

been unusually favoured. Mathews was not simply an actor. Indeed, we shall probably be supported by public opinion when we say that those pages which relate to his life before he appeared professionally upon the stage are the most interesting among the many very interesting pages of this book. Moreover, it was a great advantage to have an account of the greater part of two out of three periods of Mathews' life, written by the hero himself in his own racy style. We will, however, give a short account of the actor's career before paying attention to the subordinate point of the editor's shortcomings.

Charles James Mathews was born at Liverpool, on Boxing-night, 1803, and narrowly escaped being christened Paul. His father and mother were both well-known comedians of their day, and appear to have entertained much affection for their child, whom they designed for some more serious (or, in the cant of the day, respectable) profession.

But no amount of dressing the little fellow up in 'a complete parson's suit of black, old-fashioned square-cut coat, long-flapped waistcoat, bands, shoes and buckles,' could give the twig the necessary clerical bend, when the company of such men as Colman, Hook, Liston, Kemble, and James and Horace Smith, was leading him to look at things from a dramatic and literary standpoint. Indeed, we can imagine the circumstance operating rather to turn his attention to mimicry and the art of 'making up' for a part, in which he afterwards excelled.

The usual school-boy troubles being over, architecture was chosen as his future vocation, and his studies commenced under Pugin. Among other works upon which he was employed, he mentions the Pavilion at Brighton, which was 'artistically executed under the personal superintendence of George the Fourth.' We prefer to attribute this favourable criticism to the sarcastic powers of the embryo comedian rather than to a lack of taste in the budding architect.

Even in those early days his histrionic powers were noticeable. A professional trip to Paris made him acquainted with French actors and acting, and, upon his return, his imitation of the celebrated M. Perlet, at a private but largely-attended amateur performance, was so perfect as to deceive even men intimate with the great original.

Hardly had the young man acquired a smattering of his profession, when an event occurred which changed the complexion of his whole life. Lord Blessington, who was on friendly terms with Mathews the elder, was bitten with the mania for building a castle on his Irish estates, and young Mathews was sent for in a hurry to help to put the nobleman's crude ideas into shape. Nothing came of the building project, but so much was Lord Blessington taken by the vivacious manners and versatile talents of his new companion that he took him to Italy, where a most delightful year was spent, chiefly at Naples, amid charming company.

To our mind this part of Mathews' life is the most interesting. Certainly it had a great effect upon his future capabilities as an actor. The youth, who had known Lamb, Hook, and Liston as a boy, was now being polished by associating with D'Orsay and the society of the best travelled Englishmen to be found in Italy. It is little wonder, then, that he should have earned the praise of being the only light comedian who, in acting a gentleman upon the stage, still preserved the manners of a gentleman in a drawing-room.

After Italy, he was sent to Wales to oversee certain building operations arising out of one of the then numerous bubble companies, in which his father had unfortunately dabbled. Already he was writing songs and pieces for his father's performances (including the well-known 'Jenny Jones'), and, when the Welsh Iron and Coal Company exploded, his relatives were a little nonplussed as to the best course for him to pursue. He resisted, however, all temptations to the stage, and entered the office of Nash, the architect. Not getting on here as he expected, he essayed a second continental tour of a more purely professional character than the last, ending, however, in his meeting Lord Normanby at Florence, and going in with him, heart and soul, for private theatricals.

A severe illness sent him home again, and his expiring effort as an architect was to apply for and obtain a district surveyorship, a post which he did not retain long. In 1835 his father died, financially embarrassed, and Mathews' own troubles began. We cannot follow him through the second period of his life, the period of unwise attempts to manage large theatres without capital,