

Accounts of
Charlotte Cushman's Life

Notes and Mem^{da} taken from C's own
lips during our journey in 1878.

Earliest remembrances in Boston.

I was born a Tom boy - my earliest recollections
are of dolls' heads cracked open to see what they
were thinking of - possessed with the idea that
dolls could and did think - no faculty for
making dolls' clothes - but very capable of
making their furniture - anything with
tools - climbing trees an absolute passion.
Very destructive to toys - tyrannical to
Brother's & Sisters - but very social - and a
great favorite with other children.

Early recollections of the old meeting house,
Henry Ware Parson - (She wrote a monody
on the death of this Mr Ware - now in Sallie's
possession) - Emerson was afterwards
his colleague, and taught the Sunday
school classes.

Imitation a prevailing trait. Example,
At Ware, taking tea with her mother, sitting
at table talking with his chin resting on his
two hands - & his elbows on the table - C, sud-
denly startled by her mother exclaiming,
"My dear - take your elbows off the table
and your chin out of your hands - it is not
a pretty position for a young lady" - She was
sitting in exact imitation of the parson

I must have inherited from my mother, a
voice which was at first so remarkable
and which was the origin of my introduc-
tion to the stage - she sang all the songs
of the time with good voice and taste,
and I learned to love music in the true
way - at a mother's side - Beside singing
everything - I exercised my imitative
powers in all directions, and often from
myself, instinctively mimicking the
tones, movements, and expressions
of those about me - this ^{imitative} faculty
in especial I inherited from my Grand-
-mother - born Maria Saunders of Glou-
-cester - Cape Anne - afterward, the wife
of Erasmus Babbitt - a lawyer of
Stourbridge (for Stourbridge) Mass. From
whom I am connected with the Gov^r - Marcy
family - the Sargents - the Wuthrops - the
Saunders; and Saltonstalls of Salem, and
other well known families. My Grand-
-mother's faculty of imitation was very
remarkable - I remember sitting at her
feet on a little stool, and hearing her sing
a song of the period - called the Farm
yard, in which she delighted me by
the most perfect imitation of every
creature belonging to the Farm yard.

* I'm afraid I was what the French call "un
enfant terrible": full of irresistible life and
impulsive will - living fully in the present
looking neither before nor after, as ready to
execute as to conceive - full of imagination
a faculty too often thwarted and warped by
the fears of parents and friends that it means
insincerity and falsehood, when it is in reality

but the spontaneous utterance of faculties
as yet unknown even to the possessor. &
this understood by those so called trans-
scribers of infancy. —

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note. This especial gift of imitating the creature
Miss C. - herself possessed to a remarkable
extent - she could at any time set the
table in a roar - by the most vivid rep-
-resentations of a hen pursued, and
finally caught - or of the strange
wised - mistrustful behavior of a
parrot - this last was indelible.

My Grandmother Babbitt was also remark-
-ably clever, bright & witty, and so dominated
her household and children, that although
the qualities descended - her immediate
family had little opportunity to exercise
them in her presence. My Mother was
this lady's only daughter. She had also
one son - my Uncle Augustus Babbitt
who led a seafaring life, and was lost
at sea. He took great interest in me,
offered prizes for proficiency in my
studies, especially music and writing.
He first took me to the Theatre - on one of
his return voyages - which was always
a holiday time for me. My first play was
Cassius - with Macready - and my second
The Gamester - with Cooper and Mrs Powell
as Mr. & Mrs Beverley - all the English
actors and actresses of that time, were
of the Siddons and Kemble school - and
I cannot but think these early impres-
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-sions must have been powerful towards
the formation of a style of acting, afterwards
slowly eliminated through the various stages
of my artistic career. -

My Uncle had great taste and love for the
Dramatic profession, and became acquainted
with Mr & Mrs William Pelby - he for whom
the original Tremont Theatre was built -
my Uncle having been one of the stock
holders - through him my Mother became
acquainted with these people - and thus
we had many opportunities of seeing and
knowing something of the fraternity.
About this time I became noted in school
for my reading - where before I had only
been remarkable for my Arithmetic
the medal for which could never be taken
from me. - I remember on an occasion
reading a scene from Howard Pague's
Tragedy of Brutus - in which Brutus speaks
and the immediate result was - my
elevation to the head of the class - to the
evident disgust of my competitors - who
grumbled out - "no wonder she can read
she goes to the Theatre" - I had been
before this very shy and reserved - not
to say stupid about reading in school
afraid of the sound of my own voice

and my unwilling⁵ to trust it - but the greater
familiarity with the Theatre, seemed and
-climb to unloose my tongue, and gave birth
as it were to a faculty which has been the
ruling passion ever since. -

Then came the circumstances in my Father's
life which made it necessary that his children
should be placed under conditions looking to-
ward their future self support - reversed
in business obliged us to remove from Boston
to Charlestown, and I was placed at a
public school. My Father's name was
Elkanah Cushman - born of poor parents in
Plymouth Mass. who deprived of his parents
at the early age of 13 - walked to Boston to
seek his fortune. He was the sixth gen-
-eration from the original Thomas Cushman
who came over in the Mayflower, and in
after years when I was in Boston in the
exercise of my profession - Theodore Parker, whose
friendship I enjoyed, brought me one day a
pamphlet, which he told me contained the
first sermon ever printed in New England -
and that this sermon had been preached
by this Thomas Cushman - my ancestor.
The father of this Thomas, was the financier
of the small Colony of dissenters who
assembled at Leyden - to make their
final arrangements for emigrating to

This Country - he bought for them the Spr
-well, and sailed in it with them - when
met with disaster, and they put back to
Holland to start again - they found that
in their absence the interests of the small
colony had suffered so much - it was de
vised by them all that he should remain
to protect and watch over their interests -
~~he sent his son in his stead~~ He bought
the Mayflower for them, and started them
again - sending his son in his stead - In
1621, after the voyage - married Mary Allerton
one of the first marriages solemnized in
the infant colony. *

I only remained at school until I was
13 years of age - the necessities of the
family obliged us to take early advantage
of every opportunity for self-sustenance
and my very remarkable voice, seemed
to point plainly in that direction -
my Mother, at great self-sacrifice,
gave me what opportunities for in
-struction she could obtain for me, and
then my Father's friend Mr. R. D. S.
-herd of Shepherdstown Va. gave me
two years of the best culture that
could be obtained in Boston at that
time - under John Paddock an English
Organist and teacher of singing - the

Principal teacher of his time. - This was
the foundation of my after success, or
rather of my after opportunity - for it put
me in the way of it, and even through
failure, became the foundation of all
my success in my profession. -

There was at this time a rather remark-
-able family in Boston of the name of
Woodward. The daughters of this family
sang in all the different Unitarian
Churches. One of them - Anne Woodward
was the Soprano in Henry Ware's Church.
Rebecca, a sister sang at Dr Palfrey's in
132nd St. - and Dorcas another, after-
-wards married to Geo. Andrews the Com-
-median - sang at Dr Pierpont's - in
Hollis St. - They were friends of my
Mother, and through and with them I
sang in these various choirs. -

But before this, and before I had received
instruction from Paddock, I should men-
-tion that in my Mother's efforts to
advance me, and procure me musical
advantages she had gone to see an old
acquaintance of my Father's, a retired
sea Captain who had invested his savings
in a piano forte factory, and amused
and occupied his leisure by presiding

himself over the establishment - but
preman was a man by the name of
Chickering - the founder of the great
business which is now so famous all
over the world. - He invited me to come
there to practice, and afterwards pro-
-vided me his instruction from a protégé
of his by the name of Fanner, and
was here that I obtained my first real
knowledge of the science of Music. -

The name of this good Sea Captain was
Capt John Mackey - afterwards of the
Firm of Chickering & Mackey - but then
associated with Mr Babcock - in piano
forte manufacture. -

When Mrs Wood came to sing first in
Boston the Theaters gave only five per-
-formances in the week - they were not
-licensed for the Sat. & night, and the
evening was usually devoted to Concerts
on one of these occasions - a pianoforte
being wanted, they came to select one
at my practising establishment, and
while there, enquiries were made for
a Contralto singer to sing one or two
duets with Mrs Wood. Capt Mackey
always good and kind, spots of music

x. after this first essay of my voice, Mrs Wood
was always very kind to me, and I became
her constant attendant in her walks. She
talked to me much of the pity it would be to
waste my voice in mere teaching, and influen-
ced greatly my determination to cultivate
it in the Stage * (see Mrs Wood's letter.)

about this time Fanny Kemble burst like a
meteor upon the American public - and hardly
opportunities of seeing her acts - produced the most
grand impression of my life - I had a real hero-
-worship for her - and would walk for hours in
Tremont St. - only to get the opportunity of seeing
her pass from the Hotel to the Theatre - I believe
seeing F. K. act - was the foundation of whatever
style I may be said to have in acting.

and I was sent for to go up to the Hotel
and give a specimen of my powers,
before Mrs Wood - The voice was a very
remarkable one - it had almost two
registers - a full contralto, and almost
a full soprano - but the low voice was
the natural one. It was at the Tremont
House - Mrs Wood received me very kindly
and I rehearsed with her "as it fell
upon a day". She seemed to be much
impressed by the voice, for she imme-
diately sent up stairs to ask Mr Wood
to come down, - he came and I sang
again, and at the end of the duet they
both seemed much pleased, and both
assured me, that that voice properly
cultivated would lead me to any height
of fortune I coveted - after this I sang
with Mrs Wood on two occasions at her
concerts - and it was through her influence
that I became an articulated pupil to
James G Maeder, who had come with
them from Europe as their musical direc-
tor - afterward the husband of Clara
Fisher - Under his tuition I made my
first appearance at the Tremont
Theatre in the part of the Countess

Almaviva in the marriage of Figaro.
It was considered a great success - and
second appearance was as Lucy Barton
in my mourning. - With them I went
to New Orleans, and sang until I went
my youth - perhaps change of climate
or perhaps a too great strain upon the
upper register of my voice - which,
as his wife's voice was a contralto, it
was more to her interest to use than the
lower one - I found my voice suddenly
failing me. - In my unhappiness I
went to ask counsel and advice of Mr
Caldwell. The manager of the Theatre
Chief New Orleans Theatre. He at once
said to me, "you ought to be an Actress
and not a singer" - advised me to study
some parts, and presented me to Mr Barton
the tragedian of the Theatre, whom he
asked to hear me, and to take an interest
in me. He was very kind, as indeed
they both were, and Mr Barton after
a short time, was sufficiently impressed
with my powers, to propose to Mr Caldwell
that I should act Lady Macbeth to his
Macbeth: on the occasion of his (Barton's)
benefit. —

Upon this it was decided that I should give
up singing, and take to acting. My contract
with Mr Maeder was annulled - it being the
end of the season - so disappointed was I
~~at~~ with the idea of acting this part, and
so fearful of anything preventing my acting
it - that I did not tell the manager I had
no objection to it, until it was too late
for me to be prevented from acting it - and the
day before the performance - after rehearsal
I told him - He immediately sat down
and wrote a note of introduction from me
to the tragedienne of the French Theatre
which then employed some of the best
among French artists in its company.
This note was to ask her to help me to
obtain for the role of Lady Macbeth -
I was a tall thin, lanky girl at that
time about 5 to 6 feet in height - the
Frenchwoman was a short fat person
of not more than 4 ft 10 - her waist full
twice the size of mine - with a very large
bust - but her shape did not prevent
her being a very great actress. The ludicrous-
ness of her clothes being made 5 ft
me, struck her at once - she roared with
laughter - but she was very good natured
saw my distress - and set to work to see

now she could help it. By dint of piece
out the skirt of one dress - it was made
to answer for an under skirt - and the
another dress was taken in, in every
direction to do duty as an overdress, and
so make up the costume - and then
I engaged for the first time Lady Macbeth
intimately to the satisfaction of the
audience, the managers, and all the
members of the Company.

The season being at an end, I took passage
in a sailing vessel for Phil^a on my way
to New York - in those days travelling was
a very different affair from now - etc -
Arrived in N. Y. I addressed a note to Mr
Simpson Manager of the Park Theatre
asking him for an engagement - He offer-
ed me a trial. - While debating upon
this - which seemed to my young im-
agination a great slight - coming from
from my triumph as Lady Macbeth -
received a call one day from Mr Thom Ham-
-plin - then a very successful man - Man-
-ager of the Bowery Theatre. He was very
kind - he said that his friend Mr Barton
had arrived from New Orleans, and had
told him a great deal about me - he
should very much like to see me, rehear

and would have, if ¹³ it was like what his friend
had improved him of - he could make as great
a success for me, as he had done for another, & that
a Miss Vincent - who was a great favorite -
thus of course fired my imagination - and
soothed the feelings which Mr Simpson had
conveyed by asking me to act in trial -
I was then too much a child to understand
the advantage of having even an inferior
place at the Park Theatre - where there was
at that time an excellent school for acting
in a famous company, over a first class pro-
-sition in a second class Theatre - so I acceded
to Mr Haublin's wish - he heard me rehearse
scenes from Lady M. Jane Shore - Belvidera,
Mrs Haller etc. & expressed himself satisfied
and entered into a contract with me - for
a three year's engagement - at a salary to
increase ten dollars a week - each year,
commencing at \$25. I had no wardrobe
for these characters - and it was decided
my engagement should commence as soon
as there could be prepared - not having
the means to procure this wardrobe - Mr
Haublin arranged for me with people
from whom he bought goods for his Theatre
that I should be supplied with what
-ever was necessary - He would become
responsible for the debt - and deduct

5 dollars a week from ¹⁴my salary to meet
it. Seeing there was an independence before
me, I hastened at once to relieve my Mother
from her position in Boston, where she
was keeping a boarding house - which with
four children to support, may be imagin-
ed had not been very profitable. She
made all her arrangements - packed up her
house and came to me - I got a situation
for my eldest Brother in a store in N.Y.
I left my only sister in charge of a half
sister in Boston & took my youngest brother
with me. —

a week before the engagement for which
I was announced in N.Y. I was one day
suddenly seized with chills & fever -
caused by getting overheated in a walk
at Harlem. In three weeks I was
very seriously ill with Rheumatic fever
which finally succumbed to what was
then a novelty in N.Y. medicated vapor
baths - one week after the first applica-
-tion of this - I was acting. Thus the
weeks of the four which had been devoted
to the commencement of my first en-
-gagement, were exhausted - and other
novelties which produced at a particu-
lar date - left me only one week to meet
my N.Y. interview - for I was to be

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but four weeks in N.Y., and then be sent else-
-where - weak as I was from my illness,
that impression might very easily have been
impaired - but I succeeded beyond my expecta-
-tions and those of my manager - acting
Lady M. - to Mr. Hamilton's M. - During that
week I acted in Jane Shore - & Mrs. Haller.
The reaction after this first week was nat-
-urally very great - I was again in bed from
great weakness - my wardrobe which I felt
did not properly belong to me, until I had
paid for it, I left in the Theatre, until such
time as I should again need it. The price
produced the week after mine - was Captive
and in the first or second night of it. The
Bowery Theatre was burned & the burned
with all my wardrobe, all my debt
upset - and my three years contract
good for nothing! - In my miserable
position, with all the dependants then
upon me - I sent for Mr. D. then manager
of a little theatre called the Chatham in
N.Y. and the principal Theatre in Albany
conducted at that time by Mr. W.R. Blake
as Stage manager - I asked him for an
engagement in Albany - where I could
at the same time get practice - and be
sufficiently near to N.Y. - that if an

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opening came I might take advantage
of it. - He gave me an engagement
for five weeks - to which I proceeded im-
-mediately - accompanied by my Mother and
younger Brother - which latter I placed at
school. During this engagement I became
a great favorite - at the Hotel where we
boarded - there also boarded a number of
the of the members of the State Senate
& H. of Rep^s. I became acquainted with
a great many of them - who were very
kind to me - It became known that
Gov. Marcy was a cousin of my Mother
he was a man held in high estimation
and this fact may have bettered my
position socially, though he was then
Senator at Wash^g. It had been fre-
-quently remarked often that some of
the members of both houses could be
found at my benefit - than at the Cap-
-itol. There I remained five months
acting all the principal characters
at the end of which time - I lost my
little brother by a sad accident - which
event made a very serious mark upon
my life - much of the enthusiasm and
ambition - which had been a most
marked trait - seemed suddenly checked