

A Book and Its Story

"OUR MARY'S" MEMORIES

IT IS, I believe, quite the custom to speak of Miss Mary Anderson as "our Mary," though that name of endearment was not originally applied to her. According to Mr. Laurence Hutton (see "Plays and Players"), Mary Gannon of Wallack's Theatre was the first of "our Marys." In later days the name was given to Miss Anderson because of the very friendly feeling the American public entertained for her. That feeling will be even more friendly after her book ("A Few Memories": Harper & Bros.) has been read. It is just such a book as those familiar with the career of Miss Anderson would expect. Had she been a greater actress, I doubt if she would have written as she has. As a girl she was "stage-struck," and she was allowed to follow the bent of her inclinations. After a few years of stage life she had enough of it, and was only too glad to retire from public view. She retired while she was at the height of her popularity, so it was no sense of failure that determined her in her course. Even when she began her career she does not seem to have been very much infatuated with the life, and she always found the drudgery as well as the publicity very irksome. Success was not long in coming to her. She was fitted in many ways to shine as an actress. Her face, her figure, her voice were all in her favor, and her personality was altogether attractive.

"I have written these pages," she says in her opening chapter, "more for young girls (who may have the same ambitions that I had) than for anyone else: to show them that the glitter of the stage is not all gold, and thus to do a little towards making them realize how serious an undertaking it is to adopt a life so full of hardships, humiliations, and even dangers." Miss Anderson has conscientiously done what she set out to do, but let her not flatter herself that she has accomplished her object. If warnings were heeded, how little trouble there would be in the world! But, alas! they are not. I have my doubts whether the average girl with histrionic ambitions will find a warning in Miss Anderson's career. Indeed, I believe that she will think that the "hardships," "humiliations" and "even dangers" are offset by the applause of the public and the many social attractions of the life of a successful actress, to say nothing of the money considerations.

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The social side of Miss Anderson's career was not the least of its rewards. Through her position as an actress and her charming personality she was received by the most interesting people wherever she went. In America Gen. Sherman and Mr. Longfellow treated her as though she were their own daughter, and in England she was as much at home in the houses of Tennyson, Dean Stanley, Alma Tadema, George Watts, Mrs. Humphry Ward and other men and women famous in the world of art and letters, as she was in her own. Her anecdotes of these are the most interesting in the book. Every conversation with Longfellow, she writes, left some good result. His first advice to her, which she has followed for years, was:—"See some good picture—in nature if possible, or on canvas,—hear a page of the best music, or read a great poem daily. You will always find a free half-hour for one or the other, and at the end of the year your mind will shine with such an accumulation of jewels as to astonish even yourself." A few months before his death the poet sent for Miss Anderson, who was in Boston, to come to see him. She went and was shocked at his feebleness and "the veil of sadness that was over him." "Until the spring then!" he said as they parted, "if I am still here. I wonder if we shall ever meet again! I am old now and not very well." He stood at the window watching her as she left. Its saah was covered with snow. "His face looked like a picture set in a white, glistening frame; for the sun was shining, and his hair and beard were nearly as white as the snow itself." That was the last time she saw him.

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Miss Anderson quotes Mr. Joseph Jefferson and Mr. Lowell on immoral plays. The former was very severe upon plays that "drag one through the mire of immorality, even when they show a good lesson at the end. 'What I could not invite my friends to hear and see in my own parlor,' he said, 'I would not

feel at liberty to put before my friends in the theatre.'" Years after that she was lunching with Mr. Lowell and a party of friends, and the conversation fell upon "La Tosca." Mr. Lowell was asked what he thought of the play. "I have not seen it," he answered. "I refuse to have my mind dragged in the gutter. If Mme. Bernhardt will appear in such plays, I for one will forego the pleasure of seeing her act." Miss Anderson has also heard Tennyson declaim against "this realism; this degradation of the drama," as he called it. She met Mr. Lowell for the first time in London, at the house of Mrs. Humphry Ward, and was delighted with him, as he no doubt was with her, for Mr. Lowell loved young people, and that they were girls and beautiful did not lessen their attractiveness.

Browning impressed her less favorably than either Longfellow, Lowell or Tennyson. He was more like an "old-school Southern country gentleman" than her ideal of "England's mystic poet." "There was," she says, "a kind of friendly chattiness in his conversation, more agreeable, I thought, than distinguished."

Tennyson she met for the first time in Dean Stanley's drawing-rooms.

"He had," she writes, "a noble head and presence, but my first feeling was one of keen disappointment, simply because I did not find the Laureate exactly what I expected him to be. To form an ideal of any person, place, or thing beforehand is no doubt a mistake; for there is a disturbing surprise in store for one, even if the original surpasses the ideal. The poet's manner at first struck many as gruff. I felt it so then; though, on knowing him better, I found him one of the kindest and most sympathetic natures. He did not come into the drawing-room after luncheon, for his pipe seemed a necessity to him on all occasions. He sent for me before I left, and during our tête-à-tête his manner had so changed as to lead me to believe that his former brusqueness was only due to shyness. * * * He was a large, strongly built man, with a lion-like head, splendidly poised on broad shoulders. His profile was particularly noble. His hands were large and shapely, his fingertips square. Anyone understanding the subject would have called them honest, trust-inspiring hands, capable of doing good and great things."

After this they became warm friends, and she visited him many times in his own home. While preparing his "Foresters" for the stage, she writes that "a visit was planned to the New Forest. Lord Tennyson, with his son and charming daughter-in-law, my mother and I spent two days together under the 'melancholy bows' of that beautiful wood. I had never seen the bard in gayer mood than during that long picnic. We lunched upon the ground, in the checkered shade, and walked and drove from morning till night through the great forest. Passing some stray streamlet it was delightful to see the aged poet play at ducks-and-drakes and quote between whiles in his inimitable way:—

'Flow on, cold rivulet, to the sea,' etc.'

Cardinal Newman received her at Birmingham. She was "surprised to find him very small and fragile. No picture of him gives the spiritual beauty of his face. His thick hair was so white that it looked as if some snowy powder had been thrown over it. His eyes were light in color, small, and full of expression. When he smiled they had the youthful look of a boy of ten. His manner was pleasant, though not so winning or courtly as that of Cardinal Manning, who might have been a Prince in the most brilliant of courts. Cardinal Newman had more of the reserve of the student about him. * * * I can still see his slight, almost shriveled figure, clad in a black-and-red cassock, and the beautiful head and snowy hair with the scarlet skull cap. There was such a marked character about him that even a passing glance in a crowd would have stamped his personality upon one's memory."

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While she was in London many new plays were offered to Miss Anderson. Among others Mr. W. S. Gilbert submitted "Brantingham Hall," but she realized that the chief character was not in her line, and declined it. In his usual amusing way the author asked her whether her reason for doing so was because she found anything gross in it; "for," said he, "I hear that you hate gross things so much that you can hardly be induced to take your share of the gross receipts."

Her success in London was instantaneous and continuous, as every one knows who follows the history of the stage. From London she returned to her own country, and in Washington took her one and only farewell of the stage. She was very ill on that night, but insisted upon acting. She thus describes the last scene:—

"Donning the statue-like draperies of Hermione, I mounted the pedestal. My physician, formerly an officer in the army, said that he had never, even in the midst of a battle, felt so nervous as when he saw the figure of

Hermione swaying on her pedestal up that long flight of stairs. Every moment there was an hour of torture to me, for I felt myself growing fainter and fainter. All my remaining strength was put into that last effort. I descended from the pedestal and was able to speak all but the final line. This remained unuttered and the curtain rang down on my last appearance on the stage."

Here are the last lines in this volume of Memories:—

"The following November (1889) I became engaged to Antonio de Navarro, whom I had known for many years, and in June of 1890, at the little Catholic Church at Hampstead, London, we were married. Many and great inducements have since been frequently offered me to act again, but—

' Il en coute trop cher pour briller dans le monde,
Combien je vais aimer ma retraite profonde;
Pour vivre heureux, vivons cachés.' "

That a woman still in her thirties should have "memories" worth printing is unusual. That these were worth printing, no one will deny who reads them. They will leave to future generations a fragrant memory of "our Marv."

J. L. G.