

A VETERAN ACTOR.



John L. Saphoré, of whom an excellent likeness appears above, has been an actor and stage director for forty-four years. Mr. Saphoré recently visited THE MIRROR office and consented to a request that he relate the story of his long career.

"I was born September 15, 1835," said he, "in Philadelphia and obtained my education, like most youngsters of that time, in the public schools. Upon completing my course at the Jefferson Grammar School I entered the Central High School, from which I graduated, the third of a class, the head of which was no less a personage than the late Ignatius Donnelly. My parents and relatives were none of them connected with nor especially interested in the theatre, so that it was in no way due to them that I adopted the stage as a career. My first ambitions in that direction were aroused by my success in reciting in Sunday school. I may say here that a considerable proportion of Philadelphia actors were influenced to enter the profession by similar small beginnings.

"My first engagement was in May, 1857, at John Drew's National Theatre, Philadelphia—where the Auditorium now stands. I was a special protégé of John Drew, the father of the present actor of that name, and I might say I lived at his home until his death, for I went to my own merely to sleep. I am proud to relate that many an hour I held George Drew Barrymore on my knee. On Saturday afternoons, for we had no matinees in those days, I would take the children, Louisa, John, and George out to Fairmount Park for an outing. I commenced, as in my opinion every one must to achieve real success, at the bottom of the ladder, the first thing I ever did upon the stage being to lead the Demon Dance in The Naiad Queen. We had a splendid company at the old National in those days, including as it did George Boniface, Edwin Adams, Theodore Hamilton, Mary Devlin (afterward Mrs. Edwin Booth), Annie Wilkes, Mrs. Edwin Adams and Mrs. Boniface. Joseph Jefferson was stage-manager. Part of 1858 I spent at the Walnut Street Theatre, that was then managed by Mrs. D. P. Bowers. In the company were Mr. and Mrs. John Drew, Mr. and Mrs. Conwav, Mrs. D. P. Bowers, Peter Richings, Caroline Richings, W. A. Chapman, L. R. Shewell and Mrs. Josh Silsbee, and it was even a finer company than the one at the National. I may be prejudiced, but I firmly believe that, excepting no one, Mrs. John Drew was our greatest all round actress, for the reason that she possessed more versatility than any other. I have seen her play Lady Macbeth and follow her superb performance of that part with an equally fine piece of comedy work, neither portrayal bearing the slightest resemblance to the other, and so she could go on through an almost endless repertoire of characters. Her husband, John Drew, I also deem one of the best of American players, and had his career been longer I feel sure that he would have ranked to-day the equal in his own line of any of his contemporaries. He was mainly a comedian, although he, too, could play a very wide range of parts. Among the roles with which I always associate him as the best exponent are Touchstone in As You Like It, Dogberry in Much Ado About Nothing, Mowbray in The Hypocrite, and William in Black-Eyed Susan. His Irish characters were masterpieces, and I doubt if, in this line alone, he has ever had a peer. Some of the most notable of his Irish characterizations were Captain Murphy, McGuire, Gerald Pepper, Tim O'Brien, and Handy Andy. His eulogy can be written in one word of three letters, he was a man. I have heard that managers of the present day generally desire to engage unmarried players when possible. This was reversed in the old days at Philadelphia, managers greatly preferring to secure married couples, all things being otherwise equal. At that time the proportion of unmarried actors was very small, and the logical outcome, a desire upon the actor's part to be situated permanently in a place in order to have a home, was the result. This could not be otherwise than beneficial to both the public and the players. The performances were more even because the actors worked better together by reason of their long association with one another. The actors made more friends and took more interest in their work and homes than it is possible for single and unsettled persons to do. One instance of how well married players pleased their managers comes to my mind in the persons of Mr. and Mrs. E. N. Thayer, who were connected with different Philadelphia theatres for a period of over thirty years. Another thing that contributed to the welfare of the profession in those days was the fact that it remained to a great extent separated from the rest of the world. The players had their work and their recreation, their marriages and their funerals, but they mingled little with non-professionals, and I believe many unpleasant occurrences were thereby averted. It was almost an impossibility for a person not connected with the theatre to meet an actor or actress. Few outsiders had the privilege of entering an actor's home, and I recall that it used to be deemed an almost unattainable honor. These things, separately and collectively, aided to no small degree the exclusion of scandal from

our ranks, and of slander and gossip by the public.

"From the Walnut Street Theatre I went to the Arch Street, where I entered upon my first full season's engagement.

"I next went to the Continental—the National renamed—as assistant stage-manager. During the season we produced The Cataract of the Ganges, The Forty Thieves, Blue Beard, and The Tempest. It was at a performance of the last named that a fire broke out, destroying the lives of nine dancers, among them the four Gale sisters. These productions were all of a spectacular nature, and despite the advancement in the art of scene painting and the other attributes of a modern production, I have never witnessed such imposing spectacles since. In The Cataract of the Ganges a woman rode into a fall of real water that in volume exceeded any effect of the kind we have ever had. Sometimes as many as twenty-four horses, ridden by circus riders, were in use upon the stage at once. In one spectacle there was introduced a chariot drawn by eight horses, that dashed from the rear of the stage to the footlights at full speed and then wheeled suddenly around. I assure you it was a thrilling and hazardous maneuver.

"A short engagement at the Winter Garden, New York city, where I produced The Naiad Queen for John Sleeper Clarke, followed. I then returned to the Arch as prompter, remaining until 1861. The company at the Arch at that time consisted of about twenty-five people, of whom the only ones now living are L. R. Shewell, retired; F. Chippendale, in the Forrest Home; Frank Drew, B. T. Ringgold, P. Aug. Anderson, Walter Benn, E. P. Wilks and myself.

"Engagements of different lengths and of varied character followed at the Howard Athenæum, Boston; Wood's Museum, Chicago; the Trimble Opera House, Albany, and with Jarrett, Thayer and Tompkins' road companies around Boston. I next had charge of the Warren Combination and the tour of Mr. and Mrs. William Gomersall.

"In May, 1866, I married Harriet A. Ketchum, of Boston, a sister of the great actor, George F. Ketchum, but herself a non-professional at the time. We remained together most of the time thereafter, until my wife was killed in an accident at the Hotel Madison, Toledo, O., Oct. 2, 1900, making over thirty-four years of married life that was both happy and peaceful for both of us.

"In 1866-67 I went to Mobile as stage-manager for Roig and McDonough. After this came a return trip to Chicago for a short time with Colonel Wood at the Museum. "I then joined Spalding, Bidwell and McDonough for their New Orleans, Memphis and St. Louis theatres, and followed this up by going to Montreal with Lucille Western. Then came a winter season at the Lyceum, Toronto.

"My next move was to rejoin Colonel Wood in Chicago, where I was in the midst of the great fire and was, so far as I can ascertain, the only actor with a roof over my head the morning after the disaster. I went with Colonel Wood to the Globe, and then leased and managed for myself the Toronto Lyceum. After this I went to Galveston with Henry Greenwall. I was at the National Theatre, Philadelphia, during the Centennial season of The Black Crook. The following winter found me at the opening of the Academy of Music, Halifax, N. S. From there I went to the Pence Opera House, Minneapolis, and then once more back to Chicago, first at the Academy of Music and then at Colonel Wood's newly erected Museum. Engagements with Robert Downing and Edwin Ferry bring me down to 1893, at which time I joined Walker Whiteside at the Union Square Theatre, playing Polonius and the First Gravedigger in Hamlet and Joseph in Richelieu. I have played the two first-named roles over one thousand times, which I think quite a record. I have been with Mr. Whiteside continuously since 1893.

"During these many engagements I have either played with or directed the stage for Edwin Forrest, E. L. Davenport, Edwin Adams, Edwin Booth, John Wilkes Booth, Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Florence, J. W. Wallack, Kate Bateman, W. E. Burton, Mr. and Mrs. Williams, Helen Western, Lucille Western, Kate Fisher, William Warren, Joseph Jefferson, John E. Owens, Lester Wallack, Charles Fechter, Charles Dillor, Jane Coombs, Jane Hosmer, Charlotte Cushman, Maggie Mitchell, John Sleeper Clarke, Mr. and Mrs. John Drew, Frank Cananfrau, Julia Deane, Mrs. D. P. Bowers, Elise Holt, Isabelle Cubas, Joseph Proctor, Mary Prevost, and Ben De Bar. Of all my managers the only ones that now survive are Henry Greenwall and Henry C. Jarrett, so I think it but natural that I should commence to feel lonely. I have, as a matter of course, had many experiences and gathered many impressions in these numerous years of action. As for my opinion of Edwin Forrest, the fact that the characters of Jack Cade, Metamora, King Lear, William Tell and many of his other personations are dead to the stage is ample evidence that we shall probably 'never look upon his like again.' He improved with every performance, as he was always studying, in fact he never went upon the stage without re-reading his part. If I did not see him play a certain role for some time, I noticed many changes and improvements in his business when I did see him in it again. He believed that perfection was unattainable, albeit he came nearer to it than any actor within my recollection. He was personally a man who made few friends, but those he made he never forsook, and, it may be said to their credit, they seldom forsook him. The impression his general appearance made upon you was that of a tall man, whereas he stood but five feet nine inches in his stocking feet. As for Charlotte Cushman, I can only coincide with the view of the majority that she was the greatest tragic actress the country has ever produced, although I reiterate that to Mrs. John Drew belongs, in my opinion, the title of America's greatest all round actress. I have read a good deal in the daily papers of late about actors and actresses collapsing from overwork. In the 'palmy days,' although more was actually accomplished, such a thing was a most rare occurrence, for the reason that a player was trained for hard work by a regular system of study, and could acceptably any role in his particular line on four hours' notice, whether he had ever seen the part before or not. One of the rules posted up in the greenroom was to the effect that every actor was expected to be ready to play any part in his line within that length of time. The method that made this possible was this: The grade of role above first walking gentleman was that of juvenile. The walking gentleman was understudying all the juvenile roles and the juvenile was understudying the grade of role above his, and so on throughout the entire company each member was pre-

paring himself in every way possible to take a better line of parts, should opportunity offer. By this system we were continually raising a new force of thoroughly equipped actors, to most of whom the now arduous committing of lines was mere child's play and but the very beginning of their work. Incidentally we were able to change the bill nightly without the terrific strain that would be attendant upon such an undertaking nowadays.

"The method of stage direction is now entirely different from the method I was taught, and I cannot believe that the change is for the better. Most stage-managers of to-day, I learn from recent experiences, achieve their results by bluster and bravado, often frightening new or nervous players out of their wits at the first rehearsal. In the days gone by it was seldom that a stage director ever raised his voice, and what he ordered he had a good reason for so doing. Instead of becoming angry or disgruntled at suggestions or questions by his actors, he was rather pleased, firm in the belief that his reasons, that he would gladly give, were the correct ones. Fully as much was accomplished by this quiet, gentlemanly method, and there was not one-half the ill-feeling and resentment between the actor and the stage-manager that exists to-day. Indeed they usually were most harmonious in their relations.

"My career as one of the rank and file has been already a lengthy one, but I have never regretted one moment of it, and I am looking forward to continuing in my profession for some time to come."

A "PLAIN CLOTHES" CHAT.

The big Dramatic Critic laughed quietly at my request to tell him a few truths about the inside workings of the machine. "Certainly!" he replied, with a quick change to frigidly and assuming an up-to-date magazine pose, "if you will permit me to monopolize the conversation. Pardon me," he exclaimed, taking an easy attitude and smiling reassuringly, "my official manner has become such a habit that I frequently pose to my reflection—thoughtlessly, of course," he added, as a questioning look crept across my face.

"To commence," he said, opening the safe and abstracting a box of cigars, a bottle and two glasses, "we will sip a slight token of an uptown manager's esteem, which cost me the trouble of saying a favorable word for a lady that he was obliged to 'place' in his last venture." He filled the glasses and we drank to the uptown manager.

"I suppose," I queried, by way of a leader, "that slight tokens are frequent?"

"They would be," he returned, passing the cigars and a very elaborate diamond studded match box, "if I permitted it, but I limit tokens to near friends—it's cash to the rest. This match box, for instance, is from a prominent manager not two blocks away. I used the word 'best' where conscience dictated 'worst.' Conscience and diplomacy, however, are poor running mates in this business." We lighted our cigars and he locked the door. "I really get tired of this everlasting dignity," he exclaimed, reseating himself and elevating his feet to the table top, "but eternal vigilance is the price of exclusiveness. This place would look like a vaudeville agent's shop if I once descended to the level of other men. And one cannot be too austere. Austerity is the Gibraltar of success; it cannot be penetrated or scaled. I have known men to become powerful critics whose only qualification for that position was austerity. Of course a man to be a critic that will go down to posterity must have the backing of education, wonderful powers of analysis, coupled with rare judgment, a wonderful memory, and a graceful, scholarly and trenchant pen; he must have, in fact, all the qualities and accomplishments that make many men famous, and in addition—a complete dramatic library. But," he exclaimed, "a man with the preceding qualifications is a fool to waste them in this business, because criticism to-day is merely a question of job, and how long you can hold it, and I find and I am, to be candid, one of the 'Brotherhood,' that austerity, the complete library, a fairly good command of adjectives, sarcasm and newspaper humor, and the ability to subjugate your better self at will, will earn you a larger salary and give you a more powerful position than the posterity seeking D. C."

"The public to-day don't want scholarly criticism any more than they want scholarly acting—they want something they can understand. They appreciate the humorous and sarcastic jabs at the actor, play and playwright. The actor is the only person that thinks about himself as he does. Some actors are bad and some are good, but they all think themselves great. The public do not, but the management endeavor to make them think as the actor does. Of course we are circumscribed to a great extent by the advertising department of the paper, but then we know the managers must advertise, and so do the managers, and right here is where the rake off becomes a question of equity. Of course we have to share with the paper, if the deal becomes known, on a per cent. basis according to the critic's standing. Some so-called critics are engaged like some hotel waiters, without salary, but get what you can. It is easy to understand that the 'Brotherhood' does not countenance this method, and we are endeavoring to abolish it, but, like every evil, it is difficult to combat.

"The pitfalls of our position are many. It generally takes a new man quite a while to get over the big head occasioned by seeing his so-called opinion in print and hearing it discussed. Some men never get over this condition, but they seldom last long, and invariably they are back on the assignment desk in three months. When one is an old offender, so to speak, the position actually becomes monotonous, and we gladly welcome the slight diversion of seeing the novice 'swell up and bust.' The emolument is the only thing that holds us old men to our posts. That devotional talk is rubbish."

He filled the glasses, tendered fresh cigars, and continued carelessly: "The most wearisome part of it all is the obligation to attend first-nights; perhaps I am unconsciously biased, but for the life of me I don't see how the public stand for it. As far as I can see the plays of to-day are alike; twisted and turned and rehabilitated, of course, but imitations of each other—a dreary mess of inanities. I almost believe at times that the public attend the theatre for force of habit, and successes and failures are due to the vacillating strength or weakness of the habit. I cannot logically account for it otherwise. But that opinion wouldn't do in print—the public must be cajoled and cressed the same as successful playwrights and managers and actors. We are supposed to use our best judgment—ahem!

—when the flood tide bears a freight, and that freight a rich one. Success is invariably due to success and an intelligent understanding of human nature.

"Actors for the most part are managerial impositions in my private opinion. Popular actors are not good actors—they are well advertised actors—they are like plays, they serve the managerial purpose and are dropped—some at wonderful (padded) salaries into the vaudeville pool, convenient fad, the others whence they came. Criticism by comparison is fast becoming extinct for this reason. Of course we have to bring in the old names occasionally to mystify the public, but it is a matter of bluff on our part and the discerning ones know it—but they don't count.

"Our work without doubt is the least laborious of any of our fellows when the knack is acquired. You see we don't have to be accurate, although in historical matters it saves explanations. When we are in doubt we jest or recite a parable, and leave the situation for the public to solve as they will; 'tis an easy matter to correct a mistake later if it be necessary. A critic with a humorous vein, of course, has an advantage—anybody can be sarcastic, but the public tire of dreary criticism and a little of the ridiculous helps out wonderfully. I don't mean that a man must be a Mark Twain; merely a plain Sunday supplement humorist. You will pardon me for using the words critics and criticisms, but it is a 'Brotherhood rule' bearing a fine as penalty.

"Yes, we have to stand for a deal of abuse, but not so much as the layman thinks. A large portion of what you read is prearranged among ourselves for advertising purposes. We are well aware that it goes on behind our backs, but an actor's abuse injures no one, and when a metropolitan success makes them too obstreperous we generally 'count them out.'

"Going? Well, have another with me and a cigar to lighten your journey. And keep your eye on a certain Broadway Thespian that is airing his opinions very noisily of late. Good night, and come again when time hangs heavily."

ORMSBY A. COURT.

ENGAGEMENTS.

Cero Louis Mitchell, Eugene Shakespeare, E. St. Clair Evers, Edith Collicson, and J. S. McElhaney, for the Gibney-Hoeffler companies.

Helen Grantly, by Delcher and Brennan, to play Katherine in The Taming of the Shrew, supporting Charles B. Hanford.

Mary Carrington and Della Nivens, for the Jules Grau Opera company.

Gertrude Norman, for Hennessy Leroy's Other People's Money company.

For Sadie Martinot's company in The Marriage Game: Edwin Arden, Al. S. Lipman, Frank Sylvester, Mrs. McKee Rankin, Jeffreys Lewis, J. B. Booth, and Mabel Wright.

J. C. Vernon, for the light comedy lead in Humbug.

Dwight Smith, for The Girl from Maxim's. Sydney Barraclough, for the Anna Held company.

Herman De Vries, by Henry W. Savage, for the Castle Square Opera company.

Violet Voldaire Holmes, by Hanlon Brothers, for the role of Sylvia in Superba.

Wallie Wilson and Ollie Minell, with Carpenter's Quo Vadis, to play Chilo and Queen Popae, respectively.

Charles Sheppard, for the Southern Stock company, to be transferred later to the Nick Carter, Detective, company, supporting Ella Wilson.

T. H. Halladay, in advance of The Coked Hat.

Fanny and Louise Grave, with The Coked Hat.

George Slattery, for The Parish Priest.

Bryan Darley and Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer Martini, to support Mabel and Ethel Strickland in For Love's Sake.

Bernice Howard Jossey, with the Holden Comedy company for leading soubrette. The season opened July 28 at the Bijou Theatre, Chicago, Ill.

Joseph A. Weber, for A Royal Rival, with William Favershaw.

Phil Maher, with the Frankie Carpenter company.

George Walters has been engaged by W. H. Malloy to support William Beach in The Toll Gate Inn next season. He will play the part of Dr. Abner Buck.

Etta Butler, for The Liberty Belles.

Gertrude Norman, the English actress, for Other People's Money.

Frederic Melville, to originate a character part in Daughter of the Diamond King.

Adolph Jackson, to play Petronius in Whitney's production of Quo Vadis.

Charles W. Stokes, with Kelcey and Shannon in Her Lord and Master.

Verona Jarbeau, O. B. Collins, and Walter Benn, for Mazeppa.

Thomas Daniels, by F. C. Whitney, as basso of the Lulu Glaser Opera company.

William C. Cushman, by Tommy Shearer for the comedy lead in The Girl from Porto Rico.

Page Spencer, to be featured as Andy in A Homespun Heart.

For Murray and Mack's Shooting the Chutes: Charles A. Murray, Ollie Mack, Kattie Beck, Gus Pixley, Edward Powers, Jimmie Fanson, Lillian Durham, Adeline Mann, Katherine B. Roberts, Ed S. Jolly, Blanche Greago, Winnie Jolly, Allie Marshall, Crystal Huntley, Ed West, Flossie Coy, Amy Robiere, Tresa Roggiero, Beatrice Hammond, Jennie Kurth, May West, Charles F. Heffner, Theodore Northrup, musical director; Frank H. Mathews, business-manager; George A. Florida, agent, and Joe M. Gaites, representative.

For Finnigan's Ball (Western): Kearney and Ryan, Carleton Sisters, Kate Dahl, Clark and Gandy, John Flynn, Thomas A. Morse, Powers and Theobald, Jennie Young, Anna Young, John M. Welch, representative, and Al. Boshell, agent.

For Finnigan's Ball (Eastern): Moran and Murphy, Horace Randall, Joe Ward, Hagne and Herbert, Burdock Sisters, Al. White, Edna Murrilla, Henrietta Tedro, Harry F. Winsman, representative, and George Florida, agent.