitating gradations of feeling and of passion, the actress moved intuitively, ever feminine, yet ever majestic. Especially she made us feel how indispensable this perfect womanliness, in Shakespeare's conception, must have been, to make her taunts of Macbeth's irresolution operate with the fullest intensity. Such sentiments, from what is called a masculine looking or speaking woman, have little moral energy, compared with what they derive from the ardent utterance of a delicately feminine voice and feature, strung to their utmost tension by the spirit of unconquerable will.

The writer concludes his observations with these words :—

We cannot conclude our notice of this series of performances without pointing out emphatically, that an actress who can personate the Juliet, the Rosalind, and the Lady Macbeth, as Miss Faucit has done during her brief engagement, merits better opportunities than the London stage affords at present for the display of that art, of which she is indeed a most accomplished mistress.

The public had no idea that the close of this brief engagement was the prelude to a new epoch in Miss Faucit's life, and that she was about to change the name which she had made famous for another. A friendship with which she had honoured me for several years was to end in a union for life, and we were married at the old St Nicholas Church in Brighton on the 25th of August 1851. Many years before, she had promised her attached and admiring friend the vicar, that, if ever she married, he should perform the ceremony. The promise was forgotten on neither side, and good Mr Wagner, with his coadjutor the Rev. Mr Cook, of St Peter's Church, also a friend and warm admirer of the bride, performed the ceremony. She had a horror of public display at all times, and wished that this, the most solemn act of her life, should not draw together the crowds, which so often take all solemnity from the joining together of two lives, on which their future happiness depends. She would have only two bridesmaids, her niece, Miss Kate Saville, and Miss Eliza Bruce, afterwards the wife of the celebrated astronomer Professor Adams. Every effort was made to keep the day and hour of marriage from being known. Nevertheless, every seat in the church was filled, and the bride had to make her way through the churchyard to and from the church, shrinking from the gaze of a great crowd of eager spectators.



## CHAPTER XI.

NEXT day we left England, to accomplish my wife's long-cherished desire to visit some of the chief cities of Italy. Rome was the main object of interest, and, after spending several weeks there, we returned to England by way of Pisa, Florence, Genoa, Bologna, Milan, Como, the St Gothard Pass, Lucerne, and Paris, and arrived in London early in November. All had gone well: a store of pleasant and instructive memories had been laid by. But there was one drawback. The excitement of seeing so much, and the fatigue of travelling, which upon the Continent in those days was very great, had made a too heavy demand upon my wife's strength, exhausted as she had been by her recent professional labours. She was unwilling to admit this, thinking only of "the store of images and precious thoughts" which she had brought back; but it was a lesson to me, whose duty it was to see that her future life was not tried beyond the limits of her strength.

It had been understood between us that she was to be free to continue the practice of her art. To her it was the very life of life. Year by year her mastery of it had grown, year by year her sway had strengthened over the hearts and minds of the thousands throughout the kingdom, to whom she had opened new views of womanhood, and made real the visions that had passed before "the inward eye" of Shakespeare and our best dramatists. She was proud of her vocation, and deeply grateful for the power to fulfil it with, as she believed, greater effect than ever; and in this consciousness she rejoiced, thinking that, so long as she could exercise it, she did not live in vain. One might as justly say to

a Tennyson, Do not write,—to a Millais, Do not paint,—to a Foley, Do not model, as have said to her, Do not act! I, at least, was not the man to say so, knowing how much I myself owed of culture and of pure enjoyment to her genius, and how great an influence for good her so potent art had been to thousands who, but for her, would never have known the impulses of elevating thought and feeling, which a woman of a lofty nature can arouse, by the living commentary of voice and look and movement, in the impersonation of ideal characters upon the stage.

Great as my wife was as artist, this in no way interfered with her love of the calm delights of a private life. For home, its quiet, its security, she had yearned through a hitherto anxious and fevered career. Home happiness she had been admitted to share at the firesides of many good and gifted people, where she had been welcomed, first, perhaps, for her genius, but soon for her gentle, unassuming, bright, generous nature. Delightful contrast such intervals of repose had been to the days and nights of toil, which, however greeted with admiration and applause, left the heart unsatisfied. She valued her art not for fame, or fortune, but for the delight it gave her in itself, and in the fulfilment of what she regarded as a duty. But there was another side of her nature, which called no less for satisfaction, in the quietude of home, and in bringing around her friends whom she could esteem and trust. So it was, that in her own drawing-room, at the head of her own table, she was as attractive as she was upon the stage, but it was the attraction of the quiet lady, whose thought was never of herself, but only of her guests. New also as she was to the cares of a household, her home soon became, under her fine sense of method and completeness, a model household. To leave nothing imperfect, nothing slighted, to think nothing trivial that could either make or mar completeness, was her rule in all the arrangements of her private, as it was in those of her public life. Just as she could with apparent ease produce order out of chaos at a rehearsal, so, under her observing eye, everything in her home seemed to fall into its right place, and all her servants learned to fulfil their duties, as if she had been always familiar with the cares and occupations of a purely domestic life. It was so from the

first days of her marriage. But while she thus "the lowliest duties on her heart did lay," the love of her art burned within her as ardently as ever. Through it her higher aspirations found their outlet; but it was never allowed to interfere with the duties of her home. These were paramount with her; for to her home she always looked forward as a quiet haven of retreat, where the excitement and fatigue of the theatre could be lived over and forgotten in the society of friends, and in the companionship of the books she loved.

Soon after her return to London my wife was importuned to appear in public, and she agreed to perform under Mr Bunn for a few nights at Drury Lane. Juliet, Rosalind, and Pauline were the characters chosen. She had been promised that a strong company should be retained to support her. But this Mr Bunn either could not or would not provide. Still, although labouring under the great disadvantage of very inadequate support, she was received with great enthusiasm. Her Juliet especially was warmly recognised by both the public and the press. From her friend Mr Marston came the following letter:—

31st January 1852.

Although you must often find the inundation of such tributes tiresome enough, yet suffer mine to the perfection of your Juliet to have a place amongst the rest. I am not sure that I ever received so much delight from you before, and I say this remembering Imogen and Rosalind.

An embodiment so steeped in love and delicacy, combining the freshness of an unschooled heart with those instincts of poetry, that are truer than all acquired graces, could only be designed and carried out by a genius, which is itself an instinct, and which the highest order of mere talent can never approach.

I am writing you my thanks, not my criticism. Of the great soliloquy scene I shall only say, that if its commencement and progress were instances, in their graphic and poetical truth, of what you could *do*, its close was the instance of what you could *refrain from doing*, when fidelity to nature required. I refer to the exhaustion with which Juliet retired to the bed, instead of the ordinary climax when she takes the draught. I cannot tell you, how I admired the self-denial of true art here. . . .

WESTLAND MARSTON.

"Acting to a clever, sympathetic audience is a delight no one can tell," Miss Faucit says in one of her diaries. For this reason she always had peculiar pleasure in acting in Manchester,

for there her audience was both intelligent and sympathetic. She accepted a short engagement there in April, 1852, and made her first appearance as Adrienne Lecouvreur, in an adaptation which I had some time before prepared for her of Scribe's drama of that name. The character was not one greatly to her taste, but she thought it might prove an acceptable addition to the list of characters which were connected with her name. She was welcomed with even more than ordinary enthusiasm, and in this new character she carried her audience with her, through all the strong and stirring situations of the play up to its infinitely pathetic close, with a power, different in many respects from that of Rachel, who had hitherto been identified with the part, but certainly not less enthralling.

Mdlle. Rachel [says the *Manchester Examiner and Times*, April 21, 1852] gave us more of the individual life of the artist in a country and among a people where art is presumed to possess a nature peculiarly its own. Miss Faucit, on the contrary, presents us with a charming picture of human passion—even art is subdued to ordinary sympathies—a simple-hearted woman, loving as only woman can love. To our feelings the very simplicity of the character added to its beauty. . . . Miss Faucit's Adrienne may be considered as among her greatest triumphs. We do not enter into a detail of the plot; but we may venture to point out the passages in the drama where the actress exhibited more than ordinary power. The manner of indicating to her friend, the old prompter Michonnet, the secret of her love for the Count de Saxe—the noble confidence which she places in the Count, when, her jealousy of his attentions to another having been aroused, he assures her of his truth and loyalty—the earnest yet subdued tone, in which she solicits the assistance of Michonnet in obtaining the release of her beloved from arrest under pecuniary difficulties—the bitter scorn against her still presumed rival, the Princess de Bouillon, during the recital of a speech from Racine's *Phédre*—and the last scene of all, where, having withdrawn to her own apartment, worn down, almost prostrate with grief, which tells of a breaking heart, she is poisoned by means of a bouquet insidiously conveyed to her from the Princess,—these were all a series of pictures not to be surpassed even by the genius of Rachel. The final close of that beautiful life, to which she clings with such eagerness, after the passionate assurance of the Count that she is the wife of his heart, was painful—the more painful, not (as we see such scenes too often depicted) from its physical agony, but from that terrible reality of an inward suffering, which is more difficult to endure.

This last sentence brings back vividly my own impression on the first performance of the play. The pathos of the heroine's



death was so intense, that I not only determined never to witness the scene again, but even begged my wife never to repeat the character in any future engagement. So deeply moved by it was the Michonnet of the night—an old and able actor—that he told me, he quite lost his self-command, and could not speak the few words which he had to speak. The tragedy of this sudden severance from life, just when it gave the promise of what made it dear, was too sad not to leave behind it in the audience a feeling of unqualified pain, while it also seemed to me to involve a strain upon the actress's own feelings which could not be for her good. She was not sorry to comply with my wish, and to turn after a few nights from the hectic passion of Adrienne to the emotions of the more healthful heroines of Shakespeare and our own dramatists, with which she was in fuller sympathy.

It was during this engagement that the following lines were addressed to her by Charles Swain, a poet of whom Manchester had reason to be proud. By her they were highly prized for the author's sake, whom through a long acquaintance with his family and himself she found cause to hold in the highest esteem for his distinguished qualities of head and heart. Apart from this, the verses must have been welcome to her, as a recognition by a man of true genius of the aims she always held before her in the exercise of her art:—

Thou that flingest back the portal  
Of the high and pure ideal;  
Priestess of a spell immortal,  
Mingling fancy with the real:

Thou, whose lofty mind can tower  
With illimitable power,  
Still continue thy career!—  
Teach us—charm us—year by year!  
Still the inner light revealing,  
With an Artist's earnest feeling;  
Noble ever!—ever soaring,  
With a spirit all adoring,  
Towards that world of genius, hidden  
Save to steps that Heaven hath  
bidden!

All the Seasons seem to claim thee;  
Spring comes smiling but to name  
thee;

Saying how thou topp'st thy  
station—

How thou dost adorn thy place  
With inimitable grace;—  
With delicious modulation  
Making language something more  
Than it ever seemed before!—  
Picture—Sculpture—Music—all  
That we POETRY may call!—  
With a pure interpretation,  
Worth the whole world's approba-  
tion,  
Giving spiritual sense,  
And a purer influence,  
To the Bard's immortal line!

. . . . .  
Prove the Stage, as it was meant,  
Education's instrument!

Gifted to inspire, refine,  
 And elevate the breast of man!  
 Lend the power—for it is thine,—  
 Grasp the bolder, better plan,  
 To instruct than to amuse,  
 Or their influence infuse  
 In a mode, thou best can tell,  
 To make both inseparable.

Where shall we thine equal see  
 In Expression's mastery?  
 Perfect in all love's disguises—  
 Blushing hopes, and fond surprises—  
 Darling glances—sweet persuasions—  
 Musical on all occasions!  
 Yet, when love inspires the theme,  
 Sweeter than an Angel's dream!

Sift the dross from out the gold,—  
 Bid the Stage show, as of old,  
 Something of that classic mind  
 Which makes Heroes of mankind!  
 Takes men—from the thrall of earth,  
 And the dust of common life—  
 Where immortal flowers have birth,  
 With immortal incense rife!

In thy power o'er all illusion,  
 In thy delicate transfusion,  
 'Mid a myriad sweet gradations,  
 Of true Art—in Art's creations!—  
 In that feminine address  
 Crowning Woman's loveliness:  
 In *all* things of Heart and Mind,  
 Where shall we thine equal find?

April 28, 1852.

During this year my wife accepted no engagements except a brief one in Edinburgh in November, where her acting always stimulated some of the ablest men to write about her. Thus the *Advertiser* writes (25th of November), expressing in eloquent prose the ideas which had inspired Mr Swain's verse:—

How feeble is the pen to do justice to her powers! Her acting is pre-eminently the poetry of expression. You see the varied emotions of the human heart *living* in her as she plays—breathing or burning in her words, and revealing themselves amidst matchless grace in her every motion. In beholding her you feel, what a powerful source of moral elevation—what a fountain ever welling and sparkling with noblest thoughts—the stage is fitted to be. The opera itself, with all its splendid acting and accessories, fades from memory before that single figure, making real the Ideal of feeling, embodying all that is noblest and most fascinating in humanity. Alas! that the triumph of the actor should be so fleeting—that this most dazzling embodiment of Fine Art—this matchless combination of Poetry, Sculpture, Painting, Music (for what music can rival in sustained effect the impassioned utterance, all fire, yet all melody, of the gifted actor?) should so quickly fade irrecoverably into the past; that neither pen nor pencil can perpetuate its brilliant, thrilling, and often nameless charms, and that the real fame and appreciation of the most gifted performer perishes with the generation which witnessed his triumphs and enjoyed his art!

An old lament, and, in some sense, a true one; sure to be most deeply felt by the artist, who looks to present or posthumous fame as his chief requital. But the gifted actor starts upon his career with the knowledge that his influence is of necessity

ephemeral. Of the many great men in the world's history whose names live on, how few are those who do not live on only as a name? So, too, will that of the actor live on, if he makes a mark strong enough upon his contemporaries. But it is to the present, that he must look for his incentive and his reward. To quicken the imagination by the embodiment of noble personalities, to stir men's hearts to generous impulses and wider sympathies, to send high thoughts home to their souls by eloquent speech and gesture, to make the creations of great poets live, is his vocation. What a triumph is his, to hold as it were in his hand the very souls of an audience, and to rouse up impulses for good which would else have slept, to fill the eyes of thousands with tears, which "gracious pity hath engendered," to send his audiences home, resolved to aim in their lives at some of the goodness, the heroism, which has been put before them! What higher achievement than this can the actor desire? If he can do this, surely he has little cause to mourn, with Garrick, that

"Nor pen, nor pencil can the actor save,  
The art, the artist, share one common grave."

It is natural that those, who have profited by his worth, should be sorry that their successors shall not have the same advantage, but he himself should not complain. Schiller puts the actor's case admirably in the Introduction to his 'Wallenstein's Lager':—

"After-time  
Entwines no garland for the actor's brow,  
So from the present must he earn his meed,  
Fill brimful up the moment that is his,  
On hearts that hear him lay a potent hand,  
And in the worthiest and best of these  
Raise for himself a living monument.  
Thus does he by anticipation take  
The glory that attends a deathless name;  
For he who gives the best souls of his time  
Thoughts and emotions that enrich their life,  
That man has lived for all times yet to come."

To give to her audiences such "thoughts and emotions," to trans- fuse into them all of the best that she had learned from life and

the teaching of her own heart, was the paramount aim and study of Miss Faucit's public life from first to last.

In her own home and in society, with which she was now more free to mingle, the charm of perfect ladyhood and a certain distinction of character and bearing, which fascinated on the stage, were no less deeply felt, even by those who were entire strangers to her. Thus, in 1853, George Eliot, seeing her at a soiree in the house of Mr Chapman, the proprietor of the *Westminster Review*, (where, I remember, she felt herself very much at sea among a crowd of learned ladies), writes of her thus: "We had an agreeable soiree last Wednesday. I fell in love with Helen Faucit. She is the most poetic woman I have seen for a long time—there is the ineffable charm of a fine character, which makes itself felt in her face, voice, and manner." George Eliot at this time had never seen Miss Faucit on the stage, and many years elapsed before they again met. When they did meet, and came to know each other well, George Eliot was not slow to appreciate the character, which had so made itself felt in face, voice, and manner. How she admired both actress and woman will hereafter be shown from her letters.

Early in 1853 my wife was urged by Mr Buckstone, who had succeeded Mr Webster as manager of the Haymarket Theatre, to accept a short engagement there. To this she was the more inclined, as it gave her an opportunity of fulfilling an old understanding with Mr Browning, that she would act in his *Colombe's Birthday*, if ever an opportunity arose. The promise had, however, been made so long ago, that she was not sure if Mr Browning still remained of the same mind. She therefore wrote to him, and in her letter mentioned her disappointment at not finding him in Florence, when we called at the Casa Guidi in September 1851. Her letter quickly brought the following reply:—

"FLORENCE, Jan. 31, '53.

"MY DEAR MRS MARTIN,—Thank you very heartily for such kind remembrances of me, and be assured, that I, for my part, have been in no danger of forgetting my promises any more than your performances, which were admirable of all kinds. I shall be delighted if you can do anything for *Colombe*—do what you think



best with it, and for me—it will be pleasant to be in such hands. Only, pray follow the corrections in the last edition (Chapman & Hall will give you a copy), as they are important to the sense. As for the condensation into three acts, I shall leave that, and all ‘cuttings’ and the like, to your own judgment, and, come what will, I shall have to be grateful to you as before. For the rest, you will play the part to heart’s content, I know.

“Did you really find your way to this place, and was I unlucky enough to be away just then? I should have been happy to share in your first sights of the galleries and the mountains, and to become acquainted with Mr Martin. All *that* may be for another time, may it not? Nobody goes to Italy *once*—unless to stay altogether; but I shall probably return to England this summer, and how good it will be to see you again, and make my wife see you, too—she who ‘never saw a great actress,’ she says, unless it was Dejazel!

“Some one comes in here, but I will not lose the post, so take my best thanks again, and believe me as ever, dear Mrs Martin,  
yours very faithfully,  
ROBERT BROWNING.”

In scenery and costumes Mr Buckstone did every justice to Mr Browning’s play. Excellence in these money can always command. But there is a something more, which money cannot buy, yet which is essential where a drama, rich in character, and thought, and poetic expression is concerned. To do justice to the author’s work, every character should be in the hands of a competent interpreter, for no character in a good play is without importance to the general effect. A genuine dramatist does not rely wholly on his written words, however finely conceived they may be; he leaves much to the actor to fill up by action and expression. Merely to give voice to the words of his text, without putting into the delivery of them a life which is due to them as the utterance of the thought or emotion of the speaker, is “quite from the purpose of playing.” Especially is it so, where the language is concise, where the thought to be expressed is not put in a commonplace way, and where the sentiment or passion, which underlies the verse, requires active sensibility and intelligence to feel and to interpret. These are

the qualities of Mr Browning's dramatic writing, and they are very predominant in his *Colombe's Birthday*.

The least that can be said of the actors to whom the characters, all of them of marked importance, were entrusted at the Haymarket Theatre, is, that they were in no way qualified to appreciate or do justice to the poet's work. It was difficult work, no doubt; but not work beyond the grasp of actors of cultivated intelligence, and earnest in their art.

If Miss Faucit had not had a strong faith in the fitness of *Colombe's Birthday* for the stage, she would never have ventured to produce it. Many of Mr Browning's admirers thought that it was only for the closet; but the event proved that she was right. Despite the very inadequate treatment it received from the Haymarket Company, the skill of a true writer of drama was apparent, and one felt how great an impression might have been produced, with actors capable of rising to the level of the characters assigned to them. The same thing was felt, when the play was again produced in 1885 for The Browning Society, with the parts played mostly by amateurs. Madame Darmesteter then wrote of it in the *Boston Literary World*: "*Colombe's Birthday* is charming on the boards, clearer, more direct in action, more full of delicate surprises, than one imagines it in print." Not all the journals recognised this quality on its first production at the Haymarket; some did; but they were all of one voice in praise of Miss Faucit's impersonation of the heroine. "The heroine," writes the *Daily News*, "is a charming character—finely imagined and painted with exquisite delicacy. Miss Helen Faucit entered completely into its spirit, and displayed all its loveliness." The *Morning Post* records: "Never did Miss Faucit look or act better than on the present occasion; and the applause, which greeted her, though frequent and cordial, was not half so much as she deserved." The *Atlas*, in a very elaborate notice, says:—

We admire Miss Faucit more than ever we did. What we loved in the young girl has received additional charm by her development into the mature woman, for she now conjoins, to the early defined Raphaellesque gentleness and delicacy, dignity and grace, such as you find in the female creations of Michael Angelo and Dante. . . . There was no acting about her *Colombe*. She made us feel, as if we were actual partakers in a *fact*, and hushed our hearts or made them leap, even as Valence's *ought* to have

done. She alone proved to us, that Browning's language was full of heart-stirring thought and musical rhythm; every word and action seemed begotten by the circumstances of the moment, while the verse flowed melliflously, and from her soft voice, as if it were pulsations of tone, denoting the inward working of the beating heart, now gentle as a brook, now bursting its bounds like a rushing torrent.

Fine as was the impersonation, how much finer would it have been, how much would Miss Faucit's labour have been lightened, had the Valence of the night been as true to the poet's conception as the Colombe! Well might Mr Browning write, "I do not consider that my play has been acted without a Valence."

The following letters from Miss Anna Swanwick and Mr Westland Marston, out of the many addressed to Miss Faucit, by persons whose judgment she valued, may be taken as fairly representing the impression which her Colombe made upon the numbers who came night after night to see it:—

26th April 1853.

I cannot resist the impulse, which prompts me to express to you the very great delight with which I witnessed last evening your performance in *Colombe's Birthday*. I had previously perused the play with interest, but I had never before been so fully sensible, with what additional force the conception of the poet comes home to the heart and the imagination, when we see it embodied in a living form, and invested with all the charm of beauty, grace, and truth. I do not know why I should trouble you with these lines, except that the experience of any vivid emotion habitually prompts to its expression, which, when the emotion is admiration, naturally assumes the form of grateful acknowledgment to those who have inspired it.

A. SWANWICK.

April 26, 1853.

It is little to say, that you delighted us,—that would be true of any of your performances. I mean, that, if Browning had been present, he would have seen his Colombe as he imagined her—with all those additional developments which poetic acting gives to poetic thought, when translating it into life. Lovely as a dream, and real as a fact, we shall long remember your Duchess. But the play needs not only an audience of poets before the stage, but a company of poets upon it.

WESTLAND MARSTON.

*The Athenæum* (April 25) expressed itself as very much of Mr Marston's opinion as to the likelihood of the play taking hold of the public. "Whether the taste of the public," it wrote, "for so refined a creation on the stage is yet formed, remains to be seen.

. . . We feared that, on performance, the fine poem would scarcely be intelligible to a mixed audience. Miss Faucit, however, by her skill made them perfectly understand it; and the applause came in the proper places." She herself found so much pleasure in clothing the part with life, that she decided on giving the play a further opportunity of being heard, and included it in her list of plays during an engagement in Manchester in June, the only other engagement which she made in 1853. There the acting was, as she often found it in the provinces, better than in London. Full of shortcomings as it was, the play found its way to favour with a large section of the public, but chiefly by reason of her *Colombe*. Thus the *Manchester Examiner* speaks of it:—

Though mystical to many may be the play in general tone of form and colour—suggestive rather than definite—the acting of Miss Faucit threw over it a stream of sunshine, that lighted up the dark recesses, where lay the dreamy thoughts of the poet, bidding them come forth and live on the memory of all who had sufficient feeling and good taste to appreciate her interpretation; crowded as it was, from first to last, with so many deep meanings, such noble dignity, such pure sentiment, such delicate yet such passionate expression. Whilst forgetting and forgiving the deficiencies of the dramatist, no person of intelligence could witness such a performance without feeling admiration for the poet who could so awaken the mental faculties of the artist.

Mr Browning, on this as on former occasions, was prompt to acknowledge his gratitude to Miss Faucit for what she did for his *Colombe*. In writing of her Mildred Tresham in his *Blot On The Scutcheon*, he had said that her "perfect behaviour as a woman," and her "admirable playing as an actress were to him the one gratifying circumstance connected with it." His feeling in regard to her *Colombe* was the same. She had done all that could be done to inspire the public with her own faith in his genius as a dramatist, and had brought his ideal *Colombe* more vividly home to the imaginations and nearer to the hearts of his many admirers.

Mr Browning's experiences with the stage were certainly unfortunate. They were much regretted by his friends, as they diverted him from exercising his genius in a channel in which it was fitted to excel. An unfortunate misunderstanding lost him the services of Mr Macready as the hero of the *Blot On The*



*Scutcheon*, which was withdrawn before it had time to make its way with the public. Poor acting destroyed the success of *Colombe's Birthday*. His first play, *Strafford*, failed very much from the same cause. When Mrs Richmond Ritchie was writing her reminiscences of the Brownings, she asked Lady Martin to write her recollections of the production of that play. For Thackeray's daughter, whom she had loved for many years, Lady Martin would have done anything. Little, therefore, as she ever cared to write about her theatrical experiences, the request produced the following reply:—

“April 30, 1891, BRIGHTON.

“The production of Browning's *Strafford* which you ask me about, occurred so early in my career, that anything I could say about it, would be, I fear, of little use to you. I was so young then, and just a mere novice in my art, so that my first feeling, when I heard the play read, was one of wonder, that such a weighty character as Lucy, Countess of Carlisle, should be entrusted to my hands. I was told that Mr Browning had particularly wished me to undertake it. I naturally felt the compliment implied in the wish, but this only increased my surprise, which did not diminish as I advanced in the study of the character.

“Lady Carlisle, as drawn by Mr Browning—a woman versed in all the political struggles and intrigues of the times—did not move me. The only interest she awoke in me was due to her silent love for *Strafford*, and devotion to his cause; and I wondered why, depending so absolutely as he did upon her sympathy, her intelligence, her complete self-abnegation, he should only have, in the early part, a common expression of gratitude to give her in return.

“This made the treatment of Lucy's character, as you will readily see, all the more difficult, in the necessity it imposed upon me of letting her feeling be seen by the audience, without its being perceptible to *Strafford*.

“Of course I did my best to carry out what I conceived was Mr Browning's view; and he, at all events, I had reason to know, was well satisfied with my efforts; I had met him at Mr and Mrs

Macready's house previously, so that at the rehearsals we renewed our acquaintance.

"I suppose he was nervous, for I remember Mr Macready read the play to us in the green-room. And how finely he read! He made the smallest part distinct and prominent. He was accused of under-reading his own part. But I do not think this was so.

"At the rehearsals, when Mr Browning was introduced to those ladies and gentlemen whom he did not know, his demeanour was so kind, considerate, and courteous, so grateful for the attention shown to his wishes, that he won directly the warm interest of all engaged in the play. So it was, that although many doubtful forecasts were made in the green-room as to the ultimate attraction of a play so entirely turning on politics, yet all were determined to do their very best to insure its success.

"In the play Lucy has only to meet Strafford, King Charles, and Henrietta. It seemed to me that Mr Macready's Strafford was a fine performance. The character fitted in with his restless, nervous, changeable, impetuous, and emphatic style. He looked the very man as we know him in Vandyck's famous picture. The royal personages were very feebly represented. I could not help feeling, in the scenes with them, that my earnestness was overdone, and that I had no business to appear to dominate, and sway, and direct opinions while they stood nerveless by.

"There were some fine moments in the play. The last scene must have been very exciting and touching. Lucy believes that by her means Strafford's escape is certain; but when the water-gates open, with the boat ready to receive him, Pym steps out of it! . . . This effect was most powerful. It was a dreadful moment. My heart seemed to cease to beat. I sank on my knees, burying my head in my bosom, and stopping my ears with my hands while the death-bell tolled for Strafford.

"I can remember nothing more than that I went home very sad; for, although the play was considered a success, yet, somehow, even my small experience seemed to tell me, it would not have a very long life, and that perhaps kind Mr Browning would think we had not done our best for him.

"The play was mounted in all matters with great care. Modern

critics seem to have little knowledge of the infinite pains bestowed in all respects before their day upon the representation of historical and Shakespearian plays, and noteworthy people in romance and history.

“I can see my gowns now, in Lucy Percy, made from a Vanduyck picture, and remember the thought bestowed even upon the kind of fur with which the gown was trimmed. The same minute attention to accuracy of costume prevailed in all the characters produced. The scenery was alike accurate, if not so full of small details as at present. The *human beings dominated, all.*”<sup>1</sup>

After the close of the Haymarket engagement, Miss Faucit did not act again that year (1853) except for a few nights in Manchester, which she agreed to do chiefly for the sake of introducing *Colombe's Birthday* to a public, among whom she knew there were many on whom its fine qualities would not be lost. After a long rest, and a pleasant sojourn of some months abroad, she appeared again in Manchester in July 1854. At its close we went on a series of visits to friends in the Highlands, when she made her first acquaintance with “the land of the mountain and the flood,” as we passed onwards to Inverness by way of Loch Lomond, the Pass of Glencoe, and the Caledonian Canal. All the warmth of a Highland welcome awaited her. Many new friends were made. She was a conspicuous figure at the two annual Northern Meeting Balls. Dancing was always to her a great delight, and she held her own gallantly in even the lengthened Highland reels, where it is the pride of the ladies to weary out first the pipers and then the orchestral band. It needs not be said how much admiration this excited among the Celtic lookers-on. It was a happy time, and the kind hearts, that made their hospitality doubly precious, were always held by her in grateful remembrance.

When we left London for the north, she had hoped to leave all dramatic cares behind her. But this was not to be. To her, writers of poetical dramas naturally looked for encouragement, and a play had just been put into her hands with strong recom-

<sup>1</sup> This letter was published in Mrs Ritchie's *Records of Tennyson, Ruskin, and Browning*. London, 1892.

mendations, to which she was bound to listen with respect, and with a request that she would play the heroine. It was called *Love's Martyrdom*, by Mr John Saunders, a gentleman who had done much excellent literary work, and who became afterwards well known as the author of *Abel Drake's Wife* and other novels. In the preface to the then unpublished play were letters by Charles Dickens and Walter Savage Landor, speaking of it in the most enthusiastic terms. Mr Landor, for example, found in it "passages worthy of Shakespeare." "He did not know what tragedy he might compare with it, among the best of those which divided in their day the world with Shakespeare." Miss Faucit was bound to respect such weighty authority. She read the play carefully and admired much of the writing. But fine writing she well knew does little for a stage success. This cannot be attained without situations to arouse and maintain suspense and sympathy, characters true to nature, aptness and brevity in the dialogue, and a rising interest sustained to the end. In these qualities, much to her regret, she found the play deficient; and at a resting-place on our journey to the north, she wrote to the author an elaborate criticism, pointing out in what his work failed for the purposes of the stage, and showing among other things, what experts know well to be a most dangerous defect, that the strong scenes—and strong scenes they undoubtedly were—culminated in the third and fourth acts, and that the interest fell off instead of rising in the fifth. Her recent experience of the reception in London of Mr Browning's fine play made her more than doubtful of the success of any new poetical drama. Nevertheless, she felt so much for the author, that she told him, either in that letter or afterwards, that she would do what she could for him, if any London manager would undertake to produce his play.

Here the matter slept for some time. In the early part of 1855 my wife performed in Glasgow, and afterwards in Dublin, and in both places a great advance was recognised in the treatment of the characters with which her audiences were already familiar. A letter, written while she was in Dublin, to her old friend Sir A. Alison, brought the following interesting reply:—



LONDON, *May* 31 [1855], ATHENÆUM.

I received with the greatest pleasure your kind letter of the 22nd, which followed me up from Glasgow. I rejoice to hear you are with your kind friends in Dublin, of whom you used to tell me so much in former forgotten days; and it would be an additional gratification if I could be fortunate enough to meet Dr Stokes in your beautiful mansion before leaving London.

I often think with delight, my dear friend, of that beautiful dwelling, where so much that is exquisite in art is presided over by all that is attractive in genius, and rejoice that, after having gone through the phases of so brilliant a career, you have rested at length in a haven of such elegance. . . . Long may you live to enjoy the fulness of your fame and felicity; and, believe me, no one ever can rejoice in it more sincerely and with more heartfelt wishes for its continuance than myself.

We have been made very happy by the prospect of getting back both our sons with Crimean medals and three clasps each from the seat of war in the Tauric Chersonese, the scene of the fabled tragedy of Euripides. The one returns aide-de-camp to Sir Colin Campbell, the other captain of the light company of the 72nd, which was selected with him at its head to lead the storming of the Redan.—Ever, my dear friend, with truest friendship and regard, yours faithfully,

A. ALISON.

On her return to London my wife was again appealed to by Mr Saunders to appear as the heroine in his *Love's Martyrdom*. Mr Buckstone had undertaken to produce the play, and she was therefore absolved from responsibility in regard to its success. Her doubts on that point remained unshaken, although the play had been lightened, to an extent that must have wrung the author's heart, of much of the dead-weight of verbose dialogue and superfluous scenes. She was interested by the author, and spared no trouble in helping him to put his work into the best form for the stage. In the rehearsals all her pains were, as usual, given to bringing out, as far as she could, the points by which those who were on the stage with her might be seen to the best advantage. Rehearsals were always dealt with by her very seriously. In the case of new pieces, it was at them that for the first time she gave utterance to the words she had to speak. How they ought to be spoken was the work of silent thought. Accordingly it often happened at rehearsals, that the stage would be crowded at the side-wings by actors, stage-carpenters, and others, on the chance of hearing her speak as she meant to speak at the full performance. This she always did in a subdued semi-

tone, but with an underglow and richness of inflection, that, as I have myself seen, often drew an applause from those within hearing, which took her by surprise. Of this Mr Saunders had an experience, which he thus records in the preface to an edition (published in 1883) of his play as originally written: "During one of the rehearsals, when she was nearly perfect in the words of her part, and was speaking them with head thrown back, eyes half shut, the sound of her voice so low that only one near to her, as I happened to be, could hear it at all, I had for some minutes the most exquisite pleasure of my life. And when I could recur to myself, it was to feel for the first time assured as to my own verses, for I knew then they could not be unworthy of such delicious utterance."

It took Mr Saunders some time to "recur to himself." I was standing by his side, and he turned to me in a state of apparent surprise, and said he could not believe that the lines she had spoken were his. Low as was the voice, its vibrant quality had reached many ears besides his, for I remember well the burst of applause with which the passage was received, led off by old Mr Farren, who had come to the rehearsal.

The play, as Miss Faucit had feared, met with only a *succès d'estime*, its defects, which able writing had concealed from its readers, becoming apparent under the practical test of representation. Thus the *Morning Chronicle* said of it (June 12, 1855), "More than to any merits of its own, the success of *Love's Martyrdom* is due to the admirable acting of Miss H. Faucit in the character of the heroine." As she had predicted, the interest was exhausted in a powerful scene in the fourth act, where her acting called down a storm of applause, after which the fifth act dwindled into a feeble close. The character of Mr Saunders's hero, Franklyn, too, demanded a subtler treatment than Mr Barry Sullivan could give it.

We dwell [the *Globe* critic wrote] on Mr Sullivan's mistaken rendering of the character, because it spoiled the beauty of the dramatist's work as much as Miss Faucit's lovely and artistic embodiment of Margaret added lustre to it. It is many years since we saw this actress. In the interval her powers have matured, and her performance came upon us like a glad surprise. For grace of deportment, finish in details, and complete identification with the part she played, Miss Faucit's acting was equal to that of a first-rate

French actress. For passion, pathos, and the exquisite light and shade of womanly love—for the inexpressible and inestimable charms of voice and elocution—she was not comparable to any actress we know, French, English, or German ; she was, to our thinking, *unique*, national, and wholly excellent. Mr Saunders' best verses (and there are some of rare strength and beauty in this play) received an additional grace from the rich sonorous softness of her voice.

The play held the stage for only six nights. In my wife's sympathy for the disappointment of the estimable author, the praises lavished upon her Margaret were to her of little account. This was the last of the many characters which, according to a current phrase, she created. The remaining nights of her engagement were devoted to Rosalind. It appears from the following letter of Mrs S. C. Hall's, that to her, also, this performance came "like a glad surprise."

BRIGHTON, 7th July 1855.

✓ DEAREST LADY,—I dare not say all I felt the other evening, and all I have thought since of Rosalind. I saw you the first time you played it in London, and then it fixed itself in my memory ; but the improvement *now* is so wonderful that I cannot express (and, if I could, to *you* it would seem flattery) my delight. I will never have my memory disturbed by seeing any other creature in it. I should almost fear to see *you* in it again, lest some look, or tone, or motion should be changed, and I would have nothing changed in it. How beautiful it was ! Miss Rosalind—to read—is a thought forward in her love ; but *you* made it so pure, so innocent, so earnest, so noble ! There ! I could write for a week. I thank and bless you with my whole heart. . . . Yours ever and ever,

A. M. HALL.

## CHAPTER XII.

AFTER a year of rest from professional work, Miss Faucit, in June 1856, acted again for a few weeks in answer to urgent calls from her friends in Dublin and Belfast. Her health, then very delicate, made her turn a deaf ear to the pressing solicitations of theatrical managers, who had always found it to their profit to secure her services. They had good reason for this. It was a matter of pride with her, that no manager ever lost money by her. She made it her rule, that he should reap as much profit by her performances as she did, and this after, in some cases, deducting from the receipts a given sum for expenses of performance. She objected, too, to the prices being raised, as these might enrich herself, but must have the effect of diminishing the regular receipts in the subsequent weeks, and in this way hurt the general business of the theatre, and possibly affect the salaries, never too large, of the performers. It was natural, therefore, that in these days, when there was what was called a stock company in the provincial theatres she visited,—a thing now wholly unknown,—that her coming should be eagerly welcomed by the local managers.

At home she was now the centre of an ever-widening circle of friends, which, together with a large correspondence, absorbed all her leisure. Mrs Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, recently published, was at this time much talked about in literary circles. Much as I myself admired the poem, I persuaded my wife to wait till she was in stronger health before reading it, as I knew it would excite her too much. Her friend Miss Stokes wrote asking her opinion about this very remarkable book. This was her reply (February 2, 1857):—



“I have not yet read *Aurora Leigh*. Low health keeps my spirits low, and I know this book would depress my spirits fearfully. I will wait for the sun and the summer, and then defy it to hurt me. Mr Martin read me the bit about the drama, which I think is simply absurd.<sup>1</sup> In any one else it would be irreverent, almost impertinent, but I am sure Mrs Browning writes in simple ignorance of the subject on her part, and much soreness on her husband’s, whose plays, beautiful as they are, have not kept their place upon the stage, and indeed were only calculated to move the few, and, therefore, did not deserve to keep it. The drama should speak to all humanity, and not to a few privileged poetic natures. I am very sorry for this part of the book. How I wish Mrs Browning could see some of Shakespeare’s plays acted !”

In 1857 she was pressed by the Edinburgh and Glasgow managers to visit Scotland, from which she had been for two years absent. Having engaged to appear in Belfast and Dublin in April, she could not go to Glasgow. But she appeared in Edinburgh in March, and during this engagement Imogen and Portia took a prominent place, and retained it in all her future engagements there. Mr, now Sir Henry, Irving, who was the Pisanio in *Cymbeline*, first came under her notice on this occasion. From Edinburgh she went to Belfast, and thence to Dublin, playing in both places to unusually great houses. She was recalled to London by the serious illness of her mother, Mrs Farren, who died in the following June. She was too much depressed both in health and spirits to go abroad, as we usually did in the autumn, and spent it in visits to friends in North Wales.

Soon after our return to London the coming marriage of the Princess Royal with H.R.H. the Prince Frederick William of Prussia was made public. A series of festival performances in honour of the event was announced to take place at her Majesty’s Theatre, and Mr Mitchell, her former Paris manager, who was entrusted with their preparation, applied for my wife’s assistance. Needless to say, it was cheerfully promised, on the condition that it should be without fee or reward. *Macbeth*

<sup>1</sup> This alludes to a long passage in *Aurora Leigh*, book v., beginning “I will write no plays, &c.”

was chosen as the first of a series of three performances, and it was produced on the 19th of January 1858, my wife being the Lady Macbeth, and Mr Phelps the Macbeth. The scene in the auditorium of the theatre was magnificent in its array of Royalties, ambassadors, and men and women of the best blood and brains in England, not less than in the sumptuous floral decorations, brought, one wondered whence, at such a season.

Such gala performances are not generally remarkable for warmth on the part of the audience, for it is only natural that their attention should by curiosity be distracted from the stage. Neither is the performance, scantily rehearsed as it always is, wholly satisfactory. Upon the whole, however, the play went well. Mr Phelps was at his best, and so was my wife. Her loyalty, to say nothing of her pride in her art, upon so interesting an occasion, was enough to inspire her. The next morning brought her the following letter from Mrs S. C. Hall:—

MY DEAREST LADYE,—It is now some time since your affection encouraged me to write, “the day after the play,” something of what you have so often made me feel. But now I hardly know how to convey to you our admiration, and, dare I add, astonishment at the magnificence of your conception and portraiture of Lady Macbeth.

Remember, that I had only seen you in the range of exquisite *womanly* characters, which I considered exclusively your own. I was most anxious to see your Lady Macbeth, and presumed to wonder if you would come up (which no one had hitherto done) to my ideal of what Lady Macbeth was. “My ideal!” How poor you have made me feel my ideal was! From the first look of astonishment, while reading the letter, to your exit, when you passed like a “presence” rather than a woman, from the stage, Mr Hall and I now and then whispered to each other—“I can imagine nothing finer.” Nothing you did, or said, or looked, could be improved. It was far and away the grandest and most perfect whole I ever saw; and, in the strongest scenes, even when we trembled before you, you were still a lady and a woman. Oh dear, how wonderful it was! That by-play in the banquet scene, how marvellous! but it is impossible to particularise.

We thought it so sweet and graceful your coming forward to join in singing *God save the Queen!*

The press is usually silent about the acting on such occasions. Of the notices written by far the most interesting was an article in the *Art Journal*, from which we extract the following passage, as showing that my wife’s conception of Lady Macbeth had begun

to be accepted by Shakespearian critics in London, as it had long been in the provinces :—

If, however, in some respects the representation was deficient, it was at all events distinguished pre-eminently by the performance of an actress, who is unhappily all but lost to the London stage, and who in any metropolis in Europe but our own would be cherished as invaluable—Miss Helen Faucit. Much and often as we have had occasion to admire this lady's genius, it never seemed to us more signally displayed than in her *Lady Macbeth* on this occasion. In her development of the character, she evinced that freshness of conception and truth to nature and Shakespeare, which distinguish all her performances. Up to the point of Duncan's murder she represents, what Shakespeare meant *Lady Macbeth* to do, the indomitable will which advances right onward to its purpose, reckless of present dangers or future fears ; thus supplementing the element which was wanting in *Macbeth* to keep him to the purpose he had formed. She is "the spur to prick the sides of his intent," the lack of which kept him wavering between desire and fear. *Macbeth* himself is only upon a grand scale the common character of everyday life, who knows the right and is perpetually talking about it, but is as surely evermore sneaking into the wrong, where he can do so with safety. The splendour of his imagination and the restless irritability of his fancy are apt to mislead us into an exaggerated estimate of the original nobility of his character. But his nature is essentially base ; all the ready cunning and falsehood of the practised hypocrite are natural to him. His highest virtue is only a respect for appearances. He has no more religion than his wife—and even less conscience, for while she dies of remorse, the only "scorpions of his mind" are his fears for the stability of his reign. His selfishness, too, is all predominant. His wife wastes before his eyes, under "the affliction of terrible dreams," while he finds relief in prating of them, and all the while is thinking only of himself. He can moralise pathetically on remorse ; but he has no word of solace for the disquietude of her, whom before his thanes he is solicitous to call his "sweet remembrancer." After the one great crime she ceases to be to him what she has been before. He slips from her grasp. She is no longer the spur to his intents. He *must* act now, and if he seeks her company, it is only to tell her of his own selfish sorrows. On her the vengeance of heaven has already begun to work. Content has fled with the possession of the "golden round." Every night brings its scourge of horrors, that in the end are to lash their victim into madness and suicide. She has begun to think of her crime in the way *Macbeth* had talked of it in the stillness of the terrible night of blood—and so, as she had then foreseen, it is "making her mad." Still neither her anxiety for her lord, nor her clear proud intelligence forsake her. She can find words of comfort for him, can conjure up smiles into her face that in solitude is fast settling into the frozen lines of despair ; she engages the attention of her guests, essays to pour the inflexible firmness which she maintains before the world into the infirm heart of her husband, and only when the banquet is broken up, and



they are left alone, is it seen how great has been the effort to subdue the inward tortures which are eating away her life. Her heart is surcharged with the grief which Macbeth's selfish nature has thrown back upon it. She dies and makes no sign. Such is the Lady Macbeth presented by Miss Faucit with a completeness and force which leave no doubt of its truth. She is not an actress of points, and to do justice to her impersonation would therefore require an analysis for which we have no space. Every scene was alike admirable, whether in the ardent utterance with which she stimulated Macbeth's faltering purpose—the terrible vehemence of resolution in the murder scene—the indications of growing interest in the subsequent scene—the struggle of internal suffering with anxiety for the consequences of Macbeth's agitation at the banquet—or in the heart-searching pathos of the sleep-walking scene. Never was depicted with more vivid intensity the contrast of the woman broken down by ceaseless unspoken remorse, essaying in vain to wash the imaginary bloodstains from her wasted fingers, with the woman of dauntless will, who in the murder scene had said that "a little water" was sufficient to clear them utterly away. And in the present case it was brought more forcibly home by a departure from the usual stage tradition in respect to costume—Miss Faucit dressing Lady Macbeth in the murder scene in white, so as to resemble the night-dress of the sleep-walking scene. The impression produced on the audience by this noble impersonation was profound, as it could not fail to be. It was not a little remarkable that on the same stage where Rachael failed for want of power, Miss Faucit's voice in its lowest tones carried her meaning to the most remote parts of the house, and her breadth of style triumphed over the vastness of the space.

The Lady Macbeth of the gala night created so great an impression, that my wife received numerous offers of an engagement to repeat it. Among them came one from Mr Charles Dillon, who was then lessee of the Lyceum Theatre. She satisfied herself that he was in a position to produce the play with a fairly efficient company, and appeared there (February 18, 1858) as Lady Macbeth to Mr Dillon's Macbeth. The houses were crowded to excess, and many converts were made to what was, to London, a new reading of the character. It brought to her, among others, the following letter from Mr (afterwards Sir Arthur) Helps:—

*March 2, 1858.*

MY DEAR MRS MARTIN,—I went to hear and see you last night. To tell you that you are a very great actress would be telling you no new thing. You must know it well. But perhaps you may be pleased to hear how much delight you gave me, and how thoroughly I agree with you in the conception of the part. The grace and tenderness that you throw into it are wonderful. But you women are altogether wonderful creatures. I



could not help thinking last night as I watched you,—Is this impassioned woman the same who was, indeed, my gracious hostess the preceding evening, offering me tea and toast, and whom I noticed a little while ago whispering to her husband—not murder, but a kind suggestion, that he should take care and wheel up a sofa after dinner for a certain invalid? There is a depth and versatility of power in your sex that ours hardly understands.  
 . . . Believe me always most truly yours,  
 ARTHUR HELPS.

Another letter, from an unknown correspondent, gave Miss Faucit great pleasure, especially coming, as the handwriting plainly showed it did, from one of her own sex:—

“*February 27, 1858.*

“MADAM,—The expression of admiration must be too familiar to Miss Faucit to afford her any gratification, yet I cannot refuse myself that of thanking her for the great enjoyment she has afforded me in once more witnessing her inimitable performance. It is now eleven years ago, I think, that chancing to spend some weeks in Edinburgh, I first became acquainted with some of the most charming creations of our great poet, impersonated by the only actress of our day capable of understanding them and making them understood. That voice, that face, and, above all, the expression of that countenance, left an ineffaceable impression. Judge, then, of my delight at again beholding one who has so long been my ideal of dignity, beauty, and sweetness, of all that is most lovely and lovable in woman; whose absence from the stage we should deeply regret, were it not that no one can look on Miss Helen Faucit and not feel, that domestic happiness must be far dearer to her than the plaudits of the multitude.

“I had not before seen *Macbeth*, nor knew therefore to what a height of tragic grandeur our great actress is capable of soaring. But we cannot love Lady Macbeth. We admire with a sublime horror; we pity, hate, and dread. The more perfect the impersonation, the stronger the impression. You may have noticed, madam, that the circumstances in which we last see any one are those which remain most vividly present to the imagination. I, at least, cannot divest myself of the image of the queen, ever vanishing, ever beckoning, a fearful vision, a triumph of the histrionic art, but not Miss Helen Faucit. If ever face were formed to feel all that is most tender, most noble, most lovable

in woman, it is surely that of the lady in question. I care little for beauty of feature, but there are charms of expression to go mad for. Will not, therefore, Miss Faucit, before leaving us again for an indefinite time, chase away the awful phantom she has called forth, by substituting in its place one of those charming conceptions combining all the love, faith, devotion, and constancy of which human nature is capable. Consider that, when we lose you again, we have none to supply your place, and must content ourselves with Shakespeare in the closet rather than see him caricatured upon the stage. At any rate, whether you consent to delight us in this manner or not, rest assured of my gratitude, and the sincerest wishes for your happiness, with which I have the honour to remain, madam, your very attached and respectful admirer,

E. DE C."

This unknown correspondent was not alone in her desire to see my wife in other parts which she had made her own. She yielded to their representations, and during the engagement appeared both as Pauline and Beatrice. It does not appear to which of these impersonations the same writer refers in the following letter:—

*"Friday Evening.*

"DEAR MADAM,—Your performance last night went to all hearts, and in many, I believe, will dwell a remembrance to be classed among those things which in life have appeared to them as most beautiful. I have gazed on many a lovely face in nature and art, but never on one in which the soul spoke through the countenance as in Miss Faucit's. Perhaps the nearest approach to it is in some of Correggio's heads, but there the painter's art could fix but *one* expression, whereas in Miss Faucit's every variety of feeling, every delicate gradation passes, and could be read as in a book, even if the lips were silent, carrying with it the whole soul and sympathies of the spectator. We cease to admire the actress, we forget the fictitious personage, we love her who can thus look and speak and feel.

"You will pardon me, my dear madam, for writing to you thus, and indeed for writing at all, and believe it is no mere passing admiration I would express, but a deeper and truer feeling

for one whom I cannot but look upon as the type of all that is most excellent in woman. We will hope that you will sometimes afford us the great delight of witnessing your exquisite impersonations, and rest assured that there are some who admire and appreciate you as you deserve.—Ever, dear Madam, yours very truly,  
E. DE C.”

The success of this engagement was so great that Mr Dillon was most anxious to prolong it. But considerations of health forbade, and art had to stand aside for a time.

It was now that Miss Faucit made the acquaintance of Mr Matthew Arnold. It began with the following letter from him:—

“*March 6, 1858.*

“MADAM,—I take the liberty of sending you a copy of a tragedy [his *Merope*] which I have lately published, with a view to ascertain whether it would be possible to induce you, were it brought upon the stage, to undertake the principal character.

“In a tragedy of this kind, depending little for its success upon the complication of its stage-business, everything turns upon the nobleness, seriousness, and powers of feeling of the actor; and I would certainly make no attempt to get *Merope* represented unless I had a prospect of obtaining the help of the artist who alone, in the present state of the English stage, seems to me to display these qualities in an eminent degree. . . .

“It is very possible, madam, that you may find yourself unable to give me the benefit of your assistance for my tragedy, but I am glad, at any rate, to have the opportunity of expressing the admiration with which your delightful talent has often inspired me, and the respect with which I am, Madam, your obedient humble servant,  
MATTHEW ARNOLD.”

*Merope* was carefully read, and Miss Faucit wrote in reply, pointing out some of the difficulties which she saw would stand in the way of its success on the stage. Mr Arnold, with whom we had many friends in common, wrote in reply requesting that he might be allowed “to call and make his acknowledgments in person for her kindness. If I derive,” he added, “no other

result from the attempt to get *Merope* acted, I shall then, at least, have derived from it the great pleasure of making your acquaintance." They accordingly met, when, I believe, her reasons satisfied him that, while she might personally have pleasure in acting the part of *Merope*, it would not be advisable to put his drama to the more than doubtful test of a public representation. At all events she heard no more of his wish, and Mr Arnold became, and continued till his death, a personal friend.

It was about this time, also, that the Rev. Charles Kingsley approached my wife, through our common friend Mr John Parker, the publisher, to ascertain if she would undertake the heroine's part in a play which he wished to write for her. His *Saint's Tragedy* had been for years one of her favourite books, and he was soon made aware that she would be most happy to meet his wish. They met, and the subject of the play was talked over and almost settled,—when, upon the suggestion of friends that to write a play might injure his influence as a clergyman, Mr Kingsley abandoned the idea. But the acquaintance so begun soon developed into friendship; and, as I write, many memories rise up of evenings where Kingsley, and Froude, and Thackeray, and Helps, Dean Stanley, George Clark, Dr Charles Barham, and others, sat round our dinner-table, talking their best under the encouragement of the hostess, who shared and delighted in their conversation, and was always on such occasions as slow to retire with the ladies to the drawing-room as her male guests were prompt to follow her thither.

We were now living in Onslow Square, where we had bought a house in 1852. Two years afterwards Mr Thackeray came also to live in the Square, and we very soon found ourselves on the most friendly footing with him. He lived in 36, we in 31, and when his notes were not addressed to his "Dear neighbours," the address was "xxxvi. to xxxi." His daughter, Mrs Richmond Ritchie, tells me that she remembers her father taking her sister and herself one Sunday in 1854 to see us. She rather shrank with awe from going into the presence of the great actress, of whom she had heard so much. But this trembling feeling faded rapidly away before the gentle, simple reception with which her



sister and herself were greeted. It at once opened their hearts to her. Soon after this they were absent in Paris for about two years. But on their return they were often with us, and, I believe, regarded their new friend with a kind of admiring wonder, not unmixed with affection, little aware how tenderly and with what interest she watched them growing into womanhood. When again they had been away in Paris, and Thackeray was on the point of starting to bring them home, there came to us one of his quaint little notes, which tells of the terms of neighbourly friendship on which we stood with him:—

“Dec. 24/61.

“Many thanks for *Fuchs*.<sup>1</sup> I write in the twilight, wishing all neighbours a merry Xmas. Off in half an hour to Boulogne. ‘For all travellers by water, for all *sick persons*,’ please see the Litany.—Adieu, *mes bons voisins!*”

All our recollections of Thackeray were delightful. He used to pay us long visits at breakfast, and then he talked with frankness and unreserve, more like those of a large-hearted boy than of a man who had seen life in so many phases, many of them of a kind to induce the *pensieri stretti*, for which strangers thought he was peculiar. His nature was obviously one that yearned for sympathy. It was full of tenderness, and showed it, where he was sure that it would be understood. In fact, of all men I have known he was the most tender-hearted; in this respect, indeed, almost womanly. He always showed a marked respect for my wife’s opinion in all matters of literature and art. What he thought of her we learned from a note which came into my hands many years after his death. It was addressed to Lady Knighton,<sup>2</sup> inviting her to meet the well-known Helen Faucit at dinner, in which he spoke of her as “one of the sweetest women in Christendom,”—a tribute which came to her as an agreeable surprise, as if from the lips of her old friend. To his daughters, as the years went on, she became strongly attached, and the feeling was mutual.

<sup>1</sup> *Reineke Fuchs*, with Kaulbach’s illustrations, which I had lent him at his request.

<sup>2</sup> This note I purchased for a very large price at Sotheby’s auction rooms.

It was also during this period that we were most pleasantly surprised by a visit from Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose works my wife, as well as myself, had long admired. We were spending the Whitsun holiday at St Leonards, when a letter from an old friend, Mr Bennoch, brought the welcome announcement that he would call upon us next day with Mr Hawthorne. Of this visit Mr Hawthorne himself left the following record in his *English Note-Books*:<sup>1</sup>—

We walked to St Leonards, and there called at the lodgings of two friends of B—h. These were Mr Theodore Martin, the author of the *Bon Gaultier Ballads*, and his wife, the celebrated actress, Helen Faucit. Mr Martin is a gentleman whose face and manners suited me at once. . . . His wife, too, I liked, a tall, dark, fine, and ladylike woman, with the simplest manners, that gave no trouble at all, and so must be perfect. With these two persons I found myself, almost in a moment, on friendly terms, and in true accord, and so I talked, I think, more than I have at any time since coming to London.

We took a pleasant lunch at their house; and then they walked with us to the railway station, and there they took leave of B—h affectionately, and of me hardly less so; for, in truth, we had grown to be almost friends in this very little while. And as we rattled away, I said to B—h earnestly "What good people they are!" and B—h smiled, as if he had known perfectly well that I should think and say so.

It was impossible not to talk with "open heart and tongue," and, I may add, "affectionate and true," with Hawthorne, as he showed himself that day. We had heard of his reserved and distant manner to strangers, but found him all cordiality and frankness, and with a brightness and charm of thought and expression calculated to give warmth to the respect with which we had long regarded his genius. It was our good fortune to meet him several times afterwards, and on these occasions he recognised the "almost friends" of our first meeting as friends, on whose constancy he could always rely. To my wife he sent his *Improvisatore* immediately on its publication.

After a long rest my wife appeared in Glasgow for twelve nights in March 1859. Soon after we went to Paris for the Whitsun holidays, as we generally did at this time, partly from

<sup>1</sup> *Passages from the English Note-Books of Nathaniel Hawthorne.* Published in 1870, vol. i. p. 471.

our love of Paris, and more for the sake of valued friends there. Among these not the least valued was my wife's old enthusiastic admirer M. de Fresne. Her name was still in the mouths of many who had seen her in 1845, and M. de Fresne pressed her to give a recital of some passages of Shakespeare to a few of his large circle of friends. This she agreed to do ; but we were taken by surprise when, passing from his dinner-table into a very spacious and brilliant salon, we found it filled with over two hundred ladies and gentlemen in full dress, and among them many of the most distinguished leaders in society and in the literary and artistic world. A dais also had been prepared, from which to speak. The deep impression made in 1845 by Miss Faucit's *Lady Macbeth* and *Juliet* had not been forgotten, and a request was made, that she would give passages from both characters. Unprepared as she was, and although she had never given a recital in public, she yielded to the request. The sleep-walking scene from *Macbeth* was given first, for which her only preparation was to retire for a few minutes to throw a large white scarf over the full evening dress. This recital was followed by the balcony and the potion scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*. The counterparts were read by M. de Fresne himself. On this occasion, as in all her subsequent readings, public as well as private, Miss Faucit avoided theatrical action, trusting entirely to facial expression and inflections of voice, speaking, as was said in a notice which appeared next morning in the *Union* journal, "Avec cette nuance delicate, qui garde toute la puissance tragique en la contenant dans les limites que comporte un salon, qui n'est pas un theatre."

The writer in the *Union* was M. Henry de Riancey. From his description of the *séance* the following extract is taken :—

"L'effrayant somnambulisme de *Lady Macbeth*, ces yeux ouverts et fixes, ces gestes fébriles, tous ces phénomènes dont la torture intérieure du remords excite l'éclat accusateur, terrifient et glacent d'horreur ; tant leur réalité est vivante. Point de grands mouvemens, les seuls gestes nécessaires, sobres, mais terribles de vérité ; une émotion croissante, partie des abîmes de l'âme et passant de la placidité du sommeil aux indicibles tourmens voisins de la folie ; tout cela se peignant sur les traits et par l'attitude, avant même de se traduire pas les paroles entre-

coupées et sans suite de l'affreuse révélation ; c'est l'art, c'est l'étude, c'est le génie tragique élevé à son irresistible puissance, sans contredit : ce rôle de Lady Macbeth doit être le plus beau triomphe de Mlle. Faucit.

“ Par un contraste très rare, elle est aussi naïve, aussi passionnée, aussi réveuse dans Juliette, qu'elle est sombre et brisée dans Lady Macbeth. Aucune des délicieuses émotions de la scène du balcon ne lui échappe, et elle les traduit avec une suavité, un abandon, une retenue exquis. Tout ce qui est d'une passion si vraie et si poétique ressort sous sa voix vibrante et harmonieuse et les *conçetti* eux-mêmes sont sauvés par l'accent du cœur, qui les dissimule et les domine.

“ Bientôt ce n'est pas seulement la jeune fille qui se laisse aller à un légitime amour, c'est la femme mariée secrètement, qui va chercher dans une sorte de mort momentanée la liberté de son devoir. Mais la nature s'épouvante et tremble ; l'idée du poison, le séjour passager dans la tombe des aïeux, les visions d'une lutte sanglante, jettent un trouble cruel dans l'âme de Juliette ; elle se décide cependant, elle prend le breuvage, et tombe privée de sentiment. Ce monologue si difficile, où les pensées les plus contraires se heurtent et se croisent, est pour Mlle. Faucit l'occasion de déployer des ressources prodigieuses.

“ L'auditoire, il est vrai, était choisi et digne de comprendre la grande tragédienne ; son attente a été dépassée ; rarement une émotion plus enthousiaste a été mieux justifiée. . . . Le talent de l'habile artiste a subjugué et ravi tous les esprits.”

That my wife had pleased her host and his friends was sufficient satisfaction to her. It was, therefore, no small surprise to her to find from friends, on descending to the courtyard of our hotel next morning, that the *séance* had become widely talked of throughout Paris. Still greater was her surprise, when in the evening the paper reached her, from which the above extract is taken. It reminded her pleasantly of the enthusiasm with which she had been greeted at the Salle Ventadour in 1845, and was also an assurance, that she still lived in the memories of those who had seen her more youthful efforts there. The occasion will arise later on, to call attention to the extraordinary effect which her recital of the Macbeth sleep-walking scene, so well described by



M. de Riancey, produced upon those who heard her give it in her own drawing-room, in the broad light of day.

During the next three years Miss Faucit accepted only a few short engagements, and these in Scotland. There the theatres were crowded to their utmost limits, and it was generally recognised that, while her acting was marked by its old characteristic of singular freshness—always presenting new points of detail, struck out from the impulse of the moment,—she took a stronger hold upon her audience after each successive interval of repose. The *Glasgow Courier* (February 21, 1861), in the following passage, calls attention to a quality of her acting which has now unhappily become too rare upon our stage:—

In speaking of Miss Faucit lately we took occasion to say that her unrivalled position has been gained by industry, superinduced upon and perfecting genius. No industry could alone have made Miss Faucit the great actress she is, but it has deservedly placed her on the loftiest heights of histrionic fame. Contrasting her with Rachel of the French stage, we took occasion to say, that Miss Faucit surpassed her in sustained excellence, and we think that we only pay a just tribute to the high moral qualities of the woman, as well as to the abilities of the *artiste*, when we record the opinion that this superiority arises from purity and honesty of heart, *and a just appreciation of the merits of other performers*. For instance, it was quite a common custom of Rachel to stand on one side of the stage, and pay not the slightest attention to the dialogue going on, until it became her turn to advance to the footlights and deliver, certainly with wondrous power, some of these declamatory passages which abound in the French drama. . . . Miss Faucit, on the contrary, from her first entrance to her final exit, pays the closest attention to the whole business of the drama, and her silent, listening attitudes, and changing expression of countenance, often tell more strongly upon the audience than even spoken words. The effect is twofold. Not only have we better artists, but we feel that before us we have a great impersonation of feminine purity and single-mindedness such as Shakespeare himself would love to draw.

The words marked in italics are full of significance. To encourage merit was Miss Faucit's delight. No actor or actress was ever placed by her at a disadvantage. When they did their best, they pleased her most; and she gave them every opportunity to do their best. This indeed was the main object of her rehearsals. She could be sure of herself; she wished to be equally sure of her fellow-actors.<sup>1</sup> Often and often she was thanked for

<sup>1</sup> Thus Mr Lester Wallack, in his published Memoirs, says of her: "She gave me more encouragement than I ever received before, and the patience

suggestions that secured applause for them, which but for these suggestions they would not have had. These hints were always given with courtesy and gentleness, so as never to wound the actor's *amour propre*. Again, if an actor or actress was not quite in the position agreed upon at rehearsals, she was not disturbed, as theatrical biographies tell us so many leading actors were on such occasions. "What did it matter?" she has said to me. "I could always make out what I wanted to express, whatever my position on the stage. I should think little of myself if my hold upon the audience could be shaken by such trifles."

To speak face to face on the stage with whomsoever she had to address, however subordinate the character, was her rule. She held in scorn the practice, not uncommon in her time, but which has grown to excess since then, of always trying to speak with a full face to the front of the house, and placing the other actors with their back more or less turned to the audience. This device is, of course, injurious to the general effect of the scene; and it is also grossly unfair to those who are placed at this disadvantage. My wife herself had occasionally to suffer from it. No one was more intolerant of it than Mr Macready, if it affected himself, but even he was not free from the fault, not "having that just appreciation of the merits of other performers," to which the Glasgow critic alludes. And yet, as Mr Browning, in a letter to my wife, writes: "Macready himself told me once with great relish, how he had lectured an actor who got between him and his audience. 'Sir, by doing this you deprive the audience of what I am able to do for them, and you deprive me of their applause, which I should gain thereby. Stand thus, sir!' and then, 'Now turn, and be——!'"<sup>1</sup>

The summer and autumn of 1861 were spent by us at Bryntysilio, on the banks of the Dee, about two miles above Llangollen.

with which she rehearsed, for I was young and inexperienced, was remarkable. I shall always remember her with feelings of the greatest gratitude on that account."

<sup>1</sup> The elder Farren on one occasion was so provoked by an actor, in the course of the dialogue in a comedy, stepping back so as to get his full face to the front, that he paused—and said to the audience, "When this gentleman returns to his proper place [pointing to it], and speaks to me face to face, I will proceed." This was told me by Mr Farren himself.

We were so charmed with the situation and the surrounding scenery, that we resolved to buy the property, if ever it came into the market. In 1865 the opportunity came. The house, then only a cottage, and the adjoining grounds were bought; and in the subsequent years the house was greatly enlarged, additional land was acquired from time to time, and the decoration and furnishing of the house and the laying out of the garden and grounds was an occupation in which my wife took the liveliest interest. It was during a stay here in 1861 that I finished and published a translation of Dante's *Vita Nuova*. The book grew out of a magazine article written in 1845,—the result, in a great measure, of the impression made upon me by Miss Faucit, as then I knew her both on the stage and in private. She had indeed opened up to me “a new life,” and in her I saw so many of the qualities which Dante has ascribed to Beatrice in that beautiful book, that it had for me a peculiar attraction. In writing my translation, I was constantly reminded by her of Folco Portinari's daughter, as Dante paints her, “of perfect ladyhood in act and air,”—a spirit noble and devout—

“Meek, unpretending, self-controlled, and still  
With sense instinctive shrinking from all ill.”

Ten years of happy marriage had proved to me, that she was all and more than all I had dreamed of her. To whom, then, could I so fitly dedicate the book as to her? This was done in the following sonnet:—

“TO MY WIFE.

“Beloved, whose life is with mine own entwined,  
In whom, while yet thou wert my dream, I viewed,  
Warm with the life of breathing womanhood,  
What Shakespeare's visionary eye divined;  
Pure Imogen, high-hearted Rosalind,  
Kiudling with sunshine all the dusk greenwood;  
Or, changing with the poet's changing mood,  
Juliet, and Constance of the queenly mind;  
I give this book to thee, whose daily life  
With that full pulse of noblest feeling glows,  
Which lent its spell to thy so potent art;  
To thee, whose every act, my own true wife,  
The grace serene and heavenward spirit shows,  
That rooted Beatrice in Dante's heart.”



Two years elapsed before she again appeared upon the stage. This she did, for a few nights only, in Glasgow and Edinburgh in March and April 1863. The audiences there found in her all the old charm and power to move them, intensified by the riper thought and experience of the intervening years. As one of her Edinburgh critics writes, "There was the same music in her voice, the same majesty in her action, the same grace in her motions, the same freshness of treatment, and the same dignity in her style that have made her name and fame part of dramatic history." "Of her," another writes, "it may be truly said that 'art itself is nature'"; and another, "Great alike in the perception and exhibition of meaning and character, her instinct and power in both are clear, swift, and decisive. . . . Nothing is more admirable than her perfect skill in rendering the unapparent felicities of language, and making clear, as with a stamp, the subtle and shadowy complexities of the human heart and soul." During these engagements, of six nights each, the only characters performed were Beatrice, Portia, Juliet, Lady Macbeth, Imogen, and Rosalind. Her audiences, greater than ever, were obviously well pleased that it should be so.

Her visit to Glasgow in 1864 was made interesting to her by the presence at several of the performances of George Eliot, who had come to Glasgow, along with Mr George Lewes, for the double purpose of seeing my wife act, and of consulting her as to the fitness of a story she had in view for a drama, which she either had written or intended to write, and of which she wished my wife to be the heroine. The plan of the drama was discussed between them, with the result, that the idea was dropped by George Eliot in accordance with my wife's opinion. The subject, I believe, was made use of afterwards in *The Spanish Gypsy*. But of this, as what passed between the two ladies was confidential, I cannot speak with certainty. From this time George Eliot entertained the highest opinion of my wife's strong sense and critical acumen, as well as of her gifts as an actress.

Between 1861 and 1864 numerous appeals were made to my wife to act in London, but the theatres there were pre-engaged, and remonstrances in the press against her absence met with no response from the managers. In December, 1862, one of these



remonstrants wrote in the *Morning Post*: "I cannot but feel with a blush, that at this moment no theatre in London is prepared to invite the greatest actress to whom England has given birth to tread its boards; that while Glasgow and the Scottish Athens revel in her unequalled performances, Londoners are deemed worthy only of Wardour Street spectacles and Adelphi sensation-pieces." My wife had almost lost the hope of again meeting the London audiences, of whose support in her novitiate she always thought with the liveliest gratitude, when in the summer of 1864 Mr Falconer, who had become lessee of Drury Lane, persuaded her to accept an engagement for the late autumn.

This was the Shakespeare Tercentenary year, and Glasgow and Edinburgh, ever constant in their loyalty, induced her to leave home for three weeks in March and April to give them once more her interpretation of some of his leading heroines. It was six years since she had appeared in London, and as soon as it became known that she was to appear in October on the scene of her early triumphs, the papers were filled with gossiping notices about her. One of these stated, what indeed was true, that in Paris, where she had not acted since 1845,

The name of Helen Faucit is still popular as ever; and to every lover of the drama the features of that exquisite impersonator of Rosalind and Imogen, of Desdemona and Juliet, are as familiar as those of Rachel or of Ristori. . . . It is well known, that Helen Faucit's great triumph in the character of Juliet prevented Rachel from attempting it, in spite of the persecution of the amateurs. "Let Helen Faucit play Juliet, and I will play Romeo," was always her reply to the solicitations of the manager. There was one gesture of Helen Faucit's which Rachel would practise for hours—the graceful turn of the head over the shoulder when leaving the stage, which, however, is acknowledged by connoisseurs to be unique; and, when unable to acquire the same ease and grace, Rachel would declare that "it must have been acquired during a state of somnambulism, for no waking will could command the same grace and power of motion."

Another journal said—

If Helen Faucit is not really pretty, she is a million times better. She is charming, and perhaps we can give no better proof of this than what we once heard said of her by one of her own sex. Titiens and Patti, more as actresses than singers, were being discussed one evening in a large party, when a lady observed, that she thought their respective styles might be defined in

this way : "Titians, a glorious creature, who takes possession of you ; Patti, a winning little darling, who gets into you. I once," she added, "knew an actress who did either or both, according to the part she was playing, and that was Helen Faucit."

We found many paragraphs of this sort current when we returned in October from a few months' residence abroad. At such things my wife smiled ; but the thought of her reappearance on the scene of her early triumphs brought no small anxiety with it. Since she last acted in Drury Lane in 1843 she had only played in comparatively small theatres. Had her voice, she asked herself, still the old power to fill every part of that vast area ; were those, on whose memories she had left an impression, to find her changed, or changed only for the worse ? Should she find the welcome that had never failed her in the years of youthful struggle ?

Thus it was with a trembling heart that she went to the theatre on the 17th of October (1864) to perform Imogen, which had been selected for her first appearance. Her apprehensions were soon dispelled. The house was filled from floor to ceiling, and, when she appeared with Posthumus, she was hailed with an acclaim of cheers so great and so protracted that she was overcome, and for a time was unable to proceed. At length she recovered, and with the first few words she spoke the cheers were renewed, led off, no doubt, by those who rejoiced to hear in all their singular purity and resonance the well-remembered tones, on the music of which they had often hung in years gone by. She felt that her old London audience was true to her. Her emotion grew calm, and she soon forgot herself in the trials and sorrows of Imogen, and kept up the enthusiasm of the audience to the close. With a lightened heart she went home, wearied indeed, but happy and grateful in the thought, that she had lost none of that old command over the hearts and sympathy of the great metropolitan audience, which it had been the pride of her youth to win.

Had any assurance been needed that this was so, she would have found it in the heaps of letters from friends, known and unknown, which she found on her table next day. Of these none was more valued by her than the following from Mrs S. C. Hall :—

15th October 1864.

MY OWN DEAREST LADYBIRD,—I could hardly realise my feelings last night—the past seemed but as yesterday. There you were in the freshness of your youthful life, with the greater power of matured thought, and a voice of greater strength, without having lost one tone of its sweet tenderness,—so sweet and clear and yet low it was, that at times Carter worked himself into an agony, lest any word might be lost to the outsiders.

I can only find one word to express myself—the whole was *glorious*. It was only being too happy to witness it. We shall go again, when we cool down. What a delicious character it is to delineate!—the deep-hearted lovingness of the wife—the terrible indignation of the second scene, in which your tones were so full and grand, your indignation so withering.

But I must not weary you with recapitulating my delight, and the delight of those friends by whom I was surrounded. Only, I must say, I thought the mountain scene—just before you go into the cave—a wonderful triumph of art. The drawing the sword was just wonderful.

I am so well and happy this morning. I expected a great deal, but everything I hoped for was surpassed.

I suppose you are half-dead to-day. I saw how you panted like a frightened bird, when you came on, looking—well, if I said *how*, you would perhaps say I exaggerated.—Yours, my own darling, affectionately,

ANNA MARIA HALL.

“Such an artistic realisation of the loving, loyal, devoted wife,” wrote another lady friend, herself an artist, “suggests the idea that a perfect life must have inspired a perfection of art, unknown and unattainable by any special study of art, and unique in its kind.” From Sir Edwin Arnold came the following note. He was not the first by many, to acknowledge that he had now seen an Imogen, that enriched his own year-long ideals:—

MADAM,—I saw last evening, thanks to your skill and taste, a true, graceful, and finished picture of a character in which I thought no one could satisfy me. If a scholar's sincere gratitude for a noble and charming impersonation is worth having (especially when praise must be a thrice-told tale)—accept mine. I have known and delighted in that beautiful play since I was a boy, but *your* Imogen has enriched mine.—Faithfully yours,  
Madam,  
EDWIN ARNOLD.

Not less interesting was the following letter from Madame Fechter, the wife of the popular actor, herself an accomplished actress, who had occupied a good position on the Paris stage:—

MADAME,—Je ne sais vraiment comment vous exprimer le plaisir que m'a causé cette soirée. Je serai allée vous dire mes impressions, mais j'ai craint d'être indiscret en troublant le repos dont vous devez avoir tant



besoin, et je me permets de vous écrire quelque lignes, bien froides interprètes de ma pensée. Que vous dire que vous n'avez entendu mille fois ! Le charme, la grace, cette voix qu'on ne peut entendre sans emotion, et cette noble indignation, cette chasteté adorable, et cette sainte et douloureuse résignation, qu'une âme pure peut seule éprouver ! Merci à vous, Madame, vous m'avez rendu une fois encore les présent des beaux jours de Passé. Oh, que vous faites bien, Madame, de ne pas renoncer à cet Art, dont les interprètes disparaissent de jour en jour. Qui mieux que vous pourra jamais inspirer d'apprendre aux jeunes gens de l'avenir ce que peut être le beau, le vrai. Oui, continuez malgré votre fatigue ces représentations qui sont l'Ecole du Gout, de la Noblesse, et du Sentiment. Heureux dont ceux qui peuvent en jouir. Agréez de nouveau Madame, l'hommage de ma haute considération.—Une admiratrice sincère, R. FECHTER.

My wife never forgot Charles Kemble's advice, not to concern herself with what newspapers might say of her. Had she varied her rule now, and read the elaborate and eloquent notices, in which every leading journal dealt with her Imogen, she could not have failed to feel gratified. But read them she would not. They would have shown her that her long absence from the London stage had not dimmed the memories of her former triumphs, and that she had awakened in a younger generation the same deep sympathy to which she had long been accustomed in the provinces. She felt she had carried her audience with her. That was enough for her. But from these finely written tributes to her treatment of the character so much may be gathered, that some specimens of them ought to be preserved, not only for the sake of the actress, but as examples of what could at that time be done in the way of dramatic criticism. Here is a passage from the *Times* (October 20) :—

On her first entrance Miss Helen Faucit shows at once the artlessness of Imogen, and also convinces the spectators that she is the person to whom the worship of the British Court is justly due. Imogen is admirable in everything. She is surpassingly beautiful, her movements are graceful, she wears her garments in fashion so becoming as to make "great Juno angry," she sings "angel-like," and, according to the testimony of Guiderius, she is even an excellent cook. Her audience should at once be impressed with the excellence of this superior being, which is supposed to be manifest to every person with whom she comes into contact, and this is effected by Miss H. Faucit. An air of dignified amiability sits lightly upon her ; her gestures are various and expressive, as if the slightest thought or feeling had its reflex in a plastic frame ; in all that she says and does there is a quiet and irresistible eloquence. The strong instinct of propriety never deserts her,



and even the offence which is given to her by the intrusive advances of Cloten is subdued by native courtesy. The strong language, with which Imogen reviles the Royal cub, might lead an actress of less refined texture into coarseness, but Miss Faucit bears in mind the words—

“ I am much sorry, sir,  
You put me to forget a lady’s manners,”

and makes of them the key to the situation. Once only does she give full vent to the harsher emotions—namely, when she is urged by Iachimo to be unchastely revenged on Posthumus for his asserted infidelity; and her whole sense of virtue is aroused. Gentle elsewhere, she is here terrible in her force, and rarely do we see an audience so suddenly affected. Here all the subtlety that belongs to the delineation of the calm Imogen is to be forgotten; a feeling common to all virtuous mankind has to be uttered; a blow has to be struck hard, and struck it is.

Nevertheless it is in the quieter passages of the character that this finished artist is most completely revealed. Criticism on realistic novelists has familiarised us with the expression “word-painting” unknown to our fathers. Let us be allowed the somewhat unwieldy compound “voice and gesture painting” to denote the manner in which Miss Faucit says—

“ I would have broke my eye-strings; crack’d them, but  
To look upon him, till the diminution  
Of space had pointed him sharp as my needle,  
Nay, follow’d him, till he had melted from  
The smallness of a gnat to air.”

This passage is a gem of descriptive elocution. The reading of the letter in which the murder of Imogen is commanded by Posthumus is another masterpiece of refinement. The first sentence, which Miss Faucit has the wisdom to preserve in all its crude simplicity, is read loudly, with an air of mere wonderment at the written absurdity; but as the earnest purport of the epistle becomes more and more apparent, the strength of the reader gives way, and moral suffering acquires a physical force, and she falls to the ground literally broken down. As for the timid approach of the disgraced Imogen to the cave of Belarius, it is a study for a painter.

*The Saturday Review* was no less ardent in its recognition of the charm of the Imogen, which, but for the decadent condition of the London theatres, might have been made years before familiar to the London public:—

The crowning event of the season is the reappearance of Miss Helen Faucit on the boards where she was once considered the least dispensable of artists. The character she selected was that of Imogen, in *Cymbeline*, a play which has not been acted—save at Sadler’s Wells, and perhaps some of the remoter suburbs—for upwards of twenty years, which contains no scene or speech that has a traditional celebrity with the multitude, and which to

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uncultivated persons, who never read their Shakespeare, is scarcely known by name.

On her first entrance she seemed a living record of another order of things—a record, be it observed, on which time had left no trace, for she looked as young, as graceful, and as buoyant as when she first acted the character under the management of Mr Macready. She was at once greeted with deafening applause, but still we watched with interest to ascertain whether acting of such ethereal refinement as hers could be thoroughly appreciated by a modern audience of a very mixed kind, and in whom the organ of veneration has been but slightly cultivated. Of late years applause, when not gained by an appeal to the risible faculties, has generally been elicited by a strong reproduction of everyday reality, with those details of the truthfulness of which every one can judge. Moreover, although now rising into prominence, Drury Lane has not of late been a fashionable theatre, and the question arose whether the occupants of its pit would be thoroughly alive to that exquisite ideality which characterises Miss Faucit's impersonations, especially when the part acted was one of the most ideal kind. The lovely passage—

“ I would have broke my eye-strings,” &c.,

was, on her lips, one of the most delicate expressions of devoted tenderness, with the additional charm that it presented the situation merely described. The spectator might believe, from Miss Faucit's manner, that she actually saw the retiring Posthumus dwindling into air—nay, could almost imagine that he himself beheld the gradual diminution. But that unconscious propriety of Imogen, that innate virtue which guards her as a shield, and enfolds her as a garment, that purity of soul which speaks in her slightest movement,—would all this be thoroughly understood by persons long accustomed to sympathise with no griefs but such as might fall with most prosaic force to their own share, and to see the most tragic situations subjected to a burlesque treatment? There is something so inimitably picturesque in Miss Faucit's acting that one constantly longs to see each successive attitude fixed in a photograph, and bound into a volume to form a psychological illustration to the play. But would this excellence appeal to a public for which, of all arts, sculpture has the slightest charm?

Abandoning the interrogative mood, we gladly record the fact that Miss Faucit's Imogen was appreciated to the highest degree of enthusiasm. When once she had the audience in her grasp, she held them firmly, and was listened to with breathless attention. However admirable a performance may be, some one salient point is always requisite to convert quiet approbation into demonstrative sympathy. This point in *Cymbeline* was the sudden indignation of Imogen, when Iachimo's false reports of the infidelity of Posthumus are followed by an attempt upon her honour. To some minds the delicate doubts and sorrow by which the mind of the peerless Imogen is harassed, and in the delineation of which the subtlest emotions of the poet are reproduced in the most refined expressions of the actress—whose whole frame, so to speak, is devoted to the task of realising one of the coyest of ideals—might scarcely be intelligible; but the out-

burst of virtuous rage was a "touch of nature" that addressed all intellects alike, and the house reverberated with an explosion of admiration. We aptly use an oft-allowed commonplace when we say that the transformation of the extremely gentle being into a heroine, striking terror with glance, voice, and gesture, was electrical.

The standpoint of admiration having been attained, what a scene of beauty was opened to the view! The refined artist, to whom the right delivery of the least prominent word was a matter of the highest importance, had that power of expressing the strongest emotion, without which a wide popularity is not to be acquired, and it was felt that not only art, but nature, was at the basis of her most subtle interpretations. We have touched upon the picturesque character of Miss Faucit's acting. The one scene—nay, the one portion of a scene—in which, disguised as a boy, she steals into the cave of Belarius, furnishes a whole gallery of pictures. The terror she feels at the sword which is to be her defence, the cautiousness of the approach, the hurry of the retreat, the particle of comedy that she throws into the situation by bringing female timidity into unexpected prominence, the combination of the most contentious feelings when the entrance into the cave is ultimately accomplished, form a great work of pictorial art.<sup>1</sup>

How this Imogen was dressed playgoers of a future time will be glad to learn. This is described in an article on "Art on the Stage," which appeared at the time in the *Art Journal*:—

The costumes worn by Miss Helen Faucit were selected with peculiar fitness for the character, indicating the refinement and richness of taste on which Shakespeare has been at pains to dwell. The tunic and peplum which formed the first dress, of the most delicate colours, was of the softest and finest textures, and fell around her fine yet slender figure in the most "artistic" folds. Every movement developed some fresh study which the sculptor might have longed to perpetuate. Whatever the situation, it seemed as if we saw before us in motion all that ancient Art has transmitted to us of the most beautiful in the draped masterpieces of Greece and Rome. . . . The scenes where Imogen appears in the boy's dress, in like manner presented one continuous succession of the most beautiful pictures. The dress itself—a white tunic edged with blue—had obviously been selected, with a fine sense of fitness, to carry out the impression of beauty, somewhat "angel-like," which Imogen makes upon Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus, in their rocky home. As she first appeared to them at the mouth of the cave, the words of Belarius—

"By Jupiter, an angel! or, if not,  
An earthly paragon!"—

<sup>1</sup> In a notice of her Imogen by Dr Doran, he says: "In Imogen, under the boy's disguise, there was an innocent assurance mixed with the timidity, and (as a spectator remarked) the feet of the supposed youth seemed to grasp the ground they kissed, as the ivy does the oak."



were the very echo of what the vision stirred in the minds of the spectators. This was one of the many points which showed with what a true artistic feeling the actress had studied all the accessories of the part.

It is to be regretted that no means exist of perpetuating many of Miss Helen Faucit's attitudes in this scene; but this is indeed impossible, for she never poses for effect nor dwells upon an attitude—each position seeming to be the accident of the minute; and yet no attitude is capable of improvement.

Of the many letters to my wife at this time from strangers, to which her Imogen gave rise, none gave her more pleasure than the following:—

“ Dec. 20, 1864.

“MY DEAR MADAM,—Had you a mind less grand and discriminating, I should be afraid to intrude upon you, but as I believe that you have a soul not above receiving the gratitude of a humble member of the middle classes, be pleased to accept my grateful thanks for gladdening again my eyes, ears, and heart of hearts by your exquisitely delicate delineation of Shakespeare's Imogen. I had long given up hope of ever seeing perfection in anything again.

“In my small circle of acquaintances, mostly young people, I had mourned over departed greatness. I have been again and again seduced by the loving entreaties of my nieces, who possess in some degree your own tender winningness, to go and see this performance and that, and when I could not honestly reply to their questions in terms complimentary to the performers, and agreeable to their hopes, they have put me down in their minds as an ‘used-up’ man. They have reminded me that one like me once said, ‘That peaches now-a-day have not the same flavour they had when I was a boy,’ the speaker forgetting that peaches retained their flavour, and that his taste was less delicate than formerly; and as a climax they have said, ‘Why, uncle, if your own “Helen Faucit” were to come back to the stage again, she whom you put up as the paragon, and if she were to act the same characters, with the same grace that you extol so much, we question whether you would witness them with the same enjoyment.’

“This kind of reasoning, coming as it did from those whom I love for their tenderness, and respect for their goodness, made me



at times feel that I was getting old and worn out, and set about accepting my position as a man behind the age, who was doomed to find his 'way to dusty death' accompanied by pity, but never to be cheered by sympathy.

"Last autumn I saw an announcement in the *Times*, that you were about to return to Drury Lane. Imogen's joy at receiving the intelligence that she might see her lord at Milford Haven can but convey to your mind my joy. I went directly to my eldest niece, whose judgment is the ripest, and said, 'Now, my dear girl, I have a chance of showing you what I understand as worthy of admiration. Your tragedy queens and your sensation heroines will pale before my *beau ideal* of what a great artist is. Come and judge for yourself, and if your judgment does not accord with mine, then I will at once suppose that I am antiquated, and have lost just perception.' With a kind gladness she accepted my invitation to witness your first performance.

"I felt my reputation at stake. I was not without internal misgivings. Excuse me, if I take you for a moment above your sex. I thought that twelve or fifteen years might have impaired that suppleness, that exquisite tenderness, that delicate discrimination of tones, that keen sense of differences, which that number of years ago raised my admiration to enthusiasm. If they had, it would have been no fault of yours, and I should have been equally right in 'sticking to the old lines.' But when I saw you come upon the stage, with such a holy expression of intense love, with such delicate, feminine, and devoted motions, before you had uttered a word I felt a load taken from me. But when I heard the old familiar voice, that combination of richness, sweetness, tenderness, and sense, I turned to my companion and boldly said, 'That is my Helen Faucit, improved beyond my fondest hope! Judge of her and me together. She never performed better,—to my mind, never so well. Am I correct in judgment, or are you?' This was at the conclusion of the first act. My niece, with that frankness and honesty which are natural to her, unhesitatingly declared, in tones almost too loud to accord with the genteel decorum of the dress circle, 'Why, uncle, I never saw acting before. All I have hitherto admired is coarse and mean, rant and contortion, compared with this.' As the play went on

her admiration increased, and when in the last act you threw yourself upon your newly found lord, with that natural effect of a burning, pure affection, her woman's heart was one with yours. Since then I have been a great man in my small circle. I have been endowed with common-sense, almost youth, and an immense amount of artistic discernment. I really believe that if I were to commend the very last of Turner's pictures to my friends, it would pass for a gem.

"Do not despise the deep gratitude I feel towards you for having given me and mine so much genuine pleasure. I will not dare to intrude upon your arrangements, but if it falls in with your convenience or your interest, do allow (as a favour) the young of the present generation to enjoy the pleasure which those who were young twenty years ago experienced. If acting is too fatiguing, try reading. Any way you will be making your contemporaries your debtors. Accept once more a gratitude which I have no power to express in language.—Gratefully yours,

"S. T."

Touched by a tribute so novel and quaint in its character, my wife sent her photograph to the writer with warm words of acknowledgment. In his reply he thanked her "again and again for her kindness," adding, "When you meet with one who has fallen in 'fortune's strife,' allow me the pleasure of assisting him or her to the extent of my humble means in gratitude to you." Naming a considerable sum, he asked that he might be permitted to present it in her name to some "afflicted person or charitable institution." "By all means," was the reply, "present your thank-offering—fit objects are manifold; but present it in your own name, not in mine. I have my reward in knowing that I have moved you to give it."

The crowds, which filled every part of Drury Lane theatre at every performance of *Cymbeline*, showed very clearly, that there was no surer attraction for a London audience than a play of Shakespeare, well acted, without any wasteful excess in merely scenic adjuncts. The audiences did not diminish, when *Macbeth* on the 3rd of November took the place of the less known play. So great indeed were they, that I had myself to stand, along with

Mr Oxenford, the *Times* critic, a whole evening at an open door of the dress circle, to see a performance, of which he had written (*Times*, 7th November), that it had "awakened a curiosity even greater than was excited by Miss Faucit's performance of Imogen."

She was greeted [he added] on her entrance with a storm of applause, and the younger among the audience, who had beheld her only as Imogen, must have been surprised to see that truly feminine symbol of innocence transformed into the masculine instigator of evil, who was fit to "bear male children only." The whole figure was stern, majestic, menacing. In the reading of the letter her idealistic tendency is at once visible; she holds the scroll in a manner that a sculptor would admire. There is something weird, too, in the interpretation. From the record of the witches' predictions she has drawn inspiration, and her address to the spirits of evil might have been delivered by a Medea, conscious of her power over the preternatural world. The same conception influences her greeting to Macbeth; she is not a tempter, she is a prophetess. But when she sees him failing in his purpose, she drops from her sublimity, and even descends to the vixen to wound him in a sensitive part. The spitefulness with which she accuses him of cowardice tells with immense force, from the simple fact, that it is perfectly truthful. All that belongs to the reception of Duncan is executed with consummate skill. . . . Most admirable, too, is the activity at the banquet scene, where the lady would divert the attention of the too observant guests. She is not only the person of powerful mind sustaining the weak, she is the busy hostess, anxious that her entertainment may not go wrong. But when the guests have all departed, and the guilty pair are left alone in their vast hall, the excitement subsides into a deep mournfulness, and the slow manner in which the Lady follows her husband, at a distance of some paces, is full of mute eloquence.

It was remarkable, that with scarcely an exception the critics recognised my wife's conception of Lady Macbeth as true both to Shakespeare and nature, in contrast to the Siddonian interpretation, which had become conventional upon the London stage. She had sent them to their Shakespeares, and they had there found, that she had studied the indications of the character with a mind unwarped by tradition, that looked only to what she found written and suggested in the leaves of the Master's "unvalued book." Here is what Dr Doran wrote (*Dublin Evening Mail*, December 23, 1864). He was no great analytic critic. But he knew well what the actresses of former times, as well as my wife's immediate predecessors, had done with the character. He was



also familiar with what she had done during all her early London career :—

It was a question with playgoers who had seen Miss Faucit as Imogen whether the delicate organisation, which added beauty to the impersonation of that character, would be equal to the terrible exigencies of Lady Macbeth. Such question soon ceased to be, for one of the characteristics of this great actress lies in her power to transform herself, as it were, into that of which she is the counterfeit presentment. The personality of Miss Faucit altogether disappears, and the person she represents takes the form and substance of an undeniable reality. In Lady Macbeth the high breeding of the woman was as patent as her bad ambition, and the former seemed to warrant an ambition, which aspired to a queenly dignity for which she seemed fashioned by nature. There was a time, in this lady's early girlhood, when she was something influenced by contact with Mr Macready. All evidences of such influence are no longer discernible. Miss Faucit no more reminds the spectator of the bad school, of which that gentleman was the excellent master, than she does of the "points" made respectively by Mrs Pritchard and Mrs Siddons, and which have come down to us by tradition. We believe that she has never seen any part acted which she herself represents. There is, therefore, all the more nature and originality in her acting, with such abounding impulses—the heart taking its share with the brain, the feelings being let loose while the judgment is cool to control them—that on each night an attentive spectator may have discerned some new beauty, some artistic touch that was not there before. With all this, nature maintains itself supreme. The temptations to overstep it in Lady Macbeth are many, but Miss Faucit wisely lets them pass. A lady may be a very wicked lady without being a virago ; and may have a voice, irresistible for ill, in her husband's affairs, without caring to make that voice heard from Birnam Wood to Dunsinane. Indeed, we take it, that all heroically vicious women have been quiet, self-possessed persons, all their passions boiling in their heart, with no, or only mistaken, traces of that process in their faces. When Miss Faucit's Lady Macbeth caressed the little son of Banquo, she fairly looked a lovable person, above all suspicion ; but when she passed silently from the stage, and no human eye was supposed to be upon her, the whole woman was transformed—all the fiend, cruel and perplexed, was there ; yet not a vulgar, but a well-bred fiend, the very sweep of her admirable drapery helping the illusion. Again, as she disappeared at the end of the sleep-walking scene, with that heart-breaking invitation, "To bed," at which the very wickedest of confederate husbands might have shuddered, we could not help thinking, that Miss Faucit would require all her Christmas holidays to take the wickedness out of her face.

My wife did not act after this till March, 1865, when she again appeared at Drury Lane. Greatly successful as her Lady Macbeth had there been, she would not agree to include it in her list of



parts during this engagement. Imogen, Rosalind, and Juliet took its place. They drew as great houses, and called forth many fine criticisms in the press. In them was a general expression of regret, that the genius, which could so interpret these ideal characters, had been so long lost to the metropolis, and of gratitude that my wife had again quitted the privacy of home to show them how much the stage can do to illuminate the page of Shakespeare. After seeing the *Rosalind*, George Eliot wrote:—

“THE PRIORY,” *March 10, 1865.*

“Let me indulge myself by telling you of my heartfelt joy in your acting last night. Do not suppose that I dignify my impressions with the name of opinions, or that I think they could have any value for you in that light, but it is indifferent to none of us to know that we have been the cause of pure and high enjoyment to another.

“My first delight was in your art—in the good you were giving others. My next delight was in the good for you of being what you were for others.

“Your voice seemed to prove that you were in good health, and had overcome the drawbacks you have been having lately. I hope the voice did not deceive me. Once more, thank you.—Ever yours, with high regard and admiration,

“MARIAN E. LEWES.”

Imogen Miss Geraldine Jewsbury had seen in former years. How it had been developed in the interval the following letter tells:—

*March 13, 1865.*

DEAR MRS THEODORE MARTIN,—I wish I could by writing convey to you an idea of the great pleasure I received on Friday night, though pleasure is hardly the word to use, for it was something much better. I can only thank you for what you did, for you gave us the work of a lifetime brought to perfection. It left nothing to be desired—more; nothing to be wished undone; at least that was the impression with me and on the friends who were with me. It seemed as though I had never seen Imogen before, for the last time I saw you, with all its grace and beauty, it did not give me the idea of *perfectness* as on Friday night. With all its art and study it was *not* acting. It seemed so spontaneous that only that one *knew* all the life

that was exhaled in that result, one would not have believed you could have done otherwise.

I fear perfect contentment is a lazy emotion, for I did not want anybody to speak. I think the expression of one's admiration is more given to that which *suggests* to us something better, rather than to that which fulfils all we can conceive, or rather goes beyond all we are able to think. I think it is so in all works of art and genius, the higher they go the less we find to say about them. The same with great scenes in nature. We resent words uttered as impertinence.<sup>1</sup> I found myself crying, if that is any tribute.—  
Believe me, yours very gratefully,  
GERALDINE E. JEWSBURY.

While still under the impression made by the Juliet, a few evenings afterwards Miss Jewsbury wrote, with the accustomed subtlety of observation:—

March 29, 1865.

On Monday night I was in my place, and I am still under the spell. To *you* I dare scarcely say all that you realised for me in your embodiment. If you could have seen the faces of your audience, and not the faces alone, but the eager breathless attention with which they regarded you, it would have told you more than any words or uttered applause. I have seen so little acting in my life that my tribute is like that of an ignorant savage. I can only say how it affected me.

There was in your acting so much more than *appeared*. There was such a whole life of meaning and possibility below the surface. I think the part that gave me as intense emotion as any was in the scene where the nurse exhorts you to marry the County Paris. "Speakest thou from thy heart?" "Yea, my soul too, or else beshrew them both!" The "amen" that followed bowed down one's heart with the weight it indicated—taking up the burden which must henceforth be borne alone.

In the potion scene one realised (the first time I ever did) the *heroism* of taking that sleeping potion. It gave one the impression of *sustained courage*, not desperation. But perhaps the most intense moment to me in the whole play was that when the door was closed on the mother and the nurse. The silence fell with a weight, and the pitiful terror one felt for Juliet took one by the throat. One realised what it was that lay before her, and I think the awakening in the tomb, the stiffened movement of the limbs in the effort to arise was another of the touches which showed the depth that lay beneath.

As to the absolute beauty and perfect grace of Juliet there is no need to speak. They were not only there, but so much more was indicated. It is not the mere bodily limits of what we see and possess that give value and beauty; it is the everlasting life that underlies them. If it was not yourself to whom I am writing I could say a great deal more; and yet one can at best utter so little.

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<sup>1</sup> This was my wife's own feeling. See p. 143 *ante*, when she speaks of the Venus of Milo.

A few nights afterward *As You Like It* was produced. Miss Jewsbury went to see the *Rosalind*, and wrote of it to me the following day:—

I think *Rosalind* is, if possible, as exquisite as *Imogen*. There is in her an airy grace, a fascinating high breeding, which is inexpressibly attractive. The girlish spirits have not been *quenched* by sorrow, and there is an elasticity and youthfulness which have a charm of their own. Mrs Martin's *Rosalind* is one of Shakespeare's women, without a trace of the medium and machinery through which it has to be exhibited. I forgot all about the stage, and enjoyed without any drawback her lovely personation. There was such dainty fun and playfulness in *Rosalind*, that this enjoyment was not made sad. The epilogue, too, was charming.

Certainly, having had the privilege of seeing her in these three characters—*Imogen*, *Juliet*, and *Rosalind*—will mark an era in my life. She has shown men an ideal of what women *can* be, and I never heard a man speak otherwise than *gratefully* for that. All recognise it, young and old. They accept her as the type, not of one character nor another, but of the ideal of womanliness, and, when this is the spontaneous tribute, she has not lived or worked in vain. . . . I do not think the influence of her private happy life can be over-estimated. She does not hear or know one-half of all the good influence she has exercised. . . . It is artists like her, who keep the world alive. . . . I do not think Mrs Martin knows how *ividly* those who saw her years ago remember her. A lady said to me, "How well I remember the *Pauline* of 1848."

It will seem strange that, with all the response which the public had given to her efforts, my wife was troubled with the fear that she had lived in vain. She had seen so great a decline in the tone of the theatrical world, and in the character of the plays which were most popular, that this fear at times took a strong hold of her. Miss Jewsbury was aware of this, and it is to this groundless apprehension that she refers in the letter just quoted.

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE great interest excited by the performances at Drury Lane made the Manchester public impatient of my wife's two years' absence from their stage. She yielded to their wishes, and played a short engagement there in the April of this year, and was greeted with the same intelligent enthusiasm as of old. In Birmingham, where she had not acted for many years, she played for two nights, on her way back to London, and found there the warmest appreciation. She needed rest, but an appeal, which she could not resist, was made to her to read for the benefit of the Brompton Consumption Hospital the drama *Ulysses*, which M. Ponsard had written in illustration of Gounod's music. Neither play nor music showed their authors at the best. Although much had been done by Mr Farnie, the translator, to lighten the heaviness of the original, the task of infusing life and animation into the text was no trivial one. How it was accomplished we are told by the critic of the *Pall Mall Gazette* :—

The very defects of the work [he says] only served to illustrate more conspicuously Miss Faucit's extraordinary dramatic power, and suggested forcibly what might be accomplished in the interpretation of a worthier book by such skilful elocution, and a voice so exquisitely musical in its cadences, so charmingly sympathetic, and so wide in its range of expression. It was only at times that Miss Faucit found it necessary to distinguish by name the different persons of the drama, and even if this precaution had been wholly omitted, we doubt whether the slightest confusion could have arisen, so distinctly did the accomplished actress mark by tone and gesture the various characters who were brought together.

Mrs S. C. Hall wrote :—

I heard numbers say, as we were going out, "Well, I never heard



reading before." I certainly never did ; and then, as the old women say, "it came natural." Oh ! it was perfect. . . . It was a great thing to do for a good cause. May God bless you ! and may you long retain your powers ! Your pure heart and bright nature keep you *in the morning of your days*.

In November 1866 my wife appeared again at Drury Lane in *As You Like It*, *The Hunchback*, and in the ever-popular *Lady of Lyons*. The weakness of the company took from her much of the pleasure which she found in acting before a sympathetic audience. The extra strain from this cause was well expressed by a writer in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (November 24)—

It is something [he wrote] when an actress consistently sustains the illusion, that she *is* Beatrice or Rosalind every moment that she is on the stage ; but how much more is it, how much greater the testimony to her skill, when she contrives to maintain the illusion in the face of half-a-dozen people whose every gesture rends illusion, and every word mocks it ? This is what Miss Faucit accomplished, and we are thereby left to wonder at another thing—namely, what her acting would be, if, spared the irritation and the fret, to which she is now exposed, her powers had free scope and full encouragement among players as good, or nearly as good, as herself.

When asked, "How she could act to such a Romeo, Benedick, or Orlando ?" she would reply, "It is not to them I act—I see and hear only my ideal lover !"

In a fine appreciation of the Rosalind, the writer just quoted says :—

When Miss Faucit came before the public last year, impelled by enthusiasm for her art, her impersonation of Rosalind was that which most delighted old playgoers, and most astonished young ones. The new generation had never seen such acting before, nor anything like it ; and many a spectator who up to that time had thought slightly of acting as an *art*, learned for the first time, how much of exquisite art goes to make a really finished actor. . . . She sustains the interest and delight of her audience to the end by a constant show of grace, constant proofs of intelligent study, and by frequent flashes of something more than mere intelligence inspires, or than study can ever attain to.

The character seemed on each performance to grow in favour with her audiences, and those who saw it, as many did, again and again, found it ever fresh in its animation of spirit and in the infinity of new touches begotten of the moment's inspiration.

Thank you gratefully [Miss Jewsbury wrote the morning after the first performance] for all the great pleasure I had last night. I cannot tell you how much I enjoyed the whole play, for your spirit pervaded it, and raised the whole to a degree of completeness one seldom enjoys. . . . I enjoyed it more than last year. You were more yourself, and *lighter* and *freer*, and that made me hope you are in better health than when you last played Rosalind. Do you recollect how ill you were that night? But well or ill, you are Rosalind. My dear, did any one ever give that epilogue as you did last night? It was exquisite. . . . But it is not for the like of me to go giving criticism, or specifying what I liked best. I took it altogether, and was thankful.

So, when she played Pauline, it was felt that since she had last acted it in London the impersonation had been developed into something more complete, "more moving—natural," and full of pathetic charm. No character in our time has drawn more tears than Pauline. Men used to be seen putting their handkerchiefs into their mouths to keep them from breaking into sobs. Miss Thackeray, now Mrs Richmond Ritchie, writing the morning after seeing the performance on this occasion, said, "Papa used to say he never saw the play without crying. What a sight," she added, "that great enthusiastic house was! Why didn't you come, when we clapped and cried? I wish you could have seen three Turks who sat next to me. Dear Pauline! she made me cry when she put on the cloak. She *is* so lovely."

Mr S. C. Hall could not go to bed till he had written to me (28th November):—

In the long time ago, when I was a dramatic critic, it was a frequent duty to write at once—and at midnight—opinions and impressions of what I had seen. I do so now after a long, long interval.

I have never in my life (and that is saying much) been more gratified than I have been to-night; for the performance (a weak word) of the Lady Helen<sup>1</sup> as Pauline in Bulwer's play is the nearest to perfection my experience furnishes to my memory—and I have seen all the actresses of my time, from Miss O'Neill until now.

In truth it is perfect: there was not a single look, word, or motion that I could *conceive* might have been better. I knew that art was there,—yet it was *hidden* under *nature*: it was consummate art, the result certainly of intense thought and continual study, but I was never for a moment startled into a knowledge that it was art.

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<sup>1</sup> In her home circle my wife always went by this name.

I can compare the acting of the Lady Helen when she first acted the part with what it was to-night, and I can see profound progress—a far higher and more elevated comprehension and appreciation of the character; more vigorous delineation, but also more touching pathos, greater tenderness, and deeper feeling.

It is a wonderful portrait the Lady draws; more powerful, but also more refined. Her parallel can be only herself; for ever since she first played the part, she has made it her own—unapproachable. Now, however, she has gone far beyond what she has been heretofore.

Of Pauline Miss Jewsbury wrote much to the same effect. “From last year it seems to me she has gone on to higher completeness; there is a force and freedom greater than then. At least, so it seems to me—but ‘I speak as a fool.’ I am touched by the sympathy of the audience with her, and she must feel it as the crown of her reward.” Such indeed it was; and what else could have made her, delicate in health as she was, “spurn delights, and live laborious days” of rehearsal, and brave the exhaustion of heart and brain which went to secure that sympathy? “*The Lady of Lyons* is not one of my great favourites as a play,” Miss Jewsbury adds, “but Pauline struck me as one of her very best pieces of acting. . . . Nothing was left to desire, except that it had been a play one could reverence, for it seems sacrilege to devote her genius to anything but the highest. Nevertheless I enjoyed it, and found myself shedding tears by way of evidence.”

In the Julia of *The Hunchback* the same advance was recognised. Writing of it, Mrs S. C. Hall says: “Every time I see you, I see an increase of power, and of that wonderful electricity, that sends your thoughts into the hearts of your audience. . . . We did not until the play was over feel how badly you were supported—then it burst upon us. You absorbed all our eyes and ears.”

Much to the same effect might be quoted from all the leading journals. But they have not the same interest as the following letter from Miss Jewsbury (9th December), who knew well, with how great a sacrifice of strength the stage triumphs of my wife were bought, and how enthusiasm for her art outweighed with her all minor considerations:—

DEAR MR THEODORE MARTIN,—I was very much obliged for your note. One knows that it is her *life* she is giving to us in these representa-

tions,<sup>1</sup> and that is just the value and the beauty and the *awe* that goes along with the intense enjoyment of seeing her. What would become of the world if some persons had not loved it better than it deserves or understands, and so given a knowledge of better things than lie in the road? I do not suppose it is possible to estimate the influence she has had for good—and it is just *now* that the very crown of perfectness is put upon her work. One woman (herself an actress) wrote to me: “One grows tender over her acting, and any attempt at criticism *hurts* and angers one. It is the only acting that is perfectly sympathetic.” And a young girl, who went on Friday, said to me yesterday, “One felt so grateful to her—I cannot bear to hear any one speak of it. Ah, no! She has not wasted herself. She has put to silence the ignorance of foolish people, and as to myself, I have no words to utter her praise.” I am like that young girl, who felt *grateful* to her.

This was the last engagement my wife made in London. The fatigue of it had been so greatly increased by the very indifferent acting of the various characters in her plays, that she made up her mind to accept no other London engagement, unless a great change in this respect took place. And now, having more leisure, she began to keep a journal of her daily occupations. In it she chronicled the more notable passages which she came across in her reading, and, occasionally, what she herself thought of the books she read, the pictures she saw, and the people she met. From this Journal for 1867 the following extracts are taken:—

“28th March.—Read *Enoch Arden* again. How it grows upon you—like all true things! Tennyson surprises us with words for thoughts which we find too deep for utterance. Our gratitude then goes hand in hand with our admiration. He will surely live while tenderness and chivalry live in this world of ours. Browning is tender, too, and very manly. He feels the wound deeply, but glories in the lash which he carries to chastise the cause of so much suffering. He would smite the evil-doers right and left in his grand indignation. Tennyson feels the wrong, but never forgets the sufferer.

“7th April.—We called to see Millais’ pictures. They must be very clever. I can well understand the difficulties overcome—

<sup>1</sup> So Goethe says of Schiller—

“En wendete die Blüthe höchsten Strebens,  
Das Leben selbst, an dieses Bild des Lebens.”



the labour given—but they stir nothing within me. I feel hard-hearted, even when I look on the ‘Jephtha’s Daughter.’ The theatrical-looking old black nurse is false and objectionable to me. Jephtha’s grief may be real, but it is too conscious, and the Daughter’s moves me not.

“29th April.—Read *Aylmer’s Field* again. Lovely thoughts here and there, but I do not like the story. I think Averill acts a coward’s part in smiting the old people, and this, too, before the eyes of their little world. How little of the Christian spirit! Cruelty for cruelty! Death for death! Shakespeare knew better. He let his Capulets and Montagues live.

“May 12.—Professor Blackie dined with us. He is always fresh and clever,—like a rough day in summer, full of fresh breezes, but somewhat fatiguing to the nerves. I have promised him a letter to Robert Browning. I should like to know how they assimilate. But they are both good men and true, and will turn the corners gently.

“May 20.—We went to Mr Milner Gibson’s and afterwards to Mrs Procter’s. Dear old Mr Procter, how sweet he was! I am sure we stayed more than an hour. The dear old gentleman stole out of the room just before we left to write in a copy of his *Poems*, and put it into our hands at the door. What a well-spent life speaks out of him! His goodness and talents have walked hand in hand without a doubt. He told me, quietly, that he was ‘very old.’

“May 24.—Still so cold. A wind keen enough to cut you through and through. . . . I will resolve myself into a wind, *when I have a choice*. Then I can be soft, and strong, when and where I like, and then the delightful mystery of it, too!

“May 25.—My dear, true friend, Sir A. Alison is gone. Alas! alas! My heart is very sad. His loyal friendship leaves me a happy memory, which shall be cherished gratefully as long as I have any.

“May 29.—Lectured by Clara Lane for having given up my singing. Promised to practise a little, but what I do in this way is so small, that it does not seem worth while. Went to Christie & Manson to see poor Philips’s pictures before the sale. How amazingly I should like to possess some three or four of them!

I might as well want the moon. Mr Wyndham [manager of the Edinburgh theatre], came up to me in the room, and wrung a half promise from me to act in Edinburgh next winter. We shall see!

“June 3.—We went to the Holborn theatre to see *The Flying Scud*. Not very much pleased. The acting is both over and under the true line. The audience, as usual, vehement in the wrong places.

“June 4.—Dr Stokes [of Dublin] called in the morning. It is like a walk on the Downs to have a talk with him.

“June 9.—Went to the afternoon service in the Abbey with Lady Augusta Stanley. The Dean preached excellently on the Eleventh Commandment, which Christ gave us, ‘Love one another!’ I wish I had heard him in the morning, when he preached on the other ten. We went back to the Deanery with Lady Augusta, and had a long pleasant chat with them alone. She seems very much pleased that my ‘Ogre’<sup>1</sup> is going to do this work [*The Prince Consort’s Life*] for Her Majesty.

“June 16.—Stayed at home all day. Read my ‘Ogre’s’ translation of the Prince’s letters. What charming letters! What a father to have had! What an entry into life with such a hand to guide! So wise, and so affectionate! What a father to lose! Poor Queen! Poor children!

“June 18.—Called at the Thackerays and saw Minnie in her pretty simple wedding-dress. What a dreadful leap this into marriage always seems! ‘Till death do us part!’ Read *Queen’s Lilies* this morning. What an exquisite thing it is! How much I thank Ruskin for it. ✓

“June 19.—Went to the church in our square this morning at 8 o’clock to see Minnie Thackeray and Leslie Stephen married. They both were very brave, and he looked very fond of her. May they be very happy!

“July 11.—We had a dinner party of seventeen. The Dean and Lady Augusta Stanley, Mr Browning, Mr Frederick Pollock, the George Smiths, Colonel Hamley, &c., &c. All went off well, and the talk very pleasant. It was a great effort to me, and I

<sup>1</sup> A name given me by one of my wife’s bridesmaids, for daring to appropriate such a bride.

dreaded it greatly, being so ill lately. I must not forget nice clever Mrs Procter was with us. I think the people liked each other and were pleased.

“*July 13.*—Went again to see the portraits at South Kensington. What a noble collection it is! What Sir Joshuas! How grateful we must always be for the lovely women he has left behind him! I never thought I should care for Sir T. Lawrence, but his noble picture of Miss Farren has captivated me! What grace, life, beauty, elegance are in it! This one woman makes his fame.

“*July 20.*—Went to *Her Majesty's* in the evening to hear Christine Nillson. She sings well, but without soul or fire.

“*July 23.*—We went to hear *Romeo and Juliet* at Covent Garden. Much disappointed. Music dull, and characterless. Patti worse, and Mario not so good as I expected. The balcony scene utterly degraded.”

All this year my wife had been very far from well. The heat of the summer had exhausted her greatly. I was myself suffering much from overwork, and Dr Quain had recommended us to try the baths and waters of Ems. Leaving London on the 29th of July we crossed to Calais that evening, slept there, and reached Brussels the following day. To return to the Diary—

“*July 31.*—Obliged to stay the day in Brussels, saw the pictures again at the ‘Museum,’ and that nice old woman reading by Nicholas Maas. Saw pictures in the Palace of the Prince of Orange—some very good—all modern. Some good sculpture also. I remember seeing the ‘Deluge’ group before in London. It is very fine. A large oil painting by Thomas has some fine things in it—Judas coming by night suddenly on the Cross, and the workmen who are preparing it asleep by the side of it. Judas is a little too melodramatic, but the effect of the landscape and sleeping figures is very impressive. Some fine things by Clays, but none better, or, I think, so good, as the one *we* have at home of his. It is well there is not very much to see in the old Museum, for what an atmosphere it is to breathe, hermetically sealed from the time of its birth, I should think!”

We reached Ems two days afterwards and found several friends there. It was very crowded. The King of Prussia was there,

and for a time Prince Bismarck. The weather grew insufferably hot, and but for the shady woods, and the pleasant Schweitzer Haus Restaurant there, to which we went up with our books in the morning, breakfasted and remained sitting in the shade till the afternoon, we must have cut short the prescribed period of the cure. As it was, we were glad to get away from the beautiful, but rather enervating valley, on a tour through Thuringia, some parts of which it was important I should visit, as there the early life of Prince Albert had been passed.

“*Sept. 4.*—Left Ems at 9 this morning. A lovely day. Passed through a charming country to Gotha. Such pleasant rural scenery all the way, and such variety. Certainly two-thirds of the way we had water by our side. The stoppages were at very pretty wayside places, and the peasants looked most good-natured, but generally dirty, and in sad contrast to the well-cared-for park-like country, which they had been cultivating. The head-dress of the women of Thuringen is very picturesque, and in the fields at work they mostly looked tidy enough. One woman’s face was very fine. She was resting and quiet. I should have liked to see her speaking. Very likely the charm would have been broken.

“*Sept. 5.*—The Hotel at Gotha (Der Mohr) dirty and full of fearful odours. No better to be had, we are told, so we must bear with it. Napoleon occupied the same rooms after the battle of Leipzig, so a tablet on the walls tells you. Poor man! The beginning of the end! Drove to Reinhartsbrunn (9 miles), a charming chateau [the Duke of Coburg’s], in a lovely park. Enjoyed it very much. Returned to Gotha in the evening during a sunset like Heaven itself.”

Next day we went on to Eisenach. Hotel excellent, but very noisy. “Could not sleep,” says the Diary; “but one night out of three is as much as one gets in travelling.” A visit next morning to the Wartburg was full of interest.

“A glorious view from it! The restorations of the old Castle do not spoil the old associations linked with it—the sweet Saint Elizabeth of Kingsley’s *Saint’s Tragedy*, the Minnesingers, and Martin Luther all seem to live and speak to you of their different epochs and stories. Only one poor bear left pining alone. At



Schaumburg [which she had visited a few days before] there were four very active fellows.

“Sept. 9.—Came here (Hôtel Belle Vue, Liebenstein) on the 7th. The place is quietness itself—the country very pretty, and the walks in the woods extremely well planned and picturesque.

10th.—I like this Thuringian country very much. The peasantry all salute you in such a kindly manner.

11th.—A lovely day. Drove to Altenstein, the Duke of Meiningen’s seat in the forest. A glorious view from the top. They let you wander about here through the grounds in such a kindly way, and go where you will. We had our coffee just in view of the chateau, and our horses were put up in the Duke’s stables. Such a sunset, going home! The bonnets of the Thuringian women are wonderful structures. They are mostly worn on Sundays. Ugly beyond description, yet they look well with the rest of the dress. How thankful one is for a bit of costume now-a-days!”

Quitting reluctantly this charming Liebenstein after a week’s stay, we went on by way of Meiningen to Coburg, where we found much to interest and admire. Of the “Rosenau” the Diary gives the following account:—

“Drove out to the ‘Rosenau.’ Such a pretty quiet nook! The house quite hidden by trees. Very prettily arranged, and looking homely, but very chill. A lovely view from the windows. A pleasant old woman, who showed us the house, seemed deeply interested in the fortunes of all belonging to it. She showed us the Princes Ernest and Albert’s bedroom and sitting-room, when they were little boys. Plain enough indeed. Too much so for health. In the roof heat and cold must have found them out, and their poor tutor also. Luxury had no place there.

“At Coburg we saw a very good actor, Herr Haase, in an excellent version of *David Garrick*. He also acted the elder Klingsberg in the second piece, *Die beide Klingsberg*, of Kotzebue—quite a different style, and more finished. Put me occasionally in mind of Mr Farren. The young Klingsberg was also very good (Herr Fichtner)—moved, looked, and spoke like a gentleman. Quite a treat to see such acting!”

From Coburg we went to Baden-Baden, pausing on the way at stately old Wurzburg and our favourite Heidelberg.

“*Baden-Baden, Sept. 23.*—Heard Viardot and Schumann to-night. How one longs for a little simplicity and repose in Viardot! She fatigues you with power. Madame Schumann plays too forcibly; and, oh, how ungraceful, ungainly, her motions are! The King and Queen of Prussia were at the concert.”

From Baden-Baden we made our way to Paris. It was the time of the great Exhibition, and, as usual in such exhibitions, there was too much to be seen.

“I think,” says the Diary, “it would take a full year to see this Exhibition. The beauty in it becomes painful, because you feel that its very abundance makes it irksome. And then the jolting and the crushing, the bruising of the feet and arms, and the noise and mixture of tongues; and, not least, the terrible blasts of cold air, from which there is no escape. Then the fatigue for mind and body. Altogether, the delight and weariness become so interwoven that you do not know which is which. I feel that I should like to be a bird hovering above, and able to pounce down upon and look well into what pleased me best.

“*Oct. 3.*—Dear M. de Fresne dined with us. We had spent the afternoon with him at the Exhibition. He seems a little feebler, but is as charming and delightful as ever.

“*Oct. 5.*—Find we must go home at once [in consequence of a command for me to attend her Majesty at Balmoral], so have been obliged to put off dear M. de Fresne, with whom we were to have spent the day.

“*Oct. 8.*—Crossed from Calais to Dover to-day at two o'clock. Very rough, but sunshiny. Got to dear home again by seven o'clock.”

A cold caught at the Paris Exhibition still clung to my wife, and on my return from Balmoral I found her suffering greatly, and full of fear that she would be unable to fulfil engagements she had made to perform six nights at Manchester, Edinburgh, and Glasgow. “How am I to get well by next week? It is very provoking!” is the entry of October the 21st. By the 26th, however, she had recovered sufficiently to travel to Manchester,

and to appear there as Portia on the 28th. The town was full of excitement, and the streets lined with troops, as on that day the trial had begun of the Fenians who had rescued one of their leaders from the prison van and shot the policeman in charge. A time of public excitement is ever bad for theatres, but it caused no diminution of the audiences who thronged to see their favourite. She was still suffering much, but of this no trace appeared in her acting. It was, indeed, at all times marvellous how, the moment she set her foot upon the stage, every symptom of suffering and weakness disappeared. It seemed as though her spirit "shuffled off the mortal coil" of feeble flesh, and animated her with the buoyant life of the heroine she had to represent. Her courage was infinite, and she would let her audience see no sign of her bodily pain. So on the present occasion the Manchester critics found only evidence of greater spirit and completeness in her Portia, Rosalind, Beatrice, Iolanthe, and Pauline.

It was the same in Edinburgh, where, after a few days' rest, she appeared as Portia on November the 9th. Of this and her subsequent performances of Rosalind, Beatrice, Iolanthe, and Lady Macbeth some very notable appreciations are given by *The Scotsman*, but they are too long for quotation. Of the performances the Diary says little. For example: "Nov. 11.—Acted Portia. The old cold first-night audience. I suppose they will wake up by the time I am leaving." They waked up much sooner, for the record next night is: "Iolanthe to-night. It seemed really to please them. A great house." Next day: "We dined at Mr John Blackwood's. A pleasure to see Mrs Ferrier [Professor Wilson's eldest daughter] again. She seems as clever and witty as ever. Nov. 14.—Acted Pauline—the first part I acted in Scotland. They seem to like it as much as ever. A great house. Nov. 15.—Rosalind. It is a pleasure to act this character in Edinburgh. They really seem to know what I am talking about—understand the classical allusions, too—a rare thing now-a-days. Nov. 16.—Dined with Professor and Mrs Sellar. A very happy evening. Their children are *really* young—fresh and charming. Nov. 18.—Acted Lady Macbeth. A very fine house. Mr Wyndham [manager] talks greatly of my way of reading the letter—others of my banquet scene, &c.; but—I do not think I

(can act the part at all. *Nov. 19.*—Benefit night. Beatrice. A great house. How I wish the audiences were as intelligent when I come as when I leave them. *Nov. 20.*—Teased into giving two more nights. Much fear I shall suffer for it.” And she did suffer. “*Nov. 21.*—Took our usual walk on the Calton Hill. Acted Pauline. *Nov. 22.*—Iolanthe to-night. How strange they like it so well! Another fine house.”

My wife had not appeared in Glasgow for three years. But the enthusiasm of her audiences there had not cooled in the interval. On November 29 she appeared there as Portia, which was followed by Iolanthe, Rosalind, Pauline, Lady Macbeth, and Beatrice. Throughout this engagement she was very seriously unwell, but no sign of what she suffered was apparent to the audiences, which filled the theatre nightly to excess. Their warmth sustained her in spite of constant pain. Thus the Diary records: “*26th Nov.*—Iolanthe to-night. A charming house; so warm and attentive. Distracted with pain all through.” Again, “*Nov. 28.*—*Lady of Lyons* to-night. A great house. Still in great agony. *Dec. 2.*—*Macbeth* to-night. A fine house. This is a night I never enjoy. Besides, I am ill. *Dec. 3.*—*Much Ado.* A pleasant audience. How much of the brightness of Beatrice depends upon this! Doctor Fleming orders more wine and nourishment, *much more.* *Dec. 5.*—Pauline to-night. Another great house. Working through with pain and difficulty, I hope I shall be able to get through what is before me, but I dread a sudden failure of strength. *Dec. 6.*—Iolanthe and fourth act of Portia. A very fine house. Got on better than I could have expected. I am often a wonder to myself.” She might have added, and to all who knew her, and saw how mind at all times triumphed over bodily weakness. I urged her more than once during this engagement to rest, and send an apology for not appearing. To this she demurred. “I will not disappoint these good people, who wait for hours in rain and cold for the opening of the doors; many of them, too, who have come a long railway journey to see me.” The railway companies, when she acted in Glasgow, ran special theatre trains for more than thirty miles round. “No; it is my duty to go and do my best, and I will do it!”



An engagement for the 9th and 10th at Newcastle had still to be gone through, but next day, says the Diary: "Arrived at dear home at 10.30 P.M., very weary. Have been a little too long at work." Delighted she was to be at home, but no less delighted to have found that she had more power than ever to work out her ideas of the heroines she had to impersonate. The achievement, however, to her, as to all true artists, was ever far short of her aspirations.

Despite the drain upon her strength, which acting involved, she was really better for it after the sense of exhaustion wore off. So she gradually recovered, and we were looking forward to our accustomed holiday at Brighton, when I was summoned to Osborne, and an accident on the ice befel me there on the 10th of January 1868, which altered all our plans. It was so serious that it became obvious I could not be moved for weeks. No sooner did the Queen hear of this, than she invited my wife to come to Osborne at once, and despatched one of the royal yachts to wait for her at Portsmouth. It took her a day to recover from the shock caused by the tidings of my accident, although it had been made as light of as possible both by myself and the Duchess of Roxburgh, the Lady-in-Waiting, who wrote to her by the Queen's desire. On Sunday the 12th she arrived, and her Diary records: "I am very brave, and have got through the first shock. I *must* not be ill. The Duchess of Roxburgh came first to me, and later in the afternoon the Queen. H.M. gave me her hand, and welcomed me most kindly. I am desired to ask for every thing as if I were at home." The daily Diary, until I was able to return to London early in February, shows how every thing was done to make her feel at home by Her Majesty, the Royal children, and all the ladies and gentlemen of the Household. "What care and thought and goodness are surrounding us!" she writes, after the first few days. Again, later on: "It is not possible that greater kindness and consideration could have been shown to us, had our station been the very highest. The Royal Mistress has a Royal heart indeed!" She read to the Queen on several evenings, and had the honour of being twice invited to dine with her Majesty. By all she was treated as a friend. She was made happy by being able to be helpful in the

arrangement of a little drama and a series of *tableaux vivants* that were given in honour of Prince Christian's birthday. "They all wish me," she writes (Jan. 16), "very much to help them. I attended their rehearsal to-day. Prince Leopold seems to have a very good idea of acting, and they all enjoy it very much. Jan. 20. —A rehearsal again to-day—a dress one. I was in great request to arrange robes, draperies, &c., for the tableaux." The performance came off with great effect in presence of the Queen two days afterwards, and the entertainment closed with the speaking by my wife of a graceful address to Prince Christian, written by Mr, now Canon, Duckworth. Thanks to careful tending, the very serious injury to my limb healed with a rapidity which surprised both Sir James Paget and Dr Jenner. On February 3, the Diary records: "Left dear Osborne to-day. Who could have thought I should regret this three weeks back? Oh, that I could really show my gratitude! We both wrote to the Queen before going to bed—I to thank her for the beautiful bracelet which met me as a present from H.M. at Southampton."

An overwhelming mass of correspondence from her friends at home and abroad, with which she found it difficult to grapple, awaited my wife on her return home. Her intimate friends were naturally full of curiosity as to her reception and prolonged stay at Osborne. Reticence on that subject, however, was dictated both by good feeling and good taste. What she felt herself at liberty to say in the following extract from a letter to her Dublin friend, Miss Margaret Stokes, will be read with interest:—

"I was able to be of some little use in some *tableaux vivants* they gave last Wednesday in honour of Prince Christian's birthday. The subject was the Finding of the True Cross by the Empress Helena. The Royal children and the suite were the performers, the Princess Christian being the Empress Helena. There were three tableaux: first, the Finding of the Cross; second, the sick woman brought to the foot of it; third, the miracle of the sick woman healed and embracing the Cross. The Princess Louise was the sick woman. She is very graceful and pretty, and, with her long luxuriant hair and white dress, made an exquisite feature of the picture. At the close I spoke a few

lines, written for the occasion by the Rev. Mr Duckworth, explanatory of the legend, and ending with good wishes addressed to the Prince and his Helena.

“To see the simple, homely, loving way these Royal people live with one another is quite delightful, and a lesson to all. The Queen, evidently, is far from strong, and this, with the immense quantity of work she has to do, prevents her going into public more than she does. Her Majesty took me into her own room one morning to show me the pile of despatch-boxes, all of them full of work for her, and all requiring immediate attention; and this goes on from day to day. It is the Queen's great aim to follow the Prince's plan, which was to *sign nothing* until he had read and made notes and comments upon everything. You may imagine how such conscientiousness swallows up the Royal leisure.”

Constancy in friendship was with my wife a law. Much as she had been annoyed professionally in Paris by Mr Macready, this could not make her forget how much she had in her early life owed to him in various ways. He had in later years suffered greatly, as she knew, by the death of his wife and several of his children, and in her fulness of sympathy she took up her pen to write to him. On the 2nd of March, 1868, she records: “Wrote to Mr Macready to-day. It is his birthday to-morrow. How long ago, and yet how near, it looks since he told me it was his birthday. I remember it quite well—even his very words. We were walking in the beautiful gardens of M. and Mme. Deschappelles.”<sup>1</sup> A few days afterwards the sale was announced of Mr Macready's fine collection of line engravings. My wife, who had known them well, was anxious to obtain some of them as a memorial of the old times, and on the 12th of March she records our visit to see them: “Ordered the one to be bought which they used to say was so like me—Raphael's ‘Suonatore di Violino’ [engraved by Felsing]. I hope we shall get it. It used to be on his staircase at 3 Clarence Terrace, Regent's Park.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Lady of Lyons*, Act ii. sc. 1.

<sup>2</sup> She did get it, and it was placed upon the wall of her boudoir in London.

The sight of the once familiar engravings seems to have awakened recollections of "old unhappy times," her neglected youth, and early struggles; and the Diary proceeds:—

"Why do people sigh, and look back, and think youth means happiness. I was young enough, indeed, then, and yet how tried, and far from happy! I would not go through that time again for anything life has, that I see, to offer. If we were not so full of *hope* at that time, the struggles, and heart-breaks, and disappointments could never be borne up against. The indefinite mysterious future is before us, and we fondly think and trust it will more than repay us for the struggling painful present. I remember no joy that my youth had. Always a cloud hung over it. After my school-days, so much illness and loneliness! Poor young thing!"

Life had much to make up to her, and happily it did make it up, as many a grateful entry in her Diary shows.

This year she had resolved not to act. Rest was indeed necessary, and with the Easter holidays we went to Brighton. Hours spent at the end of the old and now vanished chain pier, where, as Thackeray used to say, "You had all the good of being at sea, without any of the discomforts," had often proved the best of tonics for us both. So it proved upon this occasion. We found many friends there, among them Mr Robert Chambers, who had from the first been one of the warmest of her Edinburgh friends. She found him much changed. Of him she writes (April 8, 1868): "I always liked him very much—frank, kindly, honest, and above all guile. He called to say good-bye. Shall I see the good man again on this side of time? He never fails to remind me of Rosalind, and my 'wondrous voice.' He says I never speak without bringing her to his memory. It is pleasant to hear of one person feeling so. Few memories hold you in them so kindly."

Tennyson's poem, *Lucretius*, had just been published. It had followed not long after his *Tithonus*. She writes of them both (April 15): "The *Pall Mall Gazette* calls the *Lucretius* a poem which has all the look of those ancient marbles which are imperishable. At present I think I like *Tithonus* better. The mixture of the sane and insane mind in *Lucretius* is very



subtle, very wonderful ; but I suppose the subject does not please me so well. *Tithonus* has a grand swing throughout."

During our stay at Brighton the following entries occur :—

"*April 18, 1868.*—To-day we called at the Vicarage and had a long talk with dear, bright old Mr Wagner. He talked of ours as one of his many happy marriages, and was as sweet and affectionate as ever. What a memory for his eighty years ! forgetting nothing past or present ! From the first night of his great pet Pauline to the newspaper I sent him in November last from Scotland, which also spoke of *her*. If one must grow to old age, what a pleasure to see it in such a form as this—happy, and giving happiness to all around ! Only health, with a well-spent life, could produce it.

"*April 26, 1868.*—Wrote a little note to the Princess Louise to accompany her album, which she had sent me to write in. After much puzzling chose Spenser's sonnet, beginning, 'Men call you fair, and you do credit it.' I thought it fitted very well."

The July of this year was spent at Ems. We had charming rooms on the shady side of the valley, far, she writes, "as the river can part us from all the fashion and bustle." Our stay was enlivened by many friends who found our large and airy rooms attractive in the great heat, which, even for Ems at midsummer, was excessive. The King of Prussia and his suite were again there, and the place was crowded and very gay. But my wife left it in feebler health than when she went there. She found the journey to London unusually fatiguing : "But oh, anything," she writes, "to be at home ! Feel very ill. My doctor orders perfect rest. Thinks me much out of health. Alas ! when am I *in* it ? Never, if freedom from pain means health. Ems has done me much harm." The illness continued, and it was September before she was able to make the journey to our future home in North Wales. "*Sept. 10.*—Came to-day to our dear little Bryntysilio. May it be a harbour of rest to us ! Found wants out of number, but all in good time. At least everything is fresh and sweet. The hills look closer than they did, I fancy. I am weary, and low in heart and strength, and I seem to want more sky to give me hope. . . . But I must look up ! look up !"

The quiet and the fine air had a good effect. We were also cheered by a visit from our friend Dr Stokes, of whom she writes (September 28): "Dr Stokes left us this evening—far too soon. My old feeling is coming back upon me, showing that I must be better. I can see now, and be grateful for all the graceful, lovely scenery around." She was able to climb to her favourite spots upon the neighbouring hills, always a delight to her, but to this her doctor had to put a stop, as too fatiguing. On October 9, she writes: "My health," Dr Perkins says, "is a very complicated and difficult matter. Time and patience and care may do much, and God will direct the rest for me." During our stay in Wales she found time for reading and being read to.

"Oct. 20.—Have been reading Lockhart's *Life of Burns* lately with the deepest, saddest interest. How well it is told; with what fairness and feeling! Richly gifted, hardly dealt by, Burns!

"Oct. 26.—Have been reading *The Spanish Gipsy*. Have wept my eyes out over many scenes of it. It is a wonderful book, so deep, so tender, and yet so sad, as all great things must be. What a grand work for a woman! I think only a woman could have written it." [And then several passages of the poem are transcribed.]

"Nov. 3.—Oh, so cold! Snow on the hills this morning, and hailstones through the day. This little nest has too many draughts for rough weather, and we have been 'blown about in winds' long enough. Hey for Onslow Square, and large, warm rooms on Saturday!"

Our experience of these draughts, inevitable in small rooms, made me decide on building a considerable addition to the house, in which there was no longer reason to complain either of small rooms or cutting draughts.

The stay in Wales had been very serviceable to my wife in the matter of health, and she was able, on her return, to go to several theatres. Thus of *The Lancashire Lass*, at the Queen's Theatre, she writes: "A fair melodrama, very well acted. Mr Emery excellent." The next entry speaks of very little satisfaction:—

"On Saturday evening we went to the Lyceum to see Lord

Lytton's altered play, *The Rightful Heir*.<sup>1</sup> A most tedious business. We were tired to death. Such a poor play, and such vulgar, hopeless acting, without an exception, I have rarely had the misfortune to see. Can the public taste fall lower, when such as this is borne with—even by some applauded! What a sign, alas! of the times!"

She was pleased with a play at the Adelphi Theatre called *The Yellow Passport*, founded on *Les Miserables* of Victor Hugo. "Liked it very well," she writes—"the first part. Victor Hugo, your book is worth a thousand sermons!" She had never seen a Westminster play, and, on the invitation of Lady Augusta Stanley, she agreed to go with her to see the *Phormio*.

"17th December.—We dined to-day with Lady Augusta Stanley and the Dean alone, and went with them after to the Westminster play, *Phormio*. Having got up in it, I followed pretty well. The boys must have been good actors in Shakespeare's time. How could one have imagined in any of *these* boys a Juliet or an Imogen? These young fellows spoke well and to the point, and the old men were personated admirably—especially Demipho. But, oh! the awkwardness of the young lovers, and even of the Phormio! Nothing but Japanese caricatures could equal the ungainliness of their motions, and their way of standing! The Milanese marionettes might vie with them. What a pity this is! With the Greek scene before you, and the Greek dress worn, what had become of the gymnasium?"

"I fear," she writes next day, "we both caught cold last night in the cloisters, coming in and out. The chill struck like death." It almost proved to be so; we both paid, in many weeks of illness at Brighton, for our interest in the Roman drama. At this time she read the *Realmah* of Mr Helps "with great pleasure. It is both brilliant and interesting." In it, her own acting forms one of the subjects of discussion, Milverton giving the palm to her Lady Macbeth, Ellesmere to her Rosalind, and Sir Arthur to her Pauline. "She gives me," says Ellesmere, "the notion of one to whom her part was always fresh, because, like the characters of all persons who are good for anything, it is, in fact, an inexhaust-

<sup>1</sup> Originally produced as *The Sea Captain*, in which she had herself played the heroine. See p. 68, *ante*.

ible subject of study." Such, in truth, they always were to her, having in them that "something that never can be wholly known," in which lies so much of the charm of the best women. On our return from Brighton we found an invitation from the Queen to Osborne from the 3rd to the 8th of February. The following extracts are from the Diary for 1869:—

"Feb. 2.—Am getting no sleep o' nights. So unfit for this visit before us.

"Feb. 3.—Crossed from Southampton in the Royal yacht Alberta with Lord Granville. Found him very agreeable. We have the same rooms as last year, and feel quite at home; the same, and yet, thank God! how different.

"Feb. 4.—Such a lovely day, and the place looking beautiful. To-night we were all invited to the Queen's Drawing Room. The Queen remained some little time. She came up to me directly I went in, gave me her hand, and spoke most kindly—asking after my illness in the summer, and the nature of it. How she remembers everything! Certainly all kind and gracious things.

"Feb. 5.—We dined with the Queen this evening. She was most sweet and gracious.

"Feb. 6.—Princess Louise showed me the bust of the Queen she is doing. It is an excellent likeness.

"Feb. 7.—The Princess Louise came to our rooms and said the Queen wished us to remain a day or two longer, to-morrow being our appointed day of leaving. . . . We were again invited to dine with the Queen. The Queen came to me and asked kindly about many things.

"Feb. 10.—We crossed in the Elfin and got home safely. Have been very happy.

"Feb. 13.—Walked in the park—met Mr Browning. He looks well. We talked as much as we dared about *The Ring and the Book*. He was as frank and friendly as usual. What heights, what depths, Browning reaches!

"Feb. 14.—In the afternoon called on the Leweses. Mr Browning came in. How pleasant to pop upon him thus, while reading his poem! If possible, it gave greater zest to it. He said to me yesterday, 'Ah, if I could have had you to *act* my



Pompilia!' As I proceed with the book, this speech fills me with most grateful happy thoughts. How kind of him to say so!

"*March 6.*—Finished *The Ring and the Book* and wrote off at once to Mr Browning. I could never say half the delight it has been to me.

"*April 5.*—Had the great grief of hearing of the death of my most dear friend M. de Fresne. Had a kind note from Lady Augusta Stanley, who must feel the loss as I do. Oh, what a gap the loss of this dear friend leaves—the loved, admired, and honoured, for so many years!

"*July 12.*—Mr Wyndham from Edinburgh called this morning. They want to fix dates for my acting in the autumn. What a delight it would be to think of, if I could only believe I was strong enough!

"*June 28.*—We went to the Queen's Garden Party at Buckingham Palace this afternoon. Lovely lawns, lake, and gardens. All the Royal party noticed us most graciously and kindly. The Prince of Wales asked to be introduced to me, and talked of Rosalind at Drury Lane. It was all very pleasant."

In the course of the summer my wife found herself well enough to accept the engagements for Glasgow and Edinburgh in the late autumn, which were being pressed upon her by the managers there. To this the following entry refers:—

"*Oct. 5.*—All my early mornings lately have been given to my work—the work before me. How ever fresh and new, like nature herself, are these exquisite women of Shakespeare! To think them over is like being on a hill-top, or on the ocean, or holding communion with some grand element apart from and above all life's wearying and depressing cares—and yet they are thorough women, and not fictions a bit."

As had often happened before, my wife was suddenly attacked by illness just as she was about to leave home to fulfil her Scotch engagements. Thus she writes (*Nov. 2*): "Doctor speaks very discouragingly of my strength. My poor heart weaker to-day and more painful. How sad it should come on now, when I can scarcely put off the work before me! Oh, may God give me the strength I have always had before!" She

became well enough to start two days afterwards for Glasgow, breaking the journey at Carlisle. The Diary continues:—

“Nov. 6.—Rehearsed this morning—an enormous theatre.

“Nov. 7.—*King René's Daughter* to-night. A fine house, but oh, so stiff and unsympathetic. My voice seemed to travel over the vast theatre admirably. . . . I wish I could feel stronger, and less nervous. I can get no sleep.

“Nov. 10.—A heavy fall of snow this morning. Poor ‘Ganymede’ suffered much from the intense cold to-night. A great house. I am told they enjoy, and are much moved. They do not show it.

“Nov. 12.—A tremendous house to-night. They say hundreds were sent away. *The Lady of Lyons* must be repeated to satisfy them. A very quiet well-behaved audience for such a crowded one.

“Nov. 13.—A most fearful morning—rain and bitter wind. Rehearsed, and caught cold, face-, ear-, and tooth-ache.

“Nov. 15.—*Macbeth* to-night. An immense house. They say hundreds again disappointed of getting in. A miserable night of rain. This ‘Lady’ strains and wearies me much, with no compensating pleasure.

“Nov. 16.—Acted Beatrice to-night. Another tremendous house,—how quiet and well-behaved, too! Had a little walk to-day, the first for many days.

“Nov. 17.—Rehearsed Portia this morning. The weather too bad to walk.

“Nov. 18.—Pauline again to-night. An overflowing house and very pleasant audience. It is certainly rising in intelligence.

“Nov. 19.—Portia to-night. A splendid house. Still bad weather—am wearying for the air.

“Nov. 20.—Rehearsed Julia (*Hunchback*) this morning. Dined with Mr M'Gregor and his family and met Dr and Mrs Norman Macleod. He was most delightful. He has a fine voice and manly genial presence. He tells Scotch stories with wonderful humour and skill. I have heard nothing so good since Professor Wilson. He often reminded me of him. I was weary and voiceless, yet I was glad I made the effort to go out. It was a very pleasant evening.

“Nov. 22.—An extra night,—my last here. A tremendous house, with as many turned away. I could not help feeling nervous all the day, and had to be very stern with myself to keep up. Julia, a character I am not very fond of, but yielded to the general desire. There have been so many things to put up with, so many anxieties and drawbacks, that I cannot but be glad this engagement is over. It is buying pleasure too dearly.”

“The Glasgow papers,” the Diary notes, “have been inserting the most stupid falsehoods in the shape of ‘biographies’ of me. I have been forced into noticing two of them. It has been most vexatious and annoying.” She always condemned strongly what Wordsworth calls, “the coarse intrusion into the recesses, and those gross breaches of the sanctities of private life,” in which modern journalism revels, and which were even then far too common. In a letter to a leading journal, she wrote:—

“In 1828, when you tell the public I was acting Letitia Hardy and Ophelia, I was a child struggling with Mrs Marcet’s *Histories* and Cramer’s *Lessons*. I may have heard of poor Ophelia then, but to the other lady I was, and am still, an utter stranger. As I know nothing of the *Men of the Time*, the book quoted as your authority, it was not possible for me, even had I felt inclined, to correct its statements; neither were my friends likely to do so for me, as I believe they have as little sympathy as myself with the morbid curiosity which in these days seeks to know everything about everybody. I have often been applied to, to furnish materials for a life of myself, and have invariably refused to do so, on the broad principle, that the life and works of an artist are before the public to speak for themselves, but that as a woman I claim the privileges of a private person. I must add that I think it is the duty of those who instruct the public to make themselves quite sure of the facts they state. If things are always to be accepted as truths because they appear in a book, and happen not to be contradicted, who would be safe?”

*Punch* made this letter the text of a very amusing article, in which he suggested prophetically what we were likely to come to, and which we have indeed come to, in the way of personal details about public persons of even the smallest notoriety. “Mrs Martin,” he added, “your protest is admirable, but we live in an

enlightened age. It might have been all very well fifty years ago, but it will not do now. The one rule regarding everybody, whose public career has an interest for anybody, is laid down by the Laureate<sup>1</sup>—

‘Keep nothing sacred; ’tis but just,  
The many-headed beast should know.’”

The change from Glasgow to the brighter air of Edinburgh was delightful; but a severe cold caught a day or two after her arrival sorely marred her enjoyment. Thus of the second night of her acting she writes: “My cold very bad to-day, and told a little on my voice to-night. Exquisite Rosalind! to act you is ever a new pleasure! An intelligent audience to-night, though very crowded.” Again, two days further on: “Portia to-night. I can hardly speak above my hoarseness. *Dec. 6. — Macbeth to-night.* An immense house. The hard strain upon the voice in this wicked ‘Lady’ is very exhausting. Thank goodness, no one seems to know I am ill.” Beatrice had to follow Lady Macbeth. The house was “very fine, but it was quite torture to me to force the spirits.” And so on from bad to worse till the last night of the engagement:—

“*Dec. 10.*—No sleep again. Very wretched, and full of pain all day. Where was I to find heart and spirits for my Rosalind? But, wonderful to say, my painful trying cough confined itself principally to my dressing-room, and on the stage I felt as much at ease and happy as I ever did in ‘Ganymede.’ The last time in Scotland, *perhaps ever!* The pain of it was on me all day, and the depression; but at night, I rejoice to say, it all went off, and no one could have seen a trace of either, only at *my last word* my voice would not be quite commanded. Oh, how blessed is this help, which I have always had in my extremest trial! How can I be grateful enough for it?”

Of this performance of Rosalind, which the actress feared might be for “the last time,” which happily it was not to be, the *Scotsman* writes:—

The character for this final appearance was properly chosen. Unapproached and unapproachable, Miss Faucit stands the living Rosalind.

<sup>1</sup> In the beautiful early poem—“To ——. On reading a Life and Letters.”



. . . The more frequently it has been witnessed, the more instructive and captivating it has become, each fresh study of it bringing to light beauties both of conception and expression which did not seem to be there before, and which, now that they are found, we would on no account wish to lose. The graceful actress shows us the Rosalind Shakespeare would have us see, and from such a picture the eye withdraws with lingering regrets. . . . On appearing, Miss Faucit was received with a ringing round of cheers; and it is needless to remark that, throughout the play, the most admiring attention was bestowed upon her. Finally, when from the festive throng in Arden's forest she stepped forward to deliver the Epilogue, the house again rang with applause, and then for a few moments all were silent to hear the last words. The Epilogue is brief. It was spoken with that grace and elegance of manner which is never absent from Miss Faucit; and when the closing words came, "You will, for my kind offer, when I make courtsey, bid me farewell," the farewell was perceptibly hard to say, and the audience did not withhold its sympathy. Applause came in an impulsive burst from every part of the house, and was continued with such enthusiasm that Miss Faucit had again to come forward, and so receive in double measure the parting congratulations which the audience had, with unanimous cordiality, to bestow upon her.

Soon after our return to London came an invitation from the Queen, through the Princess Louise, for a five days' visit to Osborne. My wife was received by all with the same cordiality which had made former visits so happy. She read Tennyson's "Dora" and "The Brook" to the Queen after dinner one evening, and Mrs Browning's "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" on another; and she records that in a letter "the Queen said very sweet things of my reading. H.M. seems very fond of Mrs Browning's poems." Not long after our return home the following entry occurs: "*March 12.*—This morning came a lovely cashmere shawl to me as a present from the Queen, with a charming letter accompanying it from the Princess Louise. Acknowledged both (no easy task) before I went to bed."

In June we went to Wales, to see the progress making with the building and garden additions to our little property there. On our way we were greatly shocked by a placard at the Wrexham Railway Station announcing the sudden death, the previous day (June 9), of Charles Dickens. "I can never forget," the Diary says, "how kind he was to me when we met in my very early days at Mr Macready's, Mr S. C. Hall's, and at his own house. His 'Christmas Carol' will always seem



Walker & Cochran, N. Y. C.

*Bryntypisilio from the Garden.*



to me his best book. How many a hard heart it must have softened! He should have been a happy man with the knowledge that he could do so much for his kind."

We were glad to escape early from the fatigues of the London season, which our large circle of friends made unusually heavy for my wife, to the banks of the Dee, in the hope that our enlarged house would be ready to receive us. But what building operation is ever finished within the promised time? Our patience was tried beyond endurance, and our opinion of the working man was certainly not heightened by what we saw of the way he either made himself unfit for his work, or dawdled over it at our expense:—

"Oct. 18, 1870.—Oh," says the Diary, "that we were away! These workmen fill me with despair. Oh, if the whole work of life were done as the British workman's is! We have them here of all sorts and kinds, and the unanimity in the one great failing is as wonderful as it is depressing. What is education doing for them? What all their privileges, if they do not teach them conscientiousness and self-respect?"



## CHAPTER XIV.

THIS was the year of the Franco-German war. All men's minds in England were full of it, and those who, like my wife, had valued friends in France, had their feelings severely tried by the almost daily tidings of the French reverses. Among the numerous passages in her Diary to which these gave rise, I find the following: "*Sept.* 11.—Am reading Herodotus lately. How events repeat themselves: This love of conquest! War seems to have been just as sad and cruel in the olden time as now. We thought we had tenderer hearts now at least, and shrank from inflicting pain. Read the accounts in the papers, and then see what barbarians men still become in battle, and what anguish and desolation they leave everywhere behind them. The poor peasants, who can heal their wounds? They are starved, unpitied, and unknown. I cannot but hope that peace must be at hand. Beautiful Paris must not be besieged!"

The wish was the prevailing one in England at the time, and it might have been well for the peace of Europe, had this humiliation been spared to France. But this was not to be; and what the citizens of Paris had yet to suffer was from time to time painfully brought home to my wife by letters, pigeon carried, from her friends there, with details of the privations and miseries brought upon them by the siege.

Dante Rossetti was a personal friend, of whom at this time we saw a good deal. Personally he was a favourite with my wife, but she had the courage to maintain an opinion as to his works, which was regarded as inexcusable heresy by many of his admirers in our immediate circle. She expressed it thus: "*Nov.* 6.—We all went to Dante Rossetti's at Cheyne Walk,

{Chelsea. Such a charming quaint old house, and many fine things in it. Do not admire his models. His colouring is masterly, and generally his compositions. Why are the present painters so much in love with morbid unhealthy-looking women? They have not a bit of the upward spirit look either. They look as though disease and not heaven had got hold of them."

Experience of the exhaustion resulting from her performances of the previous year made her determine, if she acted again, to limit their number. When, therefore, she yielded to the urgent solicitations of her Glasgow admirers to appear once more upon their stage, she consented to do so for four nights only. No audience had been more loyal or more constant in their loyalty, and her coming among them for even these few nights was hailed in the warmest terms. Her single-minded devotion to her art in its highest phases had always been felt by them and acknowledged, and it drew from the *Herald*, on the eve of her reappearance, the following graceful recognition:—

As we look back on Miss Faucit's brilliant career, we think least of its many triumphs, of the wreaths which she won when there were competitors for the prize of judicious applause. What has, above all, earned her a title to lasting remembrance is the single-mindedness with which she has devoted herself to efforts of the highest scope. . . . She has been happy in her artistic life, because it has not been her doom incessantly to woo the admiration of the public; and now that she seems preparing to quit it, the remembrance must be to her, as it is to those whom it has helped to elevate and refine, a pure and gracious one. . . . Her critics have agreed, that in two lines of character in particular, and these the most delicate and difficult of all, she has been without a rival on the modern British stage. These are, first, the most purely poetic figures among the women of Shakespeare and of the modern poetic drama; and, again, those mixed characters of romantic comedy, which are the most delightful, as they are the most perplexing, problems to psychologists. With the former, some of her earlier triumphs are associated; but her Juliet and her Imogen remain fresh in our minds, ethereal creations of an exquisitely tender sympathy with the sweetest fancies of the past. Of the same type are her Iolanthe and her Pauline. On the other hand, what can we say of her Rosalind, her Portia, and, above all, her Beatrice, except our regret, that it is only the first of those impersonations which she will find time on this occasion to bring before us?

Thereupon follows a passage of fine criticism, showing a just appreciation of the special value of the actor's art, on which we have before insisted, in filling up what the poet has left to

be completed by look and voice and action, and sending the poet's conception home to the heart of an audience with a clearness and emphasis, which even the most intelligent reader cannot attain:—

It is in this class of characters that Shakespeare, just because he has done so much for them himself, has left so much for the artist to interpret. To reunite with the purity of the poet's conception the accidents, often angular and seemingly out of tune, in the execution—to work all the colours and shades into a whole, such as every reader vaguely imagines, but is at a loss how to formulate—to harmonise racy wit with feminine gentleness, and sprightly vivacity with poetic grace,—such is the task, which seems easy when it is overcome, but which tests artistic insight far beyond the power of ordinary intelligent endeavour. Here genius makes a claim upon genius; and the poet, who has written not only for patient study, and for the quick eye which penetrates the character at once under his guidance, calls upon the actor to interpret his subtle creations, to make them clear as noonday to every spectator, and to take the world into the confidence of creative originality. And this is why the success of an actress like Helen Faucit demands more than transient applause, for she can do for all of us what but few can do for themselves, and what even they cannot convey to their fellows. To thousands and thousands she has thus made gifts of priceless value, for she has unsealed to them what must have otherwise remained to them difficulties but half-unravelling, and enabled them to enjoy in full what they would otherwise have at best imperfectly divined.

*Macbeth* was the first play performed. On this, as on every night during the engagement, the theatre was filled to an extent till then unknown. The orchestra was given up to the audience. Seats for a favoured few were placed even in the foremost side-scenes, and on some of the nights eager spectators looked down upon the stage from what are known as “the flies,” where alone the scene-shifters and carpenters have a right to be. Of the performance the *Diary* has nothing to say but “Great house; my voice served me very well,” but it called forth elaborate eulogies from the press, and the *Herald* critic says of the sleep-walking scene:—

We have seen nothing on the stage like the famous sleep-walking scene. It would be impossible to say what a contrast there is between the worn, wasted, prematurely aged figure, which the pitying eyes of the Nurse and the Doctor follow, and the haughty and daring Queen of the preceding acts. When the energy of the dying woman flashed up in that last burst of excitement—“To bed, to bed! there's knocking at the gate: come, come,

come, come, give me your hand. What's done cannot be undone.—To bed, to bed, to bed!" Miss Faucit realised all the terror and pathos of the great master, to the interpretation of whose divine works the best efforts of her dramatic genius have been given.

Rosalind, Pauline, and Julia (in *The Hunchback*) were not found to be enough to satisfy the public's demand, and they pressed for an extra night. It was conceded, and Beatrice selected. This is the entry in the Diary previous to the performance: "Dec. 5.—Beatrice to-night. An extra night insisted on. My last of all, I suppose, in Scotland. My heart is very full. I *must* be brave to-night." Brave she was, and never acted better, raising the audience to the highest pitch of excitement. "At the close," one journal writes, "it was impossible not to feel that there is no such actress left on the British stage. She was called twice before the curtain by the enthusiasm of the whole house. What memories of similar triumphs, from the time when she won them first in Scotland, must have passed before her! She has long reigned the queen of our stage; and we cannot part with Helen Faucit without bearing our grateful testimony to the nobility of her aims, and her resolution never to degrade the genius by which she has done so much to honour her profession." Next day she writes: "Last night tried me much. The audience did not seem to know how to show me kindness enough. Such a mass of people—crowds sent away. I shall live in their memories for many a day, I know." A true presentiment! But as she lived long in their memory, so did they live long in hers. If she had oftentimes touched their hearts in the deep emotions which her genius had awakened, they in turn had deeply moved hers by the sympathy which from first to last they had shown with her endeavours to keep alive their interest in the art to which her life was devoted. It had, therefore, cost her much pain throughout the engagement to think that of their loving greetings this was to be the last.

Before settling down at home she had agreed to appear in December for four nights at Liverpool. On Thursday the 8th, she writes: "Very tired, and all the last few days—quite upset by Monday night. Happily my feelings will not be concerned in my work next week." Very sorely tried, however,



they were, by the ill-managed condition in which she there found the theatre. Going to rehearse *Macbeth* on the day before it was produced, she found no one prepared. She had, therefore, to rehearse the play the very day it was acted. "Never felt," she writes, "in worse spirits. It was all labour." And yet the performance drew forth the following fine piece of analytic criticism from the *Liverpool Post*, which bears traces of the able hand of Sir Edward Russell, now its editor:—

Miss Helen Faucit, the *première* legitimate actress of our day, appeared on Monday night at the Amphitheatre in the character of Lady Macbeth. Her reception was enthusiastic, and her triumph in the part was complete—a fact the more deserving of record because it is not in the Siddons line of characters that Miss Faucit has made her great reputation. The fact is, however, that though we identify Lady Macbeth with Mrs Siddons, her massive and monumental style—which every playgoer believes he can realise from the descriptions which have been handed down—was not the most exactly suited to bring out the character of the wicked Thane's remorseless consort. . . . That statue-like simplicity was not the essence of the Shakespearian drama, and to the picturesque complexity, which was its essence, Mrs Siddons's massive person and sculptured genius were as essentially repugnant as they were akin to the spirit of the antique. This opinion lived in our memory last night, as we witnessed Miss Faucit's essentially human, and even womanly, representation of Lady Macbeth. It was as different as possible to all the merely statuesque readings, and it was proportionately nearer to the Shakespearian ideal. *Macbeth* belongs to romantic rather than to classic art: and to fully succeed in the character of Lady Macbeth an actress must not be "a living statue, with the solemn tone of a voice from a shrine; more the sepulchral avenger of regicide than the sufferer from remorse for it; a supernatural being, the genius of an ancient oracle—a tremendous Nemesis." All these things are very grand, and so was Mrs Siddons—but they are not Lady Macbeth.

Shakespeare's greatest tragic heroine stood revealed in full stature and transparent truth when Miss Faucit, immediately upon her entrance, read the letter in which the Thane of Cawdor announces to his beloved the favours which the king has heaped upon him, and the mysterious vaticinations of the witches. As a mere piece of elocution, it was the noblest example conceivable of what sublimely conceived articulation can do to illuminate the meaning of a poet. Too often the reading of this letter is a sort of glib, womanish repetition, as if for the vulgar enjoyment of its contents, of a document which has been well conned before Lady Macbeth comes on the stage. Miss Faucit stands as if transfixed; drinks in the words "even with the very comment of her soul"; bears us into a kind of ecstasy as the supernatural solicitings of the weird women begin to excite her imagination. This ecstasy becomes almost painfully intense, and is most astonishingly expressed when Lady Macbeth reads that the witches "made

themselves air into which they vanished"; and the effect does not disappear when the reading of the letter is over. On the contrary, it subtly animates the whole of the succeeding soliloquy. From the moment she hears of the witches and their more than mortal knowledge, the very being of Lady Macbeth is shared between the hard resolution to achieve the ambition of which her husband has given her hints, and an eagerness to claim partnership with the weird aids who have suddenly appeared to promote it. One could see the very air peopling, as with anxious thrilling accents and mistily wandering eyes the great actress peered around, feverishly petitioning—

"You murdering ministers,  
Wherever in your sightless substances  
You wait on nature's mischief!"

And it needed no commentator to suggest how slight and unworthy would seem to such a nature her husband's milk of human kindness.

"Not without ambition,  
But without the illness should attend it."

In a most pregnant accentuation of that word "illness," plainly conveying all its villainy, Miss Faucit embodied the whole unsentimental side of the character. Like many another woman, once instigated to iniquity, Lady Macbeth had no notion of turning weakly back before the gains were made. To the last she is true by hard force of feminine directness to this principle. But weakness of temperament prevails over strength of mind and will. Lady Macbeth cannot resist the temptation to range wildly the supernatural region into which her husband's letter tempts her; nor can she afterwards stand up against the fearful depression which sets in upon her when she finds her husband fatally environed by spectral mementoes of the crimes on which their state is based.

We have to thank Miss Faucit's vivid rendering of the first soliloquy for bringing home, more distinctly than it ever was brought before, this dual character of Lady Macbeth, and we shall never forget how at one point and in one attitude the two aspects of the part are brought into splendid juxtaposition. It is in the banqueting scene. At this point, especially when the Macbeth of the evening is also the star, Lady Macbeth usually disappears in a rather commonplace way from the scene. Her subsequent absence is felt to be almost inartistic, and her sleep-walking seems at best a very elliptical acknowledgment of her poetical importance to the story. Miss Faucit, as if the inheritor of some marvellous stage direction of the dramatist, makes all this clear by a wonderful elaboration of silent action. We defy any one to behold her exit after the banquet, even if the *dénoûment* were utterly unknown, without feeling that for her there can be no more crime or hearty enjoyment of the greatness secured by it; that by her the cup of life has been drunk, and that she will live in loathing of the lees. During the excitement of the feast, and even during the first ravings of Macbeth at the sight of Banquo's ghost, the queen has her game to play, and plays it royally. She gracefully suppresses the rising turmoil and curiosity amongst the guests. She descends from her throne to pacify the

company, and to recall Macbeth by a sharp appeal to his wits. She is perfectly equal to her part, tells the needful white lies to the court in explanation of the king's demeanour, and betrays no sign of wincing under these trying necessities. But with the second ebullition a new light breaks in upon her. With a sudden frenzy she begs the guests to depart. Then fearing she has been too brusque, the troubled queen bows low and bids a kind good night to all.

For a moment or two she remains in that position, and when she rises she is a broken woman. There has settled over her bent head the gloomy shadow of an irremovable cloud. She has seen that her husband's malady is incurable; that his guilt has enveloped him in an impenetrable curse. She is simply hopeless. She staggers and is faint. The consolation she gives her husband, now they are left alone in that dreary and deserted banqueting-hall, is given mechanically, and as if in sleep. She totters to a table, sits down at it, rests her forehead on her hand, touches the crown, takes off with a melancholy, not quite absent, air this gilded symbol of her irretrievable wretchedness, presses her agonised brow the more freely for its absence, lets it hang listlessly in her hand as she marches faintly, yet with persistent dignity, after her husband from the scene of her fearful change. She is the last to leave. There are no train-bearers. Her magnificent mantle drags heavily on the ground after her as she departs. She is visibly in a dream, a dream of royal greatness, which she must at all hazards support, while at her heart is gnawing the reality not so much of remorse as of doom.

Remorse is to come. It comes in the great sleep-walking scene, and comes in an uncommon guise. Here is no impassive statue, no monumental Nemesis. Here is instead a great lady sick to death, sick to melancholy madness, incarnadined with blood, which all her painful efforts will not rub from the paleness of her attenuated hands. As she stands there seeking to cleanse them, she begins to enact the horrid incidents of the wild night when Macduff could not wake Duncan with his knocking. In Miss Faucit's startling rendering of this scene there were no affectations of grace in attitude or melody in voice. There was the sharp, metallic, husky ring of illness. Even the repentance of poor Lady Macbeth at this last extremity seemed to have in it the shrill testiness of the querulous invalid. What a picture of bodily and mental wreck! True tragedy this—not the tragedy of convention; but of nature, explored, revealed, and sublimated by high art. The final flight to bed was weird and startling, wholly unlike the usual stilted exit; and, indeed, the conception of the whole scene was as fresh as it was just. Miss Faucit's creation—for a creation it is—was witnessed throughout with the intensest interest, in which every part of the audience shared, and which culminated from time to time in warm and prolonged displays of admiration.

Of all the descriptions of my wife's Lady Macbeth, none gives a more complete or vivid picture of its details. For the guidance of future artists, it ought not to be left to be sought for in the



columns of an ephemeral journal. Other critics have explained the principle which governed her conception. This critic points to the mind's eye how the principle was carried out in detail. A word or two might have been added to suggest how the palpable breakdown of the queen after the dismissal of her guests prepared the audience for the state in which they see her in the sleep-walking scene, which, but for such an indication, would be scarcely intelligible, but with such an indication excites no surprise.

The pleasure to the actress in the success of this and her other impersonations at Liverpool was damped by the miserable way in which the plays were presented. The audiences did not seem to feel this, or they were good-natured enough not to show they did; but to her it was a further sign, how much the treatment of her art by its professors had fallen below the level at which in former years she had seen it maintained. Thus she records: "Dec. 13.—*The Lady of Lyons* to-night. A very enthusiastic audience; but oh, how miserably and vulgarly the play was acted! I could break my heart to see the state of things now prevailing, and yet I try at rehearsal to make such things impossible." But on this and the other nights these disadvantages seemed to brace her to greater exertion, and, if one may judge by the elaborate and subtle criticisms of Sir Edward Russell on her Pauline and her Beatrice and Rosalind of the following evenings, she was never seen to greater advantage. The audience were roused to the highest pitch of enthusiasm, and, as in Glasgow, when in the concluding words of the Epilogue to *As You Like It*, she begged the audience "when she made courtsey, to bid her farewell." "It was no ordinary emotion," another critic writes, "that made the people in the pit spring to their feet *en masse* and wave their *adieux*, while the denizens of the other parts of the house lent a hand heartily in the great display of enthusiasm." And yet observe with what tremor she approached a task so triumphantly accomplished! On returning from the theatre she writes, "Felt very weak all the day. Quite frightened at the thought of what was before me; but all this went off when once launched into my work. Got through it to my own wonder."

This is the entry of the following day: "Dec. 17.—Got away to our dear Welsh Bryntysilio to-day. What a change! No



gas! No noise! Please God, we shall enjoy a few days here, and I shall go back to London refreshed. *I suppose it would be too great happiness, if I could act under favourable circumstances.*"

While still in the country she writes: "Dec. 22.—Partial eclipse of the sun to-day—mid-day. It lasted, I think, about two hours. The valley looked weird-like, and everything was changed, and spectral. The cold intense. How expressive is Milton's 'The sun, sick with eclipse!' One thought of nothing else."

To recover the fatigue of the Glasgow and Liverpool engagements a long rest was necessary; and this it was difficult for my wife to get, so numerous were the social claims upon her time and attention. To her they involved fatigue, scarcely counter-balanced by the cordial welcome with which she was everywhere received. Some Glasgow friends dining with us told her they thought her looking better than she was in Scotland. On this she writes: "May 7, 1871.—I am always so hard-worked, when they see me there—but what a much more satisfactory weariness is that to suffer from. The so-called pleasures and sight-seeings of life have always been so much less gratifying to me than my beloved work, exhausting as that ever was from the very first, but the heart and brain had the exercise they loved, even if the poor body was made to suffer greatly."

One great pleasure she had this summer, in meeting with Mr Macready. He was in very frail health, and had come to town for medical treatment. On the 2nd of June she writes: "Called on the Macreadys. Liked Mrs Macready very much. A great pleasure to see him again. He is changed, and yet not changed—like a great ship, past its work, but grand in its ruin. Have not seen him since my marriage, and yet it does not seem long to look back to."

Next day we again saw him, and she writes: "Took some flowers. He was sitting up—could manage to gather a little more of what he said. Alas, for the grand voice that used to be! Such a sweet expression on his face! Like Mrs M. more and more."

When we entered the room Mr Macready, I remember, was asleep on a couch. My wife stole gently to a chair at the foot of

the couch, and sat watching him intently. After a little time his eyes opened, and he gazed at her with a look of pleased surprise, which, she told me afterwards, reminded her of the beautiful expression which, when playing Cordelia, she used to see come over his face when Lear wakes and finds Cordelia by his side.<sup>1</sup> His snowy hair, and fine form, the eager eyes, and the tender tones of the broken voice, made a deep impression upon me. A few days afterwards my wife records, that she took Mrs Macready with her to Jules Lefort's concert, and went home with her: "Stayed some time with my dear old friend. Perhaps the last time I shall see him, for they return on Saturday. He was very nice indeed, and I could understand him better."

A few days afterwards she was much impressed on hearing Dr Fraser, the Bishop of Manchester, preach what she calls "a sermon of sermons." "What a privilege it would be," she writes, "to hear such a man often, and better still to know him; for I am sure he preached out of his daily life and practice." Her opinion of him was heightened, a few years afterwards, when she came to know him personally, during a few days' stay at Lord Egerton's of Tatton. "The sermon," she continues, "was intended principally to impress upon us the duty of working out the gift which each of us variously has given to us at our birth—oh, and so much more! Wise and happy man to see and escape from the errors and forgetfulnesses that are dragging down and making so difficult the thing we call this world and society! Happy to fight under such a leader! But we must all fight our own battles and stand or fall alone."

One more battle she had soon to face in fulfilling a promise she had made to give some farewell performances in Manchester. She knew it would be a severe trial to her feelings to say farewell to the audiences there. She had also reason to fear the extra burden that would be cast upon her in the want of actors competent to deal with the characters in her plays—a general want, which mainly influenced her in her resolution to accept no more engagements. There were not wanting many, who could appre-

<sup>1</sup> *Lear*. You are a spirit, I know: when did you die?

*Cord*. Still, still, far wide!

—*King Lear*, Act iv. sc. 7.

ciate the disadvantages in this respect under which she laboured; but these they were content to put up with, if only she would give them one more opportunity of seeing her. What they felt was well expressed (November 15) by the critic of the *Manchester Guardian*, understood to be Professor A. W. Ward, in the first of a series of remarkable articles on each of her impersonations:—

An opportunity is now presented of witnessing a class of dramatic performance that with Miss Helen Faucit will disappear—though we trust not permanently—from the English stage. There is no actress now before the public who even aims at—much less achieves—such utter self-abandonment to the occasion, and so complete an identification of herself with the character which she for the time assumes. This is not because the stage lacks ambition, but because it cannot boast the genius that fires, nor the close study that perfects the representations of Miss Faucit. From the moment when she makes her first appearance to that when she retires she is in soul and feeling the character she undertakes. Unconscious alike of applause or interruption, she proceeds through the task she has undertaken with an ease and an earnestness that are inimitable, because they are not assumed but real. These valuable adjuncts to success are intensified by flashes, not of art, but of genius, and the audience becomes spell-bound by the absolute reality of the scene presented to their eyes and ears. When Miss Faucit is on the stage she is never for a moment unoccupied; every instant of time to be filled in with picturesque by-play has been previously considered, and is carefully utilised. Many a young actress may, while the time serves, take a profitable lesson in her art by watching the extraordinary display of talent which Miss Faucit is capable of, and lavish in making.

These remarks were the prelude to a review of her *Lady Macbeth*, which ended thus in speaking of the sleep-walking scene: “Anything more terribly grand than this scene we have never, in the course of a lengthened experience, witnessed. It is not too much to say that it rose to the sublime, and, remembering it, one can only regret that it has been displayed for the last time in this city.” It was the last time on any stage, and my wife parted from it without a pang. Her record of the night shows this. “A tremendous house. As nervous as usual about my voice. But it lasted well. Oh, how glad I am this part is over! What a punishment it is to undertake it!”

To turn from *Lady Macbeth* to *Rosalind* would have been pure delight, but for the injury to her voice from having had, in addition to playing the wicked queen, to speak three hours previously

in rehearsing Rosalind. This, she writes, has "quite done for my poor throat. It is so painful, I hardly think I can speak to-night, and Rosalind is 'evermore tattling.'" Nevertheless the performance did not fall short of its usual excellence. The next day was nominally a day of rest, as there was no evening performance, and was devoted to the rehearsal of *Romeo and Juliet*. "Spent a long time over it," the Diary says, "for the actors know nothing of these plays, and one has to try scenes over and over again—so wearying it is!" Of the performance of the next night, she writes: "Got through very fairly, considering all the drawbacks I had around me. Shall I ever act under favourable circumstances? It is too late in the day now to hope for it. Thank God, I got through, despite everything. If He did not help me I could do nothing, and yet my heart always fails, and although my gratitude never flags, yet my faith and courage forever do, despite the past." Notwithstanding these misgivings, what was the impression produced by her Juliet upon the accomplished critic of the *Guardian*?

It was not without curiosity that we, and doubtless many with us, renewed on Friday night our acquaintance with Miss Faucit's Juliet; for we were thus once more brought face to face with the question whether this character, as written by Shakespeare, is capable of perfect realisation on the stage. If there be a savour of heresy in such a feeling of doubt, we can only say that of the many Juliets whom we have seen there is none except Miss Faucit who, in our judgment, contrives to avoid the dangers of the part, and to present the character throughout as devoid of the extravagance and artificiality which are not indeed elements in but temptations incident to it. As for the Juliets of past ages, they may have been perfect creations, but then,—though we say it to our shame,—it is so difficult to seize the characteristics of departed actors out of the reports of departed critics. The modern Juliets have their excellences, but they almost invariably fall short of nature at the very point where the highest demand is made upon them. There is only one who remains able in this character

"To grace the stage  
With rival excellence of Love and Rage,  
Mistress of each soft art, with matchless skill  
To turn and wind the passions as she will;  
To melt the heart with sympathetic woe,  
Awake the sigh, and teach the tear to flow;  
To put on Frenzy's wild distracted glare,  
And freeze the soul with horror and despair;"

for it is something like a combination of this kind, as we propose briefly to



show, which is demanded of a real Juliet, and which is offered by Miss Faucit's singularly complete performance of the character.

In the first place, Miss Faucit avoids a needless difficulty with which actresses at times encumber themselves, by allowing us to regard Juliet from the moment of her appearance in the play as a woman not a child. Whether or not Shakespeare exaggerates in ascribing to a girl in her fourteenth year a development of the womanly nature, which is possibly rare at such an age in the sunniest climes of the south, is not the question; what seems quite clear from the conversation between Lady Capulet and the Nurse is, that Juliet is not a mere girl certain to have hurried into love at first sight. Her behaviour to Romeo at the masquerade is not a girlish frolic; and the exquisite grace with which Miss Faucit, without unduly emphasising the dignity of Juliet in the midst of her sweet confusion, mingled the two elements, introduced us naturally to what is from first to last designed as a character heroic within the limits of an imagination concentrated upon love as the object of life.

When Juliet appears on the balcony she is already absorbed in her passion. Had the word not become the property of sheer sentimentality, we should say that Miss Faucit, in the speech of Juliet uttered to the heavens (and not to a possible Romeo in the garden), typifies with infinite truthfulness the languishing stage of love. Juliet's passion is as powerful in this moment of solitude as it is afterwards when she has discovered her daring lover; it is, like the Italian night in which it is breathed forth, as oppressive in its close heat as the day when the sun is shining. Then follows the recognition of Romeo; and here again, where there are a hundred opportunities of allowing the situation itself to interfere with its own poetry, Miss Faucit, by combining intensity with grace, conquers the difficulties of the task. She is not coquetting with a lover who cannot see her in the dim moonlight, nor is she soliloquising for the benefit of a distant hearer. One or the other of these impressions is usually created by Juliet in the balcony; but Miss Faucit, adhering to the central conception of the character—that of utter absorption in love—reveals to us the impossible truth that Juliet is lost in her Romeo, though he is bescreen'd in night, and not to be reached by the arms already open to his embrace. We lack space for following the details of this beautiful scene, inferior in its force only to the parting scene in the loggia; but if it were possible to dwell on passages which condense, as it were, the whole sweet eagerness and trembling ardour of this Juliet, we should above all recall to those who heard it the

"Hist! Romeo, hist! O, for a falconer's voice,  
To lure this tassel-gentle back again!"

In the scene with the Nurse it is customary for Juliet to expend all the coaxing wiles of which a young lady is capable; but Miss Faucit prudently abstained from an unnecessary exaggeration of this very commonplace effect. The lovers are wedded; and impatience—an impatience which is ill-called by so everyday a name—becomes the lot of the solitary Juliet. This is, without the least aid of adventitious effects of position, expressed by Miss Faucit by hurrying into the chamber and pouring forth the passionate appeal

to the sun to sink and to the night to approach. When the Nurse brings the evil tidings of Tybalt's death, Juliet's passion easily, and without faltering for more than a moment (this is a passage of peculiar difficulty, for Shakespeare is not sparing of his antithetical rhetoric in this play, and the speech, "O serpent heart," &c., is but too likely to exercise a disturbing influence), rises to its height in the moment of trial, and triumphs at the very point where an ordinary affection would have broken down.

And thus, in the most touching of all the scenes of this play, Juliet appears before us, at the very hour when her brief dream of happiness is to close for ever, wholly self-abandoned to its influence. This is a touch of tragic interest which the poet has left it to the actors to insist upon; though in no passage of the tragedy has he so marvellously brought before us the sweetness as well as the bitterness of the union of the lovers. Miss Faucit, with true poetic feeling, makes us aware how in this parting Juliet bids farewell to all her happiness; when Romeo is gone she is nothing more than a shadow of herself, and it is only the blundering cruelty of her father which hurries her into the action of despair. Nobody understands her now; she is an unreality to herself till she shall have rejoined her Romeo.

By this we are prepared for Miss Faucit's interpretation of the closing scene of the fourth act. We employ the much-abused term "interpretation" advisedly; for Juliet's soliloquy before drinking the phial requires interpretation, and to every other actress with whose performance of the part we are acquainted presents an insuperable stumbling-block. The horrible climax which Shakespeare has chosen to expose to the danger of becoming grotesque as well as horrible by the choice of the wild fancies accumulated in it is all but unbearable, unless the mind is prepared for it, first more generally by the solitary wretchedness of Juliet in the preceding scenes, then in the soliloquy itself by an almost visible unhinging of the girl's mind. Surely something like the perfection of art is reached when such a problem as this is solved within a narrow compass of time, and when the poet is vindicated almost against himself from having imposed a task beyond the capabilities of dramatic expression upon the actor.

After what we have said, it will be unnecessary for us to give words to our conviction, that Miss Faucit's Juliet is not only one of the very finest of her artistic creations, but one of the finest of artistic creations known to the stage of the present day. We have preferred on this occasion to suggest what seems to us some of the peculiar difficulties of this character, and to dwell upon Miss Faucit's success in overcoming them. . . . Only those who have seen her Juliet can form a conception of her highest efforts in romantic tragedy. The rich exuberance of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is proved to be something different from extravagance, when the test of such acting as Miss Helen Faucit's is applied to it.

This was the last time she impersonated her much-loved Juliet, and, while the above quotation is valuable as a sympathetic exposition of her treatment of Shakespeare's masterpiece, it furnishes clear evidence, that to the last there was no decline in

the power which had all along placed Juliet in the front rank of her impersonations. So true was this, that on the present occasion, as on every fresh representation of the part, fresh beauties of detail were developed through what had been to her an inexhaustible study of Shakespeare's work. How, for example, her conception of Juliet's mind in the potion-scene had revealed itself with deepened intensity is told by herself in the *Letter on Juliet*.

Repetition [she writes], certainly, had no effect in making this scene less vivid to my imagination. The last time I played Juliet, which was in Manchester in 1871, I fainted on the bed at the end of it, so much was I overcome by the reality of the "thick coming fancies,"—just as the first time I played the part I had fainted at the sight of my own blood.<sup>1</sup> I am not given to fainting, indeed I have very rarely known the sensation. But the fascination which the terrible had for me from the first, it maintained to the last; and as the images which the poet suggests rose in cumulative horror before my mind, the stronger imagination of riper years gave them, no doubt, a stronger power over my nervous system, and for the time overcame me. I know no scene in Shakespeare more difficult.

Pauline succeeded Juliet. "Felt it," she writes, "a painful drop down from Shakespeare. A tremendous house. They said, hundreds turned away." This was followed by Beatrice, which, she writes, she was "too tired to act well." How little trace of fatigue was visible to her audience may be judged from what the *Examiner and Times* writes of the performance:—

Last night the character of Beatrice lost nothing in Miss Faucit's hands. No better exponent of the self-assertive, shrewdly witty, and boisterous, the seeming cruel and distrustful, and yet tender-hearted and leal woman has been found in the memory of living playgoers, than its impersonator of last evening, and the brightness and freshness of her interpretation have in no sense been withered by time. Beatrice, indeed, is not necessarily a girl—the average student will prefer to think of her as a woman of mature powers, and of years at least sufficient to render the fact of her maidenhood subject of remark. There was in every movement of the impersonator we witnessed with delight last night, a light step, which bespoke a free and merry heart, and in every repartee a readiness, which was almost terribly keen, and yet heartily enjoyable.

Such a Beatrice as this is seen at great disadvantage, if her Benedick lacks force and vivacity somewhat akin to her own.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 9, *ante*.



His shortcoming in these is apt to make her high spirits and pungency of wit seem too exuberant, and not to make this felt calls for a tact and restraint in the Beatrice which only a thorough mistress of her art can command. This is well appreciated by the critic of the *Guardian*. Critics are not always so considerate as to note, how a piece of fine acting may be marred by not being well acted up to :—

But if the character of Beatrice stood by itself, if indeed it were the solitary pivot of the interest of the play, then no exception could be taken to this most terrible and yet most admirable of ladies. Miss Faucit has, besides that perfect command of elocution and thorough sense of appropriate emphasis which never desert her, a charm of manner which the strongest salt of the witicisms of Beatrice is unable to impair. Such is the intellectual tact of this actress, that she could be trusted, were such a thing possible in these latter days, with the delivery of badinage which Queen Elizabeth herself would have thought effective, and which the merriest wit of the Queen's Court would have found himself unable to cap. This is the perfection of the art of high comedy, in which everything is made subordinate to character, without anything being lost as a contribution towards the expression of it. Miss Faucit's Beatrice is different from her Rosalind, not in degree, but in kind, of excellence; and if the effect which she created was to our mind less powerful in the former part, it is because a Beatrice with a Benedick, who is merely a foil, is an impossibility for those who are unable, while admiring the actress, to forget the play.

Apprehension of the excitement of the really farewell performances was now pressing upon my wife. So great was the demand for places that two nights had to be allotted to them. For these she chose Iolanthe, and Portia in the fourth act of the *Merchant of Venice*. To give the whole of that play was found to be impossible for lack of competent actors. This she regretted, for the scenes preceding and following the fourth act are essential, in her opinion, to make an audience form a true idea of what was in Shakespeare's mind, when he drew his Portia. None of his characters had suffered greater wrong in the stage-treatment of it. For more than a century it had been treated as a comedy part, and trusted to actresses of low comedy, such as Kitty Clive,—heedless of what was said of the Lady of Belmont by one of the characters of the play, that she was “not less than Brutus' daughter, Cato's Portia.” Neither actors nor critics seem to have seen the deep, loving nature, the nobleness, and splendid



decision, which lie at the root of the character, and which, as the audience ought to be made to feel, would have been equal to any stress of trial which events might impose upon her. Without such qualities, how could any woman have conceived and carried out, as Portia does, the plan for the relief of her lover's friend? Grant her these, and the whole purpose of the play becomes at once intelligible. Even Mrs Siddons could not see this, and thought a great wrong was done to herself by Garrick in selecting a part so poor, as she thought it, for her *début*. She did not see that Portia, and not Shylock, is the central object of interest in the play, and that it is of her—playful, graceful, dignified, tender, as she has just before shown herself and conspicuous for moral force and intellectual strength—that we carry away the final impression, when we enter with her at the fall of the curtain into her palace at Belmont.

To present Portia, as she was revealed by an independent study of Shakespeare's text, unwarped by any thought of what others had conceived, was the aim of my wife. In her hands, accordingly, Portia was not merely the lady, "richly left," living in almost regal state, and worthy to be wooed by princely lovers, but a woman of strong character and high intellectual culture. The idea of the escape of Antonio, under a strict interpretation of the letter of his bond to Shylock, has flashed upon her own mind,—it has been confirmed by the opinion of her old tutor and friend Bellario, and, so fortified, she has the courage to appear in the law doctor's dress, in the great Court of Venice. My wife's treatment of the scene which follows was at once original, and in the highest degree impressive.

Passing through the crowd with the firm step of one intent upon a great inward purpose, she advanced to the Doge, and delivered to him her credentials from Bellario. Having, in answer to his question, replied that she is fully informed of all the points of the case, she turned, and inquired, while arranging her notes, "Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?" Her calm, penetrating look at the Jew seemed to tell what was passing in her mind—Is this man to be subdued by any appeal to his heart? This was presently proved, when Antonio had confessed the bond, by the earnestness of tone with which

she spoke the words, "Then must the Jew be merciful." His answer leads to what is so constantly spoken of as a fine piece of declamation. My wife did not so regard it. To her it was an appeal from the deep heart of a devout and noble woman to those emotions, which she will not refuse to believe the Jew shares in common with the rest of mankind. As elocution, her delivery of the "Mercy speech" was beautiful, but it was much more. The actress spoke with tones that vibrated with the intensity of the emotion excited by the thought of what mercy in its highest sense meant. No one who saw her reverently lift the barrister's cap from her head with the line, "It is an attribute to God himself," and felt the awe expressed in both look and voice, could easily forget the reverent feeling that always thrilled the audience in the exquisite pathos of the words that follow—

"We do pray for mercy;  
And that same prayer does teach us all to render  
The deeds of mercy."

"If the appeal," the *Manchester Courier*, speaking of this, her last performance, writes, "had been uttered beneath the sacred roof of a cathedral, greater reverence could not have been shown." The actress was still under the emotion caused by her own words, when, with a true woman's feeling, she made to the Jew the passionate application of what she had said—

"Be merciful:  
Take thrice thy money; bid me tear the bond."

You felt that this Portia does not wish to show her hand, and that she will not do so, until she has given Shylock every opportunity to retreat from his position with a good grace. His refusal leaves her no alternative but to declare the law, and this she does with an emphasis, which at once secures the Court against the suspicion of impartiality, and brings into view the atrocious character of the forfeiture to be exacted. Still she will give Shylock one last chance in the suggestion that he should "have by upon his charge" some surgeon to stop Antonio's wounds, "lest he should bleed to death." Shylock's answer absolves her from all further consideration for him, and at the same time places him within the grasp of the law, "for contriving the death" of a Venetian citizen.

From this point the change of the actress's manner significantly marked the change from the forbearance of one who thought the Jew was not without his provocations to the inexorable sternness of the judge. She dealt upon him blow upon blow with an emphasis as crushing as her previous demeanour has been persuasive and considerate. By this she made us see, with what care Shakespeare has destroyed any lingering sympathy we might have for the Jew. We go heartily with the decision to enforce the letter of the bond, upon which Shylock himself has so vehemently insisted. His own law shall be strictly measured out to him—

“Thou shalt have justice, more than thou desirest,”

and we have not one spark of pity for him left, when Portia refuses to let him even have “his principal,” with the words—

“He shall have merely justice and his bond,”

throwing it at his feet, as she spoke, with a curl on her lip of contemptuous scorn.

So much for the treatment of the main action of the scene. But not less notable were the countless little details which gave the verisimilitude of reality to the whole performance, and, as Tony Aston says of the great Mrs Barry, “filled the stage with variety of action.” Absorption in the not only weighty but hazardous task she has undertaken was the prevailing feature of my wife's Portia. Nothing, she felt, must divert her from this, or induce her for a moment to lift the disguise she has adopted. Her business is only with the Doge and with Shylock. She must be as heedless of Shylock's panegyrics as of Gratiano's. All was grave, earnest, and solemn, as befitted the scene. Nor did she fail to make us see, what never seems to strike any other Portia, that, after all, she is not the Court, but only its assessor and mouthpiece. This was subtly marked throughout by her deference to the Doge and his council, and especially in her by-play during Antonio's long farewell to his friend,—an interval, it almost would seem, left purposely by Shakespeare to be turned to account by the actress in ascertaining the views of the Court as to the judgment to be given. My wife here advanced to the Doge, placed in his hands a document, presumably Bellario's

opinion as to the point in Antonio's favour upon the letter of the bond—and received the Doge's sanction to judgment being given in accordance with it. She then returned to the table, removed her doctor's cap—a little touch of technical truth—and intimated that she is only the mouthpiece of the Court, by turning to them, and, as it were, claiming their sanction, each time she had to use the words, "The Court awards it." Her every tone became weighty, measured, and judicial during this part of the scene. At this point, too, one saw the significance of a previous piece of by-play, when Portia, handing one of her notes to Nerissa, made her turn up the passage in the Venetian Statutes, to be ready for the reference which Portia has to make to it, in delivering judgment.

I have given this account of the impression made on my own mind by Portia, as she was now impersonated for the last time, in illustration of the unsparing study given by the actress to the author's conception, and the pains she took to make the action of the scene as real to the audience as it was to herself. At the close of an eloquent criticism of this performance, the *Guardian* critic writes thus of her by-play in the trial scene:—

Throughout all this [scene] who could avoid noting the superlative excellence of the by-play? The delicate little mannerisms, which even the loftiest of counsel pleading in the most select of courts before a judicial committee with a Doge at its head cannot quite afford to forego; above all, the grand professional calm, as sure of itself as of every Act in all the statute-books, and the perfectly natural movements for diverting the attention of Bassanio, where it might possibly be aroused, are equally indescribable. In a word, the problem is solved; for nobody is let into the secret but the audience.

Turning to the audience, at the conclusion of the scene [another journalist writes], Miss Faucit addressed to them the words that in the text are spoken to Antonio, "I wish you well, and so I take my leave." The effect was electrical. Pit, gallery, and boxes roses to their feet, pocket-handkerchiefs were waved, and such ringing cheers were uttered as are seldom heard in a theatre, and probably never out of Manchester. The stage was soon covered with bouquets, so many in number that Miss Faucit had to relinquish altogether the attempt to carry them off, and, the curtain having fallen, she was again and again recalled to receive the genuine ovation that Manchester knows so well to bestow upon sterling merits. In the same spirit, though with sadness, we say "Farewell!" to the most truthful and most accomplished actress of the age, wishing her in her retirement the full and long



enjoyment of the happiness that should follow a well-spent professional life, devoted, as Miss Faucit's has been, to the improvement of the stage, and to the intellectual edification of the public.

There were, as already mentioned, two farewell performances. Each was followed by the same enthusiastic demonstrations of the audience. The Diary speaks of the first of these performances as "very fatiguing and exciting. Crowds sent away, and the theatre looking all alive with the waving of handkerchiefs, throwing of flowers, &c." After the final performance the record is: "Very much exhausted; had it all to go through again to-night, and could less bear it. A farewell audience outside the theatre as well as in. Terribly overcome at last. I think all of us were." Despite an unusually bleak and rainy night a crowd waited for her leaving the theatre for a very long time. It was difficult for her carriage to get away, and I remember a woman, obviously of the working class, with a child in her arms, coming to the window and entreating me to open it, that her child might look upon the dear lady, as she called her, so that she, the mother, might tell her when she grew up, that she had had the privilege of seeing her. It was impossible to resist her pleading tones, and my wife made the poor soul supremely happy by kissing the little one's hand. Here is the entry of the next day: "*Sunday*.—What could have got me from the house to-day but to say Good-bye to my sweet, dear friend, Charles Swain and his kind family? But their very affection was hard to bear, so weak as I was. Oh, that I could take up all this love and kindness to carry it about with me ever. What a pleasant burden it would be! . . . Had to go to the —s's, 'the Ogre' having promised to do so. More kindness and farewells to go through: the people are all so good to me. Will they remember me so warmly and kindly hereafter?"

They did so remember her, as will hereafter appear, these Manchester friends, the unknown as well as the known. It was difficult to get away from them. But a previous promise to visit Lord and Lady Egerton at Tatton Park enabled her to do so, and after a two days' pleasant stay there we made our way to our own quiet home in Wales, and a much-needed lull of the excitement of the last ten days. While there the serious illness of the

Prince of Wales was a source of general anxiety, and depressed our own spirits. On the 4th of December, to quote the Diary, "Better news of Prince of Wales to-day. A kind letter about him from the Duchess of Roxburghe." On the 9th the entry is—"Alas! no better news of the Prince." We had by this time returned to London; and on the 10th it says: "In the afternoon we went to the Deanery, and thence to Abbey afternoon service. I shall never forget the scene, solemn and touching beyond description. I am sure I shall never think of it without emotion. The Dean's sermon, too, so apt, so eloquent, and so suggestive. . . . He brought in most effectively Shakespeare's 66th sonnet, 'Tired with all these, for restful death I cry.' Mr Froude left the Deanery with us, and we came home together, first calling at Marlborough House to see the last bulletin. Alas! no better accounts! Crowds outside waiting for news. It is really a fine thing to see all classes so moved, so taken out of themselves, by this absorbing event—this one life, hanging as it were by a thread between life and death. What a life it must be at Sandringham just now! May God support the anxious, tender relatives in these protracted hours of watchfulness and suffering! Surely the prayers that have gone up to God's throne to-day for help will be of some avail."

The crisis of the Prince's fever was expected to be reached on the 13th of December, and next day the Diary records: "This much-dreaded day is over, and, thank God, the change is slightly for the better," and from that time onward more cheerful news reached us; but the Prince's recovery was so slow as to occasion great anxiety. On the 31st of December the Diary notes: "Kind wishes for the New Year reached us yesterday, through Mr Helps, from the Queen. Dear lady, how good of her to remember such things now! Pray God, to relieve her from this painful anxiety, and lastingly!" When the Thanksgiving Day for the Prince's restoration to health came, the same kind remembrance was renewed. "This morning [February 24, 1872] came a letter to me from Prince Leopold enclosing, he says, at the Queen's desire, tickets for St Paul's on the Thanksgiving Day. How very kind and gracious of the Queen!" My wife used the ticket with fear and trembling. The stifling atmosphere of the over-

crowded Cathedral was too much for her, and brought on a headache that lasted for days, and with it the sleeplessness that through life pursued her. In her Diary at this time the following passage occurs: "Oh, sleep, why have you always been so reluctant to come to me? Even in my childhood I remember the want of you vividly, and the looking round on the little beds to see the others asleep, and I alone without you. I fear you will never take to me kindly till you are obliged, and when I drop into my long last one. Oh, sleep, be tender to me then!"

## CHAPTER XV.

WHEN it became generally known that my wife had practically bidden adieu to the stage, but would take no formal leave of it, the expression of regret was general. Many kind letters poured in upon her, among them one from Miss Geraldine Jewsbury, in which she writes:—

It is grievous to think of all your genius (as regards its *exhibition*) passing away at its best. Still nothing can take away the *Past*, and what you have been, and what you have done for the stage in England will endure as long as there is a theatre in existence; and, what you will value still more, your example and career will remain to be a help and support to many in all ranks and professions, of which you will never hear, and who may only live in a humble position, attaining no distinction except that of bravely and honourably doing their best.

This year (1873) was saddened to my wife by the death of several of her valued friends. On April 29 she heard of that of Mr Macready, and writes: "Just heard of the death of dear Mr Macready, which took place last Sunday. May the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, be with him! Wrote to Mrs Macready. How sad it has made me. How all the long ago looks like yesterday! He was a true friend then." She would have gone to his funeral at Kensal Green had not her state of health forbidden. Next year the publication of his *Autobiography and Diaries* caused her great disappointment. Of it she writes (February 7, 1874): "Finished the Macready Memoirs. Like the latter part by far the best. Still I wish the book had not been given to the world, there are so many objectionable things in it. Alas! for my earliest dramatic hero! He has dethroned himself, and given me a feeling of depression and sadness, which I cannot throw off. My own fault, no doubt.



My youth and inexperience made *all* seem perfect, where *so much* was good and worthy of imitation. He should have been a schoolmaster, as his [first] wife used to say."

A visit to Birmingham during the Festival Week was a pleasure for which my wife had longed for years. It was made more pleasant by being with the kindest of hosts, the late Mr and Mrs James Beale of Edgbaston. The singers were Titiens, Trebelli, Albani, Santley, and Sims Reeves. Speaking of the performance of the *Elijah*, she says: "Think I have heard some of the solo parts better sung. But oh! such a chorus, such a band! Perfect!!" Arthur Sullivan's *Light of the World* was first heard at this festival, and had a great success. He was living, a guest, in the same house with us. "This morning," she writes, "we had arranged a wreath of laurel leaves (my maid made it), and after supper Mrs Beale made me crown Mr Sullivan, and dub him 'Knight of the Festival.' It was great fun, and all were very happy." There was much given at this festival of unusual interest, but my wife's enthusiasm was roused to the highest point by the execution of the choruses in Handel's *Israel in Egypt* and *Judas Maccabeus*. "Too much for one day. Deeply moved and quite exhausted. What wonderful choruses, and how wonderfully executed by all concerned! Words and music wedded in the grandest manner possible. One feels to have half-a-dozen lives moved and throbbing in countless pulses and heart-thrills to it all. How grand life seems while listening! It would be worth while living, if only for this painful sacred joy." It was long before the echo of these magnificent choruses died away. Days after we got back to our quiet home on the Dee "these tremendous choruses," she writes, "keep beating in the brain. Cannot sleep. Still this grand music and the overwhelming choruses throbbing in my head and pressing on my nerves." This ceased in time, but the performance of these choruses at Birmingham lived in the memory as unsurpassable interpretations of the inspired compositions of the great master, whom some call the Shakespeare and others the Michael Angelo of music.<sup>1</sup> A favourite

<sup>1</sup> Writing (February 19, 1874) after hearing the *Messiah* at the Albert Hall, she says: "The music was well sung, but the Birmingham Festival choruses have spoiled me for all others. The grand words and the meaning of them you heard and felt."

anecdote with my wife was that of Handel's reply to Lord Kinnaird, when, after the first performance of the *Messiah* in Dublin, for which it was written, he thanked him for the entertainment which he had given the town. "My Lord," said Handel, "I should be sorry if I only entertained them. I wish to make them better." In this spirit she had always worked in her own art.

My wife had been much pressed by the Drury Lane managers to enter into a short engagement for the autumn. But this she resolutely declined; and indeed her mind was made up to undertake no more professional engagements. She felt it was buying her pleasure in acting too dearly to act with such companies as were alone now available. At the same time she was ready to give her services for any special good purpose. She had always liberally supported the Royal Theatrical Fund, and when its committee came to her representing that their funds were low, and that they urgently needed help, she at once placed her services at their disposal for an afternoon performance, at the Haymarket Theatre, of *As You Like It*. The other parts were filled by Miss Henrietta Hodson, Miss Kate Bishop, Mrs Fitzwilliam, Mr Compton, Mr Ryder, Mr Chippendale, Mr Charles Wyndham, Mr Henry Neville, Mr J. Clarke, and other experienced actors. Financially the performance was a complete success, yielding, as the secretary of the fund wrote to my wife, "a profit of £259, an amount beyond our most sanguine hopes, for which we are entirely indebted to your kind and generous thought." Rosalind herself went to the theatre full of misgiving, having only partially recovered from a severe attack of influenza; but after the play she writes: "*Dec. 20.*—Slept well. A bright morning, sunshiny and clear. God be praised! Performance began at a little after two o'clock, and finished about five. All went off smoothly. The pit being entirely turned into stalls made the play go off with less vivacity and cheeriness than usual, and then afternoon too! One can never be in the right spirit for any great enjoyment till the evening. Although I was not quite satisfied for my great poet-master—did not think his exquisite wit and deep wisdom thoroughly understood and appreciated—for myself I had only cause for gratitude and pleasure. My voice was my 'delicate spirit,' too, and did all I wished."

The audience were happy in seeing justice done to Shakespeare's work by a company of skilled actors, such as could have been got together only for a special occasion. Of the *Rosalind* a leading Sunday paper wrote next morning:—

It was worth walking twenty miles to hear the shout of welcome that greeted Miss Helen Faucit when she entered as *Rosalind* in the third scene, and the generous and accomplished lady soon proved her capacity to delight an audience as much as ever. Of the many points in this delightful impersonation we hardly know which to praise the most. . . . Rather let us say that in conception and execution the entire performance was an ideal one—something to be treasured up as a lasting remembrance. This we are convinced everybody must have felt when, after speaking the epilogue with winning archness, the curtain fell, to be raised again after long-continued applause, in order that Miss Faucit might be seen once more.

Many letters came of congratulations, but none was more valued than that of Mr S. C. Hall, in which he wrote:—

I have known long and well your true copy of the *Rosalind* that Shakespeare drew, from the first time you acted the part down to yesterday. I never at any time saw you to greater advantage—more true, more perfect. I think I might say I never saw you to so *great* advantage; for to all that *was* good has been added something that *is* better. I fancied I could see a more thorough appreciation of the poet—at all events, a sounder exercise of judgment, a deeper insight into the character depicted, a more entire absorption of art into nature. It was the actual woman I saw in every scene—nay, in every passage. If there had been study, it was not “detectable”; if there was, the mind could not perceive it.

The “merrier” parts, I confess, took me by surprise. I suppose I had forgotten them. But every word, every motion, apparently every thought, gave me an idea of actuality such as I have rarely seen in my long life. Not a word of any sentence was lost from the beginning to the end; and the epilogue was a piece of acting (if acting it must be called) so exquisite, as the stage has seldom witnessed, and never seen surpassed.

It was not long before my wife was again called from her retirement to play in a farewell benefit performance got up for Mr Webster. Lady Teazle, the part assigned to her, she writes, (February 9, 1874) “is quite out of my way, and I have no dresses. But I have been obliged to consent.” Her dressmaker had to be called in. “How troublesome and expensive,” she writes a few days after, “this getting up dresses for a night.” Nor was this all. It was cruel weather, and she caught a severe cold at the rehearsals, so that her chronicle of the performance is



simply this: "*March 2.*—This dreaded afternoon performance. Felt so ill and weak, that I was stupidly nervous even at acting this slight part. Thought I should have coughed away all my voice, and have only hoarseness left. All over, and home again before six o'clock. So glad it is over! These monster gatherings and performances must be unsatisfactory to all concerned."

However unsatisfactory to herself, her share in this performance was certainly not unsatisfactory to her audience, not one of whom could possibly have divined that she was out of spirits, and racked by a cough. Her voice was clear and as full of tone as ever, and filled the vast area of Drury Lane, which was crowded to excess, with every appearance of ease. It was a great satisfaction to my wife that the receipts from the performance yielded upwards of £2000 to Mr Webster, her old manager, and an actor whom she admired and regarded as a true artist.

Next morning brought two letters which are interesting as a record of the impersonation, of which the Lady Teazle herself thought so little. One was to me from Mr Charles Gruneisen, in his day one of the ablest and most experienced critics of music and the drama, the other from George Eliot. Mr Gruneisen writes: "I must write a few words to express my high gratification at the delineation of Lady Teazle by Mrs Martin yesterday at Drury Lane Theatre. The performance was worthy of her best days, so replete with refinement, grace, and delicacy, and yet so easy and vivacious in the light moments of the Lady from the Country. The scene, however, that interested and touched me the most was that of the screen. It was finely conceived and carried out, and it rose into almost tragic grandeur at the exposure of Joseph Surface. The pathos at parting with her husband, the mute acknowledgment of the recognition of his affectionate qualities were points of irresistible influence on the audience, who, I saw, shared in my sympathy with the creation."

The straightforward simplicity of this letter contrasts not unfavourably with the more studied language of George Eliot in what follows:—

"THE PRIORY, NORTH BANK, *Tuesday Morning.*

"MY DEAR MRS MARTIN,—Perhaps the finest edge of all the pleasure we get is the delightful feeling of gratitude that it



creates towards the giver. That is just the feeling I want to tell you of after my pleasure in seeing you yesterday. Is it not nearly ten years—just ten—since I heard at Glasgow the tones, the rich laughter of Beatrice? I heard them again yesterday from Lady Teazle, and lost no syllable. Some little sadness mingled itself with the charm of her bearing and the music of her movements? It was that the refinement and elevation which they give to comedy, often beyond the vision of the writer, should be felt by us to be unique, and without visible sign of spreading for the general benefit that deep benefit which comes from seeing a high type of womanly grace, to shame away false ideals. . . .

“You must be half dead to-day, after giving out all the nervous energy necessary to do what you did in defiance of cold and cough; but you will come to life again the more joyously for looking back on an effort which ended in full achievement. . . . —Always yours most sincerely.”

Towards the close of the year the Royal Theatrical Fund again appealed to my wife to perform at the Haymarket Theatre for their benefit; and on December the 12th she appeared as Beatrice. A rehearsal of four hours the previous day left her, she writes, “with a dreadful headache and pains—a bad preparation for to-morrow.” These continued up to the time of performance, together with a tight pain on the chest, so that, as she writes, she was “very nervous, stupidly so at first.” But, as usual, no trace of this was visible to the audience. Of the Beatrice the *Daily News* (December 14) writes:—

Miss Helen Faucit’s conception of this difficult character, so complex and so subtle in the wilfulness and waywardness of its moods, so variable in its play of light and shade, of ever-shifting phases of thought, fancy, and caprice; from the airy malice and banter of a coquetry that is half assumed as a defensive armour for the woman’s heart, to the impetuous emotion of a noble scorn, is from first to last a model and a masterpiece. Miss Faucit’s voice has preserved all its thrilling charm, and her attitudes and gestures are instinct with the very soul of poetry and grace. In a word, she is one of Shakespeare’s women, “all compact.” Her reception on Saturday was most enthusiastic, and the homage of attentive silence in the finest passages of the play was an even more impressive testimony to her genius than the storm of applause that welcomed her in the first scene and recalled her when the

curtain fell. By the way, we should not forget to note the admirable example, which the great actress set to the players of a later day, by declining a recall at the close of a scene in the middle of an act. One of the lessons which the comedians of an age of burlesques have to learn is that respect for their own art, which is not easily distinguishable from self-respect.

The following passage from a notice in the *Graphic* is of more than ephemeral interest:—

We have heard Miss Faucit's performance of Rosalind and Beatrice called "artificial," and if the fact that every line is studied for emphasis and intonation, and every opportunity of appropriate action turned to account, renders a performance artificial, the charge is just. But the fact is that this is acting, as contradistinguished from the habit of lounging through a part, which in these days is sometimes praised for the very grace and ease which are conspicuously absent. But who shall say that Miss Faucit's Rosalind lacks grace or ease? These are, indeed, its most striking qualities, apart from its intelligence and fresh life and joyous wit and delightful archness. It would require a long study indeed of Shakespeare's play to gather all the meaning which may be seen and felt in one sitting by the light of Miss Faucit's interpretation of that Shakespearian creation.

The truth of what is here said will be appreciated by all who can understand the two elements of patience and conscience, which go to the production of all true art—"patience, the necessary condition of art; conscience, that which makes creations of art durable." Little do "irresponsible critics" know of the long, long patient searchings and broodings, that go to the thorough understanding of such characters as Rosalind or Beatrice, or of the conscience that will allow no personal considerations to interfere with the interpretation of what these broodings have revealed of the author's purpose. It is only when so prepared, that the actor will be free to infuse the impulses of life and feeling into his work, and, instead of sinking into the slipshod ease of what is called "natural acting," which, being unemotional, is not really natural, will, without losing his hold of nature, surround with a halo of ideality what will otherwise not rise above the level of commonplace. Truth to nature is the basis of all good acting. Where that is, and with it the graces of beautiful utterance, and motion, and distinction of manner, the result can never be "artificial."

In the Diary, under date 29th of March, 1875, is a reference to a

passage in the third book of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, which bears upon this subject. To some things in the book my wife demurs, but, she adds, "There is so much to admire—such depth of thought and insight into character? And the noble defence of Art (for in these days of pretension it may be called a defence), and the life study and devotion necessary to be given to it by its followers, is worth gold. I am more glad than I can tell, that some one so worthy has spoken out about it. May the readers think as well as read!" Next day, she writes, meeting George Eliot at a musical party, "I told her how grateful I was to her for Klesmer's lecture on Art and Artists in *Daniel Deronda*. She said she thought of me while writing it."<sup>1</sup> This she could not well fail to do, for the passage is little more than an enlargement of what I well remembered my wife to have said, not many months before, in a long conversation with Mrs Lewes. But the ideas expressed were so familiar to my wife, that she had herself entirely forgotten the occasion.

*As You Like It* was the play selected for a performance at Drury Lane (April 23) in aid of the fund for building a Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, and my wife, who had the erection of it much at heart, appeared upon the occasion as Rosalind. This is her record of the occasion: "*April 23.*—Acted Rosalind this afternoon at Drury Lane. A full theatre, but the people as cold and unsympathetic as it is natural they should be at this hour of the day. . . . Orlando very painstaking, but not in the least the poetical lover he should be. What a charming character! With fine qualities of heart and head. One fancies them ideally together. A great loss in not having Mr Compton's Touchstone. . . . I always pass a wretched evening after these most unsatisfactory performances. No one guesses, I am sure, what pain they cost me."

Miss Anna Swanwick wrote next day, that it was to her "a most delightful celebration of our poet's birthday." But how could a performance, inevitably crude, with no sufficient rehearsal, and no enthusiasm in the actors, brought together for a temporary purpose, fail to be very far from delightful to an artist who longed to see every character in the play as carefully

<sup>1</sup> See Book iii. chap. 23.

dealt with as her own? This was the last time my wife played Rosalind in London.

M. Regnier, the *doyen* of the Comédie Française, had mentioned to me some time before in Paris that they were desirous of having my wife's portrait in their collection. I sent him proofs of Richard Lane's copy of Sir Frederic Burton's portrait of her, painted in 1845, as The Greek Muse, and of Joubert's engraving of the portrait of her painted by Rudolph Lehmann in 1872. This brought from him the following acknowledgment :—

“COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE, 23 *Juillet* 1875.

“CHER MONSIEUR—Ce n'est pas en mon nom personnel, c'est au nom de toute la Comédie Française, dont je suis le Doyen, que je vous remercie du présent que vous lui avez fait.

“Les deux magnifiques portraits d'une grande artiste, d'Helen Faucit, vont accroître et enrichir la collection des illustrations dramatiques qu'elle se fait un devoir de recueillir. Ces deux portraits seront de la famille, ils perpétueront parmi nous le souvenir d'un nom, que notre scène envie à la vôtre, et d'une artiste que son nom et son caractère ont rendue digne de notre admiration et de tous nos respects.

“Veuillez, je vous prie, avec nos remerciements présenter mes hommages respectueux à Madame votre femme, et agréer la nouvelle assurance de mes sentimens dévoués et tres affectueux.

“REGNIER.”

In December 1875 the Royal Theatrical Fund prevailed upon my wife to appear again for their benefit. The weather was unusually severe, the streets were blocked with snow, and in her state of health at the time the exposure to the fatigue and chill of rehearsals was not a little dangerous. It was feared, too, that in such weather the receipts would not greatly enrich the fund. But many who could not attend sent contributions to my wife, which went far toward compensating for any falling off in the audience. The play selected was *King René's Daughter*, in which my wife had not been seen in London. Of the performance her Diary says : “*Dec. 9.*—Acted *Iolanthe* at 3 P.M.—a most uncomfortable time of day to give one's self up to poetry and romance.



All concerned took great pains, and it went off fairly. As usual, I had my work to do through suffering and disadvantage. I suppose the chill yesterday at rehearsal stuck to me, for I had a night of great pain and sleeplessness. The pain continued nearly the whole morning, and at times it was as much as I could bear. For want of sleep my head ached sadly, and the drive to town made it much worse. The poor eyes looked blind beforehand, they were so wearied. . . . My pain, as usual, went all away when I began to act, but I felt terribly nervous also, as usual."

What shall be said of the courage and self-command which could so throw off every symptom of suffering as to give to the audience the impression of an Iolanthe, all youth, and unembarrassed with an ache either of body or of heart?

This little one-act drama [the critic of the *Era* writes] is literally brimming over with poetry of a most noble character, and Miss Helen Faucit played the heroine in a manner to make us forget completely the years that have elapsed since first she essayed this delightful part. Although Iolanthe is spoken of as being sixteen years of age, Miss Faucit banishes the years as if by witchcraft, and we feel all the charm of the ethereal girlhood she so skilfully portrays. Very beautiful also were the statuesque attitudes which Miss Faucit assumed so naturally. One might fancy that her life had been devoted to the sculptor's art, so gracefully and apparently unconsciously does she move.

The phrase here used of "attitudes assumed" was wholly inapplicable. No attitude was ever studied or consciously assumed by the actress, or was what is understood by the phrase "statuesque." Her movements, no doubt, suggested infinite studies for the sculptor, but they were transitory movements dictated by the feeling of the moment or the requirements of the situation, and never long enough arrested for the most dexterous artist to draw them. After dwelling on several details of the impersonation, the *Era* critic continues:—

The art of this accomplished lady has still power to touch the heart and stimulate the imagination as only the gifted few have the power to do. When her task was ended, a shout arose that testified how deeply she had influenced her auditors, and, in obedience to the enthusiastic applause, Miss Helen Faucit crossed the stage again amidst the most complimentary demonstrations possible.

Her Iolanthe upon this occasion was so widely talked about, that Mr Irving selected it for performance, when my wife agreed to act for his benefit at the Lyceum on the 23rd of June, 1876. Two rehearsals sufficed for the production of the piece. After the second, the Diary writes: "The scene will be pretty. Tired myself a good deal, as I felt it necessary to try my voice. Glad to find it seems the same as ever, entirely at my command. Lady Williams Wynn, the Ladies Bismarck, the Miss Swanwicks, and Alice Helps were in the stalls during the rehearsal." On the evening of performance she writes: "The heat excessive. The noises outside my dressing-room were incessant and most distressing to an already aching head. Never went on the stage under greater disadvantages—feared all my words would have left me. Forced myself to be calm by a great effort. A great house. Have had much more pleasure in acting Iolanthe to a Manchester or Glasgow audience. There you felt the people's hearts were in the play, and going along with you."

Of her performance the *Pall Mall Gazette* (June 24) wrote:—

Those who remember this accomplished actress from the days of her professional triumphs, and who visited the Lyceum Theatre to witness her performance last night, must have felt more keenly than ever the loss which the dramatic art has sustained by Miss Faucit's retirement from the stage. We say "the dramatic art" advisedly, and as distinguished from the drama-loving public; for the stage lost something more than an individual artist of fine gifts and high cultivation when Miss Faucit bade adieu to it. It saw the departure of an invaluable example and model to her sisterhood, and that at a time when a dearth of actresses worthy of the name was beginning to be increasingly felt. Miss Faucit's retirement made the stage poorer by a true artist, who loved her beautiful art as it deserves to be loved, and who studied it as it should be studied. And every year that passes shows more and more how difficult such artists are to replace.

The year 1877 opened very pleasantly for my wife, with an invitation to spend a day (January 3) at Windsor Castle. "Her Majesty," she writes, "saw us in the corridor soon after lunch—so sweet and gracious—talked for about twenty minutes. Then by the Queen's desire I was taken to see the Memorial Chapel, and also the Mausoleum where the Prince lies. Both very rich in marbles and painting, but I like best dear Baron Triqueti and Miss Durand's work. How sad to see their work finished, and

they taken away, and not allowed to glory in its completion. We saw the chapel before in their company, and while the work was in progress. The dear Baron! so able, and so good. But this is a noble work to have left behind. Lady Abercromby [the lady in waiting] went with us to the chapels."

From this meeting a friendship with that lady dated, which grew closer every year. The rest of the day was spent in studying the pictures in the public rooms, and some of the treasures of the Library, in interviews with the Princess Beatrice, Lady Ely, and General Ponsonby. "With him I talked a little over Portia—as his children and the Biddulphs's were to act two acts of *The Merchant of Venice* before the Queen" two days afterward. This morning (January 6) she writes, "came to me a present from the Queen, *Shakespeare's Birthday-Book*. H.M. has inscribed it to me, and also written her name against her birthday. How very good of her! The Princess Beatrice has also written her name." The example thus set was subsequently followed by all the Royal Princes and Princesses, as well as by the Prince and Princess of Wales and their children.

Shakespeare's birthday (April 23) was to be commemorated by laying the foundation-stone of what is now the Shakespeare Memorial Library and Theatre. On this occasion we were the guests of Mr, now Sir Arthur, Hodgson, at Clopton House.

"We reached the stand," to quote the Diary, "a little after one. The river just behind us—Oh, the cold wind! Had a fur-lined cloak, but my limbs and feet grew numb. Such a weary waiting! When the ceremony began, we bore our misery better. It was too long a ceremony for the open air. The procession, flags, &c., looked very gay, and the bands made it cheerful. The sun shone for a time, but 'the uncertain glory of an April day' proved itself unmistakably. The clouds gathered and chilled the air, and made the speeches appear dreadfully long. Poor brother mason Creswick was very impatiently listened to. Many of the others, not actors, spoke and bore themselves much better. He *read* his speech, and bungled over it sadly. Lord Leigh spoke out grandly, and took pains to make himself heard everywhere. A gentleman from Coventry spoke admirably both in manner and matter. The brother Freemasons crowded round the stone, as



though they alone were the people to see the ceremony. We had glimpses only of the phial with coins, and the libation of wine and oil, which went towards the consecration of it. The whole wound up with the Masons singing their version of 'God save the Queen.' The rain by this time was coming down liberally.

"After the great crowd had dispersed, we all made our way to the luncheon-tent—a huge affair made to hold about a thousand people. The merciless rain soaked through, and we had to eat as we could under umbrellas. On the stand I sat between Mrs Hodgson (our hostess) and Miss Leigh, a sweet girl with her mother's eyes and gentle manner. At the luncheon I was between the Vicar of Stratford and our host. The after-lunch speeches were very good. The Mayor spoke well and feelingly about the Queen and royal children, and also upon the topic of the day. Mr Tom Taylor gave a long and very practical speech upon the uses the building, of which they had just laid the first stone, might be put to, and among others (Oh, Spirit of our great Shakespeare!) the amusement of amateur actors! What must the German Professor Leo, who spoke so well, and to the point, presently, have thought of this? In Germany art is too sacred to admit of amateurs. Nearly at the last came my 'Ogre's' speech. By far the best both in delivery and matter. He defended the actor's art as well as the poet's, and showed that Shakespeare would never have been so great a dramatist, had he not begun by being an actor. . . .

"To our surprise and to my pain the Mayor proposed my health. I was quite taken aback. I rose and quietly bowed to those just around me. The sun came out brilliantly towards the end. On our way to the carriage we passed through the grounds and by the ruins of Shakespeare's house—they seem picturesquely cared for and guarded. We reached Clopton House about seven."

My wife on this occasion promised the Mayor that, if all were well with her, she would perform the first night the theatre was opened. She did so on Shakespeare's birthday just two years after.

As there was no longer any prospect of seeing my wife upon



the stage, she was very pressinglly entreated by her friends to give some Readings from Shakespeare. In order to meet their wishes, she used to arrange for the reading of a Shakespeare play in her drawing-room, with the assistance of such of her friends as she could rely upon to take the other characters. Mr, now Canon, Ainger, was a great help upon these occasions, so also was our own clergyman, the Hon. and Rev. Francis Byng, now Lord Strafford. Several other clergymen, and, on one occasion, a bishop, gave cheerful aid. In time, Sir Henry Irving took a leading part. As these Readings seemed to give great pleasure to both readers and hearers, one was given yearly in our own home, as long as my wife felt strong enough to take the fatigue of organising and carrying them through. Invitations were eagerly sought for, but care was taken that the pleasantness of the *séances* should not be marred by the rooms being too crowded. *The Merchant of Venice* was given at the first of these meetings.

“*June 27, 1877.*—We gave our ‘Reading’ this afternoon at 3, commencing punctually at 3.30. About fifty-six present. Not crowded—the rooms only fairly full—plenty of room. All seemed pleased, and many enthusiastic. Myself very tired, although very much enjoying the great words I had to utter. The dear old Lady Essex was very warm indeed in her thanks,—so also were Lady Ducie, Lady Wolseley, Viscountess Combermere, &c., &c.

“*July 4.*—Gave the second Reading this afternoon. It went off even better. The gentlemen had more courage, and read in a more lively manner. Mr Ainger is always good. About seventy present. Pleased that Professor Huxley and Mr Froude made time to come. Mr [afterwards Sir William] Bowman came in just at the trial scene.”

At this time, my wife heard Mr Gladstone, whom she had known in private, speak publicly for the first time. The occasion was the “Caxton Celebration.” “He was the chairman,” she writes, “and made an excellent speech. He has a fine voice and a very pleasant manner.” Then followed a judgment, which would have been widely deemed heretical at the time, but is less likely to be so now. “If only his judgment upon public matters were as good! He is earnest, sincere, and enthusiastic, but sadly

needing a wider vision, a deeper insight, a truer judgment. What innocent sins such good men may commit!"

During our stay in our Welsh country home this autumn, my wife consented to give a public reading in the Llangollen Town Hall for the benefit of the Llangollen Cottage Hospital upon the 4th of September. As soon as this became known, every place was taken. People came from far and near to hear the celebrated actress, and the hall was crowded to excess, yielding a handsome addition to the funds of the hospital. Several scenes from the early part of *Romeo and Juliet* were read. Those who were familiar only with my wife's Juliet were surprised to find what life and individuality she infused into all the characters of the scene, and, not least, into that of the Nurse, which stood out with as much force as if comedy and not tragedy had been the study of the reader's life.

It was perhaps natural that my wife's opinion should be frequently asked as to the fitness of a career on the stage by young ladies who thought they had a gift for acting. When through friends she gave, as she reluctantly did give, to the aspirants themselves an opportunity of consulting her, in no case, I believe, did she ever find in them the qualifications, either natural or acquired, which in her view were requisite for even a moderate success. She had an intuitive faculty for discerning character, both in men and women, from look and manner, even at a transitory interview, and this helped her greatly in coming to a judgment on such occasions. Her nature was too sincere to allow her to hesitate in the frank expression of an adverse opinion. In giving it, she always dwelt strongly on the worthiness of the actor's vocation, when pursued in a right spirit, explaining at the same time how much devotion and perseverance were indispensable for even the *humbler* ranks of the profession. She resented warmly the low view of the actor's calling entertained by many, and when, this year, she received a letter from a gentleman, holding a good position in one of the public offices, asking whether a vocation, so full, the writer said, of temptations, could be adopted as a means of gaining an income by a young friend of his, without injury to her moral character,—a strange question to put to my wife of all

women,—it required no small self-control to reply in courteous terms. This was her answer:—

“December 20, 1877.

“SIR,—Your letter of the 18th has taken me by surprise. The art to which my life has been devoted was from the first represented to me as one demanding from those who profess it no less moral than intellectual strength. I cannot, therefore, understand such a question as you put before me. In all careers there are, I suppose, what are called temptations, and they may prove such to those who have no high ideals. If people find special temptations in a theatrical career, it must be from inherent defects of character, and from listening to the suggestions of personal vanity, instead of pursuing art for its own sake, and as an instrument of good.

“All I can say is, to recommend your friend to weigh well her own character and powers before embarking in a pursuit, in which excellence can only be achieved by severe self-discipline and study applied to the development of natural gifts for the stage. I can recommend no art *merely* as a means of gaining an income.”

No one felt more keenly than my wife the truth of the line,

“In every friend we lose, we lose a life” ;

for the friends she loved were indeed a part of her life, and remained unforgotten and cherished among its dearest records. Of such friends was Dr William Stokes of Dublin, already referred to more than once, of whom the Diary speaks (January 20, 1878): “The last post last night brought me news of the death of my dear friend of old, Dr Stokes,—long looked for, but oh, how sad to realise! A man of rare power and much natural genius. What a happy thing that in my early youth I had the chance of listening to and imbibing (I trust) some of the words of wisdom and bright wit and humour which fell so constantly from his lips! My heart is full of gratitude and love for him!”

Not less, I know well, was his heart full of gratitude to her for things before undreamt of, which she had shown him in her art, and of affectionate admiration for the *schöne Seele*, to which her art owed its peculiar charm.



{ A few days afterwards she was much gratified in making the acquaintance of Mrs Grote, wife of the historian of Greece. "She is very infirm in body," she writes, "but her mind evidently quite vigorous. She said such kind and acute things to my 'Ogre' about his book [*The Prince Consort's Life*, of which vol. iii. had just been published]. It was a real pleasure to listen to such criticism. Me, too, she had kind words for—especially remembering 'every word, look, and gesture' in my *Antigone*. Her husband, she said, spoke of it always, and with the same warm admiration. How I wish I had known it at the time! What comfort and support such praise would have given me! I, who always felt so despairingly of everything I did."

Another of our drawing-room readings was to come off in a few days (February 27), and to this Mrs Grote promised to come, if she could.

The play was again *The Merchant of Venice*, with Mr Irving as the Shylock. Mr Ainger was ill, and could not come, but Mr Clifford Harrison took his place as Lorenzo. Except Herr Moritz, a Hungarian actor, the rest of the characters were in the hands of friends, who knew their Shakespeare. Among the guests were Princess Louise and Mr Tennyson. "Glad," the Diary records, "that old Mrs Grote took courage to come. She arrived the very first, and we put her up comfortably on a sofa. . . . People seemed pleased. I was terribly tired. To receive and talk to eighty people beforehand was a little too much. Felt weary before I began. Thought they all read extremely well." Next morning, she writes, "We went to the marriage of Miss Locker and Lionel Tennyson at Westminster Abbey. The music was charming. But I do not like this ceremony in such a place. It seems more fitted for prayers only and funerals. I felt quite melancholy."

Among the guests at the last Reading was the Baroness Burdett Coutts, and on my wife calling on her one day in May, the idea was suggested of a Reading in the Baroness' drawing-room, which it was thought would give especial pleasure to Mrs Brown, her friend and companion of very many years, who had recently become blind. On May the 20th the Diary says: "Lunched with the Baroness B. Coutts and Mrs Brown. Arranged the day for



the Reading at the house to please Mrs B., who seems quite excited about it. What a pleasure to help even so little the suddenly afflicted! Hope it may not be too much for her. The 5th of June settled, if it suits Mr Irving." The 5th of June found Lady Burdett Coutts's great drawing-room filled to the full with her friends. My wife read, or rather recited, with Mr Irving the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, the first act of *Macbeth*, beginning with the letter, and selections from the second, third, and last acts of *The Lady of Lyons*. "All went off well," she writes, "Mrs Brown seemingly greatly delighted, and the dear Baroness most pleased and grateful. Miss Margaret Stokes played before the first two pieces read, and Miss E. Buller before the last. Miss Stokes read the little bit of the Widow Melnotte in the third act admirably, firmly, and with much feeling. Every one seemed pleased." She might well have said more than "pleased." The audience was an exceptionally brilliant one, and were loud in the expression of their delight.

It was a great pleasure to my wife to act as godmother, on the 28th of this month, at the christening at Kensington Church of the infant daughter of Mrs Richmond Ritchie, the Annie Thackeray, to whom she had long been warmly attached. She gave the little one the caudle cup, which had been always cherished as the gift of her own godmother. "I gave the names," she writes (June 28), "at the font, Hester Helena Makepeace Thackeray. . . . May the baby grow into a bright and happy woman, and have God's help and blessing always near!" Soon after we went to our Welsh home. The former Reading by my wife for the Llangollen Cottage Hospital had brought so large a return, that the managers appealed to her to come again to their assistance, little thinking how much what seemed to be done with so much ease cost her in fatigue of body and brain. There was a very large audience, and she read scenes from the first four acts of *The Merchant of Venice*. Her Shylock was as powerful and as strongly marked in character as her Portia, and she gave individuality to all the other characters without the use of action—a very exhausting task.

Some days afterwards, in reading the *Times'* report of a meeting at Sheffield of the Church Congress, her attention was arrested by

a speech of the Bishop of Manchester, in reply to an attack upon the stage by a previous speaker, who had used for his purpose Mr Macready's published unfavourable opinion of his own profession. She was personally acquainted with the Bishop, having spent some days with him as a guest at Tatton Park, and was so much gratified by what he said in his speech, that she wrote to him the following letter:—

“BRYNTYSILIO, *8th October 1878.*

“MY DEAR BISHOP,—Through some matters pressing on my attention, I have only to-day read your admirable speech at the Church Congress on Friday last. It has given me great pleasure. I am sure you indicated the true reason for the low state of the drama in many of our theatres when you said, that it is owing to the low tone of thinking which prevails in what is called Society. I feel quite assured, and I have said so for a long time, that neither actors nor managers are mostly to blame. Authors, or in many cases translators or adapters, as they should be called, unquestionably are. But then they work to please audiences, and would no doubt readily produce higher and better things were there a call for them. Watch an audience, as I have sometimes done, when attracted to a theatre by the report of a new play full of character. I have occasionally had to turn from the stage, shocked and offended at something said or done, and found to my dismay the occupants of the stalls enjoying, applauding, encouraging, and stamping with their approval what, if condemned by their silence, would have fallen flat, and must have very speedily died a natural death.

“I quite agree with your lady correspondent in objecting to the ballets now introduced in Christmas pantomimes. One is obliged to ask which is the least objectionable to take children to. The clown is never so vulgar, so humiliating, as the dresses and movements of the poor ballet women in their gossamer close-fitting ‘no attire.’ But they are not to blame. Their costume is worked out in harmony with the scene—they have no voice in the matter—they have to wear what is provided.

“If they, poor things, could afford it, and would ‘strike’ for longer petticoats, how all the world would praise them! Women have much to blame themselves for in the low tone of the present

day. But still, I am sure, if ever that tone is to be raised, men must help them. For instance, at a theatre what can a woman do, however offended by what she sees or hears, if the men about her are amused and tolerant? She cannot do what a distinguished lady said to me she wished to do not long since, when she saw a dress worn by the heroine in a modern drama. 'Had I been a man, I should have taken up my hat and left the theatre; but having no hat, and to wait for my carriage, I was obliged to remain until the appointed time.' The offensive dress worn on this occasion was but the usual one—such as we see in our drawing-rooms every day since the late ugly, ungraceful fashion has prevailed—but the unfitness was made more obvious on the stage, when in the necessary movements the development of the figure was much more noticeable. Men have much to do even in this matter. Bid fathers, husbands, brothers make a protest, and refuse to be seen with their womenkind so dressed, and milliners would soon know it was their interest to find less tightly fitting and more seemly gowns.

"I have been grieved to find brought up at this Church Congress by the Rev. C. Bullock a sentence of Mr Macready's, which reads, apart from his life, as not worthy of it. Why should he think a profession unworthy of his following, which had numbered in its ranks such names as Garrick and his distinguished predecessors, and, in his own time, the Kembles—great actors and good men? I do not like to think of, or to have dwelt upon, this blot in his honourable, useful career. I wish I could think any word of mine could weigh ever so lightly against such a sweeping unjust censure.

"I have ever found my art a most purifying and ennobling one, and the aim of all my life has been to educate and elevate myself *up to it*. To live in the contemplation of high thoughts, clothed, as in Shakespeare, in the loftiest language, 'to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image,' self-sacrificing heroism its own reward, how can this be lowering to a well-regulated mind? Always provided that the life lived is a blameless one.

"As to what are called the temptations of the stage—even for women—I do not believe they exist for those worthy of the name of actors. I doubt not they are to be found, but they must be



welcomed or sought for, if they do exist. An actor worthy of his art must be a worthy man. All art, if studied worthily, must be elevating. It is not given to all to reach the pinnacle; but with a pure aim and steady purpose, 'they also serve who only stand and wait.'

"To conclude. I believe so entirely in the enormous power of good in the dramatic art, which in some shape or form was born in us and has existed since the earliest ages, that I feel convinced, had we the same intelligent and willing audiences as we see any day in any theatre on the Continent—notably in Germany—where it is an education to sit and watch the people during a play of Shakespeare's, that here the Church and the Stage might move together for good, the one the willing servant of the other, and the supposed antagonism be discovered to be fallacious. But, before this can be hoped for, the general tone of society must be raised, and the desire be felt widely for the advent of the true thing,—life, in short, must be in many ways different from what it is now.

"Forgive me for having trespassed so largely on your time. You will, I am sure, do so for the sake of the cause, and in remembrance of the agreeable hours at Tatton Park, when I had the pleasure of meeting you there three years ago.—Believe me, my Lord, very truly yours,  
HELENA FAUCIT MARTIN."

To this letter the Bishop replied :—

"BISHOP'S COURT, MANCHESTER, Oct. 14, 1878.

"MY DEAR MRS MARTIN,—I can't tell you with what pleasure I read your pages. I agree, I sympathise fully, heartily, with every word. Why should the drama, which the great philosopher Aristotle, who had seen the noble tragedies of Æschylus and Sophocles, regarded as 'the great purifier of our moral nature through the passions,' be degraded, except that *society* wills it so to be. I shall be glad, if the occasion should hereafter present itself (I do not *seek* these occasions, but they come unexpectedly; I had not the least intention of saying anything at Sheffield, but the Archbishop pressed me), to quote your words, or some of them, as one who has a *right* to be heard, and, as Mr Theodore



Martin tells me in his kind letter, I have your permission to do.

“So many good people, in their schemes of reformation, think they can *extinguish* human nature. I don't desire this. I believe that upon the existing basis, *which is not of man's laying*, a noble and worthy superstructure can be raised. To have some hand in doing this I try to devote the little power and influence that God has given me.

“I retain a vivid recollection of those three pleasant days at Tatton.—Very sincerely yours,  
J. MANCHESTER.”

More than twenty years have elapsed since these letters were written. What will the historian of these twenty years have to tell of the progress of dramatic art or of public taste? More money has been lavished on the stage than at any previous period, with what results upon the aims of authors or actors towards the production of fine work, either in writing or acting? It is as true as ever, that

“The drama's laws the drama's patrons give.”

When society is pervaded by a higher, purer tone, the drama and its professors will feel its influence, and strive to satisfy it, but not till then.

## CHAPTER XVI.

THE failure of the City of Glasgow Bank towards the end of 1877 caused widespread distress in the west of Scotland, and especially in the city of Glasgow. Hearing of this, and remembering the uniform kindness, both in public and private, which she had always met with there, my wife wrote to the Lord Provost, offering to give a Reading in aid of the Relief Fund which had been set on foot for the sufferers by the bank failure. The offer was eagerly accepted, and the evening of the 21st of March, 1878, was fixed for the reading. The weather was unusually wintry, making the outlook of a journey from London most unpromising. But the officials of the London and North Western Railway Company, hearing of my wife's charitable purpose, placed at her disposal an entire saloon carriage, to take her to and from Glasgow, and in this way diminished both the fatigue and the risk of catching cold. A hospitable welcome awaited us at the house of the late Dr M'Gregor, on the 18th, and two days' rest under most genial conditions enabled my wife to carry successfully through the very hard task which she had undertaken. The programme included Act i. sc. 5, Act ii. sc. 2 (the balcony scene), scenes 3, 5, and 6 from *Romeo and Juliet*, and from the *Merchant of Venice*, Act ii. sc. 2, Act iii. scenes 2 and 4, and the trial scene in Act iv. "All went off well," says the Diary. "Was less nervous than I expected to be. My voice served me as well as ever—not even my long cough has injured it. The Lord Provost led me to the platform, and made a speech of thanks to me from it at the end." The receipts were £470, and the next day my wife sent her cheque for £30 to the Lord Provost, to make up a total of £500,

with a letter, in which she said: "Believe me, I have a great affection for your city, where I have always been received with much warmth and kindness. It has given me great pleasure to come amongst you again, and to show my sympathy with the sufferers from this late sad calamity by contributing my mite to a cause which I know the citizens of this great city have most deeply at heart."

The Glasgow journals expressed a warm appreciation of what had been done. The *Evening News* writes:—

Few persons in Glasgow, and certainly none who knew her, would be surprised when they heard that this good lady and famous artist had offered to come north, and once more play the enchantress for mercy's sake. It would have been easy for her to stay at home and write a cheque for £30. But that was not enough; and she knew that she possessed a secret which could make the scantiest soil blossom in guineas. So she left her comfortable home in the South, and braved the tooth-drawing winds of March, in order to assist in softening the sterner winds of ruin which are now chilling many an unhappy hearth. . . . What we have heard Helen Faucit speak! What we have seen her do! Not in our time shall be seen her like upon the English stage. But in all her actings she never acted so noble a part as that in which she appeared on Friday night, the comforter of widows and orphans stricken by an unmerited calamity.

Of the Reading itself, the *Glasgow News* says:—

Mrs Martin achieved a success, which must have reminded her of her triumphs of former days—with this difference, that in the present case her task was more difficult. To hold the attention of an audience for nearly three hours to a series of dramatic readings, with none of the accessories which go to make up a stage representation, is an achievement of which even Miss Helen Faucit may be justly proud.

It is on an occasion like this, writes another critic, "that one has an opportunity of understanding the strength and melody of the English language, and especially of Shakespeare's English." The characteristics of her mode of reading are well given by the *Citizen*:—

On no occasion did the reader raise her voice beyond a conversational pitch. She never declaimed. Gesture or indeed action of any kind was but sparingly used. But, this restraint of style notwithstanding, she succeeded in discriminating between the various figures in each scene with the utmost nicety. The eager pleadings of Romeo, the lovesick fancies of Juliet, the testy humours of the Nurse, Portia's high-bred courtesy, and

Shylock's mingled cruelty and greed were conveyed with a skill, which was all the more wonderful, that it did not seem skill at all. . . . We have said that she was sparing of action and gesture, but what gestures she used were infinitely graceful. The poise of her body, as she leant forward now and then to give emphasis and accent to some phrase, or it might be to some single word, insensibly recalled the drawings of Stothard or Flaxman. Her movements were almost rhythmical in their lithe yet ordered ease. At the close, when, with the words spoken in the character of Portia—

“I wish you well, and so I take my leave,”

she crossed the platform, no more graceful or more simple carriage ever lent added effect to a last good-bye.

As the opening of the Stratford Memorial Theatre in April was impending, where my wife had undertaken to act Beatrice, we availed ourselves of the Easter holidays to escape from the pressure of social engagements in London to our retreat in Wales, where she could give that fresh study to Beatrice and to the play of which Beatrice is the heroine which she always gave to every Shakespearian part before appearing in it, however often she had acted it before. Advanced although the season was, we found ourselves, as it were, in the midst of winter.

“The snow,” she writes, April 13, “is very deep, and keeps still falling. The landscape looks very lovely. We have not seen our little home before in its true winter dress. How strange to have it at this season! It is a most remarkable one, and a very sad one to many thousands of suffering people.

“April 18.—Must not venture out: wrote letters. Oh, when is the day without them? How much time they run away with!

“April 19.—Walked in the garden, and thought over Beatrice again.”

Two days afterwards we travelled to Stratford. Next day we visited the Shakespeare House, where the Lady Custodians presented my wife with a bouquet of Shakespeare's favourite flowers, which are cultivated in the garden of the house. She also visited Ann Hathaway's cottage at Shottery, and spent from 7 to 11 in the evening rehearsing at the theatre. Next day (April 23) she writes:—

“The town quite *en fête* to-day—flags flying, bands playing, &c., &c. Went to the theatre for a short time to go over some



of the worst bits. Then to the church. Charmed with the monument. Can see so much of the *man* behind it. The profile also tells so much. The profile, especially on the left, speaks of the grandeur, the full face of the humour and sweetness. There was no seeing it, until we were admitted *within* the altar rail. The bust looks like a living friend, whom one would wish *never* to part with. There is no thought of death or separation about it. It has been a great pleasure to us both to see it and the fine old church again.

“Alas! the day is wet—as bad as two years back, only not so cold. Everybody has gone to the luncheon at the Town Hall. Poor people! Determined to be gay even in the pouring rain. Cannons firing. In the high up, far, far away planet or orb of light, where Shakespeare must be, can a reflex, a faint murmur, reach him of the little doing in his birthplace to-day in reverence for and honour of his memory? If it can, his kindly heart would be pleased—would find no fault—would take the will for the deed. Let us try and do likewise! I will not mind how I am put out, or what I have to put up with to-night, in *Beatrice*. . . . Lord Leigh brought me a lovely bouquet all of white flowers from Lady Leigh.”

He did more than that. Indeed, but for him there would have been no *Beatrice* at the theatre that night. It was raining in torrents, and every vehicle in the place was forestalled to carry people to the theatre. We were in despair; but, when told how matters stood, Lord Leigh, who could not wait for the play, most kindly said he would somehow find his way home to Stoneleigh Abbey, and accordingly placed his carriage at my wife’s disposal for the evening—a courteous solution of what for a time seemed to be an insuperable difficulty.

This was my wife’s last performance of *Beatrice*. In her *Letter on Beatrice* she says of it:—

It was at Stratford-upon-Avon, on the opening, on 23rd of April 1879 (Shakespeare’s birthday), of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. I had watched with much interest the completion of this most appropriate tribute to the memory of our supreme poet. The local enthusiasm, which would not rest until it had placed upon the banks of his native stream a building in which his best plays might be from time to time presented, commanded my warm sympathy. It is a beautiful building; and when, standing beside it, I looked

upon the church wherein all that was mortal of the poet is laid, and, on the other hand, my eyes rested on the site of New Place, where he died, a feeling more earnest, more reverential, came over me than I have ever experienced even in Westminster Abbey, in Santa Croce, or in any other resting-place of the mighty dead. It was a deep delight to me to be the first to interpret on that spot one of my great master's brightest creations. Everything conspired to make the occasion happy. From every side of Shakespeare's county, from London, from remote provinces, came people to witness that performance. The characters were all well supported, and the fact that we were acting in Shakespeare's birthplace, and to inaugurate his memorial theatre, seemed to inspire us all. I found my own delight doubled by the sensitive sympathy of my audience. Every turn of playful humour, every flash of wit, every burst of strong feeling told; and it is a great pleasure to me to think, that on that spot and on that occasion I made my last essay to present a living portraiture of the Lady Beatrice.

The London season was not allowed to pass without numerous appeals to my wife to give one of her drawing-room Readings, and this she agreed to give upon the 3rd of July. Portions of *Romeo and Juliet* and of *As You Like It* were most earnestly asked for, and a circle of friends, with Mr Irving at their head, filled up the cast. All that the Diary has to say on the occasion is, "July 3.—We gave our reading in the afternoon. Torrents of rain. But some eighty-five people came through it, and dear Miss Jewsbury all the way from Sevenoaks. All seemed pleased." When the programme was finished, some of our guests entreated my wife to give the sleep-walking scene from *Macbeth*. She consented, and, passing into an ante-room for a few minutes' rest, returned with only a long white scarf thrown over the head and dress. It has been already shown (p. 260 *ante*), how great was the effect produced by her reading of this scene in a Paris salon. There it was given under artificial light, here it was given under the full light of sunshine, which had dispelled the clouds and rain of an earlier hour—with what effect the following letters will show. The first is one, written the same evening, by De Quincey's daughter, Mrs Baird Smith, who had seen my wife act in Edinburgh in the early days of her appearance there:—

MY DEAR MRS THEODORE MARTIN,—A few words on leaving you seem but a cold acknowledgment of the supreme pleasure we have enjoyed; so may I add, for my sister and myself, that never even in your glorious prime have we seen anything so overwhelming in its terrific majesty and pathos as the Lady Macbeth. The Rosalind and Juliet were all of the perfect loveliness

we remembered them, but the Lady Macbeth leaves me without words to express the deep sense of awful grandeur, pity, and terror with which it impressed me. But, perfect as my delight was, one moan followed me through it all, that, at a time when it is so cruelly needed, such a pure and ennobling influence should be withdrawn from our poor world. I longed for thousands, instead of tens, to see it, and to be the better for it.

You will forgive my enthusiasm. I had never expected to see you again, and to find you greater than even my youthful remembrance is a little exciting, and will find vent.

With deep and warm thanks, believe me to be, gratefully yours,  
FLORENCE BAIRD SMITH.

Not less interesting is the following letter from Miss Jane Lushington, who had been brought to the reading by Mrs Holman Hunt:—

DEAR MRS THEODORE MARTIN,—I am venturing to send you a few words of grateful thanks for one of the greatest pleasures I have ever had. The graceful sweetness of *Rosalind*—dear *Rosalind*—made me really love her so, that I could hardly bear to part with her into Mrs Theodore Martin again; and *Lady Macbeth* has left me awed and trembling with an almost painful pleasure that I can not put into words. I hope you will not think me audacious in venturing to write; but a pleasure such as you gave us this afternoon, must from its intensity allow of a little daring, and condone it.

Mrs Holman Hunt told me she had asked your permission before asking me to go with her, or I should not have added to your numbers.—Yours sincerely and gratefully.

“They were all pleased.” It will be seen from these letters that this is a very inadequate statement of the impression produced upon this occasion. What that really was will be gathered from the following letter, written by Miss Jewsbury the next day, when she had recovered from the strong emotion which the reading had excited:—

DEAR MRS THEODORE MARTIN,—I must write you a line of thanks for the great pleasure I had yesterday, the remembrance of which will by no means soon pass away.

As to that “sleep-walking scene,” it left me quivering and cold. I could not have entered into any talk with any one after hearing it, and I was glad to get into the open air. You had so seized the inner mystery and meaning, and indicated it so powerfully within the small confined limits on which it had to be presented, that it remained perfect. The *suppressed* force of it added, I think, to the influence. Certainly there was an element of *awfulness* suggested, which takes away my breath as I think of it.



The only time I can ever recollect to have felt the same unspeakable awe was—years ago, many years—when having expressed a wish to see a trial in a court of justice (it was not the fashion for women to go then), I found myself in the old Bailey—a trial for murder going on. I had promised myself to come away before the verdict, *but I could not*. I was too mesmerised to stir. The verdict was—*guilty*—and I heard and *saw* the sentence. I came out in the same bewildered trembling I had yesterday.

As to the Balcony Scene, you know that Juliet is the wonderful impersonation in which you impressed me most, and it was the very last character in which I saw you on the stage,—almost, if not, the last time I was inside a theatre.

In *Rosalind* it seems an impertinence in me to specify, but I was struck to the heart by the way in which you—knowing your own secret—repeat the words “I take you, Orlando, for my husband.” It was exquisite, and must have strangely puzzled any mortal Orlando. But I suppose, as *Rosalind* was the same one in *both* appearances, that Orlando must have felt the subtle influence of his dear lady’s presence.

I had never before seen Mr Irving either on or off the stage, so I was very glad to have the opportunity to look on him. I was much charmed by the way he read, supporting you and indicating the shades of meaning,—and all suppressed into smooth quietness. Above all, I was struck by the subtle way in which he conveyed, without the movement of a muscle of his face, his appreciation and sympathy with what you did. It was an *understanding* of every shade and word you spoke, which touched me. The *moral* of it all was, how the *few* give themselves for the *many*. We have there the *result* of your lives and labours, all melted down to give us pleasure, and we were not *worth* it. Only we could *receive*, and we could be glad and grateful,—but *worth* the life and genius and labour given for our good—no! Only, when people *have* received great gifts and faculties, they are bound under a law to *use them*, or to suffer the remorse, which is the real *rust* and *moth* that eat away great gifts of soul which are not used. . . . —Your affectionate admirer,

GERALDINE E. JEWSBURY.

Thinking Miss Jewsbury’s criticism of his reading would interest Mr Irving, I sent her letter to him to read. He replied, in returning it:—

“15A GRAFTON STREET, 7th July 1879.

“Thank you much for showing me this interesting letter which I return. The criticism concerning Mrs Martin is true and just. If Kean’s interpretation of Shakespeare was like reading him by flashes of lightning, Mrs Martin’s reading is by the broad light of the sun. A more truthful and exquisite conception of *Rosalind* never entered into the imagination of man.

“Fletcher’s criticism on Mrs Martin’s *Lady Macbeth* was confirmed to me fully by the one scene.”



Very beautiful, as it seems to me, and most true, in the expression of what was in the hearts of many who knew my wife in her daily walk and conversation, is the following tribute, which this Reading drew from the gifted friend to whom her letter, quoted p. 224 *ante*, was addressed: "The poor words which dropped from my lips in conventional phraseology of thanks on Thursday sounded strangely to my own ear, either as recognition of what you had given us, or expression of what was in my heart. The yearning to say something truer, deeper, has been present with me ever since, yet, as usual, words seem out of time and tune, and, instead of offering such to you, I have found myself more than once thanking God for that beautiful soul, the outflow from which has come to me ever as a revelation of the divine, not alone in womanhood, but in humanity itself."

Only on two other occasions did my wife give a Reading of this scene from *Macbeth*. The first was in her own drawing-room after a morning reading of *Much Ado About Nothing*, in which Mr Irving took the part of Benedick. The second was one evening in the drawing-room at Louisa Lady Ashburton's beautiful country seat, Kinlochluichart, in Ross-shire. On both occasions my wife yielded to an unexpected solicitation; but, after a few minutes' interval, she seemed to become the vision-haunted somnambulist, and took hold upon the imaginations of those present, as though she were in reality surrounded by the gloomy shadows of her own castle corridors, pale with the pallor wrought by innumerable nights of mental unrest, and with a half-hushed voice, in which there was a wail of heart-searching pathos, telling of agonising remembrances that, as she herself predicted, had come to make her mad. No scenic accessories were needed to deepen the impression created by mere look and movement and utterance.

A further service in the cause of Charity was undertaken by my wife this year, to which a special interest is attached, as it included her last appearance on the stage. The Manchester friends of the late Charles Calvert, who for several years had devoted his theatre there to a very well-studied production of Shakespeare's plays, and had died in poor circumstances, had organised two performances of *As You Like It* for the benefit of

his widow. The performances were to be by amateurs, and to come off in October. Sympathy for the widow overcame my wife's dislike to be associated with amateur work, and the assurance was given that her performance would certainly bring in at least £500 to the widow, which in effect it did. This outweighed all personal considerations, and she agreed to be the Rosalind on the second of the performances, Miss Wallis being the Rosalind on the first. Unluckily my wife had caught a chill at the Birmingham Festival in September, which resulted in a very severe attack of neuralgia, and on the 18th of that month she writes:—

“Not growing strong—cannot throw off the effect of this fearful attack. Took ‘Rosalind’ with me into the garden for a little. How terrible this performance looks now that it draws near, and I feeling so weak! When I read that every seat has been taken for the last fortnight or more, my heart sinks within me. It is hard to fear that one's past self may condemn the present.

“*Sept. 25.*—I gave the evening to Rosalind. What an exquisite creation she is! She combines all the most engaging, and all the noblest and most winning realities of womanhood.”

My wife did not gain strength as the days went on. On the 29th she travelled from our Welsh home to Manchester, where she was hospitably received by Mrs Willert (afterwards Lady Heron), with whom, to her great satisfaction, she found Miss Geraldine Jewsbury staying as a guest. Next day these ladies accompanied her to rehearsal, where she was welcomed with effusion by the amateur company,—a most exceptional one, including, as it did, Messrs Tom Taylor, Herman Merivale, Lewis Wingfield, J. D. Watson, Napier Hemy, Linley Sambourne, and others. She spent four hours in helping them to the due rendering of their parts. Next day she became ill, and on the following, the day of performance, was confined to bed with excessive pain. “Oh,” she writes, “may I be helped to get through to-night! May God in His great mercy have me in His keeping!” From her bed she went to the theatre. But, as usual, her strength rose to the occasion.

She had been accustomed to enthusiastic receptions in Manchester, but the prolonged outburst of cheers and applause which

greeted her appearance completely overcame her, and it took her some time to regain her self-possession. As the play went on she was borne along with more than usual animation. It seemed as if she were possessed by the very spirit of youthful joyousness, and, regardless of every drawback, she carried the character through triumphantly to its close. Her own record next day is: "This has been all along a great trial. Feared I should break down—could hardly keep up in the last act." No trace of this, however, was visible to either actors or audience. "To give an adequate idea of the beauty of the performance," the *Examiner and Times* writes, "we should have to review every scene in which the great actress appeared." Mr Herman Merivale, who was the Touchstone of the evening, wrote:—

It was a worthy and well-chosen tribute to Mr Calvert's memory to act *As You Like It* in his honour. Oh, that play! that chrysolite of a play! that entire and perfect, and love-worthy fairy-tale! . . . I believe, myself, that Shakespeare wrote the part of Rosalind, in a prophetic dream, for Helen Faucit. There never can have been such another. She is all Rosalind. The sweet round voice, the statuesque and gracious attitudes, the perfect tenderness of conception, and the sustained tone of the *Grande dame de par le monde*, as Brantôme has it, who never forgets her royalty for a moment in the lovely garnish of a boy; all these things go together to make of Helen Faucit's Rosalind a thing to be remembered. . . . The abiding charm of this Rosalind is its perfect ladyhood. . . .

If we that played with her shall not forget Helen Faucit, I do not think she will forget her greeting from that crowded theatre, nor the other spontaneous tribute, which, when the curtain had fallen, all those who had played in the comedy with her came forward to give her, hand and heart. It was an unrehearsed effect, but a fine one. Most of all, perhaps, she will remember the burst of applause which, in the cold grey daylight of rehearsal, answered in spite of us to one of those human touches which she threw into the sweet Princess, whom she understands so well. . . . Helen Faucit was the performance, the beginning and the end.

Her fellow-performers, too, were prompted to this demonstration by what one of them, writing in the *Birmingham Daily Mail*, defines as "the graceful and sympathetic manner in which she aided their efforts and counselled their inexperience."

That the incidents of this performance held a pleasant place in my wife's remembrance is shown by what she wrote of it in 1884 in her *Letter 'on Rosalind*:—



I can never forget the warmth of my Manchester friends that night, when I left my retirement to join in helping the widow and children, whom their old manager had left behind him. I had expected, and thought I had nerved myself to meet, a cordial greeting, but this was so prolonged and so overwhelming, that it took away my breath and my courage; and even when at last it ceased, I could not recover myself enough to speak. . . . The old sensation of stage-fright, never completely lost, came back upon me as freshly then as upon the night of my first appearance. After a while, when this had somewhat passed away in the interest of the scene, I was full of gratitude to find that I had not rusted in my privacy. I had found also in the rehearsal of the previous day, which, from the large number attending it, became almost a performance, that I had as much delight as ever in depicting the life of one so dear to my imagination, and that I could do so with as much freshness and elasticity as at the beginning of my career.

I was very much interested in seeing the careful study the actors on this occasion, mostly amateurs, had given to all the characters, great and small, in the play. It was a pleasure to act beside so much intelligence and artistic talent. I felt quite a keen regret when this not-to-be-repeated performance was over.

Pleasure from one point of view this performance no doubt was, but it had another aspect far from pleasant. Ill as she had been beforehand, the effort was too great. For several days after she was confined to bed. "It is well," she writes, three days after the performance, "to be good and charitable, but *this* labour of love has cost almost too much. May the poor widow get all the benefit one would desire from it!" The net receipts for this evening's performance were over £500.

This was my wife's last appearance on the stage. It has been shown that she left it in full possession of her powers; and, had she continued still to practise her art, she might safely have dismissed the fear, at which she hinted above, that "her present would be condemned by her past." But, in the interests of her own health and comfort, the time to withdraw from public life had come, and about this withdrawal she had no misgivings. Outside the sphere in which she had so long worked she was at no loss to find a world of interests. Accordingly, there was for her no monotony in the seclusion of private life, no haunting sense of something wanting, no yearning after the excitement of former years. Above all, there was no self-reproach, that she had not developed the gift of genius to the full measure of her



powers, or had wavered in the faith which had throughout sustained her, that it was a gift to be used for the good of her fellow-creatures. She had "given the people of her best," and henceforth she was content to use her influence within a narrower sphere.

She was made very happy in the opening of the year 1880 by the bringing of my work to a close—*The Life of the Prince Consort*, the progress of which she had watched for years with great anxiety, on account of the labour which it involved, occupied to the very full as I was otherwise by the claims of my crowded professional life. Of her assistance to me in writing this book I cannot speak too highly. To her fine judgment and tact I could always appeal in any difficulty, and no flaw in composition, great or small, ever escaped her severely critical eye. Not in vain had she drunk deep of "English undefiled" in Shakespeare and in Milton, and, not less, in the Bible. Rest and a change of scene had become essential to both of us, and we determined to go for a few weeks to northern Italy, with Venice as our ultimate goal. Two days before we started, The Queen, with many gracious words, invested me as Knight Commander of the Bath, and henceforth, therefore, I must refer to my wife as Lady Martin.

It had been intimated to her that she would be expected to appear at the next Drawing-room, and as we passed through Paris, the skill of the great modiste of the Rue de la Paix was enlisted for her Court dress. He had already made dresses for her. Her Diary records: "*March 25.*—Saw that great man *Worth*, and chose colours for Court dress. Much approved by him—cream satin for dress, and pale blue silk damask, richly embroidered, for train. May I feel better when I wear it! Dress to be ready on our return." Slowly we made our way, through Turin and Milan, to Venice. There the delightful calm, and the fresh breezes of the Lido had a magical effect upon the health and spirits of us both, and this was confirmed by a visit to Verona, a renewed stay in Milan and Turin, and a visit to Baveno on the Lago Maggiore. Thence we returned to Paris, where, after so much travelling and so many unsatisfactory hotels, the Hotel Chatham was a delightful haven of rest. "Went to

Worth's this afternoon," she writes (May 3), "to try on Court dress and train. All seem to think it will be charming. The great man saw it on and approved, suggesting a few alterations." On the 11th (the Drawing-room day) she writes: "Got my hair dressed at 10. How ridiculous to see myself at that early hour in feathers and diamonds! . . . At last we, I first, were ushered into the royal presence. The Queen gave me her hand to kiss most graciously, and smiled most sweetly and kindly. Several of the Princesses shook hands with me, and the Prince of Wales did the same in a very gracious cordial manner. My 'Ogre' followed close behind me, and did *not* tread upon my train." Next day, she writes, "A letter this evening from Lady Ely, saying the Queen wishes us to go to Windsor early on Monday afternoon, and to remain till Tuesday." The letter was to me, and in it Lady Ely said, "The Queen hopes Lady Martin is not very tired to-night, and I am to tell you how much the Queen admired her grace, and thought her beautifully dressed." In her Diary Lady Martin quotes this letter, which, she adds, "being addressed to my husband, made the gracious kindness still more acceptable. In such a throng, and in the quick passage you have to make before the Queen, I should have scarcely thought she would have had time to observe me, or any one." On Monday we dined with The Queen. "Before dinner," Lady Martin writes, "the Queen came up to me in the corridor, and after dinner talked to me most kindly, and asked questions about our travels."

Before going abroad Lady Martin learned with very great regret, that her friend Miss Jewsbury was suffering from an illness which must at no very distant time prove fatal. While moving about on the Continent, she kept the invalid apprised of her movements, and on her return received the following letter:—

3 BURWOOD PLACE, *May* 19, 1880.

DEAR LADY MARTIN,—But this is only your superficial title, and "Helen Faucit" is the style and title of your House of Fame, and Mrs Theodore Martin the title by which you are loved and known in private, and I fear I cannot always remember to call you "My Lady." . . .

I am here, and rather worse than when I wrote to you. Thank you much for the pleasant *Signes de vie* you sent me during your journey.

I want to hear about your dress for the Drawing-room last week. Is

*Worth* a real bodily entity, or only a form of expression? Did you really look upon him with your own eyes? I often wonder what the nominal author of so much elegance can be like? Has he a body and soul under all these clothes?

This letter reached us in Wales. Lady Martin's first visit on returning to town was to answer it in person. On the 3rd of June she writes: "Called on dear Miss Jewsbury—found her looking better than I expected—so cheery and unselfish; knowing the worst, and not fearing it. To hear her talk of it makes me very sad, and yet happy, too. She was always so fond of dress, and pretty things. Inquired about all the particulars of my Court dress, the jewels I wore, &c., &c." No doubt also she insisted upon a full description of the great *Worth*, a man of strong sense and real genius in his craft, with a presence more like that of a hale Lincolnshire farmer than of a fashionable modiste.

Amidst her numerous engagements Lady Martin always found time to visit the bedside of her friend, whose active and cultured mind retained undimmed its interest in the goings-on of the world and the welfare of her friends. In one of these visits she mentioned how much she had been pleased with the performance of a company of Dutch actors at the Alhambra Theatre in June of this year. What struck her most was the "all-round" excellence of the performances, every part having life and character thrown into it, and in this way furnishing a most valuable lesson to the managers of English theatres, by which some of them did not fail to profit. She was charmed with the acting of Miss Beersmans, the leading actress, in whom she recognised with delight a real artist, and she spoke with so much warmth of her performance of Annie Mie in the little play of that name, that Miss Jewsbury said, "Why should you not write to her, and tell her what you have *told me*? It is your duty to do so." Very reluctantly Lady Martin consented, for she was always averse to volunteering opinions either upon her own art or the professors of it. Here I may remark that while she was the acutest she was at the same time the kindest of critics, for who could know better how hard it is to achieve excellence in the actor's art, or be more quick to recognise sincerity of



purpose, and the presence of the imaginative faculty, on which success in the portrayal of character depends? In Miss Beersmans she found both. This was her letter:—

“31 ONSLOW SQUARE, *June 24, 1880.*

“DEAR MADAM,—While sitting by the sick-bed of a dear friend yesterday, I told her of the great pleasure I had received on Friday last from the performance of *Annie Mie*. I tried to explain the story, as I saw it represented, not understanding the language, but feeling and knowing it through the universal language of sympathy. It brought tears into the eyes of my dear friend, when I told her of the touching interview, so admirably represented, between Annie Mie and her daughter, when circumstances compelled her to explain to her innocent child her own past history. I can never forget the truthful, charming representation as given by both mother and daughter. It was a beautifully conceived scene most beautifully rendered. I liked the whole telling of the simple story. Throughout, all was in harmony, both in the play and in the acting. The costumes, too, so exact that you might imagine the men and women in Teniers' and Ostade's pictures were living and moving before you. I interested my friend so much by my description that she urged me to repeat to you what I had told her. She believed that, as artist to artist, my tribute of delight and praise would not be unwelcome. Indeed she pressed it so continuously and urgently upon me *as a duty*, that, to please her, before we parted, I had to give a reluctant consent. I say reluctant, because I could not believe, with her, that any word from me, an entire stranger, whose name even you can never have heard, would give you or your companions in art the smallest gratification.

“My engagements yesterday, to my great regret, prevented me from being present at Drury Lane Theatre. But my husband was there, and came home to me charmed with all he saw, his only drawback, that I could not share his enjoyment. We are so very sorry that the Dutch Company should be leaving us so soon. Perhaps, now that our slow public have wakened up to its merits, you may be inclined to stay longer amongst us. May this be so! Now that I have fulfilled my friend's behest, I have only to



conclude with my apologies for this intrusion on your time. Perhaps I ought to tell you that the dear friend of whom I have spoken is Miss Geraldine Jewsbury—a name well known and respected in our English world of letters.

“I hope that you, or some of your companions, may understand my language better than I do yours. You have spoken to *me* through my eyes, my heart, my imagination. May my voiceless words find some kind interpreter to make them not unwelcome to you!

“Permit me, dear madam, with sincere good wishes and admiration, to subscribe myself, yours very truly, an English sister artist,  
HELENA FAUCIT MARTIN.”

A copy of this letter was sent to Miss Jewsbury, and she wrote (June 26) in reply :—

DEAR FRIEND,—Your letter is perfect, and if I had any share in strengthening your heart to write it, it is one of the best things to be laid to my credit! I feel grateful to you for writing it, and next for letting me see it. It was very good of you to take the trouble of copying it for me. I think the perfect expression of your understanding sympathy made that letter one of the loveliest things I ever read. But what was *even more* beautiful was the gentle unaffected *humility* with which you kept yourself out of sight and all you have done, and only showing through and underlying the letter. Oh, the letter is lovely, and that's all I can say. The comfort and gratification it will have given to Annie Mie comforts me to think of.

Mr Froude was here one day this week, and I tried to tell him what you had said of these Dutch plays (a very faint reflex of what you had said), but it gave him occasion to speak of you, and I wish you could have heard the noble testimony he bore to you. It arose out of what I had been telling him about the plays.

Miss Beersmans replied from Amsterdam, to which she had returned, much to the regret of a public who, as usual, had only become alive, when too late, to the excellence of herself and the Dutch Company. She expressed the warmest gratitude for the sympathetic appreciation of her efforts, “Comme de l'artiste à l'artiste,” expressed as they were in terms, “dont je suis fière, et que je tacherai de conserver toute ma vie.”

During my wife's frequent visits Miss Jewsbury urged a request which had been again and again made by friends, and also by myself, to put on record her own views of the female

characters of Shakespeare, by the impersonation of which she was most widely known. This request she had always resisted, having a deep-seated distrust of her power to express in words what she had been accustomed to express by the living commentary of voice and action. But to this disclaimer her friend would not listen. "Of course," she urged, "you are bound by the responsibility of possessing the gift to do it, to write down all you know or have learned about Ophelia and the others." That she, who could talk so well of "Ophelia and the others," as my wife had talked to her, could not write as well, Miss Jewsbury would not admit. Still, nothing but her appeal to her sense of duty would, I believe, have overcome my wife's scruples. It was hard, too, for her to say no to the deathbed entreaty of so dear a friend. Accordingly she promised she would at least make the attempt to put in writing her views as to the character of *Ophelia*. This promise she at once fulfilled in a letter addressed to Miss Jewsbury, who wrote in answer (August 27):—

DEAR FRIEND,—Many thanks for writing and sending me *Ophelia*. You have revealed the secret of the depth of your acting and of its beauty. Please do another. Portia is one of my great heroines. How came you by your *silent* play in the casket scene? Take any of the galaxy you will. I want to hear of them all, but, I think, of Portia most—such a really typical great lady and woman.

Anxious to gratify her friend, whose strength was rapidly failing, my wife spent her first leisure in Wales in writing a letter to her on Portia. But before it could be printed her friend had passed beyond "these bounds of time and space." I knew how welcome these essays would be to her numerous personal friends, and had them printed for private circulation. The earliest copy was sent to The Queen, who with her wonted courtesy telegraphed at once to my wife, "Most thankful for the very interesting brochure you have sent me"; and in a letter to me her Majesty wrote: "The Queen has much admired Lady Martin's characters of Ophelia and Desdemona. . . . Why should she not go on with all the Shakespearian female characters?"

When my wife had fulfilled her promise to Miss Jewsbury to write on Ophelia, Portia, and Desdemona, she was unwilling to write more. But letters of acknowledgment, couched in the warm-

est terms of admiration, poured in upon the surprised authoress from friends eminent in literature, and science, and the arts, almost all urging that these essays should be published, and followed by further studies of Shakespeare's heroines. They were then given for publication to *Blackwood's Magazine*. It was only to be expected that, when given to the public, they should revive vivid recollections in the minds of many—recollections of the spell under which she had erewhile so often held them by her impersonations of Shakespeare's women. Glowing tributes of gratitude for what she had been to them reached her from entire strangers, and brought with them the assurance, which her modest estimate of her own powers often made her hesitate to accept, that her influence upon the stage had worked for good. Some of these she preserved, and among them one from the Rev. Archer Gurney, which is valuable for what it tells of the impression produced by her in the days of her first youth under Mr Macready's management.

Will you [he writes, April 3, 1881] allow a clergyman, who also calls himself a poet and a dramatist, to thank you for your charming and sympathetic papers on Shakespeare's heroines? The period of my youth coincides with that of your own dramatic triumphs, of which I remember many—Constance, Virginia, Lady Mabel (was it not?), heroine of the otherwise painful *Patrician's Daughter*, and, *above all*, Rosalind, so aerial, graceful, candid, sportive, chaste, and charming altogether! The ideal you have left in my mind is the sense of a singular nobility of nature, great dignity tempered by grace. Of a Siddons and O'Neill I of course know nothing, and I had not the good fortune to admire Mrs Charles Kean; but I have seen most of the chief actresses of France and Germany, the extravagantly overrated Rachel, the highly respectable Ristori, and some German actresses, who were really very sympathetic in a tender, loving, clinging way. But they all lacked the union of nobility, grace, and pathos, which I recognised in Helen Faucit. Pardon me for having said so much. I think you were slightly injured for a time by Mr Macready's strong mannerisms, especially perhaps in Virginia, but you soon rose above that. He was a wonderful Shylock (to my mind) and Henry IV., but all level speaking was sadly marred by interjections of hard breathing. Strange that he should have declined the part of Tresham in my friend Browning's lovely *Blot on the Scutcheon*, which he has never equalled, not even in *Colombe's Birthday*. Only this I will say, Mildred Tresham and Colombe are both transcripts of Helen Faucit, whose art-ideal must have penetrated the poet through and through.

Encouraged by this and many similar tributes, my wife



promised Mrs S. C. Hall to write a letter to her upon Juliet. She was at work upon this when Mrs Hall died after a few days' illness. The Diary (January 31, 1881) says, "Heard in the afternoon of the death of my old, dear, and constant friend from my youth up, Mrs S. C. Hall. Did not know that she was ill. Her death, they say, was calm and painless. Her loss makes a great gap, and fills me with sorrow. Hers is the gain!" Next day, she adds, "Tried to work at my *Juliet*, but old thoughts come back, and fill me with regret for the dear friend who was always so kind and encouraging to me." When the letter, addressed to Mrs S. C. Hall as originally intended, was printed, it was sent to her husband, who wrote:—

I was not prepared to read the name I did read on the last page of the essay. I read it with mingled emotions of pride and gratitude. She [his wife] has earned this beautiful tribute from you, if strong affection, exceeding respect, and boundless admiration could earn it. From the first time she saw you, when you were a very young girl—a perilous world before you—these mingled feelings greatly attached her to you. She had natural pride in the success that hailed your progress, but, far more than that, she loved you very dearly. Far more even than that, she respected you, and saw in your triumphs the just reward of a good woman—the advocate and the possessor of goodness and virtue. I am very sure that the feelings she entertained for you, when she was in "life," she retains for you in what is wrongly called "death."

In a letter from the late Mr William Black the novelist, who in his early youth had the good fortune, in Glasgow, to see my wife in Juliet, he speaks in very interesting terms of the influence it produced upon his mind and character:—

I was brought up among one of the very rigidest sects of Scotch Puritans, who seemed to consider the expression of affection, even between parents and children, as a sort of weakness; and your Juliet was an extraordinary revelation to me of womanly tenderness and grace and beauty and passion. It was, as I say, really a revelation; it made the world quite different; and what I owe to it in my own little bit of business, it would be difficult for me to estimate. Moreover, I have never seen anything like it since, except when I have seen yourself upon the stage; and indeed, taking your acting on the one side, and Salvini's on the other, these seem to me, in our day, to have shown to the public that particular art of which Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, and the rest of them in their day, wrote, but of which nowadays I can find no other trace.



## CHAPTER XVII.

IN the winter of 1881 my wife was much attracted by the acting of Mr Edwin Booth, who was playing a series of his chief characters at the Princess's Theatre. She liked Mr Booth himself, and he was a frequent visitor at our house. In his *King Lear* especially she found much to admire. Thus (February 18) she writes, "Went to see Mr Booth in *King Lear*. Very much pleased; it is quite his best bit of acting. The Fourth Act, mad scene, was very fine. It was indeed a treat to see such acting." Of his *Othello* she also thought highly.

On the 2nd of April we started for Italy, intending to go as far as Naples, but my wife's health failed on the way, and we had to be content with Turin, Genoa, Florence, Pisa, and Rome. The copious memoranda of the Diary show how carefully and critically she studied the works of art in all these places. I must find room for what she says of the famous Titian in the Borghese Palace, generally known as "Sacred and Profane Love," for the sake of the ingenious suggestion it contains as to the purpose of the painter—a suggestion which found favour with more than one of our principal artists.

"*May 2, 1881.*—Went to the Borghese Gallery. Fresh delight in the fine Titian, which they call 'Sacred and Profane Love'; but there is nothing profane about it. One figure to my mind is as sacred as the other. Look at the heads, the faces! The undraped woman's head is, in my opinion, even more chaste, if possible, than the carefully dressed figure, which has the hands gloved. The likeness is so remarkable, that I believe Titian meant both to be the same woman, showing how noble and chaste she could look under any aspect. There is a vase, a small lamp



Walker & Cockerell photo

*Lady Martin, 1881.*  
*From a drawing by Miss Annette Elias.*



burning, it may be holy oil, in the hand; look at this, and the expression of the face, so grave, so earnest! Where can you find the profane love? What a pity something has happened to the right hand, on which she rests! It is completely distorted. All else is so composed, lovely, and satisfying. But you easily forget the hand."

We reached home on the 20th May, full of pleasant reminiscences, my wife very much fatigued, and delighted, as most of us are, after a foreign excursion, to see "how green, and fresh, and homelike all the landscape looked" between Dover and London.

This season the actors of the Meiningen Company, preceded by a great reputation, appeared at Drury Lane. Unfortunately my wife did not see their representation of *Julius Cæsar*, their best work. Of what she did see she writes:—

"July 2.—Went to see the Germans act *The Winter's Tale*. All the early part was delightful, the *mise en scène* and grouping perfect. Much disappointed with the trial scene. They keep Hermione *standing* all through it. This and her too vehement action and speech would never suggest the sick-bed she has risen from, and herself tells you of. Again, the last Act was destitute of all ideality. So widely apart from what Shakespeare describes—no *wonder*, no *mystery* about it.

"July 16.—Went to see the *Preciosa*. Some of the music very pretty, and the scenery and grouping most picturesque; but the more I see the less I admire the acting of these Germans. There is a sad vehemence and monotony about it, and they share the faults of our actors, and in the same degree.

"July 17.—Went to the garden party at Marlborough House. It seemed fuller than usual. We did not stay after the Queen and Prince had spoken to us, yet did not get home till nearly 8. This robbed me of the rest I had hoped to have before dinner and dressing. The Crown Princess of Prussia talked some time with us, and thanked me warmly for the copies of my *Letters* which had been sent to her. She has a charming face, so bright and intelligent. She does not care for the Meiningen actors—thinks them mechanical and with no inspiration.



“In the evening dear Lady Essex<sup>1</sup> and her niece came punctually to the hour—10—so that she should not be in the crowd. Found her a comfortable seat, where she could hear, if not see. Others followed in quick succession—in all from eighty to ninety. We had a little music, but all seemed bent on my doing something. Clifford Harrison went through my scenes with Sir Peter Teazle extremely well. Later in the evening they teased me into giving the Balcony Scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, much, *very much*, against my will. Clifford Harrison read *Romeo* admirably, with warmth and expression. Our party broke up between 1 and 2.”

The late Mr Lawrence Barrett, the distinguished American actor, had come late, along with Mr and Mrs Hare, and it was chiefly upon their solicitation that the balcony scene was given. A few days afterwards Mr Barrett wrote, “To have *seen* Lady Martin would have been a happiness to me, but to have heard her, as I was permitted to do, and thus recall the glories which are linked with her name, is an honour which I would not have lost for much else that we prize.”

“*July 19.*—Had a great shock this morning on seeing in the newspaper the death of dear Dean Stanley. What a grief! what a general loss! Can hardly realise it. My ‘Ogre’ did not like to tell me, when he left me early this morning.

“*July 21.*—Got to Bryntysilio to-day. So sad to lose the Dean. Another bit out of one’s life! He was to have come here to us on a visit this year and preached at our little church.”

Beside this entry is inscribed a copy of the Dean’s beautiful poem, beginning “Till Death us part,” always full of comfort to my wife, as it must have been to him, inspired, as it is, by the hope of reunion with his wife in an after-state of existence.

Having promised to deliver in the autumn two lectures on Horace and his Friends at the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution, I took the opportunity of my visit there to go to St Andrews to deliver my Inaugural Address as the Lord Rector of its University. My wife accompanied me.

<sup>1</sup> On the 22nd of February 1882 the Diary records: “The sweet dear Countess of Essex died this morning. What a pure spirit has gone home!”

“Oct. 19.—A tedious journey to St Andrews. . . . At the station Principal Tulloch met us with a large body of students, who gave their new Lord Rector a hearty cheering. . . . While I was dressing for dinner the Principal came to my door and said a torchlight gathering of the students awaited us in the quadrangle. I had to put my fur cloak about me, and we stood together at the top step just outside the hall door, while tremendous cheering went on. Then the students sang a long *Bon Gaultier* ballad with great energy and humour, winding up with more cheering.

“Oct. 20, *Sunday*.—Went to the 11 o'clock service with Principal Tulloch to his pew. Dr Boyd preached. After lunch he came to take us over the ruins of the Castle, Cathedral, &c. A lovely day. . . . A few guests to dinner, and some of the older students in the evening. Every one so warm and kind. Invitations coming in all round, if we could accept them. The students, it seems, are entreating the Principal to ask me to read to them on Tuesday.” This she agreed next day to do.

“Oct. 21.—The Principal took us ladies to the Hall about a quarter before two. The students received me very warmly. We went to a slightly raised platform near the Lord Rector's chair and desk, which were in the middle. The students continued their songs until the arrival of the Principal at 2 o'clock with the Lord Rector in his robes. After the oath, administered in Latin, Sir Theodore took the chair amid enormous cheering, which continued at intervals throughout the Address. . . . Happily I kept all the nervousness to myself. It was a delight to me to watch the students' faces: they looked so well amused, so intelligent, and so interested in the whole Address. The same cheering at the end, and, after we left, they continued their songs. There were some guests to dinner, and after nine the Principal took me to the Hall, which was already very full of professors, students, ladies, &c. This was a very fatiguing time for me—the number of people to be introduced to, questions to be asked and answered, &c. The papers say there were 400 guests. We were very glad to get home, but the Principal did not think it right to take me away till half-past ten.

“Oct. 22.—Went to the Town Hall for my reading at 8 o'clock.

The night was fearful with wind and rain. The platform was very high and awkward, the desk most inconvenient, and the gas at my side flickered so over my book that I sometimes lost my place. I read the trial scene of *The Merchant of Venice*, and part of the three last Acts of *As You Like It*. Audience silent as mice, except at the end of scenes, when applause was vociferous. Very difficult to read, when so little sympathy is shown during the reading—when no one appears to understand and appreciate with you the exquisite thoughts and words.”

Nevertheless the appreciation, if not loud, was deep. Years have not effaced the remembrance of the impression produced by the personality of the reader upon that and every other occasion where she was seen during this visit. Next day, owing to previous engagements, we had to bid adieu to the kind hosts and many friends who had made our visit to St Andrews altogether pleasant. The students, in particular, quite won my wife's heart by the cordiality and perfect courtesy of the reception they gave us.

It required a lengthened rest to enable her to recover from the fatigue and excitement of this visit, and for many months she suffered from intermittent attacks of the neuralgia, which chequered the rest of her life and made much of it a martyrdom of pain. On the advice of her physicians to try for a time the climate of Southern Italy, we left England in March 1882, intending to visit Naples and Sorrento. But we were again disappointed. Lady Martin's health failed her in Paris, and Dr Alan Herbert, whom we had to call in there, dissuaded her from making so long a journey, and advised her to try instead the air of Monte Carlo. Thither we accordingly went. The weather was most propitious—Queen's weather, in fact, for her Majesty was then at the Château des Rosiers, Mentone—my wife's pains were diminished, and she was able to walk frequently to the Monaco promontory, with its hedgerows of geraniums and splendid outlook on the Mediterranean. For some time after her return home the good effect of this visit continued, and she was able to see, and be seen by, her friends as before. Again she was urged to give one of her home readings. Beatrice was the character asked for; Mr Irving undertook Benedick, and



the other characters were distributed among friends. While busy with arranging for this reading, the Diary records, "came a telegram saying that we were invited to dine with the Queen to-morrow, and sleep at the Castle."

"June 17.—Mr Irving came in the morning and we read the scene of Benedick and Beatrice. Went to Windsor by 5 o'clock train. The suite of rooms assigned to us, Sir John Cowell told me, was that which Lord Beaconsfield usually occupied. There is in them a portrait of him as quite a young man. The young D'Israeli, if not strictly handsome, must have been distinguished looking. It brought back to me the old, frail-looking, yet not bowed figure, which I saw last in the corridor of the Castle, and talked to about Venice, when he told me, *why* the descriptions given of scenery were usually so unsatisfactory—they were always too long. . . . It seems but the other day, and yet it is quite two years since Lord B. talked with me there, looking so delicate and bloodless. He did not live very long after. During dinner the Queen looked much preoccupied. How natural, considering the state of affairs! In the corridor, after speaking to Lady Clifden, the Queen came to me. H.M. talked a long time in such a lively and pleasant tone. It seemed, I was told, a very long time to those standing by. H.M. then went to others, ending with Sir Theodore. The Queen gave me her hand again as farewell, and then we went to the drawing-room.

"June 20.—Soon after 3 P.M. our reading began, our important guests being very punctual—the Max Müllers and others coming from Oxford, and having to return at once. It was over a little before 5, and seemed to give great pleasure. Mr Irving was livelier than at the other readings, the rest of my 'Company' doing their very best, and reading extremely well—especially Leonato [Mr Ainger] and Hero [Miss Filippi]. It surprised me to find the perfect ease with which I used my voice—so flexible and variable in tone; and, had I needed it, all the usual strength was at my command. What a gift this has been! All the brain, and heart, and study in the world would do little without a fit instrument to convey their meaning."

The quiet of our Welsh home, to which we went a few days afterward, brought a comparative freedom from pain. This gave



my wife courage to write of *Imogen*, which she had promised to Miss Swanwick she would do.

“*Sept. 1.*—Am working at *Imogen*. The play is so uneven, so difficult, so full of diverse characters! Cannot please myself at all. It will be, as Mrs Duncan Stewart said, ‘I shall never write of her,’ but then she added, ‘as I acted her.’ Certainly my heart was with her always in her nobleness, her courage, and her unselfish patience and gentleness.

“*Sept. 3.*—Did not sleep all night—not a wink. *Imogen* has become a nightmare to me. Must cease to-day, and only answer my neglected letters.

“*Sept. 6.*—Have managed to sketch something of what I wish to say of *Imogen*. Hope my brain will be clearer and less perplexed when we return from Scotland.”

To Scotland we went a few days afterward, to fulfil long-promised visits to Mr (afterwards Sir) John Fowler at Braemore, and to Louisa Lady Ashburton at Kinlochluichart, both in Ross-shire, and to the Countess of Seafield at Castle Grant, in Inverness-shire. By the 6th of October we had returned to our Welsh home. Four days afterwards, it appears from the Diary, that my wife was again at work upon *Imogen*, “but much interrupted by letter-writing.”

“*Oct. 24.*—Winding up *Imogen*. Something depresses me very much. I shall be glad, at least, when she is off my mind, I take her troubles so foolishly to heart. I always did. Wrote conclusion to my *Imogen* letter to-day.

“*London, Nov. 14.*—Miss Anna Swanwick came in just as we were going out. Dear, sweet little woman, it is always a pleasure to look on her,—like a piece of true Nature, frank, bright, and sympathetic. At my request she took away the sheets of my *Imogen* letter,—which is dedicated to her,—to read and find fault. She looked, they told me, full of delight, when she heard it was finished.

“*Dec. 3.*—Went to church in the morning. Mr Momerie preached. Sermon good, but a little too commonplace—more like a lecture-room discourse. However, reverence is a thing hardly known at the present time. They will not make much of religion without it. But science is to take the place of it. They

will not get much comfort, though, when needed, out of all their discoveries.

“*Dec. 11.*—Some very nice letters arrived from those to whom private copies of my *Imogen* letter have gone. But oh, how I miss the dear Dean of Westminster, and some others who have left us!

“*Dec. 21.*—We went this afternoon at Mr Aidé’s request to the New Dramatic School in Argyle Street to hear the recitations of the pupils. The speeches were given, some of them fairly enough, some as bad as could be. None of them much above an ordinary school speech-making day. Perhaps another three months’ practice may make all the difference, if the pupils are not too old. *Nothing can be done in the dramatic art without natural gifts to begin with. I am quite sure of this.*

“1883. *Jan. 16.*—Went to the Burlington Gallery. Saw the Linnells and the Rossettis, and some of the Old Masters. Why do *these* always satisfy best? Is it the harmony, with a certain retiring reticence about them,—the feeling that they are not pushing before you all they could,—a self-respecting reserve, so that the fancy can play over them?”

During the next two months my wife, with her wonted courage, struggled against continual attacks of pain, of which those who saw her in society, cheerful, sympathetic, and taking a lively interest in everything, had no idea. But early in March she was prostrated by neuralgia. The attack was of the most alarming nature, and was traced by all her physicians to the exhaustion of nervous energy, for which her early artistic career was mainly responsible. “The gods exact a heavy toll for their gifts,” a favourite saying of Mr Huxley’s, was markedly exemplified in her case. While, as we have seen, little more than an undeveloped girl, she found herself, all at once, raised by mere force of genius to the position of leading actress in the great theatres of Covent Garden and Drury Lane. Thus an undue strain was from the first put upon her powers, which became greater under Mr Macready’s Drury Lane management, and from the effect of which she never recovered. She lived then at Brompton, more than three miles distant from the theatre, was expected to attend rehearsals by ten o’clock in the morning,

winter and summer—new five-act blank-verse plays were being constantly produced, and then she was frequently detained at rehearsals till so late in the day that she had not time to go home to dine. Thus she had frequently to trust for refreshment to what her dresser could prepare for her in her dressing-room, as by seven o'clock she had to appear on the stage in a five-act play, returning home towards midnight, with the prospect of the same routine to be gone through next day. "At the end of a play," she writes (December 18, 1887), "I could often have lain down and begged to be left where I was. The dressing and driving home, always three miles, seemed the worst fatigue of all—the big drop in the cup too much." Her delight in her art, and determination to sacrifice everything to the achievement of excellence in it, could alone have supported her through these years of unremitting toil. The body was sustained by the spirit, but at a heavy cost. After an interval of more than a year's comparative rest, she had somewhat rallied in physical strength, when she appeared in Paris in 1845, and yet her physician there told her (see p. 142 *ante*), "The mind had been suffered to prey upon the body in a cruel manner, and, instead of perpetual delicacy of health, he only wondered she was alive." During the six following years, in which she continued the active exercise of her profession, the exhaustion of the strong emotions which gave to her performances the charm of sincerity, was often a source of anxiety to her friends. Beloved as she was by all who knew her, and rejoicing in the affection of friends who died in anxiety to make her scanty holidays restful and happy, her sensitive and unselfish nature caused many trials to her nervous system. "At all periods of my life," says an entry in one of her Diaries, "I have felt too keenly for my happiness. I can never remember when another's suffering was not my own;" and how acute that was it would be difficult for a stranger to understand.

Days and nights of continual agony, for which the most eminent physicians could find no remedy or even alleviation, continued for several months. It was not till the end of June that the pains began to abate, and she was able to be moved. Change of air was recommended, and Richmond was selected, as she was too weak to be carried farther, "To think," she writes,

“that I should be brought here to recover health, where so many months of my childhood were passed.” It was a delight to her to be driven to the spots in the neighbourhood, and especially to those in the great park, which spoke to her of the holidays of her youth. Here she regained sufficient strength to be able to travel at the end of July in an invalid carriage to our home in Wales, where she grew slowly but only slightly better. She was able to see a few friends, but the fatigue and noise of conversation distressed her—indeed she was, and continued for a long time to be, so sensitive to sound, that the mere click of a teaspoon on a saucer caused her acute pain. We returned to London at the end of October, and then went on to Bath in hopes, which were not realised, of benefit from the waters there. “What a year was this last!” she writes there on the first day of 1884, “May the good God in His mercy think fit to inflict less pain upon us in this, and in any case give me the power to bear it patiently, resignedly! We are in His hands. Oh, may He deal gently, mercifully with us!”

“*Jan.* 11, 1884.—The Princess Christian called. Was very kind, quite tender over me—says I do not look quite so ill as she expected. One always perks up upon occasion. But, oh, how ill I *feel!*”

Presently neuralgia set in again.

“*Jan.* 23.—The whole of this week too dreadful to record—*pain, pain, pain, night and day.*

“*Jan.* 25.—A dreadful night. Princess Christian came in the afternoon. After her talk with Sir Theodore, saw me in the library. She is always very feeling and kind.

“*Jan.* 29.—Sir James Paget came. Says there is no disease—*only* deep-seated neuralgia. What an *only!* Oh, so weak and pained and depressed! Oh for heart and hope to believe that all is right! May God help me to bear my cross, and put my trust in Him!”

She had still many months to endure of this fresh attack of neuralgia. She was suffering most acutely when this entry occurs in her Diary:—

“*March* 28.—Shocked beyond telling and grieved, to see on a placard, as we were driving this afternoon, the announcement of



the sudden death of the Duke of Albany. Oh, what must all the Royal people be feeling! The dear Queen! His poor wife!

“*March* 29.—Alas! alas! It is impossible to get over the shock. Feel too ill to do anything, think of anything else.”

Prince Leopold, of whom she had seen much when at Osborne in 1871, and who had always remained on the most friendly footing with us, was a great favourite with her; she kept his letters, of which she had many, and always thought and spoke of him with a very tender feeling of regret.

All through the summer the fearful neuralgic pains continued; but my wife was able at times to see her friends, to move about a little in society, to visit the exhibitions and the theatres. By the middle of July we went to Bryntysilio. Soon after our arrival she felt strong enough to resume what we called our Sunday readings, when, after a short sermon—Kingsley’s or some other writer’s—she would read a poem or two to the assembled household and any guests who might be with us, and close with a prayer. “In the evening,” she records (July 27), “we had the servants in—quite an audience, seven of them. No readings last year. They seemed much surprised and pleased by my beginning again.” These readings were continued yearly, until her failing strength put an end to them. When the poems were pathetic, one often heard from the sobs of the women how deeply they were moved. When they were humorous, they were greeted by quiet ripples of laughter. The power of the artist was equally shown in both cases.

Now that the severity of the nerve pains was somewhat relaxed, my wife sought distraction in writing her essay on *Rosalind*, which Mr Browning had begged she would write. It was one of the brightest of the series of her Essays, and yet it was written mostly in bed, between intervals of pain, with pencil on fragments of paper, which had to be transcribed for her to piece together afterwards. Nevertheless, it was rapidly written; for the subject so possessed her, that, having once begun, she could not rest till her mind was cleared of it. Copies for private circulation were quickly printed and sent to her friends.

“*Oct.* 4.—Copies of *Rosalind* arrived. Sent off my first to the Queen.

“Oct. 8.—Many kind letters to-day about *Rosalind*—an especially gracious one from the Prince of Wales.

“Oct. 9.—A kind letter to-day from Princess Christian about *Rosalind*, and many others from various people. The cry out now is for *Beatrice*. I have no heart for writing now. I thought this would be the *very* last.”

But this, happily, it was not to be. For many weeks after this time neuralgic pains set in again with unrelenting severity. But, despite of them, she began to meditate her letter on *Beatrice*, for which Mr Ruskin, among others, was pressing. So early as the 1st of December she writes:—

“Just heard from Mr Blackwood that he would be glad of the *Beatrice* letter for next number of the *Magazine*. I am sure this cannot be. It is much too difficult a subject to be treated hastily.

“Dec. 31.—Early this morning came a telegram from the Queen announcing the engagement of Princess Beatrice to Prince Henry of Battenberg. This greatly rejoices us. Sir Theodore wrote to the Queen in answer to her telegram, and I wrote to the Princess Beatrice. I trust and think this engagement will be a happiness to the Queen, as well as the Princess, in giving her a son at home.

“1885. Jan. 1.—A very affectionate letter of good wishes from Lady Ely. She tells us the particulars of the Princess Beatrice’s betrothal—how they met, &c.. We went to Miss Swanwick’s this afternoon—a very pleasant gathering of friends. It ought to comfort me to see how glad they are to see me out again. But how sad would they be for me, to know how greatly I suffer still!

“Jan. 5.—A letter from Lady Ely this morning telling us that the Queen would be ‘charmed’ to have my *Letters on Shakespeare’s Women* dedicated to her when published in a volume. How good and gracious of her Majesty! We never expected it, nor should have asked the honour ourselves. Kind Lady Ely has done it for us. I wrote at once to express my gratitude to her Majesty.

“Jan. 23.—A most kind and charming letter from Mr Ruskin. Says he is proud of having my *Beatrice* letter addressed to him,

and that I have made her dearer to him than ever, and *real*. This pleases me very much."

Difficult though my wife found it to treat of *Beatrice*, yet, ill though she was at the time, her letter, which contained an elaborate analysis, not of the character of *Beatrice* only, but of the whole play, was written very rapidly, and appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* for February 1885. It was very warmly received, and the demand for a volume containing all the Shakespeare Letters became so urgent that she began at once to revise them for the purpose. "My dear 'Ogre,'" she writes, February 19, "wants to make a pretty volume of it. Would that the inside were as satisfactory! Looking over Letters, and finding very much to amend." No pains were spared to make the volume beautiful. It soon went out of print, and is now much sought after by lovers of handsome books.

Though never free from pain, my wife now gained somewhat in strength, and was able to go to *matinées* at the theatre, whenever any play of interest was given.

"*March* 28.—Went to a *matinée* at the Lyceum to see Miss Anderson in *Julia* (*Hunchback*). Never saw the play acted before. . . . The critics now find nothing in the play. This is a mistake. There is very much in it, if the actors could bring it out. How different it must have been when first represented! How pretty Miss Anderson looked!

"*April* 3.—Miss Anderson came to afternoon tea. I read to her at her request some scenes from the *Lady of Lyons*, and lent her my prompt book. We like her frank manners very much.

"*April* 18.—Went to Lyceum *matinée* of *Ingomar*. Very fairly acted. Miss Anderson was charming as *Parthenia*. It is quite her best character, full of sweetness and dignity."

During the next few months my wife beguiled the hours of ever-present pain in revising her *Shakespeare Letters* for a cheaper edition of the collective volume. When her task was done the thought came to her, which must come to all thoughtful authors, "Was what she had written worth doing?" and she writes (*September* 4, 1885): "It seems strange the having nothing to do—no looking back to my earliest past life—no papers and MSS. filling the tables in my *boudoir*—no one coming in and

begging me to leave my task, and not bring on the sad head pains. I wonder whether it was all worth while!—this looking back, which gave me so much pleasure and pain. It pleased my dearest one, and a few others that I know of, so I must rest and be thankful, and not regret my poor little book. It cannot do harm, if no good.”

The reception it met might have assured her that what she had written was “worth while.” The book was spoken of by reviewers abroad as well as at home as a valuable addition to Shakespearian interpretation, and edition after edition of the book was called for in quick succession. To return to the Diary.

“Nov. 23, 1885.—In despair at my long confinement ventured to the South Kensington Museum this afternoon. Found the Tanagra figures. None among them so graceful and pretty as ours. Some sweet lovely little faces. Why should the Greek Islands have carried away such grace and beauty and sweetness, and left none for us? Did the people deserve to possess such excellences more than we do?—*and is that why?*”

“Dec. 2.—Oh, bliss! Another sunshiny day! How different life looks and feels! How much better one bears one’s pains!

“Dec. 16.—We dined with Dr and Mrs Smith—the last house I dined at before this dreadful illness, alas! Sat between Robert Browning and Lord Arthur Russell, with Sir Henry Layard opposite. Pleasant talk, of course. We are very fond of the Dr and kind Mrs Smith. Mr Browning has bought one of the palaces on the Grand Canal. He invites us to visit him, and so do the Layards. Oh, would that I could hope to see lovely peaceful Venice again!”

Christmas this year was very happily spent by us at Weston House as the guests of the Countess of Camperdown. Her sons, Lord Camperdown and the Hon. George Duncan, were there, and also her daughter, Lady Abercromby, all of whom my wife numbered among her most valued friends. On her return to town (31st December) the Diary records: “Found a book for Sir Theodore inscribed by the Queen at Christmas, and then came to me from her Majesty a very pretty hand-painted card with a spray of Scotch heather, the back of the card inscribed by the Queen, and



with her good wishes for the New Year to me." On each succeeding Christmas the same gracious remembrance was shown.

For some time my wife had been engaged in the sadly sweet task of looking over and destroying old letters, and on January 11, 1886, she writes:—

"Still at my letters—cannot destroy them all. *Must keep some*, to remind me of the love I have once had, and which I trust has only passed before, and will be mine again at our happy meeting. When I look on the writing, I feel that I yet have *part of what belonged to them*, and *what was most dear to me*.

"*Jan. 12.*—This evening we dined with Miss North.<sup>1</sup> [The distinguished flower-painter.] As usual, her round table was a most pleasant one. It seems to be quite strange dining out again, and mixing in company. All those who know us welcome me back so kindly.

"*March 24.*—Took my first drive to-day for, oh, how many weeks. The day very mild. Such a delight to feel the air! Her Majesty sent a messenger this evening to inquire after my health. How very kind and gracious! I hardly dare to say that my pains are lighter, because they usually return at once, if I make any boast.

"*March 26.*—My 'Ogre' has been reading aloud during the winter some of Walter Scott's novels, *The Fortunes of Nigel* just closed, and we are now beginning *Redgauntlet*, which I don't seem to remember so well as the others. I like those read best to which his Scotch tongue can give the right meaning and accent. How delicious to hear him read 'the Bailie' and all the Scotch bits in *Rob Roy*, the *Antiquary*, and *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*. He reads to us generally from afternoon tea to dinner, and after dinner until our little game of whist closes the evening. Happy quiet times, if only pain could have been absent.

"*June 23.*—Went to matinée at Adelphi. *Suspicious Husband*, a very dreary and unpleasant play—*so acted*. All the brightness and sparkle, which one could imagine Garrick giving it, being away. The manners and ideas of life so different.

<sup>1</sup> Miss Marianne North, the labours of whose life in painting the flora of foreign countries are now preserved in the gallery erected by her in Kew Gardens.

Why try to reproduce what has no virtue in itself, only living an ephemeral life because of the excellence of its interpretation. Of how many plays, now deservedly extinct, may we say the same?"

It had been an old promise of my wife's to Miss Anna Swanwick that she would read *Rosalind*, if Miss Swanwick gave a reading of *As You Like It*, at her house in the Regent's Park. Seeing my wife to all appearance in better health, Miss Swanwick claimed fulfilment of the promise. The 30th of June was fixed, and a strong cast, which included Canon Ainger, Professor Plumptre, Canon Bell, Mr Kegan Paul, Mr Dillon Croker, among others, ensured a happy result. "Day intensely hot," says the Diary. "Felt it very much. Reading this afternoon of *As You Like It* at Miss Swanwick's. The long promised, and, alas! put off so often on my account. I did not grow hoarse. Rooms not too crowded. All went off well, and our audience appeared to be delighted."

Only once more did my wife give a reading of this kind. It was also arranged by Miss Swanwick—the play *Cymbeline*. The other readers were much the same as for *As You Like It*. "Imogen" is a part very difficult to portray without the action of the stage; but the assembled guests seemed not to feel the want, which was in a great measure compensated by the varied accentuation which seemed to suggest action, and the perfect delivery of the dialogue. To *act* the part would have cost less fatigue.

"July 10, 1886.—The Prince of Wales' party at Marlborough House. A lovely day, not too warm. A very pleasant party. Saw many friends. The Queen most gracious. Passed the Prince of Wales to come up to me, and, giving me her hand to kiss, 'hoped I was much stronger.' Princess Beatrice brought up the Duchess of Albany and introduced me.

"July 11.—Dined with Mrs Sarah Phillips [now Lady Pirbright]. Sat next Bret Harte. He seems very agreeable, but somehow does not look like the author of *Miss*. But, perhaps, no more does Robert Browning in his mere outward manner remind us of the deep-down heart revealings which are found in countless numbers in his poems."

Writing on the 29th of July at Bryntysilio, to which we had gone a week before, my wife says: "Have begun the last few days to look over my *Letters*, to be ready for a new edition in the autumn. What uninteresting work it is! I would rather read *anything else*. All the record of pain in them comes back sharply upon me. Will the future we humbly hope for sweep it away? Ah, yes, if we are allowed to see all our dear ones again! and never to be separated. Have just heard from Mr Browning that he and his sister are possibly coming to Llangollen. We have both written entreating them to come to us."

Our letters, Miss Browning wrote, "decided their wavering resolutions." I fear, she added, "we shall not be able to avail ourselves of your hospitable invitation to your own house, as I must keep very quiet, with early hours, but it will be delightful to have you for near neighbours, and be the great charm in our anticipation of Llangollen." "Your kind offer," Mr Browning wrote, "to arrange for us at the hotel there relieves us altogether of anxiety. We shall be most pleasantly near you, and if my sister's feet have not lost their old cunning, a two-mile walk will be no impediment to our seeing you as often as you permit." A word to the hostess of the Hand Hotel was scarcely needed to secure every attention for the poet and his sister, for she was one of his readers. For ten weeks they found quarters there to their entire satisfaction, and Miss Browning gained the health in search of which she had come. They visited us almost daily. My wife and Browning had been friends in the days of their young enthusiasm, and the renewal of their acquaintance on a footing of easy familiarity was a pleasure to both. Browning always brought sunshine into the house. His fine elastic spirits, and command of a great range of topics made his talk delightful. In general talk, my wife writes, "he excels as in far higher things." Another brilliant talker, Miss Anna Swanwick, was our guest at this time, and with them many a pleasant hour was passed on the lawn or in the shade of the verandah among the flowers, with a charming outlook upon the mountains that girdle our valley. Thus my wife writes (September 10): "After lunch Miss Swanwick, Miss Elias, and I were sitting under the porch. I was in the middle of reading the *Flight of the Duchess*, when the

poet and his sister broke in upon us. No more reading. His talk stops all, and is so well worth listening to."

Again (October 14) she writes :—

"The Brownings came to lunch. What a fund of anecdote he has, and how well he tells his stories! Conversation there is none, but one is only too glad to listen. One wonders sometimes to see and hear the man, and think of him as a *great poet*. He does not suggest what as a poet he is. I should like to see him in his hours of abstraction, 'with his singing robes about him,' when his mind and heart are full of the force, the tenderness, the depth of thought and feeling he can give utterance to. He is always a puzzle and marvel to me. The outside so cordially kind and sympathetic, and the inner man so above you and profound.

"*Sunday, Oct. 17.*—Fearful day of rain. Harvest festival. Too bad for even Mr Browning to brave the weather. The first time he has missed the service at our little church."

Every Sunday during his stay in Llangollen we found Mr Browning seated in our pew when we arrived there. He joined devoutly in the service. As he was not by habit a church-goer, his constant presence on these occasions was the more remarkable. But he was a profoundly religious man. Canon Farrar has said truly of him that "his religion, like his philosophy, was a religion of charity, tolerance, and love, and to him the essence of all religion was to believe in God, and to live our lives as in His presence." After church he always went home with us, and gave a large share of his attention at the tea-table to the parish clergyman, who was generally present, and had at first felt somewhat awed by so distinguished a hearer. On October 19 my wife writes, "Said a sad good-bye to the Brownings, so very sorry that their last days here should be so stormy and wet."

So greatly had Miss Browning's health been benefited by the air of Wales that we had hopes they might have returned next summer. But when it came, Mr Browning wrote (August 12, 1887) to my wife, telling her that, as the health of both now required more bracing air, they had decided to go to Primiero, near Feltri. "So, while we may expect pleasant days abroad, our



chance is gone of once again enjoying your company in your own lovely valley of Llangollen, and another term of delightful weeks, each tipped with a sweet starry Sunday at the little church leading to the House Beautiful, where we took our rest of an evening, spent always memorably." The regret was indeed mutual. "Our dear friends of last summer," the Diary records, "Mr and Miss Browning, how much we miss them! especially the Sunday afternoons—meeting at church, and then the pleasant home-coming, and tea-drinking in the garden. For ten weeks we had them near us—meeting often and so happily."

The early months of 1887 were spent at Cannes. But the weather was severe, and rather aggravated than diminished the pains in the throat and chest, which my wife's doctors hoped the southern climate would cure. She made many acquaintances there, who helped to make her forget for a time the ever-present neuralgic pains from which she suffered. But these the climate could not lighten. "The lovely sunshine," she writes (January 23), "*should* make us so well; but then the air is so sharp, and seems to stab you through and through—a dangerous neighbour to so intense a sun." A worse place for people with delicate throats could not be, and yet sufferers from bronchitis are being constantly sent there. One of her earliest visits was to see the Villa Sardou, at Cannet, where Rachel died. "*Jan. 21, 1887.*—Drove to Cannet, and saw the outside of the Villa Sardou, a forlorn-looking place, but beautifully situated. Poor Rachel, my mind was full of her all the time. To be sent to this out-of-the-way, dismal, unfinished-looking place to die! She would see the sea in the distance and the hills. How I hope her sufferings were not too great! She was very sweet and kind to me during the short time I knew her, and holds a very tender place in my memory. I hope she had loving friends around her. How very sad it all is!"

Among the earliest to call upon us were M. and Madame Lind Goldschmidt. "Madame Goldschmidt," says the Diary, "looks very ill, and talks very despondently about herself. She is evidently a great sufferer. We compare notes and agree, that the future must have some compensatory power in making us think nothing of what our poor bodies here have had to pass through.

God grant it may be so!" There was a strong bond of sympathy between my wife and Madame Goldschmidt in the views which they each entertained of the dramatic art. In a letter to Lady Martin (March 12, 1887) Madame Goldschmidt writes:—

"I, born for the stage, and brought up to it from my ninth year, am well at home with all the difficulties, all the lights and shades belonging to that high profession—high, indeed, if rightly handled by its representatives—which should be looked upon as a priesthood, and a sister to the Church. But few are those who are really called to that priesthood, and fewer still those who look upon it as a mental education for the people. My sorrow is intense when I look at the miserable state of our present stage, where everything tends to over-educate the *senses*, instead of helping mankind to jump unconsciously, so to say, over their *passions*, and calm down instead of rousing impulses which breed immorality."

My wife, unlike as possible in person to Madame Goldschmidt, had somehow been so often mistaken for her by strangers, that in replying to this letter she asked Madame Goldschmidt if this had ever happened to her. To this inquiry came the following interesting reply:—

"I cannot say that I have ever been mistaken for you; but can quite understand that there is a similarity between two artists, who have been taught how to move, to walk, to stand, to sit down, to rise up. Moreover, we have been from our youth brought up to *speak* properly, not to swallow down our syllables, &c., &c. All this must make a difference in the personal appearance between us and other mortals, particularly the *present* generation, who, to me, are so extremely *off-handed and unartistical!* We, who feel and understand real art, *the meaning of it*, must bear a certain resemblance to each other and feel some.

"It is, however, most kind of you, dear Lady Martin, to have borne so patiently the question put to you, 'If you were not Jenny Lind?' I feel we have much in common. Would that we were both in better health! We would then have many interests to bind us together in true friendship."

There was indeed a remarkable affinity between the two artists in the reverential spirit in which they both regarded their

art. The consciousness recognised by Dean Stanley<sup>1</sup> in Madame Goldschmidt, that her great dramatic and vocal power was “a gift, not her own but given her by God,” and her “deep conviction of responsibility, of duty to use it for the good of others,” were no less ever present with my wife, and this Madame Goldschmidt obviously felt. A few days afterwards we called on her at the Villa d’Etoile. “Found her at home,” says the Diary. . “Walked in the garden with them. She was very nice, and more cheerful than the day she called on us. She is full of character, with humour, and power of imitation.” My wife’s interest in her was greatly deepened by what she then learned from herself of the impending doom which overshadowed her life, and when, a few months afterward, the foreboding was realised, she made this record of her appreciation of what she had seen in her. “Nov. 3, 1887.—Last evening’s papers told of the death of Jenny Lind Goldschmidt. How convinced she seemed of her early death at Cannes in the spring! And yet, to see her moving about and talking so brightly, and with such humour and decision—her quaint yet incisive remarks upon much that she thought wrong in the present state of things—the mind so actively at work, it was not easy to think her own prediction of the nearness of her end could be a true one. A most gifted, true, and good woman has passed away from us. She will sing among the angels surely! . . . I must grieve as for a friend lost. Apart from her gifts such a charming, dear woman!”

While Cannes was at its gayest, it was suddenly awe-stricken by the shock of an earthquake on the morning of February the 25th. “About six this morning,” the Diary records, “was wakened by frightful noise—the shaking of windows, bed, swaying of floors, rattling of china, &c. Called to my maid, thinking at first it was another storm. Sir Theodore came in and said it was an earthquake, but that the worst was past. He had been long awake, and heard its approach. He then ran to the window to see the condition of the atmosphere. The air was perfectly pure, the morning brilliant, the sea calm, and the birds were singing. Thank God, we were able to bear up bravely, keeping to our

<sup>1</sup> *Dean Stanley’s Letters and Verses.* London, 1895, p. 113.



rooms and hoping the best; while in our hotel—as indeed in all the hotels, as we afterwards learned—all the people rushed into the gardens, and would not return for hours.”

The event was one to try the stoutest heart, and especially to test the faith, which looks upon death with a tranquil mind. The immediate flight of multitudes from Cannes in all directions was in truth somewhat ignoble. The railway seats were forestalled for weeks. You could get to Paris only by taking the whole journey at one stretch—a fatigue which my wife was ill able, but had weeks after perforce, to bear. However, the stay at Cannes had been in many ways so pleasant to her that she returned to London in better general health, and was able to enjoy the sights and animating incidents of the Queen’s Jubilee in June and July, and the visits of many friends in our home in Wales.

In 1888 she had intervals of comparative ease from neuralgic pain, and, when she reached Wales, yielded to the urgent entreaty made to her to give one more Shakespearian Reading for the Llangollen Public Library. The announcement brought numbers of people from all parts of the country. The town hall was crowded to excess. My wife had originally intended to read only the trial scene from the *Merchant of Venice*, but, at the last moment, decided to give all the preceding scenes in which Portia appears.

“*Aug. 23, 1888.*—Had some few hours’ sleep in the night. We drove down at half-past two. The little town looked in a great state of excitement, and crowds assembled through the streets to look at us as we drove past.

“All went off admirably—Sir Theodore’s speech and my reading. My voice, to my own surprise, was again my servant, and I could command and use it at my will without the slightest thought or trouble. I was only slightly nervous at the beginning—not half so much as I have been in thinking of it beforehand. When they told me the room was crowded, something of the old heart-sinking came over me. Then I am never quite at my ease when my dear one is speaking; but, happily, there were glees and songs before my turn came, so that I had time to pluck up my heart a bit after he had finished.



“Am so *thankful* that it is so well over! Should not have thought, after *all* I have gone through, I should have nerve enough left to be so composed, and in such full possession of myself. ‘Praised be God, and not our strength for it!’ (*Henry V.*)”

This was the last of her readings. Humbly as she herself thought of it, it seemed to those who had seen her oftenest to be fuller and richer than before in its details, and more complete in its grasp and individualisation of all the characters. Neither had the voice lost one iota of the roundness or variety of tone, on the charm of which her audiences had hung with delight in long bygone years.

In 1889 the Queen decided on paying a visit to North Wales. An arrangement which I had made for her Majesty to stay at Palè, about four miles from Bala, the seat of Henry Robertson, Esq., C.E., about ten years previously, had for special reasons to be indefinitely postponed; but on her Majesty again intimating to me her desire to visit Wales, Mr Robertson's son, now Sir Henry Robertson, placed his house at her disposal. The announcement of the coming visit created the greatest enthusiasm throughout North Wales, and every preparation was made for a display of the loyalty, which is very deep-seated in the heart of the Welsh people. As early as May the Queen's secretary reported to us that her Majesty desired to honour us with a visit to Bryntysilio, if this could be at all brought into the Welsh programme. It was so brought, and August the 26th was fixed for the royal visit. “It is curious” (Diary, August 3) “how people write to offer the hire of all sorts of decorative things for the Queen's visit to us. Even our own friends fancy that we are busy with our preparations. No! Our little home will be as it always is.”

On the 26th the road to our house from Llangollen, to which the Queen had come by rail, was lined with people, who had flocked to the valley from all quarters, and had a good opportunity to see her Majesty as she drove along in an open carriage.

“*Aug. 26.*—A dull morning and cold. Rain-showers occasionally. How our hearts sank! Sun came out about two, and lasted through the day. Her Majesty and suite arrived a little after four. She allowed me first to bring her upstairs to see the

views, and Sir Theodore's room, where *The Life of the Prince Consort* was written. Then down to the drawing-room to tea. With her were the Prince and Princess Henry of Battenberg, and Princess Alice of Hesse [now the Empress of Russia]. I had put by the Queen's side, on the separate table near the sofa on which she sat, a small bouquet of pretty pink heather, with a centre of white heather (which our keeper had brought me in the morning from our Glyn property, and which I had arranged with a pink ribbon). I knew the Queen would be overpowered on her journey home with flower-offerings, so preferred this simple one, and I was glad and surprised to see that her Majesty had it in her hand in the carriage when she left. After tea the Princesses and Prince Henry went out of the drawing-room window to the terrace, where the suite were walking about. Then the Llangollen choir came near, and sung three pieces. At this time I was alone with her Majesty. She beckoned to me to bring a chair near her—spoke of various things—thought the voices of this choir better than any of those she had heard in Wales, and more cultivated. Then Sir Theodore returned and asked if her Majesty would graciously accept a bouquet from the choir. She assented and went to the open window, and one of the girls came forward and presented it very nicely. They were all dressed in white, and *looked* as well as sang extremely well. . . . I had almost forgotten to mention that the Queen at our request signed her name upon a sheet of our Bryntysilio paper, and when she came to the date, she looked up and said, 'The dear Prince's birthday!' A curious coincidence that she should come to a house so full of memories of his life on *this day!*"

Reflection told us that it was no mere coincidence. With her wonted kindness of heart the day had, no doubt, been chosen by the Queen to mark her recognition, which she knew would be felt as much by my wife as by myself, of what the biographer, working under that roof, had done in making known to the world the worth of the good Prince.

"Aug. 30.—Wrote to the Queen at Balmoral expressing our gratitude for her gracious visit to us, and hoping that her Majesty had not suffered from the fatigue of the night journeys—the two being so close together. After my letter was despatched

came a gift from the Queen—a proof engraving of Angeli's last picture of her. It was addressed to me with her Majesty's autograph. It was left for me at Palé, and has only just reached me.

' "31.—Wrote to-day thanking her Majesty and explaining why I had not done so before, and offering grateful acknowledgments from us both.

"*Sept.* 15.—This morning a letter from the Queen. Speaks delightfully of her visit to Wales, of the beauty of the scenery, and the kindness and loyalty of the people. Her Majesty says also that she enjoyed her visit to our charming home."

Soon afterwards (November 14, 1889) she writes to Miss Stokes, who was then in Italy:—

"DEAR FRIEND MARGARET,—I have been writing several letters to you, but most likely you have not received them, unless the tricky spirit Ariel may have in his caprice chosen to be the messenger. But, indeed, your letter from Italy sets me so longing to see also, that I feel how terribly matter of fact our doings must look to you, and what a drop down from the altitude in which you are living. And then a heavy cold and cough, just such as used to sit upon and smother up all my best artistic efforts to delineate what was best within me in the old Dublin days. (I have lately come across some of your dear father's cough prescriptions.) These painfully real and prosaic things have disinclined me for all letter-writing, since we left our 'Royal' Cottage in Wales three weeks back. I am reading Longfellow's biography, and have just come upon the part where he says, 'I think one feels from the very first word whether he is going to write a letter, properly so called, or only a thing with a date at one end of it and a "Yours, &c.," so forth at the other. The soul betrays itself as well in the movement of a pen, as in a glance of the eye.' So I see, and have seen, that I have nothing to say worth the reading, even if I were in the mood. . . .

"Oh that I could grow strong enough to take the journeys abroad in the direction which my inclination and my spirits yearn after! I try to think that everything may be possible *hereafter*, when we are rid of the drawback of this painful, cumbrous weight of bodily suffering. I have seen so little, been



so, 'cabined and confined' in what I *would* see. Longfellow's account of his early travels, and his keen enjoyment of them, are filling me with a fresh longing.

"We were in Piacenza years ago, but only for a day, and certainly I do not remember the frescoes you speak of. You give a charming account of the St Catherine by Pordenone. If you cannot photograph, pray make a sketch of the girlish, graceful St Catherine (Juliet). The Arundel Society's artists scarcely ever rise up to the fine spirit and indescribable grace of the originals. . . .

"Sir Edward Hamley's book, lately published, is but a collection of his Essays brought out at various times in *Blackwood*. The first, *The Funeral of Shakespeare*, is always delightful to read again. He is one of the few really fitted to write on such a subject. He has both the knowledge and the reverence."

My wife had been constantly urged to add to her series of studies of Shakespeare's women; but it was not till 1888 that she found courage or strength to resume her pen with a study of Hermione, in a letter to Lord Tennyson. For a time she had to lay it aside, and it was not till late in 1890 that she found strength to resume it. Even then she wrote under conditions of acute neuralgic pain; but of what she suffered, her writing, like her acting, bears no indication. Indeed, this essay was hailed as perhaps the ablest of a series in which, as Browning wrote, she had "effectively crystallised the impressions of her acting, which might otherwise have only remained mistily in the memories of those who, like myself, were so fortunate as to originally receive them." Writing to her friend Miss Stokes, February 4, 1891, she says:—

"I have been cheered, if anything could cheer me, by most kind letters, from Royalty downward, about my poor *Hermione*. She cost me a great deal, and my tears fell abundantly upon the page while recounting her sorrows, which I lived in as vividly again as if personifying them. The whole play was most difficult to treat. It was hard to bear with Leontes, and not make him, as he is, too hateful. No after-repentance, hardly even madness, can account for his dastardly conduct towards Hermione.

"It is curious to get the different reports from my friends of



my three heroines. Most of the men put Paulina first. She is indeed a friend—true, brave, and loyal. History shows us several like her, but I doubt if our time could do the same. Friendship cools off so wonderfully nowadays. The world is too full of small duties and fussy nothings, for much that is simply good and true to take root in it.”

In the letter from Lord Tennyson acknowledging the receipt of this essay, he expresses gratitude for its dedication to him, and says that it was “inspired by a *fine* criticism.”

While she was correcting the final proofs of this essay for *Blackwood's Magazine*, an always irksome task to her, came tidings of the serious illness of Robert Browning. It was quickly followed by the news of his death. Then she writes:—

“*Dec. 13, 1889.*—Alas! alas! The papers tell of the death of Robert Browning at ten o'clock last night—‘passed away *painlessly.*’ Thank God for that! Quite ill all the day. Such a grief, such a shock! So great a man, so supreme a poet! How he will be missed! Admiration and affection he has inspired in all who knew him. My last two nights have been nearly sleepless. How memory will go back to the early days, when I had to act in his plays and received such full kindness and more than appreciation from him, and the never-fading friendship, which has followed on these days! Years have passed between, but always came the same warm welcome when we met. The papers say he is to rest in Westminster Abbey. The right and fitting place. His grave will be a shrine which thousands and thousands will visit in grateful memory.

“*Dec. 15.*—Felt very sad all the day and could not keep up. Happily no one of our many visitors talked of our and the world's loss. It is not a theme for everyday gossip.”

The death of her friend weighed heavily on my wife's spirits for many days. She was most desirous to be present at his funeral in the Abbey, but this, I knew, would have taxed her strength too greatly, and she yielded to my entreaty that she should not go. On December 27 she writes to Miss Margaret Stokes:—

“The loss of our dear friend Robert Browning has thrown a sad gloom over our Christmas. I have known him since my very

early girlhood, and our friendship has known no interruption. . . . Annie Ritchie and I were talking yesterday of trying to sit together in the Abbey, getting our tickets arranged so that we might do so. But, alas! to-day Sir Theodore tells me he cannot bear the thought of my being present, and asks me to give it up for his sake. I think I could brace up my courage to meet it, but at his request, of course, I must give way. He is to be one of the pall-bearers, and would thus be separated from me. This weighs a great deal with me. I shall take my wreath to the house, but whether I shall go in I cannot say."

When we went to Wales next autumn my wife resolved to place a memorial tablet with the following inscription to her friend in the Llantysilio church, where it continues to draw visits from great numbers of his admirers :—

In Memory of  
ROBERT BROWNING, POET.  
BORN 1812. DIED 1889.

Who worshipped in this church for ten weeks in the autumn 1886.

By his friend, HELENA FAUCIT MARTIN.

"Saw the memorial," she writes (September 21, 1890), "to dear Robert Browning for the first time. It is put up just by the side of our pew, and close to where he and his sister always sat on my right hand. I had a curious feeling that he was beside me, and my attention was often taken off the service. For the life of me, I could not remember the text of the sermon; very likely did not hear it, as my mind was travelling backwards to the Sundays four years back. How pleasant and happy those days were! His very presence brought with it a feeling of contentment and large-heartedness. I never heard him, even in joking or in his humorous stories and anecdotes—and how abundant these were!—say an unkind or cynical word of any person or thing, and yet how angry and indignant he could be!"

My wife was always impatient of every form of interviewing, or of inquiries by strangers into matters which they would hesitate to address to a lady unknown beyond the circle of her friends. She appears, from the following letter to Miss Stokes,

to have been provoked into a strong expression of opinion by the questions of some "curious impertinent" of this class:—

"June 1, 1891.

"Do you happen to know, or know of, a Mr ——. He wrote to me about a fortnight ago, asking me to answer two questions, with an apology as a stranger, only saying that 'he should be pleased if I would reply to them,' and adding, that he had seen me in *Rosalind*, read my *Letters*, &c. As we may fairly suppose that many had done the same, I did not think he was entitled to the granting of any special favour. I answered, courteously, that I had made it my rule never to reply to questions relating to my private life. Between ourselves, I did not know that he might not be of the interviewer type, and that I might not see my answers in some newspaper. The questions were: (1) What books have exercised the greatest influence over your mind? (2) What plays and players have left the greatest impression on your memory?—rather large questions, and not to be answered without grave consideration, especially the first.

"I replied, as I have said, courteously, but declining to answer the questions, according to the rule I had acted on all my life, considering that my thoughts and studies upon all subjects were as much my own, and as sacred to myself as these are to all ladies. Upon this I received a very high and mighty letter, expressing the writer's regret that he had 'intruded' on me, which had never struck him before. It was solely because of 'the estimate he had formed of my mind,' &c., &c., that he desired to know more. How curious is human nature, and how selfish, and what a want of modesty is shown in the present day! Everybody wants to know everybody else, and the process by which they have reached a certain point. God's gifts are ignored; all could be the same if science could point the way, and science and perseverance work up to it."

She then mentions several books "that one should read just now," and adds, "Oh, if I had not an aching neuralgic head, what feasts are prepared for me! I should not write—that also brings on the pain—indeed a vegetable unlife life is the one best suited for me."

The state of Lady Martin's health from this time forward compelled her to withdraw very much from general society. Nights of sleeplessness and days and nights of constant and often alarming pain made it necessary for her to reserve her strength as much as possible. To her intimate friends she was always accessible, and she had troops of those, who loved her, and were unflinching in their sympathy. Knowing how much she suffered, they were often surprised to observe her habitual control in society of every sign of pain, taking part in conversation with the greatest vivacity and cheerfulness, as if nothing ailed her. "Why should I make others unhappy," she would say to me, "by letting them see my suffering?" In the devotion of her friends she had much to cheer her. It was a devotion earned by the charm of her character and manners, as well as by the originality and acuteness of her views upon art, politics, and social topics of the most varied kind. Browning (see p. 105 *ante*) found her spirit to be "the sweetest, fairest, gentlest, and completest Shakespeare's-Lady's, ever poet longed for." We have seen (p. 258 *ante*) how Thackeray wrote of her as "one of the sweetest women in Christendom"; and in speaking of her to her friend, the late Lady Ducie, Froude said that she had "the most beautiful mind he had ever met with." He had many opportunities of forming an opinion, for he was a highly esteemed friend of the house, on a footing of intimacy that drew out her qualities, at the same time that it revealed what was deepest and best of his own.

Her frequent dangerous attacks of illness, which the newspapers made widely known, brought to her assurances of sympathy from all quarters of the world,—the tributes of those who had seen her in the days of her youth, and who retained indelibly the impressions which she had produced on their imagination and their hearts. Many pleasant surprises of this kind came to encourage her to think that she had not lived wholly in vain. Thus Mr Halliwell Phillips, on whose researches nearly all we know of the man Shakespeare is based, wrote to her that what sent him first to the study of Shakespeare was her performance of Imogen at Drury Lane in Macready's Company, and especially the sense, with which she inspired him by her delivery, of the rich and varied music of Shakespeare's versifica-



tion. But of these surprises none was pleasanter than when, after Professor Dewar's first lecture on "Liquid Air," in February 1893, at the Royal Institution, he told her, in his own room in presence of the Prince of Wales, as she mentions in her Diary, "that he had been one among her enthusiastic admirers in Scotland—took his seat in pit or gallery every night she was in town." On this she sent him a copy of her book on Shakespeare's Heroines. This was his acknowledgment (February 25, 1893): "I regard the gift as a very great honour. The personal interest to me is beyond all expression, seeing that your embodiment of Shakespeare's heroines was the means of instilling into my youthful mind love and appreciation of truth and beauty. Without this spiritual impulse life would indeed have been poorer."

It was good for her to receive such a recognition as this, for in the depth of her humility, and despondency at the decline upon the stage of the higher drama, which it had been the aim of her life to uphold worthily, her spirits would often sink, and she would think she had failed in the development of the gifts with which she had been entrusted. It was no fault of hers if the public conception of how Shakespearian plays should be treated had undergone a change,—if they had become a mere vehicle for elaborate and gorgeous spectacle, to which, as Mr Macready said of Charles Kean's revivals, "the spoken text was more like a running commentary on the spectacles exhibited than an illustration of the text,"—spectacles, moreover, to which the actor's art was made wholly subordinate, and with which to her thinking fine acting was incompatible. This, and dramas of a lower type, were more in consonance with the giddy-paced times we live in, where "plain living and high thinking" are out of fashion, and the equivocal heroines of Dumas and Sardou and their imitators are more to the taste of playgoers than Imogen or Constance or Hermione. She lamented this, and the consequent decline in the school of acting, and the prevailing absence among actors of the ambition and perseverance in the study of their art, without which no one knew better than she that excellence, in any branch of it, can never be attained. It grieved her to see our stages crowded with people who have

rushed into the profession without the natural gifts of voice and person which are indispensable for success, and who treat their vocation as a mere mechanical craft to make money by, wasting in the frivolities of society the hours which should be devoted to enriching their minds from books, to laying up stores of personal observation, and perfecting themselves in elocution, and the fitting utterance of the infinitely varied cadences of poetic and passionate language. Worse than all, in her eyes, was the personal vanity which carried so many of her own sex to the stage, and the utter absence in them of the power to forget themselves in the characters they have to represent—the power which constitutes what Garrick defined as the art of a great actor, “de se faire oublier jusqu’à son nom, quand il paraît sur la scène.” At no time could she bear to have the vocation of the actor dealt lightly with, or spoken of with disparagement, and charged with faults due to the misconduct of its unworthy professors. She knew it to be what Voltaire called it, “the most difficult of all the arts,” demanding special gifts and special accomplishments, and lifelong effort, like all arts, in the pursuit of an ever-receding ideal. No better cure than such an ideal for personal vanity, the commonplace actor’s prevailing sin. An aphorism of her own, which I find in one of her journals, is an index to the absence of this weakness in herself, which all her friends must have noted—“No one who has an ideal can be proud.” She would never willingly speak of her own performances, or admit that they were otherwise than far short of what she thought they ought to be.

What she thought of her art is best told in her own words, written by way of a preface in 1893, when a fifth edition of her *Letters on Shakespeare’s Heroines* was called for. Out of a rooted dislike she had to speaking of herself, as savouring of egotism, she laid aside this preface, which I found among her papers after her death. Speaking of these *Letters* she says:—

“If there be any value in them, they will suffice to effect the object with which they were written, which was to show that, over and above natural gifts of temperament, of voice, figure, and deportment, there must go to the impersonation of any of Shakespeare’s great characters a thorough study of the entire play, as well as of the particular character to be represented, for only by

this study can the actor hope to identify himself so completely with that character that its development will become, as it ought to be, as spontaneous and harmonious as the growth of a plant from the germ into a perfect flower.

“How it grows thus who may tell? Not the artist himself, at any rate. I have often been asked—indeed, this kind of questioning began when I had been only a few months on the stage—how I did this, how I did that, by what means I produced such and such an effect, how I came to adopt such and such a shade of expression, or make such and such a movement. Questions of this kind irritated me, because they seemed to imply that the actor’s art was something wholly mechanical, to which the impulse of the moment was a stranger, and that no part of what it did at its best was to be regarded as the unconscious emanation of one’s own very self. To such questions, therefore, I could never reply. How could I reply, when I myself never knew how the result was produced for which I was asked to account? Of course, I never went upon the stage in any character until I had carefully considered how I might best convey to others the idea I had formed of what the author intended should be made palpable there to ‘the very faculties of eye and ear.’ But there is something which no previous study can formulate, something that gives the crowning charm to the actor’s impersonation, but of which he is himself at the moment unconscious. When, therefore, such questions were put to me, I could no more answer them than a poet could explain how a noble image or a perfect phrase flashed upon his brain, or a painter say how in painting a face some subtle and suggestive shade of expression found its way into his pigments.

“No one who does me the honour to read these studies will gather from them what I did upon the stage, or how I did it, for this is more than I myself could tell. This much, however, they may perhaps learn from them—that if I succeeded there in moving the hearts or raising the imaginations of my audiences, it was because all that I had assimilated from the study of the best literature and of the best art within my reach, all that I had tried in a humble and devout spirit to learn and to practise of what was pure and unselfish, honourable and worthy in thought and in



act, together with all that my own heart and experience of life had taught me, was turned to account in the endeavour to present a living picture of womanhood as divined by Shakespeare, and held up by him as an ideal for woman to aspire to, and for men to revere.

“Whatever gifts I had as an actress were ever regarded by me as a sacred trust to be used for widening and refining the sympathies of my audiences, by transporting them into a world larger, purer, brighter, grander than that of their everyday life, and for bringing closer to their minds and hearts the ‘nobler thoughts and nobler cares,’ which are the richest blessing that the poets have brought us. Working in this spirit, I had my reward in the bond of sympathy, often bordering on affection, which grew up between myself and the unknown world of those to whom I spoke. It gave me strength and inspiration to vanquish difficulty and fatigue, and to strive ever to give a fuller truth and completeness to my conceptions. In a thousand ways it was brought home to me that I did good, and therefore I honoured and revered my art as well as loved it. With those who, having practised it in its higher walks, and practised it with success, have spoken of it with disparagement, I have no sympathy. I should indeed be ungrateful were it otherwise. I look back upon my life with profound thankfulness, that I was able by the practice of my art, while keeping alive within myself all that in my earliest dreams I had imagined of what was fairest, and best, and highest in thought and character, to awaken a kindred feeling in those to whom it was my privilege to give a living interpretation to the conceptions of the highest dramatic genius.”

In these words the nature not only of the artist but of the woman is revealed. The artist reacted on the woman and the woman on the artist. She was one

“Whose heart the holy forms  
Of young imagination had kept pure.”

Her heart never grew old; it never lost its purity, its guilelessness; the fire of her imagination never grew dim, and her sympathies grew wider, her charity more tolerant, as the years wore on. All that she had ever loved in nature or in art she



continued to love as vividly as ever through all the martyrdom of suffering which marked her later years. She bore it uncomplainingly with a martyr's patience, bowing humbly before its awful mystery, and ever grateful for the much good with which she regarded her life as having been blest. "How happy would my life be," she says in her Diary, "if my pains were but moderate!" Only for brief intervals were they ever moderate. They robbed her so long and so constantly of sleep that to those who watched her she often "seemed to live by miracle." For her spirits never failed her, nor her interest in all that was going on around her, either in public life or in her social circle. To the last she was wakefully thoughtful for others as she had been through life, and looked calmly and hopefully forward to the Great Hereafter, when the perplexities and discords of "all this unintelligible world" should be resolved. And when in our quiet Welsh home, where she had been able for some months to look out upon the garden she loved, and the circling amphitheatre of many-shadowed hills that had been her delight for years, the end came on the morning of October 31, 1898, she fell into a gentle sleep, in which her spirit passed away to that haven of rest where, but for her love of those to be left behind, she would have long wished to be. Some months previously her Diary contains this entry: "Oh these miserable nights! What a long sleep is owing to me! Perhaps it may come before long; but, oh, the awakening! May Christ's mediation and God's mercy be with me then!" Who that knew her will not add to this aspiration a prayerful Amen?

During her last illness the Queen was constant in her inquiries both by telegram and by letter. The very last words read by Lady Martin were in a telegram from her Majesty late in the evening of the 30th October, a few hours before she passed away. Lady Martin, to whom the Queen had for very many years been an object of the deepest regard, tried to acknowledge it by a letter in her own hand, but found she could not. Letters and telegrams of condolence reached me from the Queen, from all the members of the Royal Family, from the Ex-Empress of the French, and from very many from all parts of the kingdom, as well as from abroad, to whom she was personally unknown: while

in all the leading journals, provincial as well as metropolitan, eloquent tributes were paid to her, both as artist and as woman.

She wished to be buried in London, for she loved the great city, and remembered with gratitude how kindly its public had encouraged and stood by her in her early artist life, and how their loyalty and kindness had never flagged, when in her later years she came among them. Accordingly she was buried in the Brompton Cemetery on the 4th of November 1898, and was attended to the grave by a large concourse of friends and admirers. The Queen was represented at the funeral by Major The Hon. Charles Harbord, who placed on the coffin a wreath of beautiful flowers inscribed by her Majesty's own hand, and a floral cross sent by the Princess Beatrice, which were lowered with the coffin into the grave. Over it has now been placed a monument, with the following inscriptions:—

In Memory of

HELENA FAUCIT, LADY MARTIN,

WHO DIED OCTOBER 31, 1898.

*"Her gracious gift of genius belonged to the world; the charm of her goodness was for her home, and for the friends that loved her."*

*"The sweet'st companion, that e'er man  
Bred his hopes out of."*

The first of these inscriptions was taken from a preface by Mrs Richmond Ritchie to one of the volumes of Mr Thackeray's works, in which she speaks of Lady Martin, and the second are the words of Leontes in speaking of Hermione in the last act of Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*. A monument in white marble, with an alto-relievo designed by the late J. H. Foley, has been erected to Lady Martin's memory in the chancel of Llantysilio Church.

A marble pulpit, designed by Mr G. F. Bodley, erected to her memory in the nave of the Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-on-Avon (Shakespeare's Church), was dedicated by the Bishop of Worcester on the 18th day of October last. After the dedication an eloquent sermon was preached by Canon Ainger, Master of the Temple.

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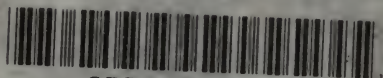
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