

## TWO ARTISTS OF COMEDY.

MAGGIE MITCHELL AND MARY GANNON.

A LITTLE girl, curiously ragged and unkempt, bounding through an open window in the side-scene—her voice not especially sweet or musical, yet rarely modulated, clear, and decided; her utterance lightning quick, and every movement, gesture, pose, electric with energy; her laugh a wild, careless, jubilant, child's laugh, resonant, ringing, and perfectly natural—such is the familiar apparition of the actress Maggie Mitchell, at the opening of her famous play of "Fanchon."

Previous to the late rebellion, Miss Mitchell had been a favorite actress with some New York audiences, and was extremely popular in Southern and Western theatres. To the play-goers of New Orleans, she was known as the "Star of the South," and at Pittsburg as the "Pet of the West"—at least these were the titles she herself had placed upon the bills, and which she liked to see there in very large type indeed. She had youth, a certain piquancy and *abandon* which served in place of beauty, a curiously child-like voice and manner, both capable of expressing joy or melancholy; add to these great vivacity and a sprightly enjoyment of her work, and you have a fair *résumé* of her dramatic abilities. As an actress, she gave no especial marks of excellence, was neither forcible nor original, and the characters in which she appeared were often better played by others, and did not belong to the highest standards of the drama. She generally appeared in conjunction with Mr. Sam. Glenn, an indifferent actor of a single part, that of a stupid Dutchman in the farce of "The Double Bedded Room."

For a good many years, she led a precarious, nomadic life, wandering about from town to town, mainly up and down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, and finding her greatest profit in the South.

In 1860, there was a gentleman in St. Louis named Aug. Waldauer, leading the orchestra at the theatre, and chief promoter and conductor of all the musical festivals in that Germanic city. He had been liberally educated in one of the best of the German universities, and his mind was deeply imbued with the spirit of the drama and the music of his native country. He sat on his perch in the orchestra night after night, watching the vivacious little actress, fancying there was more in her than she knew; that she was capable of better things than she had thus far shown. He said nothing to her or to any one about his fancy, but went home one night resolving to make the little lady's fortune, and to write her name up among the real stars in the dramatic sky. He worked very hard and earnestly at his self-appointed task, and was kept pretty busy between his morning and evening duties at the theatre and his musical societies.

When she appeared in St. Louis in the May of 1861, his work was done. He asked permission to read a new play to her. It was read and approved. It

was called "Fanchon, the Cricket," and was a translation from a German play, which, in turn, was a dramatization from George Sand's famous idyl of the loves and trials of rustic lovers.

During that same engagement, the play was put in rehearsal and produced, the author anticipating his own and the artist's future success from his stool in the orchestra. But, on the very night of its production, Camp Jackson was taken by Lyon, and there was some ugly fighting going on in the streets of St. Louis. Two German regiments, finding themselves sorely pressed, turned and fired upon their tormentors, and there was weeping that night, and for many nights after, over dead and mangled sons and fathers. The fictitious grief of Fanchon had to yield in interest to the real sorrows rife in those Missouri homes. The realities of life had suddenly become too serious to permit public attention to be devoted to the stage. Star and manager struggled bravely on, acting to empty houses for a few nights more, and then succumbed to the universal neglect, and the theatre closed.

Nevertheless, the play was a good one, and so thought author, star, and manager. When the theatre closed, the author became a soldier, and won a captain's commission under Fremont; the manager paced the stage of his dark old shell of a house, grimly surveying the tawdry scenery, the draped chandeliers and upholstery, and sighed for the "piping times of peace;" and Maggie Mitchell, left once more to struggle with fortune, wandered away through the West again, carrying the manuscript of "Fanchon" with her, and to not too fastidious audiences played the new part, thereby slowly growing to greatness.

On the 9th of June, 1862, Maggie Mitchell was in New York, lessee of Laura Keene's little theatre on Broadway, which she had especially engaged for the production of her new play. Evidently it was not held in much estimation yet, for in the issue of that morning the "Tribune" went out of its way to fling a sneer at it. But the next morning the "Tribune" told a different story; for the play had been produced, and the young actress had startled the critics by the almost miraculous power she displayed in the character of Fanchon—a power before undeveloped, unsuspected by either herself or any other person, excepting Aug. Waldauer, musician and soldier.

When Maggie Mitchell walked off the stage of Laura Keene's little theatre that beautiful summer's night, she knew she was famous and that her fortune was secure.

Joseph Jefferson went over to England a little while before that June night, carrying in his carpet-bag an old dog-eared copy of the play of "Rip Van Winkle," a dramatization of Irving's story, done by the great comedian's half-brother, Charles Burke. It was the body of the same play which Mr. Jefferson now performs. Arriving in England, he hands it to Mr. Dion Bourcicault, and requests that gentleman to "touch it up a little." That very clever dramatist, novelist, and actor, touched it up, as suggested, and has received from Joseph Jefferson, first and last, as compensation for that little bit of journey-work, eighteen thousand dollars. The result of Mr. Bourcicault's touching up, added to Mr. Jefferson's genius, made the latter one of the wealthiest actors on the stage.

Aug. Waldauer's translation, added to Maggie Mitchell's peculiar power, made her as rich as her brother artist. And, as the actress now stands triumphantly upon the stage, her fame and fortune assured, tossing back the flying masses of her hair, dancing from foot to foot in elfish joyousness, full of a singular winsomeness, and regnant with nervous passion; while boxes, pit and galleries

unite in prolonged and deafening applause, or yield to the more subtle flattery of tears, let us hope that she has not forgotten her author.

It is not alone that nature has done so much toward making Maggie Mitchell what she is, but she has of her own self a subtle intuition of, and a living sympathy with, the character of Fanchon, and to its development and representation she has been a close and patient student.

Nature might have seemed churlish and niggardly of her gifts, if this character had not been especially created for the actress; but as it is, her stunted growth, her child-like voice, which, while it has all of youth's tenderness and humor, is full of age's melancholy and bitterness, her petulant manner, and her elfish, tiny gestures, are great aids to her success. For she, more than any other, is essentially the actor of a single part.

It would be interesting to know, if it were possible, how nearly her own early career resembled in its hard knocks, stern religious teachings, and the utter absence of girlhood's ordinary pleasure and tenderness, that of the orphan Fanchon; for that there is in her disposition something closely interwoven with it, no one who has seen the performance can doubt. This fancy is strengthened by the fact, that Miss Mitchell plays no other part with marked success, and further, by her inability to make anything of this same character in the last two acts, where Fanchon, lifted out of the surroundings which established the peculiarities of her disposition, becomes a fine young lady of the stereotyped sort, with nothing more interesting about her than her 20,000 francs.

The abiding charm of the first three acts is, that Miss Mitchell has so entirely assimilated herself with the character, that the illusion of the real presence of Fanchon, of her trials, sorrows, joys and triumphs, is never destroyed. The simple girl, battered of fortune, jeered at and avoided by the village boors—she of whom George Sand told us the beautiful story—is the very same we see upon the stage.

The impression that the reader of the novelist's story obtains is that Fanchon is a little touched "o' the moon," though the author nowhere broadly asserts or even insinuates that such is the fact, nor does the play itself contain such an imputation—yet both play and story lead the auditor or reader to that conclusion. Miss Mitchell, with rare refinement and delicacy, both of conception and execution, preserves this illusion, yet never oversteps the line which would change suspicion to assurance. In overcoming the difficulties encountered in maintaining this nice balance of doubt in the minds of her audience, she gives one of the finest assurances of her power and of her right to be considered one of the great artists of the stage.

The burthen Fanchon is made to bear, is a heavy one; her way of life, through being the grandchild of a reputed witch, and being herself suspected of dealings with the devil, is rough and hard in the extreme; yet through it all, there is a noble dignity in her childish struggles, a charm in her simple goodness which yield to no temptation, and which Miss Mitchell portrays with such truth and fidelity to nature as are rarely seen upon the stage.

The elfish and eccentric elements of her character, which easily lead the spectator to believe in the existence of some hurt to Fanchon's intellect, underlie and affect her neighbors opinions and treatment of her. To them she appears half witch, half-crazed, one with whom it is best not to be too intimately associated. Before them, before any person, she is never still, never in repose.

Her arms, her legs, her feet, her hands, her head and tongue, all are in motion. She dances about the scene, now merry as the Cricket she is called; now sad; again resigned to her bitter life, again rebellious against it; but whatever her mood, she is all action and vitality. The fiery spirit in the tiny form imparts to it an eternal unrest. It is scarcely possible to look at the curiously dressed figure, which seems to be strung upon wires and impelled by electric shocks, as it gives way to laughter or subsides into tears, whose voice suddenly sinks from the most boisterous mirth into the most profound depths of pathos in a breath, without feeling that the girl's mind has suffered some rude shock. Yet when her clear, strange voice breaks into speech, its music is wedded to words of noble simplicity. When sorrow moves them, they fall upon the ear softly as rippling water, in slow, measured cadences; but when an ugly wrong has wrought upon her mind, the actress, who is utterly forgotten in the part, flings them out with quick and savage hatred; they rise, and swell and fill the air, until each hurtling word seems potent as a curse or witch's spell.

The infinite charm and grace of childhood, the jubilant sense of an innocent triumph obtained over the youth she loves, but who has not dealt kindly, fairly with her, which are shown in the last scene of the first act, are very beautifully and naturally done by the actress. She has cheated her lover into a rash promise; he is to do anything she may ask him to do, no matter how great or how absurd the thing she may exact. To-morrow she means to ask Landry, the pride and flower of village beaux, to dance with her, the poor, despised Cricket, about the garlanded pole, at the festival of St. Androché. He is an honest fellow, and will keep his word with her, though the whole village scoff and scorn both him and his eccentric partner. The knowledge of this has filled her life full to the brim, with a simple, childish joy, which at first finds vantage ground in wild, exuberant laughter, and in mad, frolicsome gestures, which are interrupted presently by her catching sight of her own weird and fantastic shadow in the moonlight. The rays fall through a break in the trees, forming a sort of fairy circle, into which she steps, and to a blithesome song that bubbles up from her full heart, she begins a strange, fantastic dance, full of artless grace and freedom. Her whole body vibrates, moves to and fro to the measured rhythm of her song. The lithe limbs, the undulating body, the bending head crowned with its wealth of hair, are instinct with happiness, swayed and impelled by the music of her own voice. Directly her shoe falls off, and she stoops to put it on, still singing, but in a softer key, her jubilant song to which still sways her body and bends her head. But as she stoops lower, the tiny, tawdry figure and its shadow meet and start appalled apart, then the sweet song dies on her lips, an awful pain fills up her face, a terror, very pitiful to see in any child, animates her form, and bending still lower, till her loose hair touches the little black shadow of herself, she addresses it familiarly, bitterly, as if it had life, and were sentient as her own self.

All this action lasts scarcely longer than a minute. But in that minute *the shadow has shown her herself*; she has seen in that little moment how her childhood has been abused by circumstance, how tawdry, eccentric and mean is her dress, her fantastic and uncouth appearance, and her lack of all that is debonair and beautiful in childhood, and though the few words with which she addresses it are a child's simple language, they are so full of nature, so burdened with her trouble, loss and pain, so nearly underlying all human sympathy, that no one who looks upon the actress now, sees any actress there, but only a little child to

succor, to whom he would like to stretch out loving, helpful hands—a little child who has wetted his cheeks with unusual tears.

Again, in the second act, where at the festival the boorish peasantry offer her the violence of scorn and blows, the actress gives noble assurance of her power. The opportunity is a great one, and she acts greatly. Small and insignificant as her form, features and gestures are, no actor upon the stage, since the elder Kean played Zanga, has thrown into any single situation the nervous force and bewildering concentration of scorn and hatred which the actress hurls upon her tormentors in this scene. Her words seemed to blister and scorch the creatures they fell upon, the tiny gestures were charged with a nameless evil against those at whom they were directed, the little, trembling body was regnant, fiery with a passion that had power to wither or to kill; her very laughter, that had been but a moment before soft and melodious as the music of the dance, was full of stinging, savage bitterness, creating an atmosphere of poisoned malice in which the very actors there seemed to shrink and cower.

There are other individual beauties in this performance of Miss Mitchell's which must forever rank with the noblest traditions of the theatre, and one of them occurs in her interview with Landry as he returns from the festival. He finds her weeping by her door; the contumely of her neighbors at the dance in the morning has rankled within and stung her all day, their cruel taunts have awakened a hundred memories of like wrongs and shames that had else forever slept. The night is coming on, and as she lies upon the ground weeping and sobbing, it is not a clever artist, but a sorely stricken girl that the audience recognize. She sobs as if her grief had exhausted physical nature and she could weep no more; but she stretches her hands out straight before her with infinite weariness, clasps them about her neck as her head droops to her breast; her eyes are swollen and dry, her dress disordered, and all that is heard is the sound of the painful, tearless sobs; but underneath all this, the spectator sees that a child's heart is breaking. She does not speak; her pain, and wrong, and misery are too deep for words, and they find more suitable expression in a certain nervous caressing of her arms, and hands, and face, which are more pitiful to see than language would be to hear. The tenderness and pathos of the picture are unutterable; its very poverty of words is an additional appeal for sympathy and tears.

When Landry finds her thus, and she can speak of her troubles, her voice echoes all the pain and sadness in it of youth suddenly grown old, robbed of its just inheritance of love and joy, and all that leads it on to gracious ends. She says to him, "Since my mother kissed me last, no mild breath has ever touched my face."

And in that speech the artist rises to great heights. Her tones linger on the words with marvellous sweetness and beauty, evoking sounds that crowd the air with their music—the child's presence appears to fill the scene, for in that burst of grief, which was but the reflex and echo of all the cruelty, neglect and shame she had ever borne, it seems to summon to the memory of her audience the images of all the neglected, forgotten children of whom she is the type and semblance, and whose cheeks their mother's breath will no more touch. The silence, the awe and tears upon the faces in the audience there, bear tribute to the artist's power.

It is not well done in Miss Mitchell that in another moment she should destroy the memory of this masterly touch of art, and shock her admirers by a mis-

conception as false as it is gross. We refer to her action in the following passage, which occurs immediately after Landry has declared his love for her :

LANDRY. [He draws his arm around her.] Fanchon.

FANCHON. [Tears herself away and runs quick as lightning over to the other side, and says, trembling,] No, no, no, Landry!

It will be seen that the stage direction of the prompt book is unusually full and clear. It tells the actress "to run *quick as lightning*" from Landry when he dares to do this thing.

Miss Mitchell disregards this direction altogether, and nestles close into Landry's breast, her whole body trembling, her eyes glowing with hungry passion, her very feet and limbs sentient with the warmth and pleasure of Landry's embrace.

It is the one single blemish in an else perfect picture. Of the artist, we will only say, she is too conscious, and of the act, that in either maiden or actress it is scarcely delicate.

The greatest excellence, however, achieved by the actress—and in it lies the beautiful moral of the play, and which runs through all of its earlier acts—is one that she loses sight of but once, in the scene with Landry, as above ; and with that single exception, she, with exquisite delicacy and sustained power, keeps it always prominently before her audience. It consists in showing how in the heart of a rough, eccentric and apparently half-witted girl, a flower of pure love springs up, the color and fragrance of which, entering into her life gradually and by nice degrees, redeem it from its grossness, making it beautiful and fragrant forever. George Sand knew the woman's heart better than her fellow-laborer, Dumas the younger. In the latter's play, which is known to us as "Camille," when unsordid love enters the heart of his heroine, purifying and lifting it into a sweeter, nobler atmosphere, the prayer of her lover's father has power to send her back to walk in her old, unclean ways. The story of that poor girl was a true one, but abused and given to shame by the novelist. It had this nobler ending. When Camille was deserted by her lover, she did not return to crime, but buried the pure, sweet life her woman's love had taught her in the waters of the Seine. The story was known to all Paris, but only the younger Dumas dared to lay foul hands upon it.

Excellent as the early portions of Miss Mitchell's performance are, we hesitate to profane the sacred inspirations of art by calling it the consequence of her *genius*. If it were that, she would produce like results in other parts, or she would carry the impersonation of Fanchon to a triumphant close. She does neither. Her few other characters are indifferently played, and Fanchon, divested of her ragged dress, her dishevelled hair and her elfish eccentricities, which are solely the property of the first three acts, becomes, in Miss Mitchell's hands, a part worthy of no especial regard.

The stage direction, written by one not altogether at home in our language, quaintly says to the player that on her return to her native village "One must see that Fanchon has been in the city." Upon this hint Miss Mitchell endows Fanchon with the subdued costume and cheap graces of a city maiden, and the best suggestion we can offer for it is, that the change is not a happy one ; that the Cricket is now much less charming, blithe and winsome, than when she danced her elfish dance and sang her merry song in the light of the moon.

Yet even in her new character there occurs an occasional flash of her old fire and vitality ; but, generally, she walks through the balance of the part as if her

powers were fettered, or buried under her trailing, sable robes. She does not seem happy in them, and she looks as if she felt that the *outré* gown and the slip-shod feet were more natural, dearer to her than the richer garb. We are all rather glad at the end that she has 20,000 francs and the lover of her heart; but we fancy it is owing more to the old feeling of poetic justice within us, demanding that at the fall of the green curtain virtue shall always triumph, than at seeing her settle down to the somewhat hum-drum existence of a dairy-maid. We rather resent it—especially when that indifferent actor, Mr. Collier, plays Landry—that all the noble wine of her life should be poured out before such sober mortals as the respectable members of her husband's family. Fanchon, half-elf, half-woman, should have married a gypsy, and had nut-brown children about her tent door.

The love for the drama is confined to no class, no station. The son of the millionaire is nightly seen at Wallack's or Niblo's. The bootblack, if he cannot earn the entrance fee to the Bowery, borrows it from a more successful member of his guild, leaving his implements in pledge. And thus our youth are learning nightly, at the school of the drama, some lesson. It is well for them that they have a school such as Wallack's to attend, or at other houses a teacher like Maggie Mitchell to instruct them in a purer, more human method than they shall find elsewhere.

While the theatre remains the instructor of America's men and women—and we have sometimes thought it a greater—not a better—one than pulpit, press, or society, it is for us, the patrons of the drama, to say whether it shall teach us well or ill.

What is required is not tragedy, even Shakespeare cannot reconcile us to that, for acted tragedy is in itself a vast deformity. It is not a natural, pleasant thing to witness bloody death brought to our very feet, to see the expiring struggles, to listen to the last groans of butchered humanity. The player's potent art is to show us the inward workings of the mind, to interpret for us the moral sense struggling from within, inciting to noble deeds and gracious lives. Tragedy pushes nature to the wall, and shows us nothing but her agonized contortions of the body. That which the audiences of to-day require, is the representation of the lives, the accompanying trials, the joys of the best social class, and by that we do not mean the simply rich, but that middle class, standing between the rich and poor, which, being endowed with intelligence, religion, and energy, makes itself the salvation of the Commonwealth. This class restrains the extravagance and the vices of the upper and reforms the vices of the lower. The stage should be a school of humanity, holding up as in a mirror, nature in her purest, wisest, most gracious forms. It does this, when it shows us, not the revolting details of tragedy, but the graceful charm, wit, probity, and repose of comedy, or the pure and simple drama of a simple life.

Of this latter sort is the play of "Fanchon." It is the poetic idyl of rural middle life, its trials and its triumphs, and in its single representation of a night is embraced the history of its actors' lives from youth to age, teaching, with no offensive intrusiveness, how a stainless life and simple worth are better than largest wealth or "long descent."

Knowing what we do of Miss Mitchell, we acquit her of any intention of reforming anything, yet she has done, and is nightly doing, a noble work for the theatre and for humanity by her matchless impersonation of the part of Fanchon. It is better than many sermons.

— But while the Cricket dances to jubilant music and the weird accompaniment of her shadow, while her sobs, echoing a feigned sorrow, fill the little Olympic Theatre on Broadway, and as her laughter is taken up and echoed again by a thronged and charmed audience, further up the street, at another theatre, among the noblest company of comedians now upon the stage, there is a sorrow not feigned, for one of that rare combination has gone from among them, and will return no more forever. They stand together in little knots of twos and threes, in the by-places of the stage and in the green-room, speaking quietly, tenderly of her who was greater than them all, of one the latches of whose shoes the Fanchon was not worthy to unloose, of Mary Gannon, the grace and crown of comedy, its noblest, truest female representative, lying, with some white flowers on her breast, in her beautiful home, in an adjoining street.

On the manager's table a card is lying, bearing these words,

Mary Gannon, *Obit* February 22d, 1868.

Blessed are the women who have no history, it is written. She had none. Her life moved purely, simply on to its serene ending, and though her death did not "eclipse the gaiety of nations," it drove the smile from the lips of thousands of her true friends for whom she had "gladdened life"—friends, between whom and her there had been no closer companionship than that which may endure between the actor and audience.

It is not easy to speak coldly and critically of this lady; she was wont to hold her audience by stronger ties than other artists hold theirs; there was ever something more than the sympathy of tears and laughter between them; they might admire the actress never so well, yet they must honor the woman more, for she was chaste as ice and pure as snow, and calumny did not touch her; her life was so bountiful, sweet, and beautiful, so filled and rounded out with charity and simple faith, that the public voice knew not whether to honor most, her home or artist life, and so honored both.

Miss Gannon was an actress at the Old Bowery in her sixth year, playing Henry in "Jack Robinson," and Julio in "The Planter and his Dog." After that she was at the old Franklin Theatre, in Chatham street, dancing with infinite grace, and so learning that charm of deportment which afterward became one of the strongest characteristics of her acting. The next season she has advanced a step, has quite left the Old Bowery behind her forever, and makes her *début* in an old play of Garrick's, at the elder Wallack's Theatre. The greatest Romeo and Don Cæsar and Benedict of his day—or of ours—has been watching the little lady, and hereafter she will grow to greatness and win from the old veteran the high praise of being "the first of America's female comedians." But for awhile, misfortune waits upon the manager, and he goes over to England, to contest the ground with Kemble, and Cooke, and the elder Booth. Meanwhile Mary Gannon is strolling through the South; but in the year 1848, and she is in her nineteenth year now, she is at Mitchell's Olympic, playing the first comedy and burlesque parts to charmed audiences, who regretfully bid her farewell and God-speed at the end of the season, for she has chosen a husband and home, and has turned her back upon the applause and adulation of the theatre, for awhile, until, in a few years, death comes knocking at her door, and takes away with him her husband and little children. Then poverty comes her way and lingers by her desolated hearth, and the young widow and mother, in whose heart husband and children will never die, but will live there to make her tender and



bountiful to other widows and mothers, betakes herself again to the stage. But she has not yet the nerve to face that old, generous New York audience while her loss and pain are so new to her, and she is up in Canada, along with that late best of eccentric comedians, Charles Wallcott, Sr., who is managing a theatre there. After awhile, Wallack grows tired of his transpontine audiences in London, who are not over-refined or courteous to the American actor, and he sets up his new house on Broadway, below Broome, and among his company is Mary Gannon. She plays for her *début* Madam Dentozy, a Lady in Difficulties, and wins great fame thereby.

A year or two later, she is in Baltimore, at the Holliday street house, of which old Charles Bass is manager. But the next season Mary Gannon has returned to Wallack's, and will act under his or his son's management unto the end.

As an actress Miss Gannon was but slightly indebted to mere personal appearances or to physical endowments for her success. Her figure was of medium height, rounded and full, and did not lack a certain grace and elegance. Her step upon the stage was firm, elastic, and she moved across it, never assertant, yet always as if assured of her power; her gesticulation was charmingly natural, graceful, and expressive, and that most difficult thing for an actress to master, the movement of the hands and arms, was always with her perfectly easy and correct, never forestalling the speech, but following it certainly and regularly, as sound follows the blow, or shadow the substance. In her by-play, a movement of her hand, or a change in the wonderfully mobile face, created a meaning out of silence, provoking laughter or tears as no words could do. But generally, her hands seemed only to emphasize the speech, giving it a significance unknown before. Voice and hand moved one before the other, with a propriety and naturalness that could result from no amount of study, but only from an intimate and very human sympathy with her author's meaning.

Her face was of exceeding plainness, but the expression of her features, when in repose, was habitually soft and pleasing; and if any fancy touched them from within, a smile, wonderfully rare in its sweetness, lighted them up, and for the moment made them beautiful. It was a face that attracted beggars, and all hurt and sorrowful people, and it never showed them anything but pity for their pain, and her hand was always ready as her face to enforce its sympathy and human love. Her voice ranged through all the scale of sweet and gentle utterances. Its mellowness, richness, and distinctness had no counterpart upon the American stage, and it died, leaving us no copy.

Miss Gannon was only lovely in the beauty of her life and art, and it is saying something for the credit of the public in these days, and more for her genius, that she could hold her audience's allegiance so long and closely, considering how plain a face she nightly showed them. There was something of excellence in the oddness of her ways, in her strange simplicity, in her freedom of all effort, and in the gracious human aspect of her genius, in its truthfulness to nature, and her honest, earnest love for her art, that won their sympathy and made her a great artist. Her success in the development and portrayal of character never seemed the result of mere study, but rather of an intense feeling for and kinship with all the personal joys or sorrows of the heroines whose phase of life she depicted. For the time being, the player and the creature she personified became one and inseparable. As an actress, she was without a single trick, and scorned the meretricious art that catches at applause.

She played in apparent, and, we believe, in real unconsciousness of her audience. After her feet touched the stage she was the thing, in outward semblance and in inward truth, that she personated. There was more subtle wit, more delicate humor, more *abandon*, simplicity, tenderness, or pathos shown by her than the author, whose character she adorned by her genius, ever suspected could be put into it. She took the bald creation of his mind, and informed it with the hot blood of life and passion that ebbed and flowed to and from her own heart.

Her nature was wide as the air, beautiful, generous, and strong, full of those delicate sensibilities which permitted her to dissolve in tenderness, to be gentle, grave, or hoydenish, to fly from the maddest burlesque to profoundest depths of passion. She wrapped her soul in "measureless content," was witty, strong, weak, stupid or passionate, grave or tender, all in a moment. She could express, as no other actress could, all shades and moods of passion; she could do so because they were in her heart, and were as real and tangible to her as the revolving years that made up her sum of life. She had learned all degrees of feeling in her husband's and her children's love—she had felt all sorrows and the extent of mortal suffering in their early death, in her prolonged and beautiful widowhood—she had known the stings of poverty, and had only learned pity and charity from them; the charms and graces of society were her daily companions, teaching her those refinements which adorned her life and made more potent her art. There was nothing weird or startling in her acting; she did not lift the soul higher than nature, but gave the true and perfect type of all that was pure and womanly. She spoke only in the true language of nature and passion, and as her most brilliant triumphs were achieved without effort, the applause attendant upon them was never tumultuous. It began in a low murmur of laughter, or followed the utter silence of tears. She touched no vulgar springs to elicit the loud shout or evoke the whirlwind of commendation. To the last she was sublimely unconscious of the "golden rigol that bound her brows withal;" from first to last, a wondrous simplicity possessed and ennobled her life. One who knew her well has laid this passing tribute on her new-made grave. "Her whole private life was passed in doing good to others, and her whole public life in contributing to the amusement of everybody."

Mr. Lester Wallack, a great artist himself, and whose dramatic career was contemporary with Miss Gannon's, in writing of his friend, says of her:

"I shall not in my time 'look upon her like again.' She has left a void that cannot be completely filled. Her appearance on the stage was always (aside from the hearty applause which greeted her) marked by a low murmur of delight among her audience, as if they were congratulating one another on the certainty of a bright and pleasant evening."

"It is my opinion, as it was that of my father and other experienced artists, that she was by far the most accomplished actress in America. Her acting in the higher walks of comedy was marked by a perfection of finish and ease that no other lady artist could approach."

"In private life, she possessed the rare faculty of *compelling* the regard and affection of all about her; she was generous and charitable to a fault."

Mr. Wallack further says: "I think Miss Gannon's best performances were Sophia, in 'The Road to Ruin,' Hester in 'To Marry or not to Marry,' Miss Hardcastle in 'She Stoops to Conquer,' Gertrude in 'The Little Treasure,' and Flora in 'The Wonder.' These were her best impersonations, I think, but

when all was so exquisite; it is difficult to indicate particular parts. She excelled in all."

That is the tribute of one great artist of the drama to another.

It will be noticed that the characters above enumerated by Mr. Wallack, are all purely legitimate comedy, that the plays of which they are part, require for their production an order of talent so high, that they are no longer seen upon the stage in this country, except in one or two theatres, such as Selwyn's of Boston and Wallack's of New York, and the company of the latter house can alone properly represent them. Not long ago it was different. We cannot believe that the present generation of New York play-goers will forget the brilliant casts of the old English comedies at Burton's Theatre, which often embraced the names of Charlotte Cushman, Mrs. Charles Matthews, Burton, Walcott, Matthews, Charles Fisher and Brougham; or at Laura Keene's new house, where nightly might be seen Rufus Blake, Joseph Jefferson, Coudock, Old Peters, vixenish Polly Marshall and Laura Keene, tallest and fairest of women; or even in provincial Philadelphia, at the old Arch Street house, in which Burton had once come to grief financially, followed by handsome Ned Conner, to sink a fortune and to make way for the great Wheatley and Drew combination, who for an entire season played to crowded houses but two plays, "The Serious Family," and "The Comedy of Errors," and among whom might be seen, William Wheatley, John Drew, J. Sleeper Clarke, E. L. Davenport, J. W. Wallack, Jr., John Gilbert, Mrs. Drew, *née* Mossop, Mrs. D. P. Bowers, beautiful Mrs. Gladstone, Mrs. Davenport and Mrs. Gilbert.

Those were the great days of the Drama, and these are great names, and if they could all be brought together for one night, we would all try to see them at no matter what prices. They should play "Macbeth," with Charlotte Cushman—greater than any since the Siddons—as the Thane's Wife, and for interlude, "The School for Scandal," with Laura Keene as Lady Teazle and John Gilbert as Sir Peter, followed by "Hamlet," with Mr. Davenport as the Dane, while Burton and Clarke should play the grave-diggers. Then, we think, we should ask for one night more, if only to see Blake as Jesse Rural, or pretty Polly Marshall as Captain Charlotte, or Jefferson as Bob Acres, or Mrs. Drew as Beatrice.

Not one of us all would remain away from that performance, and the night of it would be held forever in blessed memory. But in the meantime, no matter how remotely we may live from the metropolis of the nation, we must all go to Wallack's to obtain a glimpse of old English Comedy, or a hint of how nobly we were entertained at the theatre only a few years ago. Yet we will see there no more the "house's prop," the soul of comedy, gentle Mary Gannon.

She had been dying for a long time, and knew it. Early in the present season, she saw the end approaching, and regretted that her failing strength no longer permitted her to please, as once she had done, the refined audiences who were made glad at her entrance. The last time she played in "The Captain of the Watch," she told her old comrades—and some of them had seen her grow from childhood up—that she had felt death touch her; that she must soon leave them to put her house in order, and lay aside forever the cap and bells of comedy.

On the 27th of January of this present year, she played Mary Netley, in Robertson's and Artemus Ward's comedy of "Ours;" and when the sombre green curtain fell that night it had shut her out forever from that brilliant public whom, for thirty honorable, arduous years, she made merry and happy.

For thirty years she had served them, through sunshine and shadow, in beautiful youth and beautiful age, in health and sickness. As it chanced every night that hundreds in the slowly emptying aisles look back at the grouped figures of the scene, so did they look back that night; and they saw no figure there who had given them nobler or more devoted service than the Mary Netley of the evening, and they who saw her then saw her never again; from them, and from us all, the rare genius, the fascinations of her art, the wondrous melody of her voice, the odd, dainty ways, the plain face, and all that lends grace to comedy, are gone. Yet the loiterers in the aisles that night flung back to her no word of farewell, for no sign of parting was in her eyes, no hint of separation on her lips. But Mary Gannon, as the curtain slowly fell, looked on her audience with more real sorrow than she had ever feigned, and until the last moment the brave smile was on her lips, and if her hands trembled up to her parched throat, no man saw the meaning thereof, for art was stronger than death in this great artist's heart, and the tender eyes were filled with only their usual grave humanity; and so, slowly dying where she stood, she smiled down upon her life-long friends her old, sweet, good-night smile, and solemnly, yet uttering no word, she bade them good-night and farewell together.

When she laid aside her stage-dresses a few moments later, she said, "I have worn them for the last time;" and as she silently, tearfully folded them away, they who saw her then knew that in the act she folded away the recollections of all her noble, useful and beautiful years.

Then she went home to set her house in order, and to wait, with grave and patient dignity, for death. And when it came, it found her ready.

A few nights later, when a crowded house witnessed a new actress play Mary Gannon's part in "Rosedale," an inconstant public were for once loyal to an old favorite even in death; and when a murmur ran through the house, saying, "The King is dead," there fell a silence on the multitude, and in memory of her, no one answering, cried, "Long live the King."

L. CLARKE DAVIS.