

# THE COLUMBIA SPY.

SAMUEL WRIGHT, Editor and Proprietor.

"NO ENTERTAINMENT IS SO CHEAP AS READING, NOR ANY PLEASURE SO LASTING."

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## Selections.

### The Second Player.

"I said I would tell you my story. Well, to begin, I was born in this town of Burnton, something less than sixty years ago. My father was a small tradesman, and sent me to the best school he could afford till I was a little over thirteen. I used to recite on the public days in the school, and repeat Latin and Greek orations, of which the meaning was not a little obscure even to me; what it must have been to my hearers I don't know. My father took me away from the school to the shop. He was a tailor. It worried me to death to sit hour after hour, at the needle, and I used to beguile the time by reciting and reading to the few men my father employed, and they did my share of the work in return for the amusement I afforded them.

"At the age of fourteen I took part in some private theatricals in the town, and found the bustle of preparation much more pleasant than the dull shop work. They went off well, and when next the players came to the town I went to the manager and asked him to take me. He laughed, for I was fit for nothing. Of course I was too big for a page, and too little for a man-of-arms; too young for a first, second, or even third lover; and too old for any accidental boy parts. I was disappointed, but I soon had to leave the detested shop. My father was of rather a serious turn. He heard of my going to the manager, and locked me up, then about sixteen, and fed me on bread and water. This was rather too bad, so I took French leave, and when the bread and water came one morning there was no one to eat it. I was pleased to find myself with a pair of socks and a clean shirt wrapped up in a handkerchief, about to face the world, and try to wring the hard-earned honors from stern Fortune's hands. Still, I was young then. I need scarcely tell you that sitting here I often regretted that fine May morning's work that took me from home.

"I went to one town after another, and at each sought out the manager of the theatre, and tried hard to get in as any thing. It was no use; my voice was not yet set or certain. 'Why, young sir,' said one to me, 'you are as slim as a girl, and if you were to make love in the town you'd be talking to me, the people would insist that I had made a girl play the lover's part. I'd take you, but you are no use to me at all; two years hence you may come again, and I may talk to you.'

"I felt it was true, but still wanted to be in a theatre, so I entered a travelling circus company as holder and ring-raker. I kept at it for eighteen months, and then the manager joined another in the regular acting line. Now was my chance. They wanted a lover, and wanted him to ride; their first lover could no more sit on a horse than a sack could; the first lady saw him once, and she should die with laughing if he came on; so I offered. I did well, and thought I was on the road to fortune; I felt that Kemble and the rest of the great actors were only the same men as I was, with better chances. That is more than forty years ago, though. I'm wiser now.

"After this success I became first gentleman in that company, and remained so for some years. The manager took the leading parts, so I had no chance. I had changed my name, first, as Gowing did not look well on the bill, and next, because I did not want to hurt my poor old father's feelings more than I could help—I took the name of Alphonsus Montague. It looked well on the bills, I used to think at one time. Somebody, I forget who, says, 'What's in a name?' I know there is a good deal in a name when it's on the playbills; and the public being judge, Alphonsus Montague was better than James Gowing, for it drew better houses.

"In the company there was a young girl who took second lady. I don't say I fell in love with her; I don't think men of our class do fall in love. The constant exercising of the imitative power in delineating the passion, weakens, I think, the power of feeling in as other men feel it. I liked her; she was good, industrious, and rising in the profession, and I married her. There never was a better woman lived, and she had her reward. I don't suppose that there ever was a woman more respected in any company. I never had even a raw about her but once, and then a man had been very insolent to her; she came and told me just as I came off as 'Macedon' in Macbeth. I went to the manager and told him that the man must leave the place at once. The manager said it was impossible; he was a son of the noble owner of half the town; his father was then in the house; those things must be endured. I said that they should not be endured, and that, if he would not protect the ladies in the company, I should take the liberty of protecting my wife.

"And how did it end?"

"Why, I went to the little beast, titled as he was, and kicked him out at the stage door, I did, sir, though you would not think it to look at me now."

"And the manager?"

"Came and thanked me. Said he was much obliged to me; he had more annoyance from the complaints of the girls about that fellow than any other cause. He raised mine and my wife's salary that same week.

"We went on very well for some time. I began to find I was not a star. Once or

twice I went up to London and heard some of the best men, and found that I could not equal them. I don't know a more painful sensation, sir, than that attendant on the discovery of the limit of your powers. Every man, not blinded by conceit, who is over thirty, must have felt this. There is a limit to our powers; other men have more, some less, but still it is very painful to feel conscious that the eminence that the man has attained to whom you are listening is beyond you. Young men—very young men—feel that what man has done man can do. It does not last. Most men at thirty know their place well enough to tell them that they will be in the ruck of the wheel of life.

"Well, some few years after I was married, the conviction came to me; I knew I could never be a star—a great actor. It was not in me. I was simply a respectable one. I could take any part, and do that part so that I was not laughed at; but there I was stopped. I could go no further. I never could raise the enthusiasm of my audience. They listened, and did not disapprove; but when I played a leading part the boxes did not let and the pit was not full. I could not help it, you know. I can safely say I never went on without knowing every word of my part. I was always correct, and in the second and third parts did well. Stars liked me. They used to come down for benefits occasionally, and used to say, 'Let me have Gowing with me; he's a safe man—never too forward—no clap-trap with him; he's not slow, but he's safe.' Now, you see, praise is a good thing, but when a man has dreamed for ten years or so that he is to be a star in the theatrical world, it is rather hard to wake up and find a star of no very great magnitude telling him he's a very good background to show that star's light. Ah! me—those hopes of youth—how the large bud brings forth the little flower."

"Still, Mr. Gowing, it was something not to have failed utterly. There must be back grounds, you know, and there must be second parts, as well as first."

"True, sir, true; and human nature soon adapts itself to circumstances. Three months after I knew I was no genius the ambition was to be one left me. I was content to do my part and enjoy life. I had four children—three boys and one girl. That's her child—poor little thing." And he stroked the head of little Alice caressingly, while she played with the buttons on his coat.

"The boys, of course, we tried to make useful in the profession. Christmas was a family harvest; all were busy then, all making money. You know that the profession is not favorable to health. The excitement—particularly to children—soon wears them out. I know often and often I've seen my boys as imps, and that kind of thing, and felt the life was too fast for them. Late at night, to go from the hot theatre into the cold night air was a sad trial to the constitution; and children are not old men. You can not persuade boys of twelve and fourteen, that they ought to wrap their throats and not run out into the cold at night. We could not, and we lost two of the three boys within a year of each other. Lung diseases, the doctor said. It carries off a good many of these children, you see, in the Christmas pantomimes. I often wonder whether the house thinks of that kind of things."

"And the other children?"

"The boy left our company when he was about eighteen, and joined another as second gentleman. He was as good an actor as his father, and no better. He thought he was a genius, poor boy, as his father had thought before him. He had no experience to teach him, as he thought he was ill-used, and left us."

"And what became of him?"

"At first we used to hear from him now and then, and then there was a long silence, and his mother worried herself dreadfully about him. One night I had been playing a country gentleman in a screaming farce, as the bills call it; for in a small company you are a king, a warrior, and a fool—all in one evening; so my wife had gone home, and when I arrived, came to the door to let me in.

"Don't be frightened, dear; here's Alfred come back."

"I went up, and there he was; but what a wreck! His eyes bloodshot, his hand trembling, and a hot, red spot on his cheek."

"Well father, how are you?"

"I did not answer; I sat down and cried. He tried hard to keep from it, but couldn't; he came and knelt down in front of me, covered his face with his hands, and cried like a child. His mother, poor soul, clung round his neck and kissed him and cried till I was beside myself. He told his story. He had made a mistake. He thought himself a great actor. Managers didn't; the public backed the manager, and were right, too. He could not stand the disappointment; had no wife, as his father had, to console him; and he took to the actor's course—drink. He sank lower and lower, became ill, could do nothing, and just crawled home to die.

"One night I had just come off when I was told some one wanted me at the stage door. I went and found the girl of the house where he lodged. She wanted me to come home directly; I was wanted at once. Mr. Alfred was very ill. Our manager had his benefit that night, and we had one of the first-rate London men down as 'Hamlet.' I was dressed as the 'Ghost.' I forgot all about my dress, then, and rushed home; it was too late—poor Alfred was gone! He lay his head on his mother's arms; she was dressed as the 'Queen,' and was weeping hot, silent tears, that fell on

my boy's face, one by one. His sister sank on her knees by the bed-side as I entered, and the people of the house were standing looking on. I shall never forget it—never.

"I was roused by a touch on the shoulder. A message from the theatre."

"Manager says he should be glad if you could come back."

"Look here, Jennings, do you think I can?"

"Not to do anything, sir, but you might see him; perhaps it would be better."

"I left them and went back, saw the manager and told him; and though it was his benefit night, he said he would read both parts himself."

"I am sorry for you—very sorry; if I can do anything for you let me know."

"We buried the poor boy, and then went on as before. His mother never recovered the blow, and gradually sank, and about six months after his death could no longer take her parts, so Alice and I had to do our best. I noticed that a young fellow had been rather attentive to her, and was not surprised when he took me aside one night, and told me he wanted to make her his wife. He was just such another as I had been myself when at his age. I thought it better to see her the wife of a respectable actor than remain single behind the scenes, for she was a good girl. Well, they married and remained in the company. I was getting old, you see, then, and it was some comfort to see her with some one to take care of her. Soon after she married her mother died, and I laid in the grave beside her son one of the best women that ever lived. I was alone now, and old, for the wear and tear of an actor's life, and the late hours, tell on the strongest constitution. It was something awful, the change from the