

A DAYTON, OHIO, FLOOD SCENE



Rescuing helpless women and children. A rowboat from the Dayton Y. M. C. A., manned by volunteers, with a load of persons who had been flood-bound on the roof of their residence in Sycamore street for 40 hours. Dr. Schram who led the rescuers, at the stern of the boat.

Memories of Forster, Lamb, Browning, Carlyle

[From T. P. Weekly, London, Eng.]

With the exception of Dickens, no one loomed larger than John Forster in the London of his day. He knew everyone, wrote about most of them, made reputations and—paid the penalty. Yet Mr. Forster's "John Forster and His Friends" (Chapman & Hall, 10s. 6d. net), will swing the pendulum in the right direction. Talking of Lamb, after he had just placed "sister Mary" at one of her periodical paroxysms of mad frenzy, as a mental patient at Walden House, Edmonton, he says: "I implore you to come and see me to keep me from thinking too much, as I did yesterday." Poor Lamb! may he not be forgiven for the lapse? Who would dare throw a stone at this good, brave soul for giving way in a dark moment, with no man at his side to stay his hand or to speak the one word of friendly sympathy which would draw back the curtain and let in the light?

"Lord of Misrule." His affectionate regard for Forster is still further shown in another note. "Dear boy," he writes, "When I am more composed I shall hope to see you and Forster here. There is a world of yearning in such words as these. And yet poor Lamb, the hero, had his lighter moments. When in the vein, the natural man in him revelled in quip and jest; when, a veritable Lord of Misrule, he laughed and laughed with both his hands to his sides—until sadness gained its throne again, and all was dark and hopeless, even as before. He asks Forster for orders for the Olympic Theatre. He loved the playhouse, as Forster did. The failure of his farce, "Mr. H.", in no wise damped his dramatic ardor. In spite of his wit and love of the humorous, his taste inclined, evidently towards tragedy. A truly friendly soul, he took no interest in the disputes and misunderstandings of his neighbors or acquaintances. "I never," he said on one occasion to Forster, "trouble myself about other people's quarrels. I do not always understand my own."

Browning and His Critic. It was on the last day of 1835 that the first meeting between Browning and Forster took place at the "Blue Posts" Coach Office, in Holborn. Macready was entertaining a party of friends at his house at Elstree. It was arranged that all the guests should journey down from London in company. With the rest went Forster and Robert Browning, as yet strangers to each other. Forster, on being intro-

duced to Browning by Macready, at once said to the former: "Did you see a little notice I wrote in the Examiner?" "Did you write that?" said Browning, with an expression of eager earnestness. From that moment the bond so created between them lasted until an unhappy difference drove them apart.

A Memory of Carlyle. Perhaps the most interesting reminiscence in an admirable book is Mr. Forster's personal memory of Carlyle: "I was passing eastwards early one morning, about 8 o'clock, along the new Chelsea Embankment, close by the Albert bridge at the foot of Oakley street, not very long after the death of John Forster in 1875. Leaning with folded arms on the parapet, and apparently in deep meditation, was a figure seated in a long, loose cloak, with wrapped round his shoulders, a large black and green Scotch plaid. If I remember rightly, his shortish trousers were of the same plaid, while his headgear was a soft, circular, large-brimmed, wide-

awake hat. Although I was aware that his was an early morning habit for the moment his identity with Thomas Carlyle did not occur to me. When fairly abreast of him, he suddenly turned round and faced me. Then I knew him. There was ever something awe-inspiring in the intensity of Carlyle's gaze. His eyes seemed to burn into your very soul. It was so now. I stood like an idiot, open-mouthed."

The Artist. And yet the stage has rarely seen a more complete artistic endowment, whether of temperament or equipment. One may be forgiven in the case of an actor for dwelling on his physical traits, for they are a considerable source of the impression he creates. In the case of Forster Robertson they are profoundly important. His presence brings with it a certain air of distinction and refinement. It suggests a world of chivalrous passion and romantic ideals. The face is at once serene and sensitive, the brow high and shapely, the lips delicate and close pressed, the chin—the weakest feature—firm, but inadequate to the scale of the face. It is a face immortalized in Rossetti's great picture, "Love Kisses," in which Forster Robertson, then an actor student at the Royal Academy, represents Dante. For it was only an accident that made him an actor. He had played Macbeth, a child with his brothers and sister, one of whom, it is said, acted the part of the army of Macbeth, another the army of Macduff, with instructions to create an impression of numbers by rushing wildly from wing to wing, a device that worked admirably until they collapsed, and the poverty of the battlefield was revealed. But at Charterhouse, where he was contemporary of Cecil Maude, his interest was not in acting but in art, which he adopted as his career. But one day, forty years ago, G. Wills was complaining to Forster Robertson's father, the art critic, of the inadequacy of one of the younger players in his "Mary Stuart." "Why not try Johnston?" asked the elder Robertson. The suggestion was acted on, and Forster Robertson became an actor, never, however, wholly deserting his first calling in which he achieved considerable success as his well-known picture of the church actor in "Much Ado," painted for Irving, witnesses.

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On the stage he was simple, natural, affecting. It was only when he was off he was acting.

Irving, whether on or off the stage, was always an actor, a noble actor. His art had so absorbed his faculties that it became the only reality. He is linked in the mind with the other supreme actor of his time—Disraeli. They were very brothers in their art, equally wonderful in their mastery of the technique of mystery, in suggesting an alien and unexplored realm of experience and emotion—a realm that never was on sea or land. They differed only in this, that the one was subordinated to what he worked in, the illustration had become his existence; the other was a conscious player.

Actor as Influence. Now, Mr. Forster Robertson has none of this superlative legend. There is not a trick in his repertoire. There is a study, of course, study which through his teacher, Samuel Phelps, links him up with the classic tradition of English acting, in suggesting an alien and unexplored realm of experience and emotion—a realm that never was on sea or land. They differed only in this, that the one was subordinated to what he worked in, the illustration had become his existence; the other was a conscious player.

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There could be no better corrective to this mistaken view than a course of Forster Robertson. It would reveal the stage at its highest, and it is by its highest that it should be judged. There have been more sensational actors than Mr. Forster Robertson, actors whose imaginative intensity has carried them beyond the limits of their art. We may suppose that Charles Kean was one of them. "To see Kean," said Coleridge, "was like reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning." Irving, too, touched a note outside the range of Mr. Forster Robertson, a note of impending horror, of unimaginable things. One felt that the whole cosmos was involved in his fate, that the very elements were mixed up with the

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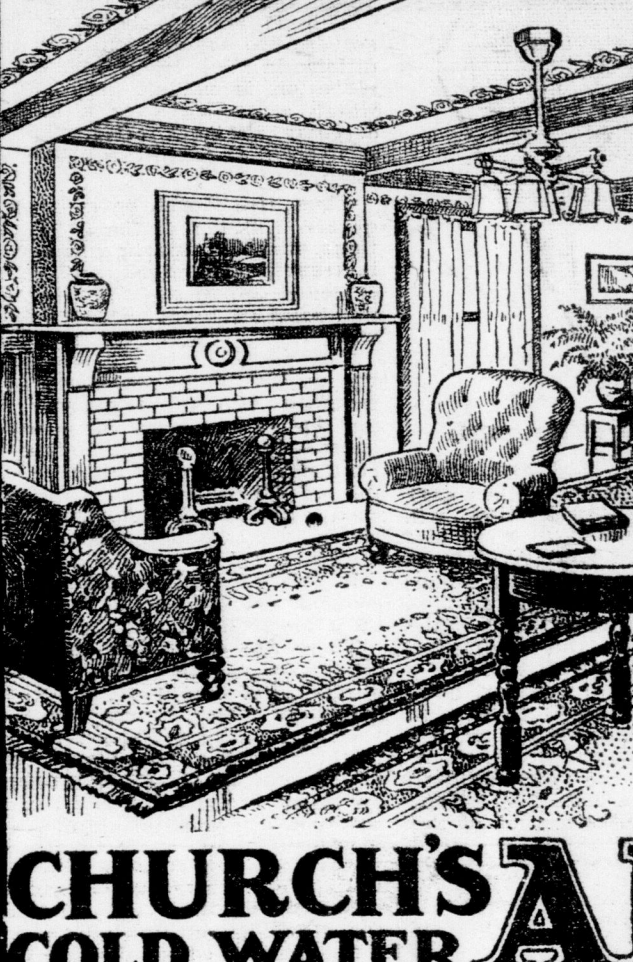
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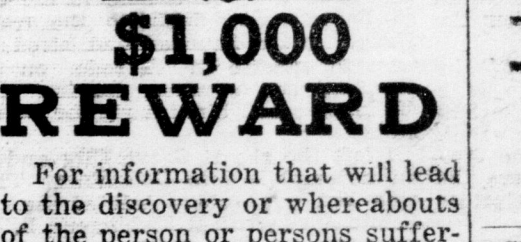
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