

IV
CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN

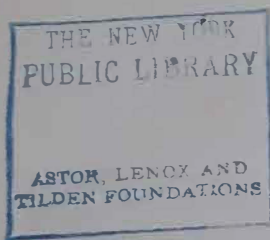
CHRONOLOGY

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN

Born, Boston, July 23, 1816.
Appeared as a singer, at the Tremont Theatre, Boston,
1835, in *The Marriage of Figaro*.
Entered the drama as Lady Macbeth, 1835.
Undertook the management of the Walnut Street Theatre,
Philadelphia, 1842.
Accompanied Macready on his American tour of 1843.
Début in London, 1845.
Last appearance at the Globe Theatre, Boston, 1875.
Died, Boston, February 18, 1876.



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I

WHEN the Pilgrims came to Plymouth in 1620, they brought with them the English conscience and intellect and energy, but, roughly speaking, it may be said that the English imagination stayed behind, with the children of Shakespeare. Now, humanity demands imagination as well as conscience, and it is most curious to trace in New England the gradual assertion of the imaginative type. Assuredly in Charlotte Cushman we have an interesting spectacle of the development of the two elements, not exactly in conflict, but in marked contrast, and existing side by side on the whole in well-balanced efficiency.

Miss Cushman was born in Boston in 1816. She belonged to the best New England stock on both sides of the family, and was brought up in comfortable surroundings and with an excellent education. Perhaps she would never have been attracted directly to the stage, though from her childhood she was remarkable as a mimic. Her early aspirations were musical, and she hoped that her powerful contralto voice might be developed to operatic quality. Her disappointment as to this was a bitter blow, but incidentally she had discovered that, though she could not sing, she could act, and she

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continued to do so, with a career of mainly triumphant and unbroken success, until the cruel malady of cancer, which she bore with heroic patience, made it impossible for her to give even the dramatic readings in which she was quite as effective as on the actual stage. She died in 1876.

It may be said at once that Miss Cushman's life was one of full, joyous, and complete absorption in her work and devotion to it. She had no apologies for her profession, no distrust of it, no shame about it. On the contrary, she fully believed that it was one of the highest means of spiritual development and education for humanity, and that while the theatrical art might often have been degraded, it really represented a lofty mission of usefulness and the conscientious actor was justified in regarding himself as an important and honorable social instrument. It is hardly necessary to say that, with such a temper as hers, this view meant constant devotion and sacrifice. Her work was never trifling, never frivolous, she never slighted it or neglected it. Her soul was in whatever she did, and her biographer justly says, 'If I were asked what special quality distinguished her then, and indeed throughout her whole life, my reply would be, intensity.' Or, as Miss Cushman herself more vividly expresses it: 'To be thoroughly *in earnest*, intensely in earnest in all my thoughts and in all my actions, whether *in* my profession or *out* of it, became my one single idea. And I honestly believe herein lies the secret of my success in life.'

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This affection, this passion, for her art made her ready to overlook all the drawbacks and annoyances which repel so many from the theatrical life who might otherwise succeed in it. How different is the attitude of Macready, who toiled at his profession with enormous patience, yet all the time despised it, and prayed that his children might not inherit any taste for 'this worst exercise of a man's intellect'; or, again, 'the wretched art which I have been wasting my life upon.' To Miss Cushman it was a noble art, and required all a man's energy and genius to make and keep himself worthy of it. Even the humbler and the harsher sides of it she valued as a useful spiritual discipline, and in one curious passage she relates how she made use of the discipline to purify and elevate her spirit when it was worn and shattered with some special strain and misery: 'It became necessary that I should suffer *bodily* to cure my heart-bleed. I placed myself professionally where I found and knew all my mortifications in my profession, which seemed for the time to strew ashes over the loss of my child-brother (for he was my child, and loved me best in all the world), thus conquering my art, which, God knows, has never failed me — never failed to bring me rich reward — never failed to bring me comfort.' And she sums up this beneficent element of her work in one effective sentence, 'Art is an exacting mistress, but she repays with royal munificence.'

In Miss Cushman's case, as in that of any im-

aginative artist, back of the intense immediate enjoyment of artistic effort and achievement, there was the long, conscious ambition to succeed, to make a great place in the world, to leave a great name behind her. And no doubt, in thoughtful moments she was clearly conscious of the defective side of this ambition, so far as the stage is concerned. No art is capable of such immediate, intense, directly appreciated triumph. And no other art is so ephemeral in its appeal, leaves so little permanent impress on the imagination of humanity. Miss Cushman saw this perfectly well, and deplored it: 'What is or can be the record of an actress, however famous? They leave nothing behind them but the vaguest of memories.... Other artists — poets, painters, sculptors, musicians — produce something which lives after them and enshrines their memories in positive evidences of their divine mission; but we — we strut and fret our hour upon the stage, and then the curtain falls and all is darkness and silence.' Yet, after all, there is something to be said for the glory which comes in one's lifetime, if it ever comes, and the immense, immediate applause of thousands laughing and weeping right before you may be worth a good deal more than the shadowy adoration of a dream-posterity. At any rate, there can be no doubt that ambition, the desire to achieve glory, if possible, and as much of it as possible, was a substantial, enduring motive in Miss Cushman's life. One little sentence is enough to show it, to

prove conclusively how she reached outward and upward always to greater and greater things: 'I bless my mother for one element in my nature, or rather my grandmother — *ambition*. I cannot endure the society of people who are beneath me in character or ability. I hate to have satellites of an inferior calibre.'

And if glory was what she sought, she certainly got it, in large measure and perhaps as little mixed as often falls to the lot of anyone in this complicated world. So far as one can judge of her acting from the varied comments of critics, it was, as one might expect, perhaps stronger in the intellectual than in the impassioned aspect. She had a mighty and ardently impetuous temperament, and no doubt she lost herself in the emotional sway of her creations to a very great extent. Still, the main impression seems to be one rather of profound, penetrative intellectual power than of immediate, spontaneous self-abandonment, as for example with Salvini. She was universally recognized as a very great actress, but perhaps rather of the Saxon than of the Latin type.

In consequence, her successes and triumphs may not always have been so violent and sensational as in some cases, but her hold on the intelligent portion of her audiences was sure and lasting. In America everywhere and in Europe her reputation grew, and she was received with admiration and enthusiasm, not only in the lesser parts, like *Meg Merrilies*, which she had created and which died

with her, but in the great Shakespearean characters, which can never die, and which each actress re-creates for herself. Perhaps the hints of what her glory was are best caught in her own reflections of it, the hasty accounts of triumphant receptions which she scribbles off to her family and friends. Thus, in early days, we hear of the 'particulars of my great and triumphant success of last night, of my reception, of being called out after the play, and hats and handkerchiefs waved to me, flowers sent to me, etc.' And it was just the same to the end: 'When I got into my carriage at the private entrance, expecting to go quietly to the hotel, ... I found myself surrounded by a mass of human beings with torches and fireworks, rockets sent up all the way along up to the front entrance of the hotel, and a most indescribable noise and confusion.... I was ready to drop with fatigue, so I only could wave my handkerchief to them, and went in, not getting to my bed before half-past two.'

And of course it all delighted her, the hand-clapping, the shouting, the fireworks, and the general ecstasy. It was the seal of reward for a life of prolonged and noble effort, and she enjoyed it, and what human being would not? She naturally missed it, when by any accident it failed to come, and the lack made her uneasy and restless, as is indicated in the letter to Mrs. Fields, suggesting that her husband might arouse a little enthusiasm in the newspapers. But generally there was no lack, rather a superabundance, amounting almost

to surfeit, if anyone could be surfeited with nourishment of that kind. That Miss Cushman's appetite for it was as wide and lasting as most appears in the pretty anecdote of her behavior on one conspicuous occasion when she had been for some time absent from the stage: 'Just then the storm of applause burst out afresh for a second "call"; as Miss Cushman heard it, she threw up her arms with a peculiar gesture, and cried out in a tone of indescribable, passionate, eager ecstasy: "Oh! how have I lived without this through all these years!"'

It is very obvious that no such career could pass without its drawbacks, its struggles and trials, and its bitterness. There were the critics always. Sometimes they said harsh things from mere prejudice, from conventional association, or favoritism for others. If the actor gets many kind words, when he is successful, he is bound also to get plenty of cruel ones, and they hurt, perhaps all the more, when you feel that they are not deserved. Then, even the greatest artists make mistakes, set their hearts passionately upon what they are unfitted for, and get just the same rebuff from an unfeeling world that comes to those who have no genius whatever. Something of this Miss Cushman found at the very start, when she failed in her musical career. The drama was not what she wanted; she wanted to be a great singer, and she couldn't, though she believed she could, and the disappointment stung. Again, like all actors, she would try parts for which nature had not intended her. Her

somewhat masculine stature and carriage made her sometimes inclined to play young heroes. Her Hamlet was one of her favorites, though I do not know that others thought so much of it. Listen to Wagner's account of her attempt in later years to play Romeo, of his surprise 'at their giving the part of Romeo to an old man, whose age must at least be sixty, and who seemed anxious to retrieve his long-lost youth by laboriously adopting a sickly-sweet feminine air.'

The best and greatest are never quite free from such attempts and such failures and such disappointments as these. But perhaps even worse than the concrete individual failure is the general sense of disillusion, the days of discouragement when the high rapture of the taut nerves leaves you, and it seems as if your best effort and your longest struggle could never reach their aim, if indeed the aim is worth reaching. It was this kind of discouragement which, in part at least, accounted for the various decisions to retire, so much criticized in Charlotte as in others of her profession. Even if you are a very great actress, you see someone who seems to you greater, and the sun suddenly drops out of heaven, as when Charlotte writes of Rachel: 'Often, as I left the theatre, and compared my own acting with hers, despair took possession of me, and a mad impulse to end life and effort together.' Or some trifle makes you realize that popular favor is won by tricks and held by compromises, and that the serious study and passion

of the artist are too often thrown away, as Charlotte remarked bitterly in regard to Meg Merrilies, 'with an outlandish dress and a trick or two, I can bring much more money to the theatre than when I give the public my heart's blood in my finest characters.' When you have the artistic temperament, that temperament which the Pilgrims forgot to bring over, these things depress as much as the high praise exalts, and Miss Cushman had that temperament in splendid fullness.

II

It shows not only in connection with her professional life, but in all the aspects of her career and character. She threw herself with her whole soul into what she was doing. If she succeeded, if things went well and as she wished, she was elevated to the clouds. When they went wrong, the depression was equally immediate and immense, as she said on one occasion, letting her head fall on the shoulder of a friend, 'Oh, I am dead and buried.' The force of impulse in her was enormous, sometimes erratic and surprising, but often leading to great and permanent results, 'knowing the sort of intense animal I am,' she writes to a friend, and her friends did know it, and she was.

So the intensity which she threw into creation went also into passive enjoyment. Take the great poets: she read them effectively, because she loved them and felt them first herself. Take her ecstasy over the poetry of Tennyson, which flowed perhaps

as superbly from her lips as from his: 'Never was such a master of versification in our time. *The Lady of Shalott*, read in a *measure* slowly, is like a gentle flowing river, "as it goes down to Camelot"! In the same way she vibrated to the subtle and varied rhythms of Shakespeare, and so made others vibrate as she did.

Again, music was always a delight to her, and with this, as with everything, her first instinct was to communicate her delight. Up to her last years she was fond of singing in companies of friends. The effort was not always appreciated, as witness the comment of Story, who, to be sure, was not particularly well-disposed: 'The Cushman sings ballads in a hoarse, manny voice, and requests people recitatively to forget her not. I'm sure I shall not.' At any rate, she tried to give what was given to her. As always, the intense personal interest predominated, in the feeling for art, as in everything else. Her friends were sculptors; therefore she had a passionate interest in sculpture. Beauty of all sorts appealed to her, but the art that was personally hers seemed to her in the end to include and involve all the rest: 'No one knows better than myself, after all my association with artists of sculpture or painting, how truly *my* art comprehends all the others and surpasses them, in so far as the study of mind is more than matter.'

And this intensely personal quality, of course, made her and kept her always a social being. She liked men and women about her, to feel them and

touch them and enter into their lives and have them enter into hers. Like all thoughtful people, she knew the value of being alone. One who knew her well says that her spirit 'dwelt apart, in its loneliness, as well of suffering that no one could share as of an imaginative life that no one could fathom.' Like all busy people, she appreciated the pest of superficial visiting, 'receiving of visits — which are the moths of life, I think.' But in the main she was ready for human faces, liked to put smiles into them, and knew that, to do so, you must have smiles on your own, and in your heart. 'She had a real genius for enjoyment,' says her biographer, and there is no richer gift for social success. She herself declared that social life was necessary to her, that it was vain to try under any circumstances to seclude her from the warm contact of mortality: 'I am sympathetic, and so more a lover of my kind than most people; hence I must *see* people, and it is useless to attempt to box me up. I cannot be saved in this respect, and it is folly to try.'

It does not appear that she was in general especially brilliant or witty as a talker, but she always said what she thought with singular frankness and point, and this goes a good way. Joseph Jefferson, who was an excellent judge, praises her conversation highly: 'She had great tact in society, being perfectly at ease and making everyone else so. Her faculty for either entertaining or being entertained was remarkable. She could do all the

listening or all the talking, whichever was the most agreeable to her guest.' And this gift of mutual response is as rare as it is valuable.

There is a ravishing variation of testimony as to Miss Cushman's social manner, so great that it is difficult to reconcile everything, though perhaps one may contrive it by suggesting that she was by nature and by profession an actress, and when she was most herself there was always something of the actress about her. The most bitter of her critics, W. J. Stillman, of whom more later, insists that 'she never lost sight of the footlights, and the best acting I ever saw her in was in private and in the representation of some comedy or tragedy of her own interests.' Mrs. Fields, who was not bitter at all, says quietly: 'She is a woman of effects. She lives for effect, and yet doing always good things and possessed of most admirable qualities.' On the other hand, Miss Stebbins, who lived with her intimately for years, and perhaps got to feel the effects as a second nature, writes: 'Not that, like Garrick "when off the stage always acting"; far from it: off the stage she was invariably — as she cordially expressed it in Julia in *The Hunchback* — "her open, honest, independent self."'

At any rate, however she managed, it is evident that she impressed people, attracted people, charmed some people, and always kept people about her. Perhaps the quality of her general social relation, its wide range and at the same time firm personal grasp, is well summed up in her own

ample phrase: 'She used to say, "This is Liberty Hall; everyone does as *I* please."'

In the more intimate ties the same intense personal feeling appears even more vividly. Miss Cushman's attachment and devotion to the members of her family were always unflinching. Her relations were the objects of her constant thought and care. How much experience she herself had of love-making is not directly shown to us; but there are interesting stories about it. When she was a music-student in Boston, working hard at her art, but personally solitary, she became engaged to a young man of excellent family, who seems to have been ardently devoted to her. The engagement lasted some time, and Charlotte even visited the young man's mother in the country, as to which visit odd and characteristic anecdotes are told. Charlotte came driving up one afternoon on the outside of the stage, in animated conversation with two young men. Her prospective mother-in-law, who had never seen her, received her cordially, and congratulated her on having found acquaintances. 'Acquaintances?' laughed Charlotte. 'I never saw them before, but I am going to ride with one of them tomorrow.' So next morning the youth appeared, leading an extra horse. Charlotte mounted, galloped off at once, and returned in an hour or so, laughing gayly, having kept about a half-mile ahead of her companion all the way. It may well be imagined that a week of diversions like this did not wholly predispose a staid New England matron

in her future daughter-in-law's favor. Perhaps the experience did not augur very well for Charlotte's happiness. Perhaps she felt so herself. At any rate, when it came to an absolute choice between her lover and her career, the lover was discarded — with much or little anguish, who shall say? Possibly a passage in her later letters refers to this struggle: 'There was a time in my life of girlhood, when I thought I had been called upon to bear the very hardest thing that can come to a woman. A very short time served to show me, in the harder battle of life which was before me, that this had been but a spring storm, which was simply to help me to a clearer, better, richer, and more productive summer.' Very shortly after the lover died.

There is no sign of any later thought of marriage in Miss Cushman's career, or even of any distinct approach to attachment, so far as men were concerned. Her life was full, however, of ardent devotion to women friends, who worshiped her and were worshiped by her. This was true of women of her own age and her own position, women who would not have flattered her or anyone. Mrs. Carlyle, for instance, was no hero-worshiper, or runner after celebrities, and she wrote to Charlotte: 'I do wish to see you; do wish to hear from you, do love you.... And further, I mean deliberately and imperatively that we two should be friends for the rest of our lives.' But, besides these distinguished relations, Miss Cushman had a group of younger followers to whom she devoted her life

with a self-forgetting ardor. 'Everything I do in this world I do *hard*,' she says, 'even to loving my friends.' How intense and how complete the surrender was is well shown by one charming passage of self-confession: 'Unless I can utterly forget myself, I am as nothing; and this is why you care for me, why my own friends love and judge me kindly; because, when I can talk freely upon the subjects which interest and occupy me, without a thought of myself or the impression I am making, all is well enough, and my life, my character through my life, makes itself *felt*.'

It is indeed possible that this extreme zeal of friendship sometimes led Miss Cushman to overlook other obligations and rights. W. J. Stillman, to whom I have already referred and who knew her well in Rome and elsewhere, insists that this disregard was excessive and scandalous. He urges that, for the sake of advancing the interests of the sculptors who were intimate with her personally, she was ready to undermine the reputation and injure the business of all the other American artists. According to Stillman, Miss Cushman's prejudices were so strong and her passions so ardent, as to blind her to all considerations of courtesy or even decency. Those about her must bow to her sway, accept her domination, advance her objects, or be swept from her path. There is little evidence besides Stillman's to support this extreme view, and I should not even refer to it if the man did not show himself generally to be a shrewd and careful

judge of character and widely conversant with human life. His analysis of Charlotte is so fiercely adverse that one can regard it only as the manifestation of contrast and conflict between two temperaments alike in energy and salience but differing totally in their general attitude toward life.

At the same time, it must be admitted that a milder glimpse of what Stillman means is afforded also by the remark of Mrs. Fields that 'it is amusing to see how full her letters are of suggestions for forwarding her own plans or those of others in whom she was interested.' In other words, the woman lived with passion, her soul was absorbed with fierce intensity by whatever happened to appeal to her at the moment, and minor considerations, even of others' comfort or convenience, were overlooked. In this aspect she was all life, all fire, a creature of ample and magnificent temperament.

III

Yet the solid substructure of New England character and intelligence was there all the time, sometimes reënforcing the temperament, sometimes checking it. You can see the sterner elements in the face and figure. There was no feminine charm, no grace, or witching tenderness, and it is said that Miss Cushman sometimes longed for these things with a profound longing. 'I would rather be a pretty woman than anything else in this world.' Instead, there was a deep, resonant, immensely varied and penetrating, but always slightly

masculine voice, firm, substantial, strongly marked features, and a commanding presence, which impressed and imposed, but hardly fascinated. Her dress suited her face: it was always neat and well chosen, but not coquettish or extreme in fashion.

And the character showed in far other things than the face. There was the capacity for work. After all, genius in any line gets so little way without the habit of industry behind it. One who knew Miss Cushman well says of her: 'Higher than her intellectual strength, higher than her culture or genius or graces of character, she ranked her ability for *work*.' When a task had to be done, she threw herself into it, no matter how distasteful it was, or how weary she was, and it was done. Even, she knew well the curative, the mere spiritual value of labor for itself, independent of the object. In one period of stress and trial she frankly declares: 'I conquered my grief and myself. *Labor* saved me then and always, and so I proved the eternal goodness of God.' At the same time she was not wasteful of her energies. They were always husbanded, and thoughtfully directed; for none knew better than she that, work as we may, and struggle as we may, there is always far more left to accomplish than one life will suffice to achieve.

In some of these aspects of work and the intelligent and frugal guidance of it, as in so many phases of her character, there is the undeniable suggestion of something masculine. And there was

a virile element in her, which she strove neither to diminish nor conceal. She herself says, 'I was born a tomboy,' and all her life she liked active and even dangerous sports and amusements. She was passionately fond of riding, as appears in the anecdote I have already quoted as to her youthful love-affair. She liked animals, and was tenderly devoted to them, but especially to her horses. During the years she spent in Rome, fox-hunting in the Campagna was a favorite occupation with her, and Mr. Lodge gives an interesting account of her engagement in this pursuit: 'She was a very large, heavy woman, over fifty years of age then, and she rode carefully, but she also rode well and intelligently, and she was perfectly mounted, kept up and saw all that was going on.'

Whether, in the intervals of sighing for female loveliness, Charlotte ever sighed for a complete transference to the other sex, I cannot say. But I doubt it. To be sure, she liked to play male parts. But I imagine she was well aware that masculine energy and feminine privileges make a very successful and effective combination in the practical affairs of life. At any rate, she manifested that combination in a wonderful aptitude for business. Her early years had been passed in a more or less constant struggle with narrow means, and in consequence she had always a keen sense of the value of money and a wide appreciation of the desirability and the varied methods of obtaining it. This prominence of the financial side is un-

deniably a rather ungracious element in her. There was no deprecation of profit, no retiring eschewal of the imputation of active acquisitiveness. She wanted a lot of money, to use in broad and generous ways and for good purposes, but she wanted it, and she got it. In her early years she wrote begging a loan to go to Europe: 'It would be doing me a charity to put me in the way of future affluence.' At a later period she looked over with a sigh at the money that was being made at home: 'I hear you are making your fortune. Alas, why am not I? If Emma had only been content to stop in America this year, I would have made mine too, but she would not, and I sit here and groan.'

It was not her habit to entrust business affairs to others, or to let the artist's delicacy keep her out of the hot struggle of dollars and cents. It is true that she sometimes complained of the difficulty of working alone: 'I have nobody to trust in money matters.' The world was hard and bitter to contend with: 'He is a tricky old manager and I am a fool, so we are not equally matched.' But she preferred to work alone, and I am not sure she did not enjoy it. She liked to fight, she liked to drive a close bargain and get the best of it, she liked to win and dominate and control.

To Stillman it appeared that this desire to dominate amounted to cruelty and unscrupulousness. Miss Stebbins, who knew her friend far more intimately, but was perhaps also somewhat prejudiced, puts the point in a very different form:

'What was right she would have, and she knew how to bend the most stubborn materials to her behests; and yet this was never done in a domineering or captious spirit, but by the sheer force of "character," that most supreme of gifts.' The right is probably with Miss Stebbins; but it is evident that Miss Cushman had her way, and was determined to have it, and while there is no proof that she was substantially unjust or unreasonable or unpopular, I doubt if those who came under her management had always a very good time of it.

In all these matters Miss Cushman showed her clear, energetic, penetrating New England intelligence. Her temperament might absorb her, inflame her; it did not fool her. Her brain was vigorous, active, and unclouded: it went straight to the heart of life, whether as reflected in the great dramas that she studied professionally, or as embodied in the flesh and blood creatures that she saw about her. Take the following superb analysis and portrayal of Mrs. Carlyle: 'Clever, witty, calm, cool, unsmiling, unsparing, a *raconteur* unparalleled, a manner *unimitable*, a behavior scrupulous, and a power invincible — a combination rare and strange exists in that plain, keen, unattractive, yet unescapable woman.' In some respects this sketch would almost seem to serve for Charlotte herself, and it is easy to see how, in the direct, concrete management of life, men and women and facts yielded to her, because she applied her profound intellectual power to mould them as she wished.

Once again to revert to the bitter criticism of Stillman, who was so deeply impressed by this intellectual power that it appeared to him to crowd out all moral qualities entirely: 'I think she possessed an utterly selfish nature, was not at all scrupulous in the attainment of her purposes, and was, in effect, that most dangerous member of society, a strong-willed and large-brained woman without a vestige of principle.' It is interesting to see this impression produced upon an acute, and on the whole generally fair-minded, observer by the striking prominence of certain undeniable and even admirable qualities in Miss Cushman, while he remains oblivious of other qualities, which are equally undeniable, indisputable, not only from the testimony of her friends, but from the far more substantial testimony of her own actions and written words. The presence of the New England conscience in her is just as clear as that of the New England brain, and her great moral qualities were as persistent and as impressive as the mental.

Her eminent and unfailing loyalty is denied by no one; indeed, in its exaggerated form it makes the basis of the charges against her. With all her subtlety and suppleness, she had a singular large simplicity of nature, a frankness and abandon of candor, which are so often characteristic of New England at its best. And there was, too, a fundamental goodness about her, a quick response to

what was high and fine in life and thought, which may have been at times obscured by prejudice or the ardor of success, but which shone out at its best when she was quiet and untroubled. William Winter even says that her genius 'was saturated with goodness,' which may serve as an antidote to Stillman's diatribes.

Or, to look at the various elements of this moral nature more concretely: Take business. For all her zest for success, her keen scent for money and acquisition, she was highly honorable, would not condescend to a mean or dubious action. Her word once passed must be kept, whatever the consequences to herself. 'I have just returned from the theatre, after acting the new play for the second time. It has not succeeded; but my word was pledged to do it, and I have kept my word.' Obligations of all kinds must be met, whatever the cost. This was true of the social and the financial both. 'Sometimes my friends argue with me on what they consider the wrong of yielding to all the social claims made upon me; but I have an innate necessity for repaying an obligation.' Also, I like much the simple sentence in the midst of one of her hard, practical, pointed business letters: 'I did not want to lose money.' She did not want to lose money herself, and she certainly did not want others to lose it by her means.

Take again, professional jealousy. This is, rightly or wrongly, supposed to be peculiarly characteristic of those who seek prominence upon the

stage, perhaps because jarring pretensions and efforts are brought so much more closely into contact and juxtaposition before the footlights than elsewhere. Even her critics do not accuse Miss Cushman of being narrow or mean in this respect. It is true that she quarreled with Forrest, as pretty much everybody did. Forrest was an easy man to quarrel with; witness Jefferson's account of him and that of many others. He charged Miss Cushman with conspiring to discredit him, and she was naturally indignant and cherished some grudge. Yet, as Mrs. Clement wisely suggests, they probably respected each other in their hearts, the more so as there was a good deal of resemblance between their styles and their characters. How pretty is the story of the autograph-hunter who pursued both of them! 'Go first to Forrest,' said Miss Cushman: 'I cannot take precedence of so great a man.' Whereupon the collector had recourse to Forrest and received a similar reply. I wonder if he got his autographs. And in the main it is clear that Miss Cushman was largely sympathetic, or at least tolerant, with her competitors, and appreciated that the world had room for other styles and other glories besides her own.

She was not only tolerant, she was generous and helpful. Both in her profession and out of it, she was quick to see and feel the needs and troubles of others and to respond to and relieve them. She was ready to do this with money, according to her abilities and sometimes even beyond them. In

this regard it is indeed interesting to see the constant presence of New England thrift and caniness. She had lived for years with little money herself. She knew that others could live with little, and she did not propose to be the prey of thoughtless extravagance and shiftlessness. When she was too urgently appealed to for local charities, she rebelled, and insisted that she gave in her own fashion and to her own people what she thought was right and did not intend to be bullied into throwing her earnings away for mere ostentation. She knew the value of pennies, none better, and her care in regard to them sometimes brought upon her the reputation of actual meanness. Yet no one gave more aptly, when there was real need, and especially gave more intelligently.

She gave her woman's heart, too, her sympathy and gentle, helpful comprehension. She well knew how often mere listening and listening rightly is the best help. A pretty story is told of one of her innumerable railroad journeys, when a woman sitting opposite her, after looking at her long and earnestly, asked if she might speak to her, and on receiving a cordial reply, confided the whole pitiful story of her life, to which Charlotte listened with absorbed interest and responded with appropriate advice. Something in her thoughtful, earnest, kindly face drew such confidences. Again, she could put herself in others' places, could gauge and understand their suffering by her own. One evening she was dressing hurriedly for a ball. A woman

began to sing in the street below her window. Miss Cushman stopped her dressing and dispatched her faithful attendant, Sally, who shared all her experiences and perhaps more of her life than anyone else, to give the woman a substantial charity: 'I never hear a woman sing like that,' she said, 'but I think I might have been doing it myself.'

What is perhaps most curious of all in the spiritual side of Miss Cushman's life is the actual and constant presence of religious thinking and feeling. This does not seem to take any very definite form of creed or church affiliation. She may not have been particularly orthodox in her belief or in her practice. But the thought of God and the consideration of God, the reference of all daily interests and actions to God, seem to have been a powerful element in her make-up, and the analysis of this in her letters is exceedingly significant and interesting, making one almost think at moments of Emily Dickinson's preoccupation with similar topics.

As to actual belief in God, Miss Cushman constantly affirms it, not perhaps with any precise metaphysical definition, but with the glow of emotion which goes further than any metaphysics. 'Every human being who goes to sleep awakes believing in God, whatever he may call it.' Again: 'Trust me, every human being believes in a God. For me, I believe in all things good coming from God, in all forms, in all ways; my faith is firm in Him and His love. I believe in instincts marvel-

lously. I doubt any power to take from me the love of God.'

Also, she did not for one moment regard her special occupation as in any way distracting or detached from this interest in God and love of Him. There are times, indeed, as with everyone, when it seems to her that she is not doing enough, or not what she should. 'But that God is perfect, and that my love for Him is without fear, I should be troubled in the thought that I am not doing all I should, *in this* sphere, to make myself worthy of happiness in the next.' But in the main she was convinced that, in doing her work in the world in the highest and best and most faithful manner she was capable of, she was doing God's work, and doing it as He would have it done. 'For I know He does not fail to *set* me His work to do, and helps me to do it, and helps others to help *me*. (Do you see this tracing back, and then forward, to an eternity of good, and do you see how better and better one can become in recognizing one's self as a minister of the Almighty to faithfully carry out our part of His great plan according to our strength and ability?) Oh, believe we cannot live one moment for ourselves, one moment of selfish repining, and not be failing Him at that moment, hiding the God-spark in us, letting the flesh conquer the spirit, the evil dominate the good.'

So, it is undeniable that, in spite of the splendid vigor and aggressiveness of her ample personality, she did not live for herself alone, ever, was always

on the lookout for larger ends, was alive to the deeper interests of humanity, worked for patriotism, interesting herself passionately in the great struggle of the Civil War, worked for benevolence, worked for education, worked for the broader, more intelligent life of man and woman everywhere. And in doing this she gave a splendid example of making the spirit conquer the flesh to the very end, for she fought one of the bitterest battles that man or woman can fight with disease, and fought it with courage, with energy, with cheerfulness, till even her superb resistance was utterly worn out by a strain which would have conquered anyone else long before.

v

All which somehow does not sound quite like the ordinary conception of the actress's character, suggesting, as it does, to many of us, a shallow emotionalism, a somewhat superficial vanity, and a way of taking life which, to say the least of it, does not imply any passionate preoccupation with spiritual things. It is unnecessary to point out how many admirable contradictions there have been and are to such a conception as this of the theatrical career. It must be admitted, also, that there were even in Miss Cushman hints and intimations of what the stage habit and influence can be. Nevertheless, she was a distinguished, a noble, an impressive figure, and would have been so in any calling in life. When you have realized fully how intense

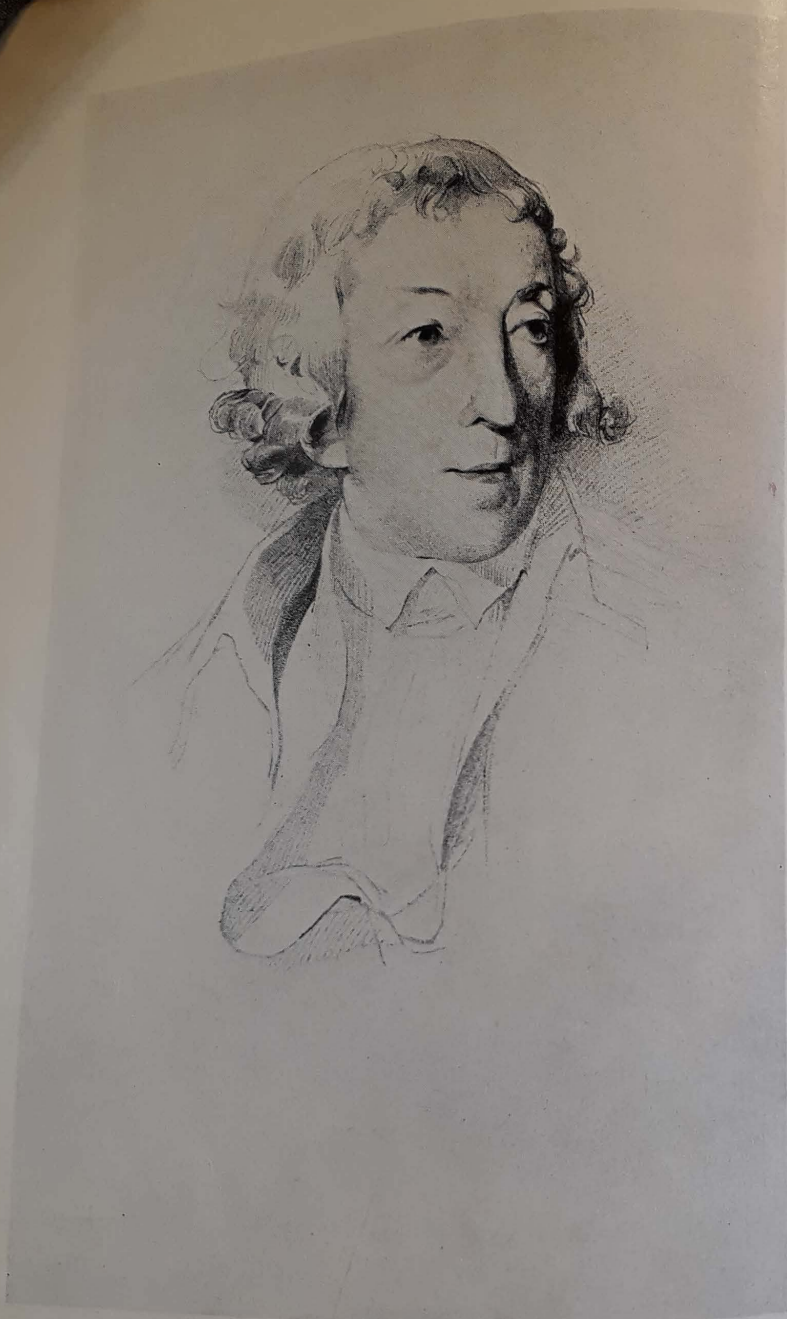
CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN

her artistic temperament was, how it absorbed and transported her, with what free and entire possession it tended to dominate her thoughts and all her soul, you appreciate how great was the energy of character which could at all times control and subdue this temperament, make it a servant and not a master, an agent to do great things intelligently, securely, and always for great purposes. She was royal and supreme as an artist, because she had firmly established dominion over her own spirit: 'Teach yourself quiet and repose in the time you are waiting. With half your strength I could bear to wait and labor with myself to conquer *fretting*. The greatest power in the world is shown in conquest over self.'

Yet I confess that I relish most, and even I think Charlotte herself would have relished, the brief epitaph of the Mount Auburn grave-digger, who might have turned up skulls in the cemetery of Elsinore, 'She was considerable of a woman, for a play-actress.'

V

WILLIAM MORRIS HUNT



HORACE WALPOLE, EARL OF ORFORD

BIOGRAPHY and the HUMAN HEART

BY
GAMALIEL BRADFORD 1863-1932

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