

III.

MR. PEMBERTON'S "ELLEN TERRY AND HER SISTERS."*

The biography of a contemporary is, after all, the safest. The first object of such a work are the facts. Who should know them better than he or she most intimately related to them? It is the only safe way to bring conviction to present and probably future skeptics. The iconoclasts have been so busy with history—sacred, profane, political and biographical—that our libraries seem now to contain, for the most part, that which we can't any longer accept with certainty. If from the beginning contemporary biography had prevailed, we would have been saved the effort and the pain of unbelieving so much we have been taught to cherish. The seminary boards would be spared the embarrassment of having young ecclesiastical candidates question that uncommon ancestor in whom we are all brothers, because the reverend seniors would have some eye-witness's word, if only Eve's. We should have some one's affidavit for the mythological whoppers about the Greek Olympians, and the now incorrigible Baconians would be put to rout, with a biographical brief of Master Shakespeare's life, of which the bard would himself have read the proofs. And does not a single notable fact sustain the contention, for with all his other limitations Boswell made himself a model to posterity by his life of Dr. Johnson. Wise enough men framed the rule of admission to the Salle Carré. Ten post-mortem years are not too many to give impartial perspective or to give logical selection an opportunity to group its canvases; but they are ten years during which the facts about the masters are languishing, and the moss of forgetfulness and the green scum of neglect are obscuring the well of

* *Ellen Terry and Her Sisters*. By T. Edgar Pemberton. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company. \$1.50.

truth. Especially desirable is contemporary biography of our players. There is no Louvre for their masterpieces; they painted in sound and motion, and erase each other in creation. The poet, the philosopher, the composer, the sculptor and the painter create for futurity. The player is essentially the creature of one generation, his own. When by his own genius and attainment he raises himself to eminence, it is pleasant and profitable to enjoy a personal intimacy with him, at least through the pages of some reliable and sympathetic chronicle. Of all the men or women of the stage who linger in active eminence, enjoying in maturity a maturity of sweetness and power, none occupies a place quite so secure in the appreciation of all who have seen her as Ellen Terry. How many hundreds of thousands her graceful comedy and impressive tragedy have made votaries at her shrine! History and tradition will gather her into the train of the elect with Betterton, Cibber, Abingdon, Garrick, Siddons, Kean, Cushman and Booth; but to no succeeding generations with whom Ellen Terry is a tradition will biographical intimacy be so welcome as to those who have seen the great actress and treasure the memory of her accomplishments. These considerations are suggested by a *Life of Ellen Terry and Her Sisters*, by T. Edgar Pemberton. As a dramatic chronicler of scrupulous exactitude, a critic of safe judgment, and a writer of engaging style, Mr. Pemberton has already made himself a secure place among present English writers on the stage. He has prepared a careful and engaging narrative of the career of the four celebrated daughters of that line of Terrys which included Daniel Terry, who "Terry-fied" Scott by his nimbleness in dramatising the ink-wet Waverleys, and "Ben" Terry of the Worcester circuit. If the writer is somewhat saccharine over his fair subject, not sometimes, but nearly always, it is an amiable fault and far pleasanter to the reader than the opposite failing. The book is an admirable addition to its class, invaluable as a document of detail, and will be treasured by all who love the stage and have seen Ellen Terry. From the earliest day of Henry Irving's tenancy of the Lyceum Miss Terry has been associated with him, so that Mr. Pemberton's book is at once

a life of Ellen Terry and her sisters and
a history of the Irving regimen of Lon-
don's most important playhouse during
almost a quarter of a century.

Paul Wilstach.

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