

gold of it, and he has written with his heart in the matter, but, best of all, he has glowingly illustrated this matter with the "Jefferson stories."

They are gentle stories, and we laugh with a lump in our throats, while in the the breast of the player who reads there is a welling up of pride, for from every page Joseph Jefferson's love for his profession cries itself. The biographer, himself an actor of prominence, has plainly demonstrated that the comradeship of one of our great presidents, honours from our great colleges, and social recognition from any to whom the comedian chose to recognise made him none the less a Thespian who loved to sit among his kind and talk stage lore. On one occasion when Mr. Wilson called upon him in New Orleans and finding the actor quite lost in a huge painting apron, he declared that he would rather paint than act, but in a hundred other instances he denies this statement.

He had the qualities that all actors possess—he liked praise, but not over praise. "Madame," he once replied, as mildly as possible to an effusive woman, "you make me very uncomfortable." And yet, to quote the text: "He was never tired of talking of Rip Van Winkle, and he loved everything connected with it. He was too modest ever to intrude the subject upon any one, but he never dodged it."

He was extraordinarily glad to gain recognition as a painter and faced his first public exhibition with all the dread and nervousness of a first night. Afterwards he wrote to Mr. Wilson sending some notices of the event. "You will see by the enclosed that I am no longer an amateur but a full-fledged rising young artist" (he was then within three months of 71) . . . . "I have no excuse to offer for sending you the enclosed except my small new departure and great vanity."

Like his lesser comrades Jefferson suffered from stage fright and was not ashamed to confess it. "He was thoroughly sincere in his reply to an amateur who asked him for a cure for stage fright," writes his biographer.

"If you find one," blurted out Jefferson, "I wish you would let me have it."

On the occasion of the opening of a

## II

### FRANCIS WILSON'S "JOSEPH JEFFERSON." \*

Francis Wilson in his book on Joseph Jefferson has bound together and presented a series of pleasant reminiscences that a player would call the "Jefferson stories." He has given as well a careful *resumé* of the labours of this great actor, he has told of his aims and ambitions, he has touched on his character showing the

\*Joseph Jefferson. By Francis Wilson. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

new theatre named in his honour the comedian was to make an address and admitted his extreme nervousness before going upon the stage. There were no evidences of his mental agony during the speech, which was remarked to him afterwards.

"Of course not," said the fine old player. "I'm too old a bird for that."

"I hope I'll strike that high to-night," he said, as he was once about to make an entrance, "I am as nervous as I can be."

"I know you are," answered Mr. Wilson.

"Of course you do," Mr. Jefferson replied. "You understand the sense of responsibility."

Mr. Wilson does well to dwell upon his fearfulness. It is this quality and the lack of it that so perfectly defines the actor and the amateur. Joseph Jefferson was no amateur, nor to judge by his biography was he of that order of "stars" which in their remoteness seemed truly not of this earth. "Joe, you've done well," cried a lout of a stage hand, as the curtain dropped on the performance in a Pennsylvania town.

"I was astonished of course, then amused," the comedian related afterwards, "so I simply said 'do you think so! When we are here again come to see us.'"

He had also the rare quality of enjoying a joke on himself which is the severest test of every actor's sense of humour. He speaks of a trip to San Francisco in the early part of his career which had been announced by a printed circular containing the verdict of the eastern critics. "On my arrival," said Mr. Jefferson, "I found Harry Parry, an old-time actor, reading one of these papers and asked what he thought of it."

"'Gad,' said he, 'but you must have improved since I last saw you.'"

One of the most delightful bits in the book is the portion devoted to the All Star Company of *The Rivals*. Here again that which touches us most is the very human quality of these well-known men and women. From that topic Mr. Wilson goes on to the last ripe years of the great actor, and, delicately reminiscent, closes his chapters with the closing chapter of his gentle old friend.

A short time before his death Jefferson said to his family, after giving the subject several days of perfection: "I shall never act again. It will seem strange to me at first to act no more, but I shall now begin what I have looked forward to these many years—my long, long holiday."

*Louise Closser Hale.*