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(For Baldwin's Monthly.)

CELEBRITIES OF THE THEATRE.

ELIZABETH OAKES SMITH.

Old New Yorkers remember with pride and pleasure that the beautiful and unhappy Malibran made her debut in the City of New York. This was before my time, but on my advent I was at once an honored associate within the charmed circle of those who were familiar with her history and character. The little building known as Palmo's Opera House has since been transformed many times; was Burton's Theatre at one era, and is now converted into the various offices appertaining to the United States Marshal for New York. Palmo would not contain a title of the auditory now found at the opera, but it was sufficient for the brilliant, but comparatively few, enthusiasts for musical art, who went half wild, as they well might, over this queen of song.

At that time Emma C. Manly, daughter of a popular and learned physician of New York, and afterwards wife of the accomplished banker, Daniel Embury, was distinguished for her culture and impassioned poetic ability. She divided the laurel with Mary L. Brooks, the "Marie del Occidenté" of Southey, who thus named her, and called her the Sappho of America. Miss Manly, being a fine Italian scholar, was prevailed upon to translate the libretto of the opera, and thus she was brought into familiar relations with Malibran. I have often heard Mrs. Embury dilate upon her grace, beauty, and sweetness. Her father was an old tyrant (to speak like a school-girl,) but he cultivated the talent of his daughter to the utmost. Her artistic rehearsals and practice were quite beyond her strength, and when she faltered he did not hesitate to employ blows. She was unhappy, and, when her father sold her to Malibran, which he did for \$50,000, the poor girl did not rebel, but passed without a murmur from one owner to another—from a tyrannical father to a tyrannical husband.

She was married in the Episcopal form, and was supposed to have exchanged her religion with her ownership. She was one of the first to compliment the country of her adoption by ornamenting her person with our native productions, appearing at her wedding reception, her dress being decorated with our forest leaves; this unique draping was exceedingly becoming, and coupled with her slight, girlish figure, and her preternaturally large, brilliant eyes, she resembled more some beautiful woodland phantom than a creature of earthly mould.

Several anecdotes, illustrative of her character, were current at the time. She was less subservient to a husband than she had been to her father, beginning to understand her own value. One time she rode horseback with a group of friends down through the woodlands and farms of what was then and is now known as Gowanus. Malibran's horse ran away with her, but she contrived to slip from the saddle uninjured. When the rest of the party rode up they found her covered with dust and kneeling, with uplifted eyes, in the highway, and praying to every saint in the calendar.

"You shouldn't do that, now you are converted," cried one of the party.

"Ah!" she rejoined, "but when one is in distress it is so natural to pray, as one used in childhood."

Sometimes she would have an obstinate fit, and refuse to sing unless indulged in some wish. One morning at rehearsal she declared she would not sing her part in the evening unless they would contrive to give her a glass of porter at a particular exhausting part. The company was astounded, and could hardly conceive how to humor her. At length it occurred that in her part she reclined upon a green bank, in sentimental wise,

and a method was devised by inserting a tube through the floor, which was plunged into a goblet of porter. This was done, and the great cantatrice leaned gracefully behind her curls and thus regaled herself.

Ellen Tree came after the furor excited by Fannie Kemble had subsided. To have seen this lovely woman and accomplished artiste in "Ion" is a memory. There was a grace, dignity and fitness in all that she said or did, that took both the heart and brain captive. It is well known that Talfourd wrote "Ion" expressly for Ellen Tree, and so well was it adapted to the graces of the woman and the delicate perceptions of the artiste, that no higher compliment than this seems worthy to be paid to author and representer.

The second visit of this woman of genius was after her marriage to the younger Keene. She was then at the height of her career, a little stouter than we had seen her in "Ion," but, if possible, more maturely finished as an actress. No one who ever witnessed her rendering of the part of *Constance*, in "King John," can ever fail to treasure it as marvelous, for its combined spirit, force, and maternal tenderness.

"King John" can never be a favorite play with the public, because of the general sombre character of the drama. The Keenes had produced it in New York at a very great expense, and its want of popular success nearly ruined them. Even the wonderful portrayal of the subtle, sinister *John*, by Keene, and the artistically rival part of *Constance*, by his accomplished wife, could not save it. In this age we shrink from a tragic representation of the domestic affections, and it may be from tragedy of every kind, as necessarily implying the elements of uncivilization, of rudeness, and barbarism. This may account for the modern passion for what is called "spectacular drama."

Nothing could be finer than Mrs. Keene's first triumphant appearance in *Constance*, as the happy mother of a promising Prince, enjoying the protection of the French King; then followed his defection, and her surprise, her horror, foreseeing the fatal consequences to her son; her biting irony to *Queen Eleanor*; the captivity of *Arthur*, and its too well divined bloody following; the deepening passion, up to that beautiful outbreak of maternal tenderness, when she says:

"Father Cardinal, I have heard you say,
That we shall see and know our friends in heaven;
If that be true, I shall see my boy again;
For since the birth of Cain, the first male child,
To him that did but yesterday expire,
There was not such a gracious creature born.
But now will canker-sorrow eat my bud
And chase the native beauty from his cheek
And he will look as hollow as a ghost,
As dim and meagre as an ague's fit,
And so he'll die; and rising so again,
When I shall meet him in the court of heaven
I shall not know him—"

This was uttered with such simple, tender pathos, so little acting, that the *Queen's* empires, pomp and circumstance of war, all, all were forgotten in the sorrow of a bereaved mother. There was no applause, but a deathly silence, a holding of the breath.

Cardinal. You hold too heinous a respect of grief.
[Then followed the hushed, mournful response of *Constance*.]

"He talks to me that never had a son!"
King Philip. You are as fond of grief as of your child.
Constance. Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form;
Then have I reason to be fond of grief?"

This simple question was given with a mournful shake of the head, such as the commonest, hard-working mother, by the way-side, might give over her dead child. Then came the revulsion, the final impassioned outbreak, when she cries, with uplifted hands:

"O Lord! my boy, my *Arthur*, my fair son!
My life, my joy, my food, my all the world!
My widow-comfort, and my sorrow's cure,"

multiplying epithets of tenderness, enumerating her wealth of sorrow, and depth of despair, as she rushes off the stage; it was the very height of human grief and artistic excellence. It was too much for me, and I nearly fainted with emotion, as I once actually did at one of Charlotte Cushman's tragic shrieks.

Like the great Siddons, who once went frantic in her part of *Lady Douglas*, this character of *Constance* so accorded with Mrs. Keene's own consciousness, that she was it for the time being, and had hardly moved from the stage before she fell upon the boards in a dead faint.

There was no prettiness in the person or face of Ellen Tree Keene; but to me she was eminently handsome, grandly heroic. Voice, look, bearing, all were on a broad, high level. She was as tragically real as Rachel; her voice and intonations as faultless as those of Fannie Kemble, and was possessed of more genuine insight than either. These two were so thoroughly trained, that little had been left them for intellectual discovery.

In her readings of Shakespeare, without stage accessories, the real power and intrinsic perceptions of Fannie Kemble became manifest. I remember how women would recoil from her free rendering of the strong-flavored wit of Shakespeare, as if she enjoyed it, which she unquestionably did, and which has lost none of its raciness by 300 years of use; but those who heard her exquisite reading of the pretty French of *Kate* in "Henry IV.," will remember that she was no longer what the world calls young; yet no allowance was needed for time, her voice and smile retaining all the sweetness of early youth. Her rendering of *Isabella* was a marvel of purity, dignity, and nun-like sweetness, while the very Serpent of old Nile lived in her *Cleopatra*.

A young artist, George Flagg, to whom she sat for her picture, ventured the question:

"How is it that you can represent such opposite characters—the impassioned *Cleopatra*, for instance, and the spiritual *Isabella*?"

To which she replied, with girlish naiveté: "Because I am each and all."

To have seen Mr. and Mrs. Wheatley dance the minuet, was bringing back the stately grace of our grandmothers and grandfathers, when every gentleman and lady wore, not defiantly, but exclusively, a sort of *noleme-langere* air, with their patches and powder. Old New Yorkers were reminded of the quiet rebuke of the witty Fanny Fairly, who when a gentleman, in the warmth of discussion, inadvertently touched his fingers to her arm, looked down, with perfect composure, upon his hand, saying: "Paws down, Pompey."

EXTREMES MEET.—"O! your nose is as cold as ice," an East New York father thought he heard his daughter exclaim, the other evening, as he was reading the *Eagle* in the next room. He walked in for an explanation, but the young fellow was at the extreme end of the sofa and the girl was at the other end, while both looked so innocent and unconscious that the old gentleman concluded his ears had deceived him, and so withdrew without a word.

A FRENCH naturalist has recently grouped, for public convenience, a number of his observations upon animals, showing that many members of the brute creation may be used as living barometers. Rain or wind, he says, may be expected when the spiders shorten the last thread by which their webs are suspended; fair weather when they lengthen them, and the duration of either by the degree of contraction or expansion observable. When swallows sweep near the ground, uttering plaintive cries, rain is at hand; when they mount up, fly from side to side, and play together, fine weather will follow. When a single magpie leaves its nest in the Spring, it is a sign of rain, but the reverse is the case when two parent birds leave it in company. Rain is near when the peacocks utter frequent cries, when parrots chatter more than usual, and when geese are uneasy.