

vile imitation, but rather to try to accumulate rich stores of scenic erudition, which may be given out to the public, stamped with the hall mark of original and creative individuality. There are some people who fancy that the accidents of good birth and an excellent education are enough to enable them to tread the stage with the same ease and freedom that they would enter a ball room, and they do not hesitate to appear there in the full belief that they can acquit themselves as well as an actor who has grown up upon them. This is a huge mistake. One of the principal difficulties they encounter at the very outset is that of not knowing how to walk upon the stage, which by the sensible incline of its construction makes the steps of a novice so unsteady, especially at the exits and entrances. I may cite myself as an example of this difficulty, although I had been dedicated to the stage from my earliest infancy, and instructed, day by day, with the greatest care, by my parental grandmother, yet, even at the age of fifteen, my movements had not acquired that freedom and naturalness necessary to render me perfectly at home on the stage, and I always felt the slight nervousness which I have just hinted at.

Addressing herself to beginners on the stage, Ristori offers this bit of advice from her own experience :

It is my decided conviction that no one who desires to devote his life to the stage ought to begin his studies by assuming parts of great importance, whether in comedy, drama, or tragedy. The task is too great for a beginner, and may result in effects damaging to his future ; either by leaving him overwhelmed with discouragement in consequence of the difficulties he has encountered, or by filling him with excessive vanity because of the consideration with which his attempt has been received, and which will probably cause him to neglect the study essential to further success. By confining himself, on the contrary, to small parts, whether they are congenial or not, he will render himself familiar with the stage, and acquire a correct and natural way of acting, and he may rest assured that by taking pains to render these correctly he will be preparing for better things, and his study will be more accurate.

That Ristori's passion for the stage was absorbing from the time when she first trod the boards, is evident from the following :

I never felt any fatigue, and such was my passion for the stage that when my manager chanced to give me a quiet evening in order not to overdo my strength, and perhaps also a little with the malicious design of making the public miss me, I felt quite like a fish out of water. It was in vain I meant to devote those leisure evenings to the study of a new and difficult part. I applied myself to it with the greatest ardour, but when the hour struck for the play to begin I was seized with such restlessness, such disquietude, that nothing sufficed to calm me. I seemed to hear the first chords of the orchestra, the impatient murmur of the audience, the intoxicating sounds of applause. I walked up and down my room with rapid and impatient strides, seeking to distract my mind. I tried to repeat from memory some of the passages in the play I had been studying ! It was all of no use ! I could apply myself to nothing, and at last I hastily entered my mother's chamber, saying : " Shall we go for an hour to the theatre ? " " Well, let us go then," she answered, " if you cannot keep away from it for one evening." Immediately we put on our cloaks and hats, and went. As soon as we reached the theatre my spirits rose, and I was happy.

Frequently fits of depression came over her which completely overpowered her :

On such occasions I would wander, by choice, in the cemetery of the city at the dead of night. I would often remain there for long periods, reading, by the help of the moon, the inscriptions of the various gravestones. Then I would return home full of sadness, feeling as though I had myself been one of the sufferers in those sad scenes and cases. Thus, also, it was my custom, when I arrived in a city hitherto unknown to me, after I had visited the picture galleries, to obtain permission to inspect the lunatic asylums ; for if I did not go to the cemetery it was there that the nightmare which for the moment possessed me, impelled me to wander. Mad girls were those who attracted my deepest sympathy ; their sad, tranquil lunacy allowed me to penetrate into their cells without danger of any kind, and I was able to stay long with them to gain their affection and confidence. Gradually, however, as years rolled on, I outgrew these eccentricities ; my nerves began to acquire the temper of steel. I learned to confine my romantic ideas within reasonable limits, and I applied myself with redoubled energy to the study of my art.

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New York.

CHARLES READE.*

How shall we form a judgment respecting the relative merits and position of literary men ? In some sense such a judgment will never be formed, and can never be formed, for one simple reason, that we cannot agree about our jury. Shall we determine the question by " count of head ? " This is clearly inadmissible. Think of Mr. Matthew Arnold, the high priest of culture, who declares that majorities are almost always wrong ! Certainly in regard to literary judgments Mr. Arnold is here right. But how shall we find our jury of experts ? Men equally capable, as far as their neighbours can judge, express opinions almost as conflicting as those of the man of culture and the Philistine.

Perhaps there can be no ultimate judgment but that of time which results in the survival of the fittest. Here we have a combination of the judgment of the best and that of the majority. The floating opinion of the many goes for very little after those " many " have passed away :

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the ages collect the judgments and the testimonies of the few ; and the resulting judgment will generally not be far wrong : at least there is very little to be gained by resisting it, and there is no appeal from it.

This is too early to determine the place of Charles Reade among the English novelists, or those of his own age. In some respects, particularly from the inequality of his work, it is not quite easy to place him, as we shall presently see ; but it is not too early to make nearer acquaintance with a man of such striking personality, whose contributions to English literature and to the English stage have been so important and influential.

Mr. Reade's nephews have shown good taste in the compilation and composition of the volumes before us. They are of moderate length ; they contain no words which can give offence to any living persons—as far as we are able to judge. They give us an adequate account of Charles Reade himself, his origin, his comparatively uneventful history, his character and peculiarities, and his writings. The selection of the extracts from the letters and journals has been made by Mr. Charles L. Reade, the residuary legatee of the author ; and the actual writing of the book has been done by Mr. Compton Reade, who is himself a literary man of some mark, and was, for some time, chaplain of the college in which Charles Reade was a fellow—Magdalen College, Oxford. We have noticed only one slip in regard to accuracy, a curious one to be made by an Oxford man. Mr. Compton Reade confounds T. Mozley, author of " Reminiscences of Oxford," the contributor to the *Times*, with J. B. Mozley, his brother, who was Regius Professor of Divinity.

Charles Reade was fond of tracing his own mental peculiarities to certain ancestors who were men of note, English gentlemen for many generations back, nor did he fail to recognise with gratitude a great grandmother, the beautiful daughter of a blacksmith, who, he supposed, had brought some new power into the family.

No doubt there is a good deal in heredity ; Mr. Reade may have been right in accounting for himself in this way. His noble and generous impulses, his hatred of injustice, his endless warfare against everything which he thought wrong and mean and base may have descended to him from his forefathers, and not least from the fine old squire, his father, and from his beautiful, pious, cultivated mother. But the eminent man had another side ; he was impatient, litigious, cantankerous, and sometimes even very violent in speech.

These things must be put down in part to nature, in part to education. In the latter respect, he was distinctly unfortunate. If he had gone to a public school, he would probably have made a much better start, and would have been better prepared to enjoy his university life. As it was, he is one of the few men of cultivated and literary tastes who have cared hardly at all for the great university of which he was a member, or for the beautiful college in which he was first a Demy and afterwards a Fellow.

Charles Reade was a student of literature and a critic long before he became an author. On one point there can be no doubt, he was eminently conscientious, if he was also crotchety, as a dramatic and literary artist. The labour which he underwent in the preparation of his plays and novels is perhaps greater than that undergone by any contemporary writer. Lord Lytton was probably quite as great a reader ; but it would be difficult to name another writer who was equally careful to get all the information necessary for the understanding and representation of the period, the persons, the circumstances, with which he was concerned.

Two faults have been thought to be conspicuous in the novels of Reade. The first is their character of pamphleteering. It does certainly appear as though the conspicuous endeavour to expose and denounce some abuse would, to some extent, mar the literary character of works of fiction. Most readers must have had this feeling when reading such books as " Never too Late to Mend," " Hard Cash," " Put Yourself in His Place." It is felt much less in his greatest work, " The Cloister and the Hearth." But, after all, the question is, whether the aim of the writer was allowed to interfere with the objective accuracy of his pictures ; and on this point we must give a verdict in his favour. We could enumerate many novels which have been supposed to occupy a place almost in the first rank, in which there is no evident purpose, which are saturated with the subjectivity of the writer. From this Charles Reade is free. He belongs to the great family of objectives, in which Homer, Shakespeare, and Scott find their place.

There is one curious apparent exception to this in the second fault which has been charged against Charles Reade. We refer to a kind of Jack Hornerism which from time to time breaks out in his pages. " What a good boy am I ! " He insists on your appreciating literature, the literary artist—nay, himself. He sometimes seems to stop and ask the reader what he thinks of *that* ! If he had been remonstrated with on this point, he would probably have said that the public was so great an ass that it needed to be told what to admire. This may be true ; but asses are stubborn, and will not always do what they are bid. It is better to hold out the bundle of hay, and say nothing about it.

Charles Reade's genius was essentially a dramatic one, and when he penned his epitaph he put " dramatist " first after his name. He was very angry when some of his plays failed, and when others were rejected by the managers. It was another case of " asses." The man, however, who put upon the stage " Masks and Faces," " Never too Late to Mend," and " Drink," has some right to strong opinions. Even his play of " Gold," which was declared to be a failure, had such success that it saved the manager of the theatre in which it was played from ruin.

Some of his novels must be placed not only in the first class, but in the first rank. " Never too Late to Mend " took the world by storm. " Put Yourself in His Place " has scenes, notably the description of the bursting of the reservoir, which no reader will ever forget. " Hard Cash " is a