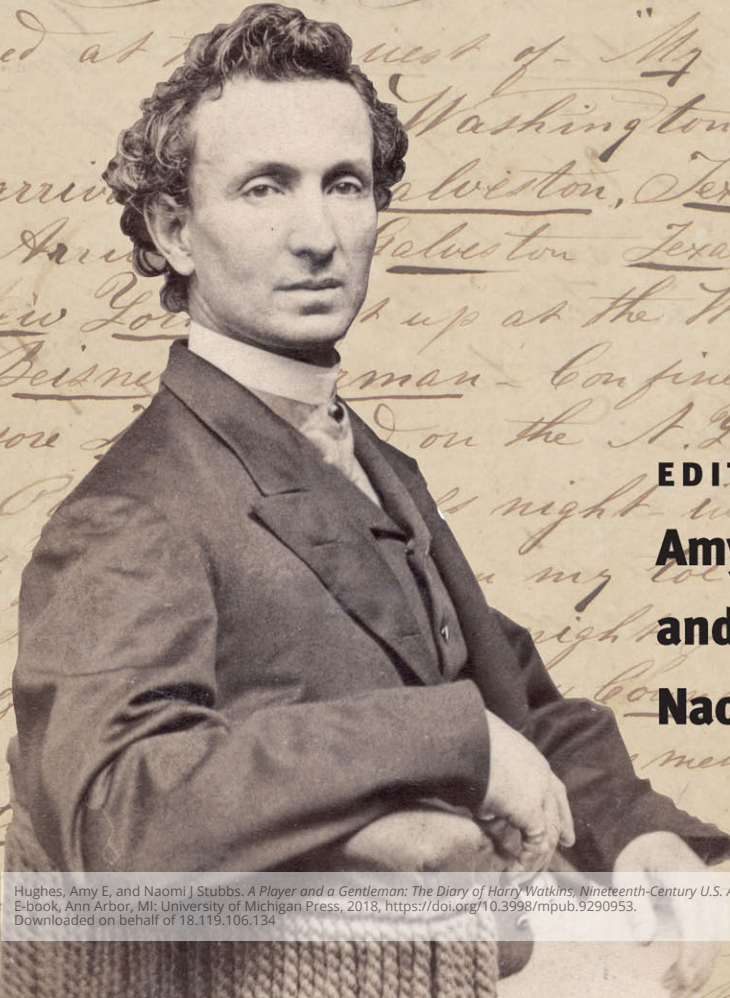


# A PLAYER AND A GENTLEMAN

The Diary of  
Harry Watkins,  
Nineteenth-Century  
U.S. American Actor



EDITED BY

**Amy E. Hughes**

and

**Naomi J. Stubbs**

## A PLAYER AND A GENTLEMAN



*Carte de visite* of Harry Watkins in costume (possibly as a character in *Photographiana*; or, *Wives by Advertisement* by Charles Gayler), circa 1860s. Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University.

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*Scott D. Dexter, Technology Director*

University of Michigan Press  
Ann Arbor

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## INTRODUCTION

During the nineteenth century, long before television and film came to dominate popular entertainment, citizens gathered at the theater to find out what was on the public's mind. Actors and producers in the United States presented plays about controversial issues like temperance, the abolition of slavery, and women's rights. Spectators watching dramatic adaptations of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the 1850s jeered and cheered, expressing their support or criticism of fugitives from slavery, southern plantation owners, and waffling politicians. Long-simmering tensions between elite and working-class New Yorkers exploded as loyal fans of William Charles Macready (the English tragedian) and Edwin Forrest (the first internationally famous US American actor) violently clashed in theaters and on the streets during the Astor Place Riot of 1849. Performance spaces, in other words, served as crucibles of culture where people gathered to reflect on, debate, and struggle with the social and political problems of the moment.

Diaries and letters written during this period offer unique insight into the daily lives and private thoughts of those who experienced the tumult firsthand. The diary of actor, theater manager, and playwright Harry Watkins (1825–1894) is one such resource. As cultural historian Carl Bode once observed, “If the career of any one man covered the range of American drama during the two decades before the Civil War, it was that of cocky Harry Watkins.”<sup>1</sup> Watkins never became famous, but he always worked. He collaborated with the most celebrated performers and producers of the day, including P. T. Barnum, Forrest, and Junius Brutus Booth (father of Edwin and John Wilkes Booth); he penned more than fifty plays and performed in them all over the United States; and he even enjoyed a successful tour in England—a notable

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1. Carl Bode, *The Anatomy of American Popular Culture, 1840–1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 3.

accomplishment for a US-born theater artist. From 1845 to 1860, Watkins kept a diary in which he detailed the roles he performed, the plays he saw, the people he met, the books he read, and his impressions of current events. Now housed in the Harvard Theatre Collection, it is the only known diary of substantial length and density (nearly twelve hundred pages in thirteen volumes) written by a US actor during the decade leading up to the Civil War. Watkins is, arguably, the antebellum equivalent of Samuel Pepys—the English naval administrator whose diary from the 1660s is one of the most important primary sources from the Restoration period.

This critical edition of Watkins's diary, which features the most interesting and historically significant content in the manuscript, offers a vivid glimpse of everyday life during the antebellum era as seen through the eyes of a typical theater professional. Commencing with Watkins's decision at the age of twenty to embark on a career as an actor, the diary contains invaluable information about nineteenth-century theater, literature, economics, and material culture. Watkins records business practices not well documented elsewhere, including financial details like salaries and contract negotiations, how actors traveled between theatrical centers (by stage, train, steamboat, horse, and mule), and how performers accumulated props and costumes. Strikes, riots, fights and rivalries, the establishment of fraternal societies in his profession (such as the American Dramatic Fund Association), advertising, casting practices, and even an exchange with an admiring fan named Pauline are all detailed in the diary's pages. Furthermore, Watkins reveals what it was like to be a professional writer: he discusses his playwriting process, his thoughts on the enforcement and infringement of copyright law, and the benefits of participating in playwriting contests. He recounts his interactions with and reactions to a host of famous actors and producers, including showman Barnum; celebrity actors Forrest and the Booths (Jr. and Sr.); actor-managers James Wallack, Thomas S. Hamblin, and James Hackett; character actors Frank Chanfrau (best known for "Mose"), Joshua Silsbee (a specialist in "Yankee" characters), and T. D. Rice (the original "Jim Crow"); actress Charlotte Cushman; actor-playwrights John Brougham and Anna Cora Mowatt; renowned singer Jenny Lind; and the Ravel family of acrobats.

In addition, Watkins's diary is an engaging account of how US citizens perceived current events and politics during the mid-1800s. He candidly reveals his sense of identity as a laborer and a New Yorker, as a man who longed to be appreciated by colleagues and audiences, and as a patriot living on the cusp of civil war. He reflects on temperance (including the perils of drunken-

ness on- and offstage), gambling, and women's rights; discusses legislation, processions and funerals, and visiting dignitaries; and describes how he, his colleagues, and his spectators reacted to these provocative topics and events. As a former soldier, Watkins responds to the US-Mexican War and the use of discipline within the military. He also writes about his family and friends, his love affairs, and his hopes for and frustrations with his personal life.

To provide some context for this rich and fascinating diary, we first turn the spotlight on its star, providing some biographical information about Watkins and offering an overview of his career in the theater. We also describe the physical characteristics of the manuscript and summarize the emendations that Watkins made to it later in life.

## HARRY WATKINS

### *Family Background, Perspective, and Personal Life*

Harry Watkins was born on January 14, 1825, in New York City, the place he called home throughout his life. His mother was Elizabeth Young Watkins (1790–1869), but his father is unknown.<sup>2</sup> Between 1807 and 1812, Elizabeth had three sons with a mariner named Osmer (or Hosmer) Watkins: James Y. Watkins, Osmer S. Watkins, and George Washington Watkins.<sup>3</sup> US census records and city directories indicate that by 1818, Elizabeth Watkins was a widow and working as a “tailoress.” In 1825, she gave birth to Henry (Harry) Watkins, and in 1834, she married a German cabinetmaker, John Frederick Bloss. Because the marriage announcement lists the bride's name as Mrs.

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2. Watkins's death certificate states that his father's name was Harry Watkins (Death certificate of Harry Watkins, February 5, 1894, file 4806, Department of Records and Information Services, Municipal Archives, New York City). But neither a Harry nor a Henry Watkins appears in censuses or New York City directories during the first decades of the nineteenth century.

3. After her father, James Young (ca. 1751–1806), drowned in New Haven harbor, Elizabeth Young was left an orphan at age fifteen. An 1807 christening record for “James Watkins” at Christ Episcopal Church (New York City), which lists the father as Osmer Watkins and the mother as Elizabeth, suggests that she married Watkins soon thereafter. “Died,” *Connecticut Herald*, March 4, 1806, 3; abstract of guardianship case for James Young (deceased), February 27, 1806, *Abstracts of Wills, Administrations and Guardianships in NY State, 1787–1835*, New York County, 842, *AmericanAncestors.org*, accessed February 17, 2017, <https://www.americanancestors.org/databases/abstracts-of-wills-admins-and-guardianships-in-ny-state-1787-1835>; abstract of record for James Watkins, September 30, 1807, *New York Births and Christenings, 1640–1962*, *FamilySearch.org*, accessed March 9, 2017, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:FDRY-9JG>

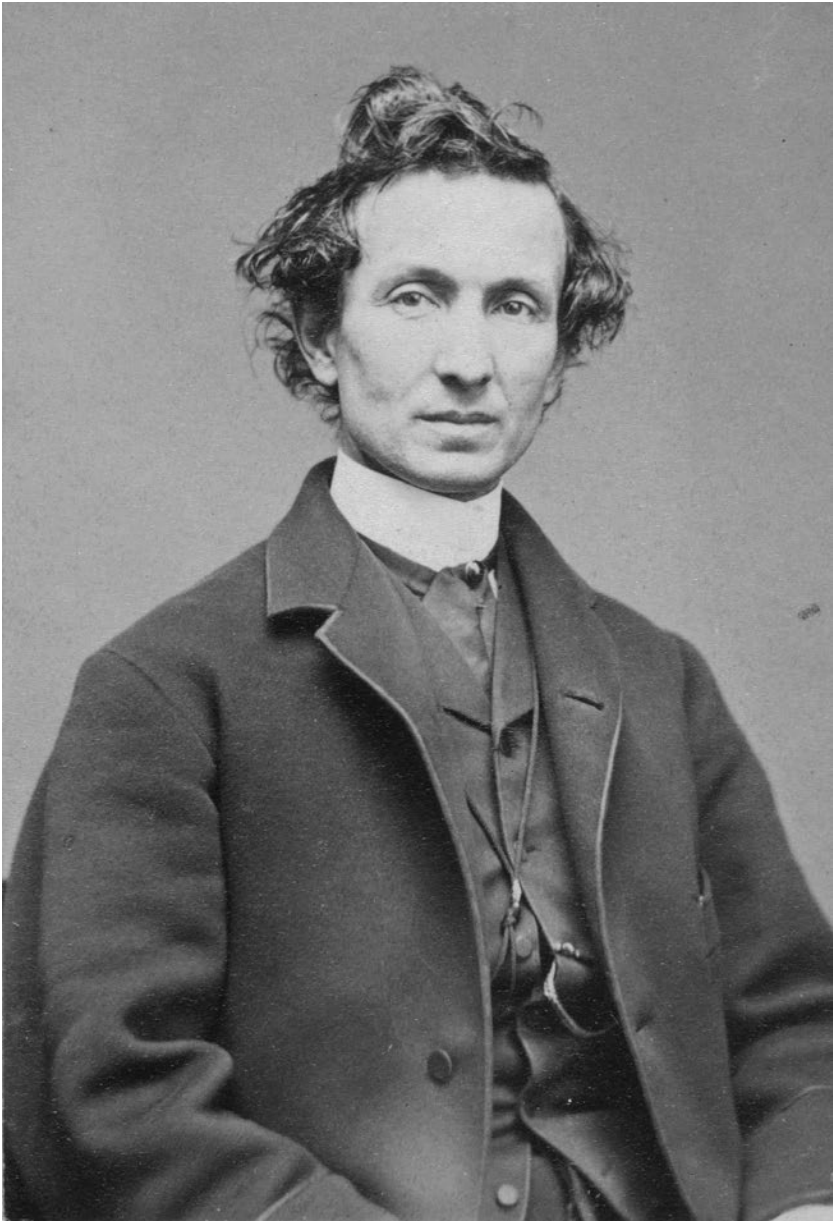


Fig. 1. *Carte de visite* of Harry Watkins, circa 1850. Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Elizabeth Watkins, it seems likely that she was unmarried when Harry was born. Bloss died four or five years into the marriage—an event that possibly informed Harry’s decision to enlist as a musician in the US Army in 1838, when he was thirteen.<sup>4</sup>

Watkins’s enlistment record describes him as having hazel eyes, dark brown hair, and a florid complexion.<sup>5</sup> He was assigned to Company I of the Fifth Infantry, then under the command of D. H. McPhail at Fort Snelling (located at the junction of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers), and served as a fife player. Though Watkins believed “there could not be a worse school in which to rear up a youth than the army,” McPhail’s “deep interest” in the boy’s well-being meant he didn’t fare too badly.<sup>6</sup> He was discharged in 1841. The following year, Watkins traveled to New Orleans and Texas (at that time, still an independent republic) as part of the Bear Hunters, a volunteer company.<sup>7</sup> In February 1843, he enlisted a second time in the army as a fifer at the Allegheny Arsenal in Pittsburgh, then under Captain Edward Harding’s command, where he established a band with a clarinetist, a bugler, and two drummers.<sup>8</sup> After a run-in with his superior officer, Watkins departed for Fort Mackinac, Michigan, in hope of transferring to his former infantry (then under the command of Captain Martin Scott).<sup>9</sup> His discharge was approved in 1845 because he had enlisted without parental consent, which was required at that time for

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4. In 1817, Osmer Watkins disappears from Longworth’s New York City directory, and the following year, Elizabeth Watkins appears as a tailoress (*Longworth’s American Almanac, New-York Register, and City Directory* [New York: Thomas Longworth, 1818], 345). Elizabeth’s marriage to John Frederick Bloss is announced in “Married,” *New-York Christian Messenger and Philadelphia Universalist* 3 (1834), 167, *Google Books*, accessed January 30, 2017, <https://books.google.com/books?id=N19GAAAAYAAJ>. She is first listed as “Bloss Elizabeth widow of John F.” in *Longworth’s American Almanac, New-York Register, and City Directory* (New York: Thomas Longworth, 1839), 105, *Archive.org*, accessed March 7, 2017, <https://archive.org/details/longworthsameric00newy>. We are grateful to Ann S. Bradburd for her generous assistance with some of this research.

5. *Register of Enlistments in the US Army, 1798–1914*, 212, Microfilm Publication M233, US National Archives, Washington, DC, *Ancestry.com*, accessed October 9, 2015, <http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1198>

6. Harry Watkins, *Diary* (hereafter *HWD*), November 30, 1856, Skinner Family Papers, 1874–1979, MS Thr 857 (hereafter *SFP*), Box 17, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

7. *HWD*, December 18, 1854, and February 27, 1852.

8. *HWD*, February 27, 1852. Technically, he had to be recruited as a mechanic or laborer, but Captain Harding assured Watkins that he would have reduced duties as a fife player, being a laborer or mechanic in name only.

9. *HWD*, February 27, 1852, and August 12, 1853. His military record states that Watkins deserted twice during his second enlistment. *Register of Enlistments*, 262.



boys under twenty-one with a living parent. At this point, Watkins started pursuing a career as an actor, and also began keeping a diary.

Watkins's diary reveals his aspirations and activities not only as a player, but also as a gentleman. During the nineteenth century, many young men from the working and middle classes kept diaries or "journals" (the words were used interchangeably) in which they archived both their experiences and their reflections on morality, industriousness, and other traits associated with good character. Although they came from relatively humble roots, Watkins, his brothers, and many of his peers strived to become "gentlemen"—a cultural status that historically had been reserved only for the elite, but which became increasingly accessible to white men of any class if they obtained a basic education and adopted the customs, routines, and attitudes of "respectability."<sup>10</sup> Watkins's chronicle is noticeably influenced by his background and perspective as a white, male, nativist, working-class New Yorker. As the child of a widowed, working mother, his formative years living in the Seventh Ward (now the Lower East Side) were probably difficult. But because their parents were born in the United States, he and his brothers very likely enjoyed the privilege of attending grammar school, where they learned to read and write—crucial skills needed for upward mobility.<sup>11</sup> All four brothers became entrepreneurs of some kind. When Harry was born, James and Osmer Jr. were already pursuing what would eventually become successful careers in retail; George, too, became a businessman. Although Harry did not follow in their footsteps, he pursued his career in the theater with the same determination, believing that hard work and good habits would bring him success.

These experiences and expectations indelibly shaped his social and political views, some of which can be discerned in his diary. He was a patriot with deep roots in New York City—home to the country's largest commu-

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10. For more on nineteenth-century conceptions of respectability, "gentlemanliness," and moral life, see Thomas Augst, *The Clerk's Tale: Young Men and Moral Life in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Claude S. Fischer, *Made in America: A Social History of American Culture and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); and Woodruff D. Smith, *Respectability as Moral Map and Public Discourse in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

11. Elizabeth Watkins, US Census, 1830, New York Ward 7, New York, New York, Microfilm Publication M19, roll 97, US National Archives, Washington, DC, *FamilySearch.org*, accessed October 5, 2017, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XH5M-SPR>; Selma Berrol, "Who Went to School in Mid-Nineteenth Century New York? An Essay in the New Urban History," in *Essays in the History of New York City: A Memorial to Sidney Pomerantz*, ed. Irwin Yellowitz (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1978), 56.

nity of free African Americans, but a metropolis rife with racial tensions. He found slavery to be objectionable, but strongly criticized abolitionists whose agitation threatened to fracture the nation, believing that the Union should be preserved above all other considerations. His anti-immigrant, nativist biases are evident in entries written during the months leading up to 1856 presidential election, including his transcription of a speech he gave in Union Square supporting Millard Fillmore, the nominee of the American Party (colloquially known as the “Know-Nothings”). He attended at least one lecture about women’s rights, but his reflections on the event, as well as other comments throughout the diary, reveal that he believed women’s potential to be relatively limited. Watkins’s insouciant racism, fervent nativism, and casual misogyny were not exceptional, however. His views mirrored those held by many white, US-born, working- and middle-class New Yorkers living during the antebellum era.<sup>12</sup>

Watkins’s first known love interest was the actress Maria Mestayer (née Pray), to whom he proposed by mail in 1849.<sup>13</sup> After she rejected him and married Barney Williams, a fellow actor, Watkins feared he would remain a bachelor. But a handful of years later, he married actress Harriet Melissa Secor. It was a swift courtship: they met in Cincinnati in December 1853, Watkins proposed on February 3, 1854, and they married just two days later. The following February, their first son was born, whom they named after Watkins’s beloved brother George; and they welcomed their second son, Harry Clay Watkins, on September 23, 1857. The marriage was short-lived, however. In April 1859, Watkins filed a petition for divorce—citing Harriet’s infidelity—which a judge initially granted, prohibiting Harriet from remarrying and granting custody of their children to their father. Harriet responded by providing sworn testimony that her husband had committed adultery with at least three women, including Rosina (Rose) Howard (née Shaw), a British actress who would eventually become Watkins’s second wife. The judge sustained the divorce but required Watkins to pay Harriet five dollars per week for forty weeks plus fifty dollars to her guardian, in addition to legal costs.<sup>14</sup>

12. Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626–1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); *HWD*, January 28, 1850, February 25, 1851, June 22, 1852, November 2, 1853, and November 4, 1856.

13. *HWD*, April–July 1849 and January 1850. This section of the diary is heavily redacted.

14. “Henry Watkins against Harriet M. Watkins,” Supreme Court, GA-638, 1859; and “Henry Watkins against Harriet M. Watkins by her guardian,” Supreme Court, GA-598, 1860, New York County Clerk’s Office, New York. For more on the changing social, legal, and political dimensions of divorce at this time, see Norma Basch, *Framing American Divorce: From the Revolutionary*

In 1860, Watkins married Howard. The actress's first husband, Charles Howard, had died in 1858 after a "lingering illness," leaving her with an infant (Charles Jr.), whom Watkins raised as his own. Rose and Harry Watkins had at least two more children together: Amy Lee (born 1862) and William S. Watkins (born 1868). All three children performed on the stage—mostly with their parents. In 1887, tragedy struck when the Watkins family lost Charles and William within two weeks: the former succumbed to tuberculosis, and the latter died of appendicitis.<sup>15</sup> They were buried in the Actors' Fund Lot in Evergreens Cemetery, Brooklyn, and their heartbroken father purchased the adjacent gravesite so that he could eventually be laid to rest next to his sons.

Watkins died suddenly of a stroke on February 5, 1894, at the age of sixty-nine. His wife continued acting for another five years. In 1904, she died in the Edwin Forrest Home, a refuge for retired actors in Philadelphia, at the age of seventy-six. Lee enjoyed a moderately successful stage career and lived until 1925, dying in the Forrest Home like her mother before her. Her death was recorded as being related to diabetes and "enlargement of the heart," which had forced her to retire from the stage nine years prior. At least one obituary claimed that she died in poverty.<sup>16</sup>

### *Professional Life*

Even as a teenaged fife player in the army, Watkins's affinity for the stage was evident. He performed male and female roles in a variety of plays staged by the troops stationed at Fort Snelling, including Jaffier in *Venice Preserved* and Clara in *Luke the Laborer* (for which he borrowed dresses from the major's daughter).<sup>17</sup> After leaving the military in 1845, Watkins made his first professional acting appearance at the Pittsburgh Theatre as Master Neville in James Sheridan Knowles's *Love Chase*, then embarked on a tour through Texas, Louisiana, and Ohio, seeking employment as a supernumerary and performing with well-known actors.<sup>18</sup> Watkins's earnings were limited during these early

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*Generation to the Victorians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). On the matter of the divorce, the diary is silent.

15. "That Mysterious Organ: Death Caused by a Grapeseed in the Vermicular Appendage," *New York Times*, April 25, 1887, 8.

16. Death certificate of Harry Watkins; Register of guests, Edwin Forrest Home Records, Box 36, folder 3, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA; "Amy Lee Famous 20 Years Ago on Stage Dies in Poverty," *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, December 26, 1925, 3.

17. "Death of Harry Watkins," *New York Tribune*, February 7, 1894, 4; *HWD*, June 4, 1853; and loose paper with *HWD*.

18. *HWD*, November 20, 1845, and February 27, 1852.



Fig. 2. Undated *carte de visite* of Rose Shaw Watkins (formerly Mrs. Charles Howard).  
Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University.

years, but he supplemented them with proceeds from several benefit performances.<sup>19</sup> Much of his income went to transportation, lodging, and food, but he was careful also to purchase clothing suitable for the stage, because actors were responsible for acquiring and maintaining their own costumes and props. Watkins frequented sales and auctions for such items as books (to build his own library of plays and other literature), gloves, and hats, and he adapted items (dyeing a coat or making a belt buckle, for example) to stretch his limited resources as far as possible.

Moving from town to town, Watkins secured contracts wherever he could, recording in his diary the parts he played, his interactions with theater managers, and the strengths and flaws he observed in his fellow actors and the profession at large. Established actors typically adopted a “line of business,” or a specialty in a particular type of role. In seeking which “line” best suited his talents and interests, Watkins performed a wide range of characters in his early years, including juvenile leads, “walking gentlemen” (the sidekick or confidant of the leading man), and even principal roles in tragedies. However, he discovered that he was most popular with audiences when playing low comedy, and eventually specialized in that line. In the early 1850s, he began to compose his own plays, including *Heart of the World; or, Life’s Struggles in the Great City* and *Harry Burnham* (both written in 1851). As he watched the actors and managers around him, Watkins resolved to manage his own company one day—a dream he first realized in 1851 when he assembled his own company in Macon, Georgia, and again in 1853 when he managed a company at The Odeon in Williamsburg, New York (now part of Brooklyn), with Alfred and Henry Kemp providing the funding. By his own account, the latter venture was not especially successful, yet he was contracted by theater entrepreneur John Bates to manage another company that performed in St. Louis, Louisville, and Cincinnati later that year before returning again to New York City. By persevering in a range of roles and positions, Watkins slowly established a reputation for himself. He also pursued social and leadership opportunities within his profession. For example, he served as the director of the Dramatic Washington Monument Association (founded to raise funds to help build the iconic memorial in Washington, DC), was elected to the board of directors of the American Dramatic Fund Association, and even became a “Master Mason” by taking the three degrees of Masonry.<sup>20</sup>

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19. The promise of one or more “benefits,” when a portion of the net profits would go to the actor, was a common way for theater managers to compensate performers.

20. The Freemasons (or “Masons”) formed fraternal organizations inspired by the fourteenth-century fraternities of the stonemasons. Masons began organizing lodges in the



Fig. 3. *Carte de visite* of Harry Watkins in costume (possibly as a character in *Photographiana; or, Wives by Advertisement* by Charles Gayler), circa 1860s. Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University.

By 1856, Watkins was in a position to consider multiple offers of employment. In 1857, he became the Director of Amusements at P. T. Barnum's American Museum in New York City, where he wrote, staged, and acted in the plays *The Bride of an Evening; or, The Gipsy's Prophecy* and *The Pioneer Patriot; or, The Maid of the Warpath* (both in 1858), which he adapted from popular stories published in the *New York Ledger* newspaper. Feeling more confident in his abilities and his standing in the profession, in 1858 Watkins forged a professional partnership with Rose Howard and headed to upstate New York, Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, Missouri, and Montreal, billing himself as a "star." Subsequently, he leased Fellow's Opera House in New York City (February 1860).<sup>21</sup> Finally feeling poised for true fame, he then toured in the United Kingdom, sharing star billing with his wife Rose, from 1860 to 1863, where he graced the stages of Liverpool and London before touring in Scotland (Glasgow and Edinburgh), Ireland (Dublin), and across England (including Birmingham, Leeds, and Penrith). They performed several of Watkins's own plays, principally *The Pioneer Patriot* (which he retitled *Pioneers of America* for the duration of the tour), in which he played Jocko, an enslaved African American, in blackface.<sup>22</sup>

Returning to New York City in 1863, Watkins performed at Wallack's theater, bringing home with him the new "Professor Pepper's Ghost" technique he had witnessed on London's stages.<sup>23</sup> From 1865 to 1875, Watkins and his family were based in New York City but toured throughout the United States, performing chiefly in plays by his own hand.<sup>24</sup> *The Pioneer Patriot* continued to

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United States during the early eighteenth century. New members (men only) can join US lodges if invited by current members, and they advance through multiple levels or "degrees" of membership.

21. T. Allston Brown, *A History of the New York Stage from the First Performance in 1732 to 1901*, vol. 1 (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1903), 469.

22. Throughout his career, Watkins practiced the convention of "blacking up" his exposed skin when playing characters of African descent. This convention is most closely associated with blackface minstrelsy—a performance genre in which (mostly) white actors mocked and allegedly imitated African Americans through song, dance, and comic repartee. For more on blackface during the nineteenth century and beyond, see Stephen Johnson, ed., *Burnt Cork: Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012).

23. A technique employing reflective glass, two rooms, and varying lighting levels to make objects (typically people or "ghosts") appear as though out of nowhere. It was created for the stage by Henry Dircks in 1862 but popularized by John Henry Pepper. See Marvin Carlson, "Charles Dickens and the Invention of the Modern Stage Ghost," in *Theatre and Ghosts: Materiality, Performance, and Modernity*, ed. Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

24. Brown, *History of the New York Stage*, 1:164, 1:215, and 1:513; advertisement for Na-



Fig. 4. Undated advertisement for Harry Watkins's play *Trodden Down; or, Under Two Flags*, depicting Rose Watkins as Blanche and Harry Watkins as Fergus McCarthy. Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University.



be a favorite, but he wrote others in which his family could appear together, including *His Worst Enemy; or, The Angel Child*, in which his daughter played the “angelic” child to her father’s iconic drunkard—who, of course, reformed by the play’s end.<sup>25</sup> In 1889, Watkins turned his hand to fiction, composing and publishing *His Worst Enemy* (based on his earlier play), a novel critiquing political corruption and championing temperance.

Watkins wrote dozens of dramas, many of which were adaptations of other plays, novels, and newspaper stories, including *The Hidden Hand* (based on E. D. E. N. Southworth’s novel), *It Takes Two to Quarrel*, and *Trodden Down; or, Under Two Flags*. But *The Pioneer Patriot* was a lasting favorite of his and the only play he ever published.<sup>26</sup> His diary reveals that he closely guarded the manuscripts of his plays: on numerous occasions, he laments the difficulties of maintaining ownership of his original dramas and the importance of not providing managers with complete scripts. A cryptic note in Lee’s obituary notes that her father’s manuscripts “mysteriously disappeared after his sudden death in New York, and his daughter was never able to obtain a trace of them”—suggesting that he did keep a collection of his plays.<sup>27</sup> However, if any have survived, their whereabouts remain unknown.

## THE DIARY

### *Length and Scope*

Watkins documented many aspects of his professional and private life in his diary from 1845 to 1860. Generally, the diary is a record of Watkins’s daily activities during that period, though the handwriting and errors in certain dates suggest he sometimes wrote multiple days’ worth of entries at one time. In making selections for this edition, we have eliminated the briefest entries—for example, when he records little more than the weather and his daily routine—and as a result, this edition masks how diligently he main-

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tional Theatre, *Daily National Republican*, November 23, 1869, 2; “Gossip of New York,” *Times-Picayune*, February 11, 1894, 16; and “Death of Harry Watkins,” *New York Tribune*, February 7, 1894, 4.

25. Advertisement for Academy of Music, *Charleston News and Courier*, April 20, 1874, 2.

26. Harry Watkins, *The Pioneer Patriot; or, The Maid of the War Path* (New York: William B. Smith, 1858).

27. Clipping in Register of guests, Edwin Forrest Home Records.

*A Journal.*

Commenced at the request of My Brother  
George Washington Watkins.

On my arrival at Galveston, Texas, 20<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1855

Nov 20<sup>th</sup> Arrived at Galveston Texas, on the Steam  
Ship, New York. Put up at the Washington Hotel  
 kept by Deisner, a German. Conjoined to my room  
 with a soe toe received on the A.P. by a fall.

Nov 21<sup>st</sup> Passed a sleepless night in consequence of  
 the great pain arising from my toe. Soe Fair

Nov 22<sup>nd</sup> Passed another bad night. I shall have to lose  
 the nail of that toe. Write off Count Montalban in  
Long Nova. I fear my Texas engagement will end in a  
disappointment. The 24<sup>th</sup> will tell.

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> I hard blow all night. Ther acted.

Nov 24<sup>th</sup> Passed the night miserably. had part of the  
 nail of that toe cut off. Went to Abbe at 10 A.M.

Fig. 5. The first page of Harry Watkins's diary. Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University.

tained his diary. That said, from 1855 to 1860, his entries are less consistent, and the theatrical seasons 1855–56 and 1858–59 are missing almost in their entirety (only six entries survive in the former and two in the latter). The omission of the 1858–59 season is particularly curious because the narrative of the diary is clearly already in progress when his text resumes, and Watkins—in a marked departure from his usual practice—does not comment on the interruption. Moreover, the dates correspond with the tumultuous years during which Watkins divorced Harriet Secor and married Rose Howard. An interruption in the handwritten numbers in the page corners suggests that Watkins continued writing during 1858–59 but that those pages were removed or destroyed. During his time in England (from 1860), he

writes entries almost monthly; but these seem to be written with the benefit of hindsight, suggesting he wrote them after the events described. On October 22, 1860, the diary stops abruptly, mid-entry, while Watkins is lamenting Madame Céleste's decision not to stage one of his new plays.

### *Physical Characteristics*

Watkins prided himself on his frugality and resourcefulness, and perhaps for this reason, he constructed his diary with his own hands rather than acquiring a commercially produced journal or ledger. The diary is made up of thirteen volumes, each containing between 58 and 118 pages. The volumes measure approximately 7.9 by 6.3 inches (200 by 160 millimeters), though this varies slightly from volume to volume due to the use of different paper stock and uneven cutting. The fact that two out of three unbound edges are machine cut and the third (usually, the top or bottom) is ragged suggests that Watkins cut his paper in half prior to use. It is likely that he purchased this paper already folded, as some pages have printed lines running left to right, with the fold stitched into the binding. The paper is from a variety of sources, though whole sections are written on the same paper stock. A number of pages, which vary considerably in size, were inserted into the manuscript at some point, and these are likely much later in date than the adjacent pages. (We describe these in the next section.) The volumes were stitched together after the text of the diary was completed, as evidenced by the inserted pages as well as the fact that portions of the handwritten text, including numbers written in the corners of some pages, are hidden within the binding.<sup>28</sup> At the end of the last volume, there are three unbound leaves and then a short sequence of pages numbered from one to seven, covering his time in London. We have not been able to determine whether Watkins maintained his diary after 1860 or not, and if so, whether these pages were lost or destroyed.

There is minor damage to the manuscript that, in some places, has resulted in lost or illegible text. For instance, the corners of some pages are gone—especially the first and last pages of each volume. One page has been

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28. These numbers seem to count leaves, not pages; as most pages are folded in half, each number incorporates two to four pages. The pages in the first two volumes are unnumbered, whereas the third is numbered in two sequences (1–12 and 1–20). The leaves in the fourth volume begin with 1 and the sequence continues to 210 in volume 12. The numbering picks up again at 249 in volume 13 and runs to 264. The resulting gap (seventy-eight pages) indicates that a full volume of the diary is missing, which is further confirmed by the jump in dates; there are no entries between May 1855 and August 1856.

torn in half, but because this contains severely redacted text, it seems likely this damage was inflicted deliberately. Other pages exhibit inkblots, which in some cases have rendered small amounts of text unreadable. Most volumes are tightly bound, but the first and/or last page(s) of volumes 3, 7, and 8 have become detached, and the binding of volume 10 is almost entirely gone. Yet overall, the manuscript is in remarkably good condition, considering its age, as well as the fact that Watkins traveled extensively with his diary in tow.

### *Emendations*

Perhaps Watkins hoped that his diary would be published one day, because there are a number of redactions and emendations throughout the manuscript. Many are Watkins's minor edits to his narrative (spelling and grammatical corrections, for example), but others are more substantial and seem to have been made at a later date. It seems that Watkins returned to his diary and altered what he initially recorded, censoring sensitive passages or elaborating on his original text. Small sections of crossed-out text are legible, so we have been able to excavate some of it. Most portions that have been deleted or added chiefly concern one of three subjects: affairs of the heart, the consumption of alcohol, and the authorship of plays. Because the material is somewhat sensitive and could be considered embarrassing to him or his family, it is probable that Watkins, his second wife, or his daughter (the last family member to possess the manuscript) made these redactions. It seems most likely that Watkins made many if not all of the deletions himself, because the additions are in his hand.<sup>29</sup>

At some point, Watkins supplemented his diary with text clarifying or elaborating on his contemporaneous description of events. These addenda are sewn into the binding but are written on different paper—another indication that they were made at a later time. Sometimes they are located

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29. Deletions related to his love life include an array of entries between April and July 1849 concerning Watkins's unsuccessful marriage proposal to Maria Mestayer and her subsequent marriage to Barney Williams. Watkins vividly recounts his vehement love and bitter disappointment in his diary, but some of this material was struck through at a later date. In volume 13, text regarding his conflicts with a female actress (we do not know who) in November 1857 is deleted as well as his criticism of his future second wife, Rose Howard (May 5, 1858).

Stories about drinking are also censored. On September 20, 1852, for example, he recalls how he drank so much that his speech was slurred and his stomach was "unable to carry its load." On December 4, 1853, he recalls drinking and toasting with a colonel. Although Watkins was not coy about his enjoyment of porter during his youth, these later indiscretions might have been perceived as being at odds with his avowed temperance, which may explain why they were struck.

adjacent to lengthy deletions or where original pages in the manuscript are clearly missing and were probably removed when the new text was inserted. This suggests that Watkins desired to alter his original record. For example, in the entry dated March 18, 1851, Watkins deleted a short passage about his dislike of his part in a new play titled *Harry Burnham* and his desire to write his own version of the play, and then reframed events in an addendum. In the revised version, he recounts how James Pilgrim was commissioned to write *Harry Burnham* but, because his version was so ill received, the company's stage manager, James Anderson, asked Watkins to rewrite it. Pilgrim requested that his name not be withdrawn from the play in order to protect his reputation, and Watkins consented to make revisions without credit. The altered play did well, but a previously scheduled starring engagement by J. B. Booth necessitated an end to its run. Although he does not say so outright, in the addendum Watkins displays frustration about never receiving credit for *Harry Burnham*. In this particular case, the rewritten text dramatically changes the narrative—from Watkins taking it upon himself to possibly write his own version, to being asked to rewrite it, to being cheated out of authorship. It is one of several instances where Watkins makes deletions and additions in passages about playwriting.<sup>30</sup>

Some inserted pages elaborate on Watkins's original description of events. For example, in his addendum for the entry of October 22, 1851, Watkins reflects in more depth on the audience's reaction to his portrayal of Othello in the South. Sometime after the Civil War, Watkins apparently returned to this entry in order to explain that spectators expressed support for the villain Iago (who brings about the downfall of Othello, a black "Moor") rather than the title character. Watkins concludes with the observation that, due to southerners' intractable sentiments regarding the African race, only civil war could bring an end to slavery in the United States. This addendum was clearly

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30. Similarly, Watkins heavily edits his entry for June 17, 1851, deleting a line in which he states that he and Charles T. P. Ware wrote *Heart of the World; or, Life's Struggles in a Great City* and inserting a small passage claiming that he was the sole author of the play. A more substantial insertion concerning authorship can be seen on December 2, 1850. The end of a page is struck through, and twelve new pages of narrative begin. The addendum describes how A. H. Purdy, manager of the National Theatre in New York City, cheated Watkins out of royalties for his play *Nature's Nobleman, the Mechanic; or, The Ship Carpenter*; and how Joseph N. Ireland, in his *Records of the New York Stage, from 1750–1860*, vol. 2 (New York: T. H. Morrell, 1867), 507, erroneously attributed authorship of the play to H. O. Pardey. Given that Watkins refers to his second wife in this addendum (whom he married ten years later), as well as the date of Ireland's *Records*, it is clear that these pages were written long after the fact.

written much later and, probably, with an awareness that it might be read one day by someone other than himself.

### *Provenance*

The story of how Watkins's diary found its way to the Harvard Theatre Collection—and, eventually, came to our attention—spans nearly one hundred years. In 1925, Lee, who inherited the diary and other possessions owned by Watkins, sold the manuscript to Maud and Otis Skinner (prominent actors in the US theater industry at the time) for the sum of fifty dollars—apparently, to help Lee pay for dentures.<sup>31</sup> The Skinners acquired the diary with the intention of writing a book based on it, and in 1938, they published *One Man in His Time: The Adventures of H. Watkins, Strolling Player*, featuring excerpts from the manuscript. Until now, the Skinners' book has been the sole source of Watkins's ruminations; for example, historians Carl Bode, Stephen M. Archer, Benjamin McArthur, Bruce A. McConachie, and Laurence Senelick (among many others) have cited *One Man in His Time* in their scholarship about US theater and culture.<sup>32</sup> After reading *One Man in His Time* as well as scholarship citing the Skinners' book, Hughes became curious about the

31. Maud Skinner, Bank check to Amy Lee, March 10, 1925, *SFP*; Maud Skinner and Otis Skinner, *One Man in His Time: The Adventures of H. Watkins, Strolling Player* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1938), xii.

32. Stephen M. Archer, *Junius Brutus Booth: Theatrical Prometheus* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010); Benjamin McArthur, *The Man Who Was Rip Van Winkle: Joseph Jefferson and Nineteenth-Century American Theatre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Bruce A. McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820–1870* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992); Laurence Senelick, *The Age and Stage of George L. Fox, 1825–1877* (1988; Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999). See also, among others, Bluford Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman and the Making of U.S. Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Faye Dudden, *Women in the American Theatre: Actresses and Audiences, 1790–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Foster Rhea Dulles, *America Learns to Play: A History of Popular Recreation, 1607–1940* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1940); John W. Frick, *Theatre, Culture and Temperance Reform in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Sam W. Haynes, *Unfinished Revolution: The Early American Republic in a British World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010); Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973); Jeffrey D. Mason, *Melodrama and the Myth of America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Geoffrey S. Proehl, *Coming Home Again: American Family Drama and the Figure of the Prodigal* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997); and Shauna Vey, *Childhood and Nineteenth-Century American Theatre: The Work of the Marsh Troupe of Juvenile Actors* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2015). To date, we have come across only one scholar who consulted the actual manuscript: J. S. Gallegly, *Footlights on the Border: The Galveston and Houston Stage before 1900* (The Hague: Mouton, 1962), 49n4. Gallegly's citation reads, "Harry Watkins, *A Journal* (Manuscript in the possession of Cornelia Otis Skinner)."

whereabouts of the original diary. She learned that in the 1970s and 1980s, the Skinners' heirs had donated the family's papers to the Harvard Theatre Collection in several installments. She noted that archivists had inventoried the donations but had never made a public finding aid for the collection, nor had they entered Watkins's diary into the electronic catalog. Hopeful that the family had included the diary in its bequest, Hughes sought the assistance of Harvard librarian Betty Falsey in 2008. After some dedicated searching, Falsey found a box in the archives containing the manuscript.

Through this edition, we strive to give scholars and teachers better access to this valuable resource—the only known diary of its size and scope written by a US actor during the decade prior to the Civil War. We expect that students and general readers will find Watkins's diary to be an engaging and thought-provoking entrée into the world of antebellum life. And we hope *A Player and a Gentleman* will inspire other editors to make forgotten voices from US history accessible to a broader audience.

# EDITORIAL POLICIES

## TRANSCRIPTION AND VERIFICATION

In general, we have endeavored to follow the best practices described in Mary-Jo Kline and Susan Holbrook Perdue's *A Guide to Documentary Editing* and the exemplary protocols featured in Michael E. Stevens and Steven B. Burg's *Editing Historical Documents: A Handbook of Practice*.<sup>1</sup> Our technology director, Scott D. Dexter, created a Drupal-based workflow tool to facilitate collaboration within the editorial team and to collect and preserve transcriptions during the recording and proofreading process. The project's website (<http://www.harrywatkinsdiary.org>) served as the online hub for this work. The diary was initially transcribed by our team of assistants and interns in XML code in accordance with the recommendations and guidelines of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI).<sup>2</sup> This enabled us to highlight and track specific people, places, titles, and roles that Watkins mentions in the diary. The resulting XML-encoded transcription served as the foundation of this critical edition as well as the digital edition; the latter features the entire text of the diary with minimal editorial intervention.<sup>3</sup> During the verification phase, editorial assistants proofread the transcriptions in tandem with the editors—with one person reading the text aloud and the other checking the transcription—and all transcriptions were proofread twice in this manner by two different teams.

We have strived to be consistent in our editorial choices, focusing on readability while staying true to Watkins's voice. Sometimes, however, maintain-

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1. Mary-Jo Kline and Susan Holbrook Perdue, *A Guide to Documentary Editing*, 3rd ed. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008); Michael E. Stevens and Steven B. Burg, *Editing Historical Documents: A Handbook of Practice* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1997).

2. See <http://www.tei-c.org>

3. See <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.9290953.cmp.1>



ing his voice has been challenging. For example, on several occasions Watkins uses a racist epithet, the N-word, when referring to people of African descent. We are extremely sensitive to the racism embedded in this word and the oppression it has aided and abetted throughout US history. Because African Americans have suffered ongoing violence and bias—despite Emancipation, Reconstruction, the Civil Rights Movement, and Black Lives Matter—we were tempted to censor Watkins’s use of this libel. Moreover, an anonymous reader of our manuscript encouraged us to consider replacing each instance of this word with a conventionalized substitute (“N---r,” for example). After pondering this suggestion at length and consulting a number of colleagues, we ultimately decided to maintain the word as Watkins wrote it. As historians, we believe that learning about the injustices of the past is a crucial step one must take in order to understand and address the injustices of the present. Watkins’s use of the N-word renders visible his biases as a white, male, nativist, working-class New Yorker. It also reminds us that during his lifetime, he and his peers routinely dehumanized African Americans in everyday speech. Because we want our edition of his diary to represent accurately both his perspective and his milieu, we have kept the N-word (and variants of it) intact whenever it appears in his text. We hope that this transparency will encourage thoughtful, critical reflection about Watkins and the culture that shaped him.

## SELECTION

This volume contains approximately 40 percent of the words that Watkins wrote. In making decisions about which entries to include, we kept two criteria in mind: the historical significance of the content and the need for continuity. For example, entries that record little beyond the weather and Watkins’s daily routine of “reading, writing, and walking” have been consistently excluded, along with entries containing tangential anecdotes or asides. We have included many extended passages where he discusses items of interest to readers studying nineteenth-century US entertainment, politics, economics, and culture, such as performances by famous actors, Watkins’s business transactions, political events, and personal matters that offer a glimpse of everyday life during this period. In addition, to enable ease of reading and to provide a sense of continuity, some entries in which he relates where and how he is traveling have been retained, so that the reader may follow his whereabouts.

## PRESENTATION

To reflect the rhythms of Watkins's life as a professional actor, each chapter encompasses a single theatrical season, running from September 1 to August 31. Entries begin with the date, as was Watkins's practice. We do not indicate when we have omitted an entry in its entirety, but we do signal when we have omitted text within an entry by inserting ellipses. When we see a need for clarification—such as supplying text that will aid the reader's comprehension—we have used square brackets to indicate an editorial insertion.

Our main objective is to give you a smooth and engaging reading experience, and this goal has informed all of our decisions on the sentence level. With the exception of editorial insertions and deletions, most of our changes to Watkins's text have been made silently. Spacing, line breaks, and page breaks in the manuscript have not been preserved in this edition, and date-lines have been standardized to facilitate navigation. We have kept Watkins's original spelling whenever it is in keeping with conventions in the United States or United Kingdom today, and Watkins's grammar remains intact. But outright errors in spelling and punctuation have been silently corrected and *sic* has not been used. In many cases, we have standardized the spelling of titles of plays, books, and newspapers so that they reflect the published title, thereby aiding the reader in finding the work. However, Watkins's deliberate departures from Standard English—such as when he attempts to reproduce a dialect—have been retained. Punctuation has been added, removed, or altered where needed to improve readability. For example, Watkins was very liberal in his use of dashes, and in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the text, many dashes have been silently removed or changed to commas or periods as the logic of the text dictates. Wherever we have changed a dash to a period, the word beginning the next sentence has been capitalized for ease of reading. Otherwise, we have maintained Watkins's capitalization, except when he fails to capitalize a word that we generally would today (for instance, "english" is rendered as "English" and "Charles street" appears as "Charles Street"). Most abbreviations, including contractions, are presented as he wrote them. In cases where the meaning of an abbreviation would not be obvious to the general reader (such as Latin abbreviations), we provide the full word and definition in an annotation. Watkins's heavy-handed underlining has been rendered as italics. Wherever Watkins double-underscores words, the text is italicized and also underlined; where he triple-underscores words, the text is italicized, underlined, and rendered in bold. Titles of plays,

books, and newspapers have been italicized, regardless of whether Watkins underlined them or not. We have not retained his use of superscript.

## DELETIONS, EMENDATIONS, AND GAPS

As discussed in the introduction, someone (or multiple people) made changes to the diary at some point (or, possibly, at several points). These changes include the substitution of words and the crossing out of entire passages. In order to preserve the readability of the text, we do not note minor additions and deletions. Slips of the pen have been omitted, and Watkins's accidental duplications of words have been silently corrected. Some of the significant deletions or additions that we think were made anachronistically—in other words, attempts to censor or alter the original text—are noted or summarized in an annotation. Portions of the text are hard to decipher due to damage; in these instances, we have supplied the likely missing text within square brackets.

## ANNOTATIONS AND MAPS

In keeping with our goal to present Watkins's words with as little intervention as possible, we have kept annotations to a minimum. Our annotations provide basic information needed to understand the diary's content (e.g., historical context, definitions of uncommon words) and form (e.g., redacted and amended text or other peculiar aspects of the original document), and we have written them with a broad readership in mind. In addition, because Watkins writes frequently about his travels and some readers might have difficulty visualizing his movements, at the beginning of each chapter we have provided a map. These maps document locations he visited on theatrical business as well as places he spent a significant amount of time (visiting family or vacationing, for example) during the period covered in the chapter.

## INDICES

One of the most valuable aspects of Watkins's diary is also one of its most challenging: the extraordinary number of people and plays that he discusses.

Adding to the difficulty is the fact that many of these names and titles are no longer common knowledge. To aid the reader, we have assembled separate indices for people, plays, and subjects mentioned in the entries selected for this volume. Whenever possible, we have identified the full name of persons and plays that Watkins mentions. We were not able to identify every name or title in full, but the indices reflect what we were able to ascertain by consulting other parts of the diary or outside sources.



# HARRY WATKINS (1825–1894)

## *A Chronology*

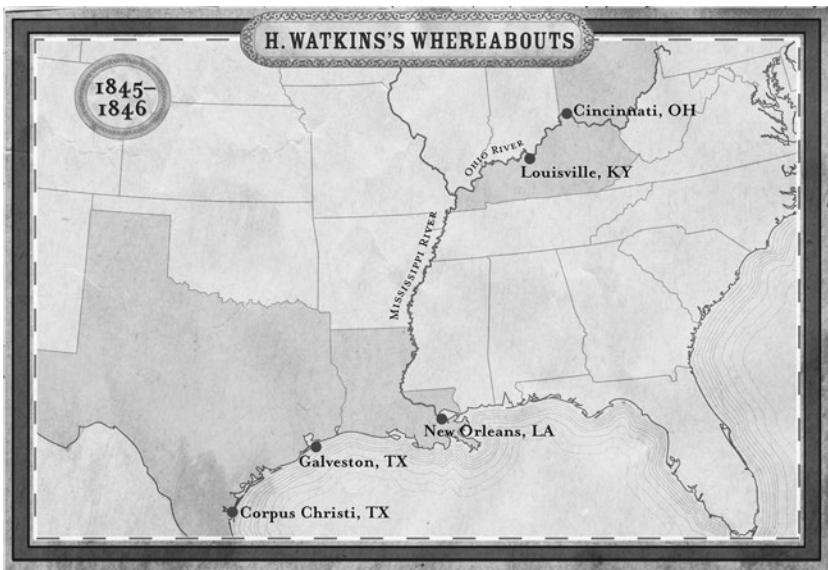
- 1825 Born at 104 Harman Street (now 92 East Broadway), New York City (January 14)
- 1838 Enlists in the US Army for the first time (May 23)
- 1841 Discharged from military service (May 23)
- 1843 Enlists in the US Army for a second time (February 22)
- 1845 Discharged from military service (August 8)
- 1845 Begins diary (November 20)
- 1845 First benefit performance (December 31)
- 1851 Tours the southern United States with his own company
- 1853 Manages the first theater company in Williamsburg, NY (The Odeon)
- 1854 Marries Harriet Melissa Secor (February 5)
- 1855 George Washington Watkins (son) is born (February 18)
- 1857 Becomes Director of Amusements at P. T. Barnum's American Museum (October 5)
- 1857 Harry Clay Watkins (son) is born (September 23)
- 1858 Writes and publishes *The Pioneer Patriot; or, The Maid of the War Path*
- 1859 Divorces Harriet Secor Watkins
- 1860 Marries Rose Howard (née Shaw)
- 1860 Tours the United Kingdom with Rose Watkins (through 1863)
- 1860 Diary concludes
- 1862 Amy Lee (daughter) is born (January 30)
- 1868 William S. Watkins (son) is born
- 1887 Charles Howard Watkins (stepson) dies (April 7)
- 1887 William S. Watkins dies (April 22)
- 1894 Dies at 463 W. Twenty-Third St., New York City (February 5)



## ONE

1845–46

*After two stints as a teenaged fife-player in the US Army, Watkins commences his diary upon arriving in Galveston, Texas. He relates the rocky start to his new career, frequently complaining about his lack of funds. He travels to Corpus Christi, New Orleans, Cincinnati, and Louisville, playing minor roles in each place. In the course of his travels, he sees a number of famous actors perform (including J. B. Booth, the Keans, Anna Cora Mowatt, T. D. Rice, and Joshua Silsbee), observes actors who go on stage drunk, and recounts a murder at a theater. He also reflects on events leading up to the US-Mexican War and daily life in the military encampment on the Texas-Mexico border.*





## A JOURNAL.

Commenced at the request of “*My Brother*” George Washington Watkins.

On my arrival at *Galveston, Texas*. 20th Nov. 1845

**Thurs. Nov. 20th** Arrived at *Galveston, Texas*, on the *Steamship New York*. Put up at the *Washington House* kept by *Beisner*, a *German*. Confined to my room with a sore *Toe* received on the *N.Y.* by a fall.

**Sat. Nov. 22nd** Passed another bad night—I shall have to lose the nail of that *toe*. Wrote off<sup>1</sup> *Count Montalban* in *Honey-Moon*. I fear my *Texas* engagement will end in a “*Bustification*.” The 24th will tell.

**Mon. Nov. 24th** Passed the night miserably—had part of the nail of that *Toe* cut off. Went to Rehearsal 10A[M]. “This is the night, that makes us, or fordoes us quite.”<sup>2</sup> Does us I hope for I’m awfully short of funds. Played *Count Montalban* [in] *Honey-Moon*. House Middling.

**Tues. Nov. 25th** Another piece of the nail of that *Toe* cut off. Played *Capt. Vauntingon* in *Spectre Bridegroom*. Rained all night, and blowed a gale. This is what’s called a “*Winter in Texas*” (Blowing and Raining). If my \$10-a-week engagement turns out a *Pay My Board One*, I shall be satisfied.

**Fri. Nov. 28th** Very cold. Played *Delpare* in *Therese*, *Tillwell* in *Irish Tutor*, and would have played *Hans* in *Idiot Witness*, but the audience, thinking the performance over, left the *House* after the *Tutor*, for which the players were very thankful, for ’twas very cold.

**Tues. Dec. 2nd** Weather as bad as ever. If it holds this way much longer,

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1. wrote off: referring to the composition of handwritten “sides”—manuscripts that included one character’s lines and cues, created for the purpose of memorizing stage dialogue. This practice allowed actors to collect a repertory of roles without the time and expense of copying entire scripts; it also protected the commercial interests of theater managers, for whom plays were valuable commodities. Writers and managers jealously guarded their scripts because US copyright law did not apply to the performance of dramatic texts until 1856 (Act of August 18, 1856, 34th Cong., 1st Sess., 11 Stat. 138).

2. Referring to Shakespeare, *Othello*, act 5, scene 1.

not only my self will be broken, but what is worse, the Treasury—for our expenses are about \$100 a week, and there has not been over \$150 taken in the whole. I shall soon number 21 years in the world, during which time I have never had what may be called *good luck*. Well, perhaps it will come one of these days—I don't care how soon. If ever anybody in this world has tried to get along, I have. I might do better if I would play the hypocrite. But if ever I do that—may *Old Death* grab me. Played *George* in *Ambrose Gwinnett* and *Hans, Idiot Witness*. Best performance of the season. \$8 in the House.

**Thurs. Dec. 4th** Opened beautiful, sun shining with clear sky, though cold. Should fair weather continue for one week, we shall be able to see whether anything can be done here or not—*Done*, I hope. Received a note from Blake, enclosing a letter from my *Brother George*—The *only Man* whom I can really call a friend on earth. Commenced a new page in my *Jour[nal]*, and turned over a new leaf in my conduct—which I should have done long ago. Played *Old Granger* in *Miller's Maid* and *De Courcy* in *Turning Tables*. \$20 in House.

**Fri. Dec. 12th** Cold and windy. Nearly hard up, but not *quite*—but if some thing does not turn up shortly I *shall* be. I have a place to sleep at night—that's all. I don't know where the *grub* is to come from, though I have managed so far to raise some beef and bread.

**Mon. Dec. 15th** One of Nature's best days. Election for *Senators* and *Representatives* to the state legislature, and for *Governor*. The *Manager*, instead of attending to his own business, clerked it at the *polls*—and when the time for performance came, he was unfit to *play*.<sup>3</sup> Instead of playing 3 pieces, they *murdered* one. House \$8.25.

**Wed. Dec. 17th** Warm, sky cloudy. Went to market—bought some beef for breakfast—provisions very cheap. Commenced to rain just as the *Theatre* was to open—\$3 came in the house. The *Manager* would not play to it, so we had no performance. I don't know how to account for it—unless we have offended the *clerk* of the *weather*—our being treated in this way. As soon as the bill poster comes out of the *Printers* with the bills—no matter how clear it is—up come the *clouds*, and down comes the rain, and then we can't play.

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3. Up until Prohibition, alcohol was often served at the US polls on election days; political candidates treated voters to beer, whiskey, or other libations.

**Sat. Dec. 20th** Weather fair, and looks as if it would continue so. Last night of *season*—still *I* do not despair. *Mrs. Cook* took a benefit—\$31 in house. Played *Mad George* in *Ambrose Gwinett* and *Allan Bane* in *Lady of the Lake*. Up till 3AM drinking *porter* and eating oysters. For want of a dime, I'm afraid that *George* will have to wait till *Annexation* is consummated before he hears from *me*; so much for *Texas*.

**Fri. Dec. 26th** Fine day. Saturday set apart for my benefit. Wrote off *Charles Paragon* in *Perfection*—sat up nearly all night to study it. Slept at the News printing office so that I would be up early to post bills &c. &c. &c.

**Sat. Dec. 27th** *Splendid day*. Posted bills before breakfast. Spent the morning sweeping out the *House*, cleaning lamps and so on. Worked harder all day than I ever did in all my life thinking I might make enough to purchase myself a few articles that I needed, but all to no purpose. 7PM opened doors, lit up the *House*, got a person to stay in the Box office, hired music to play—all in fine style—and three good pieces to perform. But 'twas of no use—only \$2 came in. Couldn't play to that, the expenses being \$11.50. And so dismissed the *House*!!! Two men in the Boxes, one boy in the Pit, and a Nigger<sup>4</sup> woman in the gallery!!! “Alas, poor”—Harry.<sup>5</sup>

**Sun. Dec. 28th** Fine day. Strolled along the beach thinking of the *Past* and the *Future*—oh, futurity, could I but pierce thee. But 'tis impossible to tell what a day may bring forth, throwing aside years.

**Wed. Dec. 31st** Cloudy. Very Warm. [Steamer] *N.Y.* from Orleans, bringing news from Congress. Great debate between the Parties, but when the *Resolutions* for putting the country in a state of defense came up, they were “*unanimous*,” showing to the world that however much we may be divided as party men, as *Americans* we are united when our country is threatened.<sup>6</sup>

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4. For more on Watkins's use of this racist epithet and our decision not to redact the word in this edition, see “Editorial Policies.” Most nineteenth-century theaters were racially segregated; African Americans (whether enslaved or free) were required to sit in the balcony (“gallery”).

5. An allusion to Hamlet's declaration “Alas, poor Yorick!” in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, act 5, scene 1.

6. Although Watkins's comments imply there was political unanimity regarding the US-Mexican War (1846–48), it was a highly controversial enterprise, criticized by members of the Whig Party as well as opponents of territorial expansion and slavery. On December 29, 1845, Congress passed a joint resolution admitting Texas to the Union as a slaveholding state, thereby

So *Tyrants—Beware*, let us alone. Took another Benefit this evening. Played Richard in 1st Act of *Richard III* and *Dick* in the *Apprentice*, with Harlequin in a pantomime. \$14 in the House—Expenses \$12.50. Through the liberality of the Painter and Musicians, I cleared about \$6. I suppose the *Stars* would say that was no benefit at all, then they would be mistaken, for that is just what it was, as I had nothing on my feet before, and now I have a good pair of boots, and enough money left to buy something to eat with—and that is a good deal in *Texas*.

**Thurs. Jan. 1st 1846** A beautiful day. *Settled* up my bills—*Settled*—“Hear that, ye Gods,” and weep. I, Harry Watkins, have paid my own bills in *Texas*, for the first time.

**Fri. Jan. 2nd** Fine day. Spent it studying *Iago*. At night I could not think of a line, although I am acquainted with both *Iago* and *Othello*. The circumstances under which I am placed seem to impair my memory. Clark arrived from Corpus Christi—he says he has procured engagements for us there, but he uses such equivocal language, there’s no understanding him. He one moment tells us we are engaged and another there are no men wanted. Well, he is like the rest of the world—Self! Self! Self! Passed the evening drinking *ale* and eating *oysters*. *Oysters* here are delightful.

**Tues. Jan. 6th** Weather so, so. On board the *Cin[cinnati]*. Gambled all day, and part of the evening. If any friend of mine more conscientious than myself should read this Jour and not like to see gambling in it, they must remember the saying, “necessity does much.” I had but 50c when I commenced and now I have \$6.50. We arrived at St. Joseph’s Island about 6PM.

**Fri. Jan. 9th** Cool and Cloudy. 11AM *Col. Long* came alongside to take us on board. Started at 12AM for Corpus. The sail up the bay is beautiful. The channel is narrow—the boat at times nearly touching the bank. The bay is literally covered with the feathered tribe such as Pelicans, Cranes, Ducks, Geese, &c. &c. To make the scene more delightful to the eye of romance, schools of small fish are to be observ’d playing in the water. Now and then a *Porpoise*

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obligating the government to defend the Rio Grande as the nation’s new border with Mexico and setting the stage for the war. Hunter Miller, ed., *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America*, vol. 4, *Documents 80–121: 1836–1846* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1934), 695–96.

shows its *Hoggish* head. We arrived just before dark at *Corpus*. 'Tis a beautiful sight to behold the long line of *Tents* that line the beach.<sup>7</sup> We landed soon after the Boat came to anchor and was welcomed by those with whom we were acquainted. Passed the night in a soldier's tent.

**Wed. Jan. 14th** This is the day that 21 years before gave me light—though if it was not lighter than it has been today my little eyes could not have seen very well. One thing is certain—I am not much better off for *funds*. 21 years, Oh! what thoughts and recollections does *Memory* bring to my view. When I think what trials and Scenes I have passed through, I am surprised. Were I a Predestinarian, I should think that *Fate*—when I was born—had filled up all her roads, and left me to shift for myself. Played Frederick in *Dead Shot*—Thornton, *Turning the Tables*.

**Sat. Jan. 17th** Cloudy and disagreeable day. Performance this evening by Officers of the *Army*. During the evening there was a *Negro Extravaganza* by the Officers. A citizen playing the *bones*<sup>8</sup> gave out a Conundrum<sup>9</sup>—“Why are the Officers and Soldiers of the Army of Occupation like a school of obedient children?” (Ans[wer]) Because there's a Twig over them (Twiggs the Col. Com. Dragoon).<sup>10</sup>

**Sun. Jan. 18th** Rained hard all day. In the evening several Soldiers of the *Army* came to the *Theatre* and we passed a pleasant night, drinking *Porter* and eating Oysters and lobsters. Slept on the stage with a stream

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7. The military encampment in Corpus Christi, TX, during 1845–46 was ordered by President James K. Polk (1795–1849) and overseen by General Zachary Taylor (1784–1850), whose popularity as a military hero helped him become the twelfth president of the United States (1848–50). Approximately four thousand US troops were stationed at Corpus Christi. By early 1846, a steady stream of nonmilitary personnel—including entrepreneurs, entertainers, and vendors—caused the population to swell to roughly six thousand. For more on camp life in Corpus Christi and Taylor's “Army of Occupation,” see Douglas A. Murphy, *Two Armies on the Rio Grande: The First Campaign of the US-Mexican War* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2015).

8. bones: a percussive instrument, consisting of two bones or pieces of wood, that provided musical accompaniment for blackface minstrel shows.

9. conundrum: a riddle that involves a pun or play on words. Watkins attended several conundrum contests at theaters where prizes were awarded (for example, see December 6, 1846) and even entered some himself.

10. During the occupation of Corpus Christi, Colonel Commander (later Brigadier General) David E. Twiggs (1790–1862) oversaw the Second Dragoons. Although popular with his men, he was also known for his brusque demeanor and propensity for swearing.

of water running under us, which we kept from us by means of Scenes<sup>11</sup> and blankets.

**Tues. Jan. 20th** Received the first week's *Salary* I ever Received in *Texas*. Well, I like a *change*—especially when it's for the best. Played *Count Winter* in *Stranger*, *Thornton* in *Turning the Tables*.

**Fri. Jan. 23rd** Fine Day. On the *22nd*, a man belonging to E. Co. 5th Inf[antry] blew his brains out, assigning as reason that he was dissatisfied with the service. The officers would give him no satisfaction, and I suppose it was true, for I know them.

**Sat. Jan. 24th** Fine day. Played *Murdock* in *Warlock Glen*. Poor House and short performance. Receipts \$110, Ex[penses] \$100.

**Sun. Jan. 25th** Cloudy and damp. Managers commenced curtailing expenses by discharging hands—Bad sign.

**Mon. Feb. 2nd** . . . Played *Wilford* in *Hunchback*. *Mrs. Hart* as *Julia*. Two weeks more and I shall be *rich* enough to leave *Texas*—that is, provided I don't have to pay my passage out of it (\$10) from *Galveston*, here.

**Sat. Feb. 7th** Day fair. Army ordered to hold themselves in readiness to move at a moment's warning to the *Rio Grande*. Played *Thomas* in *Mary Ann*, House \$150.

**Thurs. Feb. 12th** Pleasant and warm. News arrived from the Mexican Frontier of the intention of the government to invade *Texas*—but so many reports coming in from that poor country, there's no believing them. A few days will tell whether there is any truth in them or not. Several scouting parties from the *Dragoons* are out and when they return, we shall hear something definite. Played *Count* in *Therese*.

**Fri. Feb. 13th** Hard wind from the north. Played *Cool* in *London Assurance*—Benefit of *Mrs. Hart*. She playing *Gay Spanker*, or rather *murdering* it, but she got all that an actor or actress plays for—plenty of applause. Such is the way

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11. scenes (in this context): set pieces or scenery.

of the world—let a person but get their names up, no matter in what way, whether on or off the stage, and they are all right. Whether they were born with or without brains, 'tis all the same—the *World* says they are *great*, and what the *World* says must be true. House \$272.

**Tues. Feb. 17th** Sprinkling in the morning. Mrs. Hart and husband threw up their engagement. The Officers here made an *Idol* of Mrs. *Hart*—they have made her believe that she is the greatest Actress of the *Age*. Played *Aldobrand* in *Bertram*. House \$65.

**Wed. Feb. 18th** Heavy wind all day and night, with some rain. *Dam'd Lorenzo* in *The Wife*. Stuck on the stage—couldn't speak a word—either of the *text* or my own *composition*, though I knew every word of my part. I am afraid I shall never succeed in the profession until I am myself—friends do me more injury than good.

**Fri. Feb. 20th** Day beautiful but very warm. Every little thing I have to do with *Man* tends to show his duplicity and selfishness. If you were to give your heart for a *Friend*, in return he wouldn't give you the nail of his little finger if it did not gratify that *Self*—Self. I had everything ready for a Benefit on Monday night when a *Woman* told me that she was not willing for me to have it—that hers should be the first. And now I suppose I shall not be able to get one at all—and all through a *Woman*. I have *heard* of some noble Women. If I should ever meet with one, I would set it down as the greatest wonder I had ever met with. Played *Thornton* in *Rob Roy*. Benefit of Mrs. Morris. House \$240.

**Sat. Feb. 21st** The warm weather seems to have set in, to judge by the last few days. Played *Philistius* in *Damon & Pythias*, Lord Rivers in *Day after the Wedding*. Mrs. Hart has been reengaged. The Officers of the Army generally (those who attend the *Theatre*), it would seem, had formed a combination against the Managers to compel them to reengage *Hart*. For the few nights that she was out of the bill not one of them came near the house. Clark again Stage Manager.

**Sun. Feb. 22nd** One of Nature's loveliest—and why should it not be? Is [it] not the Birthday of the Immortal *Washington*—"The Father of his country"? Would I were a Poet that I might spend every 22nd of February in writing to

his praise—but as I am not, I must content myself with wishing the country may never feel the want of him. At 10AM there was a grand review of the 1st Brigade of Troops by General Taylor.

**Mon. Mar. 2nd** Warm and Windy. Played Philario in *Fazio*, *Kate Kearney* the afterpiece. Best house we have had for 2 or 3 weeks—excepting Benefit nights. Part of the Troops being paid off, I suppose, was the cause of it. The Theatre would do good business for a couple of weeks if the Army did not move, but they expect the order every day for the Rio Grande—Sooner the better.

**Wed. Mar. 4th** Very warm. Played Gaultier D'Aulnay in *La Tour de Nesle* & Capt. Achille in *Pet of the Petticoats*, benefit of Mrs. Ewing. *Theatricals* here have been getting bad for some time, but this night they cap'd the climax. Edwards, the leading man, was to play Buridan in *La Tour de Nesle*, but what with liquor and ignorance of his part he was unable to get through more than the first act. It was then *finished* by Bingham. I have seen some very bad performances, but nothing equal to this. There was no book of either piece to be found to prompt by. I felt very sorry for Mrs. Ewing, for she was deserving of better, as she is a good Actress. About 1PM I came to the conclusion that friendship is a very good word to hear talk of, but something very seldom to be found. The best friend a man can have is himself. Let him but remain true to himself and he may glide along through life pretty smoothly, but if he trust to the friendship of others, I feel confident he will lose—nine times out of ten—more than he will gain by it. This is the advice of one who, though young, has had some experience.

**Sat. Mar. 7th** Very Hot. Went to see if Gen. Taylor would grant me permission to go with the Army to the *Rio Grande*, but he would not listen to me. He said that no citizens should go, that it was strictly a Military excursion. Tended box office—Poor House.

**Sun. Mar. 8th** Sun shining, very hot. No wind stirring. Went to Denton, sutler<sup>12</sup> for Dragoons, and got his permission to accompany his wagon as Clerk—so that I will go to the Rio Grande in spite of General Taylor. Washed myself all over, put on clean shirt, shaved &c. &c. Dragoons move in an hour, so now to get ready. 11AM the *Army* commenced its movement pursuant to Gen.

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12. sutler: a civilian who provides goods at a military outpost.



Taylor's order—each brigade to keep one day in advance of the other. Col. Twiggs with his Dragoons led the way, accompanied with Ringgold's company of Flying Artillery. It was a very imposing sight—the soldiers fully armed and the Horses with their trappings—the baggage wagons, about 60 in number, following—each wagon drawn by five mules, the tops covered with white canvas, and the sun shining with all its splendor—presenting in all one of the most beautiful sights I ever beheld. But it did not last long, for after they had gone 5 or 6 miles the roads were so bad—occasioned by the heavy rains some 4 or 5 weeks before—that the quartermaster told the teamsters to get along the best way they could. During the wet season it is utterly impossible for a wagon to cross the prairies, and in the dry season, a person would travel all day before he would find water enough to drink. 6 miles from Cor. Christi our wagon broke down. I then walked into the place where the Dragoons encamped for the night (14 miles in all from C.C.). Slept with an acquaintance all night—after taking supper!!! (piece of pork and biscuit).

**Mon. Mar. 9th** Rose early—everything wet with the dew. Told by one of the men that Curry, the man who was with me and had charge of Denton's goods, had received orders to return. Just my luck. The wagon broke down because I was with it—so I had to turn back. Oh, how I hate this turning back! The Mexicans will certainly make fight now. Had I went along, all would end peaceably. Reached Corpus Christi about 2PM. The first news I heard on my arrival was that Noble got drunk the day I left and was about to re-enlist.

**Tues. Mar. 10th** Sun very hot. Seeing no way to get to the Rio Grande, packed up and went on board of *Col. Long* (steamer) for St. Joseph's. Arrived there at 5PM, went on board Schooner *Gen. Worth* for Galveston. Slept on the deck.

**Thurs. Mar. 12th** Cloudy, looking like rain. Well, what should I expect in Galveston? We lay outside the bar all night and landed about 7AM. Went immediately up to the News Office to see *Lewis*, manager of the Theatre, who offered me an engagement at \$10 a week. I am paying \$6 for board, which with other incidental expenses will amount to about \$8 per week. I have then \$2 left to keep myself in clothes. If he makes no better offer I don't think I shall stop.<sup>13</sup>

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13. Originally, Watkins concluded this sentence by writing "for that would be worse than soldiering," but crossed it out.

**Sat. Mar. 14th** Cool day. Tended the Auctions all day and in the evening bought 3 pair gloves, 50c. Good for stage.

**Mon. Mar. 16th** Fine day. Made an engagement with Lewis, \$10 per week, and a quarter benefit after the expenses.

**Mon. Mar. 23rd** Raining at intervals all day. 5PM *New York* steamship arrived from Orleans. No company from N.O. as expected. Clark, who was authorised to engage players, instead of doing so accepted an engagement to go to Mobile to play with the *Keans*. I think I shall put out of this.

**Tues. Mar. 24th** Fine day. Came to the conclusion to go to *Orleans*, so at 5PM went on board of the Steamer *Alabama*. Fare is considerably reduced since the opposition line commenced running. When I came here I had to pay \$11.50 (Steerage passage)—now I have to pay but \$5.50 and no Custom House *fees*.

**Thurs. Mar. 26th** Fine breeze from the northwest. Lay off the *Balise*<sup>14</sup> all night. In the [AM] started up the river for Orleans where we arrived about 6PM—and not having money sufficient to pay for our passage, we left our baggage on board till morning and went up to the Theatre, where I witnessed the best piece of acting I have seen for some time. Chippendale as Adam Trueman in the comedy of *Fashion*, written by Mrs. A. C. Mowatt, she playing Gertrude. I did not think much of her playing but I like her writing very much.

**Sat. Mar. 28th** Very warm. Went at 12AM to see a Negress hung.<sup>15</sup> It seems her master thought more of her than he did of his wife. And when he left the city to go up the country on business, the Negress thought she'd play the mistress, which she did with a vengeance—beating her, locking her up, and nearly starving her and her children. She was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to be hung about twelve months ago, but she deceived her keepers and even the

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14. Fort Balize (or Balise), located at the mouth of the Mississippi River, was abandoned in 1860 after suffering extensive damage during a hurricane.

15. This enslaved woman, named Pauline, was the first woman ever to be publicly executed in New Orleans. Before the Civil War, executions were often public spectacles, with many members of the community attending. Somewhere between four and five thousand spectators witnessed Pauline's hanging. For a contemporaneous account of the event, see "The Execution of Pauline," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, March 28, 1846, 2. For more on public executions, see Louis P. Masur, *Rites of Execution: Capital Punishment and the Transformation of American Culture, 1776–1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

doctors by saying she was, “*enceinte*.”<sup>16</sup> So her execution was deferred for one year. When it was found she had deceived them, she was therefore hung pursuant to sentence. There was a very large crowd around the scaffold. She died very hard—her neck not being broken by the fall, she died by strangulation.

**Wed. Apr. 1st** *My Mother’s* birthday. She being now 56, I was in hopes that by this time I should have been able to contribute in some way to her support, but it is not so—though it is some comfort to know it has not been my fault. Perhaps by her next birthday I may be able to do something towards it, though I am afraid not, as my salary is so small and when I do get a little money it has to go for wardrobe.

**Thurs. Apr. 2nd** Cloudy but no rain. This morning’s mail from the east brought the President’s message to Congress, advising an increase of the Army & Navy.<sup>17</sup> He appears to be a resolute man, meaning all he says. I like to see resolution in a President. It seems to be the general belief that with England war is inevitable. The public mind is better prepared for war than the country is, for it, in a manner, is entirely defenceless. And I do not suppose it will ever be any better prepared than it is at present, for as long as peace continues, the congress will never vote any monies—that is, amounting to anything very large—for an increase of the Army or Navy, though they might put the country in a better state of defence by fortifying the harbors and rivers. The city of New Orleans, for instance, appears to have no defence at all, comparatively speaking. New York, at a short notice, could be made very strong, as it has many natural advantages that Orleans does not possess. But let the fight come, I would like to see it. H.W.

**Wed. Apr. 8th** Beautiful day, neither too hot nor too cold. Took a walk round the town, which made me feel considerably better. Went to the *St. Charles*. Mrs. Kean played *Lady Macbeth*. I like her very well, but I have seen others that I like much better. Mr. Kean as Macbeth I thought was anything but a good performance. He made some *points*,<sup>18</sup> certainly. Still, they were not his

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16. *enceinte* (French): pregnant.

17. James K. Polk, “Special Message [to the US Senate],” March 24, 1846, available at Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, eds., *The American Presidency Project*. Accessed June 27, 2015. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=67892>

18. *points*: virtuosic moments crafted by an actor to underscore climactic moments in a speech or situation and to elicit the audience’s applause.

own but his father's, if those who have seen his father are to be believed. He labors under the disadvantage of a very bad voice.

**Sat. Apr. 11th** Very warm. Noble made up his mind to go to Louisville. I thought I would wait until the return of the *Galveston* (Steamer) from Galveston (Texas), hoping to hear of the army having a fight with the Mexicans, but thinking it would be very doubtful and knowing that every moment is precious as regards getting an engagement up the river, I concluded it best to go. So at 4PM went on board the *Andrew Jackson* (Steamer), took passage (\$12 for Cincinnati), 7PM got underway. Soon after passing the city, being very tired, I went to bed 9PM.

**Wed. Apr. 15th** About the same. Went to pay my passage, the clerk told me it was \$15. All I have left now is \$3, where I would have had \$6 if I had tended to my own business. Glad of it—another lesson—wonder if I shall ever get done learning. I have learned some bitter lessons in my time.

**Sat. Apr. 18th** Weather about the same for the last 4 days—sun very hot but a fine breeze from the water makes it quite comfortable. My affairs have come to a crisis—that is, I have no engagement nor money—not a dime.

**Mon. Apr. 20th** Night cold, ditto the morning. Middle of the day warm. 7AM arrived at Cincinnati. Put up at the Eagle Hotel for the night.

**Tues. Apr. 21st** Very warm. Took board at Mrs. Wright's. Hoping to get an engagement with Bates, the manager of the *National Theatre*. In the evening went to the Theatre to see *Conner* as Richelieu—which part he played very well. House so-so.

**Wed. Apr. 22nd** Warm and Dusty. 10AM went to Bates for an engagement. Promised to inform me whether he could or not tomorrow. At night saw *Conner* as *Othello*—nothing extra.

**Sat. Apr. 25th** Raining nearly all day. Got an engagement at the National Theatre. \$6 per week—certain.

**Mon. Apr. 27th** Fine day. Several papers published an extra stating that war had been declared by Mexico, versus U.S.—best news I have heard for some

time. As soon as the order comes for volunteers, I'm O.P.H.<sup>19</sup> for *Texas*. Should there be a battle I am determined to get to be something, or *nothing*.

**Tues. May 5th** Noble got an engagement with *Shires* for Louisville—\$8 per week. Packed up and leaves here tomorrow. T. D. Rice—the original Jim Crow—commenced his engagement this evening in *Jumbo Jum* and *The Virginia Mummy*.<sup>20</sup> I played Mr. Contest in *Wedding Day*, Patent in *The Mummy*. I received my salary today, it being due. I shall consider this as a crisis in my life—at least my Theatrical life.

**Wed. May 6th** Morning fine, PM there sprung up a heavy gale of wind and the rain came down in torrents. It lasted about one hour. After it was over everything had a good smell about it. 10AM Noble left for Louisville. Played Gripe in *Jim Crow at Court* and went on in the choruses of *Otello*,<sup>21</sup> an opera written by T. D. Rice—he played Otello himself. The best house of the season. Posted letter for Mother.

**Sun. May 10th** Fine day, slight sprinkle PM. *News* arrived of the capture of some U.S. troops and that the Mexicans had surrounded Gen. Taylor. God grant it may be so. If I thought the Army would keep the field six months I would put for *Texas*, *sure*, but I have a good situation and hate to throw it up for an uncertainty. I am afraid there will never be another chance to witness a battle during my life, so that I'm between fire and water not knowing which way to go—I must think of it.

**Tues. May 19th** Cool & pleasant. By a late arrival from Orleans, learned that a battle had occurred between the Mexicans and our army. 700 Mexicans killed—loss of the Americans not stated. Some suppose this news to be untrue. There are plenty who would be glad that it were so—Englishmen particularly.

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19. O.P.H.: abbreviation for “off posthaste.”

20. In the 1830s, Thomas Dartmouth “Daddy” Rice (1808–1860), a white US American actor, created the stock character Jim Crow—an enslaved African American who sang and danced and “jumped Jim Crow”—which he played in blackface. He enjoyed a successful career as a touring actor in the United States and England from roughly 1830 through the mid-1850s. See also introduction, note 22.

21. *Otello*: a blackface burlesque of Shakespeare's *Othello*.

**Wed. May 20th** Warm & pleasant. Played George in *Raising the Wind* & 1st Villager in *Maid of Croissy*. Benefit of *Addams*. Poor House. The war seems to injure the Theatres, to judge by the last few nights.

**Fri. May 22nd** Slight shower 9AM, rest of the day very warm. I witnessed a transaction today that made my blood run cold. An *Englishman* by the name of C. Blake some 9 months ago arrived in this country and shortly after married an American Girl—one of the best of her sex. I don't remember ever seeing a female whom I so much admired—she was, I thought, as near perfection as it is possible for *woman* to be. There was that about her to charm and tame a *devil*. She was thoughtless, that was all her *fault*—but she was young, and a few years would remove even that. So pure was she in her devotion to this **Man** for whom she had given up a rich alliance—I can hardly bear to think of it, let alone write it, but *he Struck her*—and that too before strangers. Yet why should I wonder at it, for it is all that *Englishmen* are fit for, to make war on the defenceless, whether as an individual or a nation. Played Waiter in *Cure for the Heartache*—Placide's Benefit. Good *house*. Shortly after the performance commenced a fire broke out opposite the Theatre, which burned down several old wooden buildings. Logan, who was playing in the first piece & lived contiguous to the fire—and who had left his children in bed—left the Theatre to get his children and baggage, and we had to keep the curtain down between the acts  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour. The audience kept very still after Conner telling them the cause of it. Had there been much of a wind there would have been a very large fire. Received our salaries for 4 nights. Leave here tomorrow for Louisville, where we play three months. 2PM received a letter from my *Mother*.

**Sat. May 23rd** Hot & dusty. 8 to 11AM packing up. 12PM left Cincinnati for Louisville on the *Pike No. 7*. 11PM arrived at Louisville.

**Sun. May 24th** Stayed on board steamer all night. 7AM took board with Mrs. Montcalm. Walked around the city AM and visited the Theatre—a very neat house. News from the Army, a battle having been fought between the Americans and the Mexicans—the former being victorious, but losing some of their best men, among whom were Ringgold & Brown.

**Wed. June 3rd** Night quite cool. Day pleasant. Played Officer in *Venice Preserved*—Addams as Jaffier, Conner as Pierre. Benefit of Addams and last

night of his engagement—it being 4 nights for which he receives \$100. Booth arrived in town early this morning—commences an engagement tomorrow night as *Richard III*. Stickney’s Circus arrived here last night and pitched their tent within a hundred yards of the Theatre.<sup>22</sup> Our House so-so.

**Thurs. June 4th** Alternate showers during the day. Booth was at rehearsal this morning and in prime order for playing—should he keep so till evening. Played Tyrrel & Oxford in *Richard III*. House crowded. Booth played Richard as no one else can—he was very much exhausted after the piece was over. C. Well was to play Richmond, but got drunk, and Conner played it.

**Fri. June 5th** Cool & comfortable. Went on in the Senate scene of *Othello*. Conner played Othello, Booth as Iago—he was too sober if anything, although he played it first rate. House very good.

**Mon. June 8th** Windy & pleasant. Played Amble & Vintner in *New Way to Pay Old Debts*—Booth’s Benefit. He played Sir Giles in first-rate style. Largest House yet. Bought myself a summer coat \$4.50. I am too poor yet to buy a pair of pants.

**Fri. June 12th** Rain AM. Cleared off PM. Played Burgundy, Herald, & 1st Knight in *King Lear*. Booth playing Lear, being his Benefit & last appearance. Fine House.

**Tues. June 23rd** Fine weather for these last few days. Why don’t it continue fine weather all the time? Played Conrad in *Much Ado About Nothing*—Murdoch as Benedick. The people of Louisville do not seem to like Comedy.

**Fri. July 3rd** Very warm. I have made a mistake in my Journal somewhere as regards date.<sup>23</sup> Regiment of men arrived from Cincinnati bound for *Mexico*. Played Cambric in *Sam Slick*, Rifle in *Boston Tea Party*, Postman in *Lady of the Lions*. Last appearance of Silsbee. What a shame that such men as him should be allowed to star it—a man of no talent whatever, but a copyist. Poor House.

22. During the nineteenth century, circuses featured a wide variety of entertainments, including dramatics, clowning, gymnastics, and (especially) equestrian acts.

23. Here, Watkins is referring to a series of mistakes he made when dating the preceding entries, which he caught and corrected. We have included the dates as corrected.

**Sat. July 4th** For seventy years we have struggled on gloriously and become a *Mighty Republic*. What thoughts this day brings to *Americans* where they think of *Jefferson*, Franklin, Lee, & others meeting together to declare themselves *Free*, and of *Great Britain*, who sought to reduce them to the most abject slavery. But the Parent knew not the nature of the *child* until she felt its vengeance, then it was too late—the child discarded the ungrateful Mother, for whom it had shed its best blood and wasted its treasure. Now see to what immense size and importance the infant has grown—the successful rival of the Parent. Very warm during the day. Played *Van Wert* in the *Glory of Columbia* & *Wilhelm* in *Faustus*.

**Tues. July 14th** Fine weather, the wind having changed has made it quite cool. Played *Slap* in *Wool Dealer*, *Waiter* in *Forest Rose*. Last night of the season—having done a bad business for the last week the Manager has concluded to close for six weeks and take the Company up to *Cin[cinnati]*.

**Wed. July 15th** Fine & cool, good breeze blowing. 10AM paid off for 8 days, got on board steamer *Pike* for *Cincinnati*, passages of the Company paid by Bates. So I suppose I am good for an engagement at the *National*, at least I hope so. I did not like to leave *Louisville*, as I had become attached to it. I like the place much better than *Cincinnati*.

**Thurs. July 16th** Morning quite cool, though warmer during the day. 6AM arrived at *Cincinnati*, took board at Mrs. Wright's—\$2.50 per week. Went to Theatre in the evening to see *Putnam*, which was horribly murdered—the Actors did not know their parts, nor the Scene Shifters theirs, to judge by the manner in which the Scenes were handled. Everything seemed to be in confusion, the audience was very much dissatisfied with the performance. I am glad of it, for I don't believe in introducing horses and circus performances on the stage, in fact nothing but the legitimate Drama.

**Fri. July 17th** Cool & Windy. Walked around town all day. To the Theatre in the evening—*Placide's* Benefit. Mr. & Mrs. *Thorne* played in the *Idiot Witness*. *Placide* goes to *Boston* to fulfill a three-year engagement. He is a splendid Comedian, no buffoonery about him, but real acting. He is the part he plays, it is not one thing over and over, as with the general run of Comedians that I have seen. He had a good House.



**Tues. July 21st** Cloudy, some rain. Tired of being idle—wish the National was open. Noble received a letter from Bates saying his company was too full to give him an engagement. I don't know what he will do. I would advise him to enter the *Service*, as he would do better there than on the *Stage*, but such is *Man*—advise him for his good and should it not meet his views, he'll give you no thanks for it. But on the contrary, perhaps, will accuse you of being actuated by personal motives, even though you had proved yourself to have been his best friend. So, a man who would not insult his friend should never advise him. This is my opinion, and I flatter myself I know something about it. 8PM to the *People's Theatre*—*La Tour De Nesle* and *Dumb Belle*. In the Drama, Morris as Buridan—I think he is very much overrated. Mrs. Lewis as *Marguerite*—she is *broke down*. *Good House*.

**Tues. July 28th** Fine day, though rather warm. Played *Smelter* and *Tip in Robber's Wife*, & Spaladro & Duke's Servant in *John di Procida*. *Poor House*. A young man by the name of Cook—Treasurer at the People's Theatre—stabbed another man by the name of *Reeves*, Prompter of the same Theatre—Killing him almost immediately. The Murderer fled. No cause could be assigned for the act more than that Cook's wife had been told by Reeves that she was always imperfect<sup>24</sup> in her parts. She told her husband of it, who went to Reeves and demanded an apology. After some few words, Cook went up to Reeves, who told him to go away from him as he was busy, at the same time shoving him with his hand, when Cook drew a knife and stabbed him, then went to the box office—raised an alarm of fire to draw the people's attention from him—seized what money he could lay hold of, and then fled.

**Wed. July 29th** Hot as ever. 9PM heavy shower of rain. 3PM attended the funeral of *Reeves*. He was an Irishman and a Catholic. They sent to a *Priest* to pray for him, but he would neither pray for him nor allow him to be buried in Catholic ground. So they got an Universalist Preacher who in his *sermon* took upon himself to slander the members of the profession.<sup>25</sup> I suppose he would have given almost anything to have had some of the Actors strike him—they had too much sense for that. What a shame it is that such ignorant men as

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24. imperfect: not knowing one's lines in a play.

25. Prejudice against the theater on religious grounds has a long history in the United States (and elsewhere). See Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981) and Claudia Durst Johnson, *Church and Stage: The Theatre as Target of Religious Condemnation in Nineteenth Century America* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008).

he is should be allowed to slander people on account of the profession they follow without knowing anything about them. Actors are, 9 times out of 10, better men than those who slander them. Played Officer & Murderer in *Macbeth*, Beadle in *Irish Tutor*. Poor House.

**Thurs. Aug. 6th** Hot! hot! hotter! PM we was allowed a little water from the heavens but it could not cool the atmosphere. Played Gaspard in *Sam Patch in France* & Jailor in the *Game Cock*. 1st night of *Dan Marble* who is engaged for six nights. He was greeted by a full house with three rounds of applause—Best house of the season.

**Tues. Aug. 11th** Considerable change in the weather, being quite cool today. Played *Mace* [in] *Family Ties*, Fooblanger in *Hue & Cry*. Last night but two of *Marble*—Full House—the *People's Theatre*. Noble is thrown out of employment—and no money. I do not want him to enter the service at present, for he would say I was the cause of it, though I am very poorly off—for my small salary \$6 is not enough for my present wants. I don't know what I shall do if I have to support him for two or three months. I had much better enter the service than live in the way I will have to do. I think I can do better out of it, and he better in it, than anything else he can do.

**Sat. Aug. 15th** Clear day and somewhat cooler than it has been. Played *Mace* in *Family Ties* & 1st Wrecker in *Larboard Fin*—Good House. *Marble* was so drunk during the first piece I thought he would be unable to get through with the performance, but after drinking some vinegar he got along well enough—at least the audience couldn't perceive that he had been drinking too much.

**Thurs. Aug. 20th** Raining at intervals all the morning—PM cleared off. Attended the funeral of Colonel Fanning from the Barracks (Newport). He died in this city, at the Henrie House, very suddenly. He belonged to the Army in the war of 1812 and remained in it until his death. He had been in twenty-six battles. His funeral was very largely attended, both by Citizens and Soldiers. Played *Cormac & Cusha* in *Capt. Kyd*—a boy during the evening had his face severely burnt by the flashing of a gun during the fight between the Pirate and King's Ship. Poor House.

**Sat. Aug. 29th** Fine day. Played *Simpkins* in *Catching an Heiress*—Benefit of Mrs. Kent. Morris played *Overreach* in *Way to Pay Old Debts* (last Act), after

which a farce written by the Author of the *Widow's Maid*—a lame affair. 3d Act of *Kyd*. Good House, and well she deserves it, for she is not only a fine woman, but the best actress of her kind (Comic) I've seen in the country. I find that a young man in this profession should never stay too long in one company, for he will never get advanced no matter how much he may deserve it—I begin to find it out.

## TWO

1846–47

*Watkins travels to Louisville, New Orleans, Cincinnati, and Boston in search of acting engagements, with mixed success. Desperate for money, he acquires a fife (the instrument he played during his service in the US Army) and plays for hire. He sees and/or performs with Anna Cora Mowatt, the Ravel Family, and the Booths, among others; remarks upon J. B. Booth's drunkenness; and expresses distaste for the star system. He attends lectures on the art of memory and temperance, remarks upon news about the US-Mexican War, and continues to entertain the idea of rejoining the military.*



**Wed. Sept. 2nd** Very warm AM. Went on board the *Pike No. 8* with the rest of the company for Louisville, where we open on *Thursday*. Left Cincinnati 12AM—some Heavy showers PM. Well I have now left my Friend, Thomas Noble, and I trust for good. From henceforth I'll make a confidant of no man, treat all as well as I know how, and get along in the world as I best can by paddling my own canoe—and it is what I would advise all young men to do—depend altogether upon their own exertions, confide in no one, and if they do not succeed in the world, they have hard luck.

**Fri. Sept. 4th** Rather warm—Heavy shower PM. Played Gonsalvo in *Fazio*—Simpkins in *Catching an Heiress*. Mrs. Wilkinson Played Bianca—she is a very talented woman though sickness and I suppose drink has broken her voice. She is also a very disagreeable woman—bad tempered. Nothing seems to please her but when she sees some other actress play her parts and play them badly, for she is very conceited—which is a great fault in this profession with too many of the Actors & Actresses—it spoils them.

**Sat. Sept. 12th** Hot as ever. I have been flattering myself for the last three or four weeks that I was getting along quite fast in the world—I bought some shirting in Cin[cinnati] and got a woman to make it up, and ordered a pair of tights made, leaving her the money (\$3.22) to pay for them. And when she got two shirts done I told her to send them to me by the Mail Boat and write me a note the day before she sent them. What does she do but send them on the 9th and the note on the 10th—by which means I lost them, as nobody on board the Boat knew anything about them. The loss of them throws me back a great deal—I shall have to suffer a little longer now. By God there's no use of my trying to get along, for the more I try the less I accomplish. I'll not give up the ghost yet—I will still try—it shall not be my fault if I don't succeed. Played Heartly in *Jonathan in England* & 1st Reaper in *Luke the Labourer*—Good House.

**Sun. Sept. 13th** Hot as ever. Found my shirts & tights on another Boat—“Richard's himself again.”<sup>1</sup> Walked about town nearly all day, PM went to the Theatre. Filled a tub with cool water and had a fine wash, to bed early.

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1. Oft quoted during the nineteenth century, “Richard's himself again” is a line from Colley Cibber (1671–1757)'s adaptation of *Richard III* (1699), which was more popular than Shakespeare's original well into the 1800s. For more on the history of this “punch line that Shakespeare did not write,” as Paul Menzer describes it, see Menzer's *Anecdotal Shakespeare: A New Performance History* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015), 140–46.

**Sun. Sept. 27th** Fine Day—the weather for the last few days has been very comfortable. Walked about town all day and part of the evening. Not being acquainted with any person I have no place to visit. I wonder if the time will ever come that I can keep the society of females. I never longed for anything so much as I do that, but without money I cannot afford to dress as well as I would wish. There is a time for everything—my time will come soon I hope.

**Thurs. Oct. 15th** Commenced sprinkling about 10PM last night, during the night considerable rain fell but not enough to raise the river—cleared off AM. Sent a letter to Sol Smith<sup>2</sup> for an engagement with a recommendation from Mr. E. S. Conner, the first letter I sent not being sufficient.<sup>3</sup> Played James in *London Assurance* & Barber in *Weathercock*. Benefit of Mr. C. Logan. He is a pleasing actor, but not a legitimate one, depending altogether upon gagging. He is the best gagger in the country, besides his figure being in his favor—being about five feet eight inches in height and very pussey<sup>4</sup>—a large head and full red face. Good House.

**Sat. Oct. 17th** Commenced raining about daybreak and continued at intervals during the day. Played Herald, Burgundy, & Knight in *King Lear*—Benefit of Mr. Conner. Poor House. He was called out after the piece and made a speech, complaining of the citizens for not giving him a better house, and that he would never play in Louisville again unless he wanted bread. Take it upon a whole it was a very silly speech—it is rather a novel idea for an Actor to find fault with the Public for not giving him a good house.

**Thurs. Oct. 22nd** Morning cool—10AM some rain. 2PM cleared off beautiful. We close tonight. Played Snake & Trip in *School for Scandal*. Benefit of Miss Eliza Logan—Good House.

**Sat. Oct. 24th** Morning very foggy. Sent letter to George. PM got a car and sent my things on board of the *Viola* steamer for Orleans.

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2. Business partners Solomon Smith (1801–1869) and Noah Ludlow (1795–1886) were successful theater producers in the South and what was then considered “the West,” managing theaters in Mobile, St. Louis, New Orleans, and elsewhere.

3. Watkins is probably referring to a letter he wrote on September 26, 1846: “Wrote to Ludlow & Smith for an engagement—Don’t expect to get it.”

4. pussey: fat or fleshy.

**Sun. Oct. 25th** The fogs that appear at this season of the year are very heavy, wetting the earth like as if there had been a small shower of rain. 11AM left Louisville—two hours and a half getting through the canal. Well I am now bound for Orleans with \$5 in my pocket, after paying my passage, and no certainty of an engagement. Should I be unable to get one—why then, ho! for the War! I must be either a soldier or an Actor.

**Fri. Oct. 30th** Cloudy with rain. Passed the *James Madison* and *Olive Branch* (2 Steamers), both sunk. The river is filled with snags which destroy in the course of a year . . . several hundred thousand dollars in Boats, Merchandise, &c. If the Government went to a little expense every year a great deal might be saved—though I don't suppose that anything will be done to better the condition of the rivers while the Democrats are in power. I have become disgusted with both Whigs & Democrats, all they appear to care about is to get into *power*. Damn the country, say they, unless we rule (I refer to the leaders).

**Tues. Nov. 3rd** Beautiful day. Passed several small towns. Reached Lafayette, discharged some livestock, cleared off the Boat, and went down to the city, where we arrived about 7PM. Went to the National Theatre—met with some acquaintances—slept on board.

**Wed. Nov. 4th** Fine day. Dressed and went up to the American Theatre. Asked Thorne if there was any chance, but received no definite answer. Hired a room and slept in it that night after the Theatre was out.

**Thurs. Nov. 5th** Cloudy AM but cleared off fine. No engagement yet—if I don't get one shortly I shall have to leave for Mexico and fight the Mexicans, which I would do anyhow, but it would throw me back in my profession. In the evening at the Circus & Theatre.

**Sun. Nov. 8th** Clear day—quite warm. Walked about town all day. Went to Ludlow for an engagement. His company was full but still might give me one, when Smith (his partner) arrives from St. Louis with his company. Evening at the Circus & Theatre—both full.

**Thurs. Nov. 12th** Hot and dusty. Went to the St. Charles Hotel to see Colonels Walker & Hays, from the War in Mexico. They attract considerable attention. Promised an engagement by C. Thorne, at \$10 per week, for "General Utility."

**Thurs. Nov. 19th** Quite cold. Commenced my engagement at the American Theatre—small salary but live in hopes of better before the season ends.

**Sun. Nov. 22nd** Still cold. Rehearsed and Played, for the first time in my life, on a Sunday. I do not like it much, as I think every person needs some relaxation from work—though I suppose it will never be done away with as long as the Public support it—for the houses seem to be better filled on Sunday evenings, than any other.

**Thurs. Nov. 26th** Cold—though pleasant. A French Ballet company performed this evening having been engaged for ten nights—the house was crowded [and] the Free list<sup>5</sup> was suspended—the regular company of the Theatre would not be admitted in front. The Ballet seems to be engaged on shares, and being afraid the Management would cheat them, they had men posted in every part of the house, to see that no one was admitted free.

**Tues. Dec. 1st** Very hot in the sun, but cooler in the shade. Purchased a fife for \$1 and played for a volunteer company for which I received \$4—that's a new channel to make money for me. I have often thought of doing so, but *Modesty* kept me from it—for as hard a case as I am *called*, I have always endeavored to do nothing that would be a disgrace. Necessity does much, and within the last three or four days my feelings have undergone a great change—and from this [day] out I shall always engage in anything by which I can make money, for when a man gets *hard up* there are *very few* to lend him a hand. Therefore, the best thing he can do is to make money when [he] has an opportunity of doing so.

**Wed. Dec. 2nd** Fine day. Played for a company of volunteers for which I received \$3.50. Good.

**Sun. Dec. 6th** Very warm & cloudy AM, some rain PM. Walked about town all day. Visited the St. Charles Theatre to hear the conundrums that were offered for the prize (silver cup)—the successful one was, “Why has Uncle Sam become more of a favorite since the battle of Monterrey—Because since then his ‘General Worth’ has been better appreciated.”<sup>6</sup>

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5. A theater's “free list” included critics at local newspapers and other VIPs who were granted complimentary admission to performances.

6. This conundrum refers to General Taylor's capture of the Mexican city of Monterrey on September 25, 1846. General William J. Worth (1794–1849) led an important assault that helped paved the way for Taylor's victory.



**Mon. Dec. 7th** Warm & cloudy. Settled up my board for a month (\$20) and removed to a place in Circus St. where I am to pay \$6 per month for a room only—eating anywhere I may happen to be at the time of being hungry.

**Tues. Dec. 8th** Heavy rain 8AM, cleared off about 9AM and grew somewhat cooler towards evening. In the evening I attended a lecture by Professor Miles on Phreno-Mnemotechny—a system of improving the mind.<sup>7</sup> He gave a proof of his own powers of memory by getting one of the audience to put down a number of figures on a board, and then tell them over to him once, after which he repeated them forward and backward—there were between forty & fifty numbers.

**Sat. Dec. 12th** Cool but not too much so. Raised money enough to buy myself a pair of boots. I want a pair of pants but I shall have to wait for some time yet to get money enough to purchase myself a decent pair. I creep along by degrees—if Fortune gives me half a chance I will surmount all obstacles.

**Thurs. Dec. 17th** Another change in the weather, it being quite cold today. Rehearsal AM. Walked about town in the afternoon, hunting up some wardrobe. President's message received in town on the 16th from Washington—a very plain document and appeared to satisfy the majority.<sup>8</sup> Silsbee's Benefit and last appearance. I have had very good business to do in all his pieces—playing the principal walking gentleman in them.

**Mon. Dec. 21st** Weather appears to be changing today again, it being considerably warmer than yesterday. PM played the fife for two volunteer companies for which I received \$6. Every little helps, though no matter how much I make, I have use for it all if it was \$500—to purchase myself a decent wardrobe for the stage and the street.

**Fri. Dec. 25th** Christmas—cloudy and warm, a slight rain PM. Paraded with a volunteer company through the town. Theatre 7PM. The low Comedian of the Theatre having kept up Christmas rather strong, I took his part of about

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7. See Pliny Miles, *Elements of Phreno-Mnemotechny, or Art of Acquiring Memory* (Richmond: H. K. Ellyson, 1845).

8. Watkins is likely commenting on President James K. Polk's third annual message to Congress on December 7, 1847, in which Polk offered detailed justifications for the war with Mexico.

seven lengths,<sup>9</sup> and after reading it through four times went on and knew as much about the piece as any person in it—though they had their parts three days.

**Tues. Dec. 29th** Hot & cloudy AM. Four companies of volunteers arrived from Pennsylvania, bound for Mexico—they were about as fine a looking set of men as I ever saw.

**Thurs. Dec. 31st** The last day of the old year. It leaves me in a flourishing state—not in the way of money, but professionally speaking. Four months ago I was playing very small business in Louisville (KY) such as delivering messages, stage filler, &c. &c. Now I am playing respectable parts, though much to the mortification of others who have been on the stage for some eight or ten years and are obliged to play subordinate parts to me, who have only been in the profession for about fourteen months. They talk considerably about it but I don't mind them—the stage manager is the judge of who is most capable of performing the parts in a piece, and if he thinks me the fittest and chooses to give them to me I shall perform them to the best of my abilities. I would leave the stage in a moment were it not for a desire I have of supporting *My Mother* in her old age and to show some of my *friends* that I am not so worthless as they suppose. This is the height of my ambition. Now then to see what the New Year will bring forth—and farewell to the old.

**Sat. Jan. 9th 1847** Warmer than the 8th but cold enough. Rehearsal AM. Booth played Sir Edward Mortimer in *The Iron Chest*. By riding him in a carriage all day they kept him quite sober.<sup>10</sup> He begins to feel his age but still he acts with considerable animation—he had a Good House.

**Mon. Jan. 11th** Very cold. Rehearsal PM, walked about town PM. Booth played King Lear very badly. The Managers, wishing to keep him sober, took him out riding on the 10th and being caught in the rain, he got wet, and caught a severe cold—today he was hardly able to leave his bed.

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9. length: forty-two or more lines in a play.

10. Junius Brutus Booth (1796–1852), “whose genius and instability were legendary,” as Joseph Roach has observed, had a reputation for drinking and sometimes did not show up for performances due to drunkenness or other problems (Roach, “The Emergence of the American Actor,” in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre*, vol. 1, *Beginnings to 1870*, ed. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 368).

**Thurs. Jan. 14th** Heavy fog until about 10AM when it cleared off beautifully. This is my Birthday—making me twenty-two. I have no cause to complain of the past—'tis true I am not so well off in the world as I might have been, but then I have gained more experience than most young men at my age, and learned a great many hard lessons. One is that if a person does not look out for himself nobody else will. I am poor, in a hard profession, without any friends to assist me, entirely dependent on my own exertions to gain a standing in that profession—and I think by the time I am twenty-three I shall be able to command a good situation anywhere. I am not counting my chickens before they are hatched, as I do not write this with any certainty of feeling, as I might be at the end of another year *worse* off than I ever was, but I shall hope for the best—and take whatever comes. . . .

**Sun. Jan. 31st** Fine day. Rehearsal AM. Visited Kelly PM and got all the news from the Army.<sup>11</sup> Laid down for an hour. At the Theatre 7PM. Received my first round of applause from an audience in playing Polyperchon in *Alexander the Great*.

**Wed. Feb. 3rd** Cold breeze blowing. Rehearsal AM, walked about town PM and interleaved a book (*Forty Thieves*).<sup>12</sup> At Theatre 7PM.

**Thurs. Feb. 4th** Fine day but cold. Rehearsed music of *Bayadere* AM, walked about town PM. I want some Books to read but cannot afford to buy them. Theatre 7PM.

**Wed. Feb. 10th** Cool but pleasant. Rehearsal AM—PM while writing at the house of a friend (McVicker) I was seized with a violent trembling. Felt quite warm, but a few moments after very cold—I thought I was going to make a die of it. I had got some medicine from a doctor to cure my cold and there was a considerable quantity of prussic acid<sup>13</sup> in it. The Doctor told me to be careful how I used it but I took about three times the quantity I should have

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11. On January 26, 1847, Watkins writes that he met with someone named Kelly (presumably, the same Kelly mentioned here) and notes that they belonged to the same company at some point during Watkins's military service (1838–44).

12. The practice of interleaving (inserting blank pages into books) allowed readers to write notes or paste illustrations in the books they owned. Actors sometimes interleaved the published plays they acquired and used the blank pages to record stage business. For more on this and related practices, see H. J. Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

13. prussic acid: hydrogen cyanide. Despite its proven toxicity, some nineteenth-century medical practitioners prescribed it to relieve symptoms like chronic cough.

done. Had I taken much more it certainly would have killed me. At Theatre 7PM. Mrs. George Jones's Benefit. She appears to be a very fine woman and a good Actress but she had a Poor House—though she had a poor bill—*Love's Sacrifice* and *Guy Mannering*.

**Sun. Feb. 14th** Pleasant day. Passed a sleepless night—coughing all the time—nothing can make me believe but what I have the consumption for I have been hacking for the last five years. Evening went to see De Meyer and Burke—the great Pianist and violinist. I can appreciate Burke on the fiddle, much better than De Meyer on the piano. Bought some Medicine, went home, bathed my feet in warm water—went to bed and slept well.

**Mon. Feb. 22nd** Quite cold. Rehearsal AM, at home reading PM, Theatre 7PM. 1st night of Mr. Murdoch (Claude Melnotte). *Washington's Birthday*—celebrated by the firing of cannon and parading of the Independent companies. At night all the different places of amusement were full.

**Wed. Feb. 24th** Some rain during the night—cloudy all day. Rehearsal AM. Letter from George. Some plays presented to me by J. Morgan, keeper of a literary depot. 7PM went to the St. Charles to see Anderson as Richard III, which he played very poorly—according to my opinion.

**Sat. Feb. 27th** Another change in the weather—it being quite cold. Mr. Collins, an Actor belonging to the American's Theatrical Company, died early this morning, very suddenly, of the delirium tremens.<sup>14</sup> He was the leading old man of the company—though not a very good Actor. He was, as near as I can find out, about fifty years of age. Rehearsal AM, at home PM studying, at Theatre 7PM. Good House.

**Sun. Feb. 28th** Beautiful day, but rather cool. Rehearsal AM. Attended the funeral of Mr. Collins—there was quite a large procession. Having no Minister, Sol Smith officiated. He spoke very feelingly and with more sincerity than a *Minister* would have done, for the latter would [have] undoubtedly made up his sermon by slandering the profession—their general practice.<sup>15</sup> At Theatre 7PM.

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14. *delirium tremens*: an illness involving tremors, hallucinations, and other symptoms resulting from alcohol withdrawal.

15. See chapter 1, note 25.

**Thurs. Mar. 4th** Cloudy with some rain. This being the anniversary of the Fire department there was a Large procession of the different Fire Companies. I played for a Hook & Ladder Company. We marched through the different streets of the city—I suppose some eight or ten miles in all. The streets were very muddy, in some places halfway to the knee, and the rain drenched everybody to the skin. I would not have done it for \$50 if I had not wanted the money. If I do not get along in the world it shall not be my fault—for I'll labor as long as I can stand up. At night the Firemen attended our Theatre (American) and there was an ode sung on the stage commemorative of the event—the house was full.

**Sat. Mar. 6th** Cloudy—some slight showers. Rehearsal AM. At 4PM Mr. Collins's wardrobe was sold by auction in the Theatre. They brought considerable more than they was actually worth—and more than was needed to pay the funeral expenses, which was \$150, they bringing \$179, and he had \$50 in gold. The surplus money will purchase him a beautiful slab. At Theatre 7PM. J. S. Silsbee's Benefit on which occasion he was presented with a silver cup. It was given him as coming from his *friends* and *patrons* of New Orleans—but who they was nobody could find out, though there was a letter read on the stage as coming from them—but there was no signatures. I guess he bought it himself, that is the opinion of the company.

**Sat. Mar. 20th** Heavy wind AM, very dusty—some rain PM. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Mrs. G. Jones had a benefit this evening—Poor House. She played Romeo in *Romeo & Juliet*<sup>16</sup> and Mrs. Potts in the *Milliner's Holiday*. At home 12M[idnight].

**Fri. Mar. 26th** Cleared off, cold again. 2PM took my baggage on board the (Steamer!) *Andrew Jackson*. Bid goodbye to my acquaintances and at 6PM left New Orleans for Cincinnati—with \$95 in my pocket. To bed at 8PM.

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16. Actresses who excelled in male roles, or “breeches parts,” were extremely popular during the nineteenth century. For example, the celebrated US American actress Charlotte Cushman (1816–1876) performed Romeo throughout her career. For more on this phenomenon, see Faye E. Dudden, *Women in the American Theatre: Actresses and Audiences, 1790–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Lisa Merrill, *When Romeo Was a Woman: Charlotte Cushman and Her Circle of Female Spectators* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); and Elizabeth Reitz Mullenix, *Wearing the Breeches: Gender on the Antebellum Stage* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

**Sat. Apr. 3rd** Cloudy AM, cleared off at noon. Arrived at Cincinnati at ½ [past] 6PM. Took my baggage up to Mrs. Wright's. Went round to the National Theatre, met several persons with whom I was acquainted—gave them all the news from the South. To bed 11.

**Fri. Apr. 9th** Cleared off, a little cool. AM walked about town, writing out parts of *Genoese* PM.<sup>17</sup> Evening went to the Masonic Hall to see the Sable Harmonists in an Opera called the *Virginia Gal*.<sup>18</sup> It went off very well, to a good house. To bed 11PM.

**Sat. Apr. 10th** Beautiful day. Report reached here of the death of General Scott—which I hope is unfounded. PM finished writing off parts, at Theatre in the evening, in bed at 10PM.

**Sun. Apr. 11th** Quite warm and dusty. Walked about town nearly all day. Expected people from below to arrive today—but no boat came in. News arrived of the taking of Vera Cruz by General Scott who is *not* dead as was reported. In the afternoon a salute was fired in honor of it, by some of the citizens. After supper took a walk, and came home—to bed 10.

**Mon. Apr. 12th** Very warm and dusty. The remainder of the American Theatre's people arrived AM from New Orleans, the town is full of Actors now. Evening at the concert of the Sable Harmonists—in bed at 11PM.

**Wed. Apr. 14th** Quite cold—the dust blowing so hard it is almost impossible to walk the streets. C. R. Thorne arrived from Boston AM. He intends to open his new theatre on the 26th—I must try to make an engagement with him for the summer. To bed 7PM.

**Thurs. Apr. 15th** Cold and dusty. How I hate remaining idle now, I want to be busy all the time. I wish I had a good engagement for this summer, I think I shall go South again next winter. Walked about all day—set at home in the evening and went to bed early.

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17. See chapter 1, note 1.

18. *Virginia Gal* was a blackface burlesque of Michael William Balfe (1808–1870)'s opera *The Bohemian Girl* (1843), which in turn was based on Miguel de Cervantes (ca. 1547–1616)'s short story "La Gitanilla" (1613). See David Monod, *The Soul of Pleasure: Sentiment and Sensation in Nineteenth-Century American Mass Entertainment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), 42–75.

**Mon. Apr. 19th** Some rain during last night. I feel very well this morning. Seeing a notice on the bill of the National Theatre, saying they want people, I wrote them a letter this morning, though I don't expect to get a situation.

**Tues. Apr. 20th** Quite warm—I hope it may continue so. If I do not get an engagement this week I shall certainly leave this town. Passed the day reading F. C. Wemyss—*Twenty-Six Years in the Life of an Actor & Manager*—a very passable work.

**Sat. Apr. 24th** Beautiful day—though cool. Took a stroll about town PM. 2PM while setting in my room reading, the call boy of the National called on me, and stated that the Stage Manager wished to see me. I went to the Theatre, and he offered me an engagement, which I accepted! I get \$8 per week, which is better than being idle, as I intend, as long as I can help it, never to get *hard up* again, no matter how bad an engagement I have to accept. Went to the Theatre to see Anderson as Coriolanus. Mr. McCutcheon who was to play some part in the piece got a little fuddled, so the part had to be read by Mr. Lorton, the prompter. Good House.

**Mon. May 3rd** Cool but pleasant. Rehearsal 10AM, wrote a letter to my *Mother* PM and posted it, at Theatre 7PM. Mr. Anderson's benefit and last appearance. He is one of the best Actors now living, but a brute to the people under him in the profession.

**Tues. May 4th** Fine day but cool. Reading AM, took a stroll in the PM, at night went to the Athenaeum, the name of a new Theatre erected by Mr. Rockwell. Mrs. Mowatt played Mariana in *The Wife*. I do not think her talent is above mediocrity, but she appears to draw and that is the desideratum<sup>19</sup> with managers. Good House.

**Fri. May 7th** Warm, windy, & dusty. Walking AM, working PM fixing a sword belt, 7PM went to the Athenaeum. Mrs. Mowatt's Benefit—I saw her in the *Hunchback* as Julia but did not stay for the afterpiece (*Honey-Moon*). The house was filled—and the most fashionable audience I ever saw in this city. If not a first-rate Actress she is at least a credit to the profession—for by being the member of a church, and her notoriety as a writer possessing consider-

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19. *desideratum* (Latin): necessity.

able literary attainments, people visit the Theatre during her performances that were never there before in their lives. Heavy rain about midnight.

**Sun. May 9th** Cold and cloudy. Part of our company went to Louisville, to open there on the 10th with Mr. Collins. News reached here of a great battle between Gen. Scott and Santa Anna in which the Mexicans were nearly all killed, wounded, and taken prisoners.<sup>20</sup> Santa Anna made his escape. I am glad that the battle was so decisive if only for Scott's sake, whom I believe to be *the best* General of the Age. It will forever silence the abuse that has been heaped upon him by some members of the Democratic party who feared his being a candidate for the Presidency. Walking after supper—in bed at 10.

**Fri. May 14th** Fine day—very warm PM. Rehearsal 10AM, PM at home writing out parts from a manuscript (*The Little Devil*) for Mrs. E. Kent. I wish I had about \$30 to spare to purchase books with, to pursue a course of Historical studies. I am now wasting time that might be profitably employed, but I cannot help it. I have not the means to do anything with, it takes every cent that I can spare to purchase a few properties to make myself look respectable on the stage with—well! well! At Theatre 7PM—Signora Cioccas's Benefit. She is a very fair dancer, but no comparison to *Blangy*. Fair House.

**Thurs. May 20th** Beautiful day. Rehearsal AM, reading PM, 7PM at Theatre. Several of [the] public houses<sup>21</sup> were illuminated in honor of the victories of our arms in Mexico.

**Wed. May 26th** Cool AM. Warm PM. Rehearsal 10AM, reading & writing PM, at Theatre 7PM. Benefit of Mr. F. S. R. Morris, Leading man of the Stock Company—a worthy man, but a *poor Actor*, though he can make out to get his share of applause by ranting everything he plays. He played Shylock and Rob Roy. Several persons volunteered their services for the occasion, and yet he had a poor house. The *Stars* take all the money away, and when the poor Stock Actors take a Benefit, the attraction being all gone, there is a poor chance for them to make anything.

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20. Probably, Watkins is referring to the Battle of Cerro Gordo (April 17–18, 1847).

21. public house: a bar or “pub.”



**Thurs. May 27th** Cool early AM but quite hot at noon. Rehearsal of a Ballet for the *Ravels*. 7PM at Theatre—1st night of the Ravel family. The prices having been increased kept a great many persons from attending, though the house was middling.

**Fri. May 28th** Warm and pleasant. Rehearsal 10AM. PM attended an Auction of Books; I might have purchased several that would have been of interest to me, but I had not the money to spare. When will I have it? 7PM at Theatre—Fair house.

**Sun. May 30th** Quite hot. Had a good wash and cleaning AM, walking PM. I have written to my Mother, and Brother George—and a month has elapsed, and I have received no answer. I think it rather hard considering they had not heard from me for some three months before.

**Wed. June 2nd** Warm—warm. Rehearsal AM, at Theatre 7PM. I have to *Supé*<sup>22</sup> it now—that is to go on in the *Ballets* of the *Ravels* to fill up the stage. That is “A check to proud ambition.”<sup>23</sup>

**Fri. June 11th** Beautiful day. Received a letter from George at last—business prevented his writing sooner. He like me has experienced some of this world’s ingratitude—a man whom he had, to his own injury, assisted, now treats him with contempt. Is the world all alike? I have found them so! At Theatre 7PM.

**Mon. June 14th** Quite cool. Bought a Lottery ticket for the novelty of the thing. Studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. A young gentleman of the city made his first appearance on any stage as Armand in *The Idiot Witness*. It is the greatest folly in the world for young men to strike at the head of the profession without knowing anything of the foot. There are plenty of such persons who might in time make good Actors if they would commence at the bottom of the ladder and work up, instead of which they begin at the top, and not meeting with the success they expected, give it up in despair—at the same time possessing considerable talent, which if it had been properly cultivated, they might in time have become, if not *stars*, at least respectable Actors. The house was so-so.

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22. to *supé*: to perform as a supernumerary.

23. Watkins is quoting Cibber’s version of Shakespeare’s *Richard III* (1699). See note 1.

**Tues. June 15th** Cool but pleasant. Rehearsal AM, PM walking. Purchased a lot of Books (Plays) very cheap. At Theatre 7PM.

**Thurs. June 17th** Warmer & pleasant. Reading & Rehearsal AM, covering Plays PM.<sup>24</sup> 7PM at Theatre. Benefit of Mr. Morton—not a very good Actor, but a first-rate fellow. I do not suppose it was much of a *Benefit* to him as he had to share after \$125—and there could not have been, in the whole house, much over \$150. The poor Stock Actors have but little chance to make anything—the Managers giving them very little opportunity to do so. It’s a funny world.

**Sun. June 20th** Beautiful day. At home reading AM, out walking PM. About 8PM some volunteers returned from the War, which was announced by the firing of a national salute.

**Wed. June 30th** Beautiful day—fine breeze. Rehearsal AM, at Theatre 7PM. Benefit of Mr. Logan—1st Low Comedian. And now, in the absence of the Stage manager, acting in that capacity. Also, I never wish to be in a Theatre where the S.M. has a Wife or Daughter who is an Actress—they meddle too much with what is not their business, to the annoyance of everybody around them. The pieces were *School for Scandal* & *Faint Heart Never Won Fair Lady*. Murdoch played Charles in the former piece. Fair house.

**Sun. July 4th** The Birthday of American Independence. I must enjoy it by studying for tomorrow afternoon and evening’s performances. There is no holiday for the Stock Actor. Took a walk PM, studying after supper.

**Tues. July 6th** Very warm. Paid off—End of the season. I wish I was certain of an engagement when the new season commences. Sleeping & reading PM. In the evening went to the river and bathed, which did not agree with me.

**Sat. July 10th** Very warm. Walking and reading all day. Reengaged at the National for the coming season.<sup>25</sup> Clouded PM and rain in the evening—home at 10 and to bed.

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24. During the early nineteenth century, most books were sold in paper covers. Purchasers covered their books with a sturdier material or commissioned a professional bookbinder to do so.

25. Watkins is referring here to the summer season of 1847.

**Mon. July 12th** Warm & cloudy—shower AM. Rehearsal 10AM, PM waited on Mr. R. Place—Manager of the American Theatre (New Orleans). He appeared anxious to engage me but we could not come to terms. He offered me \$10, but I would not accept less than \$15—and *I will not*. 8PM visited the Athenaeum, to see several persons calling themselves seceders from the Shaking Quakers,<sup>26</sup> who gave an account of their mode of worship illustrating it with the dances and singing peculiar to that sect. The attendance to see them was quite large, and everybody appeared to be satisfied. At home about midnight. To bed.

**Wed. July 14th** Beautiful—considerably cooler. Rehearsal AM, reading & writing a letter to Ludlow & Smith. 8PM at Theatre—Good House.

**Thurs. July 22nd** Cloudy AM. Rehearsal AM. Hot! Hot. PM wrote a letter to C. R. Thorne for an engagement in Boston, at Theatre 7PM.

**Tues. July 27th** Quite cool. Rehearsal AM, reading PM, 7PM at Theatre. Letter from Ludlow & Smith offering me \$12 per week for the south next winter—not less than \$15 Gentlemen!—for I can do better here than that.

**Sat. July 31st** Cool & pleasant. Rehearsal AM. Made a belt buckle of brass that cost me in the whole 40c whereas if I had hired a mechanic to make it it would have cost me \$1.50. This is worth a place in my Journal merely to show what a person can do with little means. There are a great many things I require in my profession that I am not able to buy—but by a little trouble I can make something that will answer the purpose very well. At Theatre 8PM—Melodrama, Blue fire,<sup>27</sup> and a good house.

**Mon. Aug. 2nd** Fine day. Rehearsal AM, working & reading PM, 8PM at Theatre. Mrs. Lewis played Richard 3d—it appears to be an attempt to copy from Booth. I received a letter from C. R. Thorne offering me an engagement in Boston for walking gentleman at a salary of \$12 per week—I shall accept it.

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26. The “Shakers” were a religious group founded by James and Jane Wardley, who broke from the Quakers in 1747 to form the Wardley Society (later named the United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing). They were colloquially called “Shaking Quakers” due to their origins (from the Quakers) and their bodily rituals during worship.

27. Alluding to the popular Victorian stage trick of blue fire (a mixture of sulfur, copper, and other ingredients that produced a blue glow when lit), “blue-fire melodrama” was a pejorative phrase applied to plays that relied heavily on sensationalism and special effects.

**Wed. Aug. 4th** Warm. Rehearsal AM. Gave *Notice* to the S.M. that I was going to quit—very good. Working and reading PM, at Theatre 8PM. 1st night of Mrs. G. Farren—she played Margaret Elmore, and beautifully she played it, to a poor house. Is it not too bad that an *Actress* like her should play to bad houses—while Mrs. Lewis with her blue fire &c. to crowded ones?

**Fri. Aug. 6th** Cloudy AM. Packed up, settled my bills, &c. and left Cincinnati PM. At 8PM reached Springfield (O.H.) and took the stage for Belle Fontaine, where we arrived at 5AM. In the stage, an old Irish woman with a child in her arms occupied the seat with me. Whenever I would get into a doze, she'd lay her head on my shoulder—and wake me up. I'd knock it off, but it was of no use—my sleep was spoiled for that night.

**Sat. Aug. 7th** Considerable rain last night—but cleared off this AM. 1PM reached Sandusky (O.H.). Took dinner and supper, and at 6PM got on board the steamer *Albany* for Buffalo.

**Sun. Aug. 8th** Cloudy & windy. The boat did not get off until 5AM—lake rough. Read and slept all day. Reached Cleveland (O.H.) at 10AM—stopped at several small towns.

**Mon. Aug. 9th** Fine day. At Buffalo (N.Y.) 2PM. Took a walk around town, met an Actor with whom I was acquainted, took a Look at the Theatre—small but comfortable—and at ½ [past] 5PM started for Albany in the Cars<sup>28</sup>—\$12 passage.

**Tues. Aug. 10th** Fair. Passed through Rochester, Utica, Syracuse, and several towns of minor importance, and arrived at Albany (N.Y.) at ½ [past] 5PM. Took supper and went on board the *Knickerbocker*—slept on a settee all night.

**Wed. Aug. 11th** Cloudy and warm. At New York 5AM. Put up at Lovejoy's Hotel—took a bath, cleaned myself, and at 10AM went to see my *Mother*—found her well. Passed AM with her. PM walking about the city. At night visited the Chatham Theatre. Charles Howard & Wife played in *Naval Engagements*—I do not think much of them. Brougham, Winans, Whiting in *Hamlet Travestie*—I liked them, particularly Brougham, who appears to be a very fine Actor. There was a good house.

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28. in the cars: via railroad train.

**Thurs. Aug. 12th** Very warm & showery. Visited my acquaintances, bid goodbye to Mother, and at 5PM started on the steamer *Oregon* for Boston—detained in the fog 3 or 4 hours.

**Fri. Aug. 13th** Warm. Reached Stonington 5AM and took the cars for Boston, where I arrived about 11AM. Went to the Theatre—saw Thorne—all well. I think it the handsomest Theatre I ever was in. Brought my *things* to a boarding house. Walked about town PM. It is the worst city I was ever in, a stranger would soon get lost in it. I had to keep making inquiries to find my way back. Supper at 7PM, to bed ½ [past] 7PM.

**Sat. Aug. 14th** Pleasant. Rehearsed Montalban in *Honey-Moon*, Mr. Neafie not having arrived. Looking at the town PM, at Theatre in the evening, when it was lighted up. There were several gentlemen present and all allowed it to be the handsomest Theatre in the U.S. There was a champagne supper given and some singing made the evening pass off very pleasantly.

**Tues. Aug. 17th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. J. Booth *Jun.*—son of *the* Booth—made his first appearance this season as Sir Giles (*New Way to Pay Old Debts*). I do not think that he will ever make *half* the Actor his father is. Good House.

**Sun. Aug. 22nd** Beautiful day. Studying AM and took a long walk among the shipping. Sleeping & studying PM, at night attended a temperance lecture at the Tremont Temple—it was delivered by J. B. Gough, and very finely too. There was some 2000 or more persons there of both sexes—more females than males.

**Wed. Aug. 25th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, walking & sleeping PM, at Theatre 7PM. 1st appearance of C. Webb. He played Damon and very well. He is one of the best Actors on the American Stage—if he would but leave liquor alone. Good House.

**Thurs. Aug. 26th** Cloudy & foggy. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Letters from Cincinnati & Sol Smith. The next time I make application to him for an engagement, I think he will give out.

**Sat. Aug. 28th** Cloudy & foggy. Rehearsal AM. PM visited J. Carter—what a change one year has made in him. We were companions for a long time—he drank very hard. I done all that lay in my power to reform [him] but it was impossible—drink he would. I was obliged to leave him. Now he is one of the best temperance lecturers in the country, has a wife, and is respected by everybody. Studying in the evening—to bed early.

**Mon. Aug. 30th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM—*Macbeth*. I played Malcolm. I am progressing as fast in the profession as I ought to for my future good. Good House.

**Tues. Aug. 31st** Fair day. Rehearsal AM, studying & sleeping PM, at Theatre 7PM. We continue doing good business—better than any other house in town. It shows what a good stock company can do.

## THREE

1847–48

*Watkins continues to criticize the star system after working with Edwin Forrest, James Hackett, J. B. Booth Jr., Frank Chanfrau, and T. D. Rice, though he does express admiration for Forrest's business sense. When actors leave the company or become indisposed, he learns new roles on short notice. Returning to New York City, he sees several performances, takes in the sights, and comments on the nominees for US president before beginning a new engagement in Boston.*



**Wed. Sept. 1st** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM. Received the first notice of my playing in the *Boston Atlas* in a criticism on *Macbeth*—saying the young gentleman that played Malcolm deserved credit.

**Wed. Sept. 15th** Cool and pleasant. Rehearsal AM. Thorne begins to use me rather badly—putting me into bad parts. At Theatre 7PM—3d night of Wallack. Good House.

**Tues. Sept. 21st** Cool, windy, cloudy, &c. Rehearsal AM, reading PM, at Theatre 7PM. Benefit of James Wallack *Sen.*, the best light Comedian on the stage, to my thinking. I do not like his Tragedy—he does not possess sufficient physical abilities to carry such a part as Hamlet though I do not suppose there is any Actor now living who possesses so thorough a knowledge of the business of the stage.

**Fri. Sept. 24th** Quite cool. Rehearsal AM, playing ten pins PM—not in this evening's bill. Went in front to see *The Brigand*, Wallack as Mazzaroni.<sup>1</sup> I think Wallack acts very ungentlemanly to those persons who have to play with him. Instead of trying to hide their faults, he shows them up to the audience. I do not know what he was in his younger days, but in this engagement he has made himself very unpopular with the Actors. At home 11PM, study—to bed at 1AM.

**Wed. Sept. 29th** Cloudy & disagreeable day. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Benefit of J. B. Booth *Jun.*—on which occasion, his father played Richard—and finely too, to a crowded House.

**Thurs. Sept. 30th** Cleared off beautifully AM. Rehearsal AM, reading & studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Last appearance of J. Wallack, who leaves for England on the 1st of October.

**Mon. Oct. 4th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, at home PM, at Theatre 7PM. 1st night of E. Forrest, opening in *King Lear*. I prefer Mr. Booth much. Full House.

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1. James W. Wallack Sr. (1795–1864) originated the role of Alessandro Mazzaroni in J. R. Planché's drama *The Brigand* (1829) and played it frequently throughout his career.



**Tues. Oct. 5th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Forrest as Damon. I prefer J. R. Scott or A. A. Addams in this character. In short I do not think Mr. Forrest a great Actor—C. Eaton or A. A. Addams were much better. An old Actor said I was the best Lucullus he ever saw.<sup>2</sup>

**Fri. Oct. 8th** Cloudy. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Forrest as *Metamora*—the house was the largest of the season. Being cram'd a great many people could not get in. This part, together with the *Gladiator* & *Jack Cade*, have been the making of Forrest—as he has a copyright of them.<sup>3</sup>

**Fri. Oct. 22nd** Cloudy—rain wanted. Rehearsal AM, making “Props” and walking PM, at Theatre 7PM. Benefit & last appearance of E. Forrest—Full house.

**Tues. Nov. 2nd** Warm & pleasant. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. 1st appearance of E. S. Conner. This man shows the absurdity of the Starring system, as there are a number of Stock Actors who are much better, but he is right—he makes about as much if not more than he would if he were playing stock business and has much easier times. He opened with *Richelieu* to a poor house.

**Sun. Nov. 7th** Cool. At home all day. 7PM attended a temperance lecture. J. Carter spoke first, Mr. H. Smith—the “*Razor Strop Man*”—spoke next.<sup>4</sup> He is an illiterate man but possessing considerable *gab*—the house was full at 12½ c[ents].

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2. John Banim's *Damon & Pythias* (1821), a tragedy set in ancient Greece, was a staple in the dramatic repertory for much of the nineteenth century. Lucullus is Damon's loyal slave.

3. Edwin Forrest (1806–1872), one of the most celebrated US actors of the nineteenth century, solicited vehicle plays for himself through contests. Two of the winning plays, John Augustus Stone's *Metamora* (1829) and Robert Montgomery Bird's *The Gladiator* (1831), remained in Forrest's repertory throughout his career. In 1841, Forrest also acquired Robert T. Conrad's *Jack Cade* (1835), which was originally written for the actor Augustus A. Addams but subsequently revised for Forrest.

4. In the 1840s, the Washingtonians (working-class temperance reformers) popularized the lecture, or “experience speech,” as an entertaining yet persuasive medium. Jacob Carter and Henry Smith wrote about their experiences with alcohol and published books shortly after Watkins saw them speak: Jacob Carter, *My Drunken Life, in Fifteen Chapters, from 1825 to 1847* (Boston: Printed for the author, 1848); Henry Smith, *The Life and Adventures of Henry Smith, the Celebrated Razor Strop Man* (Boston: White & Potter, 1848). For an introduction to the Washingtonian movement, see Leonard U. Blumberg and William L. Pittman, *Beware the First Drink! The Washington Temperance Movement and Alcoholics Anonymous* (Seattle: Glen Abbey Books, 1991).

**Mon. Nov. 15th** Cool & pleasant. Moved to Mrs. Barnes, 56 Federal St. Fixing up room PM. C. J. Smith, who was to have played Marson in *The Soldier of '76*, left town very suddenly, forgetting to settle his tailor's bill and other bills, some smaller, some larger. I was called upon to play his part at short notice, not having time to shift my street clothes—I managed to get through it.

**Mon. Nov. 22nd** Cleared off beautifully 10AM, clouded up PM. Letter from Cin[cinnati] (Saunders). Rehearsal AM, at Theatre 7PM. 1st night of *The Last Days of Pompeii* in which I played Glaucus. C. J. Smith having left the Theatre throws me into good business—let it come.

**Wed. Dec. 1st** Cloudy. Rehearsal AM. Sent letter to Cin'—at Theatre 7PM. T. D. Rice, the original "*Jim Crow*," commenced with us on Monday to play 5 nights. Poor "*Daddy*" Rice—he is entirely broke down.<sup>5</sup> His voice, that was once all music, is now entirely gone, and where he once drew thousands he cannot now draw fifty—such is life.

**Mon. Dec. 6th** Cleared off beautifully. Rehearsal AM. Lent F. S. Johnson \$5 to take him on to Philadelphia—he being hard up. At Theatre 7PM. 1st night of *Mazeppa*. The horse while going up the third run fell off and struck on the stage, falling between 25 & 30 feet.<sup>6</sup> He sustained no injury. The ladies were dreadfully frightened. Full House.

**Sat. Dec. 11th** Cloudy AM. Rain PM. Rehearsal AM, afternoon performance at Theatre—no extra pay—an imposition. When will the Profession wake up to the impositions that they suffer from Managers? I am afraid never. At home in the evening—tired out—to bed at 9PM.

**Tues. Dec. 21st** Cloudy & cold. Rehearsal AM, reading PM, at Theatre 7PM. Poor house. Thorne is one of the most illiberal managers I ever met with—and for a person who has been connected with the profession so long as he has, he knows the least about it. He cannot direct, or get up a piece at all.

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5. Watkins's observation that Rice seemed "entirely broke down" might relate to a medical condition that struck Rice around 1840 (paralysis of some kind). Although Rice continued performing until 1858, his popularity had waned by the late 1840s.

6. The pinnacle of dramatizations of "*Mazeppa*," a poem written in 1819 by Lord Byron (1788–1824), was a scene called "*Mazeppa's ride*." On stage, the actor playing the title role was tied to a live horse.

His chief aim appears to be to make money—and all he lays his hands upon he keeps. Instead of laying out \$1[00] or \$200 to get up a piece—whereby it might draw well—he brings out such pieces as *Mazeppa*, *Putnam*, & *Pompeii* with one or two Rehearsals, and for dresses<sup>7</sup> anything he can pick up or borrow, so that he does not have to go to any expense—and he then wonders why they do not draw. This is *Putnam*'s second night—and a poor house.

**Sat. Dec. 25th** Christmas. Cloudy & snowy. This is a holiday to most people—but the Actors in this Theatre (The Boston) Rehearse from 10AM 'till 1PM and play from ½ [past] 2PM till 7PM. The house was the best of the week, being full.

**Wed. Jan. 5th 1848** Cooler. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Mr. Perry having joined the company makes it much easier for me—though he keeps me out of good parts.

**Sat. Jan. 8th** Quite cool. Rehearsal AM. On going to the box office to receive my salary, I found it reduced \$2—without anything being said about it previously. If I can better myself, I shall leave. Played Billiards in the evening, it commenced raining about 10PM and froze as it fell.

**Fri. Jan. 14th** This day 23 years [ago] I was born. If my prospects for the next year should be as gloomy as the weather is today I should have a poor time of it. Warm and foggy. Rehearsal AM, wrote to my Mother PM, at Theatre 7PM. Good House.

**Tues. Jan. 18th** Pleasant AM, some snow PM. Rehearsal AM, at Theatre 7PM. Performance changed—Seguins refusing to perform. Thorne, finding they did not draw, wanted to get rid of them and threw every obstacle in their way so that they were unable to bring out pieces that would draw, whereas if he had gone to a little expense to get up their pieces he might have made their engagement profitable to both himself and them.

**Thurs. Jan. 20th** Fine day. Rehearsal AM. I wish I could start a traveling company—I think that I could do well. At Theatre 7PM. *Rob Roy*, *Purse*, *Evil Eye*. Fair house.

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7. dresses: costumes.

**Wed. Feb. 9th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM. Attended the funeral remains of my old commander Martin Scott, to the Lowell railroad. He was very eccentric but goodhearted and brave. He was killed by a shot from the enemy that pierced his heart. “*Requiescat in Pace*.”<sup>8</sup> At Theatre 7PM. Poor House.

**Sun. Feb. 13th** Beautiful day. 1PM had the part of Prince Henry in *Henry IVth* brought to me to study—Mr. Perry, who was to have played the part, having been taken sick. I studied it in about 9 hours—letter perfect.

**Tues. Feb. 15th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM. I was then informed that I had to play Charles in *His Last Legs* this night—one of the longest and most difficult of Farce parts. Besides having to study Sidney in *The Man of the World*, I did it!

**Fri. Feb. 18th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM. PM received a Letter from England from my quondam<sup>9</sup> friend *Thomas Noble*, in answer to two that I wrote him. He was very brief—not even saying anything about what he owes me. 6PM at Theatre—played in three pieces. Good House.

**Mon. Feb. 21st** Cloudy AM, cleared off cool PM. At Theatre 6PM. Benefit of Mr. Hackett and last appearance. Hackett without doubt possesses a greater versatility of talent than any man I ever saw—playing Irishmen, Scotchmen, Dutchmen, Frenchman, Yankee, &c., and he plays them all well. He is a very good man to play with, and I was glad to see his Benefit so well attended—the house being filled.

**Tues. Feb. 22nd** *Washington’s Birthday*. Cloudy, wet, snowy. Washington is nearly forgotten, except in the history of his country—his birthday is kept up with very little celebration. Rehearsal AM, at Theatre 6PM. A Miss H. F. Read of this city made her first appearance on any stage—as Bianca in *Fazio*. She did not possess the first attribute of an Actress, being homely, badly made, and very slender in her person. Besides she had not the physical strength necessary to sustain a part like Bianca, the house was full. Her friends applauded—others hissed.

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8. *requiescat in pace* (Latin): rest in peace.

9. *quondam* (Latin): former.

**Tues. Feb. 29th** Cool & cloudy. Posted letter to Cincinnati. Rehearse AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Played in two pieces. Bad House.

**Thurs. Mar. 9th** Raining all day. Rehearsal AM, at home PM, at Theatre 6PM. Complimentary of Company A. Boston Artillery, four pieces: *Maid and Magpie*, *Dumb Girl of Genoa*, *Love in Humble Life*, & *North End Will*—the house was slim.<sup>10</sup>

**Fri. Mar. 10th** Rain part of the day, the rest gloomy. Rehearsal AM. Attended the funeral procession of John Quincy Adams. The walking being bad, none but the Military & members of the Legislature joined in the procession. At Theatre 7PM. Benefit of J. B. Booth, *Jun.*—*Six Degrees of Crime*, *Presumptive Evidence*, & *Kate Kearney*. Good House. There was a lament & the Star Spangled Banner sung by the whole company in honor of John Quincy Adams.<sup>11</sup>

**Wed. Mar. 15th** Cold & pleasant. Rehearsal AM. Cutting embroidery for a Tunic—I intend having a good wardrobe made up. It will assist me considerably in the way of making engagements. At Theatre 7PM. Played in three pieces—poor house.

**Thurs. Mar. 16th** Pleasant & cold. Rehearsal AM, cutting embroidery PM, at Theatre 7PM. Benefit of Mr. E. Eddy. Mr. Pelby, Manager of the National, got out a writ against him for breaking his engagement—Eddy had to get bail for \$2000 before he could play.

**Tues. Mar. 21st** Pleasant AM, clouded up PM. The weather for the last week has been very strange—always beautiful in the AM and clouding up PM with rain in the evening. News reached here on the 18th from France that another revolution had broken out. The King had abdicated and left the country and the People had formed a Republican Government.<sup>12</sup> I hope they will

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10. Somewhat regularly, theaters would stage performances to raise funds for groups that were valued by the community. In this instance, a local military company was the subject of such a benefit.

11. John Quincy Adams (1767–1848), the sixth president of the United States, died on February 23, 1848.

12. Watkins is referring here to the French Revolution of 1848. In the wake of riots and protests in February 1848, King Louis-Phillipe I fled to the United Kingdom, and the people formed a new government that they called the Second Republic.

succeed in sustaining themselves. At Theatre 7PM. 2d appearance of Booth. *Apostate*—Fair house.

**Thurs. Mar. 30th** Fine day. Rehearsal AM, walking PM, at Theatre 7PM. Booth as Octavian & Shylock. What with being drunk & hoarse both, he played wretchedly. In any other man it would not be tolerated, but in him it is called *eccentricity*. Good House.

**Mon. Apr. 17th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. For the first time in my life I was laughed at on the stage. I was playing De Retz in *The Surgeon of Paris*—in the last scene I raised my voice too high and it broke, making a shrill cry. I shall take great care that it never occurs again.

**Fri. Apr. 21st** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM. Notice in the Green Room for those wishing engagements for the coming season to make application. I will wait a little while longer before I make any engagements. At Theatre 7PM. Benefit of Mr. Eddy—three pieces, *Damon & Pythias*, *Rugantino*, & *Born to Good Luck*. Four persons played *Damon & Pythias*—J. Proctor played Damon in the 1st, 5th Acts, & Pythias in the 2d Act; Thorne, Damon in the 2d Act, Pythias in the 3d; Booth, *Junior*, Damon in the 3d Act, Pythias 4th, 5th Acts; Eddy, Damon 4th Act, Pythias 1st Act. Good House.

**Sat. Apr. 29th** Cloudy, sprinkled some but no rain, which is much wanted. Rehearsal AM. Mr. Perry left suddenly for Buffalo. Our company was short enough before—but it will be hard to get along now. I am afraid Thorne will not be able to keep open until June. I want to spend a month with Mother.

**Tues. May 9th** Cloudy. Wrote a Letter to George. Rehearsal AM, reading PM, at Theatre 7PM. A row occurred during the performance of the last piece, arising from the attempt of an Officer to eject a man from the house. The audience paid no attention to the first scene of the piece. In the second, Mr. H. Philips & Miss C. Mestayer commenced but they could not make themselves heard. I came on, then Thorne, who advanced to the footlights to speak but he could not be heard. We all stood still for about five minutes. Thorne then managed to make himself heard, he begged them, out of respect for themselves, the Theatre, & himself to keep the peace and let the play proceed, they then became quiet and everything went off smoothly. The house was crowded.

**Mon. May 22nd** Scotch mist.<sup>13</sup> Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. 1st night of a sketch, written by J. B. Philips, entitled *Boston as It Is*. It possesses neither wit, fun, nor good situations, it has in fact no merit at all—but it drew a full house, that is sufficient. After Theatre was out I went with Mrs. Thorne to a Masquerade Ball given at the *Howard Athenaeum*. There was a great number present, and all seemed to enjoy themselves. I got to bed at 4.

**Thurs. June 15th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM. Chanfrau, who gained considerable notoriety in New York by personating Mose—one of the *B'Hoys*—in a Sketch called *Glance at New York*,<sup>14</sup> is now playing at the National, but he does not appear to have made a *hit* there, as he was hissed in some scenes. Walking PM, at Theatre 7PM.

**Fri. June 16th** Quite warm. Rehearsal AM. There is great opposition among the Abolition Whigs to the nomination of Gen. Taylor as the Whig Candidate for President. The Whigs have abandoned their principles by nominating Taylor, who is not a thorough Whig—they deserted Clay, Scott, Webster, & Mr. McLean because they were not *available*. I believe they would do anything to obtain the power in their own hands. The Democrats have acted nobly—they could have had Taylor but they stuck to their principles and nominated Cass—and I hope they will elect him.<sup>15</sup> Walking PM, at Theatre 7PM. Played in three pieces. GH.<sup>16</sup>

13. Scotch mist: foggy with drizzling rain.

14. Benjamin A. Baker's play *A Glance at New York in 1848*—later revised as *New York as It Is*—was the first to feature prominently the popular stock character Mose, a New York City volunteer fireman. Originated by Frank Chanfrau (1824–1884), Mose became one of the actor's staples; he played the role throughout his career. Peter G. Buckley, "Paratheatricals and Popular Stage Entertainment," in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre*, vol. 1, *Beginnings to 1870*, ed. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 460.

15. During the presidential election of 1848, the Whig Party, seeking to increase its power and influence, passed over prominent Whigs such as Henry Clay (1777–1852), General Winfield Scott (1786–1866), Daniel Webster (1782–1852), and Supreme Court justice John McLean (1785–1861) and nominated instead war hero and Louisiana slave owner General Taylor. The Democrats' nominee, Senator Lewis Cass (1782–1866), advocated that individual states, not Congress, should decide whether or not to permit slavery. Unhappy with these proslavery nominees, many Whigs and Democrats left their parties to form the Free Soil Party, dedicated to curtailing the expansion of slavery in the states and territories. Taylor won the election—defeating Cass, Martin Van Buren (1782–1862) of the Free Soil Party, and Gerrit Smith (1797–1874) of the Liberty Party—with only 47 percent of the popular vote. Watkins's comments here suggest he was a supporter of the Democrats, but he also sought opportunities to hear the Free Soilers speak (see July 28, 1848, for example). For more on this election, which Joel H. Silbey describes as the first in US history to struggle seriously with the question of slavery, see his *Party over Section: The Rough and Ready Presidential Election of 1848* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009).

16. GH: abbreviation for "good house."

**Mon. June 26th** Cool enough to be pleasant. Rehearsal AM. Visited Bunker Hill Monument and the Navy Yard at Charlestown. At Theatre 7PM. Benefit of J. B. Kay, a Pugilist & Sporting Man. Full House of Rowdies. Well the season is over now—I have worked hard for ten months. I played in the first and last pieces of the season. Opened with Montalban in *The Honey-Moon*, and closed with Flighty in *Married Rake*. Now for New York and some rest.

**Tues. June 27th** Warm. Packed up AM, 5PM left Boston by the Fall River route for New York. Had a pleasant passage. This is the best route from Boston to N.Y.

**Wed. June 28th** Very warm. Reached N.Y. at 7AM, took a coach and drove to Mother's—found her well. Looked at the Astor Place Opera House—very pretty. Had a long walk. At the Bowery Theatre 7PM—Benefit of J. R. Scott. I saw two Acts of *Richelieu*—did not like Scott in the part. Went to the Chatham, saw part of *New York as It Is*. Can't say that I liked Chanfrau's *Mose*—I thought he overdid it. Winans as the Market Loafer was very good. Rained all the evening. To bed at 11.

**Sun. July 2nd** Cooler, cloudy, sprinkling. PM took a long walk. Ten years has made great improvements in this city. Where was once vacant lots I used to play in, are fine rows of buildings. I am a stranger in my native city.

**Tues. July 4th** Beautiful day—cool & pleasant. Saw the procession of soldiery—one regiment among them I liked particularly, the "*National Guards*." They were as fine a looking body of men as I ever saw together. I passed the day very pleasantly, and at night witnessed a splendid display of fireworks in the "*Park*." After that I went home, and to bed at 10.

**Sat. July 8th** Cool. AM saw J. Carter. He is the *Father* of a little *girl*. Took a look in at Palmo's which has been fitted up by Burton very handsomely. 7PM went with Mother to the Astor Place Opera House—the most beautiful Theatre that I ever saw. The Lehman Family were playing there, and a small vaudeville company consisting of Chippendale, John Sefton, Dawson, Miss Rose Telbin, Kate Horn, & Roberts. There was a poor House.

**Wed. July 12th** Cloudy & clear alternately. There was a fine funeral procession in the PM in honor of some officers who were killed in Mexico, and whose remains were bought here for interment. Their names were Lt. Col. Baxter, Capt. J. Barclay, Capt. C. H. Pearson, Lt. C. J. Gallagher, Lt. E. Chandler, &



A. S. Forbes. There was a funeral oration delivered in the Park by John Van Buren, but I could not get near enough to hear it. News arrived from France of civil war, great fights in the city of Paris between the soldiers & populace. The soldiers were victorious—10,000 killed—over 20,000 wounded. The insurgents were incited by some enemies to the Republic.<sup>17</sup> Who they were has not yet been brought to light. I hope they will be discovered. At the Chatham 8PM. Good House.

**Mon. July 17th** Very pleasant—good cool breeze. Walking all day. On the 16th I met J. Haren, a boy who beat the drum with me while in the service. He is learning a trade. 7PM at the Chatham Theatre. Mr. Lester, a son of old J. Wallack, played Don Cesar De Bazan. He is a bad imitation of the old man. I never saw the part so poorly played. I put him down as bad—I will see him in something else. House was good.

**Tues. July 25th** Warm. I was woken up this AM by my Brother George, who had just arrived from the South. Walked about with him—visiting some of his friends. At home 8PM.

**Thurs. July 27th** Cloudy—close. The “New York Regiment of Volunteers” from Mexico had a Public Reception, given them by the Military of the City. The Procession was very large and the crowds that lined the streets kept continually cheering. The Ladies waved their handkerchiefs from the windows, and altogether their reception was very enthusiastic. Played Billiards with George AM, he beat me. At home PM, to bed at 10.

**Fri. July 28th** Heavy shower last night. Walking AM. Went to a Political Meeting in favor of “Free Soil” to prohibit the Southerners to remove into the territory acquired from Mexico with slaves. There was not above 1500 persons present, the speaking was nothing extra. At home 10.

**Sun. July 30th** Pleasant. Went to Brooklyn AM—it has improved a great deal. It has more churches than any place that I was ever in. In the PM took a walk on the Battery, read in the evening—to bed at 9PM.

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17. Watkins refers here to an insurrection in late June 1848 staged by workers who were dissatisfied by the Second Republic’s growing conservatism. The rebellion came to be known as the June Days Uprising. (Also see note 12.)

**Fri. Aug. 4th** Cloudy. Walking AM. Visited Greenwood cemetery PM. It is a beautiful place for the dead—some of the tombs are beautiful. It rained and so I did not get a good view of the whole place. News arrived of a threatened rebellion in Ireland.<sup>18</sup> At home in the evening—to bed at 9.

**Mon. Aug. 7th** Pleasant. Walking AM. Went to Grace Church PM and heard the funeral sermon over Mr. Simpson, late manager of the Park-Theatre, who died brokenhearted—having become poor through bad luck, he was unable to pay his debts, and it worried him. He had been manager of the Park for 32 years. 8PM at Niblo's, Hackett as Falstaff, Vandenhoff as Ford, fine house.

**Tues. Aug. 8th** Pleasant. Packed up AM, took a walk, had my daguerreotype taken—gave it to Mother. 4PM goodbye *Mother & Brother George*. Rode on a dray with my “props” to the Steamer *Empire State*, 5PM left New York *again*. Supper. *Turned in* at 8PM.

**Wed. Aug. 9th** Warm. 3PM reached Fall River. Took the cars for Boston—when we arrived at 6AM put up at the “*United States Hotel*,” good House. Shaved, shampooed, breakfasted, took a walk. Visited my acquaintances, eat a first-rate dinner at 3PM, supper at 7PM, to bed 11.

**Sat. Aug. 12th** Hot AM, some wind PM. Rehearsal 10AM, collecting more props PM. *Martin Van Buren & C. F. Adams* have been nominated for *President & Vice*, by a party calling themselves *Free Soilers*, composed of the disaffected of all parties—*Democrats, Whigs & Abolitionists*. I think that Cass's prospects are brightening.<sup>19</sup> Walk PM, to bed at 11.

**Wed. Aug. 16th** Hot—warm won't do. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. It is too hot weather for playing, and the people will not come in very large numbers, though we have had expenses in or more.<sup>20</sup> The National played to about \$30 on the 15th and a shy house on the 16th.

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18. Watkins refers here to the Young Irelander Rebellion of 1848, a failed nationalist uprising on July 29, 1848, which took place during Ireland's Great Famine and was inspired by revolutionary activity in France.

19. See note 15.

20. In other words, they have only sold enough tickets (or slightly more) to cover the cost of presenting the bill each night.

**Sat. Aug. 19th** Considerably cooler. Rehearsal from 10am until 3PM. 26 Lengths to study for Monday night. Took a walk after dinner, played Billiards, at home 9PM.

**Mon. Aug. 21st** Quite cool. Letter from George. Rehearsed from 10 till 3PM, at Theatre 7PM. Played a Low Comedy part in a Drama called *Tom Smart*—its 1st representation in this country. I played John Randall. Mr. Spear, who was to have played the part, having gone into the country for a week, the part was given to me, much against my will, for I did not think I could do it justice. There is nothing like *trying*—I, expecting a failure, made a *hit!* Good House.

**Fri. Aug. 25th** Cool & pleasant. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. I played a part tonight that I will never play again, unless compelled to—Young Novall in *Fatal Dowry*. It is the most contemptible part ever written.

**Mon. Aug. 28th** Cloudy, close, warmer. Rehearsal AM. They treat me badly here in the way of business, casting me for old men, Fops, Low Comedy, and bad parts too. Reading PM, at Theatre 7PM. 1st night of a revival of Shakespeare's *Tempest*. Mr. W. Marshall as Prospero; Mrs. C. R. Thorne, Ariel. Best House of season.

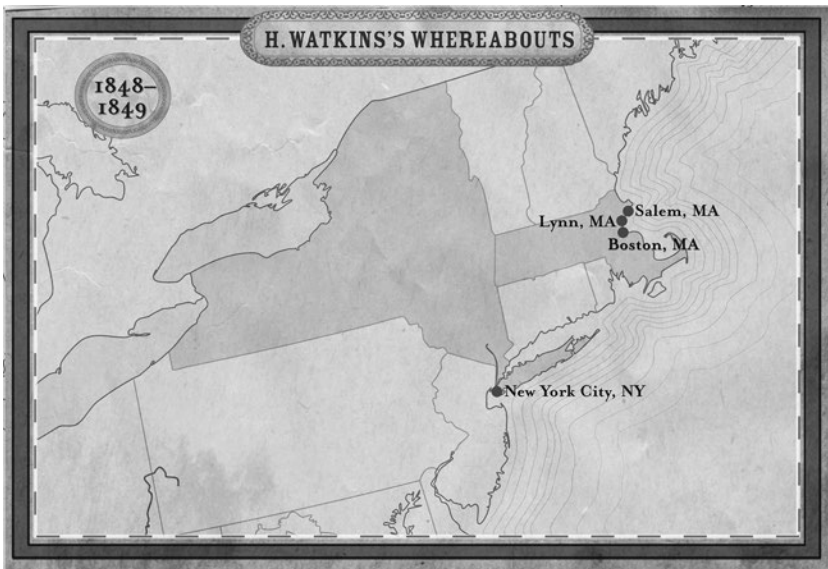
**Wed. Aug. 30th** Warm. Rehearsal AM. Received a letter from a young Lady signing herself Pauline Seymour, stating that she had fallen in love with me, and requesting an introduction. She shall have it. Theatre 7PM—Poor House. Whenever the House is bad, Thorne looks out of humor. When it's good, he is all smiles. You can always tell by his face whether the house is G or B.

**Thurs. Aug. 31st** Quite warm. Rehearsal AM. Sent a letter to *Pauline*. Studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Benefit of Mr. W. Marshall. He played *Richard III* & *Galliano* in *Orange Girl of Venice*. I did not like his readings of Richard. For instance, he said to the Officer in the Coffin Scene, "*Advance Thy halberd*"—the officer then, according to Mr. Marshall's instructions at Rehearsal, raised his halberd's point from his (Marshall's) belly to his breast, upon which he exclaims, *Higher than my breast*, which I thought was one of the vilest attempts at new readings I had ever heard. But Marshall deserves a great deal of credit, for he has, without much talent, and an inferior education, raised himself to the position of a *Leading Actor*—another proof of what perseverance will accomplish. Fair House.

## FOUR

1848–49

*Performing in Boston and New York City, Watkins gets sore from his portrayal of Edward Middleton in W. H. Smith's temperance drama The Drunkard (1844). He discusses the escalating conflict between Edwin Forrest and William Charles Macready and offers an account of the Astor Place Riot. He laments how fragile life is, meditating on cholera, fires, floods, and sinking ships across the country. In his quest to become better educated, he reads Plutarch's Lives, recording his reactions to each biography. Watkins exchanges letters with a devoted fan named Pauline.*



**Fri. Sept. 1st** Fine shower AM. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Thorne, I think, without exception, is the most *grasping, avaricious* man I have ever been acquainted with. We have been open now for three weeks, business in the city has been dull with everybody, the weather has been very warm, it is too early for Theatres to do more than pay their expenses, we are on the eve of a Presidential election, one of the most exciting that the country has known for years; notwithstanding all this Thorne has done a fair paying business. I do not suppose that he has made much money, if any—if the house should happen to be under expenses one night, no matter if the night before had been a *full* house, he thinks he is a ruined man. His face is like a weathercock, look at it and you can tell whether the house be good or bad. He works his company to death, and then appears to begrudge them their earnings—we Rehearse from 10AM to 2PM *certain*, sometimes 3PM; the performances are seldom over before 12. This night we played *Six Degrees of Crime* (six Acts), *Orange Girl* (3 Acts), *Rake's Progress* (3 Acts), *twelve* Acts in all, we got out by 1AM, two hours after the other Theatres. I got in bed a little after 2AM.

**Wed. Sept. 6th** Warm, Cloudy PM. Rehearsal AM, another letter from *Pauline*—answered it, and appointed a place of meeting. At Theatre 7PM, only in one piece, home at 11, studied till 12.

**Sat. Sept. 9th** Cloudy. Walking AM. Played Billiards PM, went on the Common to meet Pauline, but she did not come.

**Tues. Sept. 19th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, reading PM. I intend to try my hand at dramatising. If I could by any chance make a hit as a Dramatist, it would assist me materially. *I'll try*. At Theatre 6PM, three Dramas. Poorest house of the season.

**Sun. Sept. 24th** Warmer. At home all day—commenced *dramatising Cataline*—wrote one scene, took a walk PM, to bed at 10.

**Fri. Sept. 29th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM. Letter from Pauline. I could not tell by it whether she wanted to see me or not, she wanted me to correspond with her, but I can't stand that—and wrote her so, telling that I would like to see her. If I can't do so, I write no more letters. At Theatre 7PM—the Ravel family and Wallace. Good House.

**Tues. Oct. 3rd** Rain all day. Rehearsal AM, writing PM, at Theatre 7PM. Bad weather for Theatres. Fair House. After the first piece, I went into a private box and commenced talking Politics with Colonel Schouler, editor of the *Atlas paper*. He broke off suddenly, and told me I should get married. Well I believe I will—but it is not time yet.

**Tues. Oct. 10th** Shower AM. Rehearsal AM—they treat Forrest as if he were a God. Everybody is required to be perfect at Rehearsals. While standing behind the wings you must not talk above your breath. Every thing must be done as he says—be it right or wrong—he is *Sir Oracle*.<sup>1</sup> Thorne fawns on him like a spaniel dog. Studying PM, at Theatre 7PM.

**Tues. Oct. 17th** Warmer, cloudy. Rehearsal AM. W. Marshall refused the part of Clifford in *Jack Cade*. They brought it to me to do. I might have done it, if the stage manager had not said, “I ought to *jump*” at it—that made me mad. I laid the part down, and said I would *not* do it. There is nothing like being *spunky* when you can—I am the only young man in the company, and they cannot very well spare me. Writing and studying PM.

**Fri. Oct. 20th** Cool & cloudy. Rehearsal AM. Letter from Noble (England), he is married and doing very well—for which he may thank me—had I not supported him, he would have been in the Army at the present time, unless he had been killed. At Theatre 7PM, George arrived in town 6PM and came to the Theatre.

**Wed. Oct. 25th** Pleasant. Water was introduced into the city from Lake Co-chituate. There was a very large procession of Military, firemen, Societies, &c., in the PM. In the evening fireworks were displayed on the Common—everything was well got up, and all passed off pleasantly. The Theatre was crowded in the evening. George left for New York 5PM. I am alone now. Well, if I have good luck, in three years’ time, I shall be able to get married, and live comfortably, that is if I can get a good wife—I’ll try it.

**Sat. Oct. 28th** Cloudy—some rain. Thorne broke his engagement with his company by leasing the Theatre to Welch & Delavan for a circus for two months. I think Thorne is about the *darnedest rascal* that I ever had any deal-

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1. Watkins refers here to a line in Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, act 1, scene 1.

ings with—he would sacrifice his best friend if he could make fifty cents by it. Richard III had a *conscience*, although he could part with it when he found occasion to do so, but *Thorne* has *no conscience* at all. *Damn him*. Brougham & Burton open the Howard Athenaeum on Monday night with Macready—I am engaged at a salary of \$15 per week—**good**.

**Mon. Oct. 30th** Foggy—rainy—and everything disagreeable. Rehearsal AM, writing PM, at Theatre 7PM. Macready played Macbeth, the house was not very full—but the prices were \$1 and 50c for the first and second Boxes. There is a prejudice against Macready because he did not treat Forrest well, while the latter was in England—some of the audience hissed—but the majority applauded. He was called out.

**Mon. Nov. 6th** Cool & pleasant. Rehearsal. Went to box office—they offered me \$12. Refused it—I am engaged for \$15. At Theatre 7PM. Macready played Hamlet—I did not like it, as a whole—some parts of it I thought very good. Especially the closet scene. Good House.

**Fri. Nov. 10th** Cool & pleasant. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Macready's Benefit—Oakly in *Jealous Wife*, Wolsey in *Henry 8th*. The best house of his engagement. Macready may well be called the greatest Artist on the stage—I consider him the *only* one. He so disposes of all the Actors and Actresses on the stage that he kills their parts entirely, and without their being aware of it. When he is on the stage he contrives to fix the whole attention of the audience upon him—though the scene may belong to another character.

**Mon. Nov. 27th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, writing PM, at Theatre 7PM. I have known pieces to be changed on the night of the performance through the sickness or absence of an Actor but *Used Up* was substituted for *Don Cesar De Bazan* merely because Mrs. Ayling did not *like* the part of Maritana and did not want to *study* it—but her *husband* is *stage manager*—nothing like having authority.

**Fri. Dec. 1st** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, writing PM, went to Theatre 6PM and commenced dressing, when Mr. H. Ruan (Mr. Burton's treasurer) closed the doors—no performance. There had been some difficulty about the rent, and the business was also bad, so Burton very wisely closed the Theatre. Well, I am out of an engagement now.

**Sat. Dec. 16th** Unsettled weather. Finished dramatising the *Roman Traitor*. Went to Lynn with Dinneford and played—such playing I never saw. *My Fellow Clerk, Nature & Philosophy, & Rendezvous*. We did not know who was to play Hooker & Fag in the first piece until just before the curtain went up. Victim & Fag knew not the first word of their parts. Hooker was *perfect*, there was no Knitbron or Bailiff, and Mrs. Dinneford played the three women. I was the Tactic. I talked until I could talk no more, then spoke the *tag*. Two songs, a dance, and the three Farces were all done in one scene. Paper hung up for wings—a carpet put over the *top* of the stage. The house was full at 12½—and the audience were pleased! I received the sum of two dollars for my services—and expenses paid. Such is country acting.

**Fri. Dec. 22nd** Heavy fall of snow. Made an engagement at the Beach Street Dramatic Museum! \$15 per week, it may not hold out very long—but my engagement there assists in establishing me. Between seven and eight I accomplished something I had been trying to do for a long time—perseverance.

**Mon. Dec. 25th** Christmas. Raining all day. 7PM 1st appearance at the Beach Street Museum—*Belmour* in *Is He Jealous?* Good house—fine reception—made a *hit*.

**Mon. Jan. 1st 1849** Pleasant. 1848 has gone—it used me well for which I thank it. I have done more this year than for many years before. Now then for 1849. My prospects are good to commence the year with—how will it end? That's the question! Rehearsal AM, at Theatre 6PM. 1st night of the *Broker of Florence* written by Isaac C. Pray of this city. I did not think much of the play but it made a *hit*. I was complimented by the Author for playing the part of Ferdinand. J. Proctor, who played the leading part, was very imperfect. Best house of the season.

**Tues. Jan. 9th** Cool & pleasant. I refused to rehearse or play until the managers made some settlement with me as they could not very well spare me. They paid me at the rate of \$12 per week—though I was engaged at \$15. When I receive \$15 per week, it will be one of the *events*—the *great events* of my life.

**Sat. Jan. 13th** Milder. Rehearsal AM. PM visited the Boston Museum for the first time. The proprietor Mr. Kimball is reaping a golden harvest out of this place by his skill in management. He has collected together a lot of paintings,



stuffed animals, birds, &c., and under the *name* of *Museum* he gives *Theatrical performances* in what he calls the *Exhibition* room, which is a *Theatre* in every sense of that word—that is if a Parquette, Boxes, Orchestra, Scenery, Actors, stage manager, Prompter, Wardrobe Keeper, &c. constitute one. But it is *called* a *Museum*—and under that title is visited by the members of the church and others who would not enter the walls if it was called by its right name, *Theatre*.<sup>2</sup> Such conduct they call *religion*—I call it *hypocrisy*—which is a component part of human nature. At Theatre 7PM. Drilled some females for a new Ballet or Burlesque on the *Forty Thieves*.

**Sun. Jan. 14th** Warmer—snow melting fast. My Birthday—I am now commencing my 25th year. This day, seven years gone, I was in New York—no place to lay my head, or money to buy food with. Now I have got a wardrobe worth about \$300, \$150 in cash, receive \$12 per week, stand fair in my profession, and am in the full tide of success—now to see what my 25th year will bring forth. “*Hope for the best, expect the worst*”—that’s my motto. At home all day reading & studying.

**Mon. Jan. 15th** Cloudy AM, rain PM. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Benefit of Miss Mary B. Provost. She played Young Norval (*Douglas*), Kate in *Perfection*. She is young in the profession—has some talent—with study, may make a very fair Actress. Slim house. I led her out, when she was called—made my *first speech*—several voices cried out “*Three cheers for Harry Watkins.*”

**Fri. Jan. 26th** Cloudy AM, cleared off PM. Rehearsal AM. 3PM followed to the grave the remains of George Graham, a Comedian of considerable merit. He died of the dropsy, aged 40—native of London, England. At Theatre 7PM. Played Fudge in the Farce of the *Three Clerks*—but which I named *Fudge, Trudge, Drudge, and Grudge*. Complimented by Col. Schouler, Editor of the *Atlas*—praise from him is worth receiving.

**Mon. Jan. 29th** The weather is unsettled. Rehearsal AM. Wrote an Article for the *Boston Herald*, in vindication of Mr. Davies, who having been discharged

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2. The practice of producing plays in museums, such as Moses Kimball’s Boston Museum and P. T. Barnum’s American Museum (New York City), emerged during the 1840s. Attempting to create the impression of respectability by combining education and entertainment, museum proprietors displayed artifacts, artworks, live and preserved animals, “human curiosities,” and plays.

from the Theatre without any cause—had been called by the Manager an habitual drunkard—which was false. At Theatre 7PM.

**Wed. Jan. 31st** Pleasant but Cool. Rehearsal AM, reading PM, at Theatre 7PM. The Article I wrote for the *Herald* was published PM<sup>3</sup>—I made a hit. Well, there is a hit in literature—Good Harry.

**Thurs. Feb. 1st** Heavy fall of snow. Rehearsal AM. Some months ago a report was put into circulation that there had been immense quantities of gold found in California. It has since been confirmed—and is said to be almost inexhaustible. Everybody has now got the *Gold Fever*. Several companies have been formed who have purchased ships, put in a cargo, and started for the Gold region. Some men have thrown up good situations to go—even men possessing fortunes. Everybody has gone—is going—or wants to go. It has done some good, it has made business better. I shall stay at home—if any good Actors go, it will make it better for me.

**Sat. Feb. 10th** Cool—but pleasant. Walking PM. Mr. Caldwell, Manager, wishes me to engage for a smaller salary, or he will not be able to retain me—though he cannot well spare me. He has promised me a Benefit on the 23d of this month—though I doubt him.

**Wed. Feb. 14th** Pleasant but cold. Rehearsal AM. A friend of Pauline's met me, and gave me a note from her—she leaves for New York next week and wishes me to go there. I cannot conceive how a stranger, and a female, can profess love for a man whom she has never spoken to—and knows nothing of except by report. It's a funny world!

**Tues. Feb. 20th** Very cold. Rehearsal AM, making out bills for Benefit, at Theatre 7PM. Some accident happening to the gas pipes the lights went out—the curtain was lowered—had to light up with candles. Manager said it had injured the receipts \$50.

**Fri. Feb. 23rd** Bad prospects for my Benefit—bad weather. Rehearsal AM. Letter from George—he wants money. Thank fortune it is in my power to

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3. "More About the Beach Street Museum," *Boston Herald*, January 31, 1849, evening edition.

assist him—how I have longed for the time to come when I might be able to do so. At Theatre 7PM, my *first Benefit* in Boston—*lost \$20 by it*. I laid myself in the manager's (one *Mr. Caldwell*) power and he took advantage of it. I was to have a one-third benefit—but having no written agreement he would only give me one third of the receipts, providing they were \$150, if under that sum *nothing*—there was but \$108. I played Montaldo in a piece written by Epes Sargent, Esq. called *The Genoese*—made a hit. I put at the head of the bills that I played the part at “Corpus Christi,” “Texas” at the especial request of General Taylor—but Taylor would not *draw*.

**Sat. Feb. 24th** Beautiful day after my *benefit*. Last night Caldwell brought me a paper to sign, engaging me for the season, at \$12 per week and a fourth benefit. I wouldn't sign it, but wrote other terms, to play the “Juvenile & Light Comedy” business, at \$12 per week and a third clear benefit, for two months—he wouldn't sign that. As I left the office this morning, I told the stage manager that I would play no more after this week—a few moments after, Mr. Caldwell came to me and said that he would sign my paper. *Hurra! hurra! hurra!* I have brought one manager to his senses, even though he may break the engagement afterwards. Performance PM. J. Proctor refused to play for my benefit, giving as a reason that he expected to leave town before Friday. This was said on Tuesday—now I find out that he does not leave town until Monday next. I'll not forget this.

**Fri. Mar. 16th** Cloudy—cleared off 5PM. Rehearsal AM, walking, writing & studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Played Edward Middleton in a play called *The Drunkard*. The piece had been played at the Boston Museum for 130 nights some four years ago, when the Temperance Fever was at its height. Mr. W. H. Smith, an old Actor, and who at that time was a hard-drinking man, signed the pledge of total abstinence. This play was written for him—in fact he wrote the greater portion of his own part himself. He made a great hit in the performance of it. The people looked upon it as a faithful portraiture of himself—it was but playing his own life. He was *the part*. Under these circumstances, when I was cast for the part I felt inadequate to the task assigned to me but it was for a Benefit (Mrs. Reid's) and courtesy would have forbidden my refusing to play it, had I not been obligated to do it by my engagement. I went at it—the night came. My greatest hope was to get through the part respectably. Applause I did not think of—did not dream of. I felt nervous—I knew the greater portion of the audience had seen the part played—comparisons I felt

would be made—and I was confident of falling in *that* scale. I heard my cue—went on—no reception, or at least but trifling. The audience did not expect much, and were determined not to give much. My first good speech received a *little* applause—my exit a little more. Every scene applause increased—as though the audience were waking from a sleep—perhaps a dream. At the end of the second act, *loud* applause. The third act, applause increased to the end of it—I *had the audience with me*. The first scene of the fourth act—I was discovered lying in the street, a ragged, drunken, miserable wretch with the *delirium tremens*. The scene progressed—the *audience still with me*—applauded every speech—until, through my ravings, I fell upon the stage in convulsions—*then*—they **shouted**. At the fall of the curtain, I was called out—received *nine cheers*—made a speech—and went off. Congratulations poured in upon me from every side—*friends* and *enemies*. It was pronounced a great piece of acting. Old Actors had shed tears over it. But why dwell upon it—I heed it not. In another week they may *hiss me*—such is *popular caprice*. The House was very good.

**Sat. Mar. 17th** Pleasant AM, clouded up PM. Rehearsal AM, writing PM. Played Billiards after supper. My body is very sore from the effect of the *delirium tremens* scene of *The Drunkard*.

**Wed. Mar. 28th** Drizzling. Writing all day—at Theatre 7PM. 3d night of *The Drunkard*. When the curtain went down the audience commenced calling for me, but I hurried off to my dressing room—and got nearly undressed when the Prompter came after me and said the audience would not let the performance go on until I made my appearance. I went out and *made a speech*.

**Fri. Apr. 6th** Beautiful day. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. *My Benefit*—I had out the strongest bill of the season. *Fudge, Trudge, &c., King & Freebooter, Your Life's in Danger, "Delirium scene from The Drunkard,"* and *Founded On Facts*—but with all this bill, I could raise but \$56. "*Nil Desperandum*."<sup>4</sup>

**Mon. Apr. 9th** Pleasant. AM started for Salem to play one night. The first thing that saluted my ears was a man on horseback ringing a large bell and crying out, "At Mechanic's Hall will be performed this evening the tragedy

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4. *nil desperandum* (Latin): never despair.

of *Virginius*—the part of Virginius by Mr. J. Proctor, the great tragedian—Icilius by the *celebrated Boston favorite*, Mr. H. Watkins!” Salem is rather a pretty town—and numbers among its inhabitants some of the richest families of the state. 7½PM made my first appearance in Salem, playing Icilius (*Virginius*). The attendance was not very numerous. I was promised \$5 for my services and had the *extraordinary good luck* to get \$2—which just about covered my expenses. One Mr. Addams—alias Foster—was the Manager. He had formerly been an auctioneer (I suppose that accounts for his *knocking down* on me), smuggler, and Yankee Pedlar. Another Addams (brother to the Tragedian A. A. Addams) was to have played Appius Claudius but when the time arrived he was “*Non est inventus*”<sup>5</sup>—the manager went on for the part. Mrs. Kean told C. Webb to go to England and show Sheridan Knowles what he had written. Had the Author been present at the performance of *Virginius* in Salem, and seen Mr. Addams (alias Foster) in the part of Appius Claudius—he would have heard language—and such language!—that the flowery emanations of his poetical imagination would have been put to the blush. Whether he improved upon the Author, or not, I am unable to say, as he spoke in a language with which I have not the slightest acquaintance. It might have been Hebrew or Latin—though it sounded like Greek to me. In the Forum scene he was inimitable. He continued to have the Forum—an old chair covered with a dirty white rag, it might have been a sheet—elevated upon a large box, white-washed, placed within a foot of the wing. By this admirable management he was enabled to repeat after the Prompter—who was quietly ensconced behind the wing—the words of the author, in a style of delivery resembling a man troubled with the asthma. Slept at the City Hotel.

**Fri. Apr. 13th** Cloudy AM, cleared off PM. Writing PM, at Theatre 7PM. The house was bad—the Burlesque I think is a failure. I think the days of the “*Beach Street Museum*” under its present management are numbered.

**Thurs. Apr. 19th** Windy. Rehearsal AM. Finished dramatising a novel entitled *Guildford or a Trial by his Peers*. Idling PM, at Theatre 7PM.

**Fri. Apr. 20th** Pleasant AM. Rehearsal AM—severe headache arising from a heavy blow on the head with an axe. Studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Some rain. Benefit of Mrs. C. Mestayer. Mrs. C. R. Thorne volunteered and played “Lis-

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5. *non est inventus* (Latin): nowhere to be found.

sette” in *Swiss Cottage*—*Angel of the Attic* & *Model Modern Aladdin* were also performed. Good House. After the 1st act of *Aladdin*, Mr. Mestayer went to the box office for a settlement—which the managers refused, saying that she was not entitled to a Benefit, producing a written engagement that she had made with Mr. J. Proctor, but which was annulled by her leaving the Theatre after the trouble she had about her first Benefit. She says she then made a verbal engagement with Mr. Caldwell, by which she was entitled to a Benefit every month—this he denies. Mestayer would not allow his wife to go on for the second act until he received half of the house—the managers blustered but he would not yield—so at last they were compelled to *pay up*. The house was returned \$174.

**Tues. Apr. 24th** Warmer. It took me four hours to get my salary but *I got it at last*. It is a singular fact that I have been disappointed in everything that I felt confident would transpire. If I was certain of good it would be sure to turn out bad—and *vice-versa*. If I could only demonstrate to my own mind that I should never be President of these U.S. I dare say I should find myself elevated to the height of all Henry Clay’s ambition—the Presidential chair. Yet as I cannot but entertain the idea that I shall, at some future day, be called upon to fill that office—why, I dare say I shall be disappointed. 3PM packed up, 5PM took the Fall River route for New York in company with Mr. & Mrs. C. Mestayer—she fainted on the passage. Pleasant trip.

**Wed. Apr. 25th** Pleasant. Reached N.Y. . . .

**Mon. May 7th** Gloomy. At home AM, walking & writing PM, at Bowery Theatre 7PM. Mr. Hamblin as Macbeth—only saw the first Act—did not like his impersonation of the part. Mrs. Shaw as Lady Macbeth was very good. *Great Row* at the Astor Place Opera House—got up to drive Mr. Macready off the stage—apples—eggs—pennies—chairs &c. were thrown at him. He got as far as the 1st scene of the third Act, but the tumult increasing, he was obliged to leave the Theatre.

**Tues. May 8th** Raining. Studying Romeo. The papers today openly charge Mr. Forrest with being the getter up of the row against Macready. He contradicts it in a letter published in the *Courier & Enquirer*. 7PM attended a lecture on Memory & intellectual improvement by O. S. Fowler, Phrenologist—I was very much pleased.

**Thurs. May 10th** Pleasant. Walk AM. Wrote a letter. Another great row took place at the “Astor Place Opera House.” When Mr. Macready was driven from the stage on the 7th, it was his intention not to appear again. But several leading men of the city sent him a note requesting him to play, assuring him of protection. A large police force was in attendance. The house was filled early—the play commenced—and when Macready appeared he was greeted with applause mingled with hisses—but his friends were in the majority and the rioters were apprehended. On the outside there were from five to ten thousand persons assembled—the greater portion drawn there by curiosity. The rioters commenced throwing stones at the windows, and endeavored to force the doors. After some time a company of horsemen & two or three companies of Infantry soldiers came upon the ground. They marched up in front of the house & formed a hollow square, they had hardly taken this position when they fired upon the crowd. Everybody thought the cartridges were blank—I could hardly credit it when told that several persons were shot. Several volleys were fired. Five persons were lying, wounded & dying, in one drug store. A man was brought into a barroom where I was that had a musket ball through his breast just above the heart—he died shortly after. The people were very much excited. I think the Mayor (Woodhull) is very much to blame—his conduct was such as to excite the rioters to resistance to the laws. The lessees of the Theatre went to him to see if they should play, he told them to do so and he would protect them. The military were called out, and paraded the park. This made the mob more determined, and the Mayor, instead of sending the Military in the forepart of the evening, before the mob got underway, they were not brought on the ground until late, when the rioters were flushed with success. They assert that the Riot Act was read. I was in the crowd and heard nothing of it. It was a disgraceful affair, and will generate a hatred of the aristocracy by the lower classes, that will show itself upon every occasion.

**Fri. May 11th** Pleasant. Walking AM, reading PM. Large meeting in the Park 6PM. Michael Walsh, Strahan, Rynders, & Commerford made very inflammatory speeches—Walsh denounced the Mayor & city authorities as murderers. I fear this row will injure the Theatre, for a while at least.

**Sat. May 12th** Pleasant. Reading AM, walking PM. Had a talk with Barnum, proprietor of the American Museum, about playing *The Drunkard* in Philadelphia, at his Museum there. Went to the Broadway Theatre 7PM. Forrest as

Metamora. Miss Fanny Wallack played Nahmeokee—she is a very good Actress. I saw Dyott for the first time—did not think much of him—he played Walter. Mr. Fredericks as Fitzarnold was bad. His death was *funny*—and *being funny* raised a laugh. The rest of the company was passable.

**Tues. May 15th** Pleasant. The Jury that sat on the bodies of the persons shot on Thursday returned a verdict justifying the authorities—but adding that bloodshed might have been prevented, had more police been called out in the early part of the evening. Walk AM, at home PM, at Broadway Theatre 7PM. Saw *Monte-Cristo*. Dyott played the Abbe Faria very well—and if spasmodic twitchings of the mouth, a constant rolling of the eyes upward, long pauses before speaking, and, when speaking something which it is necessary everybody should hear, to breathe it so low that a person sitting in the fourth seat from the orchestra could scarcely distinguish a syllable—if all these constitute good acting, then, and only then, C. E. Lester played Monte Cristo finely. The piece itself has little merit but as a spectacle. There was a good house.

**Tues. May 22nd** Rather warm at M.<sup>6</sup> Cooler in the eve. Writing AM. Shakespeare's "*On horror's head horrors accumulate*"<sup>7</sup> is very applicable to the newspaper reports of the last week. On the 18th we had news that the steamer *Empire* (Capt. W. W. Tupper) on her upward trip to Albany, on the night of the 17th at 10PM, was run into by the schooner *Noah Brown* (Mr. Snyder of Troy, owner), staving in the starboard side of the steamer (forward). She sunk in a few minutes—several lives were lost—18 have been found—more missing. Report of a great fire at St. Louis on the 18th. 27 steamboats burnt, and over 400 houses, loss estimated at \$6,000,000. Another fire at Milwaukee (Wisconsin), \$60,000 worth of property destroyed—and another large fire at Watertown (New York). At New Orleans, a crevasse had occurred in the levees, and the city is at the present time threatened with an overflow—part of it is already overflowed. The Cholera is making fearful strides through the West—Danforth Marble died at Louisville with it, on the 12th. *Poor Dan!* He lived *too fast*—he was a good fellow and beloved by the profession—peace to his manes! General Worth died at Antonio de Bexar (Texas) on the 7th inst.,<sup>8</sup> of the Cholera. He was as brave a man as ever drew a sword—and after serv-

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6. M (Latin): abbreviation for *meridiem* (midday).

7. Shakespeare, *Othello*, act 3, scene 3.

8. *inst.* (Latin): abbreviation for *instante mense* (this month).



ing through the last war with England, and gaining great distinction in the late war with Mexico, being in nearly all the hard-fought battles—it is hard that he should be cut off by sickness, his well-earned laurels yet so fresh. He was in his 56th year.

**Wed. May 23rd** Warm. This day, eleven years [ago], I entered the Army of the United States, a boy of 13 years. What have I not undergone since that time—disease, want, almost starvation. All that man—or boy—could suffer and live, I have suffered. Now I am a man and my pathway through life seems bright—but it is hard to tell what the future may bring forth. “Hope for the best, expect the worst” (my motto). Wrote to George AM.

**Mon. May 28th** Pleasant & Unpleasant. Writing AM, walking PM. I want to play one night at the Bowery Theatre, but can’t screw my courage to the sticking point,<sup>9</sup> and ask the manager—Mr. Hamblin—for an opening. It is something that I never could account for—that, knowing my own ability, and having full confidence in it, I never could seek preferment. I see men all around me in my profession holding situations, that I feel, and *know* myself to be, much more capable of filling. I do not make this remark from any vain or conceited opinion of my own talents—but I predicate it upon what managers themselves have said. I have known them to acknowledge me to be much superior as an Actor to others—and yet, in making up a company, they would give them the preference. But the fault lies with myself. Prosperity is seated at the summit of a steep mountain, more lofty than the loftiest of earth’s great hills. To reach it we have but to choose a faithful guide—our own indomitable perseverance—to lead us, and then with energy at our back, we may commence the ascent with some hope. If that brittle thing, the cord of life, holds out of reaching the hard-won goal—and, wearied with the arduous task, gain a short and sweet repose upon the soft cushion of Prosperity’s seat, until at last we take that sleep which ends alike all trouble—all joy—the sleep of *death*. 7PM at the Bowery Theatre. Saw *William Tell*—Hamblin played Tell. His voice is broken—he should give up acting. Mrs. Shaw played Emma. I have not seen her play much, nor is Emma a part to judge her in—but from what I have seen of her, she appears too monotonous in her manner of speaking, and there is a great sameness in her acting. The house was good. Raining.

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9. An allusion to a line by Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, act 1, scene 7.

**Thurs. May 31st** Rainy. Studying AM, downtown AM, studying PM. There is a fine chance for a young man in this city, as there are no Actors of any moment, at present, on the stage. If a stranger, of much talent and an American, could get a chance to open at the Broadway Theatre, and should make a hit, with the genius and energy necessary to back it up—he would set the Theatrical world in a blaze. He would have a clear field, for there is not an Actor on the American stage to dispute the palm<sup>10</sup> with him, in fact there is not an Actor of *real genius* in this country, and I doubt, if in England.

**Wed. June 6th** Pleasant. Walking AM. Introduced to Mr. Stevens, the Stage Manager of the Bowery Theatre—told to call at 12M tomorrow and he would let me know if I could have a chance to open. Reading PM. Went to Chatham (or National) Theatre—saw a new piece called *Three Years After*. It was like all of the *Mose* pieces—*trash*. Good House.

**Thurs. June 7th** Warm. I have been rather unwell today—Cholera symptoms. Reading. Saw Mr. Stevens agreeably to appointment—he had not yet spoken to Mr. Hamblin, the manager—call again tomorrow—pshaw! Why not say at once that you cannot or will not give me an opening, that will be the final answer. Oh, how these managers do love applicants, it makes them feel their *dignity*—bah! I despise such *things*.

**Fri. June 8th** Weather very close AM—rained M, cooler PM. Cholera decreasing. Called again on Mr. Stevens—he was busy—sent word to leave my address, and he would send me a note this PM. I can lay no great claim to prescience—but I can easily divine the contents of the note—would but can't.

**Sat. June 9th** Pleasant—being cooler. Reading AM, walk PM, at home in the eve. Mr. Stevens did not even deign to send me a note—not wishing to hurt my feelings by a refusal, I suppose. *All right*—we're all born, not dead yet.

**Wed. June 13th** Cloudy—the atmosphere is very heavy—clear PM. Letter from Thorne offers me \$14 per week—that's rising—studying PM, at home eve.

**Mon. June 18th** Pleasant. At home all day reading Phrenology—I find it very instructing. Evening, went with Mother to visit a cousin—Jane Mott.

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10. to dispute the palm: to challenge or question an individual's preeminence.

When I was an infant she nursed me (she was then 15 years old) and would sit for hours with me in her lap, and when asked if she was not tired, she would say, “no, let him sleep until he awakes himself.” She loved me as only a woman loves—and I was attached to her with that devoted attachment natural to a child, and which is born with us, though it becomes blunted by age and intercourse with the *world*. . . . After a lapse of 20 years, during which time we have never seen each other—we met—but, oh, how! When we parted I was an infant—she a beautiful girl of fifteen—full of life, and beloved by all who knew her. I was now a man, full of health, and the world fair before me—while she lay on her *death bed*—her friends having given up all hope of her recovery. She grasped my hand in hers and began to talk of the past. I have heard of the “touch of Nature,”<sup>11</sup> but never realized it before. Although I have not seen her for so long a time and could have no recollection of her, being so young when we parted, yet it appeared to me then as if I had been with her all my life. I don’t remember of anything ever striking me so forcibly. I shall never forget it.

**Tues. June 19th** Rather warm. Concluded an engagement with Thorne for Boston. It’s the best engagement I ever had, and if he keeps open I may be benefited materially by it—but I must not be too sanguine. Thorne is like ice in hot weather—not very substantial. Reading Phrenology PM, at Bowery Theatre 7PM. Poor House.

**Sun. June 24th** Cloudy. At home AM. PM went to Jane’s, she is failing very fast. Osmer, my brother, came in while I was there, he pretended not to know me. I took no notice of him. When we went away, he walked with Mother while I took another course. At the ferry we met again—he came up and shook hands with me, saying I had entirely grown out of his recollection—that had Mother not told him who I was he should never have known me. *Oh, fudge!* He knew me well enough—for he passed me in the street last Sunday evening and I knew by his actions that he recognized me. But a few years ago he denied me his house—times have changed since then. I can now hold my head as high as any of the family. A good coat and a little success in life makes considerable change in men—although their blood, bones, and flesh may remain the same—such is life. Walk after supper—good wash—to bed early.

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11. Possibly referring to a line from Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*, act 3, scene 3.

**Wed. June 27th** Pleasant—Reading AM. Started off PM to see Mr. Hamblin about playing two nights of next week with him. I *saw* him, but could not bring myself to *speak* to him, my courage was not screwed to the sticking place. Whenever I form a *determination* to accomplish anything I do not pause until it is consummated—stopping at nothing—but, unless fully resolved, I generally persuade myself to put it off. This may be called irresolution, but it is not so. I seldom act from impulse, never attempting a thing until I have weighed the chances pro and con—when my mind is made up, I am resolution itself.

**Fri. June 29th** Cloudy—cleared off PM. Commenced reading Plutarch's *Lives*.<sup>12</sup> How much better the mind feels after a perusal of such works as this than when it has been—I may say—vitiating by reading the light literature of the day, which, by its cheapness has made its way into almost every house—filling the parlor tables and thrusting history into the garrets, there to moulder away under an accumulation of dust, the ignorant maidservant not thinking it worth her while to pay any attention to the care of those “*old Books*,” which their masters or mistresses have thrown aside, as being too dull and tedious for their diseased imaginations, and—in order to understand—calling for a greater exertion of the reasoning faculties than they are willing to bestow—whereas, the *trash* they are accustomed to read, pleases infinitely better, and does not even require *common sense* to understand, nothing being left to the comprehension. How easy to discern this corrupted taste in the attendance at our Theatres. Those dedicated to the sublime and intellectual productions of Shakespeare, Knowles, and others of the great poets who have written for the stage, are entirely deserted—while others that revel in such pieces as abound with “*terrific tableaux*,” “*Grand Denouements*,” “desperate combats,” great rows, and all the concomitants of melodrama, are nightly crowded. I do not inveigh against all works of fiction, for there are many such worthy of recommendation, and really necessary to a refined education—but I do believe it to be a sin to waste time over the filth that is daily hawked about our streets.

**Sun. July 1st** Pleasant. Reading AM, visited poor Jane PM. She is declining gradually but surely—I think she will not live to see the 15th of this month.

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12. *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans*, written during the second century CE by the Roman writer Plutarch, is a collection of biographies detailing the virtues and failures of renowned men in classical Greece and Rome.

**Tues. July 3rd** Pleasant. Finished reading *Julius Caesar*. How rarely do we find in either ancient or modern history one in whom the highest qualities of the warrior and the statesman were so strongly interwoven. Although to my thinking he excelled as the former, his capacity for either was equal. This is easily accounted for when we consider his boundless ambition—which, as the leader of a victorious army, would not let him rest while there remained a single enemy in arms, or a nation to be subjugated. That ambition which taught him to despise all fatigue or danger. His life was staked on every action, the enemy could not conquer and he survive. Often did a battle depend on his individual prowess, and he was never found wanting. He possessed in an eminent degree the great essentials of a successful General—sagacity, foresight, daring, and the skill to take advantage of every accident. What he lacked in numbers he made up by stratagem. He likewise took care to gain what every leader should—the affection of his soldiers. Now this very ambition, which made him successful as the Warrior, as the Statesman cost him his life, for had he but rest contented as the first man in Rome, and the idol of the people, he might have died a death more natural, but his ambition was not satisfied with this, he wished for absolute power, and though he rejected the crown offered him by Antony at the Lupercal, yet it was palpable to all he did so reluctantly, and that it was but a trial of the people’s feelings, to see how they would take it. But they shouted in the wrong place for him—they shouted when he *refused* it, not when the crown was *offered*. Yet this act, together with others, cost him his life, for it made Brutus—who feared that Caesar would subvert the liberties of his country—his foe, without whom, that conspiracy would never have grown to so great a head, as many of the leading men of Rome would not have joined it, had not Brutus been its leader, for they knew him to be an honorable man. Caesar’s ambition made him and destroyed him. I believe he was a good and feeling man, and one who loved his country, but his ambition was too much for his patriotism. He sought to make Rome great, and raise her above all the nations of the earth, and he did so. There he should have stopped, but his restless ambition could not endure inactivity, so that when Rome stood the pinnacle of the world, Caesar would have stood upon Rome, but he became giddy and fell. Had I but written this lame and impotent critique before Shakespeare wrote his *Julius Caesar*, I should certainly accuse him of plagiarism, in making Brutus harp so much (in his speech to the people) on Caesar’s Ambition.<sup>13</sup>

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13. In this volume of the diary, Watkins dedicates several entries to meditations on other

**Wed. July 4th** Pleasant. This is the Birthday of American Liberty, the 73d Anniversary of the “Declaration of Independence.” What a glorious retrospection from thirteen feeble colonies with a population of three millions, governed by a foreign King, and ruled by laws made 3000 miles off, has arisen one of the most powerful nations of the earth—the “*United States of America*”—now numbering some twenty-five million of inhabitants governed by their own laws and choosing their own rulers. The 13 *colonies* have grown to thirty *states*, and God only knows how many in perspective. Downtrodden Europe, having sniffed the air of Freedom wafted across the broad Atlantic from America’s Liberty tree, charmed with the delectable perfume, and longing to taste its fruit, yet unwilling to leave the graves of their sires, determined to transplant it. They did so—yet ere it had maturely grown their tyrant masters hewed it down, but its roots being sound it will again spring up, and if those who tend its culture prove firm and watchful they may yet enjoy its delicious sweets—but they must first destroy the deleterious weeds whose poisonous exhalations are pernicious to its growth.

The city fathers have been much censured for annulling the order for the military procession customary on this day. The authorities thought it would be imprudent while the cholera is raging. Otherwise the day passed off finely—there was a beautiful display of fireworks in the evening at the different parks. I played Billiards all the evening.

**Tues. July 24th** Pleasant. Reading AM, visiting PM. I fear that my situation with Thorne will not be very pleasant, if I may judge from the persons whom I understand he has engaged—but if I have an equal chance I do not fear any of them. There’s no such word as fail. . . .

**Tues. Aug. 7th** Pleasant. Walking & Reading. It is singular that not anything turns out as I expect it. I thought to be in Boston today and my brother arrived just in time to prevail upon me to stay this week.

**Wed. Aug. 15th** Beautiful day. Walking—packing up—preparing to start 5PM. Goodbye, Mother! Goodbye George! God bless you both! Hurra for Boston! The sky seems clear—may it continue so. On board steamer *Bay State*—

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men profiled in Plutarch’s *Lives*, including Pompey the Great (July 5), Cato (July 6), Alexander the Great (July 7), Brutus (July 8), Marcus Crassus (July 9), Sertorius (July 10), Cicero (July 11), Mark Antony (July 16), Pyrrhus (July 20), Gaius Marius (July 21), Sulla (July 24), Lucullus (July 26), and Timoleon and Aemilius Paullus (July 28).

good view of the great metropolis of America. How I long for the day that, living with my Mother, I may call my native city—*home*! Read newspaper—turned in at ½ past 8.

**Thurs. Aug. 16th** After a good night's rest, took the cars at Fall River at 4AM and reached Boston at 7AM. Put up at the U.S. hotel—Holman & Silsbee, proprietors. Visiting all day. Business seems dull.

**Sun. Aug. 19th** Shower AM. Pleasant PM. Took a walk to Mount Washington—it gives a fine view of the city of Boston, and its harbor. What feelings does it awaken in the breast of an American when, gazing upon the piles of earth thrown up to serve as a rude fortification, he thinks upon the brave hearts whose willing hands did rear them. While calling to mind the events of those days, my imagination could almost picture the form of the “Father of his country” as he stood upon these heights, his glass in his hand, watching the movements of those who would enslave his beloved country, and giving his directions—not to his myrmidons, but his noble compatriots in the cause of Liberty, the *children* of that country of which *Washington* was the *parent*. Study—to bed at 10.

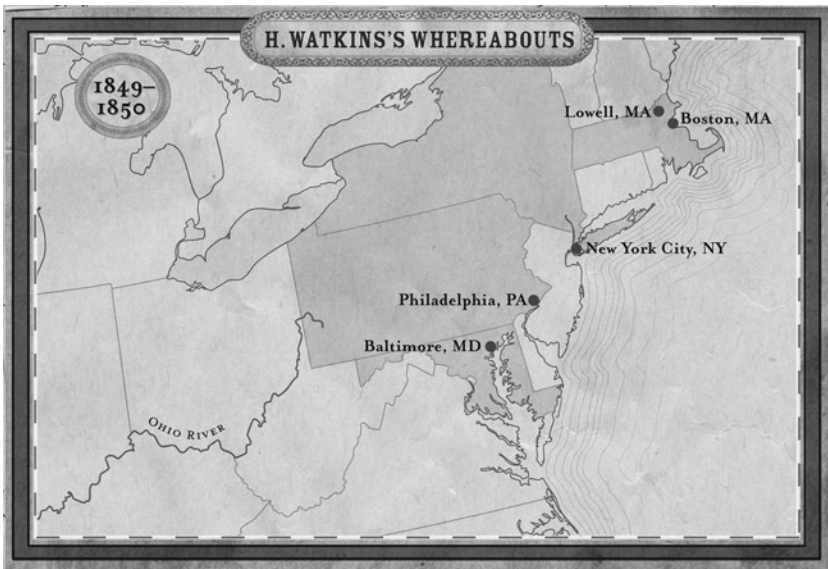
**Mon. Aug. 20th** Warm & sultry. Up at 6AM studying. Rehearsal 10AM, studying and writing to George PM, at Theatre 7PM. Opening night—crowded house—*Richard III* & *Forest Rose*. Thorne played Richard. I was the Tressel. On my entrance I was greeted with a fine reception—proving that I am a favorite, and if Thorne gives me a fair chance, I will be a still greater favorite ere the season closes, or, at least, I will deserve to be so by my exertions. Study—to bed at 12 M[idnight].

**Thurs. Aug. 30th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM. Thorne has commenced discharging some of his people. I think the “Beach Street” is doomed—he'll not keep open both Theatres—that's certain.

## FIVE

1849–50

*Touring through several northeastern cities, Watkins reflects upon the unfair business practices of theater managers. He ponders the prevalence of drunkenness in the theater and discusses the impact of his delirium tremens scene in *The Drunkard* on audience members. He sees and critiques performances by Charlotte Cushman, the Ravels, Frank Chanfrau, Fanny Davenport, and J. B. Booth Sr. Toward the end of the season, he engages with William E. Burton at the Arch Street Theatre in Philadelphia, and briefly with Thomas S. Hamblin at the Bowery Theatre in New York City, but as the next season approaches he has trouble finding work—all the managers seeming to prefer English actors over native talent.*





**Mon. Sept. 3rd** Cool. Rehearsal AM. I gave Thorne a manuscript of mine to read, about ten days since—my mind being made up to leave Thorne, unless he dealt fairly by me, and finding that he would not do so, I concluded it best to get the play from him before saying anything about leaving. He told me that he had sent it out to his house, some three miles from the city. I went out there, but it could not be found. So I think it was but a plan of his to gain time, that he might have it copied off. He is a *most consummate villain*. At Theatre 7PM. 1st night of Hackett. GH.

**Tues. Sept. 4th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM. Being cast for Master Slender in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, I went to Thorne, “I can’t play that part.” “Well, suppose we put an end to the engagement?” “Very good! When?” “On Thursday?” Yes!—so that Thursday ends my engagement with Mr. C. R. Thorne. Fortune grant we may never meet again. Miss Charlotte Cushman came into the front of the Theatre last night—the audience, seeing her, gave three cheers. They hardly commenced to shout before she retreated from the box and left the Theatre, not wishing to be the “observed of all observers.”<sup>1</sup>

**Fri. Sept. 7th** Close & sultry. Rehearsal AM. Thorne closes the Beach Street tomorrow, throwing a lot of actors out of employment, the greater portion of them without the means to pay one week’s board—I believe there will yet come a day of retribution on this *villain’s* head! At Theatre 7PM. Benefit of Mr. Hackett. *Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Monsieur Mallet*. I played Ford and Freeman—my last appearance.

**Sat. Sept. 8th** Pleasant. Squared up with Thorne, and I hope to keep square with him. Settled all my bills and left Boston 5PM for New York. I never left any place with so much regret as I have Boston. I made a great many friends, and was respected by all who knew me, and indeed, if there is anything of which I feel proud, it is the good name that I have always left behind me. Goodbye Boston. I love your very stones, nothing but *villainy* compels me to leave thee. May our separation be short.

**Sun. Sept. 9th** Pleasant. Reached N.Y. 7AM. Took lodgings at “Lovejoy’s Hotel,” corner of Beekman & Park Row—cleaned up, called on Byrne—walked about town all day—to bed at 8PM.

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1. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 3, scene 1.

**Mon. Sept. 10th** Pleasant. Walking AM. Called on Mr. H. Philips, prospects of an engagement at “Niblo’s Garden”<sup>2</sup>—it would be a good start for me if I could get an opening there—to bed early.

**Thurs. Sept. 13th** Pleasant. Called on C. Burke, Stage Manager of the “National,” AM to learn if he could give me an opening—the same old answer—I’m busy now! *Call again.* At National.

**Fri. Sept. 14th** Pleasant. Called on Mr. Blake, S.M. of the “Broadway Theatre,” who offered me an engagement, but no certainty of business.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Dyott, having possession of all the Juveniles, would throw me into a great many of the walking gentlemen, so I refused Mr. Blake’s offer—much to his disappointment. Now my chances in New York are lost. At Niblo’s Theatre 7PM—the Ravel family were playing. The house was full and so it should be, as it is the only place of amusement in the city where a person can sit of a warm evening and get a draught of fresh air. It is the best ventilated house in this country—there being no houses contiguous to it, by throwing open the doors and windows they catch all the air that is stirring.

**Mon. Sept. 17th** Close & sultry. Chance of an engagement a month hence, if I can hold out that long—but my funds are growing *lesser*. Started for Philadelphia on the steamer *Penobscot*, by way of Cape May. Reached Cape May 8AM.

**Tues. Sept. 18th** Philadelphia after 3PM. Quartered at Copple & Jones, Dock Street. At Arch Street Theatre 7PM. *Strathmore*, a new tragedy from England, was played—the language was good—the sentiment also—but the play lacked effect. Mr. Marshall, S.M., says he would like to have me in about six weeks—too far off.

**Fri. Sept. 21st** Pleasant. Walking all day. I must try Baltimore tomorrow. If I fail in making an engagement there, my case will be desperate. At Arch Street 7PM.

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2. Niblo’s Garden opened in 1823 as a pleasure garden (a privately owned outdoor entertainment venue), offering refreshments, illuminations, exhibitions, and musical performances. After a fire in 1846, it closed and reopened in 1849 with a large, fully enclosed theatre. For more on pleasure gardens, see Naomi J. Stubbs, *Cultivating National Identity through Performance: American Pleasure Gardens and Entertainment* (New York: Palgrave, 2013).

3. business: line of business or the possession of parts.

**Sat. Sept. 22nd** Cloudy. Took the cars for Baltimore, where I arrived, all dust, about 2PM—put up at the American Hotel. Called on Mr. Owens, manager of Baltimore Museum. I don't think I shall be able to do anything here. At Museum 7PM. Mr. & Miss Logan were playing, he is a good comedian, but I do not admire her. The company is small and not the best.

**Mon. Sept. 24th** Pleasant. No chance to act—must back to the Quaker city. Left Baltimore 1PM on steamer *Constitution* for Frenchtown—a place numbering three houses and a barn. Kept waiting there one hour for the cars. Off at 6PM for New Castle ( $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour's ride)—thence to Philadelphia by steamer, arriving at that city about ten PM. Took rooms at the Columbia House, Chestnut Street, below 7th, MacKenzie & Ferguson, proprietors. Sought out Mr. Owens and delivered him a letter from his partner. It appeared to contain something concerning me, as Owens asked me to call on him at ten tomorrow. What can it be about—an engagement?—perhaps! To bed at 11PM. The thoughts of playing a *star engagement*, of six nights, kept me awake until past 2AM—building castles in the air with the fifty or sixty dollars I thought I saw in the perspective.

**Tues. Sept. 25th** Pleasant. Called on Mr. Owens as per agreement—down tumbled all those castles that took me two long sleepless hours last night to raise. The letter from his partner told him to engage me if Mr. Murdoch did not accept, which, *of course*, he did—Nil desperandum! Walking about all day gazing into the windows of jewelers & brokers and wishing I had sufficient of the precious stuff, placed so annoyingly before one's eyes, to place me beyond the powers of Managers. At Arch Street 7PM. Chanfrau played William in *Black-Eyed Susan*. His imitations are very good, and he plays *Mose* well, but *he cannot play anything else*. But he's lucky. And that's better than being a good Actor.

**Wed. Sept. 26th** Cloudy—rain 6PM. As I set in front of the hotel waiting to hear the gong sound for dinner—ruminating on the future, and laying out plans to make my remaining capital of \$27 support me for six weeks (not seeing any chance to renew operations before that time)—when along came Mr. Owens and offered me \$30 and a benefit to share after \$100 to play six nights at his Museum, Baltimore. I hesitated a few moments, and then very reluctantly with *words*—yet *inwardly* rejoicing—I accepted his offer—here was a *windfall!* Called on Jake Carter—found him well—he talks of returning to the stage—sorry to hear it—the stage is no place for him. To bed *early*.

**Thurs. Sept. 27th** Cloudy AM, cleared off. Took the cars for Baltimore. Called on Mr. Ham, Owens's partner, to see about opening on Monday, when I was informed by that worthy person that he was negotiating with another party to play the coming week, whom he had given till tomorrow to decide. I told him that I was absolutely engaged by Mr. Owens, who said that he had telegraphed to Mr. Ham to that effect. Ham acknowledged that he had received such a communication, but had not answered it. Yet if the other party did not accept, I might play—he would let me know tomorrow.

**Fri. Sept. 28th** Pleasant. Mr. Ham informed me that the other party had accepted—here was a dilemma. I am now worse off than ever. I telegraphed to Mr. Owens the position of affairs, and asking him if his engagements were of any value—that his worthy partner (the damn rascal) refused to acknowledge it. Owens sent me answer to return and he would pay all my expenses—thank God! There is some honor in the world.

**Tues. Oct. 2nd** Soaking, drizzling rain. Mr. Ham could make no arrangement with me for next week, so now that hope's gone, and my money nearly so. Met James Metcalf, a young man who enlisted into the U.S. Army at the same time as myself. We learned music together, and were in company a long time at "Fort Snelling." We had not seen each other, before today, for seven years. Our position in life is widely different now. I pass for a gentleman, while he drives a beer & porter wagon at \$25 per month. I have outstripped all my contemporaries of the Army.

**Wed. Oct. 3rd** Weather ditto with the 2d. Reading nearly all day. Partly concluded an engagement with a Mr. Barton for the "Front Street Theatre." At Baltimore Museum 7PM. Miss Logan as Claude Melnotte—she had better let the breeches parts alone, *they don't fit*.

**Thurs. Oct. 4th** Cleared off beautifully. Signed articles for one month with Mr. Barton, at \$16 per week, and a fourth benefit—that's increasing.

**Thurs. Oct. 11th** Pleasant, but cool. Rehearsal AM. Cast for a part which I refused, Mr. Hield, stage manager, attempted to bully me into it, but I told him peremptorily that *I would not do it*—then he took me out of it. Managers wish to make the actor entirely subservient to their interests, no matter how much the latter may suffer in his individual reputation—and they (the managers) pay

no more respect to the engagements they enter into than circumstances compel [them] to do. If they do not wish to retain an Actor, they very soon make him so uncomfortable that he is obliged to leave. But should Actors retaliate by breaking their engagements when they see a chance to better themselves, the managers cry out with horror upon the poor devil, and swear that, if he was starving, they would never engage him again. But necessity cools the manager's resentment, and the very next season may see the offending Actor again a member of his company with, perhaps, an increase of salary—such is life! At Theatre 7PM. Mr. W. Marshall played Hamlet. He was not very easy in the part, but nevertheless got through it with considerable applause. I do not admire him in anything legitimate, but consider him a good melodramatic actor.

**Sat. Oct. 13th** Cool. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. I begin to feel now as if I had gained a position in the profession. This evening I played Cassio—heretofore I could expect nothing better than Montano. It will be long before I shall play Iago, if ever.

**Tues. Oct. 16th** Cloudy—Rain PM. Rehearsal AM. Received my first week's salary in Baltimore—\$16. Three years ago I should have thought half of that a very good salary. Studying PM, at Theatre 7PM.

**Thurs. Oct. 18th** Cooler—cloudy—sprinkling. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. 1st appearance of Mrs. Farren & Mr. Hadaway. She as Julia in *The Hunchback*, he as Dulcimer Pipes in *The Double-Bedded Room*. The house was poor, Dan Rice's Circus drawing all those in want of amusement. Most people prefer *horses & clowns* to the most intellectual performance ever given—I pity such persons.

**Fri. Nov. 2nd** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM. Refused to play "*Marcus Roche*" in a piece called *O'Flannigan & the Fairies*. Mr. Hield informed me that he would write to Mr. Barton—the manager—and let him know how many parts I had refused. This most contemptible wretch (that no manager would have in his Theatre, if any other person could be had), in order to raise himself in the estimation of his *master*, and to screen his own incapacity, uses every means in his power to injure me with the management—for were I out of the Theatre he could play my business. At Theatre 7PM. Hudson brought out a piece called the *Irish Secretary*, an alteration from an old farce of *Fish Out of Water*—it makes a very good *Irish farce*.

**Wed. Nov. 7th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM. I leave Baltimore after this week, my engagement being concluded, I wonder where I shall bring up. Fortune, if you have hitherto frowned upon me, give me a smile now, I want it badly. At Theatre 7PM. Mr. Bowes, having some misunderstanding with the management respecting salary . . . for two nights, which he alleged was due to him from Mr. Barton, refused about fifteen minutes prior to the time of raising the curtain to play his part (“O’Sullivan” in *O’Flannigan & the Fairies*) unless his salary was paid to him, and said he would leave for “Philadelphia.” Upon this Mr. J. Barton had him arrested and sent to jail. Mr. Bowes was certainly wrong to leave with his name in the bill, but it was a high-handed proceeding on the part of Mr. Barton to pursue the course he did. Managers take upon themselves to close a Theatre whenever it pleases them, though by so doing they may break their contract with a whole company and leave some of them in great distress. This has very often been the case. But should the actor seek to better himself by accepting a good offer, the manager calls it *villainous*, and takes every means to injure the offending party. I had to go on for the part. In making an apology to the audience it was said that I would read the part. I *played it perfect*—to the surprise of all, though I knew not one word of the part until after the curtain had risen for the first scene.

**Mon. Nov. 12th** Pleasant—settled up—left Baltimore 9AM, not sorry to do so either. Reached Philadelphia 2PM, put up at the Mansion house, J. London proprietor. Prospects of an engagement at the Arch Street Theatre—dropped in there during the evening—saw Miss Davenport as the “*Countess*” in *Love*. She was very successful in New York & Boston, and though she is much admired here, she has not been able to draw very good houses, having Miss Cushman in the field against her. I think Miss Davenport is possessed of considerable talent.

**Tues. Nov. 13th** Pleasant. Called on Carter—found him well—his family increased one girl since I last saw him—go it Jake, but don’t get any more than you’re able to support. He wanted me to leave the stage and lecture on Temperance—he thought that I could not only do a great deal of good to others, but that I could benefit myself at the same time, by “*putting money in my purse*.”<sup>4</sup> The money is all very well, but my heart is on the stage—and though I may labor for years to reach the height of my ambition, yet fail to do so, the

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4. An allusion to Shakespeare, *Othello*, act 1, scene 3.

poor man's best friend, *Death*, steps in and brings me peace. Wise men and fools, Rich & poor, honest men & rogues—although society, the lawgiver of the living, may place a barrier between them, "*Death on his pale horse*"<sup>5</sup> o'erleap it with his passengers and tumbles them into one common bed—the grave, where the most fastidious are never heard to complain of their bed-fellows. At Barnum's Museum 7PM. This is one of the most beautiful & comfortable places of amusement in the country. Mr. & Mrs. E. S. Conner were playing there. They are both so bad, as players, that I could make no discrimination between them—but they please the people who frequent this place.

**Thurs. Nov. 15th** Pleasant. W. Marshall wrote to Burton to see if he would give me an opening next week—don't expect it.

**Sat. Nov. 17th** Pleasant. Marshall received a letter from Mr. Burton saying that as I had left Mr. Barton at Baltimore in a bad fix, he declined making any engagement with me. This Barton has prejudiced Burton against me merely because I refused to extend my engagement with him one month longer. Although I played four nights beyond my time to oblige him, and when we parted he appeared quite friendly, yet writes a *lie* to Burton to injure me. I immediately wrote Mr. Barton a strong letter, then started by the 12M train for New York where I arrived at 6PM—too late to see Burton. Called on Mother.

**Tues. Nov. 20th** Cleared off. Walk AM. Called on Mr. Burton, asked him for an opening—couldn't give it, but offered me an engagement at the Arch Street, Philadelphia, to play the Juvenile tragedy, at \$18 per week, which I accepted. The engagement is for the season, but I hardly think I shall see it through—for I fear I shall not be comfortable. Called on Mother PM—passed the evening with Mr. Ware.

**Thurs. Nov. 22nd** Pleasant. Bid Mother goodbye—God bless her!—shook hands all round—paid my hotel bill—intended to leave by the 12 o'clock line for Philadelphia—arrived at the wharf in time to have the *pleasure* of seeing the steamer fifty yards from the dock—too far to jump—and progressing down the bay at about sixteen knots an hour—agreeable upon my soul! Well, there must be a first time to everything, and this is the first time I ever had

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5. "Death on his pale horse": an allusion to Revelations 6:8, and possibly also to *Death on the Pale Horse* (1817), an oil painting by US artist Benjamin West (1738–1820).

the misfortune to be left behind. Not to be too late for the 4½ o'clock train, I was on hand *three hours* before starting. Reached the Quaker City between 9 and 10PM, put up at the Mansion house. Called on Marshall with my parts of the *Drunkard*. He did not like to cast it for Saturday night, as the company had so much other study, but after considerable hesitation he consented to do so—would that night was over.

**Sat. Nov. 24th** Raining AM. Rehearsal AM. Moved to a private boarding house, corner of Prince & Fifth Streets. It pleased the heavens to irradiate its stern features with a smile about noon. Laid out my things—at Theatre 7PM—made my first appearance in Philadelphia at the Arch Street Theatre, W. E. Burton, manager, about 9PM as “*Edward Middleton*” in the play of the *Drunkard*. My success equalled all I could have wished, as at the end of the piece I was loudly called for and upon my appearance before the curtain was greeted with three cheers. I made a short speech, and upon retiring, three more cheers were given me. I must labor hard to keep up the impression I made.

**Thurs. Dec. 6th** Cool & pleasant. Took a long walk AM, reading PM, at Theatre 7PM. Fifth night of the *Drunkard*. I wish they would discontinue it, my body is sore enough from playing it. Poor house.

**Fri. Dec. 7th** Pleasant. Walk to the Navy yard AM. On the road saw a mob collected around a man lying on the pavement, went up to him and found that he was dead—poor fellow, he had evidently died from want and exposure, perhaps brought on from hard drinking. I suppose he had been a soldier from his having on a pair of Uncle Sam’s pants. The forefinger of his left hand was gone. It had the appearance of having been shot off. Probably he has fought for his country through the late war with Mexico. If so, he deserved a better fate than to be left to die in the streets like a dog—though death in any place must have been a blessing to him, it being but a sudden transition from the most abject want to the greatest luxury prepared for the poor man—the *Grave*. At Theatre PM. During my “*delirium tremens*” scene in the *Drunkard*, a lady from the boxes fell from her seat, fainting, and had to be conveyed home. Her husband came to me afterwards to tell me that I ought not play that part again. I have since understood that he was not the most sober of men. May the incident of this night prove a warning.



**Tues. Dec. 11th** Pleasant overhead. Rehearsal AM. Informed that Mr. Burton had just sent orders to close the Theatre for three nights—this did not surprise me in the least. I have had dealings with this managerial tyrant before, he arrogates to himself the power to close his Theatre when he chooses, and without a moment's warning to the poor devils in his employ. Yet, should any person violate their contract with him when an opportunity occurred to better their condition, the moral and profane words peculiar to the English language could not supply him with epithets sufficiently strong to express his indignation at the gross injustice done him by the individual who has dared to retaliate. How blind the mass of mankind are to the wrongs they inflict on others, but when the tables are changed, and they in turn become the persons wronged, how great their lamentations. How I do despise these *things* to whom providence has given the *shape* of man without those feelings that should characterize God's image.

**Fri. Dec. 14th** No sun today. Walk AM, writing PM. We reopen tomorrow night, the bills say with *additions* to the stock, misprint I presume, *subtractions* would have been the correct wording. Miss Wood, who was engaged for "*Walking Ladies*," and whose ambition did not soar above that line of parts—being compelled, in the absence of a Juvenile actress, to play that business in conjunction with her own, after working herself sick by overexertion—had the *courage* to write to Mr. Burton to have her salary increased from *ten* to *fifteen* dollars, deeming the former sum an inadequate compensation for the destruction of her health. Emperor Burton, burning with rage at the audacious presumption of his rebellious subject, and having no other means of vengeance, issued his imperial commands through his vicegerent,<sup>6</sup> to banish the contumacious Miss Wood from his dominions. Why will persons be so foolish as to seek for their rights, and demand justice! 8PM dropped in at the "*Sansom Street Hall*" to see the "N[ew] O[rleans] *Serenaders*."

**Fri. Dec. 21st** Beautiful day. Rehearsal AM, study PM, at Theatre 7PM. Benefit of Mrs. C. D. Pitt. After the play—*Macbeth*—Mr. Pitt, being called out, made a speech that was anything but flattering to Mr. Burton. It appears that Pitt was engaged for two weeks, but as he did not draw, Mr. Burton concluded to quash the engagement, so telegraphed to Pitt, informing him that he could not play after this week. All this Pitt communicated to the audience, adding

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6. Likely W. Marshall, Burton's stage manager.

that Burton had said the audiences of the “Arch Street Theatre” were not sufficiently enlightened to appreciate or understand *Shakespeare* or the “*Legitimate Drama*.” This will not add to Burton’s popularity. Several persons present were heard to say that they would hiss him off the stage if ever he made his appearance here again, and I must say he richly deserves it, for his treatment of the public of this city has been shameful in the extreme. Although his Theatre has done a more prosperous business than any other in Philadelphia, whereby he has, I understand, made thousands of dollars, yet he seizes upon every occasion to defame the taste and misrepresent the liberality of the people. ’Tis true the business has been rather poorly for the last three weeks, it could hardly be otherwise with so poor a company.

**Tues. Dec. 25th** Christmas—coldest day of season. Rehearsal AM. Holiday for all classes of society but Actors, whose *labors* are *increased*—not their *salaries*—to two or three *extra* performances. They are made to *suffer* for others’ *amusements*, filling their managers’ purses while their own are empty. At Theatre 7PM—three pieces—fine house.

**Tues. Jan. 1st 1850** Pleasant. For the last four years, every new one finds me better off. I now hold a good position in my profession but it is not sufficiently stable to be very pleasant, for though I am engaged as “*Juvenile Tragedian*” yet am I obliged to perform many “*Walking Gents,*” which is a direct violation of my engagement on the part of the Management. But were I to refuse to do them I would be informed—and not very politely either—that I could have my choice (how obliging in the manager to give me a choice) either to play the parts cast to me or leave the Theatre. In this case, I generally ask myself the question, “*would it redound to my advantage to leave?*” If this cannot be answered affirmatively I put a large wafer on the organs of speech and play the part, consoling myself with thoughts of the future, for every dog will have his day if he is resolved not to swerve from the straight road but to o’erleap all obstructions that may present themselves. “*Hope for the best, expect the worst.*”

**Wed. Jan. 2nd** Cold. Rehearsal AM. The company were politely informed that Mr. Burton had sent orders to close after this evening. I could find no cause for this proceeding on his part, more than a fear of doing bad business for a month or so, which could not be the case if he would have but strengthened his Company and put forth some attraction. It appears that he wants to get rid of the Theatre for the remainder of his lease, yet he demands so

great an advance upon the rent that no person could assume the management with any prospect of deriving benefit from it, while he might have a fine opportunity of evincing his devotion to the Drama by the loss of a fortune (if he was so fortunate as to possess one) in endeavoring to sustain a temple dedicated to the “Muses,” or rather to the blood and thunder of “*Melodrama*,” that being better appreciated by the Patrons of the “*Arch Street Theatre*” than the abstruse productions of “*Shakespeare*,” Knowles, Bulwer, and writers of that class. Well, here now is a large company thrown out of employment in the worst season of the year, many of them without sufficient means to pay a single week’s board and with no prospect of an engagement. It’s hard that this—(no, I’ll not call him man, for he who, with the power to do good, brings suffering upon his fellow creatures is unworthy of the name) villain should be allowed to inflict so much wrong with impunity. Yet so it is, for while he causes others to endure the curse of poverty, he is making a fortune in New York. ’Tis a strange world if the actions of man are governed by an omnipotent being who is all mercy and justice, otherwise it is no cause of wonderment.

**Sat. Jan. 5th** Pleasant. Walk AM. No prospect of opening. I suppose that I shall have to pack up and go in search of another place. This is not only inconvenient but very trying to a weak purse, but then I cannot complain while I see so many others worse off than I am. Walk AM.

**Tues. Jan. 8th** Unpleasant. Packed up my “*props*”—missed the 12M train. *Letter from George!* I can breathe freer now—my only friend yet lives—in good health, and all right. Mr. Clarke, another young man thrown out of employment by Burton’s reprehensible conduct, found himself rather short of the needful (though not through any mismanagement). He told me that he feared his bank would suspend payment before many days had elapsed. Now, though I could not well spare it, I offered him—without his asking it—the small sum of five dollars, which he thankfully took. Aside from the pleasure it gave me to assist him, it was a noble revenge for his cool treatment of me when I first entered the “*Arch Street Theatre*.” I do not know whether he looked upon me as a rival or not, but he acted as though he would have been much better pleased never to have seen me. But Clarke is a very good fellow, and I wish him prosperity. He has been but a short time on the stage, yet possesses considerable talent and in a few years will make a fine actor. Left Philadelphia at 4PM, tried to fool the baggage master at the cars, but couldn’t come it—so had to pay one dollar extra baggage. Arrived in New York 9½PM, snowing hard. Put up at French[’s].

**Tues. Jan. 15th** Pleasant but cool. I wrote a letter on the 10th to the *Albany Museum*—C. T. Smith, stage manager—for a chance to play the *Drunkard*. Courtesy demanded an answer, though a negative one, but I suppose they consider it too much trouble—I’m *nobody*! Oh, no! Well, it’s all right—let’s see the future. . . . At Broadway Theatre 7PM. Saw Miss Cushman for the first time—she played Bianca. It was indeed a fine performance. Judging from her acting in this part I should say she was deserving of all the praise that has been lavished upon her. She has more power than any person, male or female, that I have ever seen. The house was full.

**Thurs. Jan. 17th** Rain. Studying AM, at National Theatre 12M. Spoke to C. Burke in regard to my playing. *He feared the Drunkard was too heavy, or too long, or it might be a failure—would like to give me an opening—but that he had no power in the matter—would talk to the managers about it and give me an answer in the evening.* Now all this *stuff* is but equivalent to a direct refusal, and, having had some experience in managerial sophistry, I regarded it as such, and the time gave it proof—for, calling at the Theatre in the evening, and waiting until the performance was nearly over and not so much as catching a glimpse of Mr. C. Burke, without exhibiting more penetration than naturally belongs to the humblest of sane individuals, I came to the conclusion that my chances were not only small, but that they never existed—*Nil desperandum! There is still a future!*

**Tues. Jan. 22nd** Cleared off—studying AM. . . . Dropped in at the National, good house. About 10PM as I was thinking about retiring to bed, a note was brought to me from the manager of the “National Theatre,” requesting me to call on him in the morning. Can it be possible that, after I have given up all hope of an opening, I am about to have a chance offered to me thus unexpectedly?

**Wed. Jan. 23rd** Fine day. Called on Mr. Ewen,<sup>7</sup> left the book of the *Drunkard* to be read—asked my terms, offered to play for Benefit to share after \$100, thought that rather high—would give me an answer in the evening. Called in the evening, made me an offer (through Mr. Purdy, he hadn’t the moral cour-

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7. T. Allston Brown describes W. Ogilvie Ewen as “the moneyed man and silent partner” at the Chatham Theatre while actor Frank S. Chanfrau served as acting manager and star. During their tenure (1848–50), they dubbed the building “Chanfrau’s National Theatre.” A. H. Purdy took full control of the theater in July 1850. *A History of the New York Stage: From the First Performance in 1732 to 1901*, vol. 1 (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1903), 302–3.

age to make so *liberal* an offer in person) of \$20 for the six nights or a Benefit to share after \$200. They said to me in the morning that they were willing to do all in their power for me, were it only to encourage *native talent*. I have heard so much of this *encouraging* native talent that I have become disgusted with it, and shall henceforth look upon the man who uses the expression to me as one not to be trusted, for I have never yet found one who said it that would not prefer the *devil* to an American, if he could make a sixpence more by him. Took my book home. I would sooner starve than labor like a dog to enrich others, while I received a mere pittance. I can live without you, Messrs. Burke and Ewen.

**Sun. Jan. 27th** Pleasant. Reading AM. Met Barton, manager from Baltimore. Talks of opening on the 22d of Feb. Wants me—he'll have to pay me a better salary.

**Mon. Jan. 28th** Cloudy AM. Rained hard PM. Called on Barton, supped with him—he has not settled upon opening yet—sooner the better. It's hard that I should lose so much time—and there's no recovering it. The proceedings of Congress, since the commencement of the present session, have been most disgraceful. There are a few fanatics from the north and south who are determined to oppose everything not conformable with their wishes. Many of them, I believe, would glory in a dissolution of that Union, whose noble struction was reared by the strong hands, and cemented with the best blood, of our forefathers. Oh! May God strike that brain with idiocy that but conceives the simple thought of disunion, and palsy the tongue that dares give utterance to that thought. . . .

**Thurs. Jan. 31st** Cool & pleasant. Writing & walking AM. Packed a few things PM and started for *Boston* by the "*Fall River* route." . . .

**Sat. Feb. 2nd** Unpleasant—some snow. I don't see any chance here for an engagement—will have to retreat to N.Y.

**Tues. Feb. 5th** Winter appears to have just set in. AM took a trip to *Lowell*. This is a thriving place, but finding there was no chance for me, I left in two hours—paid my bill and started for New York 5PM. . . .

**Wed. Feb. 6th** Cool & pleasant. Reached home 9AM. Wrote away the AM, took a walk PM. No news in the Theatrical world.

**Mon. Feb. 11th** Cool—pleasant. Studying and walking PM. Wrote a letter to Wm. B. Schouler, Editor of the *Atlas* (Boston), to use his influence in procuring me an engagement at the “*Boston Museum*.” I wonder if such an anomaly could occur in my life as to find one man who would interest himself in my behalf without being impelled to it through that great motive power of mankind—*self interest!* Walk after supper.

**Sat. Feb. 23rd** Cool. Mr. Conner sent me a note, saying that he was unable to negotiate with me—very well Mr. C., I’ll have to try somebody else. 7PM called on Dr. Cockroft, who gave me a prescription for my cold and ordered me to be dry cupped, which cost me \$2.00—rather a large sum to pay in the present very limited state of finances, especially when I see no prospect of their speedy replenishment.

**Mon. Feb. 25th** Pleasant. At home reading—I am a sick man, *sure*. At Castle Garden 7PM. Mass meeting in favor of the Union, discountenancing the Abolitionists of the North and the disunionists of the south. It was the largest public meeting I ever saw. There must have been nearly ten thousand men present. Everything passed off pleasantly, each allusion by the speakers, in favor of the “*Union*,” was highly applauded. General Scott made his appearance on the platform and I never heard such cheering in my life. As a soldier the people adore Scott, it would have been better for his fame had he never entered the political arena. He made a speech but spoke too low for me to hear.

**Tues. Feb. 26th** Weather somewhat warmer. Reading AM, walk PM. At Broadway Theatre 7PM. Saw a new Comedy called *Extremes*—the bills say “*written by a gentleman of Baltimore*.” It is the best American play that has been produced for some time. It has a cut at the politician who agrees with the opinion of every person he meets with in order to catch his vote—at the missionary societies that send money and clothes to the heathen, while people are suffering for the necessities of life here at home—at the Abolitionist who *talks* of amalgamation but, practically, revolts at it—in short, the play is a capital satire upon every folly and all the hypocrisy of the day. I was glad to see it successful.

**Thurs. Feb. 28th** Cooler. Letter from W. H. Smith, stage manager of the “*Boston Museum*,” wishing to negotiate with me for the next season. In the PM, J. Johnstone called to let me know that Barton opens next week, and that he considered me engaged—does he? There was nothing definite between us when we parted last, and I do not intend to go to Baltimore on an uncertainty. I must hear further from him. Letter from George, he has left the steamer and sold out his interest in her. Ah, George, I fear your success in this life is not destined to be very great, birds that fly all the time seldom become fat. Heavy rain PM, some snow.

**Fri. Mar. 15th** Pleasant AM, Cloudy PM. Letter from W. H. Smith, no chance at the “*Boston Museum*” until the next season. The last plank to which I clung has floated from me, I can see no “*spec*”(k) on the theatrical horizon to rescue me from the waves of idleness. Were my health restored, ’twould be some consolation, but to be sick and out of an engagement is making misery miserable.

**Tues. Mar. 19th** Cool. Reading, studying, and walking. I expect to lie idle for *five months longer*. I shall grieve myself to death by that time, being happy only while playing. How deeply do I regret not playing at the National Theatre, when I had an opportunity of so doing. Even though I should have realised nothing pecuniary by the engagement, it would have brought me into notice. I shall always look upon it as the most foolish act of my life, but it takes a life, and a long one too, to learn wisdom. Wisdom and folly both end in death.

**Mon. Mar. 25th** Windy & cold. Reading AM. Dropped in at Windust’s Park Row, a general rendezvous for Actors. Wallack, Brougham, Fleming, Gilbert, and a host of others were there, Tragedians & comedians, good actors & bad ones, chattering away as fast as they could articulate, and all making desperate exertions to say the most, in order to save time. Three or four would speak on the same subject, at the same moment. A very good plan, as no one came there to hear what others had to say, but to say for himself. They had, apparently, taken an emetic not of ipecac, but of the English language, and it seemed necessary to their literary health to throw off as great a quantity of words as possible. Some of them were in a very bad way, for they emitted much *foul matter*. When they had emptied themselves of words, and filled up the vacuum with beer, they fell off, one by one, until I was left alone in the chair I had so quietly occupied. (No person knew, or seemed to notice, me.

So, like Paddy's owl,<sup>8</sup> I had nothing to do but to keep up a devil of thinking.) Heaving a deep sigh, I started from my reverie, went off to a dining saloon, demolished a large beef steak with some mashed potatoes and bread, and at 4PM went home, no nearer an engagement than when I left it in the AM. Walk after supper.

**Fri. Mar. 29th** All kinds of weather. Called on Mr. Bass—manager of the “Astor Place Opera House”—and applied for an engagement—told to leave my address. He *expected* to make alterations in his company next week, and thought he should be able to give me an opening—*fudge!* He doesn't think any such thing. C. R. Thorne & wife left yesterday on the steamer *Ohio* for “Chagres,” their ultimate destination being “San Francisco.”<sup>9</sup> That's the best news I have heard for a long time. Thank the fates, Thorne is at last out of Boston. Dinneford & wife, with H. Mestayer & wife, accompanied him.

**Mon. Apr. 1st** Pleasant. Mother's birthday. May she see many of them. Telegraph from Baltimore for me to come on immediately, I had better go. I'll leave tomorrow. . . .

**Wed. Apr. 3rd** Cloudy AM, rained hard all PM. 9AM started for Philadelphia—in bidding Mother goodbye, her floodgates opened. I felt the symptoms strong, so, to keep my eyes from running, I run with my feet. Don't despair, Mother. I think there are many happy days in store for us. Reached Phil[a]-d[elphia]. 2PM, covered with dust and hungry, no time to get dinner—bought three rusks—dined off them—left my hat box on the boat, crossing from N.Y. to Jersey City. Thank heaven my head is fastened on my shoulders!—*between* them rather. Left for Baltimore 2½PM—reached there at 11PM. Put up at the Mansion House.

**Thurs. Apr. 4th** Pleasant. Went to the Theatre 10AM. Manager surprised to see me—thought I was not coming. Things look squally, company bad, only

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8. Watkins is likely referring here to a nineteenth-century squib about an Irishman's owl that, in contrast to a parrot, squawks little but nevertheless “keeps up a devil of thinking.” See Rowland Berthoff, “A Little Nonsense Now and Then': Conventional Humor in Indiana, 1850,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 90, no. 2 (June 1994): 118–19.

9. During the mid-nineteenth century, passengers traveling from New York City to San Francisco would stop at the Chagres port (in Panama) and journey overland to the isthmus's western coast, where they would board another ship.



one woman, and she an old one. Got myself put into bill for tomorrow night, being anxious to commence operations as quickly as possible, not knowing how soon they may be brought to a stop. If the manager will only keep his house open one month I shall be satisfied, as I can make sufficient in that time to carry me through the summer. I must pass two months in the country in order to recruit the health of this much-abused and debilitated body of mine. At Theatre 7PM. Blangy was playing, she appears to have fallen off since I last saw her—her being *enceinte* may, perhaps, account for it, as it must be very fatiguing to dance for *two*.

**Fri. Apr. 5th** Cloudy AM. Rain PM. At *rehearsal* AM, hurra. I shall soon be myself again, now that I am with the object of my affections. Most young men bestow their hearts on women, mine is on the stage—perhaps I may share it some day. At Theatre 7PM. Opened with *Fudge*—poor house, and poorer company. I found my voice much better than expected.

**Tues. Apr. 9th** Cool—our season looks short. This Barton, through meanness and procrastination, has allowed all the stars to slip out of his fingers—Barton is the daguerreotype of an individual who depends upon other persons to do his business instead of attending to it himself. He has placed himself completely in the power of that *noble-minded man*, Mr. W. Burton, who will not allow him to engage such persons as might strengthen his company, because they are on his—Burton's—*black-list*. Every man who has spirit enough to act with independence, and oppose the dictation, arrogance, and mean conduct of this Burton, is marked, and the most despicable means are resorted to that may injure the offender. A company of Firemen (Hook and Ladder No. 3) from N.Y., being on a visit to this city, were invited to attend the Theatre. An address to deliver to them was handed to me at 3PM for study—the time was very short and, as luck would have it, I was very unwell, but it was too good an opportunity to gain popularity for me to slight. I went at it hard, and when the time came for its delivery I was perfect, but not easy. The house was crowded from parquette to dome, I was never before placed in so strange a situation. I have studied parts at short notice and got through them creditably, yet that was in my vocation—but now I was to be, simply, Mr. Watkins, there was no tragedy comedy about it. I was to stand still and deliver an address to three thousand persons, there was no acting about it. Failure would ruin my prospects for the future, and knowing this, when the curtain rang up I felt more nervousness than I ever experienced in my life. My heart

beat faster than does a young lady's when her lover first pops the question, and my limbs testified that I was not *too lazy to shake*, but any resolution to do was as firm as my corpus was weak. I commenced quite cool, but warmed up as I progressed, and when I felt sure of my ground, let out with more freedom. The audience gave me every encouragement, being no way sparing of their applause. After I had gone through some half dozen verses I began to feel at home, as though I were one of the audience, and was speaking each man's sentiments. Then I had them all with me, what I *felt* and *spoke*, they *thought* and *felt*. One line—"The Union—our Native land" I threw my soul into, and it was responded [to] by all present, they made the Theatre shake with their cheers and shouts. Several gentlemen, after the performance, remarked that it was the best written and the best delivered "Fireman's address" that has ever been given in Baltimore. So, that's another feather in my cap. Oh, if I was only a well man! Shall I ever be? Time is a pantomimist, never speaking, but showing us at the proper time.

**Mon. Apr. 22nd** One pleasant day appears to be as much as we can expect at this season. Raining hard today and the weather quite chilly. Rehearsal AM, at Theatre 7PM. Miss Wallack played Hamlet, and very well for a woman, though I am opposed to the assumption of male characters by females—they had better stick to the petticoats. In the foil scene she came near to putting out one of my eyes. Making a false guard she knocked the foil's point into my face.

**Mon. May 6th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. 1st night of Miss Davenport, who appeared as the Countess in *Love*. This young lady has been well drilled, but I do not think she possesses the slightest particle of genius. I cannot admire her acting in the least. It is all art, a constant straining for effect, even at the sacrifice of good sense. Yet she draws well and is a great favorite. But it is the press that has made her so. Her father goes around among the editors, makes interest with and pays them well to puff his daughter. At night, he stations men in different places about the house to applaud and call her out—not only at the end of the play, but between the acts. These things cause her to [be] talked of, and create a desire to see the talented creature about whom so much is said. The majority of the audiences, not being acquainted with the tricks of trade, imagine that her acting must be something extraordinary to have so much applause showered upon her, and in the goodness of their hearts, without knowing why or wherefore, they join

in and applaud as vehemently as her most enthusiastic admirers—or rather, *hired friends*. People love to be led, to be told what is good. It saves the trouble of thinking, and thinking is a great bore, especially to those having no brains.

**Tues. May 21st** Rather cool for this season. Wrote two letters AM, walking, and catching the mice that infest my closet, PM. Letter from Moses Kimball, manager of Boston Museum, informing me that he could offer me no encouragement for next season—that’s bad news. Well, I must look elsewhere. Out of the bill. At Balt. Museum, Julia Dean as Bianca in *Fazio*—was not all pleased with her performance, having been led, by her reputation, to expect something above mediocrity—’twas rather beneath it.

**Thurs. May 23rd** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM. A notice was posted in the green room to the effect that any actor refusing a part they have been cast in would be obliged to leave the Theatre, that the Manager could not afford to pay people to walk about. This agreeable morceau<sup>10</sup> was evidently intended for my especial benefit, I having refused to play in most of Collins’s pieces, which left me idle for four nights out of the week, much to the annoyance of the worthy manager, who insisted upon it that I should play in *all* the pieces. This being in direct violation of m[y] engagement, I, of course, refused, and, as the company was rath[er] weak, he was compelled to make a virtue of necessity and so not enforce his commands. But, having received some recruits this week, and among them one that might fill my place, it would add to his pecuniary interest to whistle me off, and by the tenor of this notice he intends, I presume, to try it on. But I will have to be annoyed much more than even he, I think, will have the face to attempt, for I shall play now, more for money than reputation. Mrs. Melinda Jones appeared as Ion. Some persons in front kept interrupting the play by laughing and talking. Mrs. Jones stepped forward and addressed the audience, saying she felt she had not done full justice to her part, but that it would be impossible for her to proceed unless the policeman would keep order in the house, that the repeated annoyance of some blackguards, who appeared to have no respect for the ladies present, so disturbed her that she could not keep her thoughts upon what she was doing. The audience cheered her—quiet was restored—and the play was finished. Poor House.

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10. *morceau* (French): a short composition, usually musical or literary.

**Mon. May 27th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, study PM, at Theatre 7PM. 1st night of J. B. Booth, opened with *Richard* to a fine house. He played very well, but his strength is failing him. When he came to the fight he was very much exhausted, when it was over he was entirely so. Yet, even now, when he is himself I derive more pleasure from his performances than any actor now living, for he is certainly the best.

**Tues. May 28th** Warmest day of the season—thermometer at 84—two days since it was quite cold. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Booth as Bertram—he walked through the part without any attempt at acting. Considerable falling off in the house from last night. The manager, *honorable individual*, has at last hit upon the right plan to get rid of me. He sent word by the stage manager that his expenses being too high he would be obliged to curtail my salary four dollars per week. He *hoped* that when I considered the circumstances I would see the justice of the act and continue on my engagement. If otherwise, I was at liberty to leave after the present week. Not seeing the *justice*, and being at *liberty to leave*, I sent the *worthy man* word that I should go. He is very sick at present—if he goes the way of all mortal flesh, I freely forgive him, should he regain his health my memory will not fail me.

**Thurs. May 30th** Warm & Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, walking PM, at Theatre 7PM. Booth as “Sir Giles Overreach”—he played very tamely. House slim. Manager talks of closing—he has promised me a Benefit on the 5th of June, *providing* he has no other attraction. It will not be his fault if he is without attraction. If I should not make anything by a Benefit, it may increase my reputation to play the *Drunkard*, and I am in pretty good trim to play the part, as well as I ever did.

**Tues. June 4th** Quite Warm. Barton would not give me a yes or no with regard to a Benefit, yet gave me sufficient encouragement to *suppose* that I might get it—through this I fooled away the time until 12M, then got desperate and started to leave the city at 1PM, when D. P. Bowers of the Museum made me an offer to stay until next week and play for his Benefit. Writing PM. Went out to a mill dam and had a fine Shower bath. At the Holliday 9PM. Mr. J. B. Roberts, stage manager, had a *complimentary* Benefit tendered to him *by himself* and there was not many more present—the house was very shy.

**Fri. June 7th.** Phew! how warm. Walking about Canvassing for the benefit. Called on J. H. Wagner PM, promised to come upon Tuesday night—walked out to Spring Gardens to have a swim—too far to walk for luxuries, being two miles.

**Sat. June 8th** Close & sultry—Heavy rains PM. Rehearsal at the Baltimore Museum. . . . Letter from Mrs. Muzzy of the National Theatre, N.Y., to know if I would come on and play for her Benefit. I telegraphed that I could be there on the 14th. I hope to be in time, as I would not miss playing in New York when so good a chance presents itself, for should I make a hit 'twould advance my future interests materially.

**Tues. June 11th** Beautiful day—fine breeze. Rehearsal AM. Telegraphed from New York that I am announced to open there on Friday—**good!** Walking & Writing PM, at the Museum 7PM. Mrs. D. P. Bowers's benefit, *Drunkard* and *Delicate Ground*. The house was well filled. I was called out after the first piece and made a short speech. *The Drunkard* went off well, and those who were in the habit of attending the Museum informed me that they had never heard so much applause given within those walls. I did not hear how much money there was in the house, as the returns were not to be made out until the following AM. After the performance, went with a party of friends—had a glass of porter and some baked beans—got to bed at 1AM.

**Wed. June 12th** Warm—settled up—goodbye—down at railroad depot—started for Philadelphia 9AM. . . . Reached N.Y. at 9½PM, put up at French's Hotel—had a good wash, and turned in about 11PM rather tired.

**Fri. June 14th** Phew! how warm. Rehearsal AM. Had my “props” brought up to Mother's—shower PM. At National Theatre 7PM—made my first appearance in my native city as “Edward Middleton” in the *Drunkard*, for the Benefit of Mrs. C. Muzzy. The house was very good for the evening. I brought them down in the “delirium tremens,” and everyone said that I made a hit—they called me out and gave me three cheers. I made no speech, though it would have been good policy to have done so—I am satisfied with the success I met with.

**Sat. June 15th** Warm. . . . PM met Mr. Ewen, the worthy manager of the “National,” who wished me to call at the box office on Monday and talk about an engagement. Ha! ha! Times have changed, a few months since I almost

begged him to give me an opening, but he made me an offer too contemptible for a man to accept—but, at last, I got the opening without any thanks to him, and now that I have been successful he is very anxious to engage me. I don't think he'll get me, unless he is more liberal than I believe him to be. To have him ask me to engage, after his former slight, was quite a triumph. At Barnum's new museum 8PM—a pretty place.

**Wed. June 19th** Warm. Writing & walking all day—I begin to pick up flesh. Mr. Purdy, hired as a kind of convenience by the Manager of [the] National Theatre to do all the dirty work, such as grinding down the salaries of Actors, etc., asked me to play for his benefit on the 21st although he was the means of keeping me out of an opening when I was last in the city. I shall play, because 'tis for my interest to do so, yet I do not like the thought of putting money into his pocket.

**Mon. June 24th** Pleasant. Visited Newark, New Jersey. I found it a much prettier place than I expected. Dined at the City Hotel—returned to N.Y. at 9PM. Dropped in at the National Theatre. Chanfrau was playing Mose, in a piece called *Mose in China*, an alteration of the old Farce of the *Illustrious Stranger*. The house was crowded in every part—it is astonishing how these Mose pieces do draw. I have heard persons decry them as disgusting, miserable trash—in fact, the greater part of the audience so express themselves—and yet, they will flock to the Theatre and fill the house to overflowing whenever “Mose” is on the bill. The dear people are singular in their tastes—*very*.

**Tues. July 2nd** Quite a sudden change in the weather—cool enough for thick clothes. Rain PM, study AM. Called on Ware—tried to arrange with him for writing me a piece in the style of the *Drunkard* but with a title less offensive to those who deem a glass of liquor of no injury to any man—also, a piece that I can call my own and prevent others from playing. *The Drunkard* is getting stale and worn out. Since I have been so successful in the performance of it all the young aspirants for fame are trying their hand at it.

**Mon. July 8th** Pleasant. Studying AM. Called on Mr. Baker—partner of Mr. English, of Boston, in the management of the Howard Athenaeum in that city—for the coming season. He thought he should be able to offer me an engagement if the party with whom he was negotiating did not come to terms. At National 7PM. Fair House.

**Tues. July 9th** Pleasant. Studying AM. Informed by Mr. Baker that he had closed with a Mr. Howard, an Englishman, to play my business—oh, certainly, if there's an Englishman to be had, give him the preference to an American—it matters not if he lacks talent, so he be an Englishmen. Zachary Taylor, President of the U.S., died thirty-five minutes past ten PM. I regret his death for he was a good and well-meaning man, though totally unfitted for the post he filled. Walk after supper, to bed early.

**Wed. July 10th** Pleasant. Studying AM, walking PM. The town is full of Actors, and 'tis really amusing to hear those who play the same line of business endeavoring to draw from each their chances for an engagement. Whoever may be sufficiently confiding to inform another of their business may, in a very short time after, find that they have been forestalled by their confidant. It should be borne in mind that the brain is never a traitor unless betrayed by the tongue. At National 8PM.

**Thurs. July 11th** Pleasant. Studying AM, walking PM. Having heard that Mr. Hamblin, Manager of the Bowery Theatre, had been inquiring about my merits, I thought 'twould be prudent to drop in *by accident*. Met Mr. Stevens at the door, who appeared quite sociable. After I had passed in, Stevens went into Hamblin's office, who came out and walked around me three times, eyeing me very closely, in order, I presume, to judge by the external if there might be anything valuable in the internal. He must have been favorably impressed as Stevens—his S.M.—returned shortly after and, calling me aside, offered me an engagement for the coming week, though at a small salary, saying it would lead to something better after Mr. Hamblin had seen what I could do. I accepted the engagement as it would yield me something while I looked around to better myself.

**Sat. July 13th** Windy. Rehearsal AM, walk PM. Went into the Green Room of the Bowery Theatre to see what time the *Siege of Monterey*—in which I was engaged to play Capt. Allen—was called for rehearsal on Monday when I was informed that the city authorities had called on Mr. Hamblin and requested that he would not bring out the piece so soon after the death of Taylor, in consequence of which the performance was postponed—and I shall not make my appearance at the Bowery as soon, if ever, as I expected. I would sue the city for damages in throwing me out of an engagement, but I don't think 'twould pay.

**Mon. July 29th** Heavy shower before daybreak. Hot AM, sun-showers PM. Rehearsal AM—PM brushing up my props to commence work—8PM made my first appearance at the Bowery Theatre as Capt. Allen in a dramatic spectacle called *The Siege of Monterey, or the Triumphs of Rough & Ready*. I was fearful that I should not be able to make myself heard, having never played in so large a Theatre, but I was informed by a friend, who was in front, that my speaking was as distinct & audible as any of the persons on the stage with me. I can now play with more confidence. My part, though about the best in the piece, is but poor trash. The Author—what a perversion of the title—makes the Mexicans all cowards, the Americans all bravery, and the latter have nothing to do but slay the former whenever they meet—no matter what the odds. The substance of all the speeches of the Americans is “*Freedom or death*,” as though the liberties of this Union were perilled by the war with Mexico.

The weather is too hot to write correctly, the sweat is rolling down my cheeks in streams.

**Thurs. Aug. 8th** Weather a little cooler. Received my first week’s salary in N.Y. at 1PM paid to me by Mr. Waldron, Treasurer of the Bowery Theatre—walking, reading & writing PM, at Theatre 7PM.

**Sat. Aug. 10th** Very warm. Reading AM, walking PM, at Theatre 7PM. Last night of *Monterey*—well, I made two weeks’ salary by it. Whether Hamblin wants me for the next season or not his actions give me no clue to judge by, and he has not said a word to me on the subject. During my short stay at the Bowery I have become as much a favorite as could be expected from the limited sphere I moved in, having appeared in but three parts.

**Fri. Aug. 16th** Pleasant. Mr. G. Barrett, stage manager of Broadway Theatre, having expressed a wish to see me, I called upon the individual, who informed me that he might possibly be able to make some arrangement with me—should I be still unengaged—in the course of a few days. A great portion of the company have been freshly imported from England. Mr. Conway as Juvenile & Light Comedian, Mr. Davidge the old man, & Mr. Scharf for the Low Comedy, besides a Miss Anderton, two misses Gougenheim, & others. In the event of the former, Mr. Conway, proving a failure, I presume Barrett would like to engage me, so if fortune favors I may slip into something good. Walk PM, passed the evening at John Cox’s.



**Tues. Aug. 20th** Rainy. Walk AM. Barrett offered me \$15.00 per week to play the best of walking gents & Farce parts, but I wouldn't accept, the salary was too small. He has imported an Englishman to play business he is totally incapable of doing, yet receives the snug salary of \$40.00 per week—I have been told he is paid \$50.00. All professionals were denied free admittance, as is the custom at all Theatres. Hamblin paid for a ticket, so did others. Those who were *fortunate* (in having funds to pay for a ticket) to see the New Company report it as a failure—so mote it be. I regret wishing ill to anyone, but may all Managers fail in their attempts when they seek to supplant the indigenous flowers of America with the exotic *weeds* of England. Far would it be from me to complain if I thought we lacked the talent, but it seems unjust that the leading Theatre of the country should send abroad for a Company when one might be found, if not superior at least equal in merit, here, at home. But so it will be while Englishmen conduct our Theatres.

**Thurs. Aug. 22nd** Fine day. Walk AM. Met Hamblin—asked him for an engagement—would let me know if there was any chance in about ten days. I expect to be shut out of New York for this season. The houses at the Broadway Theatre have fallen off greatly since the first night—the prices are too high, and the new Company is a *failure*. At Bowery & National 7PM. Good house at the former, bad at latter.

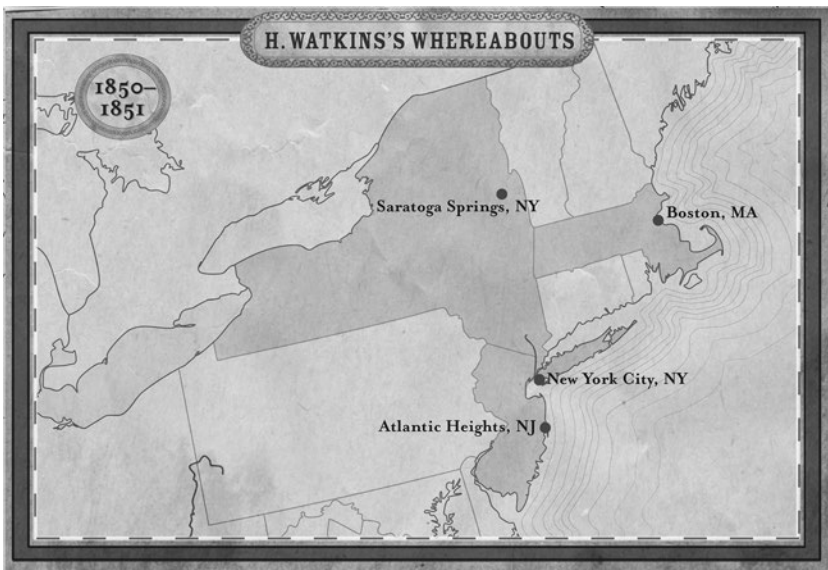
**Wed. Aug. 28th** Fine day. Hunting for Hamblin—not come back yet—my chances for the Bowery are very slim, an Englishman having been offered the engagement, of course the preference will be given to him. What is to be, will be.

**Sat. Aug. 31st** Warmer. At Bowery Theatre 10AM. Waited three hours to see Hamblin—he came at last and, calling me aside, informed me that, at present, he could not offer me an engagement, but, in the course of a month might be able to do so—if I would leave my address &c. he would bear me in mind—would he! Oh, *Fudge!* Well, I tried hard to get an engagement at the Bowery, and had strong hopes of so doing, yet now all idea of it is dissipated. I am actually driven out of my native city by Englishmen, all the leading Theatres are in their hands and while there is one of their own countrymen to be found Americans must give way. With a little patience and a great deal of perseverance my turn may come yet, so now to try in another quarter. The *present* soon becomes the *past*, there is always a future.

## SIX

1850–51

*Watkins makes his first appearance at the Astor Place Opera House and then secures an attractive position at A. H. Purdy's National Theatre. He writes the play Nature's Nobleman, the Mechanic; or, The Ship's Carpenter and enters a playwriting contest—which he wins. But Purdy cheats him out of royalties. He also premieres Heart of the World; or, Life's Struggles in a Great City, another of his original dramas. During the summer, he enjoys several weeks in "the country," traveling to Sheepshead Bay, New Jersey, and Saratoga Springs.*



**Mon. Sept. 9th** Fine day. Hunting for an engagement—couldn't find one. At National & Bowery 7PM, the former a poor, the latter a full house—the audience seemed to relish Wallack's enacting of "Melantius" in *The Bridal* as a good piece of *comic* acting, laughing heartily at what the author evidently intended should be received as a Tragedy. The risibles of some individuals were not to be restrained even at the death of "Evadne" and her brother's grief thereat. The afterpiece was to have been a concoction called *Strike for Wages*, but, prior to rising the curtains, the manager came out and stated the play would be withdrawn, as he had received information that a disturbance was contemplated by a certain party with whom the house was packed. It appears that some German tailors, who are now on a *strike* for higher wages, and who have had, also, a very serious row with some of their brother "*jours*"<sup>1</sup> for working at low prices, conceiving the play to be a reflection on them, had repaired to the Theatre in a large body with the determination of hissing the offending piece off the stage, but the manager very wisely defeated their intentions by withdrawing it—thereby depriving the Dutch pluck of a fine chance to display itself.<sup>2</sup> The excitement put money into the manager's pocket, the house being filled.

**Wed. Sept. 11th** Pleasant. Walking AM, reading PM, at Theatres 7PM. The "*Jenny Lind Excitement*" lessened the audiences at most of the theatres, she making her first appearance in America at Castle Garden. P. T. Barnum, the Prince of humbugs, entered into an engagement with Jenny some two months since, to come to this country and give a series of concerts. Not a day passed without some article laudatory of her talents, or her charities, appearing in the leading newspapers, until, at last, "Jenny Lind" was in every mouth, and each tradesman seemed to think her name a talisman to make his goods sell well—it was "Jenny Lind hats" and "Jenny Lind coats," and pants, also cigars, liquors, oysters, &c. &c., in short, everything was "Jenny Lind." The warmest advocates for the simplifying of the English language seemed about to have

1. *jours*: journeymen.

2. During the summer of 1850, New York City tailors from multiple ethnic groups sought higher wages by attempting to establish a "scale of prices." Tensions between strikers, nonstrikers, and law enforcement boiled over on August 4, when police confronted tailors rioting at the intersection of Thirty-Eighth Street and Ninth Avenue. At least two workers were killed, dozens more were injured, and forty were arrested. Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850*, 20th anniversary ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 377–82.

their wishes gratified as the nomenclature of the different trades & sciences was in a fair way of abridgement, the three syllables of Jenny Lind being sufficient to express all things. She arrived in this city from England on the 8th inst. in steamer *Atlantic* and, although it was Sunday, thousands of people thronged the wharf eager to gain a glimpse of the “*divine creature.*” The carriage in which she was driven to the hotel could hardly make its way through the dense crowd surrounding it. At night she was serenaded, and on the preceding day the Mayor, together with several distinguished personages, paid their devoirs to her. For several days the Irving house, at which she resided, was besieged with men, women, & children, anxious to get a peep at her head when she deigned to look from her window. The tickets for the first concert were sold by auction, and the choice for the first seat brought \$225!!!—which was paid by a Mr. Genin, a hatter on Broadway. The gross receipts for the concert were between \$20 & \$30,000 dollars! Jenny’s share—\$10,000—she distributed to the different charitable associations—\$3000 to the Fireman’s, \$2000 to the Musical fund, \$500 to the Dramatic fund, etc.

**Mon. Sept. 16th** Fine day. Spoken to about an engagement—it’s some comfort to be *spoken* to on the subject—though I hardly think ’twill lead to one. At National 8PM. Fair House.

**Sat. Sept. 21st** Fine day. Walking about all day. After the Theatres were out I dropped into “*Herbert’s Saloon,*” a reading room attached to “*Burton’s Theatre*”—there were between thirty & forty actors assembled together, among whom were W. Burton, R. Blake, J. W. Lester, Bland, Skerrit, Howard, Parsloe, C. K. Mason, and several other Englishmen—the Americans were in a *small* minority. The little planets clustering around the greater ones, listening to their *jokes* and bestowing on them deferential smiles, had not a word to say to me, so that I was left entirely to my own meditations, and I thought if ’twas possible for me, in my native city, to achieve an enviable position in spite of the many who stood ready to crush me, and who were now the means of keeping me out of an engagement in any of the principal Theatres. I resolved to leave no stone unturned in the way of obtaining a foothold, and in the coming week I shall make personal application to all the managers in the city, and if perseverance will succeed I’ll not flag in it. If I can’t climb the mountain I’ll get under it, perhaps I may be able to push myself through mole-like, and so, by undermining, topple it down. After 2AM before I got to bed.

**Fri. Sept. 27th** Wet—disagreeable & rainy day. Passed the AM in the *Herald* office. A part was given me to study for Oct 2d. At National 7PM. Booth played “*Sir Edward*” in the *Iron Chest* very well indeed—his son Edwin playing Wilford, being his first appearance on the New York stage. He will make a fine actor in time, should he prove studious. There was a fine house, being the “old Man’s” Benefit.

**Wed. Oct. 2nd** Raining & shining. Rehearsal AM, study PM, 6PM made my first appearance at the “*Astor Place Opera House*” as Thraseus in a new Roman play called *Paetus Caecinna*, written by Isaac C. Pray. I regret that the author should have selected Mr. Buchanan to personate his hero, as I believe the part to be worthy of a better actor. The house was not as ’twas expected to have been. It is difficult to say if the piece was successful or not as the house appeared to be packed with Buchanan’s friends, who called him before the curtain three several times.

**Tues. Oct. 8th** Fine day. At the Astor Theatre AM—Maretzek, the manager, paid me \$25.00 for my five nights’ services, which squared our account. Now I am “*on the town*” again. Writing PM—at Bowery & National—fair houses at both—to bed early.

**Thurs. Oct. 10th** Fine day. Walking AM & PM. Refused an offer to go to Boston—If I sacrifice many more engagements for the sake of remaining in N.Y. I shall find myself thrown out of all. 7PM went to a book auction to purchase a book marked on the catalogue but was so tired out I fell asleep and woke just in time to hear it was *gone*. My interest in the auction being over I concluded it would be as well to finish my nap at home.

**Sat. Oct. 12th** While in my room writing, who should walk in but a Mr. J. S. Potter, manager of the Richmond Theatre, to whom I wrote some four weeks since but received no answer. He told me that he had just got my letter from Philadelphia, whither I had sent it, as directed by his advertisement, he expecting to have been there but business detained him in the West. He offered me \$25.00 per week for Richmond and though it was the best engagement ever proffered me I declined giving him a final answer before 2PM of the 13th, being determined not to leave the city while there was a hope of remaining, not that I had the *slightest* hope for, on the contrary, I felt *sure* of having to leave.

In the PM I met Perry in company with Mr. Carr, one of the managers of the Buffalo & Rochester Theatres, and the thought struck me that the manager would induce the Actor to go West with him. After the performance I called on Perry who confided to me, as a secret, that he had played his last night at the National, intending to slip out of the city on the following day—and if I played my cards well I might slip into his situation. Here was most welcome news for me, who passed an uneasy night in thinking of the good luck that might—*possibly*—(nothing certain in this world) be in store for me.

**Sun. Oct. 13th** Fine day. At Perry's house AM. Found him packing up—5PM down to the steamer & saw Perry off for Albany. Well, the situation is vacant, now to see if I can fill it. Passed the evening with some friends—to bed early.

**Mon. Oct. 14th** Pleasant. Wrote an anonymous letter to A. H. Purdy, manager of the National, informing him of Perry's departure. J. Gilbert, an old friend (who was let into the secret), went to the Theatre. When Purdy told him the *news* of Perry's—*villainy*, the manager called it, Jo mentioned me, and remarked that, if he, Purdy, wished to secure me he would have to be speedy as I was about concluding an engagement for Richmond. A messenger was dispatched to seek me out, instanter, Jo saying where he *thought* I might be found (*I hadn't told him, a few minutes previous, where I would certainly be—oh no, of course not*) and where, as it *chanced*, I was found. Calling upon Mr. Purdy I was *astonished* to hear of the “*villainous trick* Mr. Perry had served him.” After some coaxing on his part, as I was *very reluctant* to throw aside the good offer made me by Mr. Potter, I agreed, if he would transfer Perry's engagement to me, to study a part for tonight. The necessary articles were drawn up and—I *went home to dinner*, which I enjoyed most heartily. Study PM—at Theatre 7PM. An apology was made for my taking the part of “Frederick Jerome” in the *New York Fireman* at short notice. I was well received, and got through with the part creditably. . . .

**Sat. Oct. 26th** Nasty weather. Rehearsal AM, walking PM, at Theatre 7PM. I played De Mauprat, in *Richelieu*, very badly. Had a talk with the manager after performance—he promises to offer \$1000 for the best “Local Drama,” the chief part to be sustained by me. It shall not be my fault if he breaks his promise—for it will benefit me too much to let it sleep.

**Tues. Nov. 5th** Gloomy suicidal weather. Cast my *first vote*. The election was for state and city officers. I voted for men & principles more than for party, making a selection from both tickets, though mostly from the Democratic, the Whigs being too much tinctured with Free Soil & Abolitionism. Writing PM, at Theatre 7PM—played in the farce—Fair house.

**Sun. Nov. 10th** Beautiful day. Cut the “Buck” in a new coat—and cut my thumb while strapping my razor—the latter cut being the most *impressive*. I can’t be called an *ambidexter* for at least a week to come, one hand is hors de combat.<sup>3</sup> Reading AM, writing PM, at John Cox’s 7PM to get some ship-yard slang for new drama—was informed that “*Shemed*” meant to spoil anything, that “*Smiled*” referred to the fullness of a vessel’s bow, that when a ship was building she was considered “*on the stocks*.” From all this *important* information I am to glean sufficient material to construct a Drama devoted to the “Ship Carpenters”—It shall be done my lord.

**Wed. Nov. 27th** Unsettled—writing AM. Went to a ship launch, the first I ever saw. The painter, property man, and stage carpenter, with the manager of the National, were all present, taking items for my new play. Study PM, at Theatre 7PM. Mrs. Grattan too sick to play—*Floating Beacon* changed to *Spitfire*—Good house.

**Fri. Nov. 29th** Considerable rain during day. Rehearsal AM of *Nature’s Nobleman*. From this point to Dec. 14 is concerned with this play & to which I shall devote a few pages, sketching its history during the two weeks of its performance.<sup>4</sup> Purdy kept his promise and offered a thousand dollars for the best American drama, the leading character to be sustained by Harry Watkins. All plays sent in for competition were to be read by a committee of three competent persons, selected by Mr. Purdy. A sealed note, containing the author’s name and address, were to accompany each manuscript, but were not to be opened until the committee made their decision. This was to prevent their judgment being influenced by friendship, or prejudice. The only condition exacted, on the manager’s part, was that the author should guarantee

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3. *hors de combat* (French): outside the fight.

4. At some point in time, Watkins crossed out the remainder of the text on the page and removed subsequent pages with his original report of the premiere of *Nature’s Nobleman*. He then added this sentence above the line, and inserted pages containing the text of this entry and the next.

his play to be original. Purdy said that plays enough were sent in to keep the committee busy in reading for five years. As no one knew me to be a competitor everybody was surprised when the author's name was given. Of course the disappointed dramatists all vowed it was a set thing, and it would have been impossible to convince them to the contrary; yet there was never a more honorable transaction in any matter of this kind, especially as one of the committee was my personal enemy; a man who would have been more likely to decide against me than in my favor. In constructing my play I had the peculiarities of the different members of the company in mind, and arranged the dramatis personae to suit them. My success in so fitting the actors was what impressed the committee, more, perhaps, than the merits of the play. There is a great difference in writing a play for a general market, than in writing for a particular company. In the latter case an author of practical experience is guided by his knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of the actors who are to take part in the representation of his play. Knowing the ability, and talent, of each individual, he constructs his dialogue and situations in a manner calculated to develop their best points. Ignorance of these matters is what makes it so difficult, almost impossible, for a man, however great his genius as a writer, to create a successful play. The best acting dramas have come from the pens of actors, or from persons who have been, directly or indirectly, attached to Theatres. These parties while developing the plot of their plays bear constantly in mind the effect of a speech, or situation, upon the audience, whose likes and dislikes are so well known to such writers. . . . Believing that my drama would please the class of people whose lives it was intended to portray—the working men—I proposed to Purdy to make a change in the terms. Instead of paying \$1000 for the play, as he advertised to do, I suggested that he might produce it by paying a royalty for each performance. Of course Purdy thought me a fool to refuse so handsome a surety, for the uncertain result of a royalty. He said that Mr. T. Bowles, the treasurer, had a cheque made out for the sum agreed upon, and which had been awarded to me by the committee of readers. I replied that I was willing that Bowles should tear up the cheque, and prepare a contract based upon royalty. This was done and I left the office. As I closed the door and stood by it for a moment I fancied that I heard a chuckle from the astute Purdy and words which sounded like—“Watkins was a blanked fool.” Plays in these days required strong titles, something which gave the public an idea of what they might expect. This was especially the case with the East-side Theatres, where the audiences liked their dramatic feasts served up with plenty of spice. There could not be too much reading matter in their pro-



grammes. They read the whole thing, although it often contained sufficient to furnish a newspaper. With this knowledge I christened my “prize drama” *Nature’s Nobleman, the Mechanic, or the Ship Carpenter of New York*. . . .

**Mon. Dec. 2nd** First night of *Nature’s Nobleman*. The house was crowded from pit to dome, and the play was received with an enthusiasm seldom heard even on the occasion of a “first night.” . . . On the fifth night quite an exciting incident occurred, caused by the political condition of the country. The slavery question was agitating the people, murmurs of disunion were heard—Henry Clay’s compromise resolutions had been passed at the last session of Congress—the ideas of the North and South, and of different parties, as to the powers of the government and the rights of the states, were beginning to clash in a manner that foreboded evil to the country. Under this state of things men became sensitive and were easily excited on political subjects, taking sides according to their prejudices, or predilections. The scene of my play was laid in New York during the Mexican war. At the end of the second act a regiment of soldiers embark for Mexico, a regiment of volunteers which the hero, Herman Grey, has joined. The color-bearer stands near Herman who points to the flag and speaks as follows: “*Our Country’s flag! May that traitor stand for aye accursed who from the heavenly blue of its bright firmament would seek to blot a single star, or sunder the great chain that binds them into one harmonious whole, for it was forged by God-like patriots and its tenure should be eternal.*” This speech never failed to “bring down the house,” but on this occasion an enthusiastic individual, finding it impossible to restrain his feelings, arose quickly from his seat and, springing upon the balustrade of the dress-circle, proposed “three cheers for the Union!” His proposal had an electrical effect upon the house. Every person present stood up and the three cheers were given with a rare vim. This was followed by “three more!”—and “three more!” Such an excitement was rarely ever witnessed in a Theatre. It extended to the stage, for the actors and supernumeraries joined in spontaneously. All present appeared to forget that it was a Theatrical performance, it seemed so like reality—an ebullition of patriotism such as might have been witnessed at a scene of actual occurrence, instead of a mere mimic representation. It showed the state of popular feeling, disassociated with politics, which displayed itself so forcibly in the subsequent great uprising of 1861. Of course after this cheering episode, every patriotic allusion was applauded to the full. The success of the drama had a strange effect upon Purdy, the manager, whose conduct would appear inexplicable save to those who knew his antecedents. On

Saturday he called me into his private office and then stated that he did “not like this royalty business,” and was not willing to continue the run of the play after the coming week unless I would accept the fixed sum he had agreed to pay. It was evident that if he pushed the play, as its success warranted, that the royalties would considerably exceed the \$1000, and Purdy felt annoyed to think he had made such a mistake as to change the original terms. I tried to reason with him by showing that although I might make a few hundreds extra by this arrangement he would realize thousands, whereas had the play failed he would have been delighted with the “royalty business,” and regarded me as a simpleton for having proposed it. I refused to accept his offer. When I relinquished my claim to the \$1000 I took the chances of making more in the event of success, and would not have murmured had it proved otherwise and the play been withdrawn after the second night. Finding I would not yield, Purdy announced the “last six nights” of *Nature’s Nobleman*. The company could not understand the strange announcement—taking off an attractive play that was drawing money to the house. When they understood the circumstances they said that I was right and Purdy foolish. He was certainly very angry at not carrying his point, and still more angry when he found that I would not let him have a copy of the play. He thought that paying me a royalty entitled him to the ownership, which idea did not speak well for his business qualifications, as his lawyer informed him. Our contract read—“*I hereby agree to pay Harry Watkins the sum of \$25.00 per night during the run at my Theatre of his drama Nature’s Nobleman. A. H. Purdy.*” There was nothing like purchasing in this agreement. I did not dispose of my property. Purdy did not treat me well. I had worked hard for his interests, and put considerable money in his treasury, having induced persons to visit his Theatre who would not have entered the doors but through my personal influence. He was one of those self-made men who overestimate their importance, and are often injured by success—not being able to appreciate the favors of the fickle goddess, Fortune. Purdy entered the National Theatre as an usher, he then became doorkeeper, afterwards treasurer, and ultimately manager. For this he deserved a great deal of credit, but his head was not well balanced. As soon as his treasury became a little swollen he went in for outside show; wore large diamond breast pins, and covered his fingers with rings so thickly that he could hardly close them at the second joint. He was the first to produce *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in this city, from the success of which he must have derived quite a large sum—going well up into the thousands. He was determined that this should be known, and, consequently, committed many eccentric freaks of liberality. One of these

freaks had a destructive tendency. Seeing an acquaintance with a hat which did not suit him, Purdy would smash it and then soothe the outraged feelings of the wearer by giving an order on his hatter for a new one. It was said that Purdy was a big enough customer to keep one hat store in trade. Certainly, never before were so many new hats seen about that Theatre, or in its immediate vicinity around Chatham Street. I christened him “Purdy the Tiler,” being a slight alteration of the title of an old farce—*Teddy the Tiler*. After a splendid week’s business the last performance was announced for Saturday evening, when the house was crammed to repletion, while a sufficient number were turned away to fill another Theatre of much larger size. . . .<sup>5</sup>

**Sat. Dec. 21st** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM. Rather unwell—my mouth breaking out with fever sores—a good sign—but not a handsome one. The business was so wretchedly bad during the week that Purdy was compelled to put up *Nature’s Nobleman*—now called by its second title, the *Ship Carpenter of New York*—for this night, and the result was a *packed* house. Purdy was so annoyed at his own conduct that he avoided me the entire evening, although I deserved his sympathy, if not his gratitude. Few men would have attempted such a night’s work—“Herman Grey” and “Lord Darnley”—in my condition, and yet had I not played there could have been no performance—as I was in all the plays in such prominent parts that there was no member of the company could take my place. The audience called for me after the first piece, I told them I had not earned their approbation—and stated how I was suffering from sickness, that when Heaven restored me to health, they would, probably, find my exertions more deserving of their applause. My poor speech was richly responded to.

**Tues. Dec. 24th** Pleasant, quite cold. I have got the *smallpox*, my face & body are covered with the blotches. The disease is going the rounds—several in the Theatre have it. Dose of salts AM, reading PM, at Theatre 7PM. Took a lemon sweat on going to bed.

**Wed. Dec. 25th** Unsettled—snow in the evening. Feel much better today—reading & writing—so passed my Christmas—at Theatre 7PM. The timid la-

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5. We have omitted the conclusion of the addendum, in which Watkins explains how and why H. O. Pardey’s *Nature’s Nobleman* (1851) was subsequently mistaken for Watkins’s 1850 play.

dies & gents are rather afraid I shall give them the smallpox, some thought it wrong for me to come near the Theatre—and to quiet their fears I had to deny having anything more than a fever. Two performances—House full PM, *crowded* in the evening.

**Sat. Dec. 28th** Unpleasant—some snow. Reading & writing AM—performance at 2PM of *Magic Well & Golden Axe*. There couldn't have been more than fifteen dollars in the house, the manager wished to make the experiment of Saturday PM performances, this one was a complete failure, much to the joy of the Company. I presume that Purdy does not expect to pay extra for the extra playing, but I shall most certainly demand it, which demand may lead to hard words. At Theatre 7PM, three pieces—to a fair house.

**Sat. Jan. 4th 1851** Cold. Rehearsal AM. Had a row with Mr. Wemyss during the rehearsal of the *Drunkard*—in which he was to play Cribbs. When the piece was first cast, I told him that I would bring him a written part, he said that 'twould be of no use to him as he had played the part several consecutive weeks at Barnum's Museum. Now, I play the same piece, but in a different manner, cutting down the five acts to four, leaving the part of Agnes out—who has nothing to do with the play except to find a will, which I have done by another person. In order to make the plot of the play work smoothly, I had introduced a few new lines for Cribbs to speak, this I told Wemyss of, who replied, that *he'd be damned if he'd speak another line more than he had spoken before*. I took no notice of this, but on the morning of Rehearsal brought my part, and tendered it to him, he refused to take it saying that his own would answer him. Seeing that he was determined to oppose me, and, not wishing to display any ill tempers with a man of his years, I walked onto the stage, when, to hurry through with the rehearsal, as 'twas growing late, I was requested to direct the piece, as being the only person acquainted with it. All went on smoothly to the second act, when Wemyss refused to speak three lines, which were essential to the plot, because he had not spoken them at the Museum. I appealed to the stage manager (J. Anderson)—who, it appears, had some words with Wemyss a few days previously—he flew into a passion and swore that Wemyss should speak the lines or he would forfeit him a week's salary. Hard words passed between them, I endeavoring to pacify Wemyss, though his conduct was wholly in opposition to me—but he stormed like a madman and would listen to nothing. Purdy came up, said he would have no such language in his Theatre, other words followed and Wemyss walked off the

stage—the rest of the rehearsal was concluded without him. After Wemyss had finished his performance in the evening, he was handed a note from the manager saying that his services would no longer be required. This was not what he expected, and he fumed more than ever, but it amounted to nothing. Previous to this affair I had always respected Mr. Wemyss, and thought him friendly to me. . . .

**Sun. Jan. 12th** Cloudy AM, the PM was beautiful. Reading & walking AM. Visited Brooklyn PM, called at Mott's—passed the evening very agreeably with some young ladies to whom I was introduced for the first time. I must begin to look around for a wife, if I can spare the time from my studies, but I doubt ever being married.

**Tues. Jan. 28th** Rainy. This AM while I was trying on a new dress, who should walk into the room but my brother George, on a visit from the south, where he resides—I threw every thing else aside to enjoy the day in his company. . . .

**Sat. Feb. 1st** Weather cold but moderating. Attended an Auction—bought a court-dress, sword, a chapeau, and a pair of buff pants, the property of Col. Mumford, of the 7th regiment, a lawyer of this city—but now deceased. I bought the things very cheap. The sword was a windfall to me, dress-swords being so scarce in this country. Reading PM. Walk after supper—to bed early. I have not played at all this week.

**Tues. Feb. 4th** Unsettled. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Played Iago for the first time. Hanley as "Othello." Iago is the most difficult acting part in the whole drama, and I played it *better* than *any* part I have yet enacted, it took the house by surprise, and made quite a talk among the critics in the boxes—as I was informed by a friend who overheard their remarks. To have played a leading Shakespearean part with success is the best feather I have ever gained—and why may not that success lead me to hope for a still greater in the future? The house was good—I was called out.

**Mon. Feb. 10th** Suicidal weather—wet, foggy, rainy, muddy disagreeable day. About all day with George buying up crockery, groceries, hardware, fancy goods, etc., for his store in the south. I might as well get an insight into business so that if my funds should ever reach anything like a respectable pile I

may be enabled to enter into some kind of a speculation. I should like to be worth \$10,000 when I reach the age of forty—that sum will satisfy my wants. George & myself, receiving an invitation to visit Mr. Benham (a merchant of this city) and family, passed a very agreeable evening. Mrs. Benham & her sister lacking that *polished refinement* which renders the society of prudish and delicately fastidious females rather embarrassing to a stranger—by their sociability [they] made me feel quite at home, in fact, I never passed a few hours more pleasantly.

**Sat. Feb. 22nd** “*Washington’s Birthday*”—There was a large procession of the military and civil societies, and Senator Foote, of Mississippi, on an invitation extended to him, delivered a most eloquent address at Niblo’s Garden before an audience of near 7000 persons. The recent agitated state of the country on the slavery question, and its settlement by a compromise, gave an additional zest to the day, and, indeed, I have never known it to be celebrated with so much enthusiasm. Washington’s farewell address was read at all the meetings held in honor of the occasion, and most peculiarly is it applicable to the present time, when demagogues are seeking their own political aggrandisement even at the expense of their country. That address should be the guiding star of every American who loves his country better than his party. Rehearsal AM. George left for the south, in the steamship *Alabama*, at 4PM—goodbye thou best of *friends*—may the day soon arrive when our business will no longer keep us separate. Out of the bill—took a walk after supper—to bed late.

**Tues. Feb. 25th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, writing PM, at Theatre 7PM. Most of the leading Senators of the country have paid this city a visit during the last few months and delivered themselves of what is termed “*Union speeches*”—that is, speeches in favor of the Compromise measures passed by the last Congress. Whether there is any real danger to the Union or not, these speeches serve to keep alive among the people a love for the country as it stands, by portraying the evils that would follow a dissolution, though I do not believe that the next hundred years will give birth to the child that will live to see this “*Union*” dissolved. The designing politician, the intriguing demagogue, or the mad fanatic, to effect their own vile purposes, may seek a subversion of our blessed Union, but ere they apply the torch of the incendiary let them pause, lest they ignite in the breasts of the people a fire of patriotic indignation that will consume them all.

**Wed. Mar. 5th** Pleasant. Purdy, wishing me to get him a file of the *Island City*—a newspaper published here some three years ago and containing the story of “Harry Burnham,” which he has had dramatized—procured me a horse and a wagon with which to drive out to Westchester, the only place where a file of the paper was to be had. A lady, at whose house the papers were, rode out with me, it was my first appearance as a driver and I acquitted myself very creditably. The horse was a fine animal and passed everything on the road, which, by the way, was rather a dusty one, for at times the dust would be so thick I could scarcely see beyond the horse’s head, especially when racing with two or three other vehicles. I drove thirty miles in about three hours—considering the bad state of the roads, this was pretty fair for a novice—in fact I made a hit—my friends thinking me an old hand at the reins. At Theatre 7PM—fair house to see the *Road to Riches*. I presume the people come to see if they can discover the right road to the much sought-for goal of sudden riches.

**Mon. Mar. 10th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM—what with studying & walking I got pretty well tired out and was obliged to take a nap PM. At Theatre 7PM—first night of *Harry Burnham*, it went off very well, much better than I anticipated—there was a crowded house. Besides the mimic battles on the stage the audience were treated to a real fight in the Pit between some boys and an officer who was endeavoring to eject one of them for creating a disturbance.

**Mon. Mar. 17th** Rained all day—rather bad for the followers of St. Patrick, destroying the great preparations they had made to celebrate the day. Walk AM. Reading, writing PM. At Theatre 7PM—*Harry Burnham* drew well last week, and is now in the second, and though it rained hard, there was a fine house this evening.<sup>6</sup>

**Sat. Mar. 29th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM—feel a little better today—studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Although *Harry Burnham*<sup>7</sup> continued to attract, a previ-

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6. At some point, Watkins added a page to the diary here in which he claims that James Anderson, stage manager of the National Theatre, asked him to revise a dramatization of *Harry Burnham* written by Irish dramatist James H. Pilgrim (ca. 1823–1879), and that Watkins’s version was staged at the theater. We have omitted this text.

7. The text that originally concluded this entry about *Harry Burnham* (“appears to have done drawing, as the houses have fallen off nearly every night this week”) was crossed out at some point, and the text after the footnote reference was added above the line.

ous arrangement with the elder Booth compelled Purdy to announce the “last night,” much to his regret.

**Tues. Apr. 15th** Drizzling rain. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Benefit of Mrs. Drew, an actress possessing some talent but considerably less than she flatters herself with having—the same may be said of her husband, Mr. F. Drew. There was a finger ring and breast pin thrown to them from the boxes but from circumstances connected with the *flattering testimonial*, it was more than suspected that Mr. & Mrs. Frank Drew had, several hours previously, fancied the articles while on a visit to a jeweller’s shop, and that the Ring and Pin cost them more than they cleared by the *Benefit*.

**Sun. Apr. 27th** Pleasant. Reading AM. Writing & studying & walking PM. Purdy not only had a rehearsal this evening but issued cards of invitation to the number of three hundred, so that there was quite an audience—the most of whom were drawn to the Theatre to see “*how the Actors did when they were rehearsing*.” I do not think Mr. Purdy will profit much by his experiment as the rehearsal was a failure in its purpose—that of instruction to the company—for, aside from the displeasure of the actors at being compelled to rehearse on a Sunday evening, they were most justly indignant at being shown as wild beasts for the gratification of the manager’s friends and toadies, and so mumbled over their parts with very little attention to the business of the stage.

**Thurs. May 1st** The Clerk of the weather has been most kind to the workers of the great *moving* panorama that occurs in this city every first of May,<sup>8</sup> a custom that would be much “more honored in the breach than in the observance,”<sup>9</sup> though ’tis of some benefit to storekeepers and cartmen, to the former in replacing the broken furniture and the latter by the exorbitant charges they are enabled to make for carting. I have become so used to moving, having been at it for over fourteen years, that I was quite at home superintending mother’s affairs in getting into our new quarters. I regretted having to leave my old home, 92 East Broadway, where I first made *some noise in the world*. After a hard day’s work and a hard night’s work, I laid down on my bed at midnight pretty well tired out.

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8. Until the mid-twentieth century, it was customary in New York City for rental agreements to end on May 1—a date that came to be known as “Moving Day” due to the many families relocating to new addresses.

9. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 1, scene 4.



**Fri. May 2nd** Pleasant. Slept first rate last night in my new quarters and awoke with the sun shining full in my face—helped the old lady to clean up house—PM bought some new carpet, chairs, window shades, etc., to adorn my parlor with. I shall be quite a fashionable house-keeper, all that I want is a wife, and that is an article I do not expect ever to obtain for love or money. Severe attack of dyspepsia brought on by eating too much pie. At Theatre 7PM.

**Mon. May 5th** Raining—chilly, disagreeable day. Rehearsal AM. I was quite—I was about to write surprised, but man cannot surprise me—on entering the Green Room to see a notice posted up to the effect that on and after Thursday, Mrs. C. R. Thorne would perform the part of *Thalaba*. The worthy manager in his notice also stated that “*in making this change he wished the company to know that he meant not the slightest disrespect to Mr. Watkins but that he had staked his all upon the piece and that, consulting his own interest, he was necessitated to improve the piece by all the means in his power—and that he deemed it would increase its attraction if the part of Thalaba was personated by a Lady.*” This notice may be all very well as far as it goes, but with those who know nothing of the circumstances, it will seem as though the manager deemed me incapable of performing the part, and so the change will tend very much to my injury, especially with managers in other cities. This is not the first time that this *thing* created from the filth of all mankind—this A. H. Purdy—has sacrificed my interest with the despicable hope of coining an extra shilling thereby. But, in all my dealings with man, I have not yet found one who—oh, God! Save me from misanthropy! At Theatre 7PM.

**Wed. May 21st** Fine day. Rehearsal AM, another row in the camp. Mrs. C. R. Thorne threw up her engagement in consequence of Purdy’s refusal to admit into a private box a party of her friends—this proceeding was in keeping with all this “beggar-on horseback”<sup>10</sup> conduct. He might at least have shown some respect for her sex and position by admitting her friends, and then have spoken to her on the subject in private, not by stopping them at the door to wound her feelings. ’Tis said that “consistency is a jewel.” If this is so, Purdy possesses that gem in its greatest purity, for he is the most consistent man I ever had the misfortune to meet with, being contemptibly mean and villainous upon all occasions. Walking & reading PM. 8PM at Burton’s Theatre. *The*

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10. “Set a beggar on horseback and he’ll ride to the Devil” (proverb): a person with newfound privilege or power often ends up abusing it.

*Heir at Law* was played, and well played too. Burton as Pangloss and Blake as Daniel Dowlas were most excellent.

**Mon. June 2nd** Pleasant—growing warmer. Rehearsal AM, walking & studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. 1st night of J. R. Scott, who is engaged for the rest of the season—another piece of injustice towards me by this thing Purdy, but I shall not throw up my engagement as long as I can hold it with anything like honor, as I want all the money I can clear from now to the end of the season, when, if I can receive any encouragement from George, I think I'll set sail for England, where I may spend a couple of months, or longer, if circumstances will warrant it, for I shall play there if there is the slightest chance of so doing.

**Tues. June 3rd** Pleasant. Walking & reading AM, walking & studying PM, out of the bill, Benefit of the “*Actors' Order of Friendships*”—a new society started in Philadelphia, by a few actors, about two years since. It met with considerable opposition from Managers who deemed it is a kind of conspiracy among the actors to compel them to do as they pleased. The most respectable members of the profession held aloof from the society when it was first formed, but by organization of a lodge in this city the former prejudice was done away with and the association has received a large accession to its members and is now in a flourishing condition. The Benefit yielded some \$200.

**Fri. June 6th** Pleasant. Transacted some business for George AM, walking & writing PM, at Theatre 7PM. Another piece of Purdy's sagacious management has been displayed in his engagement of J. R. Scott, whom, to make use of, he is obliged to produce old worn-out dramas, that the public has seen over and over again, for Scott either cannot or will not study new parts, and he might improve his knowledge of those parts that he has so often played for the language of them appears to have slipped his memory most sadly.

**Sat. June 14th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, making out my benefit bill and notices for the papers PM. The cost of advertising is nearly as muc[h] as an actor can reasonably expect to clear by his benefit, but were he not to advertise he would incur the ill will of the press, which would prove very injurious to his interests professionally, and so in the end, pecuniarily. The most he can expect from a benefit is what he may gain by an increase of his popularity. At Theatre 7PM. *The Surgeon of Paris* was most wretchedly played. J. R. Scott and Mrs. M. Jones found fault with everybody for being imperfect, which, I

should say, was done to screen themselves, for in the scenes I had with them it was very palpable to me that they knew what the *play was about* but possessed very little knowledge of the language—Good house.

**Tues. June 17th** Beautiful day. Rehearsal AM, studying PM. At Theatre 6PM. Took my first benefit in my native city—the house was very good though not so full as I expected it would be from the attractiveness of my bill. The benefit of a popular actor at the Bowery Theatre no doubt kept many from attending mine who would otherwise have done so. My bill consisted of *Brutus*, *My Precious Betsey*, and a new local drama written by myself<sup>11</sup> and entitled the *Heart Of The World, Or, Life's Struggles In a Great City*. This drama, as also the *Ship Carpenter*, was an *original* work in the full meaning of the word. The company being overworked, and having an unusually hard night's labor, took but little interest in my drama. The majority, if they did not expect a failure, hardly anticipated the success it met with which, under the circumstances, was much beyond what I could have hoped for. After a five-act tragedy and farce an author could hardly expect his audience to be in a condition to enjoy the first performance of a new play, but it held them—until past one o'clock AM! . . . The play was announced as "A Moral Drama." Following the title, the object of the play was given as follows: *The design of the author is to portray the evils resulting from ingratitude, and to show the young man who is about entering, for the first time, into this world's busy traffic that his chief reliance should be upon himself—that this self-reliance, when backed by energy and industry, and upheld by the inspiring influence of a true woman, offers the best promise of worldly advancement.* If those in front of the curtain were not glad when the play was over, those behind the curtain were delighted. Everybody was tired out, especially the author, who was both mentally and physically wearied.

**Thurs. June 19th** Beautiful weather. Rehearsal AM, walking & studying. At Theatre 6PM—a new farce was played called *Pettyloons, or the Ladies' New Costume*, written to take off the Turkish style of dress which some ladies are endeavoring to bring into fashion, and I should not be at all surprised to see it adopted.<sup>12</sup> Though it will be some time before it can come into general use

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11. A reference to actor-playwright Charles T. P. Ware, who probably coauthored the play with Watkins, has been crossed out here. In addition, the rest of the original diary entry has been struck from this point onward, and Watkins has inserted two new pages with a different report about the premiere of *Heart of the World*. The revised account is provided here.

12. This "Turkish style of dress" (the bloomer costume) was popularized in 1851 by Amelia

on account of the prejudice against so great an innovation on the present style, the new dress has certainly every advantage over the old one, both as to comfort and utility—also in appearance. The play was a very poor one though it went off very well which, I believe, may be attributed to the Actors being imperfect, for had they stuck to the author the poor dialogue and wit of the piece must have dam'd it—the ad libitum carried it through. Poor house.

**Wed. June 25th** Quite warm. Walking AM, walking & writing PM, at Theatre 7PM. There was a benefit got up for Mr. Hamblin, at Castle Garden, for the purpose of relieving him in his embarrassments, but it turned out a complete failure, which I do not think caused much regret, at least among the profession. The failure could not be attributed to any want of exertion on the part of the committee to whom were entrusted the getting up of the “Hamblin Festival”—for they flooded the city with bills and the newspapers for a month previous, teemed with notices of his—Hamblin’s—many *virtues*, his liberality, his encouragement to American Actors and Authors, & etc., though it is well known that he never gave an Actor a salary of one hundred cents while there was a possibility of getting him for ninety-nine—and he permitted poor Nat Bannister to die in the city hospital though he had made from fifteen to twenty thousand dollars on a piece (*Putnam*) which Bannister wrote for him and for which Hamblin gave *thirty dollars*. I have no sympathy for those men who appear so very philanthropic—in the newspapers. Out of the bill.

**Thurs. July 3rd** Showery. I can’t make up my mind whether to go to England or into the country—every hour I change my mind—now I determine on going to England, and as soon as I come to that determination I determine to stay at home. My mind is more vacillating than I deemed it, though a trip to England with but two hundred dollars in pocket should make any person pause when he thinks of the expense attending such a journey. At Theatre 9PM—Poor house.

**Fri. July 4th** My beloved country has added another year to its infancy. *How great and glorious has it become for one so young*. The day was quite cool & pleasant and the people celebrated it with considerable enthusiasm. Two performances were given at the Theatre and both times the house was jammed. I

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Bloomer (1818–1894), a women’s rights and temperance activist.

enjoyed myself looking at the happiness of others and luxuriating upon Ice Cream. At Theatre 7PM, my last appearance at the National Theatre, being the end of my engagement—played Macduff & Harry Burnham.

**Sat. July 5th** Warm. Had my hair cropped close, making quite a change in my appearance, having worn it long and curling. Removing my “props” from the Theatre AM—walking about PM. Had an offer of a free passage to England, to sail in a fortnight, but it is very doubtful if I go, not having screwed my mind to the *going point*.<sup>13</sup> Passed the evening with some merry fellows.

**Mon. July 7th** Pleasant. *Resolved* to go into the country—walking AM, packing up PM. The National reopened after a close of one night. I dropped in but made only a short stay—the scent arising from fresh paint and sweltering humanity being too much for a sensitive nose.

**Wed. July 9th** Pleasant. Left home with the intention of going to Navesink in New Jersey, but missing the steamer, and determining to go somewhere, I went to Coney Island. On the boat I got into the company of Mike Walsh, the politician on his own hook. From what I had heard of him, as being a self-made man and one possessed of great talent, I was much disappointed to find a person not very prepossessing in appearance, and rather low in his manners, and whose chief talent seemed to be a good gift of gab—as he could talk enough for half a dozen. At the island, I was advised to continue on to “*Sheepshead Bay*” where I arrived at about 7PM. The place disappointed me very much, it is a low sandy place, principally inhabited by a class of people who live by catching fish and digging clams for the New York market. This evening a heavy fog arose that soaked my clothes while standing in it—so that the first night prejudiced me against “*Sheepshead Bay*.” I stopped with Jerry Tappan, proprietor of the “Cove Cottage,” where I arrived just in time for supper, which consisted of fat bacon, strong tea, stewed cherries, and stale bread. I made my meal off the three last mentioned articles, but not possessing the stomach of an Eskimo was obliged to refrain from the “*smoked hog*.” A mattress being prepared for me on the floor I thought the better way to enjoy the pleasures of this delightful spot would be to go to sleep, which I did at about nine PM and being tired slept quite sound until aroused at 5AM . . . by the voice of my worthy host shouting to his negro servant, whom, as he

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13. An allusion to Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, act 1, scene 7.

informed me, he was compelled to feed upon bad rum in order to make him work. I had determined to return to the city immediately after breakfast but was prevailed upon by some young men to go out with them on a fishing excursion. We went where we were told that fish were plenty but after wasting an hour and a half without even getting a bite and catching nothing but crabs, we set out hunting a more propitious spot, when, after rowing about an hour up a large creek we cast anchor and threw out our lines. After patiently exhausting another hour I caught a black fish weighing about three ounces, this being deemed satisfactory we started for home. There being several branches to the creek of course we had to go up a wrong one. Discovering our mistake after rowing a mile of the way, we turned back, the wind and tide both against us, our boat having neither sail or rudder and only place for one person to row and not a good rower in the crowd, it may be easily imagined how much we enjoyed ourselves. And then to add to our happiness the clouds treated us to a heavy shower, but perseverance must prevail and so, about 3PM, we reached the “Cove Cottage,” tired out and so voraciously hungry that I was not very fastidious in selecting my food but made an indiscriminate onslaught into the fish, roast lamb, pickles, stale bread, and ice water. In the evening went to the beach to have a swim but was nearly eaten up with sand flies from which there was no escape but by rushing into the water. This annoyance completely disgusted me with Sheepshead Bay—went to bed early.

**Fri. July 11th** Rather pleasant. . . . Not wishing to dwell any longer on the pleasures attending my first visit into the country I will bring this part of my diary to a close by stating that I reached home at 8PM, much to the satisfaction of Mother, who feared that something had befallen me—having stayed so much longer than expected. Rain—to bed early.

**Sat. July 12th** Rain early AM—cleared off 10AM. 12M down to the steamer *Edwin Lewis*, found that she did not start until 3PM. Made my dinner on ice cream and Gingerbread—a good mixture for a dyspeptic. At 3PM started for Brown’s dock, on the Navesink River, New Jersey.<sup>14</sup> . . . Reached Brown’s dock 7PM—inquired where I could find board, was directed to the farmhouse of a Mr. C. Maxson, where I found them quite willing to accommodate me—partook of an excellent supper and went to bed early.

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14. Likely just south of Atlantic Highlands, NJ.

**Mon. July 14th** Pleasant. I do not wish for any greater wealth than would provide me with the certainty of being able to pass the summer months in the country away from the heat and impure air of the cities, and where I can enjoy vegetables fresh from the earth, fish from the river, fruit from the trees and bushes, and a good *drink of milk from the cow*—all of which are extremely doubtful anywhere out of the country. Took a gun AM and went hunting for Quails, not meeting with much success and falling in with a Mulberry tree in which the fruit was ripe, I passed an hour in its branches feasting on the most delicious mulberries. PM took a walk on the beach—found nothing very pleasing except some fine springs of water gushing out of the hills—got into a boat—caught some crabs—had them boiled for supper—to bed at 10PM.

**Thurs. July 17th** Very warm in the sun. Went into the field and dug enough potatoes for dinner—writing AM—chopped a lot of firewood PM. I had a much convincing proof yesterday of how easy the greatest popularity may be lost. A few years since Martin Van Buren was the idol of the Democratic party, but at the last Presidential election he, by his advocacy of free-soil doctrines and opposition to the Democratic candidate, lost, to that party, the election, and now they speak of him but to curse him, while even the Whig party hold in detestation the man who has acted so ungratefully and deceitfully as has Martin Van Buren.<sup>15</sup> When I returned from my unsuccessful hunt, having a gun loaded my host desired me to shoot at a picture, which he had in frame, of that “*d—d Democratic renegade and Abolitionist, Van Buren*” whom he should like to have “*the pleasure of hanging.*” After I had fired and put a ball through the neck of the painting, Maxson (my worthy host) shouted with joy, and exclaimed, “*You’ve hit him in the right spot, damn it how I should like to put a rope around the same place of the original.*” Why will men who have labored years to attain a reputation, and through it popularity, destroy all by, to say the least, a foolish act, or to gratify a most poor revenge. A sociable chat after supper—to bed half past nine.

**Sat. July 19th** Cloudy AM, cleared off hot 9AM. Filled a basket with Blackberries, Pears, and Cucumbers to take home to the old lady, settled up my

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15. Martin Van Buren (1782–1862) served one term as president of the United States (1837–41). An opponent of slavery, he left the Democratic Party to become the Free Soil Party’s nominee in the 1848 presidential election. He lost to the Whigs’ candidate, General Taylor.

board bill. My host and hostess were very sorry to part with me though they were not at all backward in charging enough for my board, but they treated me very kindly and I presume, charged, as they thought, according to my *wages*, which, during a conversation yesterday, they *guessed must be pretty large*—and I, forgetting good policy, did not inform them to the contrary, so was obliged to pay a *moneyed* man's board. This taught me another lesson—only to appear flush when there are no bills to be paid, but extremely poor when the reverse is the case. Reached the city at 3PM on a new steamer, the *Thomas Hunt*, this being her first trip. The country has not only improved my health but it has changed the shade of my skin, and now, as regards color, I would make quite a respectable-looking mulatto. Cleaned up and took a walk after supper. Between 8 & 9PM there was one of the heaviest thundershowers ever known in this city, it lasted but a short time. At home early.

**Tues. July 22nd** Pleasant but warm. Walking AM. C. T. Parsloe, an actor, has established a "*Theatrical Agency*" next to the saloon in Burton's Theatre, and it is quite a sight to go there of a morning to see the number of actors looking out for engagements. The first question asked, after passing the compliments of the day, is—"where are you going next season"? to which a very equivocal answer is given, especially if the questioner be one who performs the same line of parts with the questioned. . . .

**Tues. July 29th** Out of bed at 5AM, packed up my valise—washed, breakfasted, and started for the foot of Chambers Street—depot of the Albany steamers. . . . 7AM took passage on the steamer *New World* for Albany. Had a very pleasant passage though I found it rather cold for one so thinly clad as I was—expecting the weather would be insufferably hot I left all the *thickest* of my thin clothing at home. I felt the want of it most coldly. Reached Albany 4PM, left immediately for Troy—having half an hour to spare I strolled through the town—it does not appear to increase much, being, in appearance, but little larger than when I passed through it some years since. Not having time for supper I lunched on Troy ale and sugar crackers. At 6PM the Locomotive whistled and off we sped for Saratoga, reaching there at 8PM. With my valise in my hand I started through the town to hunt that anomaly, a *good* cheap boarding house—*twelve* dollars per week—the price charged at the principal hotels—being rather too strong a run upon my bank. Found a house kept by Mr. White—an Irishman—put up with him.



**Thurs. July 31st** Pleasant. Up at 5AM, drank four tumblers of the Congress water<sup>16</sup>—walked out into the country—met a farmer named Slade who offered to board me on reasonable terms. Liking his appearance and that of his house I accepted the offer. Reading, writing, and walking AM, ditto PM. After supper settled up with Mr. White, who looked quite *black* at my leaving, as he anticipated my staying with him for some time. Walked out to my new boarding house—the landlord drew me into an argument on immortality, but walking and mineral water had so tired me that most of his conversation was like a dream, for I slept through a portion of it—though I was fortunate enough to awake whenever I had to answer questions. As soon as the family were all present someone proposed prayer and down they all went onto their knees—not wishing it to be seen how great a sinner I was, I joined in—that is, I knelt down, and did pay most particular attention to what was said, and, after the prayer was ended, presume that I felt as good as the best. I was then shown to a nice room and a nice bed, which latter I was soon enjoying.

**Tues. Aug. 5th** Mornings and evenings are quite cool—too cool for the season. Reading, writing and walking AM, PM the same. After supper attended a lecture by the Reverend Mr. Pinney, general agent of the Colonization society,<sup>17</sup> on the subject of Liberia, the nature of its soil and climate, the variety of its products, and the little labor required to produce the necessaries of life. I have seldom heard a more interesting lecture nor a more pleasing lecturer, his style was not grandiloquent but to the point, showing a greater desire to give information than to impress his audience with the idea that he was a great orator, yet he was eloquent from the inspiration of the enthusiastic love he apparently felt for the cause in which he was speaking—that of the colonization of the negroes of this country in Liberia. After hearing the lecture, had I been one of the “*colored gemmen*” and believed in the truth—and there is no doubt of truth—of Mr. Pinney’s description of Liberia, I should pack up instanter and taken the first vessel up for that country.

**Mon. Aug. 11th** Settled up my board bill—I was glad to find the Landlord’s board bill as *fair* as his *bill of fare*—both very small. 8AM took the cars for

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16. Congress water: mineral water from the resort town of Saratoga Springs, NY, which was believed to have health benefits.

17. The American Colonization Society, founded in 1816, endeavored to repatriate free and emancipated African Americans to Africa as a way to avoid integrating the white and black populations in the United States.

Troy—reached there at 10AM—concluded to go by the railroad to New York. I have been unfortunate in my choice of traveling days for, both in coming here, and now in going away, I find the fare raised—yesterday the charge on the cars was one dollar fifty cents, today it is *two dollars*—and to make it still more aggravating the locomotive broke down, which caused a delay of two hours, whereas I had taken the cars in the hope of reaching N.Y. sooner than by steamer. At home by 7PM, supped on bread and tomatoes—walk after supper—to bed early.

**Thurs. Aug. 21st** Rainy. Reading, writing and walking AM. Offered an engagement for Boston. I have refused offers of engagements in all the towns that I would accept an engagement in, so that now I shall be obliged to make an attempt at starring, though I fear my chance will be rather a poor one as I shall have so much prejudice to combat with in the different managers—the old ones will turn up their Managerial noses at my presumption, while the younger ones will endeavor to keep down a rival—but *nil desperandum*, I'll screw my courage to the starring point and, *perhaps*, I'll not fail. Time is a panorama without a chart, we can only tell what the next scene will be when it rolls along. Walk after supper.

**Fri. Aug. 22nd** Close & sultry. Reading & walking AM. Wrote to George PM. Great excitement in town created by some news from Cuba to the effect that fifty Americans, forming part of a body of men under one General Lopez—who sailed from New Orleans a short time for the purpose of revolutionizing that island—had been taken by the Spaniards and shot down without a trial, and not only shot but their dead bodies most horribly mutilated. The great majority of the people of the United States were opposed to any expedition being fitted up in this country for the purpose of interfering in the affairs of Cuba, but this most cruel barbarity on the part of the Spaniards has made a great change in the popular feeling and a large mass meeting was held this evening in the Park to express sympathy for those Americans who were shot and to seek some means of avenging their death. It is hoped that the news from Cuba has been greatly exaggerated, but should it prove true, I have no doubt that volunteers will flock from different parts of the union in such numbers that in less than three months' time Cuba will be wrested from the dominion of the Spaniards, and this too in spite of all the efforts of our own government to restrain its people from leaving the country in armed bodies for the avowed purpose of assisting the inhabitants of another country in

throwing off the oppressive yoke of their government, with whom we are at peace.<sup>18</sup> Every civilised nation on the globe is destined, ere the expiration of another century, to become free and independent, and it would be a much easier task to make the waters of our mighty Niagara flow backwards than to stay the onward march of republican principles.

**Mon. Aug. 25th** Close & sultry. Reading & walking AM—overhauling manuscripts, plays, etc. and packing up preparatory to starting for some place, as yet unknown. I leave this city now very much against my own will but fate and villainy have conspired against me, and go I must to some more propitious spot—away from home and *my Mother*.

**Thurs. Aug. 28th** Pleasant. Walking AM, at 6PM started for Boston. I presume we had a very pleasant passage, though I didn't see much of it, for as soon as it was dark I *turned in*.

**Sat. Aug. 30th** Beautiful day. Took a look in at the “Howard Athenaeum”—which is to be opened on the 8th of September under the management of Wiseman Marshall. He was very anxious to make an engagement with me and asked what salary I would require, when I told him he scratched his head and wished me to stay in town until Monday, when he would be able to give me a decided answer. I refused to stop longer than this PM—he then agreed to let me know his decision at 3PM. Knowing how tight he holds his purse strings, I feel confident that he will not accede to my terms. At the appointed time, I met him, when, as I expected, he hem'd! and hawed! “*thought I was worth what I asked,*” “*wanted to pay me a large salary,*” “*but couldn't afford to go so high,*” “*wanted me very much,*” “*willing to pay me so and so,*” I wouldn't accept “*so and so*”—and left him and Boston at 6PM on my return to New York. I have been rather unfortunate in my trips to Boston, having, invariably, returned home ill. I have now got a cold and a sore throat.

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18. For more on Narciso López's attempts to liberate Cuba from Spanish rule, see Tom Chafin, *Fatal Glory: Narciso López and the First Clandestine U.S. War against Cuba* (1996; Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 2003).

## SEVEN

1851–52

*After trying his hand as a stage manager in Boston, Watkins establishes a theatrical company and embarks on a tour through Georgia and Alabama. As a manager, he struggles with maintaining order in the ranks, refereeing rivalries between actors, and negotiating the misbegotten love affairs of dancer Fanny Mowbray. He ruminates on slavery and recounts how his production of Othello was received in the South; is elected to the American Dramatic Fund Association and takes the three degrees of Masonry; and documents Lajos Kossuth's tour of the United States and Henry Clay's death.*



**Fri. Sept. 12th** Very warm. Reading & walking AM. Offered an engagement in Boston for one week to stage manage and act. Accepted—packed up. 5PM left N.Y. for Fall River—heavy gale of wind sprung up just as we left port, giving token of a heavy storm, but it passed off without doing any more harm than to frighten the timid old women in petticoats and breeches. To bed early. At 4AM reached Fall River, changed to the Cars, and arrived in Boston 7AM of Sat. 13. I stood at the depot one hour thinking of some place to put up that would be preferable to the “*Pemberton House*,” as I have stopped there upon several occasions and on each one left it with a strong attack of my old enemy—the dyspepsia. But remembering the old adage “*go further and fare worse*,” enrolled myself once more among the “arrivals” at the Pemberton. Cleaned up and went in search of my new manager. On the stage of the Federal Street Theatre an individual introduced himself to me as Mr. Chamberlain, the “*Manager*,” which individual installed me into the important office of “*Stage Manager*.” I immediately entered upon the functions of the aforesaid office and made out a flaming bill announcing to the public that there would be a “*Grand Reopening of Old Drury on the 15th*” with great attraction consisting of “*Leon Javelli, the ‘Star of the Ravel Family,’ and Herr Cline, the two greatest rope dancers and Athletes of the Age*,” together with a “powerful stock company.” Though when I came to cast a play I found that I was all the company to be found in the male department—the actors who were to have come on from N.Y. being detained in that city from various causes, the Agent telegraphing that some were taken “*suddenly ill*” and others “*wouldn’t come*.” At 4PM things looked desperate and I began [to see] what I could play with my “powerful Company”—three women and myself. At length kind Fortune smiled upon me, as she generally does when not expected. I found out McVicker, a Yankee Comedian, and a person who had the “*Rheumatism*” in his side and legs so badly that he could scarcely walk, to play the old men—also, a young man who fancied himself exceedingly talented, though his talent had never been appreciated by the public (the Theatrical profession has many such—*very* many), and a couple of Thespians. With these I contrived to cast the *Morning Call* and *Forest Rose*. This Chamberlain, the manager, I should say, has embarked in the wrong business for him to speculate in, for he does not seem to have been in the audience part of a Theatre many times, and never behind the scenes. He seems to be a very liberal man but I think that after next week he will forswear all Theatrical speculations, unless he has more nerve or is more infatuated than he should be for his pecuniary aggrandisements. After

supper made out the small bills giving the promised “particulars.” Got to bed about 10PM sufficiently tired to sleep sound and fast.

**Mon. Sept. 15th** Coolish. Several deluded individuals called upon me this AM applying for an engagement, some of whom had *done* the “*leading business*” in a barn—leading out the horses I presume—whilst others had spouted their hour upon the Aristocratic boards of some stage, or rather platform, erected in the town hall of some country village in Yankeedom, where, for a “season of six nights,” Shakespeare is offered up as a sacrifice for the amusement of our “country cousins” and their “gals,” who have “come to see the show” at a shilling a head. I selected three or four of these would-be heroes of the “sock and buskin,” and told the others to call again next week when, if I am fortunate, I hope to be “out of town.” To one, calling himself Wilson—but who, as I afterwards learned, had played in several towns, and in each one under a different alias—I entrusted the part of Blandford in the *Forest Rose*. He seemed to be full of acting at rehearsal, but at night he was so lost in the character that he lost the words. The part is some six lengths, and in it he had to say, “*I demand an explanation of all this*”—and he did say it too, but he didn’t say anything else. The actors could scarcely open their mouths before Wilson would shout out at the top of his lungs, “I demand an explanation,” and though there were several old stagers in the piece who had been accustomed to getting through a play however imperfect it might be, yet, having been called upon to make so many “explanations,” they were at last unable to respond to any more of Wilson’s “demands,” being completely nonplussed—the novice in this case was too much for the actor. When the curtain descended on the play, I was fearful lest the *audience* should “demand an explanation,” but they appeared to be more pleased than was the stage manager and retired in good order, but I have since thought that their kind forbearance was attributable to the paucity of their numbers. So much for my first night’s management.

**Tues. Sept. 16th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM. I was disappointed in getting an actress from N.Y., having telegraphed to her to come on but which message she did not receive in time, so was obliged to send the “old woman” of my “powerful company” on the stage to play a girl of sixteen. I have offices enough on my hands to satisfy the most ambitious office-seeker, being Stage Manager, Prompter, Call Boy, Property Man, Stage Clearer, and, in short, having to do everything myself or let it go undone. Wishing to do all in my

power to benefit my employer, and thinking the *Drunkard* would be the best attraction that could be had, and not having actors enough to cast it, I hunted up G. H. Wyatt, the original “Cribbs”—although it took me until 5PM to find him—whilst the Printer was hunting me up to get the bill for tomorrow night, telling me that he would not print it unless it was handed in at his office before night. I managed to get the bill in just in time. After I had got this trouble off my mind Blandford, alias Wilson, who was cast for the part of Capt. Oakley in the *Wool Dealer*, sent word at 6 o'clock that he *couldn't play it*. This was rather trying but I was determined not to be put out by it, so sent Mr. Yeomans on for the Captain, whilst I played his part of Con. Gormly, an Irishman, being my first appearance with the “*brogue*.” I got along with it very well excepting in the scenes with the Yankee and the “*Nagur*”<sup>1</sup>—with the former I was several times reminded by the cachinations of the audience that my “*brogue*” bore too strong a resemblance to the Yankee twang, whilst with the latter it was too much *colored by amalgamation*. But the performance upon the whole passed off quite smoothly.

**Wed. Sept. 17th** Pleasant. The President arrived from Washington to be present at the great railroad celebration—he was received by a large procession—the town is filled with people. Manager very sanguine of a full house. There was an afternoon performance advertised but when the time came, it was concluded as unwise to give it as everybody would be looking at the procession. I had so much to do in getting ready for the night that I didn't get away from the Theatre until nearly 5PM, at which time I dined—though it was difficult to get much of a dinner as the country people not only crammed the hotels but they brought such tremendous appetites with them that they crammed down nearly all the eatables. Back to Theatre 7PM. I have been disappointed before in my expectations of a good house but must confess was never so much surprised as to find, when the curtain rose for the performance this evening, fewer persons present than on any preceding night. The poor manager—whom I pity as he seems a very honest man—was perfectly bewildered and astonished. He had entered into a speculation that promised to yield him quite a profit, but after expending the little cash he had to pay the expenses of Monday and Tuesday evenings, with the certainty, as he thought, of having a full house this night, the result came upon him like a thunderbolt, crushing all his *profitable* hopes—and, to add to his perplexity,

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1. This variant of the N-word represents an Irish person's alleged pronunciation of the word.

after the first play was over, the orchestra refused to proceed until they had received their pay. He gave them and the rope-dancers all he had while the poor actors were *promised* their money on the following night, when, as he said, he felt *sure* there would be a better house and they should receive their pay before the curtain went up. They were at first resolved to give it up, but I thought, and so persuaded the rest, that as we were here, it would be as well to go ahead—the bills being out—and see what could be done. Deeming this the wisest counsel they as[s]ented and retired with most gloomy physogs to their respective hot[els].

**Fri. Sept. 19th** Fine day. . . . The houses of Amusement were all filled, except the Federal Street Theatre, where there was a grand insurrection in consequence of the non-payment of monies due. The audience was about the same as last night—less, if anything—and it was plain that the chances for salaries were small, so before playing I went into the box office to find out what the manager intended on doing. He said that he meant to divide all around whatever he received as far as it would go, *commencing with the actors*, and he kept his word. There was a great deal of dissatisfaction, especially among the Stage Carpenters, who refused to prepare the stage for the rope-dancers until they received *all* that was due them. But after considerable loud talking accompanied with the usual number of damns, they c[oncluded] that it would be best to make the most of a bad bargain an[d] take what they could get. So the performance went on, was concluded, the audience retired, the doors were closed, and thus ended our very brief season at the Federal Street Theatre. If the owners are wise they will convert their building to some other use, for as a Theatre it will never pay, being situated in an out-of-the-way place to attract the attention of strangers, and not very popular with the citizens. As for Mr. Chamberlain, I have not been able to find out *who* he is, or *what* he is, not having met with one person who knew him. That he is as honest as the majority of mankind, I've no doubt, for he not only paid away the little cash he had but, as far as I can judge, every cent received at the box office. I was fortunate enough to receive about two-thirds of that which was due me with the promise of receiving the rest at some future time—but, if I do not, what I have already received pays me very well for my trouble. When I left the Theatre at 11PM, Chamberlain was surrounded by a crowd of Ballet-girls, supers, carpenters, sweepers, and a host of others, all clamorous for their “salaries.” Poor fellow! though he possessed considerable nerve yet, as he stood there hemmed in by that incensed group of non-paid employees, without a cent



to stop their cries nor even a word to say for himself, he looked the very picture of despair. How he eventually got rid of them I do not know, unless [he] [ga]ve them leg-bail.<sup>2</sup> It is not likely that he will ever dabble [in] Theatricals again, having paid too much for his first lesson.

**Sat. Sept. 20th** Pleasant. Packed up AM—called on some old acquaintances—settled my bills and at 5PM left Boston for New York by the “Fall River Route.” There were a great many passengers. After getting on board the Steamer, I inhaled some of the fresh sea-breeze, then “turned in” at 9PM.

**Sun. Sept. 21st** Pleasant. Up at 5AM—had a good wash—went on the promenade deck, where we enjoyed the sail up to the city, arriving there at 8AM. Met my brother James on board of the boat but did not speak with him—nor return the nod he gave me, but taking a cab drove up home to see *My Mother*. . . .

**Tues. Sept. 23rd** Rainy—gloomy. Made an engagement to go South as [Stage] Manager with a gentleman of Macon. . . .

**Wed. Sept. 24th** Pleasant. Hunting up a Company—hard work to do it, the [a]ctors that I want demand about double the sum they ever received [be]fore, but I think I shall be able to select a very fair Company.

**Wed. Oct. 1st** Pleasant. Writing & telegraphing AM. PM received a note from W. H. Hamilton, whom I had engaged to go South, regretting that circumstances compelled him to break his engagement with me. His note did not surprise me a great deal for I was not over-sanguine of his honor, but thought that the good engagement I had tendered him with an offer to pay his debts would have induced him to at least reciprocate my kindness, instead of which he used me as a Catspaw<sup>3</sup> to compel Mr. Hamblin to increase his salary. Ah, well! Let’s see if the future will advance most my interests or the interests of the wretch who has been base enough to break an engagement with me at a time when such an action is likely to do me the greatest injury. I have been writing & telegraphing to Fanny Mowbray, a dancer, now at Albany and whom I should like to have go with me, but receiving no answer from her

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2. leg bail: to run away.

3. cat’s-paw: a person used as a tool by another to achieve a goal.

and hearing that my communications were most likely intercepted by persons interested to have her stay in Albany, I determined to see if they could intercept me, so took the evening boat for that city.

**Thurs. Oct. 2nd** Pleasant. Steamer grounded at 6AM within a mile of Albany. I got a boat to put me on shore where I footed it to the city. Called on a Mrs. Brown from whom I learned that Fanny had gone to Whitehall. As soon as I had breakfasted I took the stage for Troy—from thence I telegraphed to Fanny to know if she intended coming on. At noon I received for answer that she had telegraphed from Albany to say she would accept my offer but not hearing again from me concluded I did not want her—that she had then engaged for a week at Whitehall, and now would not be able to go with me for a couple of weeks. Determined not to be put out in this way I took the evening train of cars for Whitehall, reaching there about 11PM, and immediately sought out Fanny, whom I found in company with several others, at supper. Feeling rather hollow inwardly I accepted the invitation to eat. After supper I went home with Fanny. At 2AM I went to bed with Fanny's promise to accompany me in the morning to New York.

**Fri. Oct. 3rd** Raining. Knocked at Fanny's door—she came out and knocked me down, or rather my hopes, with the astounding intelligence that she had *altered her mind* (oh, these women). I talked and pleaded with her until all my powers of persuasion were exhausted, but to no purpose. 6½AM arrived and I had to start for the railroad where I arrived in time to see the cars go away without me. Here was a fix! Back I put to the hotel and again sought Fanny when she told me that she had given a promise to a young Frenchman, Monsieur Halle, who *appeared* to be desperately in love with her, that she would not leave. Presently I caught them together and told him plainly what I thought of his conduct—that if he really loved her he should show his love by studying her interest. This drove him out of the room with the color in his face. After he had gone, I recapitulated to Fanny all that I had before said and telling her the expense and trouble I had been at to get her and how, as if to make a climax to all, the cars had gone away and left me at a time when every moment was precious. At last the woman's heart prevailed over the woman's head and she gave me her hand with the positive assurance that *she would go*. Determined not to give *her* a chance to think—or her lover another opportunity to talk her out of it—I paid her bill at the hotel, packed up her things, got a wagon, put her baggage into it with instructions to the driver

to use all speed in getting to the railroad depot. When I had got everything so far advanced this lover, my evil-genius, Mons. Halle, brought Fanny information that she was going away without her music. This news was very trying as she could do nothing without the music of her dances, but it was no time to pause. I started in search of the musician, Fanny with me—found his house—he was not at home—took the liberty to search his room but the music was not there. I left the house in despair when lo! Fanny had herself found the discordant notes in the Theatre. I took her arm and almost dragged her through the streets of Whitehall. When we got within a quarter of a mile of the depot, the locomotive gave its whistle and the heavens opened their floodgates and poured down upon us its watery element—no doubt for the purpose of cooling our blood which must have been at a frying temperature. At this a carriage was driven by which I hailed. It contained a gentleman in a great hurry to reach town. I told him that everything but life depended on my reaching the cars in time. He said if that was the case he would willingly waive his claim upon the driver and give us the coach (bless his heart, there is something good in human nature, after all). In we got, on went the horses. The goal was reached, we took our seats in time and at 10AM was on our way to Albany—which place we reached at 4PM. I paid a bill of thirty dollars that Fanny owed there, secured our passages on the steamer *Rip Van Winkle*, and by 9PM we were both asleep in our berths and the steamer was paddling her way to New York. It rained hard all day.

**Sat. Oct. 4th** Rainy. Reached New York at 7AM. Breakfasted with Fanny at Clinton Hotel, Beekman Street. 10AM home to Mother—packed up—sent my things on board the steamship *Alabama*. Not ready to go myself, sent those of the Company who were ready on board and at 4PM they were on their way to Savannah. There is no danger of their throwing up their engagements, although they may throw up something else if the sea should be very rough. Walk after supper. To bed early. Done something.

**Sun. Oct. 5th** Pleasant. Walking, writing, etc. Expected to leave town this PM but unable to do so by the non-arrival of a check from Rodgers of Macon, for three hundred dollars, which money is required to pay the passages of the Company.

**Mon. Oct. 6th** Pleasant. It was expected that today's mail from the south would certainly bring the check, but at 1PM there was no sign of it. Coolidge

tried to raise the money by a loan from others but being a stranger in the city found it impossible to do so. I waited until I found it was impossible for him to obtain the money when I advanced it myself from what I had on hand and by a check [from] George. It was a great risk on my part but I had pledged my word to the company that we should leave N.Y. this PM and I prefer even to lose my money than compromise my honor. Mother took my parting much to heart, when I bade her goodbye she trembled and turned pale as death. Oh, God! grant me success in this undertaking be it only to smooth the declining years of that mother's life that when stern death claims its victim, her noble spirit may pass from her sea of troubles into thy presence with a smile in her eye and a prayer upon her lips for that son who, while he struggles with an iron fortune against an unfeeling world, consoles himself with the thought that he may one day say, "here Mother, here is a home for you free from all further toil." At 5PM started from N.Y. by the inland route, for the south, reaching the cars just in time to save our passage. The conductor caused us a great deal of trouble by refusing to check our baggage because we did not arrive sooner. We reached Philadelphia at 10PM where we expected to meet J. H. McVicker. I enquired at the hotel where I supposed him to be, and the landlord told me that he had gone out to take a walk. Not having a moment to spare I had to make tall walking for the depot, getting there just in time. After we had gone about a mile from town I concluded it best to return to Philad[elphi]a and bring Mac on with me the next day. On my return to the hotel the landlord said he had made a mistake—Mr. McVicker had gone on to Baltimore. Here was a situation, but there was no help for it so I took my lodging for the night and turned in.

**Tues. Oct. 7th** Pleasant. Started for Baltimore at 8AM reaching there at 2PM. Hunted up Mac—found him after considerable trouble. Went to the Holliday Street Theatre 7PM. Murdoch as Claude Melnotte—did not think he played it as well as I've seen him do it. Miss Anderton as Pauline did not please me—she is young, though, and seems to possess talent.

**Wed. Oct. 8th** Fine day. Up at 4AM. Took the steamer *Herald* for Portsmouth, leaving Baltimore at 6AM. Pleasant passage, although McVicker was a little sea-sick. Left Portsmouth—the appearance of which town did not impress me very favorably—at 9PM. There was not much chance for sleeping in the cars. Nothing but absolute necessity shall ever compel me to travel this route again for it is tedious, wearisome, & annoying from having to change cars so often, the trouble to look after baggage, and the little chance for rest.

**Fri. Oct. 10th** Pleasant. Reached Charleston 7AM. Breakfasted at the Pavilion Hotel. On board of the steamer *Calhoun* 9AM bound for Savannah. Company repeated their sick scenes and with much more effect than yesterday, the sea being considerably rougher. I read the *Roué*, a novel attributed to Bulwer, but which he, very sensibly, never acknowledged. Arrived at Savannah, 5PM took a stroll through the town—found a letter in the Post Office from George. In everything appertaining to the man of business the Southerners bear no comparison to those of the North. Take a man who has passed much time in travelling through the North and South, and, while sleeping, spirit him away to some strange place then, upon his awaking, ask him where he was and, with one glance from his bedroom window, though he could not be able to give the name of the town, he could give a most positive answer in what part of the Union it was located—whether in the North or the South. It is gratifying though to see that this want of energy in the south is fast giving way to the spirit of enterprise. Manufactures begin to flourish and the railroad—type of a fast age—now extends its iron arms through dense pine tree forests, hitherto almost unpenetrated, conveying the man of business from town to town seeking some eligible spot whereon to employ his capital in that speculation most likely to realize the greatest return. While, in the seaport towns, the Merchant, instead of depending wholly upon the rise and fall of cotton, now turns his attention to the ocean and embarks his means in some line of steamships employed to convey passengers and goods from port to port in the most speedy manner yet known to man—for everybody and everything in this fast age must go by steam, and some persons deem that too slow, wishing to telegraph it through the world. 8PM started for Macon.

**Sat. Oct. 11th** . . . Reached Macon at 11½AM—a nice little town but rather dusty. Put up at the Washington House. Gave a *nagur* sixty cents to clean off a portion of the dirt that had accumulated on me during the last week. There was dust on my body from six or seven different States, but shaving, shampooing, and hair-cutting soon restored me to myself. Cast a couple of pieces for the opening night. To bed early.

**Sat. Oct. 18th** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM. Had quite an angry discussion with Mr. F. Drew & his wife, two of the most unprincipled persons I ever had any dealings with. She having become quite a favorite with the audience presumed upon it and made exactions from me that no man possessed of any feeling could submit to, demanding of me to play pieces to suit their vanity at the

sacrifice of my interest. They act thus thinking that I cannot do without them, but I could get along better without them than they without me. Yet I did not wish to take advantage of their pecuniary wants though they seek to force me into their views because my Company is too weak, in numbers, to spare them. It is a singular fact that those whom I took the most trouble to engage have given me the most trouble after being engaged, whilst those who were easily had cause the least annoyance and are the most willing to oblige. Miss Fanny Mowbray, for instance, who caused me a great waste of time and money, has not only annoyed me but, by her conduct, injured the business of the house. The steward of the hotel where we were boarding—one Mr. Hernandez—took a great fancy to Fanny, so much so that he could hardly bear to have her out of his sight, and, in order to get her as near him as possible, caused her room to be changed from one part of the building to another and directly opposite his own room. As her windows were very accommodatingly situated for the curiously inclined it soon became the town talk that Mr. Hernandez passed a great portion of his time in her room, and that, too, at very unreasonable hours. This, soon becoming notorious, kept the ladies from visiting the Theatre and, of course, many gentlemen likewise. At last their conduct grew so displeasing to all respectable people that the proprietor of the hotel threatened to turn them both out of his house. This brought things to a head and to save themselves from disgrace a Minister was sent for and the before *happy* couple were made *miserable* by marriage, for everyone believed it to be a bond of passion not of love. She, I know, to be a heartless coquette, whilst he is said, by those who know him, to be a villain, having been the cause of the death of a former wife, and, also, having purchased the poison with which a wanton, whom he was keeping, destroyed herself.<sup>4</sup>

**Sun. Oct. 19th** Pleasant. Settling up the accounts of the Theatre with my partners AM. PM called a meeting of the company in my room and told them how I should henceforward act, that I should play such pieces as I thought would prove the most attractive, without consulting anyone on the subject, or whether the pieces I wished to perform would prove displeasing to this or that person, but, at the same [time], I should fulfill my engagements to the very letter. I regretted the causes which led me to make these remarks but

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4. This marriage ended unhappily. Joseph Hernandez committed a series of infidelities, including seducing a shopgirl (for which criminal charges were brought), causing Fanny to leave him. After she left him a second time, he tracked her down and shot her in 1868, leaving her unable to dance again. She died in 1870. *New York Clipper*, March 5, 1870, 382.

was determined, for the future, not to be annoyed as I had been during the last week. I had tried to please all parties but, foolish man, found that it was impossible.

**Wed. Oct. 22nd** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM. Those who work the hardest in this world do not always thrive the best. I have labored hard enough during the last five years to enrich a dozen men, but I'm not much ahead of the World yet. I am most unfortunate in speculations never having entered into one that proved successful. Played Othello for the first time, the audience called for me but I did not act the part to my own satisfaction, as I could not devote my whole attention to it, besides having been given to understand that Othello was very displeasing to a Southern audience. In fact there were many of the citizens who came to enquire how I intended to color the part, that they would not permit his being played dark, so to avoid a row I played him nearly white. It made the language seem absurd but pleased the audience and I suppose that should satisfy the actor, when to please is his business.<sup>5</sup>

The next day I met the fire-eating editor of the Macon newspaper,<sup>6</sup> who advised me "*not to play that d—d nigger again*"—that "*It would kill me with the Southern people.*" When I suggested that *Othello* was one of Shakespeare's grandest tragedies, the critic replied "*Oh, yes, I've read it, but could never understand why he should have chosen a nigger for his hero, and put into his mouth language that no nigger's brain could ever have conceived.*" When I stated that the tragedy was one of the most attractive plays ever written the editor replied—"*Oh! well, it may take with Englishmen and Yankees, but it will never go down with a Southern audience. Our people are inclined to like you as an actor, and a gentleman, but if you wish to become popular here you must drop Othello.*" This language is verbatim as it was delivered, but the emphasis and manner in which it was given can hardly be explained. The impression it made upon me was *the less I said the better*. I never attempted "that nigger" again South of "Mason & Dixon's line." Had some skillful shorthand writer been among the audience on this occasion, to take down the comments of the spectators, it would have made very interesting reading. Iago was never before so warmly received. He had all the sympathy of the audience who applauded at every opportunity.

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5. The subsequent text of this entry is interleaved in the diary. Using the symbol of X with four dots, Watkins indicates that the addition on the inserted pages should follow on from where this entry left off. Watkins probably composed this addendum in the early 1880s, when he made several edits and additions to the manuscript.

6. Possibly Philemon Tracy, editor of the *Georgia Telegraph* in Macon.

The actor playing Iago became quite nervous at the applause bestowed upon him in portions of the play where it had never been heard before. For a while he thought he was being guyed,<sup>7</sup> but after the third act it became painfully evident that he had the sympathies of his hearers in his attempts to break up the domestic tranquility of “poor wronged Othello.” It was also demonstrated that the lookers-on thought Desdemona got what she deserved on being smothered, while the only satisfaction shown for Othello’s efforts was when he suicided. In looking back at this reception of Shakespeare’s grand creation, one ceases to wonder at the bitter and terrible war of the rebellion which followed the election of Abraham Lincoln. It proves conclusively to my mind that only by such a war could the institution of slavery have been extirpated from the land.

**Sat. Nov. 8th** Pleasant. Up at 5AM. Finished packing, sent everything to the railroad depot, and at 8AM took the cars for Barnesville. Had I gone to Macon as the sole manager of the Company I have every reason to believe that the business would have been much better as all the citizens seemed well disposed towards me, whereas Mr. Coolidge rendered himself unpopular with many of our best patrons, but the worst of all was in having three managers, which was two too many, especially when those two were *outsiders* or *dead-heads*,<sup>8</sup> for they were not of the slightest advantage to the concern. Reached Barnesville at noon. Sent most of the Company on to Columbus by stage—two or three remaining to accompany me with the baggage and scenery which had to be packed in a large wagon and drawn by mules. Two or three hours were consumed in packing the wagon. At half past two PM we started off on foot—the driver of the mules was obliged to take a byroad some two or three miles out of the way, in order to stop at his home to lay in fodder for himself and mules.

**Tues. Nov. 11th** Pleasant. Up and on the way by 6AM. Kept the muleteer in sight until 11AM then left him to pursue his own course whilst we drove on to Columbus where we arrived at 12M. I did not find much done towards fitting up the Hall and everyone who spoke to me on the subject said that it would be impossible for me to get ready for playing at night, but I thought otherwise, so off coat and went to work. 6PM found all the scenery up and

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7. guyed: made fun of; ridiculed.

8. deadhead: a dull or stupid person.



everything ready for acting except one or two of the actresses, whom I found quite sick, having caught severe colds whilst riding in the stage. I was obliged to substitute *Black-Eyed Susan* for the *Lady of Lyons*. 7PM opened at Temperance Hall, a very fair house for the first night and the performance went off quite satisfactory.

**Mon. Nov. 17th** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM. Another row with the Drews—not by me alone, but nearly all the Company hauled them over the coals. The row first commenced between McVicker and Drew during the rehearsal of a Farce which the former was directing but to which the latter paid no attention. During the talk between these two, Drew called all the Company toadies<sup>9</sup> of the manager because they choose to be on good terms with him. McVicker, Byrne, and myself were old acquaintances having been in stock companies together, and held each in good esteem, but because they choose to continue their friendship towards me, having no reason to do otherwise, they were to be censured as “toadies.” This last blowup may do the Drews some good as it will let them [see] in what estimation they are held by this Company. This occurred on Tuesday. At Theatre 7PM. Fine house to the *Lady of Lyons* [and] *Stranger*.

**Sat. Nov. 22nd** Gloomy. Packing up AM. Set to a Mr. Woodbridge for two daguerreotypes of Claude Melnotte and Fudge—the latter was most excellent. At Theatre 7PM. Last night of the season in Columbus, and the poorest of the week. Our business in this town—take it for all in all—has been excellent. After performance, took down the scenery, packed up everything, loaded a wagon, and got to bed at 4AM.

**Mon. Nov. 24th** . . . Reached Montgomery at 2PM. Found scarcely anything ready though Coolidge had been here four days. I saw it was impossible to play at night, so had the performance postponed.

**Mon. Dec. 1st** Cloudy. Rehearsing AM. I became so exasperated at the conduct of the Drews that I resolved to leave the Company, and should have done so had it not been for Rodgers. I could not bear to quit while he was so much out of pocket and he pleaded so strongly for me to continue on that I could not refuse. Although it is prejudicial to my own interests to stay as there is

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9. toady: a person who praises and helps powerful people in order to get their approval.

not the slightest prospect of my making more than board and washing by so doing, but I will not act wrongly to an honest man because others act dishonorably towards me. At Theatre 7PM. Played Othello, which part I will never play again, from choice, in any southern city, for however much an actor might please an audience with his acting, yet the Southerners not sympathising with Othello will not applaud the impersonator.

**Thurs. Dec. 4th** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM. I think the “Watkins’s Theatrical Troupe” will soon be numbered among the things that were. Rodgers is discouraged and I am disgusted. I know the futility of attempting to please everybody yet I made an effort to do so and, of course, failed. The McVickers & the Drews, like the rival houses of York and Lancaster, will not rest satisfied until one or the other is exterminated or driven out. I would not mind this did I not stand between both fires and am made the greatest sufferer, for their jealous war of words costs them nothing but breath whereas it depletes my purse. If I cast a play wherein one would have a better part than the other I am obliged to lay it aside no matter what benefit might accrue to me from it, merely because the one having the poorer part refuses to play it. Today the McVickers will complain that I wish to sacrifice them to the Drews. Tomorrow the Drews will assert the same thing with regard to the McVickers, so that all their bickerings rebound on me. I have borne this as long as Job could have done and with much more patience than I thought I possessed, but now I will soon bring things to a climax—according to Davy Crockett “*I’m sure I’m right,*” and now, “*I’m going ahead.*”<sup>10</sup>

**Tues. Dec. 9th** Pleasant. Last night the Drews sent in their resignation to take effect after the 13th. Today they refused to play if McVicker did—swore they would starve rather than do so. Thinking to force me to their wishes or else break up the company, and by doing the latter go into management on their own responsibility, they sought to draw others into their conspiracy but only succeeded with Mr. & Mrs. Cullen. Four persons out of a small company would certainly cripple it most seriously, but determined to show that I could get along without them, I accepted their resignations and “put up” three Farces—*Fellow Clerk*, *Lend Me Five Shillings*, and *Spectre Bridegroom*—which

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10. David Crockett (1786–1836) was a frontiersman and US congressman for Tennessee who died at the Battle of Alamo. His personal motto has been recorded as various iterations of “Be always sure you’re right, then go ahead.”

made quite a respectable bill and appeared to give as much satisfaction to the audience as anything we have yet done.

**Wed. Dec. 10th** Pleasant. The Drews looked the very picture of despair when it was announced that Mrs. Hernandez had arrived in town, for they then knew that we could play very well without them, and they felt that after the treatment and injury we had received at their hands that we would not be over-anxious to have any further dealings with them. At 10AM Drew came to Rodgers and insisted upon being allowed to finish their engagement. Rodgers replied that, “*they were too late,*” “*rather behind the time,*” “*Yesterday they had him in a tight place and were deaf to all his entreaties,*” now, “*the tables were turned—he had them in a tight place and meant to keep them there.*” The Drews and the Cullens were now completely chopfallen, but the former determined not to give it up so and sought the advice of a lawyer who wrote a note to Rodgers stating what the Drews were willing to do and hinting at a lawsuit in case of Rodgers’s noncompliance, thinking by this to frighten him into their wishes, but they missed their object—we had both law and justice on our side and so laughed at the idea, telling them to try the law and see who would make the most by that proceeding. Finding all their efforts to coerce us fail and seeing that we could get along very well without their services, they began to think how their case stood—they were in a strange country, without money, in debt, no chance to get an engagement anywhere else, and we determined not to yield one point. At 5PM they called us into their room and, stating their circumstances, added that they were *willing to finish their engagement and perform whatever we thought was to our interest.* Here was a proud victory for us! Yesterday they insisted upon our discharging McVicker & wife or they would not play another night no matter how much the interests of the manager suffered thereby—that they would *starve* rather than play with McVicker. Now, they are willing to play with anybody so that they are paid for it. Poverty like sickness is a great humbler. At Theatre 7PM. House so-so.

**Thurs. Dec. 11th** Storm breeding. Rehearsing AM. Writing PM. At Theatre 7PM. Our Orchestra, consisting of two harps, a fiddle, and clarionet, should be quite effective, but the players being Italians and not understanding a word of English, and musicians only by ear, they are entirely useless for theatrical purposes. When Mrs. Hernandez handed them the music of her dances they looked at each other and then at her as if to learn what it meant. She gave them to understand, by pantomime, that she wanted to dance. When

they struck up a tune never heard before and which would most certainly never be *encored*, it was evident that there could be no dancing to their music, so I took my fife and played *Rory O'More*, the “orchestra” following to the best advantage. I did not go in front to play but stood close up to the proscenium so that the Italians could hear me, although I could not hear them. I was told by a person who was in front at the time that they followed as well as they could but chose their own key—one several degrees removed from mine. As I made the most noise I had the advantage. The fife made a hit—it was my first appearance as the leader of an orchestra.

**Sun. Dec. 28th** Some rain. Caught a severe cold. Reading AM. Rodgers gave the Company notice that he should close after the coming week. They seemed willing that it should be so. For my part I rejoiced the prospect of a speedy termination to this most disastrous Theatrical campaign—a campaign, which, I have not the least doubt, would have under different auspices been eminently successful. With regard to myself I trust I may never again be placed in the position in which I have been for the last three months. Striving to please everybody I presume I pleased nobody. In the first place Coolidge & Rodgers were great drawbacks to the concern without being, in the slightest degree, beneficial. They entered into the speculation with the expectation of realizing a good round sum, being flattered into this belief from the fact that the previous season Messrs. Jefferson and Ellsler had brought a company to Macon and realized some three thousand dollars in the course of four weeks, but the managers in this case were both actors, both working men, and having no person’s advice to seek save their own. Too many cooks, etc. Now Coolidge & Rodgers, finding that the houses were not so well filled as they expected, sought to discover the cause and went all about town asking the opinion of everyone that they could get an opinion from. Some attributed it to such and such a play not pleasing or this or that actor or actress not pleasing, but no one attributed the failure to the true cause which was, to my belief, that the public of Macon had been surfeited with Theatricals during the last season, the novelty having worn off. These small towns will pay about once in three years, and then only when cotton brings a good price.

**Sat. Jan. 3rd 1852** Pleasant. Had quite a row which might have proved serious if the one who started it had been possessed of Courage. Mr. Hernandez wished his wife to have a benefit on the 5th and asked me if I would play for it. I told him that I had determined on leaving town before that if there was any

possible way of getting off. This excited his anger, and he commenced using some hard expressions towards me. But I kept cool until he talked of risking of his life to have justice done and hinted strongly of knives or pistols. This brought me to my feet and I told him to go ahead, that my chances were better for heaven than were his and I believed that I had less fear of meeting my Maker than he had. This made my gentleman alter his tone and his anger fell several degrees below the freezing point. I am used to these fire-eaters having passed some time among them and know just how to take their bravado. The only way is to let them see that you do not fear them, check the first insult, and you will be spared half a dozen. At Theatre 7PM. Last night of the regular, or, rather, *irregular*, season. I went on for William Tell but was wretchedly imperfect, although the audience seemed pleased or, at least, those who were not conversant with the text for, as I have a happy faculty for talking liberty, the piece went off smoothly.

**Mon. Jan. 12th** Cool. I begin to think less of Rodgers than formerly—his conduct to me is rather suspicious especially with regard to money affairs. Since we came to this town I have troubled myself very little about the receipts and expenditures of the house as I gave up all hope of realizing anything from it. I only knew that the expenses, if paid, equaled, or exceeded, the income, and Rodgers told me that he was losing money every night. But now I doubt it as it appears that a great many bills he never paid—he being in debt to the printer over \$100, to state and county for taxes \$133, to city, for the same, \$130. My name being at the head of the Theatre bill as Manager, all these due bills were sent to me for payment. Judge Watson, whose duty it was to collect the tax due the state and county, put the bill into the hands of the Sheriff to collect. Rodgers promised me to see it paid but he kept putting the Sheriff off from day to day until that officer could stand it no longer and today he called upon me and said that it must be settled immediately. I referred him to Rodgers but he could only recognize me as the manager. I went with him to Rodgers who said he had no money to pay the note but would try to get security for the payment of it in ten days providing the Judge was willing. We then called on him and asked if he would consent to take Mr. Marston, proprietor of the Rialto Coffee house, in this city as security—the Judge assented—the bill was drawn up and we were suffered to depart. I regret not leaving town last week, I should then have avoided all this trouble, now I have to work to pay other people's debts. Put up my name for a Benefit—played the *Drunkard & Founded On Facts*, \$60 house. The entire receipts were to have been turned

over to me, but Rodgers having stipulated with all parties interested that their dues should be paid nightly and having, as he said, no money of his own, I was obliged to advance \$40.00 with which to pay the night's expenses, Rodgers promising to refund the same to me out of the receipts for the week.

**Wed. Jan. 14th** Cold, but moderating. *My Birthday—27 years!* Good gracious! I'm getting old. This birthday is memorable for one thing, on it the poor "Troupe" received its death-blow—no galvanic battery ever possessed the power of again imparting to the defunct "Troupe" the smallest show of vitality. It was comforting to its friends to see it perish thus calmly for its long sufferings merited an easy death. Painful was its birth, misery marked its life, convulsive spasms each day shook its frame, an hour of ease it never knew. At last when fate had steeped it in wretchedness and poverty to the very lips it sunk quietly into an untimely grave unmourned, unpitied, and soon to be forgotten—save by its numerous creditors. The Drews determined on leaving today, but before going they had a row with Rodgers because he would not give them any money. There was some salary owing them but the two benefits which they had had greatly overpaid all that was due them. They put on a poor face and went about among the citizens and by exciting their pity, or, rather, by *begging*, raised, I understood, from thirty to forty dollars, although no longer ago than last Sunday they acknowledged to Mr. Coolidge that they had two hundred and twenty-odd dollars, whilst the excuse they made for begging was that they had not sufficient funds to take them home. We should not have played this evening but, as the bills were out, it was agreed to play and divide the receipts equally all around after deducting the expenses—the division amounted to fifty cents a head. *Child of the Regiment & Perfection* were the pieces played.

**Fri. Jan. 16th** Pleasant. Finished packing up. Rodgers was in despair at my obstinacy in refusing to play. Sometime since, I resolved not to leave the company until Rodgers would confess that nothing more could be done, but his wife—by the way, an amiable and most exemplary lady—begged of me to go, for, said she, as long as you remain my husband will cling to it. "It does not matter if all the rest should leave if you remain, for if you cannot perform alone he'll wish you to give a lecture on temperance, or something of that sort." I promised Mrs. Rodgers that I would certainly leave this PM and to make all sure I settled up my hotel bill and sent my trunks on board of the steamer *Southern Bell*, Capt. Cox, then bid my friends goodbye and at 5PM we

left Montgomery—a place I part with regretfully. I made no money there but made many friends, who may prove serviceable at some future time. To bed early.

**Mon. Jan. 19th** *Very cold.* . . . Reached Mobile 7PM. Took the nearest road to the Theatre. Found a very poor house assembled there to witness as poor a performance, the company being a most wretched one. Mr. J. M. Field, the manager, is an actor well calculated to please the mass of Theatre-goers and so become popular. His forte is said to be “Light and Eccentric Comedy,” but he turns everything into Burlesque.<sup>11</sup> I never suffered so much from cold weather in the south as on this evening—everything freezable not protected by a hot fire was frozen solid. The “oldest inhabitant” cannot remember a “spell” of cold at all comparable with this. Put up for the night at the Exchange Hotel.

**Tues. Jan. 20th** Extremely cold. Rose early, breakfasted. Was charged \$1.50 for a poor bed and a passable breakfast—rather too *high* for a *low* purse. Left for New Orleans at 4PM on the steamer *California*. Engaged a berth and used it as soon after supper as possible.

**Thurs. Jan. 22nd** Cold enough. Roused up at 3AM to go on board the steamer *Florida* which had come alongside to take off the *California*'s passengers. At 5AM we were underway again. In two hours we were as near the end of our voyage as the steamer could take us. The water being too shallow for her to reach her dock we were transferred to the deck of a schooner which was hauled to the landing place by means of a long rope—though not until we were all chilled through by being exposed to a very strong & cold north wind. The schooner was so crowded that there was no moving about, no person being allowed more than standing room, so everybody, old and young, black & white, masculine & feminine were obliged to show their knowledge of the Terpsichorean<sup>12</sup> art by dancing away as hard as they could—not with a view of displaying any grace but with a warm desire to keep the feet from acting as an ice house to the rest of the body. 9AM reached the city. Not knowing where to procure cheap accommodations we took dear ones by putting up for a day at the “City Hotel” or until we could have time to look about. Called at

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11. burlesque: a play, story, novel, etc., that makes a serious subject seem funny or ridiculous.

12. terpsichorean: of, or related to, dancing.

the different Theatres, met old acquaintances, had a talk about old times, etc. There seems no prospect of either getting anything to do here or of going up the Mississippi—that river being so filled with ice that steamboats cannot make the passage.

**Wed. Feb. 4th** Pleasant. Walking & reading AM. Writing PM. Several members of the St. Charles Company having benefits to come off next week are very anxious to have me stay and play for them. I would do so if I could afford to waste the time or if they had offered to pay my necessary expenses for the ten or twelve days I should be compelled to lose by remaining in the city. Besides, every moment is particularly precious to me now as, by hurrying on towards New York, I may be able to make an engagement that I should be unable to effect a month hence.

**Fri. Feb. 6th** Warm. Walk on the “Levee.” Only one boat advertised for Cincinnati—passage \$16. At first thought we should wait until next week when, there being more boats, the fare would be cheaper, so went to our room, and after thinking it over concluded that we should be acting “penny wise,” etc., as it would cost more than the difference to stay in this city until next week—so packed up and took passage for Cin[cinnati] on the steamer *Moro Castle*.

**Sat. Feb. 21st** Raining. Arrived at Cincinnati about midnight. Put up at the Revere House, F. Wibel. Called at Post Office—got a letter from George. Offered an engagement up to June 1st by Bates of the National but did not deem it advisable to accept. Met many old acquaintances—talked over times past. Took a walk to look at the town which has much improved since I was last here. Dropped in the National 7PM. Mrs. Warner was playing in the *Winter’s Tale* and *Pizarro* to a poor house. Her tour through this country has been somewhat of a failure thus far. I was glad to find that an old friend, Mr. L. P. Roys, had improved greatly in his profession—he was decidedly the best actor I saw this evening.

**Sun. Feb. 22nd** Cloudy. Reading AM. Walking about town PM. This is “*Washington’s Birthday*.” The Governor of Hungary—when Hungary was struggling for its independence—Louis Kossuth,<sup>13</sup> is now going the round of the

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13. Lajos Kossuth was regent-president of Hungary during the 1848–49 revolution, and was



country to enlist the sympathy and to solicit the aid of our people in the cause of his nation's independence. When he first landed upon our shores [he] did—by his brilliant eloquence and stirring appeal to Republicans to assist his nation in her struggle for freedom, to gain which seemed his only ambition—win the hearts of all who heard his voice or read his speeches as they were copied into the newspapers. But he has not improved his position—arrogance and egotism have lost him many friends. Of course, when first Kossuth landed upon our shores every man calling himself an American could [not] but sympathize with one whom they regarded as a martyr in the cause of Republicanism, one who had suffered in endeavoring to establish that great political principle for which our forefathers had so successfully combated—the right of self-government. But when this man, a mere tyro<sup>14</sup> in the school of political freedom, a man whom we have feted and honored beyond all precedent, undertakes to tutor us in our duty as freemen, and presumptuously tells us that we are ignorant of the true meaning of the words of wisdom contained in the farewell address of our Country's Father<sup>15</sup>—“to keep faith *with all nations and seek entangling alliances with none*”—when a man honored as Kossuth has been and acts as he has acted, is it to be wondered at if, while we still most truly sympathize with the *cause* he advocates, we should lose our confidence in and our respect for the sophistical pleader? His conduct has, to say the least, been ungrateful to our government which not only exerted its influence to obtain his release but dispatched a national vessel to convey him to our shores that he might enjoy a home in the land of the free. But he had scarcely set foot on our soil 'ere he began to promulgate doctrines which, if followed, would plunge us into war with nearly every nation in Europe. And when, at the city of Washington, he was informed by the President and most of our leading statesmen that the doctrine of intervention in European affairs could not be entertained by this government, as it was in direct opposition to its policy—the policy laid down by Washington, and which has raised us in

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widely honored in the United States and United Kingdom for his support of democratic principles. In his 1851–52 visit, Kossuth attempted to enlist support from the United States to enter into an alliance with Hungary, but his “doctrine of intervention” was met with opposition. John H. Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America, 1851–52* (Buffalo, NY: East European Institute, 1973).

14. tyro: a beginner or novice.

15. George Washington's Farewell Address (1796) is a classic statement of republicanism and advises US citizens on how to stay true to their values. In it, Washington states that the United States should “observe good faith and justice towards all nations” and that “it is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world.”

sixty years from the position of a poor and weak republic to that of a mighty nation whose influence in the political world, both morally and physically, is now second to none—and when, in a private conference with Henry Clay, that pure patriot declared that “*a dying man* he opposed *his doctrine of intervention*,” did Kossuth receive these declarations with the same kind feeling that dictated them or as a man grateful for the favors he had received would have done? No! He acted as though he had said within himself, “*I have my own ends to gain and they must be gained at whatever sacrifice, even though it may plunge your country into war. I have failed with the government, now to try if I can win the people to my views. If so, I care not for the present opposition of the former as that opposition must yield to the will of the people.*” But he will fail, for, although our people are easily excited and are ever ready to assist a nation struggling for Liberty, though demagogues may succeed in arousing them to enthusiasm—thank God! they have not yet degenerated into the hot-headed precipitancy of a French mob but in their actions are governed by prudence—the counsels of our immortal Washington are not yet forgotten nor *misunderstood*. From out of the womb of nations did that *Good Man* bring forth the infant Republic, its course he watched with all the anxious solicitude of a father’s care, its safety filled his thoughts by day and mingled with his nightly dreams, and when e’er on bended knees his pure spirit had sought communion, with the great “king of kings,” a prayer winged its way to the judgment seat invoking protection for his child. When danger and disease no longer threatened the health of his dear and *only* child, he yielded back his soul to *Him* that gave it, bequeathing to the *young Man* a rich and wise legacy in his *Farewell address*. The Bible teaches us that God sent his only begotten son into the world to teach man the only true religion. My heart tells me that to George Washington he entrusted the mission of teaching to man that his true birth-right is Freedom! If to associate with Christ the name of Washington be profanation, God pardon me!

**Tues. Feb. 24th** Pleasant. Bid goodbye to old acquaintances and at 10AM left for Pittsburgh on the *Messenger*, No. 2. The charge for passage was rather more than I expected—seven dollars—but it is a fine boat and sets an excellent table. Reading & promenading PM.

**Fri. Feb. 27th** Rather coolish. Arrived at Pittsburgh about 2AM. After breakfasting had my trunks taken to the Philada. R.R. Depot and then took a walk out to the Allegheny Arsenal, where, on the 22d of Feb., 1843, I enlisted for

the second time in the service of the U.S. . . .<sup>16</sup> Returned to town 6PM, walked about for a while, took a room at the U.S. Hotel, and went to bed at 9PM.

**Sat. Feb. 28th** Cold & raining. Up at 5AM, breakfasted at 6, and in half an hour after took a seat in the cars on my route to Philada. The Conductor charged me most shamefully for extra baggage but there was no getting over it—it had to be paid. The railroad not being completed all the way through we were carried twenty-four miles by stages—the meanest of all ways of travelling. Ex-governor Johnstone of Penn[sylvani]a occupied a seat in the same stage with myself. He is rather a fine-looking man though his appearance had nothing remarkable in it. I found him a very social and agreeable travelling companion. Reached Johnsbury at 5PM where we were detained four hours by reason of the bank having caved in and covered part of the railroad. After a detention of over five hours we started off again. The night was a bitter cold one and though there was a stove in the car it failed to keep warm any others than those standing around it, sleeping was out of the question for me—the most I could make was ten- or twenty-minute naps.

**Sun. Feb. 29th** Pleasant but very cold. This road is most wretchedly managed. About 2AM the cars ran off the track, and this, too, on the very summit of the Alleghenies, where the wind had full sweep at us. We were told that we should not be detained here more than half an hour and the conductor left us, as he said, to bring a locomotive up behind to haul the cars back on the track. But the half hour passed and five or six more half hours without any sign of either locomotive or conductor, which latter individual, as we afterwards learned, went to an Inn half a mile distant, and there enjoyed the luxury of a bed whilst nearly two hundred passengers were left shivering with cold and more hungry than a New York beggar, as there had been no opportunity of getting anything to eat since noon of the day previous. There was an Englishman in the cars very anxious to reach Philada. before this day was gone and as there was no prospect of our getting off in time to connect with the 8AM train from Holidaysburg, distant ten miles, he wished someone to accompany

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16. In the portion omitted here, Watkins recounts his travels from New York City to Pittsburgh, where he enlisted in the army for a second time under Captain Edward Harding. He describes how poorly he was treated by Harding and how he ran away from his regiment to find his former company (Company I, Fifth Regiment, under Captain Martin Scott), where he eventually transferred, and then was formally discharged for being a minor who enlisted without parental consent.

him to town on foot. I agreed to go and at 6AM we started. . . . Supped at Lancaster, reached Philada. at midnight, took quarters at the “Union,” Col. Webb, Arch Street between 3d & 4th.

**Tues. Mar. 2nd** Pleasant—but deuced cold. Started for N.Y. at 12PM—reached home in six hours—found the old lady in first-rate health—and that’s some comfort. Gave her a short history of my doings since leaving N.Y. then to bed.

**Mon. Mar. 8th** Moderating. Walking AM. Walking & writing PM. A law was passed by Congress Sept. 28th, 1850, granting 160 acres of land to all those who had served in the army during any of the Indian wars,<sup>17</sup> and as I enlisted during the Florida war,<sup>18</sup> I this day forwarded my discharge on to the Commissioner of Pensions to learn if I was entitled to the land. Should I get it, it will be a little windfall, and very acceptable. As I have nothing to do at present, donations thankfully received.

**Fri. Mar. 12th** Considerably warmer. Walking AM. Writing PM. Received a note from the “Commissioner of Pensions” acknowledging the receipt of my discharge and affidavit. The note stated that my claim to bounty land would be investigated and, if found correct, a certificate for the land would be forwarded to me as soon as possible. This looks favorable to my prospects. Walk after supper.

**Fri. Mar. 19th** Cold. Walking AM. Studying PM. There is no doubt but that the mind influences the digestive organs, for whenever anything annoys me I am sure to be troubled with the dyspepsia, and to be idle so long with no prospect of speedy employment is, to me, extremely mortifying.

**Thurs. Apr. 8th** Unpleasant. Reading and walking AM. Reading & writing PM. On the 6th ult.<sup>19</sup> I was elected a member of the “*American Dramatic Fund*

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17. The “Act Granting Bounty Land to Certain Officers and Soldiers who have been Engaged in the Military Service of the United States” applied to those who performed military service (or their survivors) in the War of 1812, any combat with Native Americans after 1790, or the US-Mexican War.

18. The Florida War (1835–42)—today, commonly called the Second Seminole War—was one of several conflicts between the US military and Native Americans in Florida who were collectively known as Seminoles.

19. *ult.* (Latin): abbreviation for *ultimo mense* (last month).

*Association*,”<sup>20</sup> but my membership was dated back to the 31st of March. This society has been in existence but four years yet it has already created a fund of nearly \$13,000, although it has met with much opposition from members of the profession, some believing it was gotten up to raise a fund that would find its way into the pockets of a few individuals, and so, be heard of no more—as was the case with an association of the same kind started a few years ago. Americans looked upon it with suspicion because, when commenced, most of its officers were Englishmen. Young men regarded it as a scheme on the part of those who were “declining into the vale of years” to create a society to support them in their dotage. But all these prejudices are dying off and the respectable portion of the profession are fast joining the association. Studying after supper. To bed early.

**Wed. Apr. 21st *Raining!*** Reading & walking AM. Called on Owens. I can do nothing with him that’s pretty certain, although he holds the “*Word of promise* to my ear he breaks it to my hope.”<sup>21</sup> On Tuesday night I was proposed for membership in the order of Masons and a committee formed to look after my character—I presume they were fortunate enough to find it as a favorable report was given. I have long desired to become a Mason, for I believe that every young man should join an association of this kind as, however industrious or prosperous he may be at the time of joining, the centrifugal rotation of Fortune’s wheel may, in one of its eccentric revolutions, throw him into a calamitous position, from which nothing could, or *would*, rescue him unless it were the centripetal power that binds brother to brother. At Bowery Theater 7PM to see a new Drama, *Corsican Brothers*.

**Fri. Apr. 30th** Might have been a pleasant day but for the dust. Reading & walking. I received a letter yesterday from I. C. Pray, stating that Mr. G. V. Brooke, the Tragedian, was about to open the “Astor Place Opera House” for a short season and that he, Pray, could secure me a “good position” if I wished to engage. Thinking that fickle fortune had been arranging something good for me, I called upon Pray, as requested in the letter, when I learned that the “good position” he intended for me was to play *fourth-rate parts*, whilst the second and third—Mr. Brooke, of course, filling the first parts—were to be played by one broken-down actor and another who, three years before,

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20. This organization, founded in 1848, supported members of the theatrical profession who were unable to work. It led, in part, to the establishment of the Actors’ Fund of America in 1882. Louis M. Simon, *A History of the Actors’ Fund of America* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1972).

21. An allusion to Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, act 5, scene 8.

had played subordinate to myself. Finding Mr. Pray's ideas of a "*good position*" so entirely different from my own I declined the proffered engagement. He said that if I could overcome my scruples I might be made quite comfortable. Overcome my scruples I might, but not my interest. Those who are worldly blind may dig their own graves and then creep into them, it is expected—they manure the social earth that wise men may grow fat thereon. But those who can *see* the part wherein their interest lies, and yet not pursue it, are unworthy of success, nor can they hope to achieve it whilst society silently, yet loudly, proclaims its motto to be, "*every man for himself and the devil take the hind-most.*" And, by the worth of Brooke, I know my price, I am worth no worse a place than his own second.

**Tues. May 4th** Beautiful day. I take pleasure in recording that novelty. Reading & walking AM. Laid out a plot for a farce to be called *A Cure for the Dyspepsia*. It is an excellent subject for a farce and if arranged with any skill must prove successful, for nothing can be more amusing than the whims and fancies of a dyspeptic. 8PM was initiated a member of the "Lebanon lodge" of Masons. After the ceremony came home, talked with Mother, and at 11 went to bed.

**Fri. May 7th** Pleasant. Writing & walking AM, ditto PM. An engagement offered me for Worcester, Mass. but refused it—I want to remain in this city if possible. Chances rather doubtful.

**Fri. May 14th** Partly pleasant. Writing & walking AM. Walking PM. When I sent my army discharge and other papers to Washington, asserting my claim to bounty land, an answer was returned stating that the papers were received and would be attended to as soon as possible, and requesting that I should wait a reasonable time before writing again to know what had been done. After waiting nearly three months and receiving no further information and deeming that an *unreasonable* time I concluded to enquire into the subject and so wrote again this PM. I understand that those who make application through a lawyer are likely to be attended to with more punctuality. Knowing something of the working of *army* officials, I've no doubt the same rule applies to the whole batch of Office-holders.<sup>22</sup> 8PM at "Astor Place." Brooke as "Shylock" was fair, nothing more—I've been better pleased.

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22. Ultimately, Watkins was not awarded this "Bounty Land" because he was not on active duty in Florida during the Second Seminole War. In December 1852, Watkins sought support for amending the law to apply to those who were in the service during the war "no matter whether they were in Florida or not," but was unsuccessful. *HWD*, December 24, 1852 (omitted in this edition).

**Tues. May 18th** Beautiful day. Writing & walking AM. Offered an engagement with Burton to play “walking gentleman.” Didn’t refuse, didn’t accept—I must give it a little thinking. An engagement of almost any kind with Burton is worth having, but I do not wish to descend too far down the theatrical ladder, the ascent being so difficult—yet, if he will give me half a chance, I’ll engage with him. Writing & walking PM. 8PM received my third degree of Masonry, which makes me a Master Mason, and proud do I feel of the position.

**Thurs. May 20th** Pleasant. Arranged to play at Burton’s on the 24th for J. B. Johnstone[’s] benefit. I hardly think it will lead to an engagement as the part I play, Sceptic, not being in the line of business for which Burton wishes to engage me, will hardly give him an opportunity of judging whether I am capable of sustaining the position or not. But if I can succeed in making an impression it will prove of great benefit to my future interests. Walking PM. 8PM at the “Astor Place” to see the *Corsican Brothers*, which was most beautifully gotten up. It is a different translation of the same play as performed at the Bowery. Mr. Brooke as the Brothers was excellent. The audiences at this house have been very small since the opening but appear to be increasing.

**Wed. May 26th** Fine day. Reading & writing AM. Walking PM. Met Burton—had a talk with him about an engagement, *but couldn’t make one*. He remarked that he feared I lacked experience. I thought that ten years’ practice in the profession of an Actor was experience enough to play the business for which I wished to engage, but thus it is. In every other pursuit or profession save the stage, young men are expected to do the work of young men, but an actor must be old to be young, to personate the juvenile of twenty-three ’tis necessary that the player shall have passed his fortieth year. There is something wrong in this but, as I can’t reform it, I must e’en abide my time and wait for old age to give me the position my ambition aims at. Experience, forsooth! I almost hate the word! Experience, indeed! I have something better than that—youth, ambition, enthusiasm, and an ardent love for my profession. I remember reading, some years since, how that in France, when the revolutionary spirit was at its height and political clubs were the order of the day, that, at a meeting of one of these said clubs, a man made a speech to the effect that one of the evils of society were old men, and then offered a resolution that forty should be fixed as the ultimatum of life, that no person should be suffered to live beyond that age, and those who were already passed it should

be guillotined. At the time of reading this I thought the man who could make such a proposition was either a madman or a fool, but if really sane the guillotine would be too light a punishment for such a villain—now, I am inclined to think more favorably of him, in fact, almost respect him. I've no doubt he was a young actor who had just been told by some superannuated old buffer that he lacked *experience*. Wrote a letter. After supper took a walk.

**Sat. June 5th** Pleasant. Writing & walking AM. PM packed up my valise with clean shirts and other necessaries for a short trip down the coast and up York River, VA, on a coasting schooner, the *Florida*, Capt. Jesse Mott. No doubt it will improve my health. On board at 6PM. The wind being ahead we were obliged to cast anchor at Quarantine. The schooner, not being arranged for the carrying of passengers, having accommodations for only the crew, I shall have to rough it, especially with regard to the sleeping part. There being no spare berth I was obliged to turn in with the Captain, whose berth, though the largest on board, was not of sufficient size to accommodate two persons of the same gender, but might have been quite comfortable for a lady and a gentleman on good terms. I retired with not the most sanguine expectations of “a good night's rest,” which the sequel realized to the fullest extent.

**Sat. June 12th** Fine day. Had a look at Yorktown, memorable as being the place where the final blow of any great importance was struck for American freedom. Whilst gazing upon the hallowed spot where was fought the great battle known in history as the “siege of Yorktown,” my fancy peopled the void space with the noble form of the immortal Washington surrounded by his brave compatriots as he stood after the conflict awaiting the approach of the once haughty, now crestfallen foe, to present to his conqueror the hilt of that relentless sword whose insatiate point, reeking with the blood that flowed from its remorseless stabs into the infant breast of struggling freedom, had been broken against the invincible armor of a righteous cause. We made but a few hours stoppage in the river—a good breeze springing up PM, the Capt. thought it best to profit by it and start up the bay to where he intended taking on his load of oysters. One of the “hands” was taken sick which made my assistance quite valuable in hoisting sail, steering, heaving the lead, etc., at which I became quite skillful and made considerable proficiency in nautical skill. If I am not much of a sailor on returning to N.Y. I shall at least be the color of one for the sun is changing my complexion rather too fast to be agreeable. Came to anchor at 11PM. Turned in quite tired.



**Tues. June 22nd** Exceedingly warm. On shore at 8AM.<sup>23</sup> Mr. Hughes<sup>24</sup> kindly furnished us with a horse and buggy, with which we rode out into the country to see what prospect there was to procure a load of apples to take on to New York, but what we saw were too small both in size and number. Virginia as a state is one of the most beautiful in the Union, and its resources are unequalled, although little practical use is made of them. The people are very hospitable, but, like most of the inhabitants of the southern states, they lack enterprise, and are wanting in some of that progressive spirit of their brethren of the Northern states. This defect is entirely owing to their “peculiar institution.” The incubus of accursed slavery seems to smother and stifle in them all feelings of energy—it is a dark cloud covering the bright sky of success where sits enthroned the star of enterprise to guide deserving nations and individuals on to the goal of Prosperity where Happiness with her sweetest smiles stands ready to receive them. On board at 12, got underway and run down to the mouth of the river where we cast anchor for the night—the Captain not deeming it safe to go outside while the clouds were threatening a storm, especially as the schooner was without ballast.

**Wed. June 23rd** Pleasant. Started off early AM and had a pleasant sail down the bay. 12M passed “Old Point Comfort”—a fort situated at the entrance to James River. It is the strongest military post in the United States. Reached Norfolk early PM. The position of this city is one of the most eligible in the Union, yet in no place is such a lamentable lack of enterprise so sadly apparent. Being the chief naval depot of the Country and having one of the most splendid harbors in the world with a thickly settled country, easy of access, lying all around it, Norfolk may be said to have almost stood still. There are several steamship and steamboat lines plying between it, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, yet they are nearly all doing a losing business—the most successful scarcely realizing more than expenses. The city, I believe, at this time, contains sixteen thousand inhabitants, but go into the streets and look around and the question naturally suggests itself—where are they all? We do not see any of that businesslike appearance nor hear that bustle to be expected from the place where dwell such a number of persons. There are a great many stores but there seems to be little doing in them. Yes, the rum-shops appear to thrive, there is always a customer at their counters. Tippling houses

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23. Somewhere on the York River, near Gloucester County, VA.

24. Mr. Hughes: a farmer who had invited Watkins to pick cherries the previous day.

are the only houses of amusement in Norfolk. A Theatre could never flourish there for more than a week at a time—the experiment has been tried with some excellent companies but, in every instance, they were starved out. The bar-rooms were more attractive to the young men, and the old ones, too. Shakespeare, to them, was not half so entertaining as the obscene story, or stale joke, of their pot-house companions. The religious fanatic may preach until the world’s course is stopped and he will fail to impress man with the belief that he was created for no other purpose than to pray and work. Nature has planted a “passion” within his breast to contradict the false theory—the sophistical reasoning—a passion that, of all others, is the first to exhibit itself. Why does that infant whose little tongue has not yet learned to imitate the sweet sounds of father! Mother! smile when dandled upon its fond parent’s knee! Yet, why ask the question—the smile speaks for the babe—it is amused! And when, a year or two later, the child is able to crawl about the room, if mischievous, or if peevish and fretful, what means does the wise Mother use to assuage its tears or keep its little hands from mischief? She provides the rattle, the wooden horse, the miniature drum, or some other pleasing toy with which to *amuse* the “darling pet.” Years later, what great incentive is used to induce the boy to diligently apply himself to his studies? It is the promised reward that when they are learned he may “go out to play.” With what assiduity does he then betake to his otherwise dry task, and what an effort of the mind does it require to concentrate his thoughts upon his lessons, so eager is he to join his play-fellows in their innocent *amusements*! Let us take our station at the school-house door when the hour draws near for breaking up. Hark! what means that bee-like hum! The scholars are conning o’er their lessons. Suddenly all is quiet as the grave! What means that death-like silence? The clock struck and breathlessly they await the master’s signal that “school is out”! The word is given. The doors are suddenly thrown open and, like pent-up waters that have burst their dam, out they rush, pell-mell, their glad hearts swelling within their youthful breasts at being thus freed from all scholastic restraint. How they laugh and shout at the prospect of anticipated sport! Observe them at their play—some trundle the hoop, some choose marbles, some spin the top, knock the ball, fly the kite. Oh! how they enjoy their *amusements*! Where lives the wretch who would spoil this scene and deprive those children of their sports? If there be any such—and I know there are—would to Heave[n] it might please the Omnipotent to strip them of their humanity and banish them to the infernal regions of the damned, fit consorts for devils that riot upon mankind’s miseries, and most exult when

most they suffer! Now, there are many, very many, most worthy and kind-hearted persons who have not the slightest objection to amusements for children but deny any to men, who, indeed, stand most in need of amusement. Let us, for a moment, lay aside bigotry and with a calm unprejudiced mind reflect upon some youth just merging into manhood—not one whom fickle Fortune has recognized amongst her pampered darlings, but one of the great *majority—the workers*—he to whom nature hath given a strong arm to aid him in the life of toil to which cruel Destiny hath doomed him. Go into the workshop, see him at his labors, mark how the sweat stands upon his brow as, vigorously, he toils on in his irksome vocation from which the Grave only can give him rest. Happily the worker knows not this—he has bright thoughts of the future, for he is buoyed up by Hope, which is the poor man’s friend. The day’s work being done, the question with the worker is, “*how shall he pass the evening?*” “*What shall he do with himself?*” “*Where shall he go!*” These were questions put to his “Master,”—or, to soften this word, so harsh to an American’s ear, to his “Boss,”—the answer would be, “pass the evening at hom[e].” Go to bed early “so that you may get a good night’s rest, then I can get more work out of you tomorrow”—the last sentence would be spoken confidentially to himself. But these questions are seldom asked—the Worker generally follows the dictates of nature and seeks *amusement*. What shall it be? Being a man he may not indulge in the sports of boyhood, and there are no “places of amusements” in the town, which, though large enough to do so, will not, from prejudice, encourage or support anything of the kind. Yet, these same persons who would raise their eyes heavenward and clasp their hands in holy horror at the bare mention of a Theatre can countenance a rum-shop, and ’tis there the Worker must look for his amusement, which, even on the score of economy, cannot be regarded as the more preferable of the two, for a seat in a bar-room is generally much more expensive than a seat in the Theatre. But let us compare these two “places of amusement” upon the strongest point of argument that can be brought to bear against the Theatre—that of immorality. Who ever went to a play with the expectation that there they should hear sentiments to feed a gross appetite? Who ever returned from a play with a mind vitiated by wha[t] it had seen represented? ’Tis true that in many theatres, wantons are admitted, yet they are not allowed to mix, indiscriminately, with the audience, but are set apart, Cain-like, with a mark upon them that all *who choose* may shun the evil. Those who seek such society know well where to find it without visiting the Theatre, the purpose of which is to enter-

tain its patrons by the representation of plays, and persons are supposed to attend the Theatre with the sole object of being so entertained. But the man who enters a bar-room can have but one end in view—to drink. That is the only attraction offered there. I need not enumerate the many sad results of too frequent an attendance at these houses, I need not relate how they have brought misery and ruin upon thousands of once-happy families! How many noble intellects prostrated! How many rich men made poor! How many poor ones made vagabonds! How many crimes have been committed under the influence of the accursed spirit of rum! How many widows and orphans created! Oh, no! I need not expatiate upon these—Alas! the sad history is too well known! Now, what great crime has ever been perpetrated where a visit to the Theatre may be traced as the cause, yet, how many sermons have been preached against it, and how much vituperation and vile slander heaped upon its unoffending followers. This too, strange and inconsistent as it may appear, by those who confess that of themselves, they *know nothing of them*, they only speak from hearsay. If this is acting like a Christian then am I ignorant of what constitutes the same. It is also asserted that grog-shops flourish most where Theatres are. I do not remember ever to have heard the contrary proved, yet it is easily done. 'Tis true that in the vicinity of a theatre there are always a great number of these houses and so would there be in the neighborhood of any place where large assemblages were in the habit of nightly congregating. But would it tend to lessen the quantity of liquor consumed by closing the Theatre? Oh, no! It would increase it as I can easily show. For instance, few drunkards visit the Theatre while drunk, for they could not sit still long enough to enjoy a play, and if noisy they would be put out. Those persons who seldom attend a Theatre, when they do so, are too intent upon the performance to leave until it is over—a gentleman accompanied by his wife, or any other lady, cannot very well quit her to go out and “liquor.” And it is a fair supposition that the major part of an audience are entire strangers to each other, a man may have one or two friends who have gone to the Theatre with him, but that is, generally, the extent of one’s acquaintance. Now, it is a fact well known that moderate drinkers seldom indulge when alone—the most of their drinking is in response to an invitation and in reciprocating the same. This being the case, it is reasonable to suppose that on the evening a man of this kind visits a Playhouse his libations would not extend beyond a couple of glasses, but were he to pass an evening in a favorite bar-room where he would be likely to meet with a dozen, or more, of his associates, the prob-

ability is that, unless his brains were more spirit-proof than poor Cassio's,<sup>25</sup> he would return home feeling exceedingly "happy," and the next morning feeling decidedly vice-versa. Other proofs might be adduced which, to a mind candid and unprejudiced, would show how fallacious is the reasoning, and how false the assertion, that "where Theatres are, grog-shops flourish most." During the last winter, whilst performing with my company in several of the Southern cities, I was told by many gamblers and bar keepers that "*they hated to see a Theatrical Company come into the town, as the Theatre always injured their business.*" These remarks struck me very forcibly at the time and I here insert them as the greatest proof that could be given of the soundness of my argument. When I commenced this subject I did not expect to pursue it so far, but it is one that I have much at heart and feel most deeply, for I am convinced that a well-conducted Theatre can present the most rational amusement yet devised for the diversion of mankind.<sup>26</sup>

**Fri. July 2nd** Pleasant. Took walk to the courthouse where I saw a Richmond paper announcing the death of Henry Clay—an event long expected. In his decease, the country has lost one of its purest patriots, and the Union its best and most faithful defender. Although a Whig in politics he knew no north, no south, no east, no west, not even party trammels when his conscience told him that a particular measure was for the good of the whole country. The greatest fault his political enemies could impute to him was an ambitious desire to be President—it was an ambition worthy of a great man. To be President of the United States—the first and highest officer within the gift of a free people—is an honor that might well excite ambition, and is the desire not a most laudable one? That Henry Clay was thus ambitious I can well believe, and I honor him for it—but however much he may have desired to achieve that position, he never stooped to any unworthy means for its accomplishment, and no more honest words ever issued from man's lips than came from his when he exclaimed, "*I would rather be right than be President.*" As a Statesman, at the time of his death, Henry Clay stood for man among the first in the world. What a great benefit it would be to America if her politicians would but emulate the illustrious dead. Fishing & writing PM.

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25. An allusion to the fact that Cassio has "very poor and unhappy brains for drinking." Shakespeare, *Othello*, act 2, scene 3.

26. See chapter 1, note 25. Watkins later revised this essay and published it in the *Williamsburgh (NY) Daily Times*: "A Few Dramatic Remarks," June 8, 1853, 1.

**Sat. July 10th** Very foggy. Made but little headway during the night, the wind having died away. 10AM it freshened and we sped along quite fast, but the fog prevented us from knowing where we were until 4PM—it cleared off and the highlands of Navesink loomed up in the distance. I was glad enough to get a look at New York again where we arriv[ed] at 9PM. Took a stage and reached home just as Mother was retiring for the nig[ht]. Found two letters waiting for me—read them, looked over some newspapers. Had a short chat with Mother. To bed at 11PM.

**Tues. July 20th** Pleasant. Appointed as a day of public mourning in honor of the memory of Henry Clay. Reading AM. 2PM at Lodge-room, corner of Broome & Crosby Streets, where all the different Masonic lodges were appointed to meet preparatory to taking their position in the line of the procession. I was glad to see so general an attendance of the masonic order, of which Henry Clay was not only a brother, but stood very high in the fraternity. The mourning was very general throughout the city—all the stores were closed, many of which were tastefully arranged in emblems suitable to the occasion. Indeed the stores, public houses, places of amusement, and many private dwellings seemed to vie with each other in the extent and tastefulness of their decorations. There have been many very large processions in this city but not one to equal this. *The Herald* newspaper stated it to have been *seven miles* in length and I've not the least doubt but the report was correct. The procession was worthy of the occasion—the *cause* was worthy of the process[ion]. Politics are said to be the National characteristic of the Americans and the saying is, in a measure, true and it could not well prove otherwise, considering the past history of the United States and its position among the nations of the Earth, being the propagator of a peculiar system of politics demonstrating to the world the capability of man for self-government. If too great a devotion to politics be an evil, there is a bright redeeming feature in the American character which more than balances it, this feature is this: that however much they may be opposed, *politically*, to an individual their opposition does not blind them to any opponent's greatness or his goodness. And when the true patriot, whose deeds have shed lustre on his country's name, is elected by Death to fill a vacancy in his cold charnel house, the grave, the politics of the living are forgotten in the general desire of all parties to do homage to the illustrious dead.

**Mon. Aug. 9th** Warm but pleasant. Reading, writing, & walking AM. Met Stevens, S.M. of the Bowery Theatre. He was very anxious that I should speak to Hamblin about an engagement for next season, saying that there was a chance for me to play the “juveniles” as Hamblin had no man in his Company for that business. Stevens said he only gave me this information *as a hint*, but *I know* that he first got the *hint* from Hamblin himself who is aware that I am the only “juvenile” actor disengaged and that actors of standing are very scarce—so many new Theatres being about to open that they have been taken off. Indeed, Managers find it very difficult to make up their companies for the coming season.

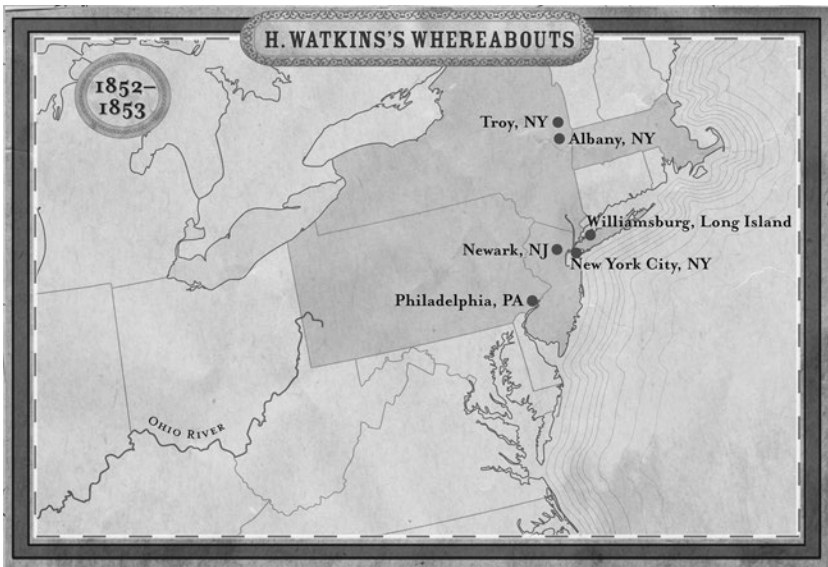
**Fri. Aug. 20th** Warm. Writing & walking AM. Made an engagement with Thorne. I never expected to be under his management again but there was no help for it. I wished to stay in New York—and he offered the best engagement I could make. PM writing—took a walk after supper with George—to bed early.

**Tues. Aug. 24th** Warm—cloudy. Called at the New York Theatre 11AM in pursuance to a call to the company engaged for the coming season to meet at that place. There was a rehearsal for the persons engaged in the Opera, with which the season commences on the 31st inst. Thorne will have attraction enough for the first week, and he has fitted up the Theatre in fine style—in fact left nothing undone to attract the people. If they will only come, that’s the question? Writing PM, at Lodge 7PM.

## EIGHT

1852–53

*During his travels to Albany, Newark, Philadelphia, and New York City, Watkins sees the Bateman Children perform and critiques the management styles of Chanfrau and James W. Wallack. He manages a company at the Odeon in Williamsburg, New York, and produces his original plays Nature's Nobleman (or The Ship Carpenter), Heart of the World, and Laugh and Grow Fat. Watkins forms the Dramatic Washington Monument Association, dedicated to galvanizing the theater community to purchase a stone for the memorial. Overwhelmed by financial concerns and angered by theater managers who favor foreign actors over US American ones, he considers leaving the profession.*





**Sat. Sept. 4th** Warm. Rehearsing AM. Had quite a wordy altercation with Mr. & Miss Logan in regard to the casting of *Romeo & Juliet*—Mr. A. H. Davenport (whose right name is Hoyt), a member of the stock company, informed Miss Logan that if she would let him play Romeo for her benefit, his friends would fill the house. The lady, in the alluring hope of making a dollar, or from personal predilection for Mr. Davenport, had the play cast as he desired, and without consulting either myself—to whom the part of right belonged—or the manager. Altogether it was a most contemptible insult to my feelings. I made no noise about it though, but gave them to understand what I thought of their conduct, and refused to play for the benefit at all. I have had dealings with the Logans before but on no occasion were they favorable ones. At Theatre 7PM. *Love's Sacrifice* was to have been performed but in consequence of the sudden (hic!) indisposition of Mr. J. R. Scott, who was to play Matthew Elmore, *Fazio* was substituted—a bad substitute, but the house was also bad.

**Wed. Sept. 8th** Pleasant. Rehearsing & reading AM. Reading & studying PM. There was no performance this evening—the bills said on account of giving a dress rehearsal to the Bateman children, but the real cause was want of attraction. James Wallack, Sen. opened “Brougham’s Lyceum” for the season—rechristening it “Wallack’s Lyceum.” He has a fair company in the male department but is rather weak with regard to the females. . . . I was not present but learned that the house [was] full and that the performances went off well. Old Wallack appeared between the plays and was received most vociferously—he made an extempore address.

**Thurs. Sept. 9th** Quite warm. Reading & rehearsing AM. Sleeping & studying PM. At Theatre 7PM. First appearance of the Bateman children since their return from England, where they have been performing very successfully during the last eighteen months. They are certainly the most talented children I ever saw. There are two of them, Kate & Ellen Bateman, and are said to be six and eight years of age—the youngest seems to possess the most talent and, indeed, is quite a genius. She acts with a great deal of feeling and appears to appreciate and understand the part she is acting. The opening piece was not well selected—the last act of *Richard III*. Aside from the absurdity of such children playing Tragedy, it required too great an exercise of physique—too much straining of the voice—Richard became as “hoarse” as one would suppose Richard might have been with “daring Richmond to arms.”<sup>1</sup> They next

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1. Watkins is paraphrasing a line in Colley Cibber’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, act 5, scene 7. See chapter 2, note 1.

appeared in a petite comedy entitled *The Young Couple* and here their talent appeared to great advantage—in comedy their acting is really superb and deserving the most lavish praise. Their ages are stated to be six and eight years but they are older by two years.

**Sat. Sept. 11th** Warm. Rehearsing AM. PM George left us for his home in the South—we shall miss him very much—may old Neptune curb his boisterous temper, whilst my brother traverses his broad domains, giving him safe passage. At Theatre 7PM, rained in the evening. Good house for the weather.

**Mon. Sept. 13th** Coolish—quite a change in the weather. Rehearsal AM. Informed by the stage manager that the Theatre closes after tomorrow night, to remain closed until Thorne recovers his health. If they had kept open a fortnight longer I should not so much have regretted the closing but now I feel it most keenly in a pecuniary point of view. My dealings with Thorne have been generally unfortunate, though, in this instance, not the slightest blame can be imputed to him. Had he not been prevented by sickness from attending to the Theatre I've no doubt he would have made it successful. Study PM. At Theatre 7PM. Played Backhuysen Buff in a Farce called *Taking by Storm*—it is an English production and this was its first representation in this country and ought to be the last, for it is one of the poorest things that I ever had the misfortune to play in. The audience were inclined to hiss it but good naturedly refrained from expressing their feelings at being obliged to witness such a production as *Taking by Storm*. Many persons left the house before the farce was half through—I envied them as I myself should like to have gone out.

**Tues. Sept. 14th** Coolish—summer clothing had to be thrown aside. Rehearsal AM. Reading PM, besides doing a little tailoring. At Theatre 7PM. The orchestra refused to play any more notes until the Manager paid his notes. This was the regular salary day but it was concluded, in order to save trouble, to postpone it until tomorrow and then to settle up for all that was due. This was fair enough but the musicians were afraid the money would not be forthcoming and so determined to force the thing—but there was no danger of this, for, with all Thorne's faults, he has always paid his salaries up to the time of closing. Fair house.

**Wed. Sept. 15th** Rainy. At Theatre AM, the company were paid their salaries and thus ended the first season of the "New York Theatre." F. S. Chanfrau, having leased the house, intends opening it on the 27th and to keep it open until Thorne recovers sufficiently to take charge of it himself. Chanfrau will reduce

the prices of admission—this is the only plan to make this place successful for if it is ever made a paying property, it will be as a cheap Theatre. The house was built for the patronage of the “upper ten,”<sup>2</sup> but they have never given it their support, and the class that would do so are unable, or unwilling, to pay the prices heretofore asked for admission—reduce them to the standard of the Bowery & National Theatres and I’ve no doubt it will prove eminently successful. Chanfrau wishes me to continue on with my engagement but I am tired of having anything to do with these very doubtful speculations—my purse is too low and its repletion requires something more certain. Indeed I am getting, if not sick, disgusted with Theatricals—or, rather, the manner of conducting Theatres in this city, where an American, however talented he may be, stands no chance of engagement while there are Englishmen to be had. They form nine-tenths of the companies of the principal Theatres in this city, and now that Theatricals are dull in England, English actors are flocking here, where engagements are tendered them immediately upon landing and at much larger salaries than Americans who are cast aside to make room for them [who] think of asking. This state of affairs will continue too as long as our Theatres are managed by Englishmen.

**Thurs. Sept. 30th** Pleasant. Rehearsing & reading AM, walking & reading PM. Feeling sleepy I laid down at 5 o’clock to get the benefit of a short nap, from which I was aroused by the ringing of a neighboring church bell for the weekly evening meeting of its members—upon awakening I was surprised to find that it was dark, which alarmed me considerably, when I considered that I was to appear in the first piece, *Hamlet*. According to my watch, it wanted but five minutes of time of ringing up the curtain, and the Theatre was more than a mile from my house. I grabbed a pair of black tights, the only article of dress that, under the excitement of the moment, I could think I should need, and off I started like a wild horse, to the imminent danger of any person unfortunate enough to get in my way. I reached the Theatre just as the curtain was going up on the play—told the wardrobe-keeper to let me have anything in the shape of a dress and to hunt up a pair of shoes for me, as I had brought none myself. He brought me a pair that contained sufficient material to have made me two pairs, but there was no time to lose, so I stuffed the toes, sides, and bottoms of the shoes with all the paper I could find, and then, by the aid

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2. upper ten: short form of “Upper Ten Thousand,” referring to the upper circles of New York, a phrase coined by Nathaniel Parker Willis (editor of the *New York Mirror*) in 1845.

of a strap, and by pinning the heel of the aforesaid shoes to the heel of my tights, managed to locomote without danger of losing my understandings. How the rest of my dress was arranged I had no means of ascertaining as some kind person had removed my glass and there was no time to hunt it up as the prompter was making loud call for “Laertes,” but Laertes was not to be had as soon as wanted and they were obliged to cut out his first scene which, fortunately, is easily done. I was ready for the second scene which saved my culpabl[e] negligence from b[e]ing made known to the audience. This was the first time during my career as an actor that I was ever found missing at my post—and an apology has never yet been made for me.

**Sat. Oct. 2nd** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM. Reading & writing PM. At Theatre 7PM. Last night of the season under Chanfrau’s management, and, I think, under any other person’s management—at least for some time to come. I have made great exertions, and many sacrifices, to stay in N.Y. this winter, but now I shall be compelled to seek an engagement elsewhere—I think it would be good policy for me to leave this city and stay away from it for some years, but can’t make up my mind to do so. I wish to do what is for the best but don’t know what is best to do. I shall not regret when my connection with this world is severed for I am tired of this constant struggle between man and man—each striving to soar above the other. Were the rivalry for supremacy honorably conducted, earth does not bear that man who would labor more laboriously, and with a better heart, than myself—but I become disgusted and weary of life when I look around me and see that the great majority of those who seek eminence, *and attain it, too*, are those who come to the battle armed with hypocrisy, deceit, and low cunning, backed with vile presumption and bare-faced impudence, awhilest their despicable natures are encased in that most invulnerable of all armor—*cold-hearted selfishness!* Oh! how crept these attributes of hell into the heart of man? Is it the judgement of an insulted creator? If so, Oh, God! suspend thy just wrath! Into the breast of man instil thy immaculate purity that he may be again thy image in spirit and in form! Ah! my prayer, I fear, will not be heard! As man have been in the past so will he be in the future! Is death the purifier? Let us hope so! The closing plays were the *Lady of Lyons* and *Toodles*. Mr. Stark’s Melnotte was not as good as his other impersonations—he appears to excel in such parts as Lear and Richelieu.

**Mon. Oct. 4th** Rainy day. At Theatre AM, salaries were paid for five performances, and thus ended the second season of the “New York Theatre”—when

will the third commence? PM started off in the rain to hunt some individuals who happened, unfortunately, to be in debt to me. I never expected to be a “*dun*”<sup>3</sup> but stern necessity demands it to be *done*. At Bowery Theatre 8PM—it was not very pleasant to my feelings to see this house crowded where the manager and his entire company, with two exceptions, were foreigners—and to think that the New York Theatre, where all the company, *with but one exception*, were Americans, had to be closed for want of patronage.

**Wed. Oct. 6th** Unsettled—slight sprinkling. Walking AM. PM took the *Rip Van Winkle* steamer for Albany to see what chance there is in that vicinity for an engagement—there being no opening for me here. To sleep early.

**Thurs. Oct. 7th** Pleasant day—shower in the evening. Reached Albany 6AM. Dropped in at an eating house—discussed a hearty breakfast of beef-steak, etc., after which took the stage for Troy. Called on G. C. Howard, manager of the “Troy Museum” who offered me an engagement for three months but that did not meet my views—I wished to produce my plays of the *Ship Carpenter*, *Heart of the World*, etc., and leave when they ceased to draw, but this did not meet his views and so I returned to Albany by the next stage. Visited the “Albany Museum” for the first time. Lovell, the stage manager, offered me two engagements—one to stay with him, the other for Syracuse. I shall make one more trial to engage in New York and if that fails I think I will take the Syracuse offer. If I only had a couple of thousand dollars, I see an excellent opportunity to acquire a fortune—a new Theatre was opened in this city, Albany, during the last summer of which a man named Preston—an old manager and actor, but with a very bad reputation as a pay-master—became proprietor. Though the Theatre has been open but a few months, Preston, by dishonesty and bad management, has contrived [to] plunge himself into debt with everybody in his employ. The building, itself, is mortgaged for \$7250—the mortgages to be redeemed by certain installments, the first of which will be due in a few days, and there is no probability that Preston will be able to meet the payment. The holder of the mortgage offered to turn it over to me for the sum of \$2000, to be paid on the 1st of January, in this case if Preston failed, as expected, the Theatre would fall into my hands—but where am I to get security for that amount? Echo answers, where? I shall hurry on to New

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3. *dun*: a person (especially a creditor) who makes repeated and insistent demands, often for money.

York and see if I can't enlist some monied person into the affair—there is nothing like trying. Took the same steamer at 6PM to return home—in berth at 8PM.

**Fri. Oct. 8th** Pleasant. Reached N.Y. at 5AM, walked home, washed, shaved, breakfasted, and wrote a little, walk after dinner. Received a note from an old debtor enclosing a five-dollar note, which \$5, though a long time due, came to hand at a most opportune moment and was very acceptable.

**Sat. Oct. 9th** Wet, drizzly, disagreeable day. Reading & walking AM. I think the best thing that I can do will be to take the first engagement that offers and to give up all thoughts of going into management until I can find money enough in my own purse to do so without having to look to others for assistance. I must give up *thinking* what will be best for me to do and commence *doing*—action alone can ensure success.

**Wed. Oct. 13th** Pleasant. Reading & walking AM. Mr., or *Signor*, Canito, a monkey actor,<sup>4</sup> called me from a party of friends, with whom I was conversing, and *insisted* that I should take the management of the “New York Theatre” for one week—he to supply the necessary funds to procure and pay a company. His object, he said, was to produce his drama *The Machinist of New York*, which drama, I remembered, was placed into my hands during my engagement at the National for revision and correction, but which I returned to the manager immediately after reading the first speech, it being very evident that my limited knowledge of grammar was totally at variance with the entire orthography, etymology, syntax, and prosody of the author of the *Machinist of N.Y.* The Signor had made many attempts to have his play “brought out,” but the managers were inexorable. “Some of them,” said he, his eyes sparkling with brandy—indignation I mean—“wouldn't even read it.” Theirs was a blessed condition, thought I, the vision of that first speech flitting across my mind. “But now” continued the monkey-man, “I'll take a Theatre and bring the *Machinist* out on my own hook, and you shall play the leading part and be manager besides.” Here was a chance for glory but which my modesty would not suffer me to realize, so I declined the honor, much to the surprise of Cani-

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4. Signor Canito (Samuel Canty) performed acrobatics dressed as a monkey in a variety of plays (several written by himself), and created a “mechanical ring-tail,” which allowed him to suspend himself from wires.

to, who swore that it “*would be the making of me,*” that it “would gain me the friendship of every machinist in the city”—I should like to have gained their esteem, but not on those terms. To get rid of the signor’s importunities, as he would not take no for an answer, I agreed that, if unengaged by Friday, I would undertake his business. After bidding him good-bye, I went home and wrote letters to three managers whom I thought might want me, being fully determined to make an engagement of some kind by the Friday. 5PM started for Philad[elphi]a.—arrived there at 10PM, called on Conrad Clarke who invited me to pass the night at his house—accepted the invitation.

**Thurs. Oct. 14th** As I brought no umbrella with me it rained—of course. Called on some old acquaintances—at National Amphitheatre 7PM, introduced to J. Foster—had a talk with him about playing my *Ship Carpenter*—promised me an answer next morning—think I shall make terms with him.

**Fri. Oct. 15th** Pleasant. Called on Foster per agreement. After much talking we concluded an engagement for two nights—sharing after \$250. I can hardly expect to realize anything from such high terms, but Foster secures me from loss by agreeing to pay me \$10 for the two nights should the receipts fall short of the sharing point—this will about cover my expenses. 5½PM started back to N.Y.—home at 10PM, packed up my things and at 1AM, turned in for a few hours’ sleep.

**Sat. Oct. 16th** Pleasant but chilly. Up at 5AM, started for the railroad depot—missed the train, it having started a few minutes previously. This was a bad beginning and very annoying—obliged to wait for the 8 o’clock train—made sure of that—back to Philada. at 1PM, too late for a rehearsal—the company had all gone home. Set the stage-carpenters and painters to work, had the bills made out, took up my quarters at the Mansion House, and at 4PM went to bed being completely tired out—slept till 7PM. After supper visited the National—fair house.

**Mon. Oct. 18th** Cloudy part of the day. Up early—after breakfast went to the Theatre and copied out several chorus parts in the *Carpenter* which was rehearsed at 10AM. Writing & studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Played Herman Grey in the *Ship Carpenter*—the play went off much better than I anticipated considering that it had but one rehearsal and all the performers read their parts at that. I was received very well, was called out after the play and loudly cheered. There was strong attraction against us, Lola Montez at the Chestnut,

Mrs. Farren at the Arch, & Barney Williams & wife at the Walnut, yet we had the fullest house among them all. The elections being so near at hand keep a great many persons away from the Theatres.

**Wed. Oct. 20th** Pleasant. Reading & walking AM, walking PM. Dropped in at the Arch and National Theatres—Fair houses at both. General Scott visited the city this PM and was received by quite a large procession. He quartered at the “Girard House,” from the balcony of which he appeared and was formally welcomed by the mayor, Gilpin, to which Scott replied in a short speech. There was a great crowd of people in attendance, many drawn thither to get a sight of the “*old hero*” but the majority were brought there through party feeling—Scott being the nominee of the Whig party for the presidency. The time was when I would have gone any lengths to have assisted in placing Scott in the presidential chair, but his conduct since his nomination has been disgusting to every man not blinded by his partisan prejudice. An insane ambition to be president had turned the greatest of American soldiers into the smooth-tongued demagogue. Whilst pretending to be travelling on public duty he has been canvassing the country, making speeches in all the stopping places on his line of travel, which speeches were filled with flattery of the “dear people” and accounts of the services he had rendered his country. Some years since he was a strong “Native American” in politics and expressed himself in favor of extending the period of naturalization to twenty-one years, but now, thinking to gain foreign votes thereby, he repudiates all his former opinions. He seems ready to declare in favor of any and every creed, however opposite in nature, if such declaration appears likely to secure a vote. He was a strong union and compromise man, and doubtless is so now, but his nomination was only effected through free-soil and abolition influence. His chances for election are about as good as mine—no better.<sup>5</sup>

**Sat. Oct. 23rd** Pleasant. Up early, settled my hotel bill, and at 8AM started for home which I reached at 1PM. Cleaned up, wrote & read a little, and took a walk.

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5. General Winfield Scott (1786–1866) was nominated as the Whig candidate at a time when the Whig Party was divided over the issue of slavery. Although Scott won the party nomination due to dissatisfaction with the Compromise of 1850 (including its implicit support of slavery through the Fugitive Slave Act), Scott and the Whigs were generally in favor of compromising on the issue of slavery in order to preserve the Union. As Watkins predicts here, Scott lost the election to Democrat Franklin Pierce (1804–1869).



**Sun. Oct. 24th** Fine day. News of the death of Daniel Webster reached this city at 9AM. He died at his residence, Marshfield, Mass., at 22 minutes before 3AM. Within a few months America has lost her three greatest sons—first fell Calhoun, Clay followed, and now Webster. “When shall these three meet again?”<sup>6</sup> Is their greatness a direct passport to life eternal, or must they, like common mortals, lie i’ the earth and bide the last trump’s summons? It has been said that “great men never die,” let us then hope that the spirits of those whose bodies now lie stiffened in the icy embrace of death, may yet hover o’er their beloved country to protect its liberties from the baleful influence of the many demagogues that now swarm throughout the land. Freedom trembles when the demagogue speaks, for she knows too well that his voice hath ever been her death knell. His teachings breed anarchy and anarchy breeds monarchy—witness France.<sup>7</sup> Webster certainly possessed one of the profoundest intellects ever bestowed on man—there was nothing that his mind could not take in. Clay & Webster were perhaps equally great and so was the contrast between them—the former by his almost matchless eloquence, [which] fascinated and spell-bound his hearers, whilst the latter surprised them into awe and admiration of that gigantic mind whose scholastic acquirements and deep research brought to its aid all the treasures of language. These two great men were also equally the recipients of party ingratitude. Both had a right to expect, from the eminent services rendered by them to the Whig Party, and to their country, an elevation to the presidency, yet both were shamefully set aside to make way for men who had no qualifications to recommend them but gunpowder popularity. But each hath earned for himself a name that party cannot rob him of and which the title of President, glorious as it is, could not exalt—Clay the “*Champion of the Union*”; Webster—the “*Defender of the Constitution*.” Had these men lived and received that which was their due I might have been a Whig—dying as they did has made me a Democrat. Reading & writing AM, walking PM, to bed early.

**Mon. Oct. 25th** Pleasant. Reading, writing, & walking AM. Don’t see much prospect of an engagement in this section of the country. Wrote to St. Louis for one, should I succeed in making it, I’ll make the West my home. Walk after supper.

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6. An allusion to Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, act 1, scene 1.

7. Watkins is referring here to the French Revolution of 1848. See chapter 3, note 12.

**Wed. Oct. 27th** Pleasant. While reading this AM, word was brought in that Jane Mott was dying. I immediately started over to her house and found that she had been delirious for two or three days and was sinking very fast. During her ravings she would call for her husband, her children, and persons with whom she had been most familiar, but her attendants said that her thoughts seemed to run on me more than on anyone else and that she would call out my name at the top of her voice and associate me with the Theatre as, "Henry," "*Henry Watkins*"—"Star"—"*star actor*." I stayed with her several hours and at times she seemed to recognise me—once she said, "*I'll see you again Henry—in some Heaven I don't know which—God knows*." She spoke of me several times but did not seem to be aware of my presence. When, coupling me with my profession, she called me a "star"—was it a prophecy? and will it be fulfilled? Poor Jane! I left her at 4PM in a quiet sleep, when next I see her, my *love* fears, it will be in the sleep of death—but my *compassion* makes me trust it will be so, for her sufferings here death only can relieve.

**Sat. Oct. 30th** Cloudy AM. Raining PM. Reading, writing, & walking AM, ditto PM. Poor Jane is dead—her sufferings in this world were brought to a close at 8PM. Surely they have been great enough to ensure her peace in the life to come.

**Tues. Nov. 2nd** Pleasant AM, heavy rain PM. Reading & voting AM. Voted the Democratic ticket for President & Congressmen, and the Whig ticket for state officers. PM went with Mother to attend Jane's funeral—there were a great many ladies though but few gentlemen in attendance. The funeral services were rendered by the Rev. Mr. H. Chase of the mariner's church, whose remarks were in excellent taste and delivered with much feeling. She was buried in the Cypress Hills Cemetery, in a lot owned by her husband. The funeral cortege had not proceeded above two miles before the rain began to pour down in torrents and so continued until Jane was in her grave when, shortly after, the rain ceased and the heavens cleared up beautifully. Poor Jane! she died in a storm and was buried in a storm! It seemed as though the heavens wept in pity for her sufferings, and I trust that the angels smiled when they received into their holy and pure ranks her kindred spirit!

**Thurs. Nov. 4th** Cool & unsettled weather. Received an offer of engagement at the Chestnut Street Theatre, Philada., to play four weeks, commencing on the 15th inst. My good luck generally shows itself when least expected. I was

wondering where I could get an engagement, the prospect being very gloomy, when a letter is put into my hand containing the above offer, and that too, from a manager to whom I had written and received an answer that dispelled all hope in that quarter. I must do my best in this engagement for it may be the making of me.

**Wed. Nov. 10th** Pleasant. Finished packing, AM did some writing, 1PM got a cart to haul my baggage, bid goodbye to *Mother*, and at 2PM started for Philada. by the Camden & Amboy line. Arrived at Philada. at 6½PM, put up at the “Commercial House” on Sixth Street, kept by Irvin. After supper went to the Theatre and reported myself to the manager as ready for business. Saw W. Wheatley play for the first time in a light comedy part—the line he is allowed to excel in. I was much disappointed with his acting—it was not near as good as I expected. He had been set down as the best light-Comedian in the country but I think such praise somewhat beyond his merit.

**Mon. Nov. 15th** Cool. Rehearsing & studying AM, walking & studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Made my first appearance at the Chestnut Street Theatre as Charles Paragon in *Perfection*. I felt slightly nervous, not so much at having to appear before a strange audience as on account of the Company concerned in the piece with me—with all of whom I was an entire stranger. The audience seemed pleased with me, and that is one point gained. If the manager acts fairly with me I have no doubt of becoming a favorite before the end of my month’s engagement.

**Sun. Nov. 21st** Fine day. Took a long walk AM. Determined to see if an association could be started among American actors for the purpose of raising money to purchase a stone to be placed in the Washington Monument. I’ve no doubt of the proposition being received with great favor. I shall take a great deal of trouble to effect this object, and if successful will consider myself amply rewarded in the satisfaction of knowing that I was the originator. Writing PM.

**Wed. Nov. 24th** Pleasant. Reading, writing, and walking AM, writing PM. Finished writing an address to the profession calling on them to subscribe for a stone to be placed in the Washington Monument, appealing to their professional pride and laying down such reasons for their so doing that if there be one spark of patriotism in their breasts [it] will fan it into a flame of enthusiasm that will not rest until the stone be embedded in the monument.

**Thurs. Nov. 25th** Cloudy—rain in the evening. Thanksgiving day. It was very generally observed throughout the city. Read my address to a few friends among the profession—they appeared well pleased with it, and promised to exert themselves to promote its views. PM went to the different Theatres in the city and, with the consent of the managers, posted up a notice for a meeting to devise means for pushing forward the Washington-stone movement. All the actors to whom I spoke on the subject seemed delighted with the idea.

**Sat. Nov. 27th** Cleared off. Walking & studying AM. 3PM being the time appointed for the meeting, went to the “Arch Street Theatre,” at which place it was called. There were not near as many present as I had reason to expect there would have been, though there was quite a respectable attendance. Many were prevented from attending by business, others, and the majority, no doubt, stayed away from prejudice. Some were offended because the Arch Street Theatre was selected to meet in. I was glad to find that the friends of the cause were not discouraged at the small attendance. The meeting was opened by appointing me the chairman and D. Palmer, secretary. The only business transacted was the appointing of a committee of one from each Theatre in the city, with power to select another place of meeting and the time of holding the same. The committee were Conrad Clarke of the Arch, John Gilbert of the Chestnut, C. F. Adams of the National, and D. P. Bowers of the Walnut Street Theatres. After a few remarks from different persons the meeting adjourned, all seeming confident that success would eventually crown our efforts. Of one thing I am resolved—that if the profession neglect sending a stone to the Washington Monument, I’ll send one on my own hook. I wish I had learned the names of all those members present at this meeting—those that I knew were C. F. Adams, C. B. Clarke, A. Fenno, David Palmer, Ponisi, J. M. White, J. H. Robinson, L. P. Roys, Quayle, J. Byrne, Anderson (*Shuney*), Hemphill, and Lewis. The next meeting will show what interest is taken in this movement. I fear that the “old fogies” of the profession will not come forward, but have some confidence in “Young America.”

**Sun. Nov. 28th** Beautiful day. Reading AM. Called at the office of the *Sunday Delta*, in which paper my address was published. I was surprised to find that the article printed out so long, filling, as it did, a whole column of the paper. The proprietor told me that he had never sold so many copies of his paper before, and was extremely anxious that I should continue contributing—“He would be extremely glad to publish anything that I should write—no matter on what subject.” My address was very generally read by the profession, and

all spoke of it in the highest terms of praise, as being a composition of considerable merit. The encomiums bestowed were quite flattering, but if the measure advocated by the address is successful, I shall rejoice more at that than at all the eulogy that can be given to the address itself. Studying PM.

**Sat. Dec. 11th** Rainy. Packing up and walking AM. Tonight concludes my engagement and I shall then be again thrown out of employment. The fates appear to have conspired against me since my first arrival in Philada.—in the first place I was to have opened with Mrs. Mowatt, the engagement with her was broken off and I was obliged to appear in Farces which gave me no opportunity to show what I was capable of doing—the following when there was a fine chance to display what little talent I might possess I was afflicted with a heavy catarrh and the bronchitis which completely marred my efforts and so injured me with the audience who, of course, not knowing my condition set me down as an indifferent actor<sup>8</sup>—but the worst of all was the loss of my money that distressed me beyond measure as it reduced my otherwise shallow finances to an extremely unpleasant lowness.<sup>9</sup> My prospects seem duller now than they have appeared for many a long day—but “hope for the best—expect the worst.”

**Sun. Dec. 12th** Beautiful day. Reading & walking AM. 3PM, the time called for the meeting, things looked gloomy—at 3½PM we mustered 11 and with that number resolved to organise the “*Dram. Wash. Mon. Ass.*” which was accordingly done. The persons present were L. P. Roys, A. W. Fenno, C. F. Adams, D. S. Palmer, Conrad Clarke, H. A. Langdon, J. Byrne, J. O’Connor, N. Lewis, Zavestowsky, and myself—D. P. Bowers would have been but was prevented by a previous engagement. As before not an “old fogie” honored the meeting by his presence, no regrets were heard on account of their absence, neither did it dampen the ardor of the friends of the movement for we determined to organise the association and trust to the merits of the cause for its success. The meeting was held in the parlor of the house at which I boarded. A. W. Fenno was appointed President, L. P. Roys and H. A. Langdon, Vice-presidents, D. S. Palmer, Secretary, H. Watkins, Corresponding Secretary. Resolutions were

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8. His first appearance in Philadelphia was in November 1849, but Watkins does not record any proposed engagement with Mowatt in his diary—simply that he was engaged to play “*Juvenile Tragedy.*”

9. In his entry for December 8, 1852, Watkins records that thirty dollars was stolen from his pocketbook, which he had left in his dressing room.

passed and ordered to be printed, together with a circular—a copy of which to be sent to every Theatre in the Union, the person receiving a copy to act as an agent to collect subscriptions for the association. D. P. Bowers, Conrad Clarke, C. F. Adams, and myself were appointed as a Committee to transact all business of said Association until the next general meeting to be held on the 22d of February 1853. In order to meet the expense of printing, the subscription list was opened and signed by all the persons present. I had the pleasure of paying in the first dollar—being the amount to which all subscriptions are limited. Well, the ball is in motion and it will be soon known whether the Theatrical profession as a whole will send a stone to the Washington Monument, or whether it shall be left to the enterprise of a few individuals. Our meeting was a very pleasant one, indeed I never saw a more sociable party—the greatest unanimity prevailed and all present seemed determined to make themselves as agreeable as possible. We broke up at 6PM all expressing the hope that the good cause would succeed in spite of the “*old fogies*.”<sup>10</sup>

**Sat. Dec. 18th** Great change in the weather—Very cold today. Writing and packing up AM, turned over the accounts of the D.W.M.A. to L. P. Roys, 2PM started for New York by the Camden & Amboy line, 8PM once more at home—to bed early.

**Mon. Dec. 20th** Cloudy AM, pleasant PM, raining in the evening. Walking AM, found nothing stirring that would interest me. Received an offer from George to leave the stage. I can't make up my mind how to act in the premises—studying interest I should accept the offer, but my heart and soul is on the stage, where, I feel certain, I have talent to fill an enviable position had I the good fortune to reach that position. Humbug would accomplish it, but that is a weapon I cannot use. I was never so puzzled what to do, or how to act, as at present. What is for the best? Alas! I know not. I sometimes wish the grave would decide for me, but it seems too cowardly to die—it's like crying enough in a fight, though life is a very unequal battle—*there's too many*

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10. The Washington Monument features 193 commemorative stones donated by states, towns, organizations, foreign countries, and individuals. Watkins was successful in this endeavor, and the stone (from the “Dramatic Profession of America”) can be found at the 280-foot level with the inscription “All that Live Must Die / A tribute of respect / from the Ladies and Gentlemen of the / Dramatic Profession of America / 1853.” Judith M. Jacob, *The Washington Monument: A Technical History and Catalog of the Commemorative Stones* (National Park Service, 2005), 200.

*on one.* PM over to Newark. Did not return till late, so passed the night at a friend's house.

**Wed. Dec. 22nd** Quite cold, but pleasant. Reading, writing, & walking AM, writing PM. I suppose there is no alternative for me but to take George's offer and leave the stage. I should like [to] be able to look a little way into the future—two years would suffice. Walk after supper.

**Tues. Dec. 28th** Bad as yesterday. Finished the writing of my dyspeptic-comedy and handed it to Burton to read, offering, if he was satisfied with it, to play it at his house without any remuneration, contenting myself with the fame that its success will bring me—I shall be much disappointed if he consents to produce the piece. At Lodge 8PM.

**Wed. Dec. 29th** Partly pleasant. Reading and writing AM. Called on Burton to learn if he had yet read my piece. He told me that he had intended to merely glance over it to see if it was fit for representation, but that after finishing the first scene he became so interested that he carefully read the whole play through—setting up until 2AM to do so. He expressed himself in very flattering terms indeed with regard to the merits of the composition, and felt confident that its representation would be crowned with success—that if I would reduce it to one act (having written it in two) he should be happy to place it before the public. He said that he was perfectly well aware how painful it was to an author's feelings to be asked to cut his play—the author believing his judgment to be the better, and insisting that the erasure of such or such a scene would be the murder of the play. This is certainly the case, and I have always thought that the wisest course an author could pursue would be to place his play into the hands of some experienced actor with a *carte-blanche* to cut it as he pleased. I have known plays which their authors insisted upon having performed as they had written them almost *dam'd* by their tediousness, but which, after a skillful pruning, met with great success. As Burton seemed kindly disposed towards me I went home and, following his advice, my two acts were soon abridged to one—though the cutting was like cutting off my flesh, for I was obliged to take out many of the best scenes, but after putting the fragments together again I saw at a glance that the play was greatly improved. He promised to produce it on the tenth inst.

**Sat. Jan. 1st 1853** The “New Year” made a very bad beginning—I trust it may have a more favorable ending. Rained hard AM, held up PM. The clerk of the weather ought to pay some respect to the habits of the people—it was very unkind of him to throw a “wet blanket” on that excellent old knickerbocker custom of “New-year-day-calls”<sup>11</sup>—a custom only kept up in New York, therefore if “the Clerk” wanted to get rid of any superfluous water that he had on hand, his garden being a pretty large one, he might have sprinkled all the rest of creation and not have put such a damper as he did over the spirits of the hundreds of young ladies who had made great preparations to receive the visits of those young gents who select such occasions to form an acquaintance that *may lead to something*. Wrote all the AM. PM went over to Brooklyn, and, in company with Capt. Mott, made some few calls there, then, returning to *the city*, made several others. At one of the houses we visited there lived a young damsel whom the Captain had been talking to me about for the last two years—having “picked her out” for me. As there happened to be four young ladies present, and the Captain having given me no hint as to which was the right one, I did not learn until we left “which was which,” though it turned out that I had selected her from the group by a kind of instinct—as the one to whom I directed the principal part of my conversation was *the young lady herself*. Before leaving I received two very pressing invitations to “call again”—perhaps I shall. Home at 11PM, turned into bed—pretty tired.

**Sun. Jan. 9th** Fine day. Reading & walking AM, reading & writing PM. Thos. S. Hamblin died at 10½ o’clock last evening of brain fever, or rather delirium tremens. He had been manager of the Bowery Theatre for the greater part of the last 20 years. His [first] appearance in this country, I think, was in the year 1826—playing Hamlet. As a “Star” he was not very successful, having little to recommend him beyond his personal appearance, which was truly noble—indeed he was one of the finest-looking men that ever trod the stage. As a man he was haughty, dictatorial, and overbearing—one who thought his own opinions were infallible—they were truisms, and the individual who did not so regard them was “not the man for him.” He was a “Sir Oracle” whenever

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11. From the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth century, New York City gentlemen would call on female friends and relatives on New Year’s Day, while the women stayed home to receive the callers.



er he “opened his lips” and woe upon the poor dog who dared then to “bark.”<sup>12</sup> With regard to women, Hamblin was a perfect libertine, and became quite notorious for his intrigues. His wife sued for a divorce, which was granted *vinculo matrimonii*,<sup>13</sup> allowing her the privilege of marrying again but denying it to him. She did afterwards marry J. S. Charles. This divorcement of one party only is a disgrace to civilization, dooming, as it does, the transgressor to a life of *sin*, not *punishment*—that is reserved for the innocent issue who are thus compelled *by law* to bear the parent’s disgrace, as though the struggle, the privations, and the sufferings, which the child must pass through during its earthly pilgrimage, were not sufficient without having the sins of others, *by statute*, entailed upon them! Bastardy! Oh, God! what a legacy for a man to bequeath his offspring! and what an inheritance for a child! Some ten years since, Hamblin formed a liaison with Mrs. Shaw, with whom he lived until the time of his death. By her he has had several children, four of whom are still living. There are also living two children by his lawful wife. It is said that he leaves property to the amount of \$80,000, equally divided among all his issue, but should his wife’s children contest the will—which, rumor says, they intend to do—every cent left by Hamblin must fall into their hands. This is certainly a hard case for Mrs. Shaw’s children who have as much of the deceased’s blood in their veins as have those gotten in wedlock, but they must suffer because *the law does not recognise them*. Now, as the law cuts them off in this point—a most *material* one—it would be *consistent*, if not *merciful*, to cut them off in another point—“You do take my life when you do take the means whereby I live.”<sup>14</sup> Now, to live in this world the *most* necessary—if not the *only* necessary—*means* is money; which *means* did this father provide for these children as he was in duty bound to do. But now when death has deprived them of him who, alone, could have protected their rights, they are deprived of those means whereby they hope to live: not because it is *justice*, but because it is the *law*! Therefore, I think it would be but merciful in the law when it strips them of the “means to live,” also to take from them that which makes such means necessary! If the law has power to do the one thing it should also have power to do the other thing and never exercise either power singly. As regards Mrs. Shaw, there seems to be little sympathy for her, as she is a depraved and heartless woman and led Hamblin a dreadful life. He had

12. Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, act 1, scene 1.

13. *vinculo matrimonii* (Latin): absolute divorce (as distinct from limited), freeing both parties from all matrimonial obligations.

14. Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, act 4, scene 1.

little peace or happiness with her, and there is no doubt but that her conduct shortened his days. He died after a very short illness, being confined to his bed but six days. On the 2d inst. he was at Mr. Eddy's house; when about to leave he told Mrs. Eddy to get her mourning ready by the following Sunday, as he should be dead by that time. It appears that the death of Seguin,<sup>15</sup> with whom Hamblin was very intimate, affected him a great deal, for since that event his feelings have been in a very despondent state. The presentiment that he should shortly die no doubt caused him to indulge more freely in drinking than he otherwise would have done. Those who had access to his bed-chamber say that his ravings were dreadful, and to hold him several persons were required. Dr. Crane, the attending physician, was the only person who seemed to have any power over him; he could talk him into calmness. Mrs. Shaw had to be kept out of the room as much as possible as the patient could not bear the sight of her—it seemed to throw him almost into convulsions. If half the reports of Mrs. Shaw's conduct during the week that Hamblin was dying be true, she must be a fiend in human form. Amongst other things, it is stated that but half an hour before Hamblin died, she brought a minister into the house to marry them and, had not Hamblin's friends interfered, she would have had the ceremony performed although her wished-for bridegroom was, at the time, *insane!*

**Mon. Jan. 10th** Spring weather. Walking & rehearsing AM, walking about all the PM searching for a peculiar hat to wear this evening, but couldn't find what I wanted. At Burton's Theatre 7PM—played Whimsical Eaton in my dyspeptic farce, which was now produced for the first time, and under the title of *Laugh and Grow Fat*. I wrote it in two acts but Burton convinced me that it would play much better as a one-act piece, and no doubt his judgment was correct. It was as successful as I could have expected. There were two or three little drawbacks—T. Johnston, who was cast for Dumps—the principal part in the piece after my own—caused me considerable annoyance by his being imperfect in the text and so requiring me to prompt him all through the scenes we had together. Whether he acted thus intentionally, or not, I don't know; but it seemed strange—considering that he was very perfect in his part at rehearsal—that he should be so much out at night. The house was crowded in every portion.

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15. Opera singer Arthur Edward Shelden Seguin (1809–1852) died December 13, 1852, and was a close friend of Hamblin's.

**Fri. Jan. 14th** Today concludes the twenty-eighth year of my life, which year did not treat me very well—quite the contrary. But I shall not complain—perhaps it laid the foundation of many happy years to come, at least the future looks pleasantly as I view it from my present good position. Reading & walking AM, reading PM, at Theatre 7PM. Every night this week the audience have called for me to come before the curtain but I never went—having always made it a rule not to do so unless told by the manager. Hitherto he paid no attention to the calls and, I not appearing, the audience quieted down; but on this occasion they seemed determined to have their wishes complied with, and so increased their clamors that the “individual in authority” was obliged to send his “call-boy” to “inform Mr. Watkins that the audience were calling for him.”

**Sat. Jan. 22nd** Gloomy. Reading & walking—thus runs my time away. I hope never to pass another year as idly and unprofitably as I have the last twelve months. If nothing turns up by Monday I shall take a trip to Albany—something I think may be done there.

**Tues. Jan. 25th** Growing colder. 6AM started for Albany—reached there at 10AM. Went to the “Green Street Theatre”—this house has been fitted up in fine style since I was last here and is now doing an excellent business under the management of Madame Julie de Marguerites. Called also at the Museum, which place has been going downhill very fast since the opening of the Theatre, though the declension is not so much the consequence of competition as the unpopular and bad management of the proprietor Mr. H. Meech. He retires from it this week and the house passes into the hands of F. Kent, who, although quite popular as an actor, I do not think will be able to retrieve the Museum’s fallen fortunes, from the fact of his lacking every essential requisite of a manager—industry, energy, and stability. Without these necessary qualifications a man cannot expect to succeed in anything, especially in the position that Kent is now placed in. Visited the capitol—the legislature being at the time in session. Heard a noble senator expatiating on the benefits of railroads, which reminded me that if I desired to reach home again this night, there was no time to be lost in making tracks for the railroad track, which I reached just in time. Kent expressed a wish that I would play with him on the 7th of February—promising, on his part, to get up my pieces in a satisfactory manner. To do that he will be obliged to reorganise his company for as it stands it is a most wretched one. Reached home at 10AM. To travel three

hundred miles from sun to sun, as I have done today, seems something of a feat, but I've no doubt that the time will come when 300 miles in the above space will be considered *a slow movement*. Went to bed considerably tired-out.

**Mon. Jan. 31st** Beautiful day. Full of business AM, PM over to Newark. Seeing them busy putting up scenery reminded me of my southern tour. There was a fair audience in the evening. The play, *Maniac Lover*, went off excellently well. Wyatt is the best travelling manager in the country. His company consists of but eight persons and there is not one really good actor nor actress among them; yet they are all respectable people—dress well, are perfect in their parts, and what they have to do, if not artistically done, is well done. Wyatt is very popular in the small towns of the eastern states, and he has realized considerable money by his management, at least I hope he has, for he is a good man and an honorable one. Returned home after the performance.

**Wed. Feb. 2nd** Rainy. Felt quite unwell this morning, whether it arose from my sleeping in Jersey or from the hearty supper I partook just prior to retiring to bed last night, I am unable to say, but am rather inclined to think it was from the latter cause. Rehearsed AM, did nothing particular in the PM, at night played “Robert Shelley” in the *Momentous Question*—piece well received—house not very good. Got through just in time for the last train of cars—home at 10PM, went to bed tired out.

**Sat. Feb. 5th** Raining. Reading, writing, & walking AM. Letter from Albany promising me an opening in the course of two or three weeks. I rather think that I shall get the opening, though I've little faith in promises—they're too easily broken. Reading PM, at Burton's 7PM. Surprised to see a poor house—perhaps accounted for by Burton's being unable to play.

**Mon. Feb. 21st** Pleasant & moderating. Reading & walking AM, reading PM, evening went to Williamsburg—which place I had not visited for years before. In a very short time Williamsburg has, from the overflowing of New York, become quite a city. The first theatrical performance in this place was given on last Tuesday evening, the 15th of Feb., by a company of actors from New York playing together as a commonwealth,<sup>16</sup> the company having been

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16. commonwealth: an organizational structure in which all members of the company share the profits (and losses) equally.

thrown out of employment by the closing of White's Varieties. A. H. Davenport and J. Pilgrim acted as managers. The place of performance was in the Odeon, a fine hall fitted up with a stage for the purpose.

**Thurs. Feb. 24th** Rather windy to be pleasant. Over to Williamsburg PM. If I can get the management of this place I shall certainly do so, for judging by the success of last week, there is a sufficient number of theatre-going people here to make a Theatre profitable. Pilgrim is at present negotiating with the proprietor and if the negotiation is broken off I stand a good chance.

**Fri. Feb. 25th** Unsettled. Walking around town AM gathering the news, PM at Williamsburg again—entered into an arrangement with the owner of the Odeon to become partner with him in the management of the Theatre—he to bear all the losses, if any, I to share the profits with the same *proviso*. I promised to open the place on the ensuing Monday. At 8PM started back to New York, where, to my consternation, I learned that “White's Varieties” was to reopen and that all the persons whom I depended upon to form a company with were engaged. Things looked badly, but there was no time to give way to despair. I had promised to open on Monday and on Monday I was *determined* to open. Hunting about, by twelve o'clock (midnight) I found a man and his wife worth having—engaged them—started off to the *Herald* office, got there just in time to insert an advertisement for “Ladies & gentlemen of acknowledged talent”—back to one of the places where Actors most did congregate—secured one more individual—kept moving until everybody had gone to bed, then concluded to take a little horizontal refreshment myself.

**Sat. Feb. 26th** Pleasant. In bed at 2AM, up again at 6AM—breakfasted—started off to finish what I *began* last night—making up a Company—Good luck followed my footsteps. If any of my friends knowing my dyspeptical propensity saw me, they must have thought I had a violent attack of indigestion and was making a desperate effort to walk it off. Met several acquaintances who seemed disposed to talk but I could only spare them a shake of the head—heard my name called several times but never paused to see the caller. If I spoke to any person it was only to ask “who's out of an engagement?” By 5PM I was astonished to find I had engaged twelve persons who formed a far superior Company to that engaged at “White's Varieties”—a great proof of what dogged perseverance will accomplish, as this morning the making up of anything like the ghost of a respectable Company seemed a hopeless task.

Made out the copy of a poster and sent it over to Kemp, my associate manager, or rather the individual who “takes the responsibility” pecuniarily. At 10PM went to bed bodily tired, mentally satisfied.

**Sun. Feb. 27th** Beautiful day. Writing & reading AM, over to Williamsburg PM, made out a bill for Monday night, back to New York PM. Got on the wrong ferry boat, which mistake gave me an extra mile to walk—pleasant that to an individual in a hurry—had it not been Sunday I should have said d—nation. Evening went around among the members of [the] company to find if they were still true to their allegiance—all right—to bed early.

**Mon. Feb. 28th** Raining—of course, it could not well be otherwise on our opening night. Called rehearsal at 10AM but did not commence until 12M. Two men on whom I depended disappointed me—one of the parties really begged me to give him an engagement, and was recommended as a good and reliable person, therefore his conduct was surprising. I managed to change the cast of the plays so as to get along for this evening, and then went back to York and hunted up Mr. Warwick—a person I was as sure of as it is possible to feel of any man. The expenses are rather higher than politic for my purse, but if I can only make the place successful and at the same time realize a half respectable salary, I shall be satisfied. At 8PM we hoisted the curtain on the *Idiot Witness* to an audience fully twice as large as could reasonably be expected on such a night as this. The performance concluded with the *Rough Diamond* and all passed off to the apparent satisfaction of the spectators.

**Sun. Mar. 6th** Beautiful day. I wonder if there will be any more like it. The first week of my management is past, much to my relief, for—from having to deal with some dishonorable men, and one of the principal members of my Company a drunkard<sup>17</sup>—it was a week of great trouble and anxiety to me without even the solace of remuneration—the receipts barely covering the expenditures. This is attributable to two causes—bad weather and want of attraction. It was so extremely difficult to organise a suitable company that I found it impossible to play anything but Farces without exposing my weakness, and I deemed it the better policy to get along the first week creditably than profitably, as creditably now will be profitable hereafter, providing, of

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17. In earlier entries we have omitted, Watkins claims company member Jerry Merrifield is a “drunkard.”

course, that the town will support a Theatre—and I think it will. Reading, writing all day.

**Mon. Mar. 7th** Astonishing as it may appear, it was a pleasant day. Rehearsing AM, at Theatre 7PM, brought out the *Drunkard*. Having made considerable parade about it on the bills and the papers having puffed it during all of last week, I anticipated a fair house but was not prepared to see a *full* one. Much to my surprise the hall was well filled in every part, and the play went off admirably. Indeed I can't remember its ever being received better—the audience were worked up to enthusiasm and when I was first discovered after the reformation they hailed me with three most hearty cheers, and when the play was over called me before the curtain where I made quite a lengthy speech which was well received. Should the weather continue fair I shall this week make what, at present, I most need—money.

**Fri. Mar. 11th** Rained very hard all the day and evening. Rehearsing AM. At 5PM Mrs. Merrifield, who was to play the part of Pauline in the *Lady of Lyons*, sent word that she was too sick to appear. This, I have every reason to believe, was a falsehood—her health was better than mine. It was Pauline that hurt her, for though she was very anxious to play the part, she knew little of the text—rehearsing from the book. This conduct caused me a great deal of trouble, as I had nothing to substitute, she being cast in the principal part of every piece that we had played—saving only one poor Farce. Kemp, my partner, at 6PM started for New York to hunt up Mrs. Warwick—the only lady we could think of who had before played Pauline, and the only person whom there was the slightest chance of procuring. She was under engagement at the Broadway, but happened to be out of the bill for that evening. After waiting some time beyond the hour appointed for raising the curtain, I ordered the Farce to be played first—that over, two or three songs were introduced, but there was no sign of Kemp. There was a Miss Louise Moreton in my company, who, fancying that she was overflowing with dramatic talent, had understudied many of the leading parts, and among them Pauline. I had engaged her on a risk, but like risks in a lottery scheme, it turned out a blank. Her talent, if she possessed such a rarity, must have been hid under something larger and more impenetrable than a bushel, as there was not the slightest glimmering of it perceptible. *Thinking* she might *get through* [a] performance, and determined if possible not to alter the bill, I told the lady to prepare for the part, which she did with the greatest alacrity. An apology was made, and the play commenced, but before the first act was finished Kemp arrived with Mrs.

Warwick. Here was a position to be placed in—Kemp had gone to an expense of ten dollars to get her, and she would be more acceptable to the audience. Being fond of novelty, I concluded to let Mrs. Warwick finish the piece. The audience must have considered Pauline a very difficult part when it required two to play it. Two Paulines in one night! Very few Theatres, I take it, could afford such attraction—and all for twenty-five cents.

**Sat. Mar. 12th** Unpleasant—some rain. Rehearsing AM. Mrs. Merrifield was not at rehearsal but her husband said she would be able to play at night—of course she would. During my managerial career the *Lady of Lyons* has had a most singular effect upon the two leading actresses of my companies—last winter, in the south, it cured a lady who was thought to be very sick, now it sickened a lady who was thought to be very well.<sup>18</sup> At Theatre 7PM, had an excellent house.

**Tues. Mar. 22nd** Fine day. Rehearsing AM, at New York PM. The Merrifields leave me after this week. I shall find it difficult to supply her place, but shall not miss him, indeed I am not sorry to part with either as they have occasioned a great deal of trouble. House not very good—about expenses.

**Mon. Mar. 28th** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM, writing and over to York PM, at Theatre 7PM. Brought out my play *The Ship Carpenter*, under a new title, that of *Our Country's Sinews*. It was never played so badly nor so well gotten up. I introduced a marine view with several well-known vessels sailing across the stage—among which was the Ericsson Caloric Ship, so that I may safely claim the honor of having been the first to put that species of craft on the stage. There was a much better house than anticipated from the counter attraction of a concert given in the upper room of the building by six hundred children.

**Fri. Apr. 1st** Pleasant and so it should always be on the first of April as it is my Mother's birthday. Rehearsing AM, at York PM. Engaged a Miss Henri, said to be a fine dancer. She will fill up the void between the pieces and supply the loss of Merrifield's singing. Her parents knew we could get no other Danseuse, at least at present, and so compelled us to accede to his terms yet I think we shall not be the losers by it. At Theatre 7PM. Fair house.

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18. The previous incident with *Lady of Lyons* occurred on November 18, 1851 (omitted from this edition).



**Mon. Apr. 4th** Rainy. Rehearsing AM, at York and writing PM, at Theatre 7PM. I begin to fear for Theatricals in Williamsburg. I had up a pretty strong bill for this evening and yet there was but twenty-four dollars in the house. A large house was not anticipated on account of the weather, but we felt assured that there would have been a respectable attendance at least. The Messrs Kemp have lost money by the speculation, which I do most sincerely regret, as it has never been my lot to deal with more honest and worthy men. I regret exceedingly ever having had anything to do with the affair. Management is not the thing for me, at least not management in a country town.

**Sat. Apr. 9th** *Fair weather.* Rehearsing AM, at York PM, at Theatre PM. “Grand Complimentary Benefit to Harry Watkins,” on which occasion I take pleasure in recording that there was a very fine house, and a fashionable one—the audience being composed, in the main, of the most respectable citizens of Williamsburg. Since the house was opened for Theatrical purposes there has not been so many ladies present as there were this evening. The bill was quite a strong one—the *Lottery Ticket* with J. B. Johnstone as Wormwood, *Maid of Croissy*—C. F. Adams, who volunteered for the occasion, as Austerlitz, Miss Henri in a dance, *Laugh and Grow Fat* for the first time here, and all winding up with a Panorama. Now that my benefit is over I shall *turn over* a new leaf with some of the members of the company who have been imposing upon me pretty considerably—I’ll make them toe the mark or *heel* it.

**Mon. Apr. 11th** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM, at York PM, at Theatre 7PM. For the first time in my professional career I had a row this evening with an actor that ended in blows—a member of my company, Mr. C. Warwick, who, ever since our opening, has treated me in a manner which, to say the least, was extremely annoying. Knowing that I could not supply his place very easily, he has acted pretty much as it pleased his highness. I have asked him as a personal favor to attend some particular rehearsal, yet my requests were seldom complied with. At the performance of *Laugh and Grow Fat* on Saturday evening, nearly every actor concerned in the piece was imperfect, and, as a natural consequence gagging was the order of the evening, which gagging came very nearly killing my play. As it was to be repeated this evening, I called a rehearsal and explained what I wished done. Warwick, I should judge, was not pleased with the part assigned him—one of the patients—and so determined to burlesque it. During the last scene his interpolations so annoyed me that I

was compelled to speak to him loud enough for the audience to hear me. This raised his mad and when the curtain descended he insulted me in the grossest manner—I retorted—he squared himself for a fight—the invitation was accepted and—down went Mr. Warwick. As he seemed to think he was making matters worse for himself, he kept quiet and I let him alone. I regretted that so disgraceful a thing should occur inside of the Theatre which I was managing, but there was no help for it. To have suffered such an insult to pass with impunity would have opened the door to others—but now if any of the rest of the company feel disposed to follow Mr. Warwick’s conduct they will be most apt to think twice. I have no desire to gain notoriety as a fighting man, but for the future, I intend to take less from my enemies than I have hitherto done. When sure I’m right I’ll go ahead.

**Wed. Apr. 13th** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM. Concluded to close the Theatre after the coming week—I’m tired of working without remuneration, as I have been doing since opening this place. If our audiences could be increased in number one-fourth, the house would prove profitable. After the first of May there will be at least five thousand more residents in the city than there are at present. I shall then give the Theatre another trial for a month and if at the end of that time I find myself no better off than when commencing, I shall drop Williamsburg as a bad speculation.

**Wed. Apr. 20th** Rainy. Rehearsing AM, at York PM. Telegraph from Conner, Manager of the Green Street Theatre, Albany, offering me terms for six nights—answered him that I would come if he would make the sixth night a half benefit. At Theatre 7PM. Benefit of Miss Henri, a young danseuse, and a very promising one—I was sorry to see so poor a house.

**Thurs. Apr. 21st** Fine day. At York AM, letter from Conner accepting my terms, writing PM, at Theatre 7PM. Benefit of J. Brookes (McSorley his right name)—he is a young man and but a short time in the profession—his personation of Irishmen is very good and he has sufficient *brass* to push himself ahead in the world. Good house.

**Sun. Apr. 24th** Rainy. At York AM. Helped Mother pack up preparatory to moving to our new quarters during the coming week. 5PM started by steamer for Albany.

**Mon. Apr. 25th** Pleasant. Reached Albany 4AM, put up at Stanwix Hall, 10AM went to rehearsal. At Theatre all the PM, arranging the Scenery for my piece. Made my first appearance in Albany as Herman Grey, in *Our Country's Sinews*. The house was slim though much better than the general run of houses that the Company had been playing to. I evidently made a very good impression but my poor play was most wretchedly performed by a most wretched Company which was made up principally of boys, novices, and drunkards. It is evident that I have got myself into a very bad snap—Money I can hardly expect to realize, and it will be hard to acquire fame with the miserable support of Conner's stock company.

**Tues. Apr. 26th** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM. This place keeps me almost as busy as when I was managing the Odeon. I am obliged to look after the properties or, when the time comes for them to be wanted, they're not there. *Our Country's Sinews* went off as *well* as last night.

**Thurs. Apr. 28th** Warm. Rehearsing AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Produced the *Heart of the World*—it was played as badly as the rest of my pieces have been. I shall be glad when the bills announce the last night of my engagement.

**Sun. May 1st** Pleasant. Packed up AM. Reading & writing PM. 7PM took the steamer *Manhattan* for New York. All the Actors in town came down to see me off. Turned in at 9PM.

**Mon. May 2nd** Pleasant. Reached New York at 5AM. Drove up to my new quarters, No. 9 Forsythe Street, found Mother hard at work cleaning house—off coat and lent a hand. At Williamsburg PM. Several persons had been to Kemp expressing a desire to step into my shoes, but he informed them that I had not yet vacated.

**Wed. May 4th** Pleasant. Reading & walking AM. At Williamsburg PM. Called on Miss Weston—should like to engage her for my leading woman—no doubt she would prove “a card,” being handsome and possessing considerable talent. At Bowery Theatre 7PM.

**Sat. May 7th** Fine day. Reading & walking AM, attended a canvass private meeting of actors to decide upon what ticket to support at the next annu-

al meeting of the Dramatic Fund.<sup>19</sup> The meeting was called to advance the interest of Mr. Burton, but in this it signally failed. Before I arrived in town Mr. John Gilbert was the most prominent candidate for Trustee, but I think I shall have the pleasure of being the cause of his defeat. This will repay him for his treatment of those who started the Dramatic Washington Monument Association.

**Mon. May 9th** Beautiful day. Walking AM, over to Williamsburg. Heard something that leads me to think that Miss Weston either wishes to break the engagement made between us or to force me into giving her more salary—if this is so it will be a contemptible act on her part: but I can believe anything of women—be it for the best or for the worst. In their actions they seldom pursue a middle course—generally the extreme. 2PM attended the annual meeting of the “Dramatic fund”—had the pleasure of seeing Mr. J. Gilbert defeated for the Trusteeship. I was elected one of the Directors. Evening, attended a special meeting of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons. A committee was appointed to draft resolutions expressive of sympathy and bidding a “Godspeed” to Dr. Kane and associates who are about starting on an expedition in Search of Sir John Franklin who was lost some years since in attempting to discover a northwest passage.<sup>20</sup> Some traces of him have been found on the ice which gave rise to the hope that he and his companions are yet living. Sir John was a Mason.

**Tues. May 10th** Pleasant AM, rain PM. Met the brother of Miss Weston who, it appears, was the cause of her refusing to keep her engagement, persuading her that it would injure her reputation. He denied having said it, and consented to go with me to his sister who then repeated his words and obliged him to own up. I convinced her of the folly of such belief and, after spending *a whole day* at the house, got her to consent to the agreement made between myself and her husband. It always excites my risibles to hear an actor or actress talk of injuring their reputation by playing at such a Theatre or in such a town,

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19. American Dramatic Fund Association. See chapter 7, note 20.

20. In 1845, Captain Sir John Franklin (1786–1847) led an expedition to traverse the final section of the Northwest Passage (connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans through the Arctic Ocean). In 1847, concerns were expressed regarding the expedition, and almost forty search parties were sent out over the course of the ensuing ten years to determine what had happened. The expedition headed by Elisha Kane (1820–1857), from 1853 to 1855, was one of four US-led expeditions. John Rae (1813–1893), during his 1853–54 expedition, determined that Franklin’s entire crew had indeed perished.

for what do the public care about where they have played. The people go to a Theatre to be amused and are totally indifferent as to who the individuals are that amuse them. Let the actor become ever so great a favorite, and be possessed of more talent than was ever yet given to man—should he but lose his voice or any of those powers which give effect to his representations, and those very persons who once applauded him to the “echo that did applaud again”<sup>21</sup> would turn their backs upon their “favorite” and with a “pshaw!” exclaim, “so-and-so ought to quit the stage—he can’t act any more”—“if the manager can’t get any better actor than so-and-so is, he had better close the Theatre”—and thus this individual, who was once so tenacious of his *reputation*, finds the “dear public” turning him out to die, like an old horse that can no longer do its master’s work. Therefore, Mr. Professional, make hay (that is money) while *your star* shines and then retire quietly into your own stable and die as comfortably as you can; don’t wait to be kicked in poverty out of the public crib. Home early, to bed ditto.

**Mon. May 16th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, at York PM, opened the Theatre under the title of the “Odeon Garden.” The stage had been enlarged during the recess—new scenery painted etc. so that we were enabled to make quite a respectable show on our opening night, besides having one of the best companies in the US composed of the following ladies and gentlemen: Miss Lizzie Weston, Mrs. R. Merrifield, Mrs. W. Henderson, France, & Barnett, Mr. W. Henderson, L. J. Bernard, France, J. Byrne, Walton, Merrifield, Barnett, J. W. Clifford, and myself. The opening pieces were the *Lady of Lyons* & *The Secret*, the house was good.

**Wed. May 18th** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM. At York and studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. *The Honey-Moon* has seldom been played better than it was by our company this evening, yet the house was quite poor. This was surprising as the piece is a very popular one and had been played in this town but once before. The attendance thus far has been far from encouraging. I fear the result.

**Thurs. May 19th** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM, studying PM. The Kemps are beginning to get scared and are anxious that I should reduce the company—I told them that they could do as they pleased—I would have no hand in dis-

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21. “echo that did applaud again”: to applaud enthusiastically; a reference to Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, act 5, scene 3.

charging persons who, when engaged, expected to be retained the whole season. They were not pleased with my remarks and I was sorry to be compelled to make them, as I respected the Kemps very highly; but I am determined never to commit an act that will make my heart blush for my head—honor and integrity should never be sacrificed to pecuniary self-interest and with me they never shall. The gold that I earn shall never be blackened by the means that gained it. The weather has been very warm for the last two or three days and as the heat came on so suddenly it may, in a measure, account for the paucity of our audiences.

**Fri. May 20th** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM, at York PM, at Theatre 7PM. Bernard came to me after the performance and said he should leave after this week—he having made an engagement to go West. Every man has a right, and should use it, of bettering himself, but he should not do so to the injury of others. Bernard knew a week before that he was going away but made no mention of it until the last moment, when he knew it would be difficult to supply his place, therefore his only object was to annoy. As regards the Kemps I am glad that Bernard acted as he did, for they engaged him in opposition to my will—engaged him, they said, because he was a *first-rate fellow*! When will people learn that it requires something besides a smooth tongue and a smiling face to make a “*first-rate fellow*”—Goodness is in the heart not the face. At Theatre 7PM. Fair house.

**Sat. May 28th** Fine day. Rehearsing AM. I find it very difficult to cast pieces from the want of a Low Comedian. At Theatre 7PM. Played Robert Macaire for the first time and got through with it to the satisfaction of the audience, although I had but two hours to study the part. Very few persons would dare to attempt Robert Macaire with so little preparation.<sup>22</sup>

**Sat. June 4th** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM, studying PM, took my first swim this season, at Theatre 7PM. Played Philip in *Luke the Laborer*—this was the first piece I ever appeared in, playing Clara. This was at Fort Snelling—at the junction of the St. Peters and Mississippi Rivers.<sup>23</sup>

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22. The principal character, Robert Macaire (in disguise as the wealthy Redmond for much of the play), is a role requiring various sleight-of-hand tricks to advance the plot, including stealing keys, switching bottles, and pickpocketing. He also sings, dances, plays the violin, and is on stage for much of the play.

23. Watkins was stationed at Fort Snelling from 1838 to 1841. He wrote a short summary of

**Tues. June 7th** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM. Wrote a long article in defense of the stage and had it published in the *Williamsburg Times*.<sup>24</sup> It was written in opposition to several articles that had appeared in the same paper, from the pen of a Methodist clergyman. The minister's writings were made up of vituperation and slander, there was no argument in them—nothing but assertions.

**Sat. June 11th** Fine day. Rehearsing AM, fixing up scenery and studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. My benefit—best house of the week and a poor one at that. I am getting rather tired of this profession and should not be surprised if this season divorced me from the stage—I wish to enter a political life.

**Sat. July 2nd** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Last night of the season—A complimentary benefit to myself. The Plays were *Evadne* and *Dumb Girl Of Genoa*, the last piece being substituted for *Your Life's In Danger*, in consequence of the illness of Mrs. Henderson. Miss C. Wyette volunteered and played *Evadne*, Miss C. De Forrest (Mrs. Whytal) also volunteered but disappointed. During the evening a most beautiful sword was presented to me on the stage. It was bought by subscriptions given by many personal and dramatic friends, and bore the inscription: "Presented by his many dramatic admirers to Mr. H. Watkins, as a tribute of respect to his character as a man, his talent as an actor, and, as the First Theatrical Manager in our city. Williamsburg, L.I." The sword was delivered by Mr. Sparks, Sheriff of the county, and one of the editors of the *Williamsburg Times*. He made a very neat and appropriate speech to which I responded in<sup>25</sup> effective, if not eloquent, terms. This sword was a facsi[mile] presented by the State of New York to General Worth, for his services during the Mexican War.<sup>26</sup> After the presentation a bouquet was thrown to me with a very handsome gold watch-seal attached to

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the experience (especially his theatrical performances) on a loose sheet of paper that is included with his diary at the Harvard Theatre Collection.

24. H. Watkins, "A Few Dramatic Remarks," *Williamsburgh Daily Times*, June 8, 1853, 1.

25. The page that begins here was added by Watkins to the end of volume at a later date. From this point through July 7, the text has been rewritten.

26. Watkins is likely referring to a sword of honor (or "presentation sword") given to General William J. Worth (1794–1849) in 1848 by the citizens of Columbia County, NY, in recognition of his outstanding leadership during the US-Mexican War. What became of the sword presented to Watkins in Williamsburg is unknown; apparently, Watkins kept and cherished it, because it was in the possession of his daughter as late as April 1925, eight months before she died. See Amy Lee to Maud Skinner, April 22, 1925, *SFP*, Box 25.

it. The proceedings of this evening were certainly quite flattering, as the idea of a presentation was only mooted about forty-eight hours previous to the night of the Benefit. I have made many friends during this season—friends of some who were not favorably disposed towards me when here before, because they were not, personally, acquainted with me. Performance passed off finely.

**Mon. July 18th** Fine day. Walking AM. Plenty of managers in town but there is a great scarcity of good actors, in consequence of which very fair salaries are offered. I do not wish to make any engagement until after a conversation with George; if he deems it advisable for me to leave the stage I shall take a respectful farewell of it as I am tired of shifting about from place to place—I want a home.

**Sun. July 24th** Warm. Reading & Walking AM, at Williamsburg all the PM and until 11 at night. Got in company with Mrs. Forbes who was an excellent talker, though not a learned one. She was first-rate company to while away tedious time with. Her husband, the manager of the Providence museum, R.I., was very anxious to have me engage with him for the next season and I should have done so could we have agreed about the salary, but the highest figure on his salary list was fifteen dollars—a sum lower than I expect to play for this many a year to come.

**Mon. Aug. 8th** Warm. Downtown with George AM. At meeting of the Directors PM.<sup>27</sup> John Sefton proposed that the entire management of affairs on the day and night of the benefit be entrusted to me, with power to employ such persons and incur what expense I deemed necessary: the motion was carried, but when the bill was being made out and N. B. Clarke said that my name ought to be placed on it as manager, Sefton dissented, but the other directors said “yes,” and the thing was done. I presume Sefton would have been willing that I should have had my labor for my pains, but did not intend that I should gain any credit by whatever I might do, that was more than he bargained for when he made his motion. Thank you, John, for the motion, but when you wish to confer an honor let it be a *full* one.

**Thurs. Aug. 11th** Rather warm for comfort. At Castle Garden all day preparing for the dramatic fund benefit—attended to the rehearsal AM, PM ar-

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27. Directors of the American Dramatic Fund Association.



ranged the dressing rooms and got everything in readiness for the evening, at ½ past six the doors were opened and people began to come in quite freely. We had a fine bill. The entertainments commenced with an overture from *William Tell* by the Italian orchestra under the direction of Max Maretzek, after which the *Young Widow*. . . . This should have been followed by the Tent Scene from *Julius Caesar* but Mr. E. Eddy, who was in for the part of Cassius, not making his appearance, it had to be cut out. Eddy sent me a note in the morning stating that he was called suddenly out of town but, if no accident prevented, he should return in time to play. I have good cause for believing that Mr. Eddy had made up his mind not to come near the place at all. I apologised to the audience for the omission and went on with the performance: the *Irish Lion*, . . . Shelton's Brass Band in a variety of airs, scene from *In and Out of Place*, John Winans was advertised for a song and Miss Turnbull for a dance but they having to play at other Theatres could not arrive in time, Miss C. Hiffert was up for a song and came all dressed to sing it but the band having left the orchestra and it being too late to hunt them up we went ahead with *London Assurance*. . . . The whole wound up with a grand display of fireworks prepared for the occasion by Joseph G. & Isaac Edge—the fireworks were in commemoration of the event of the A.D.F.A. having attained the object of its institution—with the exception of the above drawbacks the evening's entertainments passed off very pleasantly. There were about twenty-two hundred persons present which was quite a respectable attendance considering the extreme hot weather. The performance was concluded by ½ past 12—much earlier than was anticipated from the length of the bill. I was glad to get to bed, being about as tired as a fellow ought to be to enjoy a night's rest—though there is not much pleasure in sleeping [in] this hot weather.

**Fri. Aug. 12th** Still warm. At Castle Garden AM, settled up the business confided to my charge, PM took dinner at Rabineau's saloon, where I was introduced to Recorder J. F. Talmadge<sup>28</sup> who, during the year 1844, discharged me from my enlistment in Uncle Sam's Army.<sup>29</sup> A lawyer named Bishop spoke of going to England in the course of a few weeks, and said, if I would accom-

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28. Watkins is likely referring to F. A. Tallmadge, who was recorder in New York City from 1841–46 and 1849–51.

29. Watkins's enlistment record indicates that he was officially discharged in 1845. *Register of Enlistments in the US Army, 1798–1914*, 262, Microfilm Publication M233, National Archives, Washington, DC, *Ancestry.com*, accessed October 9, 2015, [http://interactive.ancestry.com/1198/MIUSA1798\\_102880-00524](http://interactive.ancestry.com/1198/MIUSA1798_102880-00524)

pany him, he would take me along. I accepted the offer without a moment's hesitation but felt certain that it would not come to pass—not believing that there is any such good luck in store for me. I have long had a desire to try my fortune in England—thinking that I should do well there.

**Fri. Aug. 19th** Beautiful day—the weather having cooled off considerably. Downtown AM. PM went with Mother & George over to Williamsburg on a visit to the Kemps—passed a few hours very pleasantly and returned home at 10. Then to bed. I shall begin to think that I am too particular in the choice of a wife ever to get one, for here are two girls either of whom would make an excellent wife, yet I cannot fancy them although they are both very fond of me. But then I wish to marry in my profession.

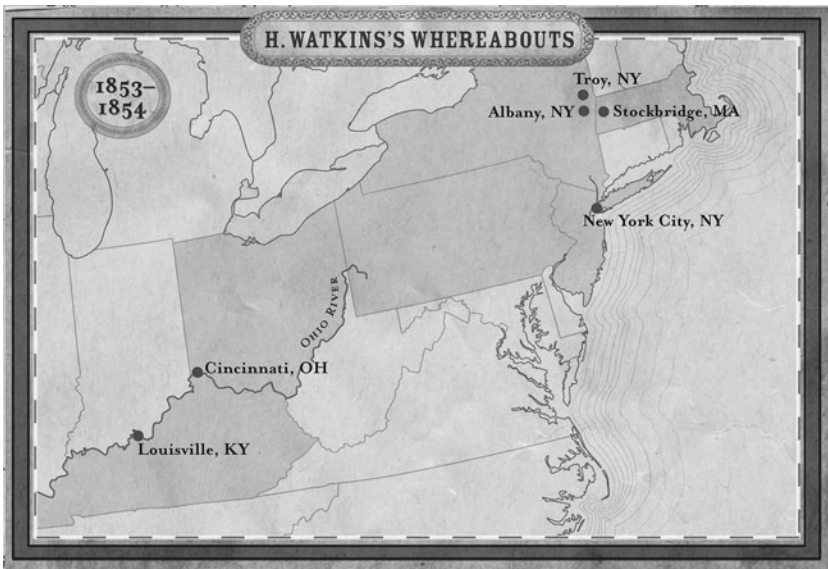
**Sat. Aug. 20th** Lovely day. Downtown AM. 'Tis almost time that I had an engagement made for the coming season, and it is also very certain that I shall not be able to make one in New York—something must be decided on, and that shortly, too, or rent-day will come around and find me unprepared to meet it in an agreeable manner. I shall try to make an engagement at Washington.

**Thurs. Aug. 25th** Unsettled. Rehearsed AM, downtown PM, came home early and took a nap. At Bowery Theatre 7PM, played Whimsical Eaton. The piece went off finely but I was surprised at not being called out, indeed every person in the company wondered at it for the play had certainly made a hit. But it was one of those things that cannot be accounted for. I have observed it in other cases though I never before experienced it myself. Some of the finest pieces of acting are often witnessed by an audience without the slightest manifestation of applause though, at the same time, they may be extremely well pleased, on other occasions the most mediocre representation will be hailed with enthusiasm. Burke advised me, in a conversation that we had in his dressing room after the performance, to continue to star it and he felt confident that I would ultimately succeed. Believing this advice to be given in good faith I shall act upon it, provided I can get a start—which is the most difficult part of the business.

## NINE

1853–54

*Watkins manages a theater company in Louisville and Cincinnati for producer John Bates, with mixed success. He reacts to a lecture given by women's rights activist Lucy Stone. He also meets, and is enraptured by, actress Harriet Melissa Secor, whom he marries.*



**Thurs. Sept. 1st** Unsettled weather. Downtown AM, met H. Eytinge who had been engaged to go to St. Louis & Louisville as Stage Manager for John Bates, but afterwards, receiving a better offer to travel as agent for the Ravels, he threw up the former engagement. By his advice I wrote to Bates that I was prepared to fill Eytinge's situation. Writing the letter seemed to me a waste of time for it is very doubtful of my getting the engagement. Bates not being much acquainted with me, all depends on whose advice he asks—whether it be a friend or a professional enemy.

**Tues. Sept. 6th** Sweltering weather. Reading, writing, & walking AM, PM at meeting of the A.D.F.A.,<sup>1</sup> Andrew Jackson Allen presented his claim for annuity on the ground of incapacity from age—the claim was allowed, and thus the first person to receive benefit or assistance from the association was an American. According to the rules and regulations of the Association, Allen could have drawn the first quarterly payment of his annuity in advance had he expressed a desire to do so, but not having made the request simultaneously with the presentation of his claim, it gave rise to considerable angry discussion as to whether Allen was, or was not, entitled to the money until the end of the quarter. I contended that he was not, but it being the first case of the kind, thought that some allowance should be made, and, therefore, moved that the Secretary be empowered to pay the money when called upon; this was opposed by C. W. Clarke, N. B. Clarke, & T. Hadaway, who deemed it time enough to give the order when the advance was asked for. This opposition seemed to me to be more for the purpose of opposing Wemyss, who strongly advocated my motion, than because they thought my motion wrong—the passage of which would have saved the expense of a special meeting. But Actors, as a general thing, are the worst businessmen in the world. After supper took walk with George.

**Wed. Sept. 7th** Warm. Called on Parsloe AM. No answer to my letter to Bates but a telegraphic dispatch was received from him to the effect that he wanted a good Juvenile actor. Parsloe telegraphed back that I would come for \$25.00 per week and a clear third Benefit. Rather big terms for Bates to accede to, but as he seems hard pushed he may give it. 4PM went down with George to steamer *Alabama*, on which he had taken passage for Savannah—bid him “goodbye” and in a few minutes the steamer got under way. I watched her

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1. American Dramatic Fund Association. See chapter 7, note 20.

passage down the bay then started for home with a heavy heart. Thou close-mouthed Future forego thy immutable silence and answer me this: shall George, my mother, and myself end our days together, or shall cruel destiny forever keep us separate? I much fear that the great Unionist—Death—can alone unite us.

**Thurs. Sept. 8th** Warm. Downtown AM. Parsloe showed me a letter just received from Bates in which he stated that “*Mr. Watkins could not possibly know anything about stage management.*” Wise old man, he regards me as the same young man who, six years before, played “walking gentlemen” in his company. Time, he thinks, has not improved me, or, else, that I have not improved time. Bates’s letter did not set well on my feelings and so I took a walk down Broadway to ruminate upon what was best to be done about it. I half resolved to start off west and convince Bates that I was somebody, or, at least, more than he expected. On my way home I stopped in at Parsloe’s office to get his advice upon the subject, when he handed me a telegraphic message from Bates, which was brought to him shortly after I went out, saying “engage Watkins as low as you can and send him immediately on.” Of course I could not be had any *lower* than was telegraphed yesterday. Parsloe drew up the engagement, which I signed, and then went home to inform Mother of my good news. She was glad to hear it but could not bear the idea of being left all alone by herself. ’Tis hard but Fate wills it and we must bow [to] its decree. Packed up, went around and bid goodbye to some acquaintances. To bed 10.

**Fri. Sept. 9th** Pleasant. 6AM started for Cincinnati by way of the Erie railroad. Mr. Couldock was in company as far as Hornellsville—he was going on to play an engagement at Toronto, Canada. The day will come when an actor can play in Toronto without leaving the United States. Reached Dunkirk 9PM, changed cars for Cleveland—I hope that the next generation will find night travelling in railroad cars more convenient for sleeping than it is at present.

**Sat. Sept. 10th** Pleasant. Reached Cleveland 5AM, breakfasted and at 8AM started for Cincinnati, arriving there at 5PM. The man that invents a plan to keep dust out of the cars will confer a great blessing on the travelling community and will deserve to have a monument to his memory erected by the subscription of every person obliged to travel by railroad—I could not have been much filthier if I had been used as a broom to sweep the streets of New York. Put up at the Woodruff House. An hour in the barber’s hands and in

a bathtub restored me to my proper self. Called on Bates to learn where he wished to make use of my services, and he told me at Louisville. Parsloe had not yet informed him of my engagement but he was glad that I had come. Talked with him till 10PM then went to bed—and glad I was to get there. No trouble to fall asleep.

**Sun. Sept. 11th** Fine day. 12M took steamer *Ben Franklin* for Louisville—had a fine passage down the river. An Actor nam[ed] Leonard, who was attached to Thorne's company the first season I went to Boston, was on board and his company made the time pass very pleasantly. There were a great many passengers, in consequence of which a number were obliged to sleep on temporary cots erected in the cabin: One of which I took possession of and was soon in the land of dreams.

**Mon. Sept. 12th** Slight sprinkling early AM, cleared off when the sun rose. Steamer reached Louisville sometime during the night. Roused up at 5AM, washed, dressed, and took a walk about town till 8AM when I found out the lodgings of E. L. Tilton—the stage-manager—woke him, and he went around with me in searc[h] of a boarding house. After considerable trouble found a plac[e] where *reasonable* board was to be procured at \$6.00 per week. A *good* boarding-house in Louisville would be a novelty; the best hotel in the town is nothing to boast of, whilst the charges are enormous in comparison to the accommodations. I am glad that our stay here is but for a month, at the end of which time we proceed to St. Louis, where I hope we shall winter.

**Wed. Sept. 21st** Unsettled, air quite coolish. Received my first week's salary on my present engagement. When I previously performed in this city my salary was but six dollars per week—quite a change from six to twenty-five—over four to one—the increase is entirely satisfactory. At Theatre 7PM.

**Thurs. Oct. 6th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM. Letter received from Bates ordering me to stop here and lead his Cincinnati company, which plays in this city next week.

**Sun. Oct. 9th** Quite warm AM, some rain PM. Rain is much needed here, the want of it is severely felt by the business community—the river is exceedingly low for this season of the year. The company started this morning for St. Louis on steamer *Sam Gaty*. There was quite a number of us on board to see them

off, and a happy time we had of it. I should have preferred going to St. Louis to remaining here, but it would have been bad policy to have continued playing such parts as Tilton was obliged to cast [me] for—obliged from the want of another person to do them. When this present engagement is terminated I shall, thenceforth, eschew all tragedy, and if I cannot find an opportunity of combining the light and eccentric comedy I shall take entirely to low comedy. This will give me an infinite deal of trouble but will, undoubtedly, prove to my ultimate advantage, for, however much persons may have differed in their ideas of my merit as a tragedian, there has been but one universal opinion in regard to my talent as a comedian.

**Mon. Oct. 10th** Pleasant. Afflicted with a cold. The company from Cincinnati arrived this morning. I reported to Sarzedas who received me very well and acted as though he meant to do what was right, yet I have very little faith in him as he is a man almost universally disliked. However, I shall put up with a good deal before breaking my engagement, as there is too small an amount of funds in my treasury for its owner to stand on his dignity. Sent some money on to Mother and the amount of my dues to the “Dramatic Fund,” also one third of a week’s salary to Parsloe, being his charge for making my engagement—the first money I ever paid for such a purpose and I think it will be the last. This agency business is a humbug. Reading & walking AM, writing PM.

**Mon. Oct. 31st** Pleasant. Rehearsing & reading AM. Reading and walking PM. At Theatre 7PM, being the first time I had appear[ed] for nearly two weeks. Having a good deal of spouting to do, it made me as hoarse as though I had not played for six months. Some persons would think it was having easy times to receive pay for being idle as long as I have been, but idleness is to me the hardest of work—I have no desire to pass a single night without playing. *Heart of the World* was well received.

**Wed. Nov. 2nd** Raining. Reading, writing, & walking AM, ditto PM. In the evening went to hear Miss Lucy Stone lecture on “Woman’s rights.” She made a very good argument for the cause she advocated, and her remarks were received with much favor by a large audience composed principally of those who, as she declared, were the oppressors of poor women. I believe, myself, that there are many pursuits now exclusively filled by men for which women are as well, if not better, adapted than the former. Females would make ex-

cellent physicians, as they are better fitted for the sick-room than are men; the only cases they would be incapable of managing successfully would be fevers, for to have a pretty woman feeling one's pulse would be more likely to increase than to allay the heat. However, I shall strongly advocate female physicians, also female clerks, printers, & etc. But to extend the sphere of "woman's usefulness" as far as Miss Stone desires, by opening to her the bar, the halls of legislation, the army, & navy would be the worst possible thing that could befall her sex—all the respect, attention, and courtesy now shown to them would be withheld; becoming, as it were, thus unsexed she would receive the same treatment that man bestows upon his fellow man—and that is bad enough, heaven knows! The poet's language "the man that lays his hand upon a woman save in the way of kindness is a wretch whom it were a gross flattery to term a coward"<sup>2</sup> would no more be hailed with loud applause, it would rather excite laughter. Oh! no woman!—keep as you are. You rule the world now did you but know it! Miss Stone was attired in the bloomer costume. Her age I should have judged to be twenty-five, rather a good-looking face, a passable figure and, on the whole, looked as though she ought to make an excellent wife. So take your time Miss Lucy—talk no more about "rights," get a husband, make him comfortable and if he be a *man*, you'l[l] have your *rights*. The good book commands us to "increase and multiply"—so get married Lucy and obey this divine command. If no other man can be found to take you for better or for worse, on account of the principles you advocate—I am willing myself to run the risk. What say you Lucy?<sup>3</sup>

**Mon. Nov. 7th** Pleasant. Reading, writing, & walking AM. Sarzedas, the stage manager, accused me of writing some articles lately published in the *Times*, censuring the manner in which the business of the Theatre was managed. He said he had it from good authority that I was the author, which was so far from being the case that I had actually been the means of keeping articles censuring his conduct out of the paper. It is a very strange thing that I, who have never attempted to injure even my enemies and have always avoided giving offense to the humblest individual around me, should find, wherever I go, persons who seize upon every occasion to prejudice against

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2. From John Tobin's comedy *The Honey-Moon* (1805).

3. Watkins's contradictory views about women's potential and "place" typify the era. For more on the status of women during the nineteenth century and efforts to promote their rights, see Catherine Clinton, *The Other Civil War: American Women in the Nineteenth Century*, rev. ed. (1984; New York: Hill and Wang, 1999).



me the minds of those who, with the will, have the power to benefit me. I have, however, generally come out triumphant. Soto being reengaged for five nights, I suppose I shall not have to play again this week.

**Sun. Nov. 13th** Pleasant. Settled my bills, sent baggage on board steamer *Telegraph*, bade goodbye to acquaintances, and, at 12M, we started for Cincinnati—expect the trip was a very pleasant one—don't know for certain having slept nearly all the way up the river—the effect of not getting to bed this AM till early cock crow.

**Mon. Nov. 14th** Pleasant. Boat reached Cincinnati at 3AM. . . . Hastened on shore to hunt up a stopping place—offered very good accommodations at the Merchants hotel at \$6.00 per week—concluded it was as well as could be done, considering the high price of board, so had my baggage brought to the house. Cleaned up and went to rehearsal AM, took a walk about town PM, at Theatre 7PM. Played Don Cesar De Bazan better than ever I did before, and seemed to make a very favorable impression.

**Sun. Nov. 20th** Beautiful day. AM took a long walk into the suburbs of the town. If I can become a favorite with the public I shall endeavor to settle here. A good museum in this place would pay a large profit, and I think that there are persons who would build it if they were approached in the right manner.

**Sun. Dec. 11th** Reading & walking AM. After dinner two or three ladies, members of Marsh's company, having expressed a desire to see the water-works, as there was no other person to gallant them, I could not do less than offer my services. We had a very pleasant time of it. One of the party, Miss Melissa,<sup>4</sup> was about as pretty a girl as one would wish to see—were it not for her family connections I should be tempted to court her a little and if she should prove worthy, offer her an engagement for life. If ever I do marry I am determined there shall be no one to interfere with my Mother, and two sets of parents seldom agree—I have had strong proof of this. Walk after supper—to bed early.

**Tues. Dec. 13th** Foggy. Reading, writing, & rehearsing AM, study PM, at Theatre 7PM, being eleven nights since I last appeared. Had twenty, or twenty-

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4. Harriet Melissa Secor.

five, dollars extracted from my pocket-book while on the stage. The money was rolled up in my pantaloons pocket and put in my valise. I could suspect no one, though the robbery had evidently been done by some person who knew of my having the money. It served me right though, as I should have known better than to take so much money with me to the Theatre after paying so dearly for a lesson at Philadelphia.<sup>5</sup>

**Sat. Dec. 17th** Rainy. Rehearsing AM. Letter from George, in which he mourned over his bachelor life. I am in hopes that my fate will not be like his, although I am following fast in his footsteps. Thirteen months more and I shall be thirty years of age—thirteen months more must find me a married man or I shall die a bachelor.

**Sat. Jan. 14th 1854** My birthday. I have just reached the 29th milestone on my road of life. In taking a retrospect through the mind's eye of my past life, I see but little to call for repentance or regret—my sufferings have been many, and my faults, those resulting from the follies of a headstrong youth. I have gained many lessons of practical utility taught only in the schools of adversity, which, after all, is a much better instructor than prosperity. Those twenty-nine years, like the seasons, have been diversified by sunshine and darkness, storms and calms, times of famine, times of plenty, and there have been floods and droughts of Fortune. I have experienced all the ups and downs of life, but yet, gazing upon the bright side of the picture, things appear brighter than do they on the dark side—dark. Many unpleasant occurrences have taken place which might, perhaps, have been avoided, but as they have entailed neither sorrow nor misery, call for no more regret than one must feel at any unpleasant act however trivial in its nature. In respect of the wrong done by me to others, and done by others to myself, judging by my intentions, the lesser share is mine. Considering that I am a member of that impossible-to-be-satisfied portion of the animal kingdom, ycleped men, I am about as contented with my situation and prospects as is necessary for the mind's ease—might be bettered, could be rendered a great deal worse. On the borders of bachelordom and no wif[e] in view! Why don't the right one come along? Where does she keep herself? Come, come, young lady, don't remain in the background any longer, for if I am to be married, now is the time. Com-

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5. Watkins had thirty dollars stolen from his dressing room while in Philadelphia on December 8, 1852 (omitted from this edition).

menced snowing early AM but cleared off beautifully, though cold. Reading & walking AM, studying & writing PM, at Theatre 7PM. Confound *Uncle Tom*, it is to be played another week.

**Thurs. Jan. 19th** Rainy. Reading & walking AM, writing PM, or rather, trying to do so, as Miss Melissa (Secor) being in my room for a couple of hours, of course there was no writing while she was there, especially as I have taken quite a liking for her; which liking, if I am not very careful, will turn into love. It requires all my self-command to prevent such an issue—much desired, I have good cause to think, by the lady.

**Sun. Jan. 29th** Pleasant. Letter from Fitzgerald, editor of the *City Item*, Philad[elphi]a., informing me that Bowers sought to arrogate to himself all the credit of procuring the Dramatic Block for the Washington Monument. When the movement was set on foot, of all those who professed to be the leaders of it, Mr. Bowers made the least exertion to secure its success. He did not even attend the preliminary meeting, nor the meeting organising the society; from the first, business, he said, prevented his attendance—and when the second was held he had made an engagement to *dine out*. Yet now, forsooth, this individual would clothe his little body with whatever honors may accrue to those who originated the idea. I wrote Fitzgerald a full account of the whole affair—with whom it originated and who were the active promoters of its success.

**Fri. Feb. 3th** Pleasant but cool. Reading & walking AM. Reading PM, at Theatre 7PM, and while there made up my mind to marry. 9PM went to the Melodeon, accompanied Miss Secor home—set down and talked a while—proposed marriage—offer accepted—and time appointed. To bed early—but did not sleep well.

**Sat. Feb. 4th** Pleasant. Reading & walking AM. PM went to the Probate Court and procured a “license of marriage.” A few days since I should have as soon expected to obtain a “license to kill” as a license to marry. After supper sent word to the Rev. Mr. Quimby, of the Universalist church, that his services would be required on the following day to join together “Two souls with but a single thought—two hearts that beat as one.”<sup>6</sup> Very pretty poet-

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6. From Friedrich Halm (1806–1871)’s *Der Sohn der Wildnis* (published in English as *Ingomar the Barbarian*), often erroneously attributed to John Keats (1795–1821).

ry this—though I trust there will be more truth than poetry about it in the present case.

**Sun. Feb. 5th** Beautiful day. Heaven put on its prettiest smiles as though rejoicing at the union about to be consummated. At 9AM I repaired to the Melodeon Hall. My affianced bride soon followed in company with Mrs. Geron and Mrs. Douglas. Mr. Quimby shortly after arrived and soon fulfilled his heaven-ordained duty by making man and wife of H. Watkins and Harriet M. Secor. There was one little incident connected with this marriage which those who believe in omens would hail as a most favorable one. A very handsome dog met the ladies on the street and following them to the Hall, laid down before us during the ceremony, looking as serious as any one present—but when the marriage was concluded and the minister with our friends had congratulated us, the dog standing on his hind legs, and placing his fore ones against my body, seemed to express great joy, after the canine fashion, at what had just taken place, and then repeated the same performance with the bride—after which he ran off and no more was seen of him. It is difficult to say whether the dog meant anything by his strange conduct but it was rather a singular proceeding on his part. At 10AM we took a stage and went out about six miles into the country—to a farm house, where we had been invited by the proprietor, Mr. J. Saunders, to pass the day—and most delightfully did the hours glide on. Fresh air, fresh milk, fresh butter, and everything else fresh was a most *refreshing* novelty. Retired to bed early.

**Mon. Feb. 6th** Another beautiful day. Our married life had a very pleasant beginning. If it continues so until death parts us, we shall have a happy time of it, and I shall not regret the day I became a Benedick.<sup>7</sup> Returned to town AM, received the congratulations of my acquaintances—at Post Office found a lot of books and letters—at home all the PM, *of course*.

**Thurs. Feb. 9th** Pleasant. Reading & walking AM, took a walk after dinner in company with my wife—an event not dreamed of a week since—writing. In the evening went to the Theatre with *Hal*.<sup>8</sup>

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7. At the opening of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, Benedick is a sworn bachelor; by the end of the play he declares his love for Beatrice, marries, and advises others to "get thee a wife."

8. Watkins calls Harriet "Hal," and later "Hetty."

**Fri. Feb. 10th** Pleasant. Reading, writing, and walking AM. Walk after dinner—wrote to Mother apprising her of my marriage—it will rather astonish the old lady. Spent the evening at home.

**Wed. Feb. 22nd** *Washington's Birthday*. To think that there should now be wretches at work to destroy the Union of the states—that Union which He was so instrumental in effecting. Rehearsal AM, walking and reading PM, evening attended, by invitation, a “merchant’s banquet,” given at the Madison house. It was a splendid affair. Nearly all of the principal merchants, editors, etc. of the city were present. Among the volunteer toasts I offered one which drew out the British Consul in a very fine speech. My toast was “The Flag of Our Union. May it never cease to wave over the *United States*: and may that wretch stand for age accursed who from the heavenly-blue of its bright firmament would seek to blot a single star or sunder the chain that binds them into one harmonious whole, for it was forged by God-like patriots and its tenure should be eternal.” The Consul remarked that he was glad to see the toast so enthusiastically drunk, yet, being the representative of a foreign government, it could not be expected that [he] should receive it with the same enthusiasm as would Americans. He wished that the gentleman seated opposite to him—myself—had joined the flag of Great Britain with that of the United States, for in that relation he hoped the future would ever find them. He also gave a brief sketch of the causes which led to the Revolution, and endeavored to show that that war met with no sympathy from the great body of English *people*—it was the work of a *faction*—while the people always believed the Americans were right in pursuing the course they did. The Consul’s remarks were probably true in the abstract, but not as a whole. The People may have thought the war was wrong on the part of the British government, yet that the war was of seven years duration is rather a strong fact that the People evinced but little *opposition* to it. The party broke up at midnight—I do not remember ever passing a more agreeable evening.

**Wed. Mar. 1st** Pleasant AM, cloudy PM. Reading AM and walking, walking, & writing PM. Wrote a long letter to my wife’s father, informing him that his daughter was truly and lawfully wedded to H. Watkins.

**Fri. Mar. 3rd** Pleasant. Reading & walking AM. Wrote to the manager of the Chicago Theatre to learn what chance there would be of playing with him a couple of weeks, provided I do not continue with Bates after the expiration

of my present engagement, which is extremely doubtful. If I can get an opening at Chicago I can go on a starring tour for the spring and summer that will prove more profitable than staying here. At Theatre 7PM. Benefit of Miss Richings, good House.

**Tues. Mar. 7th** Rainy. Reading & walking AM, did nothing particular PM, at Theatre 7PM. A Company, under the management of J. Rogers, opened at the Lyceum Theatre, corner of Sixth and Vine, for the representation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. My wife played her old part of Eliza. From what several persons who were present, and on whose opinions I could rely, said of her, I feel confident of in a few years making her one of the best juvenile actresses in the country.

**Wed. Mar. 8th** Lovely day. Reading & walking AM, walking PM, canvassing for my benefit, which is due this week, but the manager could not let me have it until after the Richings' engagement. When I informed Bates that my benefit was due, he had the effrontery to ask me to go down to Louisville—play a week, and take the benefit there, knowing full well that Louisville is one of the worst Theatrical towns in the country, and that my taking a *benefit* there would, probably, realise me no more, if as much, as would cover the extra expense I should be obliged to incur for advertising, etc.—while it would certainly put a dollar or two in his own plethoric purse.

**Fri. Mar. 10th** Raining. Reading & walking AM. Long talk with Bates PM. He asked if I would stop with him three months longer—if so, how much less salary would I take. I told him that it was immaterial to me whether I stayed or not, but if I remained it would not be at a reduced salary. The engagement was extended on the old terms—and the Benefit postponed.

**Sat. Mar. 18th** Pleasant, though colder. Reading, rehearsing, & walking AM. Writing & walking PM, at Theatre 7PM, played Richmond in *Richard III*—first night I have played this week. After the piece was over there was a loud call for me, of which the prompter informed me, but after I had gone before the curtain, Sarzedas, the stage manager, told me that I had no right to do so without first asking his permission, that it was Mr. Bates's wish that no stock actor should appear before the curtain. It is now palpable that Sarzedas is opposed to and seeks to injure me—I shall try to get even with him now that I know this to be so.

**Wed. Mar. 22nd** Pleasant. Reading & writing AM. Bates wishes me to go to Louisville to play six nights—I shall do so and if I make anything by my benefit, shall bid goodbye to Mr. John Bates and his Theatres.

**Fri. Mar. 24th** Pleasant though rather cool. Packed up and, with my wife, took passage on the steamer *J. Strader* for Louisville where I go to play six nights. H. Chapman & lady also go down. The business has been very poorly in Louisville—as it always is without a “Star”—and so Bates sends us there, not because he thinks we will draw anything, but there is a benefit due to Chapman and myself, and on the nights of those benefits there is certain to be much more in the house than the stock company could play to—so that our going there *must* benefit Bates a little—whether we are benefited or not is immaterial to him. By this course he lays the flattering unction to his soul (has he such a thing—doubtful) that he fulfills his contract—to the letter—and so he does *to the letter* but not to the *spirit*, nor in the manner contemplated by one of the contracting parties. My benefit was due two weeks ago. Instead of giving it to me then, and in Cincinnati where any kind of stock attraction would draw \$300 per night, he waits for an opportunity best suited to his own interests and then posts me off to take a benefit in a place where, by great exertion, I may be fortunate enough to realize a \$5.00 bill—lucky if I don’t lose that much—whereas, at Cincinnati, I could have cleared \$100. Who keeps to the letter of his contract may be *called* an honorable man, but, according to my ideas of right and wrong, that man who, in *making* a contract, misleads the person with whom he contracts as to its *intent*, and so, taking advantage of a quibble, commits an injury, is, *de facto*, no less a scoundrel than the man who is a professed cheat. Deceit is the worst foe a man can contend with—there is no warding off its thrusts—we feel the wounds before we know what weapons gave them. Caesar felt no sword so keenly as the blade that Brutus held. If I make anything by my benefit I shall throw up my engagement with Bates, first telling him what I think of him.

**Sat. Mar. 25th** Quite cool. Reached Louisville early AM, up to the Theatre—arranged to open with *Don Cesar De Bazan* on Monday next. Took board at my old quarters—PM called on old friends—to bed late.

**Wed. Mar. 29th** Rainy. Reading, rehearsing, & walking AM. All around town PM, at Theatre 7PM. *The Drunkard* last night drew one of the best houses of the season, although played in opposition to Bates’s wish, who thought it would

keep people away. It was finely received—I was loudly called for and went out, there being *no stage manager to prevent me*. Tonight *All That Glitters* was played.

**Thurs. Mar. 30th** Rained very hard all night—stopped early AM but looked threatening until towards night when it partly cleared up. Rehearsing AM. Studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. My friends prophesied, and my enemies hoped, that my benefit would be a poor one—but, astonishing to relate and to the surprise of all—myself included—it was, excepting the nights on which Julia Dean played, *the best house of the entire season*, and this too with the drawback of bad weather, which, no doubt, kept many ladies from attending. This success is one of the most gratifying things I ever experienced—it proves that my conduct off the stage has gained me many friends and that my talent as an actor has made me popular with the public, thus silencing the slanders of my foes, and placing me on a better footing with Mr. Bates who judges a man by the money he makes. I wish to give Bates a piece of my mind about certain things connected with this management of his Theatres, and the business of this week, having been unusually good, will give my words more weight. I had a fine bill, *Asmodeus, Laugh and Grow Fat, Hercules, and Is He Jealous*. My dyspeptic piece<sup>9</sup> made a great hit—after it I was called out and made a speech, which was well received.

**Mon. Apr. 3rd** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM. Orders sent from Cincinnati for me to return there on Wednesday. I shall put a stop to this changing about—it don't pay. N. Johnston, stage manager pro tempore,<sup>10</sup> played me a pretty trick. Without consulting me he put up the *School for Scandal* for tomorrow night with me in for the part of Joseph Surface, which I have never played, and have not time to study in. He then sends the bill, before rehearsal, to the printers, and telegraphs to Bates what was to be played—thereby throwing the responsibility of changing the bill on my shoulders. It was an evident design on his part to do me an injury—the act was a contemptible one and will not be forgotten if an occasion occurs for retaliation. At Theatre 7PM, played Claude Melnotte to Mrs. Mowatt's Pauline. She is now playing farewell engagements prior to leaving the stage—which she does after June next. I have not seen her in many parts, and personally know little of her talent as an actress, but she has met with great success.

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9. Watkins is referring here to *Laugh and Grow Fat*.

10. *pro tempore* (Latin): temporarily; for the time being.



**Thurs. Apr. 6th** Pleasant, quite warm. Arrived at Cincinnati, took lodgings at the Merchant's—reported present at the Theatre—writing PM. Julia Dean's engagement has been a succession of full houses.

**Tues. Apr. 18th** Pleasant. Reading & rehearsing AM. Letter from Mother announcing the death of James's wife's mother at the advanced age of ninety-three—also one of his children, a little girl, just past her eighth year, and the smartest child in James's family. I never thought that the death of any member of my brothers' families—James's or Osmer's—would draw a tear into my eyes—believing that their conduct had alienated all brotherly affection and sympathy from my heart—but on reading of “little Fanny's” loss it required a strong effort of the mind to keep the floodgates of sorrow from streaming forth. I became somewhat attached to the child from its visits to our house to see its grandmother, of whom it was very fond, and from its precociousness. She was a child in years, a woman in conversation—her sage discourse often provoked my laughter. It is a remarkable fact that children who use language and express ideas that belong to maturer years are seldom long-lived.

**Mon. Apr. 24th** Pleasant. Rehearsed, read, and walked AM. Gave Bates notice that I should quit after this week. Nothing could induce me to remain in his Company while Sarzedas is his stage manager. At Theatre 7PM.

**Thurs. Apr. 27th** Cold rain. Was to have been a rehearsal but Mrs. Bates—wife of the manager—dying at 9AM, the Theatre will be closed for two nights. Feeling in a charitable vein I will not expatiate upon old Bates's feelings in regard to the death of his wife—as to which causes him the most uneasiness—the loss of wife or the money lost by closing the Theatre. This morning while I was standing in conversation with Mrs. Mowatt and some others, Sarzedas came up, and, calling me aside, asked if I positively intended leaving on Monday. On being answered in the affirmative, he said that I had better remain a little longer and I would find things different from what they had been, that he had been obliged to do many things which, he now regretted—if I would stay I should have *all* the leading business; the parts belonging to me but which had been played by others should be given up to me—likewise I should be taken out of any part that I did not wish to play: he expressed himself as willing to make every reasonable concession. Here is a complete somersault. A few days since—*before I resigned my situation*—he did everything in his

power to injure me—now he will do everything to please me—anything if I will but stay. This singular change in his conduct can only be accounted for by supposing that the *master* whom he serves with such abject subserviency has *ordered* him to pursue this course. I gave no satisfaction as to what I intended doing but finding a chance to walk off did so. Sarzedas called to me as I went “to think it over.”

**Sat. Apr. 29th** Coolish. Rehearsing AM. Sarzedas came to me again and asked what my decision was. I told him that I still preferred going—but he pleaded so strongly and made such fair promises—yielding every point to me—that I consented to try it a little longer. If he swerves in the least I shall leave. Studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Full House.

**Sat. May 20th** Pleasant. Reading & walking AM, writing & walking PM. At Theatre 7PM. Hoped this would be the last night of *The Ethiop* but it is up for part of next week. I don’t much admire blacking my face and neck every night—’tis not only troublesome but injurious to the skin.

**Thurs. May 25th** Very Warm. Rehearsing, reading, & walking AM, walking PM, at Theatre 7PM. Played the *Drunkard* again, and, following my wife’s advice, played it without *ranting*—did not get near as much applause but pleased the audience better—that is the judicious portion. I shall try the quiet style for a short time and see how it takes.

**Fri. May 26th** Warm AM, cloudy PM which prevented a fine eclipse of the Sun from being seen—much to the disappointment of the many thousands who had provided themselves with smoked glass in order to have a sight at the “free show.” The leading paper of this city—the *Commercial*—which, hitherto, has taken very little notice of my performance, and that little neither very flattering nor otherwise—in this morning’s issue, speaking of my personation of the “Drunkard”—declared it to be “*the finest piece of acting seen upon the National boards since the departure of Mr. Anderson, and fully equal to some of that gentleman’s finest efforts*” and that “*all Mr. Watkins required was to study and to **wait***”—the latter word being strongly emphasized. What it meant I can’t imagine unless it meant that I should *wait* until the Astute Critic discovered all my talent and found time and *inclination* to notify the public of the fact—if it be one.

**Mon. June 5th** Warm. Up at 4AM, took “a bite,” and then took the cars for Cleveland where we arrived 3½PM completely covered with dust. At Cleveland we were transferred to the steamer *Crescent City* bound for Buffalo, washed and brushed off the worst of the dust, supped, and at 9PM, turned in with the hope of having a good sleep, which we were in a condition to fully appreciate, but a close state-room in warm weather is not the best place to enjoy “sore labor’s bath.”<sup>11</sup>

**Tues. June 6th** Warm. Reached Buffalo 7AM, breakfasted—I am almost ashamed to term the meal provided for us a breakfast—at the Railroad Hotel[.]. Took no pains to learn the landlord’s name, not having any desire to ever patronise him again—at least when I feel hungry. 8½AM started off again by railroad for Albany, saw nothing along the route worthy of note but dust—obliged to see that for it was constantly “in my eye.” Dined at Syracuse with an appetite like a hungry Lion. It was a capital dinner, and I was gratified to think that the morning’s breakfast had had sufficient time to vacate the stomach, as I should have regretted that so good an entertainment should have been mixed with so much baser matter. 8PM left Albany on the steamer *Isaac Newton* for New York. Promenaded for a while, then lemonaded, then turned in with the hope that I should wake up safe in Gotham.

**Wed. June 7th** Pleasant. Steamer behind time in reaching her port. 9AM found Mother well—took breakfast at home—how good—cleaned up and took a walk downtown. PM called on Wemyss. At Bowery Theatre 7PM—it has been splendidly fitted up since I left the city, and is now one of the handsomest Theatres in the Union. Theatricals are dull in New York at present.

**Sat. June 10th** Pleasant. Reading & walking AM, out shopping with Hetty PM. Rather expensive Amusement this shopping with one’s wife—at every window it’s “*Oh, how I should like a dress off that*” or “*That bonnet would so become me*” and other hints of the kind; hints so expressive and *persuasive* that there is no resisting them, although indulgence makes one bleed most profusely.

**Wed. June 14th** Rather too warm—rain in the evening. Reading—downtown AM—offers were made [to] me to go to Boston and Providence—refused them. Walking & reading PM. At Bowery 7PM.

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11. Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, act 2, scene 2.

**Wed. June 28th** Pleasant. Heavy shower 6PM. Reading & walking AM, walking PM, took the *Isaac Newton* steamer for Albany—tired, turned in early.

**Thurs. June 29th** Pleasant. Reached Albany 5AM, stopped at Stanwix Hall for breakfast. Met several professional acquaintances. Called on Mr. Meech to learn if he had abandoned the idea of building a Museum and Theatre in Cincinnati—he said that he had not, but property was too high, and money too tight, to build at present. 7PM took the Steamer back for home—enough of Albany in twelve hours.

**Thurs. July 6th** A good breeze blowing all day made it quite comfortable. Reading & walking AM. Received an offer of engagement at the “New York Theatre”—a new establishment, now in process of erection on Broadway. I would not accept the offer because it was for no “specific line of business”—the manager wished me to enter the “lists of competition” and “win myself a position.” I thought I had already won that—and so wrote in reply. At Bowery in the evening.

**Thurs. July 13th** Overcast, rain in the evening. Reading & walking AM. No chance of effecting an engagement at the Bowery so volunteered to play for a friend’s benefit on the 19th inst.

**Sat. July 22th** Sweltering as usual. Reading & walking AM, ditto PM. Ot-way in his *Venice Preserved*, speaking of honesty, remarks, as near as I can remember, that “’tis but a ragged virtue, and he who boasts most of it has least share in’t.” Substituting Americanism for honesty it would be extremely applicable to many *boasters* that I wot of. Mr. Harry Eytinge, of the new New York Theatre, wrote to me some time since, making an offer of engagement. In his letter he stated that he was not only an American himself, but that he intended to foster none but American talent—that I was an American and as such had a claim upon him. Here, thinks I, is a patriot as is a patriot—we Americans will henceforth be some pumpkins—the American drama shall be revolutionised—and here is the hero for the momentous enterprise. A few days after I met Mr. Eytinge and talked over the engagement—we perfectly agreed as to terms but as to the business I wished to play he said he would not be able to give me all of it—I would be obliged to share with—whom? An American? No! but with his antipodes! This individual who made such a parade of fostering Native talent wished me to share the business with an Englishman who had not yet worn out the clothes he last bought at home! I

took leave of Mr. Eytinge with the firm conviction that the inauguration of the American drama was yet in future—and that when that great event transpired the above bogus champion would not be the presiding genius. I am yet young, and if death does not overtake me too soon, there is no telling what I may live to see in this fast age.

**Mon. July 31st** Pleasant. Reading & walking AM. Opened a negotiation for the management of the Troy Museum. Walking PM.

**Thurs. Aug. 3rd** Pleasanter. Reading, downtown AM. Letter from W. C. Boardman, proprietor of the Troy Museum, offering me the management of his place on the following terms. At the end of the season, after paying all the expenses thereof, together with a rental of \$50.00 per week—him & myself to share equally the net receipts. I wrote back that if he would strike off the rent, putting that against my services as actor and manager, I would accept—otherwise he might go further for a manager and fare better or worse.

**Fri. Aug. 4th** Warm. Reading & walking AM. Letter from Bates offering me the stage management of the St. Louis and Louisville Theatres—to play the Juveniles in connection (he has engaged a leading man)—terms same as last year. Wrote back that if he would add five dollars to the salary I would accept. This would be a more certain engagement than the one at Troy—though if Boardman agrees to my offer I will take the latter place and run the risk. At Troy I should have no one to dictate to me, and, if I happened to hit the tastes of the people there, might realize a nice little sum by it and lay the foundation of a good thing in the future. I doubt Boardman's accepting my proposition—it will depend upon how hard pushed he is and the number of applications he may have received.

**Mon. Aug. 7th** Great change in the weather—quite cool this AM. Letter from Boardman—he did not understand what my proposal was. Determined to secure Troy or Bates and expecting a letter from the latter—having no time to negotiate, I resolved to pay Boardman a visit. More can be said to the purpose in half an hour than could be written in a week.

**Tues. Aug. 8th** Pleasant. 8AM took the cars for Stockbridge, Mass.—at which place Boardman resides. Had a pleasant trip, and reached the town at 3PM—found the gentleman I went to see—introduced myself, and immedi-

ately opened a conversation upon the subject which brought me there. After considerable talk in regard to the Troy Museum, its past success, what style of management would suit, what kind of a Company would be requisite, etc., Boardman remarked that he believed I would be the man to suit him, and he would give the best terms he had ever given—viz.: one-third of the net receipts and no rent to be charged. I accepted the offer—articles were drawn up and signed by both parties, and I started for Troy—being driven in a buggy seven-and-a-half miles to the state line in order to meet the cars from Boston to Albany. Reached Troy at 10½PM, took lodging at the American House and went to bed tired enough to enjoy a soft board.

**Wed. Aug. 9th** Fine day again—Morning rather cool for August though. Up early—called on the man having charge of the Museum—took a look at the premises—overhauled the books—and made out a list of the salaries paid to the Company of last season—the lowness of which list surprised me. It will be impossible for me to get a company this year anywhere near as low—a rather discouraging idea when it is considered that, to make the place pay, the proprietor stated that the expenses should be kept below \$50.00 per night—and that the manager has to depend upon the *profits* for his living. Profits? Their anticipated magnitude is not extremely inspiring. 11AM started by the Hudson River road for home—reached there at 5PM. Got a sore throat and cold by my journey—tied a wet rag around my throat on going to bed—the most efficient remedy I ever found in thes[e] cases.

**Thurs. Aug. 10th** Pleasant. Downtown AM, what should be the first thing put into my hand but a letter from Bates accepting my terms \$30.00 per week and a 3d benefit. Here's a pretty dilemma to be placed in. I had made an arrangement with one man while another supposed me to be engaged with him. One would have to be broke with, which should it be? If I broke with Bates it would shut me out of nearly the whole western country—besides, his is the better engagement, both in regard to position and pecuniar[y] matters. At Troy I should have to labor very hard with little o[r] no resources, and perhaps the result of all would be—*nothing*. Wi[th] Bates I have a respectable certainty, and everything at my command that wealth can control; besides being in first-class Theatres, I shall gain a managerial experience which, in after years, may prove to be of incalculable advantage to me. In my contract with Boardman there was a clause that either party could annul the contract by giving ten days' notice. After advisement with my friends I gave the notice—

writing a long letter to Boardman explanatory of my conduct in so doing, and regretting that my circumstances were such as to compel me to be governed by policy even at the sacrifice of feeling. But so it is, and so it ever will be, with that man who—in a world where gold alone is worshipped—has nothing to depend upon but brains and muscle. If I do well this season I shall try to settle down in the west.

**Wed. Aug. 16th** Pleasant. Walked about with George, and while he was laying in a bill of boots and shoes, I laid in a stock of the same for myself and wife—getting them at wholesale prices—“A penny saved,” etc. Letter from Bates containing list of people engaged in the east—I hope the portion now in the west are better than those engaged here, or I shall have poor material to work with. Pity I could not have had the selection of my own company as I should have had if Sarzedas had not been so fearful of my returning to Bates, who, when I get his ear, shall have a full report of the former gentleman’s proceedings—how he labors (over the left) for his employer’s interest.

**Fri. Aug. 18th** Pleasant. Reading, writing, and walking AM. Engaged a scene-painter—Mr. Whytal. He travelled with me through the South, three years ago. At Bowery Theatre 7PM to see a new piece, the *Courier of Lyons*—it is a very effective drama. Two characters are played by one person. It will have a run in St. Louis where I shall, probably, be the first to produce it—having the only copy, at present comeatable.<sup>12</sup>

**Tues. Aug. 29th** Same weather. Bates arrived this AM. Arranged business with him—notified the people to be ready for a start the next morning—packed up my baggage and sent it to the depot—called on some favorite acquaintances and took leave of them. To bed as early as possible.

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12. comeatable (also “come-at-able”): accessible, attainable, obtainable.

## TEN

1854–55

*Watkins continues to manage Bates's company for the entire season, working in Louisville and St. Louis. As stage manager, he contends with salary negotiations, rivalries within his company, and two theater fires. As an actor, Watkins begins to focus on low comedy roles. His first son, George Washington Watkins, is born.*





**Fri. Sept. 1st** There is not much use in noting the weather—it merely changes from warm to warmer, from hot to hotter. Called at National Theatre AM, got a list of the company. There has been a railroad communication opened [in] this city<sup>1</sup> and Louisville since I was last here, and, in consequence of the low stage of water in the Ohio, I was desirous of taking this route through fear of being delayed, but was persuaded to go by the boats, assured that we would be “*sure to get through in time.*” At 8PM left by the *Fort Pitt* for Louisville—at 10[PM] turned in. Soon fell asleep but was awakened shortly after by the boat running on a bar. Went to sleep again with the strong hope but extremely doubtful prospect that She would shortly get off and under weigh once more.

**Sat. Sept. 2nd** Awoke at 5AM. Found that the boat had not moved from her last night’s position. What was to be done? If I remained on board it was certain that the Louisville Theatre could not open on the 4th. Ascertaining that the cars stopped at Lawrenceburg—sixteen miles distant—I ordered them to set me ashore, which, being done, I started with all speed for the town—but oh! such a journey! First I came to the Miami river which I swam in the hope of finding, on the other side, a better road to the railroad track, but was deceived, and compelled to go about three hundred yards across a bottom covered with six-foot-high weeds and bushes, the dew from which drenched me to the skin. At last I reached the track, though this did not end my troubles as I was obliged to travel two miles at an elevation of from thirty to fifty feet, with sometimes but a single plank to walk on and sometimes nothing but the rail itself—I dared not look to the R. or L. for fear of growing dizzy and falling off. I never travelled so short a journey under such disagreeable and difficult circumstances—besides, the thought that the cars might come and catch me in their way did not at all add to my comfort. I reached the depot in a most deplorable condition. As everybody I met looked at me with distrust I thought it would be best to explain matters for fear of being arrested as a suspicious character. Soon the cars arrived and I took a seat, satisfied that no more *bars* could prevent my reaching Louisville, barring an accident. Arrived in town 2PM, hurried to the Theatre, made out a bill, and, by coaxing the Printer to do a little extra work, had the satisfaction of knowing that my exertions had been successful. 7PM took the first mouthful of food that I had tasted for 24 hours. At 11PM, tired of watching for the *Fort Pitt*, I went to bed at the “Owens House.” Completely tired out.

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1. Cincinnati, OH.

**Mon. Sept. 4th** Commenced my regime as Manager for John Bates—anticipate a hard time. Rehearsal AM. Writing & reading PM. Opened the Theatre with *Love's Sacrifice* & *Spectre Bridegroom*. The house was not good, the weather being too hot for the people to turn out—besides there was a circus against us, which is the strongest attraction we could have to contend with. I do not expect, however, that we shall do much business for a month at least. The company—some of whom were better than I expected to find and others worse—consisted of J. G. Hanley, H. Thompson, N. Johnson, A. Bradley, Van Horn, Wentworth & wife, A. Conner & wife, T. Hind, Lannegan, Hildreth (prompter), H. Watkins & wife, Mrs. Hind (née Mrs. Knight), Mrs. J. Reid, & Mrs. A. C. Carman. Performance seemed to give satisfaction.

**Thurs. Sept. 14th** Short but heavy shower—cooled off a little. Rehearsing AM. Had a row with Mr. Hanley about business. He has altogether too high an opinion of his abilities—thinking himself the compeer of Forrest. Before we left New York his friends persuaded him that, as I was manager, he would stand a poor chance of getting what he was engaged for. In this they were mistaken, as it was my determination not to play any more than was absolutely necessary, having enough to do to manage. All that I cared about was to play some favorite parts in Dramas seldom played by others—parts to which Hanley told me he had no desire to play as they were not in his way—as, for instance, Giles in *Miller's Maid*, which he acknowledged he could not personate on account of not being familiar with the Yorkshire dialect. Yet when I cast myself for these parts he claimed them as belonging to him by his engagement. It was soon palpable that Hanley was resolved that I should not play anything good if he could possibly claim it as belonging to the leading man. As I had done everything in my power to place Hanley in a favorable light before the public, and had not attempted to interfere with him, this conduct on his part was not only annoying but *nearly* ungrateful. I therefore determined to hold him strictly to his engagement and make him play *all* the leading parts—the bad with the good. This course was extremely annoying to him as he was willing that I should play the bad parts, but I was not such a dolt. He refused to play the Golden Farmer, Mark Redland, Alfred Devere (in *Agnes Devere*) and others of the same stamp, although they are recognized as being leading characters, basing his refusal on the ground that J. R. Scott

would not play them<sup>2</sup>—“How we apples swim.”<sup>3</sup> As both the public and myself considered that there was a wide difference in the positions of J. R. Scott and J. G. Hanley, that the former would not play such parts as the above was not a sufficient reason why the latter should not. I told the “discounted paper”<sup>4</sup> that he should have had his engagement worded differently—instead of the words “to play the Leading Business,” he should have had inserted “to have a choice of parts”—and as long as he was under my management I should hold him strictly to the letter of his bond. If he can get a chance to go to the Bowery Theatre N.Y. no doubt he will leave here—if not, probably he will act in a more reasonable manner.

**Mon. Sept. 18th** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM, writing & studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Brought out Epes Sargent’s Drama of *The Genoese* under the title of *The Dawn of Liberty, or The Child of the People*. I made a great flourish about it, but did not succeed in drawing together much of an audience. It seems almost impossible to get the people out—nothing but a star can effect that.

**Fri. Sept. 22nd** Pleasant. Had another row with Hanley about position, during which he somewhat cooled down. I then stated the only terms on which we could agree—by letting me play a fair share of the leading melodramatic business, I would not interfere with him in the legitimate business. To this he consented—probably we shall get along better after this, now that he finds that I am resolute. Produced a 3-act comedy first produced at the N.Y. National at the time I was in the company. The plot, characters, and incidents were written by myself and were original—I localized it to this place.<sup>5</sup>

**Thurs. Sept. 28th** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM. Wrote a long letter to Bates on business—I wish to learn what power he allows his stage manager. The stage manager becomes a mere nonentity unless he has authority to discharge a

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2. John R. Scott (1808–1856) was a popular actor in New York City and Philadelphia in the 1840s and 1850s.

3. From the fable “Apples and Horse-Turds,” in which apples are swept into a stream along with a dung heap. As they continue down the river together, the dung, thinking itself equal to the apples, calls out, “How we apples swim!” In Roger L’Estrange, *Fables of Aesop and Other Eminent Mythologists* (London, 1669), 124, *Archive.org*, accessed March 7, 2017, <https://archive.org/stream/fablesofaesopoth00lest>

4. discounted paper: a bill or bond traded below value.

5. Watkins is referring here to his play *Early Closing; or, Clerks vs. Merchants*.

man who refuses to do his duty. The opening of the Mechanic's Fair<sup>6</sup> has lessened our audiences.

**Tues. Oct. 3rd** Heavy thunderstorm last night—rain during day. Rehearsing AM. Reading & writing PM. Letter from Bates informing me that Hanley had been up to Cincinnati and called upon him to state his *grievances*. This Hanley whom I thought, at least, an honest man proves to be a scoundrel and a liar—a scoundrel for attempting to injure a man in the opinion of his employer, and a liar for perverting another's language by a willful misstatement of the words used. Both of these things this individual has been guilty of towards me—I shall get even with him and that, too, without pursuing a dishonorable course. At Theatre 7PM.

**Thurs. Oct. 12th** Rain. Rehearsal AM. Writing & studying PM. Bates wrote me a letter stating that the company would have to defray their own expenses in travelling to St. Louis. Knowing this to be a violation of their contract I determined to put the people on their guard. The same thing occurred last season, but the company were not notified of it until their arrival at St. Louis when the passage money was stopped from their salaries and there was no chance to help themselves. By pursuing the course that I have it gives the people an opportunity to defend their rights. As soon as the notice was put up every member of the company refused to go unless their passages were paid—and they acted justly in so doing. Believing that Bates intended no wrong but that the fault lay with Sarzedas<sup>7</sup>—who made the engagements—I determined, instead of writing, to go up to Cincinnati and have a talk with the old man. At Theatre 7PM. Good House.

**Fri. Oct. 13th** Cloudy AM, cleared off cool PM. Rehearsal AM. PM took the cars for Cin[cinnati]—arrived there at 10PM—drove to the Theatre—reached there shortly after the doors were closed. Met Bates—told him of the company's refusal to go to St. Louis unless their passages were paid. He was for closing the Theatre and sending me on to the East to procure a new company in their place, but when I told him how the engagements were made and brought up Mr. Sarzedas to refute it if he dared—he having made the engage-

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6. Mechanics' fairs exhibited new technologies to the general public.

7. John Bates was the proprietor of the company, but D. A. Sarzedas, as manager, was responsible for arranging contracts with each member of the company.

ments and promised the people that their expenses would be paid—Bates then agreed to stand by the contracts which had been made in his name and by his authority, although they were made differently from his orders. Bates invited me into [his] house where we sat talking until ½AM, when [I] stepped over to the Woodruff Hotel and took lodgings for the night.

**Sun. Oct. 15th** Cold. AM took steamer with R. Johnston for Louisville. I succeeded in changing off Hanley for Johnston. The change was effected without the knowledge of Sarzedas, who, when he came to know it, was highly offended, but he couldn't help himself. This change was quite a victory over Sarzedas, who seeks to injure me all that he can. I think that Johnston and myself will agree, as we do not stand in each other's way.

**Mon. Oct. 16th** Cool. Reached Louisville early AM. This trip was a little pleasanter than my last one. Rehearsing AM, writing & studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Played Jack Sheppard for the first time. This part is generally played by a woman, yet nothing could be more absurd, for no woman could go through what Sheppard is reported to have done—escaping from jails, etc. The piece went off very well and I was called before the curtain. This drama certainly does not tend to elevate the morals of the auditors, but it is a very attractive play and, if it does no real harm, Managers can hardly be blamed for playing it. I shall fix up this drama for myself.

**Fri. Oct. 20th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM. Bates arrived in town last night. I took him all over the Theatre and showed what was wanted. The company were cramped for dressing rooms, although an addition had been built to [the] Theatre for that express purpose—yet [it was] never put into condition for use as no previous manager ever told Bates how necessary it was for fear of offending him by proposing anything that required an expenditure of money. I soon got him to consent to my having the place fitted up which will add greatly to the comfort of the company, though I shall get no thanks from them for it. At Theatre 7PM. Benefit M'll H. Vallee (Mrs. De Bar). R. Johnston made his first appearance and left a good impression.

**Tues. Oct. 24th** Cleared off. Rehearsing AM. Writing & studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. First night of E. L. Davenport—his opening part was Hamlet, which he played smoothly and nicely, but there was nothing extra about it—nothing to entitle the personator to be classed as a star. Fair house.

**Wed. Oct. 25th** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM, writing & studying PM, at Theatre [7PM]. Davenport played Othello well—house much better than last night. *Laugh & Grow Fat* must have drawn a good many, for the entire audience stopped to see it—and it is something unusual when a “star” is playing for the majority of [the] audience to stay for the afterpiece. It went off capitally.

**Mon. Oct. 30th** Rained & shined. Rehearsing AM, writing & studying PM. Telegraph from Bates to get the company ready to leave for St. Louis on Thursday next—rather short notice, but it must be done. This sudden departure arises from Davenport’s refusing to play out the week unless Bates made the sharing terms easier. He was engaged to play here nine nights which would have made his engagement end here on Wednesday night, but he lost one night by being delayed on the road from Baltimore. This night Bates wanted him to make up, which he was willing to do, but Bates also wished Davenport to finish out the week here, and thus give up two nights at Cincinnati for two in Louisville. Considering that the average nightly receipts at the former place will exceed the latter by from \$1[00] to \$200, Mr. Bates’s proposition was not altogether a fair one, and Davenport declined it—and very justly too, though not perhaps wisely, as by so doing he may make an enemy of the old man.

**Thurs. Nov. 2nd** Pleasant. By 10AM got all the company on board the light draught steamer express. . . . The steamer glided slowly down the river on account of low water and sand-bars. Anxious to make up for lost sleep I went to bunk early.

**Sat. Nov. 4th** Pleasant. Quite evident that we should not reach St. Louis at the appointed hour for opening. I would have stayed the publication of the bills but the telegraph wires were all down. Business seems dull all along the river—the effect of the low water. Reading—walking the hurricane deck for exercise.

**Tues. Nov. 7th** Pleasant. This floating boarding-house drags its slow length along—5 miles an hour for a steamer is a satire on steam. Arrived at St. Louis 4½PM—one day and a half beyond the appointed time. Put up at Mrs. Robinson’s—seems a nice place—pay \$50.00 per month. Went to the Theatre, got out posters announcing the opening for Wednesday night.

**Wed. Nov. 8th** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM, writing PM, at Theatre 7PM. Opened with *Macbeth* (played by the stock) and *Wandering Minstrel*—house so-so. The performance seemed to give satisfaction, and the company made a hit.

**Wed. Nov. 15th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, reading & writing PM, at Theatre 7PM. Produced a new National Drama entitled *Rebels & Tories*—it was well received by the small number present. It is going to be a dreadful season for Theatricals—I shall be glad when it is over.

**Thurs. Nov. 23th** Heavy rain PM. Had quite a row at rehearsal this morning. On Tuesday I discharged a ballet-woman, Mrs. Conner—wife of one of the company—for using insulting language towards me while rehearsing the *Golden Farmer*, in which I called upon her to do a part which she had previously played. Presuming that I was justified in acting as I did in the premises, I thought the matter would drop, but, to my surprise it was reported that the company, espousing the lady's cause, were about to hold an indignation meeting and call me to account. I should have taken no notice of this movement had it not been that the prime movers were men whose interests I had greatly advanced—Messrs. Van Horn & Wentworth. I also learned that they had made strong threats as to what they would have done had the case been theirs. Determined to find out what the people had to say about me—and also to test the courage of these valorous gentlemen—just before rehearsal commenced this morning, and while all the company were standing about the stage, I related what I had heard and then stated that I threw aside my position as manager and stood before them as Harry Watkins—that if there were any who felt aggrieved and desired satisfaction they were at liberty to “pitch in” and I would endeavor to accommodate them, but none of them expressed a wish to accept the offer, except the lady who rushed at me frantically from the R.3.E.<sup>8</sup> armed with a cowhide with which to inflict retribution on my unfortunate person. I saw her just in time to catch the blow on the left arm while with the right I clinched the instrument of torture and, wrenching it from her hand, took out my knife and cut it up in as cool a manner as possible. Finding that her allies did not come to her assistance, this Amazonian vindicator of “Woman's rights” retreated from the field and thus ended the ten minutes' war. When this affair was first started it was asserted that the majority of

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8. R3E: abbreviation for Right 3rd Entrance.

the company were concerned in it, but the majority soon dwindled down to *three*, either one of whom would give anything if they had minded their own business. I will so impress a lesson on the minds of these gentlemen that will make them wiser, if not better. At Theatre 7PM. 1st night of *Our Country's Sinews*—it made a great hit: it was received better than ever before.

**Thurs. Nov. 30th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. R. Johnston being afflicted with a severe hoarseness, I was obliged to play his part—Gismondo in *St. Marc*—and though it was quite long and I had but two hours for studying, yet I made quite a hit. I almost regret making hits in tragedy now that I am about to devote myself to the study of comedy. Nothing can draw in this city at present, that is certain—no better entertainment was ever given here than that which we are now presenting, yet all our endeavors cannot succeed in attracting more than a third-rate house.

**Tues. Dec. 5th** Pleasant. Another row at rehearsal this AM. We had calculated on doing *Jack Cade* tomorrow night when, to our surprise, Mrs. Knight, who was cast for Marianne, a part of eight lengths, declared her inability to study it unless more time was given her. This woman has been a serious drawback to us the whole season—piece after piece has had to be laid aside because of her inability or unwillingness to study the parts without having more time for the purpose than it was possible to give any person. She has kept a great deal of money out of the treasury. I set down and wrote to Bates that if I were in his place, I would close the Theatre, annul all engagements, and then form a new company—retaining those who had performed their duty and filling the places of those whose conduct had been detrimental to the interests of the Theatre. The conduct of many members of the company fully justified him in resorting to “extreme measures.”

**Sun. Dec. 10th** Cloudy AM, cleared off PM. Reading & writing AM, ditto PM. After supper called on Davenport & lady to bid them adieu, they leaving tomorrow for Boston.

**Thurs. Dec. 14th** Thanksgiving day—and a beautiful day it was. Letter from Bates telling me to close the Theatre, discharge all the company, and reorganise for Louisville. I posted a notice in the green room that the Theatre and season would close in one week after [this] date. The individuals who conspired against me will now regret their conduct—they wrote to Bates to have me



removed from the stage management and he wrote back *to me* to discharge them all. As most of the clique are young in the profession, it will be a good lesson to them. I doubt if they will ever join in another plot so contemptible as this was—seeking to injure a man who had benefited them.

**Thurs. Dec. 21st** Pleasant. Settled up my bills, and, at 10AM started on the steamer *Belle Golding* for Louisville. Considerable floating ice in the river but not sufficient to seriously impede navigation—though the boat’s insurers insisted on the boat laying up at night, which the Captain did at a town called Chester. Went ashore and took a walk into the country to give me an appetite for sleep—to bed at 10[PM].

**Thurs. Dec. 28th** Cold. Reached Louisville 1AM. At daybreak went up into town—called on Mrs. Biggert and took board with her at \$13.00 per week—a pretty high figure. At Theatre AM—think I shall like the new manager, Mr. G. Mellus. A number of actors in town idle. Several applied for engagements—shall not have much trouble in getting men but women are scarce.

**Fri. Dec. 29th** Pleasant though cold. 7AM started by rail for Cincinnati—reached there at 1PM. Called on Bates—he seemed to be well pleased with my conduct—said he would have nothing to do with the persons who had so shamefully treated me—wished me to go to New York for people. Should have done so had my wife been well. Engaged some few actors here and telegraphed to N.Y. for others—took lodgings at the Woodruff House—turned in at midnight pretty well tired out.

**Sat. Dec. 30th** Pleasant. 6AM took the cars back to Louisville. Commenced to make preparations for opening on Tuesday next. I shall have to go into the low comedy myself now—wonder if it is wisdom!

**Mon. Jan. 1st 1855** The New Year set in splendidly—hope it will act better than the old one—it behaved shamefully. 1854 resulted most disastrously to all the world. In Europe it brought about a bloody war,<sup>9</sup> while in the United States Commerce, agriculture, and business of every kind was prostrated—the effect of a severe, general and long protracted drought. All the distress in this country may be attributed to that. Reading, writing, & walking all day.

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9. Watkins is referring to the Crimean War (1853–56), which was fought between the Russians and the British, French, and Ottoman Turkish.

**Sun. Jan. 14th** Fine weather. I close my worldly account with thirty years on this day. All right so far. Reading, studying, & writing.

**Mon. Jan. 15th** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM, writing & studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Brought out the *Lawyer's Secret; or, the False and True Blood*. This was the first play I ever wrote—it was while I was in Boston. Being a very full piece I never had a good opportunity of playing it before. The house was poor but the piece was well received—it plays very well.

**Sun. Jan. 21st** Heavy thunder showers—some snow PM. Writing nearly all day. Wife got sick yesterday—it is not likely that she will be better until there is an increase of the family.

**Wed. Feb. 7th** Raining. Rehearsal AM. After dinner assisted wife in sewing canvass for scenery. I am going to make one more attempt with a travelling company—I shall start under better auspices than before, and with the benefit of dearly bought experience. At Theatre 7PM. Poor house.

**Sat. Feb. 10th** Quite pleasant part of the day. Rehearsal AM. Writing, walking, & reading PM, at Theatre 7PM. During the performance of the *Honey-Moon* last night the gas suddenly went out—and at a very *a propos*<sup>10</sup> moment, it was at the part where Juliana exclaims “I’ll be a devil!” “What?” says the Duke, “A very devil!” she replies—and on the word, the gas lights vanished. As the Duke I should have said, “No, we’ll have no devils!” instead of which I substituted “And the King of the devils must certainly intend to assist you, for it is already *devilish* dark.” This remark drew forth a spontaneous shout of applause, louder than was ever before heard in that portion of the *Honey-Moon*. I also paid Miss Makeah an impromptu compliment—the best, as she afterwards said, that she had ever received. It was as follows—some person having handed me, from the wing, a lighted candle, I stepped forward and placing it by the footlights, addressed the audience, “Ladies & Gentlemen, we beg your patience for a few moments until the gas is compelled to its *en-lightened* duties—meanwhile we cannot be entirely in the dark while we have so bright a star to illuminate us.” This was “received with the most rapturous applause” and the rest of the play went off with *éclat*—the little episode, no doubt, giving additional Zest to the performance. A comedian should always be ready for an impromptu.

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10. *a propos* (French): pertinent or opportune.

**Sat. Feb. 17th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM. Writing & studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Mrs. Mowatt's Comedy of *Fashion* drew a fair house. After performance went home—found wife sick and momentarily growing worse—started for the doctor at midnight—back home again—waited an hour—matters coming to a climax—came pretty near using emphatic language at the doctor's tardiness—after him again—this time met him on the road—made the old gentleman hurry up his cakes.

**Sun. Feb. 18th** Cold & cloudy. After three hours of the most dreadful suffering Harriet was relieved by the advent of her firstborn. When the doctor told me it was a "*feller*" I rejoiced at the thought that its sex preserved it from the pangs of maternity. Before this child was born I wanted children, but now I have no desire to have another—not wishing any woman to suffer for me as my wife suffered this morning. The child weighed eleven pounds and was delivered in first-rate order—those who are a judge of such things pronounce it "a fine boy," some said "a buster." I hope he'll not bust me. For new beginners we have made a pretty good job of it—we must be careful not to spoil the work. What will be its future? I named it after my best friend—George Washington Watkins. If it makes as good a man as he is I shall be satisfied. At 4AM I laid down to get a little of "sore labor's bath"—up at 9[AM], dressed, and went to a masonic funeral. PM I tried to study but was too tired. Wrote to George and Mother apprising them of their new position as relatives. Study after supper.

**Mon. Feb. 26th** Coldest day of the season. Rehearsal AM, walking & reading PM, at Theatre 7PM. 1st night of the Bateman Children. They are now playing their farewell engagement throughout the country preparatory to leaving the stage. They are getting too old to be called "precocious children"—being in their teens. I should suppose that a sufficient fortune had been amassed to make them comfortable for life. Good House.

**Thurs. Mar. 1st** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM. Letter from Bates in which he states it as his belief that none of the company are engaged beyond six months, and that such being the case he wished me to inform them that the season having been a losing one, and the prospect for the future not being very bright, he would be obliged to close the Theatre unless they would consent to a reduction of salaries, and that he would then try to keep open all through the summer season. I said nothing to the company, but wrote back to Mr.

Bates that he was laboring under a slight mistake with regard to the length of engagements—that all of the old members of the company had written articles of agreement binding on him for a season of *nine* months, also that the people engaged by me had been engaged for the lowest possible living salaries, and that although they were not engaged for any stated period yet they were given to understand that the season would last until the first of June—therefore, as it would be a breach of faith with the former, it would also be doing a little wrong to the latter. I also wrote that the only *reduction* necessary was a reduction of the prices of admission—the high standard of which was a subject of complaint with all the Theatregoers of the city, who found fault that he obliged them to pay more than was charged at any other Theatre in the country. I don't think my letter will be very agreeable to the old gentleman, but he will have to stomach it as best he can. He may proceed to extreme measures, but if he does, it will redound upon him. At Theatre 7PM. 1st night of a new Drama, entitled *Young America, or the New York News Boy*. The piece does not possess much merit, but it has an attractive title, is clapp-trappy, and being well gotten up with effective scenery, it will probably draw well for a few nights. Best house of the season to witness its first representation. It went off well.

**Mon. Mar. 5th** Pleasant AM. Rain PM. Rehearsal AM, reading & writing & walking PM, at Theatre 7PM. Quite a row in front—three men were annoying the audience by loud talking and laughing, and when requested by the officer in attendance to desist one of the party told him “to go to h'—ll—that they had paid their money and had a right to do as they d—n pleased.” The Officer differing with them, a fight ensued in which the belligerent individuals came off second best. If ever they visit a Theatre again the probability is that they will show respect for the rights of the other portion of the audience, and learn that in visiting a place of Amusement people pay their money to *be* amused not to amuse *themselves*.

**Wed. Mar. 21st** Clear and cold. Rehearsal AM, writing PM, at Theatre 7PM. Anderson played Gisippus finely. It is somewhat singular that this piece is not oftener represented for it is certainly one of the best of the modern plays. The Theatregoers of this city are constantly calling for new plays! new plays! but whenever a new play is presented a smaller number of them are in attendance than on any other occasion.

**Sat. Mar. 24th** Rude blustering March with a vengeance. Rehearsal AM. Dined with Anderson by invitation—passed a pleasant PM in his company. He is very sociable in company and a good man withal, but fully impressed with his own importance although not intrusively so. He is certainly one of the finest actors now on the stage, yet his engagements are not very successful in any part of the Country because the Press is not on his side. He lacks a person to manage his outside affairs and manufacture public opinion for him. Unpuffed talent is useless—it won't pay at all nowadays. An Actor, however exalted his genius, requires a Gabriel to *blow his horn* when making a tour of either this Country or England. At Theatre 7PM. Anderson's last night—*Richard III* was played in which he has made a great hit. Good House.

**Sun. Mar. 25th** Pleasant. Down to steamer to see Anderson off. In bidding me goodbye, he expressed himself as being grateful for the kindness I had shown him during his engagement. Reading PM, took a walk with wife. Youngster is growing finely—hope I shall be able to raise him.

**Thurs. Apr. 5th** Rainy. Rehearsal AM, writing & reading PM, at Theatre 7PM. We came very near having a conflagration this evening. The light used in the working of the moon was suffered, by the negligence of those supposed to have the care of it, to continue burning some time after use, and shoved away in a corner. One of the company happening to go by found the scene in flames, it having been pushed against the light. Two or three buckets of water put out the moon, in fact totally eclipsed it, but had the discovery not been made as soon as it was the engagements of the company would have terminated in a very abrupt manner.

**Fri. Apr. 13th** Very warm for the season. Rehearsal AM, walking & study PM, at Theatre 7PM. Produced a piece called *Aline, or The Rose of Killarney*, the title of which I changed to the *Rose of Penrith; or, A Mother's Prayer*, for the purpose of making the hero a Yorkshireman instead of an Irishman. The change was certainly for the better because the *language* of the piece, as originally written, was very inconsistent with the *action*, which, by laying the scenes alternately in England and Ireland, was rendered an impossibility. It was well received though the audience was small.

**Tues. Apr. 24th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, reading & walking PM, at Theatre 7PM. Mellus returned from Cincinnati. He wishes me to stay and manage

next season. He also said that Bates spoke of having me come to Cincinnati in place of Sarzedas—I should like this infinitely, but have no particular desire to stop in this city and would not if anything more eligible should offer. A stage manager's labor is not appreciated in Louisville—here the public care for nothing but stars. No matter how good the stock company, or the pieces produced, they will not come to see them. Poor house.

**Thurs. May 3rd** Raining all day. This rain will cause great rejoicing among the farmers, who began to fear that the sun would burn up their rising crops. If the crops should not be more abundant this year than they were the last, the result will be a widespread famine. Rehearsal AM, studying PM, at Theatre 7PM. Played Graves in *Money* for the first time and made quite a hit. I did not expect success for I went at the part with a great deal of diffidence, distrusting my ability to do anything with it. My success on this occasion will be of incalculable benefit to me in the confidence it inspires me with to grapple with other, and more difficult, comedy parts—parts, which, hitherto I have feared to essay. Murdoch played Evelyn well.

**Sat. May 5th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, reading & writing PM, at Theatre 7PM. No building ever had a more fortunate escape from being converted into ashes than had the Theatre this evening. After the performance, and when all the attachés of the house had gone home, a fire broke out in the prompter's stand. I was in my dressing room at the time, and had nearly finished my change of dress when I heard the Watchman cry out. I rushed on to the stage and there beheld the whole of the right proscenium in a blaze. At first sight the destruction of the Theatre seemed inevitable, but I determined to make an effort to save it. Luckily there were plenty of buckets at hand, and a good cistern of water, in the yard. There were but two men present besides myself—Mr. Hind and the watchman. Mrs. Knight was also present and did good service. By extraordinary efforts we soon got the flames under our control. The alarm of fire was given in the street—the bells rung and the engines were soon on the spot, but I gave orders to fasten all the doors and not let a person into the building, being aware that if the firemen once got to work they would do as much damage as the fire possibly could, besides which a *crowd* would be in the way. In half an hour every s[par]k<sup>11</sup> of fire was out, but how we succeed-

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11. Due to a hole in the page, a number of words are missing in this entry. This page is the last of a volume and the damage does not appear to be deliberate.

ed in accomplishing this end a[gain]st such inflammable material, and after the flames had [become] so widespread, seemed a miracle to us all. At the ti[me] [the] [fir]e broke out, the watchman, who was in front of the h[ouse], [heard], as we all did, a crash upon the stage. Being used to hearing c[rashes] [on] stage, I paid no attention to this one, but the watchman [was not] and rushed to see what was the matter, when he discovered the f[ire]. [A]nd so the “crash-bag,” filled with broken crockery, and which had so often been used for “effect” in giving alarms at mimic fires, did, without the prompter’s aid, give an alarm which saved the Theatre when “*reality* was there.” The “crash-bag” was suspended immediately over where the fire broke out—the small cord which held it being burned away, down came the bag, making the most *effective crash* that I ever heard.<sup>12</sup>

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12. Watkins wrote entries through May 9, 1855, but his entries during the rest of May, as well as June, July, and August, are missing.

## ELEVEN

1855–56

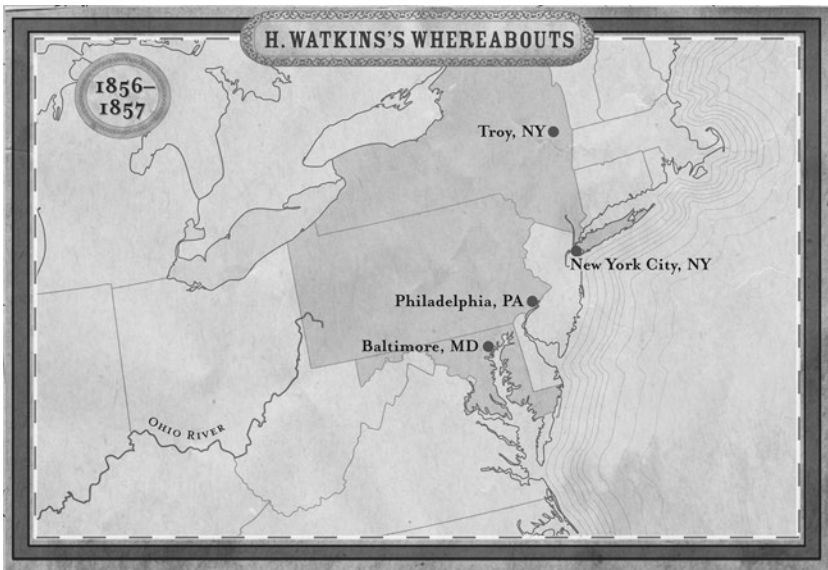
*A large gap in the diary occurs here, spanning May 10, 1855, through August 18, 1856. As a result, Watkins's account of the 1855–56 season is missing in its entirety. Clues in the manuscript suggest that Watkins continued writing during this period: the leaves of the adjacent volumes are numbered, and they indicate that there is a seventy-eight-page gap in this section. In other words, an entire volume (or more) is either lost or no longer extant. (See introduction, note 28.)*



## TWELVE

1856–57

*Traveling between Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York City, Watkins is presented with several offers of employment. His success as both an actor and a manager leads him to consider touring in England with Thorne, but Watkins declines, because his wife is expecting their second child. He is hired to give public-speaking instruction to W. Morton, who presents a panorama of an Arctic expedition team led by Dr. Elisha Kane; when Morton proves unfit for the task, Watkins ends up doing the lecture tour himself. In anticipation of the 1856 presidential election, he gives a rousing speech at a gathering of the American Party in Union Square.*



**Mon. Sept. 1st** Pleasant. At present my life is so monotonous that there is hardly any use of making daily records. I pass the time with George, accompanying him in his peregrinations in search of vendibles.

**Mon. Sept. 8th** Pleasant. Spent the AM in search of a “house to hire.” My youngster is so noisy and troublesome, and I am so fearful of having him annoy other people, that I have determined, if a suitable place can be found, to let Harriet keep house while I am away. At the solicitation of some friends, yet in opposition to my better judgment, I was induced to make application, by letter, to Mr. J. Wallack, Sen. for an engagement—the result was just as I anticipated—he did not even condescend to answer my letter. It was some consolation to know that he had treated Charles Burke, one of the best Comedians this country ever produced, in the same manner. Burke wrote to Wallack offering to play a month for nothing, but no notice was taken of the letter. I can account for this conduct on no other ground than a strong prejudice that Mr. Wallack must entertain against American Actors. In the evening went to Burton’s Theatre (late the Metropolitan). This was the first night of his season: the opening Pieces were *The Rivals & Loan of a Lover*. In the first Mr. Mark Smith made his first appearance in New York, playing Sir Anthony. He created a favorable impression—in fact made his *mark*. The house was fair but not full—which was the case with the company.

**Wed. Oct. 1st** Coolish but pleasant. Nothing to do yet, and the prospect ahead not very cheering. The Oswego concern caved in, as I anticipated it would.<sup>1</sup> The manager, Mr. H. Huntington, after realizing all that he could, by fair means and by foul, left last week for Chicago, in company with his wife. He gave out that he intended returning at the end of a fortnight, but after his departure it was ascertained that his business arrangements were in such a condition as to render it unwise, if not unsafe, for him to visit Oswego again; unless a conflagration should consume certain documents, and an epidemic carry off certain inhabitants of the town who have an especial attachment for said Huntington—which attachment is said to be a *lawful* one. Harry Peebles wrote me a letter to know if I would join him in the management of the Theatre at Indianapolis, Ind. I answered, if he would furnish the funds to carry it on with, I had no objection to test the speculation—but when I last saw Harry

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1. Watkins had made an engagement to play in Oswego from September 29, which he recorded in his diary on August 21, 1856 (omitted from this edition).

he did not seem flush in a pecuniary point of view. I think the place would pay this season, there being many things in its favor.

**Sun. Oct. 12th** The weather has been beautiful for the last few days. Mr. Peeples seems very anxious to have me join him, and wishes me to do so in a hurry, but he delays so long in answering my letters as to make me think, at times, that he has abandoned the project. Anything but procrastination in business—I am extremely slow in making up my mind to do a thing, but once resolved upon a plan, and I know no rest until it is consummated.

Politics never ran so high in the United States as at present—the coming presidential election is likely to be a bloody one. Heaven grant it may prove otherwise, but such is the indication. The election of either Buchanan or Fremont is to be deprecated—the party to which Mr. Fillmore belongs is composed principally of the conservative people, and seems the only one calculated to give peace to the country. Should the coming state election in Pennsylvania go against the Democratic Party, it will increase Mr. Fillmore’s chances, as the South will then see the impossibility of electing Mr. Buchanan, and through fear of Mr. Fremont, the Republican candidate, being successful, they will, probably, throw their electoral votes for Fillmore. This will be their wisest course, for although they know that this gentleman will not carry out their extreme views, yet they know he will administer the government impartially.<sup>2</sup>

**Tues. Oct. 21st** In the evening was present at a Mass meeting of the American Party held in Union Square: It was a large assemblage and must have numbered near twenty thousand persons. I took up a position, at an early hour, on the main stand, determined to speak if an opportunity was afforded me. Mr. Stuart of Virginia, who was Secretary of the Interior during Fillmore’s administration, spoke first. He was followed by David Paul Brown, of Philadelphia—one of the best criminal lawyers in the country, and an excellent stump-speaker. After Brown had got through, Mr. Warner, who had charge of the stand, desired him to continue on, as there were no other speak-

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2. In the 1856 presidential election, there were three candidates: James Buchanan (1791–1868, Democratic Party nominee; supported “popular sovereignty” to determine if slavery was legal in newly admitted states), John Fremont (1813–1890, Republican Party nominee; strongly against the expansion of slavery), and Millard Fillmore (1800–1874, who served as US president from 1850 to 1853 and, in 1856, became the presidential nominee of the American Party, also known as the “Know-Nothing” Party; focused more on anti-immigration and anti-Catholic policies than slavery). Buchanan was elected with 174 of the 296 electoral votes.

ers present, but Brown declared it impossible for him to speak any longer—he had talked himself out. After a somewhat lengthened pause, during which Warner exerted himself in vain to procure a speaker, while the crowd below were fast becoming impatient, I stepped forward and tendered my services, which were quickly accepted. I gave my name to Warner, who introduced me to “the people” as “Mr. Watkins of New York,” and then called for three cheers for “Young America.” They were given with a good will, and I then commenced my speech. . . .<sup>3</sup> After I had finished, an excited individual came upon the stand from the crowd below, and forcing his way to where I stood, exclaimed, “By g—d, sir, I wish to know you! That was one of the most patriotic speeches I ever heard! Your eyes flashed fire, sir! Are you a Southerner?”—When I informed him who I was, he said “Well, if you do not make your mark in this world ’twill be your own fault.” I thanked him for his good opinion and left for home. My speech evidently made a strong impression, and it was most enthusiastically received. Open-air speaking is an extremely laborious and difficult task, but, strange to say, although I had not used my voice for some time previous to the meeting, I was not at all affected with hoarseness until I reached home, and then it began to display itself very badly.

**Mon. Nov. 3rd** Rainy. This is the momentous day that settles the presidential election—We shall soon know which of the candidates is the choice of the majority for President of these U.S. Whoever that choice may fall upon, I trust the “Black Republicans”<sup>4</sup> will meet with an overwhelming defeat. There was considerable rioting at the polls, yet not more than is usual upon these occasions. I stuck in my vote for Fillmore and the entire American ticket, but, before bedtime, was satisfied that my ballot accomplished nothing beyond the gratification it gave me to feel that I had exercised the right of suffrage in a manner which, as I conceived, would be most productive of good to the *entire* country.

**Tues. Nov. 4th** This city has gone Democratic by a large majority, but partial returns from the state indicate that it has gone Republican. Regret to hear it, for I had hoped better things of the Empire State.

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3. In the omitted passage, Watkins records a portion of his speech, urging those present to vote for Fillmore, and stressing the importance of maintaining the Union. He also records the enthusiastic responses of the crowd.

4. Prominent Democrats applied the slur “Black Republican” to members of the Republican Party in reference to their antislavery stance.

**Sat. Nov. 8th** Took the 6AM train of cars for Troy, where I have been [engaged] to play “a few nights.” Reached Troy at 11AM, put up at the Troy House. Dull-looking place this city, it reminds one of the “deserted village”<sup>5</sup>—I shall be fortunate if I leave this town much richer than when I entered it.

**Fri. Nov. 14th** Rehearsing AM, at Theatre 7PM. Played *Our Country’s Sinews* and *Laugh and Grow Fat* for my Benefit. The house was not as good as I expected, yet I cleared enough by it to pay my expenses for the week, and it is a great satisfaction to know that my engagement, with one exception, has been more successful than that of any “Star” who preceded me. I have never had my pieces done better, as a whole, than they have been here. The company is not an exceedingly talented one, but the members of it are all willing, and do their best to please. In a Theatre dependent upon Stars, it is better to have a company of this kind than one made up of supposititious talent—that is, individuals who imagine that anything less than Hamlet is unworthy of their consideration, while, in reality, they have not sufficient capacity to render the Priest, who officiates at Ophelia’s grave, with respectability.

**Sat. Nov. 15th** Smith was anxious to have me play with him another week, but this could not be, as I had made an arrangement to play in New York on the 20th. I consented to play two nights more, he reducing his sharing terms one-fifth, and ensuring me sufficient to preserve me from loss.

**Wed. Nov. 19th** Took the 6AM train for New York. When I quitted the Hotel, there was nobody up about the house but the Porter, and so I was obliged to leave without paying my bill. This annoyed me considerably, as I did not know what they might think of my conduct in thus going away, although they were aware of it, and showed a singular neglect of their business in lying a-bed when they should have been up to see their guests off. I gave the Porter my direction in N.Y. and desired him to tell the clerk of the hotel to forward my bill by the first mail. Home at noon.

**Thurs. Nov. 20th** *Thanksgiving Day*. Henry Jarrett and John Brougham, having engaged the Academy of Music for this day, gave two performances there—afternoon and evening. In the PM I played the “Drunkard” to a

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5. “The Deserted Village”: a 1770 poem by Irish author Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774) idealizing rural life and communal values, and lamenting their demise.

very large audience, and, though badly supported, with the exception of Miss Saxon as Mary, I succeeded in making as great a hit in the part as I ever did. Brougham played in the evening, with his company from the Bowery Theatre, but the house was not half as well filled as in the afternoon.

**Sun. Nov. 23rd** Writing AM, PM started, in company with Mr. H. Jarrett, for Baltimore; partly for pleasure, partly in search of business. Reached Philadelphia 11PM—supped at an eating house and then off by rail for Baltimore.

**Mon. Nov. 24th** Arrived at Balt. at 3½AM, took lodgings at the “Harlow House,” and at 4AM turned in to get back a little of the sleep lost during the forepart of the night. Arose at 9AM, washed, partook of a cold breakfast, and then started for a short walk. The city seems little altered since I was here last—six years ago. Dropped in at the Balt. Museum—saw the proprietor, Mr. Ince, who immediately offered me an engagement for one or two weeks, as I might choose. The terms being agreeable I arranged to commence on the following Monday—he promising to strengthen his company, which at present is rather a weak one. In the evening I visited the Holliday Street Theatre, where the Florences were playing to a full house—They are making money.

**Tues. Nov. 25th** At 8AM started back to New York—reaching home at about 8 o’clock in the evening.

**Fri. Nov. 28th** 6PM started again for Baltimore. I left home in rather bad spirits, for Bub<sup>6</sup> was somewhat ill, and there is a probability of his getting worse. Cold weather for travelling.

**Sat. Nov. 29th** Reached Balt. 4AM, put up at “Barnum’s Hotel”—went immediately to bed—which bed had too great a paucity of covering for bodily comfort, and was not such as one has a right to expect in a first-class house. Slept until near 10AM. After breakfasting, went to the Museum, where I found the company assembled, conversing mournfully in groups of two, three, or half dozen, according to their dramatic standing; the face of each member wearing a singularly elongated aspect. As I entered the dramatis personæ gazed at me with a vacant stare, those with whom I was acquainted extending towards me a lugubrious welcome. Having beheld such sights before, I knew that this

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6. Bub: nickname Watkins gives his son, George Washington Watkins.

unusual depression of the actor's naturally buoyant spirits could result but from one cause—the manager had neglected the Roman's S.P.Q.R.<sup>7</sup> as defined Theatrically. The Stage manager, Walter S. Leman, beckoned me into his office, and there related to me the whole state of affairs. The Manager, Mr. Ince, was in arrears with everybody—Actors, Musicians, Printers, Gas-company, Newspapers, etc. He told them that he could procure funds in New York, to which place he had gone, two days since, for that purpose, but had not yet returned. Things looked so badly, I was prompted to take the back track for home, but Leman persuaded me to stay by saying he believed Mr. Ince would return in the evening prepared to fulfill his promises. We cast *The Drunkard*, made out a bill, and went on with the rehearsal. Early in the afternoon Ince returned. He told me that his Company would be strengthened by the addition of some people whom he had engaged in New York, and that he had made such further arrangements as would ensure the success of his season. With a skeptical credence as to the candor of his assertions, I yet hoped there might be sufficient truth in them to enable me to get through my engagement creditably—profitably, the prospect was gloomy.

**Mon. Dec. 1st** Pleasant. Rehearsing AM, took a walk PM, at the Museum 7PM. From indications during the day I expected there would be some trouble among Mr. Ince's employees, but it came sooner than anticipated. At the end of the first act of the *Drunkard*—with which piece I opened—there should be a dance by all the characters, but after we had got into position it was suddenly discovered that there was no orchestra. My first thought was that the Prompter had neglected his duties, and not summoned the musicians to their places; but I soon learned that, like Owen Glendower's Spirits,<sup>8</sup> to *summon* them was one thing—to make them *appear* was quite a different affair—they had quit the premises. Mr. Ince, it seemed, had promised the Musicians a certain amount of funds on this evening immediately after the performance began. The overture concluded and the curtain up, they sent to the box office to receive their stipend as agreed upon, but they were too late, other debtors were before them and had cleaned out the treasury. As people in their profession should, they acted in perfect harmony, and refused to issue any more of their dulcet-notes without an equivalent in banknotes. Their absence

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7. S.P.Q.R. (Latin): abbreviation for Senatus Populusque Romanus, or the Senate and People of Rome, referring to the governing of the Republic.

8. Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part 1*, act 3, scene 1.

threw a damper on the evening's entertainment, and was a serious drawback upon me, for I was obliged to omit all the music in the Play, of which there is considerable, and it is an important auxiliary to my acting. However, in spite of all disadvantages, I succeeded in giving satisfaction to the audience, and when the curtain descended, was honored with a call before the curtain. But I am convinced now that the engagement will yield me nothing pecuniarily.

**Fri. Dec. 5th** Pleasant—Rehearsing AM. Another letter from Harriet that Bub was improving—glorious news that. At Theatre 7PM. *Our Country's Sins* and *Live and Let Live* for my Benefit. The Public can't be *dragged* into this place, and, although it is unprofitable and unpleasant to me, I cannot find fault with the meagre audiences I have been compelled to play to during the present week. No person could enjoy a performance in a pigpen, and the audience department of this Museum is only comparable to that filthy receptacle of unclean beasts. Everything is in a filthy and dilapidated state, while the Proprietor, from his *bestly* proclivities, is only fit to cater for hogs. I realized sufficient from the *Benefit* to defray all the expenses I had incurred, but should have been a loser by the engagement had not a free passage been given me to New York.

**Sat. Dec. 6th** Pleasant. At rehearsal AM. Things look squally—Company all demanding money—manager declaring he had none to give. At night when I went to the Museum to prepare for the play, I found the doors locked—reason: the Gas company had cut off the supply of gas and darkness reigned supreme in this dirty Temple of Thespis. I expected something like this, for in the morning Ince wished me to leave town by the early afternoon train—telling me that he did not believe the Company would play. But I saw his object. Had I left he would have thrown upon my shoulders the responsibility of closing the house. This would have been injurious to my prospects, and laid me open to censure from the actors, many of whom would not have played the previous evening had it not been for my Benefit. The Company assembled about the door to talk over their grievances, and then, actor-like, when the worst comes to the worst, laughed and joked over their misfortunes. I took a walk about town and then, at 10PM, went to the Hotel and retired for the night.

**Sun. Dec. 7th** Cold. Passed the AM with some acquaintances, PM settled my bills, and at 8 o'clock started homeward—Reached Philadelphia at



midnight—Had a long and uncomfortable omnibus ride from the Baltimore to the New York depot.

**Mon. Dec. 8th** Cold. The cars were not kept very warm, so that when we arrived at N.Y. all the passengers were pretty well chilled through. Engaged a coach and was driven up home as speedily as possible, arriving there at 6AM. Nobody up in the house, but, being expected, a knock at the door was soon attended to by Harriet. I found Bub fast recovering from his illness—which must have been very severe to have wrought such a change in his appearance in so brief a time. When I entered the room he was lying in his cradle, but as soon as he saw me he raised up and called to me, and when I knelt by his side, he clasped me tightly about the neck and there held me, with his face close pressed to mine, for some minutes without uttering a syllable. My presence appeared to make him feel better, and he was livelier during the day than he had been since my departure. The disease he had been afflicted with was an aggravated case of Scarlatina.<sup>9</sup>

**Thurs. Dec. 25th** Christmas. Cold day. I cannot enjoy anything while idle, and there is no prospect of my being busy for some time to come.

**Wed. Jan. 14th 1857** Another birthday come round—tomorrow I shall enter upon my thirty-third year. What that year has in store for me, its end only can reveal. Fortune has dealt rather hardly with me of late. However, I shall not repine, as, perhaps, it is all for the best. If I can but secure an engagement in this city for the coming season it will be a sufficient recompense for my present loss of time and money. As things look now I see no chance for employment until next autumn. This long period of idleness will eat up the little amount of funds that I had, some years ago, placed in my brother George's hands, and which I had hoped not to have touched until I could have made a profitable investment of it. Now, the probability is, I shall commence next season without being possessed of a single dollar in the world; yet it is fortunate that I had something to fall back upon at the present time, else I should have been running in debt—a thing I have ever had a dread horror of, and which I have, hitherto, been able to avoid.

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9. Scarlatina: scarlet fever.

**Mon. Feb. 23rd** Beautiful day. Washington's Birthday was very generally kept. Last week Mr. E. L. Davenport and myself entered into a partnership in the management of the Chambers Street Theatre, and this evening opened it under the title of the American Theatre to a house not so well-filled as was anticipated, yet still there was a good attendance. The bill consisted of an "allegorical Tableau" arranged in honor of the day—Mrs. E. L. Davenport appeared as the "Goddess of Liberty," and recited Drake's ode to the American Flag,<sup>10</sup> then the Company sang the *Star-Spangled Banner*, after which the scene changed to "Washington crowned by the Goddess of Liberty"—*Faint Heart Never Won Fair Lady* followed, then dancing by Ernestine & Annie Henrarde. The performance concluded with *Our Country's Sinews*, Mr. Davenport as Herman Grey, and myself as June the "nigger." I never beheld a more enthusiastic audience—everybody seemed determined to be pleased. The pieces went off exceedingly well—all things working smoothly. At the conclusion of *Our Country's Sinews*, Davenport and myself were called before the Curtain. We made [turns] taking speeches and were much applauded. Our opening was certainly flattering and augers well for the success of the season.

**Sat. Feb. 28th** Pleasant. Rehearsal AM, writing PM, at Theatre 7PM. Davenport out of the bill. Played four pieces but the house was not good. Nothing but a reduction of prices can save us and the sooner it is done the better.

**Sun. Mar. 1st** Gloomy. Reading & sleeping AM. Spent the afternoon with Davenport and lady. We concluded to try one more week at the present prices, and if the business does not pick up, why, then reduce, and go into the "blood and thunder"<sup>11</sup> style of pieces.

**Fri. Mar. 20th.** I have had so many difficulties to encounter within the last three weeks that I have neglected posting up my journal. We have experienced more ill luck than seemed possible. The receipts of the house have been barely sufficient to cover the expenses—not including in these the salaries of the company which we are not bound to pay if the money does not come into the treasury. The first two weeks we did much more than agreed upon, for we paid the salaries out of our pockets. On the third week we did not pay,

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10. "The American Flag" by US poet Joseph Rodman Drake (1795–1820).

11. "blood and thunder": a dismissive term for melodramas filled with sensationalism and violence.

but there was not the slightest murmur from any member of the company, on the contrary they appeared in the best of spirits. The fourth week being about expiring, with the certainty that the salaries would not be forthcoming, unless we again put our hands into pockets which had been so drained by the previous demands upon them that they could not yield any more, we determined to call a meeting of the company, and, placing the true state of affairs before them, be guided by their decision as to whether we should continue on in hope of better times, or close the Theatre at the end of the present week. Without a single dissentient, every attaché of the establishment told us to go on, that they were willing to go without their salaries for they felt assured that, if the money came in, they would be paid. We desired some of the people to go into the office and look over the books, so that they could see what business had been done—but they refused to do so, saying they had the most implicit confidence in our integrity, and were fully satisfied that they would be justly dealt with. In all my Theatrical experience I never before saw so much sympathy and good feeling between Managers and actors. As I afterwards told Davenport we must have reached a dramatic millennium.<sup>12</sup> It is a great consolation for our losses to know that we are held in such high estimation by our brother-actors. On Monday we produced a local piece called *Modern Insanity, or Forgery and Fashion*—from which we had great expectations, but it was a lamentable failure. The Play was founded on the career of a Wall Street broker named Charles Huntington, who was arrested some few weeks since on the charge of having committed forgeries for over half a million of dollars. His lawyer argued for his acquittal on the ground that Huntington was “*morally insane*.” The novelty of the plea startled the community by the bold effrontery with which it was urged. But “*Modern Insanity*” failed in the courtroom (as well as on the stage) and Huntington was sent to Sing Sing for ten years.

**Sat. Mar. 28th** Rehearsing AM, at Theatre 7PM. *Merchant of Venice, Lord Darnley, & Wealth and Its Temptations* drew a fair house. The audience were very enthusiastic, and, at the conclusion of the first piece, called “Davenport and Watkins” before the curtain. I made a lengthy speech, commenting upon our non-success and telling the many reasons that had been given to account for it. One person, I stated, had given it as his opinion that changing the name of the Theatre and calling it the *American* was the chief cause of the failure. When I said this there was quite an excitement in the house, and one

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12. millennium: a period of peace and prosperity.

gentleman called out to me to give the name of the person who had attributed the failure to the word American. Had I given the name (which was W. E. Burton), it might have led to a serious disturbance but I refused to do so. I spoke for a long while and was loudly cheered.

**Tues. Mar. 31st** Pleasant. We called a meeting of all our employees, and gave them a full statement of the business we had done. They all expressed themselves as being satisfied with the manner in which we had acted towards them, regretting only that we were losers by the speculation. No season ever closed in any Theatre where a better feeling prevailed between the Management and the Company than was evinced on this occasion. After paying off our liabilities, we found that our loss for the five weeks the Theatre was open amounted to about five hundred dollars—a larger sum than either of us can spare.

**Tues. Apr. 28th** Nearly a month has elapsed since I have taken a pen in hand unless for the purpose of writing an answer to letters. Health is the chief blessing, after which an even temperament of mind should call forth eternal gratitude from those whom Nature has dealt so kindly with; for a man thus endowed, although he may never experience the high-wrought feelings of an enthusiast, is spared the curse of those despondent views that depress the spirits of an extremist. I have endeavored to restrain my natural proclivity to run into the extremes of joy and sorrow, and have been, in a great measure, successful in my efforts to that end. But the task has been a difficult one because there has seldom been a medium to my fortunes—they have ever been all smiles or all frowns. I am somewhat inclined to despondency at present, but do not give way, entirely, to my feelings, believing, or, rather, strongly hoping, that the ill-luck which now pursues me, will, ere long, run itself out, leaving me in better condition than ever. Vacillation is my curse. This evening went to the Academy of Music to listen to a discourse delivered by the Rev. Mr. Bellows, on Theatrical amusements and their relation to society. A short time since, in a sermon delivered at his church, he was heard to speak favorably of the Theatre and his followers. A note was sent him by some of the leading actors, thanking him for the kind manner in which he had spoken of themselves and their brethren, and stating that they were desirous of presenting him with some testimonial<sup>13</sup> as a mark of their esteem for the clergy-

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13. testimonial: an event staged to honor an individual, during which speeches of praise are given by his or her friends and colleagues. Typically, one or more gifts memorializing the occasion would also be presented to the honoree.

man who had *dared* to speak a word in their favour. In reply to their note, Mr. Bellows stated that, although he could not consent to receive a presentation, he would like to have the pleasure of delivering an address to the members of the dramatic profession. His offer was accepted, but instead of addressing solely members of the profession, it was afterwards resolved to give a lecture at the Academy of Music, charging the Public fifty cents for admission—the proceeds to be given to the American Dramatic Fund Association. There was a quite a large audience in attendance, and Mr. Bellows delivered the best lecture on amusements that I ever listened to. He made no attempt at oratorical display, but rather sought to promulgate an argument as unanswerable as he could make it. He was thoroughly conversant with his subject, giving a complete review of the Theatre in all its bearings upon society—its power for evil, and its power for good. He nothing extenuated, nor ought set down in malice<sup>14</sup>—censuring where censure was deserved, and praising where praise was merited. He said that he was aware that his conduct would call forth the animadversions of the secular Press and the denunciations of the clergy—he regretted that such would be the case, but the knowledge of that should not deter him from following the dictates of his conscience which taught him thus to proclaim the necessity of amusement for mankind, and his firm conviction that the Theatre afforded, or could be made to do so, the most entertaining and healthful relaxation ever yet devised. One notable feature of this occasion was the presence of nearly the whole of Mr. Bellows’s congregation in a body. It showed the confidence they had in their pastor, and their belief in his honesty of purpose.

**Mon. May 11th** John N. Genin, E. Phalon, Treadwell (proprietor of the St. Nicholas Hotel), and two or three other gentlemen, having had painted a series of pictures illustrative of Dr. Kane’s expedition to the Arctic regions in search of Sir John Franklin,<sup>15</sup> were anxious of procuring some person to write a lecture on the subject, and then travel with the exhibition as lecturer. Genin meeting with E. L. Davenport, asked him if he knew and could recommend a person capable of doing what they wanted. Davenport said he knew exactly the man for their purpose—and named me. Genin, and two or three others associated with him, called upon me and insisted on my going with the ex-

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14. Shakespeare, *Othello*, act 5, scene 2.

15. See chapter 8, note 20.

hibition whether or not they were willing to pay me well for services, but go I must. I showed no external signs of eagerness to accept their proposal, but had some considerable rejoicings inwardly, for it was really a piece of good luck that I could not have anticipated. On the contrary everything betokened a summer of idleness. They wished me, at first, to try if I could teach a Mr. W. Morton how to deliver the lecture, as it was thought he would be a “great card” if he could be taught to do it at all respectably. Morton was a member of the expedition, and a very faithful follower of Dr. Kane’s, having been for a long time a servant in his family. After the return from the Arctic regions, Morton still remained attached to the Doctor and was with him at the time of his death. Morton also gained considerable notoriety as the putative discoverer of the “Open Polar Sea.” He is an Irishman with an extremely limited education, but an excellent brogue. I told Genin and his friends that it was an impossible thing to make an elocutionist of a man unless Nature had laid the foundation, and it was evident that when Morton was created, Nature had no idea of his ever becoming an orator. I declined complying with their wishes, as it seemed too much like getting money under false pretences to undertake a task that I was satisfied could not be accomplished. They then told me that their ideas coincided with mine, but they were anxious to secure the good will of the Kane family who were very desirous of advancing Morton’s interests, to whom the proprietors had promised a large weekly salary if he would deliver a descriptive lecture on the paintings. Philadelphia being the birthplace of Dr. Kane, it was deemed policy to open the exhibition in that city, and what the owners wanted of me was to go on to Philada. one week before the opening night and try to drill Morton into the lecture—in doing which I would become familiar with the subject and, in the event of his breaking down, I would be ready to go right on with it. They declared that they would be perfectly satisfied with what I did, all they wanted of me was to go on and they would pay me liberally for my trouble. I accepted the offer of \$75.00 and expenses—and agreed to leave for Philada. the following day.

**Tues. May 12th** Bade goodbye to Harriet and Bub and started by the 8AM train for Philada.—which place I reached at noon and put up at the Girard House. Morton called on me and I set him to work. He said in New York, while there last week, that he had already committed nearly the whole of the lecture to memory. This I soon saw was a lie, and it was not the only lie I caught him in.

**Sat. May 16th** As the opening night draws near Morton continues to grow more nervous. Today he came to me and said it would be impossible for him to deliver the lecture from memory, but if he was allowed to read from the book the first night he would gain confidence to do without it afterwards. It seemed ridiculous to have a man, whose association with the expedition should have familiarized him with the scenes, describe them from a book, but there was no help for it. It was palpable how the affair would result but it would not do to break with him before a trial was had. Out of respect to the gentlemen who had gone to so much expense in getting up the exhibition, and knowing how much depended on making the first night successful, I consented to deliver an opening lecture and, at the end of it, introduce Morton to the audience, letting him describe the scenes as they were displayed.

**Sun. May 17th** Fine day. A brother of Dr. Kane's called upon me today to thank me for the trouble I had taken with Mr. Morton, saying he was astonished at the improvement I had wrought in him—That I had done something more than to polish a rough Diamond—I had really made a passable jewel out of a brickbat. I thanked Mr. Kane for his Compliment, which was evidently an honest one, but in my own mind was satisfied that “the jewel” could never be made brilliant enough to please the public that had to pay to see it. I took a walk with Mr. Kane who related to me many pleasing incidents in the life of his brother.

**Mon. May 18th** Unpleasant day. Walk AM, called on some friends. Went to Concert Hall, the place of our exhibition, and at 8PM delivered an address on Dr. Kane's Arctic expedition. I concluded my remarks by introducing Mr. Morton to the audience, first alluding, in the most eulogistic terms that I could command, to his devoted attachment to his Commander. Morton was rapturously received, but the enthusiasm I had raised for him cooled off as he advanced with the descriptive lecture. He made a lamentable failure—worse than I expected, for he did not read near as well as he had done to me the day previous. Besides, he spoke so low as not to be intelligible a third way down the hall. The attendance was not so large as we had expected.

**Wed. May 20th** Unpleasant. Morton, at his own earnest desire, was allowed to make another trial this evening, and in his own way. He dispensed with the printed lecture this time, describing the scenes, as they passed, from his own knowledge of them. But he extemporized worse than he read—committing

some of the most ridiculous “Irish bulls.”<sup>16</sup> In speaking of an encounter with a Bear, the beast underwent a singular transformation—when attacked, Bruin was a “*She*,” when killed a “*He*,” when cut up an “*It*.” He did not say what He, She, or It was when eaten—if he had thought of their hunger at the time, he might have said “devilish *good*.” Genin and friends now became satisfied that Morton would not do, and so made me an offer to continue with the exhibition as lecturer. This will probably be a Summer engagement for me.

**Sun. May 31st** The business was excellent during all this week. Yesterday afternoon and evening the hall was filled. Next week they remove the exhibition to Baltimore. They are obliged to do this in consequence of the Hall having been previously engaged for another purpose. It is a pity that they are thus compelled to remove, as a fine business could be done here for a month to come. 5PM started for New York—home at 10 o’clock.

**Fri. June 5th** 8AM started for Baltimore—reaching that city at 5PM. Quarters at the Fountain Hotel, Light Street—W. H. Clabaugh, Proprietor. Monday is fixed for the opening night. It seems unwise to lose three days, because the expenses are nearly the same while closed as when open. Besides this, the thing does not become well known until after several exhibitions. In addition to the newspaper notices, all those persons who witness the representation act as advertisers, and the sooner advertisers are procured the better.

**Thurs. June 11th** Rained during the day. The weather has injured the houses certainly, but the agent, Mr. Paul, by his folly likewise prejudiced the interests of the concern by putting out false advertisements. He had large posters stuck up all over the city announcing that the boat “Faith,” and Eskimo dog “Etah,” would be exhibited in connection with the Panorama; whereas the Boat and Dog were not in the city, nor was it at all certain that they would be. These “relics” possessed great importance from their peculiar connection with Dr. Kane’s expedition. The “Faith” was a small whaleboat in which Kane and fourteen others passed eighty-five days, during which time they were journeying from the place where they had abandoned their Brig to the Danish settlements, being on the way home. “Etah” was the only dog that remained out of those that accompanied the expedition. Of course the anxiety to behold this Boat and Dog was as great as the desire to see the Panorama.

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16. Irish bulls: ludicrous, incongruent, or logically absurd statements.



Although apologies were made for their absence, yet those persons who came expecting to see them went away with the conviction that they had been deceived, and their reports kept other parties from attending. Had there been no announcement made of the Dog & Boat, just the same number would have visited the exhibition on the first two or three nights, and they would have been pleased by what they saw. I could not reason this into Mr. Paul's head—he would have his own way.

**Thurs. June 18th** I have never known so wet a season as the present. Scarcely a day has passed without rain, and some of the showers were like sheets of water—as though the sky was a vast ocean from which the bottom had fallen. Mr. Morton joined us on Monday with the “Faith” and “Etah,” but the houses have not made much improvement. The Public having been once deceived are now rather incredulous. Morton is now a shareholder. Paul has acted the scoundrel by me, and most ungratefully too, for I was the means of his getting a share in this Panorama. A week before we left Philadelphia I entered into a verbal engagement with Paul, who is the agent of the company, for a period of three months, at fifty dollars per week. Then Paul had no interest in the affair, and did not care how high the expenses were; but now he is a partner and finds retrenchment necessary. The first move he makes is to cut off the largest salary, which is done by swearing that the contract with me was but for one month. There was no expostulating with such a man, and I would have satisfied myself *pugnis et calcibus*<sup>17</sup> had not the wretch been so weak as to have made the act unmanly. This is another act of ingratitude added to the many I have experienced through life, and it is nothing more than I expected. I can be deceived in a man now only when I find him grateful.

**Sun. June 21st** Reading and writing AM, 7PM left Baltimore for Philadelphia—at Philada. 11PM, put up at the Girard House.

**Mon. June 22nd** Pleasant. Called on John Drew, now Manager of the National Theatre, to see if he could give me an opening, but there was no chance. 2PM started for New York—reached home at dusk: found all well. To bed early.

**Mon. July 13th** Pleasant. Eddy, who has taken the Bowery Theatre, offered me an engagement, which I accepted, though I am doubtful of our being able to agree very long. He *promises* fair, but I have little faith in *Eddy's* promises.

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17. *pugnis et calcibus* (Latin): with fists and heels.

I know him of old, and unless he has changed his nature, this world contains men more honorable than, I fear, he will ever be.

**Sat. July 25th** Warm weather all this week. The business of the Bowery Theatre has been excellent thus far, whether it will continue so is a question for time to decide. Eddy has not disappointed me—he has broken every promise that he made, and that is just what I expected. The snake can only shed its skin—its nature remains ever the same. What motive Eddy could have for acting towards me, in the manner he has done, is beyond my comprehension. Had he secretly determined to do me a great injury by checking my professional advancement, he could not have adopted a surer course to that end. Yet I am so much in want of funds that I cannot afford to relinquish my engagement, but must cling to it until something better offers. My greatest fear is that it will destroy all my prospects in this city. It is really discouraging to think of the ill-luck that follows me—the scoundrels from whom I have received so much wrong. Called on C. R. Thorne this PM. He talks of going to England, and, if he can secure a Theatre to suit him, go into management there. Should he do so, he wishes to have me with him.

**Sat. Aug. 1st** Beautiful day—Thorne left for Europe on the steamer *Vanderbilt*, taking with him his wife and youngest child. Yesterday, at 12 o'clock M, he gave me a note securing me a free passage on the same vessel. He also promised to send me back whenever I wished to return. I came home and talked it over with my wife, but she couldn't listen to the idea; indeed I little expected that she would, willingly, consent to my departure, her confinement being so near at hand. Besides, considering my present limited resources, a voyage to Europe would be rather a hazardous undertaking. If there had been any certainty of my being able to effect an engagement in London, I should not have hesitated a moment, feeling confidence in my ability to make a favorable impression, should the circumstances prove at all favorable. As Thorne went out on business he was much disappointed at my not accompanying him, as, from my having been there before,<sup>18</sup> he believed that I would be of great use to him.

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18. During the 1855–56 season (when there is a significant gap in the diary), it seems Watkins traveled to England, because he is listed among the passengers of the *Baltic* who sailed from Liverpool to New York City in August 1856. *Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1820–1897*, Microfilm Publication M237, roll 165, Records of the US Customs Service, National Archives, Washington, DC, *Ancestry.com*, accessed November 15, 2017, [https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/7488/NYM237\\_165-0462](https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/7488/NYM237_165-0462)

My feelings were anything but pleasant at seeing the vessel sail without me. I love my wife and child but they are a great drawback to me. . . .

**Tues. Aug. 4th** Reading, writing, and downtown AM. As per agreement, called on Eddy at two PM. He said that he was sorry anything had occurred to cause me unpleasant feelings, and acknowledged that I had cause of grievance. I recounted what had passed between us prior to his opening the Theatre—how he had made me three important promises and broken them all. First, I was to be the “Acting Manager” provided that a man whom he had engaged for that position did not arrive in town on a certain day—the man did not arrive for two days after the appointed time, but I was not made acting manager. Second, if James Anderson, the stage manager, was not adequate to fulfill the active duties of that position, they would devolve upon me: Anderson did *not arrive at all* and another person was made the stage manager. Thirdly, my position in the Theatre was to be *second only to Mr. Eddy*. The loss of the acting and Stage management I cared little for, but when he struck at my position as an actor he was doing me an irreparable injury, and to accomplish this seemed to be Mr. Eddy’s sole aim. Some half dozen names were displayed at the head of the bill, but mine was not one of the number, although I have not appeared in New York for several years without having my name placed prominently before the public. Two of the individuals whose names figured so conspicuously on the Bowery Theatre bills were Mr. R. Johnston and C. T. Smith. The former Mr. Eddy did not regard as a friend, and vowed to me that he would not have him, Johnston, in the company on any consideration. As to Smith, Eddy could hardly find language sufficiently strong with which to denounce him—“Scoundrel” and “Thief” were the favorite adjectives employed. This denunciation of Smith was caused by his having involved Eddy in a debt of seventeen hundred dollars, for the rent of a Theatre at Troy; in the management of which they had been connected as far as profits were concerned, while Eddy was alone responsible for the losses. But these are the men to whom Eddy assigns the posts of honor, and when I mentioned the singular fact, he made some shallow excuse. We conversed for some time, when we were interrupted, and he desired me to call and see him again in a day or two. I do not think that I shall have anything more to do with him in the way of business, unless I can find no opportunity of engaging elsewhere.

**Thurs. Aug. 27th** Burton being about to open the National Theatre, Philada., his acting manager, Mr. H. C. Jarrett, spoke to him in regard to making an

engagement with me for the stage management. Burton approved the suggestion, and Jarrett told me to see him on the subject. Having sought an engagement with Burton on several different occasions, and at times when I knew he really wanted a person of my capacity, without being able to effect anything, I felt satisfied that he had some private feeling against me individually, and that that private feeling arose from political, or national, prejudices. This opinion was confirmed fully in my conversation with him today, for the first words he addressed to me were—“*such a hot native American as you are wouldn't engage with a bloody Englishman, would ye?*” I answered—“*how can I help myself, the bloody Englishmen have got possession of our best Theatres, and I must either engage with them or lie idle, which I cannot afford*”—that, “*I had no particular prejudice against men of talent, no matter where they came from, all I wanted was an equal chance.*” We talked the thing all over, in a friendly way, and the result of our conversation was my being engaged as stage Manager and principal Low Comedian at a salary of \$40.00 (forty dollars) per week—quite a respectable sum. I shall now have an opportunity of ascertaining if there is anything really good in Burton, a thing much doubted by nearly all who have had any dealings with him. If entire devotion to his interests, as far as in my duty lies; if unwearied industry and close application to business will gain his favor and win from him a reciprocity of action, it shall be no fault of mine if our intercourse does not continue harmonious until the termination of my engagement.

**Sat. Aug. 29th** We open in Philada. on Monday, having got together sufficient people for that purpose. Packed up P.M. Running about the streets all day put me in a condition, when bedtime came, to enjoy a good sleep. The prospect of soon being under salary is quite refreshing to a purse already *in extremis*.

**Sun. Aug. 30th** Beautiful day. Dined with mother and George—settled up my board bill—at 6P.M. started for Philada. with Harriet and Bub. Harriet being enceinte I was desirous that she should remain in N.Y. where, in her sickness, she would have the assistance of both my Mother and her own. But she pleaded so strongly to accompany me that I could not deny her. Reached Philada. at 10P.M. and put up at the American House, Chestnut Street.

## THIRTEEN

1857–58

*Starting the season in Philadelphia with his wife and son, Watkins is offered and accepts a position as Director of Amusements at P. T. Barnum's American Museum in New York City, where he writes *The Pioneer Patriot* and *The Bride of an Evening*. Feeling overworked and underpaid, Watkins refuses Barnum's request to write more plays. His second son, Harry Clay Watkins, is born. He and a fellow actor at Barnum's Museum, Mrs. Charles Howard (née Rose Shaw), agree to collaborate on a US tour.*



**Sun. Sept. 6th** Our first week has been a very successful one. Burton and myself have got on well. He begins to learn that my *Americanism* does not blind me to the merits of any man, wherever his birthplace, or to the faults of my own countrymen.

**Sun. Sept. 13th** Another successful week has passed. Life can have but little enjoyment for Burton, and so he confesses. In business he looks upon every man as a scoundrel or a thief, while at home he knows no such thing as domestic comfort. He seems to be very fond of his Children, but his wife keeps him in hot water. I have heard from mutual friends that Burton speaks of me in the highest terms—that he believes me one of the most honorable men that he has ever had dealings with. Knowing that he was about to leave for New York, to remain away for two or three weeks, Dr. Shelton Makenzie asked him who would take charge of the Theatre in his absence—Burton replied, “Oh, I’m perfectly safe here with Watkins, in whom I have every confidence.” This remark is all very well but *it amounts to nothing*. No reliance can be placed on Burton’s friendship—it is too fickle, and only to be retained at the sacrifice of every feeling of manhood. And on such terms I would not purchase the friendship of mortal man.

**Mon. Sept. 14th** Rehearsal AM. At Theatre 7PM. Burton’s last night—an excellent house. I doubt if there are more than one or two other “stars” in the country who could have drawn such good houses as has Burton during the past fortnight, and he could have played two weeks longer to business just as good, but he was obliged to go on to N.Y. to meet Charlotte Cushman, who is expected to arrive from England by the steamer *Persia* tomorrow. She is engaged to play with Burton, but other Managers have been writing to her such reports of his inability to do well by her that there is some fear of her seeking to break the engagement.

**Sun. Sept. 20th** The Florences closed their engagement last night—and a very bad engagement it was for the Theatre, although profitable to them. They received a certainty of sixty dollars per night, while the receipts of the house averaged but a little over one-hundred dollars nightly. It is not a very pleasant reflection to dwell upon—that this man Florence, without the smallest share of talent, should receive as much for his services in five *nights* as it takes me nearly eight *weeks* to earn, and then the difference in our labors—that which he performs can scarcely be called labor, it is merely pastime, whereas I have

barely more leisure than is required for eating and sleeping, the whole of my time being occupied at the Theatre. At eight in the AM I go to the Box Office, and count over the tickets taken at the door on the previous night (Burton requested me to do this that he might have a check upon the treasurer, of whom he is suspicious)—after this, rehearsal, bill making, and casting of Plays occupies me till past 3PM—then to dinner—after that I prepare notices for the newspapers which fills up the time till dusk—the entire evening is, of course, passed in attending to the performance. As I am obliged to play in the majority of Pieces it may be premised that I have little opportunity for study—winging my parts is about all I am able to do.

**Mon. Sept. 21st** Received a letter from John N. Genin wishing to know if I would accept an engagement, as Stage Manager, in the city of New York. I answered that I certainly would if I could leave Mr. Burton with honor. Miss Kimberly commenced an engagement this evening, opening in *Love*—Mr. J. E. Mills, from the London Theatres, making his appearance in the part of Huon, which he played very poorly. He has evidently belonged to some blood-and-thunder melodramatic Theatre where he was obliged to shout until his lungs broke down—this, added to “gin drinking,” has left him but little in the way of voice, and that little extremely husky and unpleasant.

**Sat. Sept. 26th** Mr. Delmano, the Artist, came on from New York to see me in regard to the letter written by John N. Genin. The engagement is for Barnum’s Museum,<sup>1</sup> the manager of which had given up dramatic performances some few months since, but is now anxious to resume. I had a long talk with Delmano, but he was not authorised to offer me as much salary as I wanted, and so our conversation did not result in anything. He returns to New York this evening but if they want me very much I shall hear from them again. Benefit and last appearance of Miss Kimberly—*Jack Sheppard* and *George Barnwell* drew the best house of the week, yet it was not good enough to be profitable.

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1. P. T. Barnum’s American Museum (1841–1865) was at the corner of Broadway and Ann Streets in New York City. It housed a variety of displays and amusements, including scientific instruments, animals (such as a white whale and the “Happy Family” menagerie), extraordinary people (including conjoined twins Chang and Eng; Charles S. Stratton, widely known as “Tom Thumb”; and the “What Is It?” exhibit, featuring William Henry Johnson and others), and theatrical performances in the “Lecture Room.”

**Mon. Sep. 28th** A letter from John Greenwood, manager of the American Museum, making me a direct offer—I wrote back that my lowest terms would be \$35.00 per week and two half-clear benefits.<sup>2</sup> J. E. Murdoch opened with us this evening, being his first appearance in this city since his return from Europe. He opened in the *Inconstant* to a good house, but not near as full as was expected. This may be attributed to the great monetary panic now existing throughout the whole country. It is feared that we shall experience the hardest times ever known in this country—Banks and Merchants are failing by the wholesale.<sup>3</sup>

**Mon. Oct. 5th** Murdoch's business during the past week has been from fair to middling. He is much disheartened at his ill luck, and would like to back out from the engagement, but Burton will not let him do so. As soon as I concluded to accept the Museum engagement I wrote to Burton to learn if he would give his consent to my withdrawal from his services as I was desirous of parting with him on good terms. His answer should have reached me long before this, but not coming, I was compelled today either to accept or refuse the above offer, as Mr. Greenwood came on from New York last night to get my final answer. After consulting with Mr. Murdoch, and several other friends, I, acting upon their advice, accepted Greenwood's offer. No doubt it will cause a breach between myself and Burton that can never be healed, but my engagement with him is of an exceedingly uncertain tenure and may be brought to a conclusion at any moment, leaving me, through lack of funds, in a very uncomfortable position.

**Tues. Oct. 6th** I have really been so busy during the past few weeks, as hardly to note a most important event—the birth of Harry Clay Watkins, occurring at 9PM of September twenty-third. I was at the Theatre when Dr. Godard stepped into my dressing-room and announced that my wife, after considerable travail, had made another addition to our family. Well I hope I shall be able to provide bread for this extra mouth, and for all the extra ones it may please the Lord to confide to my charge. Harriet suffered much more with this child than with George, although the latter was a considerably larger babe. I should much like to have had Harry born in New York, however it is sufficient to know that he is an American.

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2. A "half-clear benefit" was a performance for which the actor would receive a full half of the box office takings, with no deductions made for overheads or house charges.

3. The sudden downturn in the US economy known as the Panic of 1857 had begun the previous month.



**Fri. Oct. 9th** The business not being satisfactory here, Burton determined to remove the company on to Baltimore, and so we closed this evening with Murdoch's benefit—the *Gamester* and *Honey-Moon*.

**Sat. Oct. 10th** 8AM started for Baltimore—reached here at 1PM. Went immediately to the Theatre for the purpose of rehearsing. Opened to a splendid house. The Plays were the *Robbers* and *Founded on Facts*. Wishing to be near the Theatre I put up at a tenth class Hotel and was nearly eaten up with bugs the first night.

**Wed. Oct. 14th** Election day—there being a great deal of rioting<sup>4</sup> it was deemed advisable not to give any performance this evening. Had we played it would have been done to an empty house, for few people cared about venturing into the streets as the chances were about equal as to his returning home by his own assistance or being brought on a shutter.<sup>5</sup>

**Thurs. Oct. 15th** Two days since Burton sent me a note couched, as near as I can remember, in the following words. "*I do not see any necessity for giving my consent to your withdrawal, as I perceive that you are already announced to appear in this city (N.Y.). Mr. G. Boniface will be in Baltimore on Friday to relieve you, therefore terminate your engagement with the present week. I am glad to find that you have obtained a situation more congenial to your feelings. Respects W. E. Burton.*"<sup>6</sup>

**Mon. Dec. 28th** [New York City, American Museum] On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of last week we revived the *Rose of Penrith*, and on Thursday evening, Christmas Eve, we produced *Valentine and Orson*—the new version brought out by me in Cincinnati during my last season there. It made a fine impression, and drew excellent houses during the remainder of the week.

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4. These were the first city council elections in Baltimore and riots occurred due to several Democratic candidates being withdrawn from the ballot as well as concerns over unfair voting practices. One police sergeant was shot and killed during the riots.

5. shutter (in this context): stretcher.

6. The subsequent page in the diary is torn in half and several portions are heavily redacted. As a result, entries from the month of November are missing. During this time, Watkins travels to New York City and begins his employment as Director of Amusements at Barnum's American Museum.

**Mon. Jan. 11th 1858** Another week of good business with *Valentine and Orson*, so good as to warrant its performance for another week. Trying to think what would be likely to draw the best, I determined to essay a dramatization of one of the *New York Ledger* stories. The *Ledger* is a family paper, and has the largest circulation of any paper ever issued in this Country. Its last story was on a National Subject, and called the *Pioneer Patriot, or, The Maid of The War Path*. I thought the title a good one, and so commenced yesterday to construct a drama from the story. If that does not draw it will be apt to bring our Theatrical season to a close.<sup>7</sup>

**Mon. Jan. 18th** *Valentine and Orson* last week to fair houses. Having partially completed a four-act Drama of the *Pioneer Patriot* I put it in rehearsal on Friday, and tonight give the first performance of it. The endings of several of the scenes I did not finish until this morning. However, the actors think well of the Drama and believe it will succeed. I have certainly constructed an effective piece—the only thing that remains is to get the public to come and see it.

**Tues. Jan. 19th** A good audience present last night to witness the first representation of the *Pioneer*—which really achieved a brilliant success. I played a negro part, “Jocko,” and made a double hit—as dramatist and actor. Philip Lancey I intended should be the hero, but it was played so badly that the whole weight of the play came on my shoulders. Jocko is a capital acting part, of the serio-comic nature. His master and mistress are constantly getting into scrapes and Jocko is constantly getting them out again.

**Mon. Feb. 8th** Fine houses to see the *Pioneer* last week. Nobody expected that there could be ever any money made at the Museum again—it was too far out of the way, was worn out, etc.—but now people begin to think differently. Barnum, who had quite neglected the place, is now full of enthusiasm—he feels satisfied that there is “money to be made in the Museum yet,” and he is determined “to build it up again.” That is to say, after I have discovered a vein he is going to work it. But I am satisfied the Museum can never be made what it once was—its situation forbids that.

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7. This is the only play Watkins published: *The Pioneer Patriot; or, The Maid of the War Path* (New York: William B. Smith, 1858). It is based on the serialized story by Sylvanus Cobb Jr. (1823–1887), which is set during the American Revolution and depicts clashes between colonial settlers, British soldiers, and Native Americans.

**Mon. Feb. 22nd** Washington's Birthday. As an appropriate piece we performed the *Pioneer Patriot* twice, afternoon and evening, winding up with an allegorical Tableau arranged in honor of the occasion. The *Pioneer* drew well last week, this week—the sixth—is to be the last of it for the present. I am working myself to death here. Last week I did what I have never before done—disappointed the public. On Tuesday evening I was so sick that I was unable to stand on my feet—could I have done that I should have played. My head was willing to act, but the legs and body rebelled and so the head was obliged to lay down. When I was getting up the *Pioneer Patriot* Barnum thought it was impossible for me to do it in the time I stated, but having done it, he now wishes me to perform a still more difficult task—construct a *five act Play in eight days*. I consented to undertake it but I have little hope of accomplishing the task. The story to be dramatised is the *Bride of An Evening*, written by Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth<sup>8</sup>—who is about the best among the female authoresses of this country, but her novels, although dramatic in the reading, are not *stagey*. It would be a much easier job to write an original play than to construct one from a story of hers. But in this case something must be done in order to take advantage of the *Ledger's* circulation. The proprietor of the paper, Mr. Robert Bonner, kindly furnished me with proof sheets of the story before it was finished in publication.

**Fri. Feb. 26th** After three days' hard labor I have contrived to form, from the *Bride of an Evening*, a plot for a play, and tomorrow I shall commence on the play itself. I have not much faith in the result.

**Sat. Feb. 27th** Played in the PM but left myself out of the bill in the evening for the purpose of writing. The *Pioneer* had forty-seven representations.

**Mon. Mar. 1st** Wrote all day and until half-past two of the following morning—then went to bed pretty well tired out. First act finished.

**Tues. Mar. 2nd** Slept till 8AM—washed, dressed, breakfasted, and took the first act down to the Museum for the copyist to go to work on. Wrote all day.

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8. Novelist Emma Dorothy Eliza Nevitte Southworth (1819–1899) published many stories in serial form, and exclusively so with the *New York Ledger* from 1857.

**Wed. Mar. 3rd** To bed at half-past one this morning—up at seven—at work all day—completed the second act but broke down at 9PM and obliged to go to bed.

**Fri. Mar. 5th** To bed at 3AM—up again at 8AM hard to work. The Piece cannot be played on Monday, as desired—I may have it finished, but there will be no time for study.

**Sun. Mar. 7th** Wrote all the morning. In the afternoon had a meeting of leading members of the company to hear the piece, as far as I had written it, read. They expressed themselves well pleased, and thought the *Bride of an Evening* would be a success. At ½ past nine PM I wrote the *tag* and gave a whoop! hurrah! To write a five-act Play in eight days is something to boast of—*provided the Play is good for anything*. I fear, however, that I shall pay for it in loss of health. During the whole time I have not taken an hour's exercise, and the last two days I suffered a great deal of pain. To bed at 10PM with a mind somewhat relieved.

**Wed. Mar. 10th** Pleasant—Rehearsal AM. PM the house was crowded to witness the first performance of the *Bride of an Evening*—which achieved an unqualified success. The only fault found was in regard to its length—it playing nearly four hours. The pruning knife will remedy that fault. In the evening the piece went smoother.

**Thurs. Mar. 11th** Called a rehearsal this morning, and cut three quarters of an hour out of the *Bride of an Evening*.

**Fri. Mar. 19th** Mrs. Southworth arrived last night and witnessed a performance of the *Bride of an Evening*. This morning, by invitation, I called on her at the residence of Mr. Horace Day, where she is staying. I had three hours' very agreeable talk with her. She expressed herself as being highly pleased with my dramatization of her story, and was anxious that I should put some of her other works in a dramatic form. In appearance, Mrs. Southworth is not very prepossessing—indeed she is what would be termed a homely woman. She has a sallow complexion, prominent nose, and dull blue eyes. Her age I should judge to be the *wrong* side of forty-five. I have learned that she has had a great deal of trouble, domestic and otherwise, and this is visible in her care-

worn looks. I should take her to be a woman of strong nerve—one impatient of restraint, and not easily governed.

**Fri. Mar. 26th** This evening was set apart as a benefit to Mrs. Southworth—the Management paying her one hundred dollars for the use of her name. After the performance I was called before the curtain and made a lengthy speech on the American Drama etc. Mrs. Southworth, who was in a private box, was then called upon. She arose and made a short speech, but it was inaudible six feet from where she stood. She paid me a very high compliment.<sup>9</sup>

**Sat. May 15th** Afternoon and evening played *Clari*, *Maid of Milan*, and *Ticklish Times*—the latter a new English Farce—its first performance in this city. Good House. Barnum called me into his office on Thursday last and desired me to go to work and dramatize the last new *Ledger* story. I told him if I did so, I should certainly make a charge for it. This rather astonished Barnum, who thought he had a good thing on me—by getting the work of three men out of one for one salary. As the play had to be written in one week, he proposed to leave me out of the bill for that week and to consider my labor as an author an equivalent for my not acting. But I would not listen to any such bargain—the odds were too strong against me. As the author I should have had as much labor to perform in one week as would have been required in a month of acting. Barnum, finding that I was really determined to be paid for my services, made an effort to be liberal and offered me twenty-five dollars extra for my trouble. His *liberality*, however, instead of developing my gratitude, excited my indignation, and I inwardly resolved not to do the dramatizing. After some further talk I gave the “great showman” my opinions, in accordance with the above resolve, and told him that I would find a playwright who would do the work at his price. The result was I hunted up a Mr. J. F. Poole who agreed to furnish the play for forty dollars. This figure was satisfactory, and the gentleman went to work. I suppose that I have, by this act, offended my kindhearted employers, and, probably, converted them into enemies. It was a bad day for me when I put my pen to paper. Before I produced the *Pioneer Patriot*, Barnum and Greenwood were highly pleased with my efforts. They pronounced me the best stage manager and actor that they had ever had, but when they discovered that I could do still more, then there appeared to be no limits to their

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9. A page has been carefully cut from the binding of the diary here, and the content for all of April 1858 is missing.

requirements. They were not satisfied when I had shown them the mine from which the gold could be dug—but wanted me to dig it out for them—I taking the labor for my pains, and they reaping the profits. Instead of thanking me for what I have done they are now angry because I refuse to do more without some *compensation* for my services, and the result will be that this season will end my connection with them. Some other person will step in and reap the benefit of my labors. Well, so be it.

**Wed. May 19th** First performance of Mr. Poole's dramatization of *Rosalind Hubert*. It was a failure, and could hardly have been otherwise, for the dramatist had made no attempt to construct a *drama*—he merely took chapters from the story and strung them together without making any allowance for lapse of time, so that both the language and the scenes were one mass of incongruities, not bearing the slightest relation to each other. But the play was worth the money paid for it, although Barnum thinks forty dollars is the full value of a dramatist's labor. He may think differently if he lives long enough—as yet he is ignorant of the difference between muscle and brains.

**Mon. May 31st** *Rosalind Hubert* has been a great failure—the houses falling off every night. Barnum seems much put out by the result—probably he finds his forty dollars was badly invested. He will never forgive me for having caused him to pay away a sum of money that I might have saved his treasury as a free-dramatist.

**Mon. June 14th** *Two Loves* ran through last week to rather slim houses. This afternoon and evening having been set apart for my Benefit, I produced a new piece, written by myself. It was founded on a story published in the *New York Sun*, and entitled *Jessie Wharton, the Traitor's Daughter, or, The Boy Martyrs of The War 1812*. When the day was appointed on which my Benefit was to take place, I was puzzled how to get out an attractive bill. At first I thought of getting an array of popular names, but, upon reflection, I determined to depend on myself, and the result showed the wisdom of the choice—there was over three hundred dollars in the house, which was, considering the dullness of the times, an extraordinary sum. The Play was as successful as any produced during the season. I played Toney, an old negro, and made a really great hit.

**Mon. June 28th** Another week of *Jessie Wharton*—business only a paying one. This has been the worst Theatrical season ever known. Ours is the only

establishment in the city that has realized a profit, and this result is entirely due to the production of dramatized “Sensation stories.” Had it not been for the *Pioneer Patriot*, *Bride of an Evening*, and *Jessie Wharton*, the management would have had to record a loss. Any other style of Pieces, however great their merit, or however well they might have been placed upon the stage, would not have drawn the expenses of the house.

**Fri. July 2nd** There was a grand procession today in honor of the removal of President Monroe’s remains. He died in this city on the 4th of July 1831, and was deposited in a vault in the 2d Street burial ground. The government of his native state, having erected a monument to his memory at Richmond, Virginia, the coffin, containing the Ex-President’s bones, were yesterday disinterred and placed in the Governor’s room at the City Hall; the Eighth regiment acting as a guard of honor. When it became known that the state of Virginia desired Monroe’s removal, the crack regiment of the New York state militia—the Seventh—one of the finest and best disciplined bodies of soldiers in the world—offered to escort the remains from New York to Richmond, and likewise<sup>10</sup> defray the whole of the expenses. The patriotic offer was accepted and the steamer *Ericsson* chartered to convey the soldiers to Richmond. The body, with the Virginia Committee, went by the steamer *Jamestown*. This act of the Seventh regiment will do more to promote a good feeling between the North and South, and bind the Union together in harmony, than the traitorous disunionists can undo in a quarter of [a] Century.

**Sat. July 10th** Last day of the season. Afternoon played to a good house *Founded on Facts*, *To Paris and Back*, and *Nature & Philosophy*—evening *Forest of Bondy* and *Nature & Philosophy* to a poor house. Now for an idle time.

**Mon. July 19th** Wrote last week to Mrs. C. Howard to learn if she would join me in a starring tour through the states. Received a favorable answer from her today, and, in compliance with her wish, wrote out the full particulars of what I purposed doing.

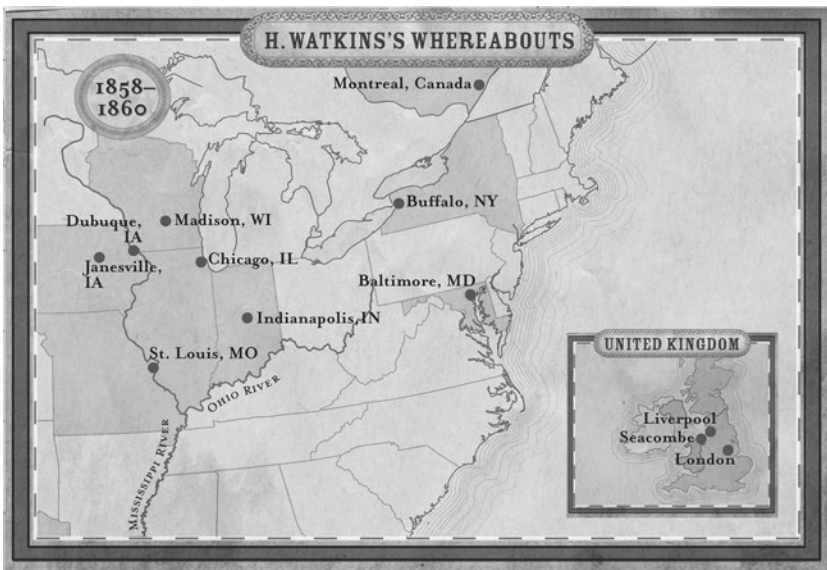
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10. At this point in the diary, a page has been erroneously inserted from the June 11, 1860 entry. We have omitted this page and continued Watkins’s narrative as originally written.

## FOURTEEN

1858–60

*Watkins's account of these two seasons was written after the fact and with the benefit of hindsight. He relates how he and Mrs. Rose Howard convened in Baltimore in the summer of 1858, then went on a "starring tour" to Montreal, upstate New York, Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Missouri. They then traveled to Liverpool and eventually London, seeking engagements. While on tour, he performs a condensed version of his play *The Pioneer Patriot* (retitled *Pioneers of America* for English audiences), and meets actress *Madame Céleste* and playwrights *James Planché* and *Tom Taylor*. Watkins expresses amusement and frustration about the way people from the United States are portrayed upon the English stage and complains about how some British actors market themselves as "American." He also muses on international copyright law and the genius of *Shakespeare's* plots.*





**Mon. June 11th 1860**<sup>1</sup> After a lapse of two years I again resume “My journal.”<sup>2</sup> Those two years have wrought more changes in my fortunes than any previous two years in my eventful and ever-changing life. Well, I have now no hope for rest this side [of] the grave. Thank God! there *is* rest there—at least till the judgement day. It will be impossible to give more than a brief outline of the occurrences of the past two years. . . .

Having made arrangements to travel as a “Star” in conjunction with Mrs. Howard<sup>3</sup> I joined her at Baltimore to play six nights at the Front St. Theatre, which was then open for the summer season of 1858 under the commonwealth system.<sup>4</sup> The weather was oppressively warm, and we had no idea of doing anything more than merely paying expenses, as Baltimore is a poor Theatrical town at the best of times; but our engagement was much more successful than anybody anticipated, for our income was considerably more than our outlay, and inspired us with confidence for the campaign. Commencing so late in the season, however, placed us under the disadvantage of being compelled to take engagements just as we could get them—whereas starring is only profitable when a series of engagements can be made to follow each other in close succession. We next played at Montreal, Canada, under the management of J. W. Buckland—commencing September 13th. Unfortunately we could play here but six nights, by reason of having made a prior engagement to open at Buffalo the 21st of Sept. Mrs. Howard being an established favorite in [M]ontreal, we did very finely, so well indeed that Buckland was anxious that we should break our Buffalo contract and continue on, but we thought it impol[itic] to violate our contracts in the outset of our starring tour, however unprofitable they might result. . . . Our engagement here lasted from the 21st of September to the 1st of October. We were to have played on the 2d but there being no Sunday travel, and as we were to open at Dubuque on the 4th, we gave up one night so that we might get off on Saturday morning. Our receipts here were better than anticipated. Reaching Chicago early Sunday morning, we were obliged to put up at a hotel until evening—when we took the night train for Dubuque, arriving there pretty well tired out on the 4th

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1. Watkins indicates that he wrote this entry (detailing his recollections of touring several US cities in 1858) while in London. Subsequent entries discuss his activities in Liverpool and London and are dated by Watkins to indicate when they happened.

2. In 1859, Watkins divorced his first wife, Harriet M. Secor (see introduction). This entire year is missing from the diary and is not mentioned in his recollections here.

3. Rose Howard (née Shaw) became Watkins’s second wife in 1860. Watkins refers to her variously as Mrs. Howard, Rose, and Mrs. W.

4. See chapter 8, note 16.

of October. . . . From Dubuque we returned to Chicago, where we opened at the National Theatre, under the management of D. Hanchett, on the 18th of October. Two weeks' engagement had yielded us a little over one hundred dollars. From Chicago we went to Madison and Janesville. In these towns we made a little over our expenses, and that was more than was made by any stars that preceded us, for there was very little money to be had in the West this season. Our next engagement was at the St. Louis Theatre, St. Louis. Henry Farren, Manager. Here we played six nights to indifferent houses, and went thence to Indianapolis, Indiana. The Theatre here was under the management of C. J. Sherlock. Our receipts were eighty dollars. This town is only good during the sessions of the Legislature. It was in session while we were there, and the business was very good, but the sharing terms were too high for us to get a fair proportion of what we drew. At the time we were playing at Indianapolis the Legislature was warmly debating a divorce law. I arranged a Farce on the subject,<sup>5</sup> and it drew an excellent house on the occasion of my benefit. On the 20th of December we returned to Chicago to fulfill a two weeks' engagement at McVicker's Theatre, J. H. McVicker, Manager. . . .

**Sat. May 5th 1860** Left for England on the Steamship *City of Baltimore*. . . .

**Thurs. May 17th** Arrived at Liverpool early this (Thursday) morning. Put up at the George Hotel, Lime Street. I felt very well after the voyage, but Rose was much fatigued. After breakfasting I procured a directory and hunted up her relatives—found that Mr. J. O. Marples, who had married one of her nieces, was a printer and kept his office at 50 Lord Street—called there and learned that he was at his residence, Queen's Terrace, Seacombe, situated at the opposite side of the Mersey, and that his mother-in-law, Mrs. Jane Pardey, was residing with him. I took a note from Rose to her sister, who was very glad to hear of her arrival, and accompanied me back to town. As it was necessary that I should proceed to the Metropolis<sup>6</sup> in quest of an opening, we made an arrangement for Rose to board with her niece, Mrs. Marples, during my absence. On reaching London, I called upon J. N. Anson, a dramatic agent, who introduced me to Benjamin Webster, manager of the Adelphi. I read him the *Pioneer Patriot*, which I had somewhat altered and rechristened the *Pioneers of America*—changing the action of the Play from our revolutionary war

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5. *How to Get a Divorce* (circa 1858), later called *It Takes Two to Quarrel*.

6. Metropolis (in this context): London.

to the war of 1755–6, when France and England were struggling for supremacy on the western continent, and Englishmen and Americans fought together under the same banner against a common foe. I hardly think *that* Union will ever occur again! Webster expressed himself well pleased with the play, but could not make any positive arrangement with me until his return from Paris, whither he was going the following day. Thinking it best to put other irons in the fire, I wrote to Madame Céleste, who had become Manageress of the Lyceum Theatre, informing her of our arrival in London, and requesting an interview. The following morning I received a note inviting me to call upon her. I did so and the result was an arrangement to open with her, on Oct. 7th, with the *Hidden Hand*—to play one month at a salary of £10.00 per week; the arrangement to be extended if mutually satisfactory. I was thought extremely fortunate in having secured this opening, and so I should have been had I compelled Céleste to adhere closely to the contract. Having concluded the business which took me to London I returned to Seacombe, where I passed a very pleasant summer. Deeming it advisable to get in acting trim before assaying a Metropolitan audience, and anxious to see how we would be received by an English audience, I called upon W. R. Copeland, manager of the Theatre-Royal and Amphitheatre, Liverpool, with whom I arranged to open, alone, in the *Pioneers*. This Copeland was a true representative of John Bullism<sup>7</sup>—his opinions were infallible, and for a person not from the British Isles to dissent from them, was the height of presumption, impertinence, and absurdity. After the opening was arranged he expressed a desire to read the *Pioneers*, and I told him it was not a Play written with a view to claiming attention as a work possessing any literary excellence whatever, but was constructed with an eye, solely, to *dramatic effect*. He informed me that he did not anticipate anything more, but that it was necessary for him to read a play before casting it. After reading he politely informed me that the *Pioneers* was *trash*, and, as I was afterwards informed, he stated in the Green Room, to the company, that he very much regretted having given his consent to produce the Play—that it was execrable and *must fail*—that nothing could save it but my performance of “The Nigger,”<sup>8</sup> and he did not see how it was possible for me to make any-

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7. John Bull is a national personification of England created by John Arbuthnot (1667–1735) in his political allegory, *The History of John Bull* (1712). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Bull, John.”

8. Referring to Watkins’s signature role of “Jocko, the Ape Negro” in *The Pioneer Patriot* (or *Pioneers of America*). For more on this character and its predecessors in US theater culture, see Amy E. Hughes, “White Rebels, ‘Ape Negroes,’ and Savage Indians: The Racial Poetics of National

thing of that—he had read it and could see nothing that gave an actor, whatever his ability, any scope to display his talent. Now this prejudgement, and in so public a manner, was contemptible in the extreme, for if it did no other harm it tended to make the company lukewarm in the representation of their own parts, and thus deprive me of whatever strength my own performance might derive from an efficient support. Of course after this autocratic opinion of the Managerial demi-god, the lamentable failure of the “new American Actor” was a foregone conclusion.

**Tues. Aug. 14th** Assured of my failure, and in order to give his prophecy every chance of fulfillment, Copeland would not give me an opening on the Monday, but announced me for Tuesday—*the worst night in the week*. Very little publicity was given to my opening; still the attendance nearly doubled that of the previous night, and, with the exception of Mr. Marples, there was not a single person in the house [who] had ever seen me before. On my first entrance there was a very generous reception extended to me, and at the end of the first act there was a very good call—at the end of the 2d act there was a still better call, while at the termination of the Play, so great was the enthusiasm of the audience, I was summoned twice before the curtain. The next evening Copeland made another statement in the Green Room—that my performance of Jocko was not only the best piece of negro acting he had ever seen, but it was one of the greatest bits of acting he had ever seen *of any kind*; and yet this *brute* had not the manliness to speak to me one kind word of encouragement, although I was a stranger in a strange land, and he had been ungenerous enough to prophecy my failure. I played three nights of this week—Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. Previous to my opening the nightly receipts had ranged, for several weeks, from £8 to £15—on my third night the receipts were over £70 although it was at the dullest period of the year and in a remarkably dull business season. I played two weeks for which I received only a benefit and sharing after £25, even on that night.

**Mon. Sept. 10th** Commenced a re-engagement of two weeks in conjunction with Rose—opening in *Smiles & Tears*. I afterwards regretted having made this engagement, as Rose was not at all in condition to do justice

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Unity in Harry Watkins’s *The Pioneer Patriot* (1858),” in *Enacting Nationhood: Identity, Ideology and the Theatre, 1855–99*, ed. Scott R. Irelan (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 1–23.

to herself—she had not only just recovered from a depressing illness, but, unfortunately, caught cold two days before opening. This state of her health so acted upon her naturally nervous temperament, that at night she was thrown into a high fever, and, therefore, was fit for anything but the task before her. I do not remember ever to have seen a person so affected by stage fright. However, she pleased the audience in spite of all, and, in a few nights after, when fully recovered, made a legitimate hit in the *Belle's Stratagem*—also in *Grist to the Mill*. My arrangement with Céleste was to open on the fifth week of the season but she wrote to me requesting that I would undertake the part of a Yankee Captain in a new Piece written for her by Tom Taylor, and with which she intended to commence her season. She thought it would be good policy, as Taylor was anxious, I being an American, to have me play the part. By opening with my own play I ran the risk of having it mercilessly slaughtered by the press, but by complying with Taylor's wish it would make a friend of one who had great influence with the critics of London. I answered Céleste that I would hear the play read and if I thought I could do justice to the part, as well as to myself, I would undertake it. By appointment I visited Taylor at his residence—Brompton, a few miles from London. After tea we adjourned to his library—a very fine one, by the way—and, after a short chat, he began a reading of the MSS.<sup>9</sup> The scene of the play was Greece, on the shores of the Mediterranean. A party of English tourists were roaming through the mountains, and while they were enjoying a lunch the Captain makes his first appearance, à la Sam Patch<sup>10</sup>—coming down the mountain pathway a short distance, and then jumping over the heads of the lunching party to the stage below with a “How d'ye do!” Taylor had not proceeded far with the scene before I became so indignant that it was with difficulty that I could restrain my feelings. At first I thought the character was an intended slur upon my countrymen, but after reflecting that I was an invited guest at Taylor's house, it did not appear possible that he would take such an opportunity to offer an insult to a stranger—I knew that it was the received opinion of Englishmen that all Americans speak with a nasal twang, but here was an educated man of letters portraying the Commander of one of the finest steam frigates in the United States service, the *Merrimac*, as an impertinent downcast old-

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9. MSS: abbreviation for manuscript.

10. The “Yankee Leaper” Sam Patch (1799–1829) was a daredevil known for jumping off waterfalls, including Niagara Falls, in the 1820s.

fashioned stage Yankee! I wondered what Taylor would have thought had our positions been reversed—had I been reading to him a play with Lord Nelson as one of the chief characters, and presented him as conversing in a broad Yorkshire dialect? It would have been no more absurd than this caricature of one of the most accomplished officers in our navy. But I merely kept up a-thinking and restrained my feelings. I was there to conciliate one of the leading English dramatists, and a critic of the London press. After the reading was over Taylor asked how I liked the character, and I answered, like a true Yankee, by asking a question—“how did he wish the character to be dressed—like the typical portraits of Uncle Sam, I presumed.” “Oh, no,” he replied, “dress him exactly similar to the Captain of the *Merrimac*. I do not want the part buffooned.” Taylor did not appear to understand that he had already made the Captain a buffoon by the language and action he had given to him. . . . The *Brigand and the Banker* was produced Oct. 4, 1860 with a strong cast, but failed to please, and was withdrawn after the second week. . . . Mrs. Watkins sat in the pit with the dramatic author J. R. Planché and his sister. All around them were the usual first-nighters, and the press gang. On my appearing the audience extended me a satisfactory reception, but after my first exclamation Mrs. W. had to listen to such pleasant expressions as: “Oh! Oh! Oh! Here’s more of that d—d Yankee twang!” “We had a surfeit of that with Mrs. Barney Williams and Mrs. W. J. Florence.” “*Carn’t* those blarsted Americans talk any way but through their noses.” These and other choice expressions were given all through the first act, after which they appeared to become reconciled to my twang, and allowed that the “chap could act well enough, but his nasal is enough to give one the catarrh.” Rose was burning to inform the authors of these sage remarks that the actor was merely attempting, to the best of his ability, to depict the burlesque on American character as conceived by one of their own number—the distinguished author and critic, Mr. Tom Taylor. . . . The papers of the following morning were rather lukewarm on the play, but spoke pleasantly of my appearance in a part that was not sufficiently strong for the display of much talent, but that I made a favorable impression upon the audience, and played the character for all it was worth. After the curtain fell on the last act Taylor came to me and expressed himself as satisfied with what I had done, that he had no suggestion to make in regard to my acting, but thought the Yankee dialect was not a pleasant one for an English audience. I longed to tell him how unpleasant it was to the Yankee himself, but refrained from adding to the mortification Taylor must have felt at the palpable failure of his play.

**Wed. Sept. 5th<sup>11</sup>** Read the *Pioneer Patriot* to Céleste. She feared it would prove too Melodramatic for her audience, and desired that I should condense the play down to *two* acts! In my case her request did not wound my feelings as an author, but it appeared like a resolve on her part to jeopardise my success by weakening the play itself, which had been already shorn of an act to please one Manager. I called attention to the fact, which she well knew, of the enthusiastic reception the drama had met with at Liverpool, and in its present shape, but she insisted on the excision. Not being in a position to demand that the play should be presented as it stood, I left her with the understanding that her wish should be gratified. Planché dined with us today. He thought I did not appear very cheerful. I then related the treatment I had received, or, rather, my play, which had landed in Liverpool in its original condition, four acts, but how, in order to pacify the managerial potentate presiding over the Royal Amphitheatre, it had been reduced to three acts, and now the lady manager of the Lyceum, Mad. Céleste, remorselessly demanded the sacrifice of another act. “Why, my dear boy,” exclaimed Planché, “you’re surely not annoyed at that—? What! save two acts out of four and not happy? They are paying you a very flattering compliment. Good gracious! if I offer the managers a *five*-act play, they will not accept it until I promise to reduce it to *one* act! That is, these modern Managers insist upon having everything *simmered down*. But I *won’t simmer*; consequently my new plays cannot find a market.” Planché was capital company. . . .

**Thurs. Oct. 18th** First night of *Grist to the Mill*, and Mrs. W.’s first appearance in London, she being announced as Miss Rose Howard. . . . The play was well acted and received with much applause and when the curtain descended there were loud calls for Francine. She was led out by Mr. Vining, and enthusiastically received. Planché, who had been in the pit, rushed behind the scenes, and embracing Mrs. W. expressed himself as delighted beyond measure, saying to Céleste, “Why she played it better than Madame Vestris!”—Vestris had been the original. We thought he was expressing himself a little too warmly—was a trifle over-complimentary, but was assured, by those who knew him well, that Planché was never known to flatter—on the contrary, the old gentleman was entirely too candid in censuring

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11. In dating this entry, Watkins appears to have made an error. It is possible he is referring to October 5, 1860, because *The Pioneer Patriot* opened under its British title, *Pioneers of America*, at the Lyceum (London) on October 22, 1860.

those whose acting displeased him. He afterwards explained wherein Mrs. W. pleased him better than Vestris. Francine was a patter part, and Vestris was not sufficiently glib of speech, while Mrs. W. was not only rapid in her utterance but surprisingly distinct, not a word being lost of her speeches, however quickly they were delivered. The morning papers, of the following day, were quite lavish in praise of the new “American Actress”—the *London Times* especially so. . . . While everybody was congratulating Mrs. W. on her reception, Céleste was pacing up and down behind the scenes, acting more like one annoyed at a failure than pleased with success. While conversing with Céleste, Planché remarked that he had a new comedy, which he had not yet offered to any of the Managers, and would like her to produce it with Mrs. W. as the heroine. Now it appears that just previous to the opening of the season she had asked Planché if he had anything for her house, and he replied in the negative, fearing, as he afterwards told me, that Céleste would insist on playing the part, and that would damn his comedy. Among the members of the London press there was the best of feeling for Céleste’s success in her managerial venture, if she would only confine herself to management, and let acting alone. She was too ancient to appear in her old pantomimic parts, and could not sustain speaking characters, her English being so execrably bad. Many jokes were told of her perversion of the vernacular, which often excited shouts of laughter where the author expected quite the reverse. . . . She would not entertain Planché’s offer in regard to his new comedy with Rose as the heroine, but would have been willing to accept it for herself; this is what the author would not permit. In a conversation with her I reminded Céleste of the hopes she held out in the statement made to me at the time of our first interview—that the Lyceum was just the house for Mrs. Watkins, and that she would have a fine opportunity to establish herself with a London audience. I also reminded Madame of her positive assertion that she would not act herself, but should devote all her time to management. It was upon this assurance I abandoned my negotiation with Ben Webster, and closed with her: caring more for my wife’s position than my own. Céleste expressed herself as being very sorry to disappoint us, but that the public were anxious for her reappearance—that her patrons were desirous of seeing her in new characters. They did not wish to see her at all—at least in sufficient numbers to make it profitable, as the sequel proved. A better opportunity for making a successful season seldom presents itself to a Manager than was here offered to Madame Céleste, yet she deliberately and persistently threw it away.



**Mon. Oct. 22nd** First night in London of the *Pioneers of America*. . . . In compressing the drama to two acts, I retained all the telling situations. The cast was a tolerable one, but the play was not produced so well as it might have been, besides which it was preceded by the five-act comedy of the *Love Chase*. It was after ten o'clock when *The Pioneers* began, but notwithstanding the lateness of the hour the audience remained to the end and were very enthusiastic in their applause. The press notices of the following day were extremely favorable, but the Lyceum, being a strictly comedy Theatre, was not so well adapted for melodrama as the Adelphi. *The Times* in quite a lengthy notice detailing the plot of the play, etc. stated "Mr. H. Watkins's impersonation of Jocko is well worth seeing. It is one of the most decided and attractive specialties ever presented to a London public. The character requires a rare combination of talents for its successful portrayal, being, at times, pathetic, comic, and pantomimic. Few actors could be found capable of sustaining this unique creation. Jocko's hearty love of fighting, the cat-like agility of his movements, the animal cunning which accompanies all his feats, constitute a character of an extremely novel kind, for the delineation of which, moreover, a peculiar physical training is requisite."<sup>12</sup> . . . The company were confident that the *Pioneers* would be relied upon by the Management as the drawing card, but Céleste would not have it so, and in two weeks the play was withdrawn—to the astonishment of everybody, and our engagement at the Lyceum terminated. Céleste then appeared in a succession of new plays, but not one of them caught the public taste—at least the public did not come to see them and her season ended disastrously. There was little sympathy for her on the part of a public that would have sustained her managerial enterprise with pleasure, had she been content with the honors and laurels to be won by those who cater for the amusement of their patrons by seeking to gratify their tastes and desires. But Céleste sought solely her own ambitious gratification and, as must ever be the case under the same circumstances, she did so at her own expense. It was a pity that so clever and good a woman, and so excellent a stage director, being undoubtedly one of the best in England, should have been so blind to her own interests. Where two courses are open to us from which to choose how much depends upon a wise selection, and how often does the choice we make not only shape our own future but deter-

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12. Although much of this quotation is accurate, Watkins made changes to highlight the positive notices of his acting while ignoring the rather strong criticism of the play (and author). "Lyceum Theatre," *The Times* (London), October 24, 1860, 9.

mines the future of others. One week after I had accepted Céleste's offer, Dion Boucicault arrived in London with his, then, new play—*The Colleen Bawn*, which had been played with great success at Laura Keene's Theatre, New York. The Adelphi turned out to be the only house in London where Boucicault could procure an opening. Had I concluded with Webster, Boucicault would, probably, have been compelled to return to America. He had an important object to gain by playing his drama, as soon as possible, in London. By the law of copyright a play first produced in a foreign country is denied the protection of a copyright in England, and B. was fearful of being forestalled by some *enterprising*(?) Manager. *The Colleen Bawn* is, undoubtedly, the best drama he had yet constructed, and its success in England was as pronounced as it was in the U.S. Several of the provincial managers attempted to produce the drama without B.'s permission but by threats and injunctions he fought them off for two or three years, until he had, in fact, reaped all the benefits of its first success. He certainly managed his game very shrewdly, and, although the law of copyright was not on his side, Boucicault fully deserved all the pecuniary gains of his play. The money value of his drama is of more substantial importance to an Author than any literary honors he may gain. The one may gratify his pride and swell his vanity, but the other gratifies his pocket—swells his importance—keeps his stomach in good humor and, in every way, adds to his worldly comforts. Of what use is posthumous fame to the poor author who has passed through life struggling with poverty? If after death the departed author's works are to be found adorning the shelves of all libraries, imparting pleasure or information, while they may be regarded as a valuable legacy to the living, yet the enjoyment is something akin to that pleasure the pirate feels in gloating over his plunder. Posterity may acknowledge the injustice of the dead writer's contemporaries, and seek to do justice to his memory by the erection of a grand monument over his poor remains, but *Cui Bono*, for whose good?—certainly not the dead. To kings and beggars all graves are alike. No! 'tis the living should be cared for, and few deserve more from the world in which he moves than the man who gives to the stage a successful play; while among those who labor none better merit all the protection the law can give than the dramatist. However prolific he may be in the production of plays that yield him a temporary benefit, there may be but one of all the number capable of outliving the fickleness of public taste, or the caprice of a passing fashion, and that one play, were the author's rights properly protected, might be the sole means of preserving him from want in his old age. But the dramatist will never obtain justice until legislation makes the

stealing of a play a misdemeanor. These play-thieves are the most contemptible, despicable, mean, and cowardly of petty scoundrels. They steal because the act is not a punishable one. The same knaves would filch your purse if it could be done with equal impunity; but make play-stealing a crime that may send the convict to prison and then writing a play will be a pleasant task. The author will feel encouraged to do his best when he reflects that he shall reap all the reward of his success. On the first night of a new play all the speculators, country managers, and actors in search of novelty are sure, if they happen to be in town, to be present, and if the play makes a passable hit, listeners will hear in the lobbies, or adjoining saloons such questions as these: Is it original? Is it from the French? Is it a German, Italian, or Spanish translation? Is it the dramatization of a novel? Do you know what it's taken from? I would like to get hold of a copy of it? *et hoc genus omne*.<sup>13</sup> But not one of these wretches will say: "I wonder if he (the author) would sell me a copy? I will call on him tomorrow and see if I cannot arrange to produce it in such or such a place." Oh, no! they never think of going to the author, and if they do purchase a copy it will be a stolen one. If they pay for it at all they will prefer remunerating any person other than the writer. There are few plays so original as not to owe their creation to something which has gone before—to some sketch, or incident, that has struck the dramatist's fancy, and from which he has elaborated his play. For my own part among the numerous plays I have written there are seven wholly original—original in the full meaning of the term. For the others I was indebted, more or less, to extraneous sources, although, in nearly every instance, I made an original use of the material I worked upon. Even in the dramatization of a story I seldom adhered to the plot of the romance, or novel. In fact this is the only way in which a good or effective play can be constructed from such material. It is very rarely that a strong acting play is obtained when the dramatist has closely followed the story whence his play was taken. I have often found it necessary, for stage success, to not only change the relation of the characters in the novel, but to antedate the period, alter the locale, and entirely reverse the dénouement. At first thought it appears strange that the talent required to make a successful novelist should so utterly fail in the conscription of a play, but the genius of the dramatist and the novelist are quite distinct from each other. When I stated this to the distinguished authoress Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, she was astonished, and remarked that she thought the strong point of her writ-

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13. *et hoc genus omne* (Latin): and everything of this kind.

ings was the dramatic instinct pervading them. After admitting this I explained to her that what might be deemed dramatic in the plot and situations of a novel would not be considered at all dramatic in a play. Dialogue that might read well in a story would yet prove anything but effective if delivered on the stage. In the one case it is elaboration, in the other condensation. The language of the drama should be epigrammatic, short, strong, and pointed—every superfluous word not necessary to the strength of a speech weakens it. A novelist will be pardoned if he digresses for the purpose of description, or to moralize, or even when it is apparent that he is merely padding his work—provided the divergence is entertaining reading. The dramatist, however, jeopardizes the success of his play when he introduces side issues, and so diverts the mind of his audience from the direct continuity of his play. His dramatic personæ should all bear some relation to each other, and work together for the development of the plot. The interest, however, should never be divided between more than two characters. The remaining should be given sufficient strength to ensure them a certain degree of importance, but their action must be, as it were, centripetal—working to the centre. The strongest of Shakespeare's plays—those that keep the stage—are generally based upon this plan. *Richard* and *Hamlet* are one-part plays with no diversion of interest, and they are the most attractive of this great author's plays. *Othello* has two characters of equal importance, although, to my mind, Iago has always appeared the stronger of the two. Other dramatists might have given to the stage an Othello, but Iago is unapproachable—He has a common existence in real life but only a Shakespeare could place him before us—give him a vitality impossible to the painter or the sculptor. The Iago of real life stands before us, reading him in the closet, or viewing him from the stage—an incarnation of all that is evil in mankind. A candid manner conceals the total insincerity of his nature—a smiling face masks a heart filled with the blackest thoughts. A bluff soldierly deportment gives a license to his rudeness. He has the power of adapting himself to all moods and idiosyncrasies, consequently every sufferer can find in him a sympathizing friend. He is, indeed, everything to everybody, yet nothing to anyone—Falsehood, duplicity, treachery, deceit, all stand personified in Iago. *King Lear* is, also, a one-part play—Edgar and Cordelia are pleasing characters, but entirely overshadowed by Lear, whose sufferings are alone remembered on the descent of the curtain. *Julius Caesar*, it is true, has three grand characters, of equal prominence, yet this play depends largely on spectacular display, and the aid of numerous auxiliaries. *Romeo & Juliet* has three parts, but Mercutio dies so early in the play as to be almost

forgotten at the termination. Shakespeare was not only the greatest of dramatists, but his style of construction must ever stand as a model. He knew the strength of a concentrated interest, and seldom diverted the minds of his hearers from the central figures of his plays. Our engagement at the Lyceum ended with the withdrawal of the *Pioneers*, which, notwithstanding that this Theatre was not the house for a drama of this kind, might have enjoyed a long and profitable run. Lieut. Col. Addison, a dramatist of some reputation in London, was anxious that Céleste should produce a new Comic drama, from his pen, entitled the *Rose of Vera Cruz*, with Mrs. W. as the heroine. The play read well, and would probably have proved successful. But Céleste would not entertain the author's proposition—She was determined to have the field.

*The diary ends here, at the bottom-right corner of the manuscript page. We do not know if Watkins continued to maintain his diary after this point. Harry and Rose Watkins toured the United Kingdom until 1863, at which point they returned to the United States. They continued acting and touring together for two decades.*

*To read our transcription of the entire diary and related resources, we invite you to access our digital edition of Watkins's diary via the University of Michigan Press website.*

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## INDEX OF SUBJECTS

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