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ON ACTORS AND THE ART OF ACTING

BY

GEORGE HENRY LEWES.

IN ONE VOLUME.

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EPISTLE TO ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

MY DEAR TROLLOPE,

One reason for inscribing this trifle to you is that years ago you expressed a wish to see some dramatic criticisms which had interested you republished in a more accessible form than the pages of a periodical. The reasons which have always deterred me from republishing articles written for a temporary purpose have not lost their force; and if I here weave together several detached papers into a small volume, it is because a temporary purpose may again be served now a change seems coming over the state of the stage, and there are signs of a revival of the once-splendid art of the actor. To effect this revival there must be not only accomplished artists and an eager public; there must be a more enlightened public. The critical pit, filled with playgoers who were familiar with fine acting and had trained judgments, has disappeared. In its place there is a mass of

amusement-seekers, not without a nucleus of intelligent spectators, but of this nucleus only a small minority has very accurate ideas of what constitutes good art.

The performances of Salvini this summer, while reawakening my slumbering interest in the stage, recalling the fine raptures of bygone years, have also, by the discussions to which they have led, made me sensible of the chaotic state of opinion on the subject of acting in many minds of rare intelligence. I have heard those for whose opinions in other directions my respect is great utter judgments on this subject which proved that they had not even a suspicion of what the Art of Acting really is. Whether they blamed or praised, the grounds which they advanced for praise and blame were often questionable. Every reader will admit that, without knowing anything of the Art of Painting, each visitor at the Exhibition is at perfect liberty to express his admiration or dislike of any picture, so long as he confines himself to the expression of a personal feeling, and says, "This pleases—this displeases me." But it is preposterous (though exceedingly common) for one who has never qualified himself by a study of the conditions and demands of the Art to formulate his personal feeling in a critical judgment, and say, "This is a