# Mr. Wallace Brownlow.

So many singers have had adventurous careers before achieving fame in their profession that it would be quite possible to formulate a theory that the short road to success on the operatic stage is to "knock about" the world for a few years, doing anything but study music. Mr. Wallace Brownlow, the baritone engaged by Mr. J. C. Williamson in London for the Royal Comic Opera Company, has a face which strongly resembles that of Lord Rosebery when he was thirty years old, but his figure is not, and never will be, as podgy as that of the present English Premier. Mr. Brownlow comes of a military family, his father being an officer in the Guards. His adventures commenced when he was thirteen years old, and he insisted upon going to sea. He shipped as an apprentice on board a Cardiff brig of some 600 tons register, and made a voyage to Adelaide. After three years of sailoring, including a term on board H.M.S. *Active* off the Zulu Coast, he tried his hand at vine cultivation, but in a very few months he decided to join the Cape Mounted Rifles. He was not eighteen years of age, but as he looked old enough, and could ride, the authorities did not insist upon the production of his birth certificate. He saw some service in the Baputi campaign, being present at the taking of Morosis. A year later, in September, 1880, the Basuto rebellion broke out, and Corporal Brownlow found himself one of a detachment of 200 men besieged at Mafetung by 5000 Basutos under the command of the ferocious chief Lerothodi. Colonel Carrington's dispatch tells a graphic story of hard fighting, the Basutos being armed with Martini-Henry and Snider rifles, and Corporal Brownlow received a gunshot wound. A friend writing to Brownlow's father about the battle states:—

"It was about 4 p.m. on this day (September 21, 1880), after five hours' hard fighting, that your son (whose side I had just left to deliver my fire to the right) was shot at from a hill rising behind the 'schantzen' (temporary fortifications) about 500 yards distant, and wounded in both hands, his carbine falling at his feet, shattered at the breech with the bullet. He was soon after relieved of his charge, and conveyed, during a heavy fire from the enemy, to our hospital, narrowly escaping a second hit. The wound on the right hand proves to be the severest, the bullet having entered by the knuckle of the forefinger and lodging in the wrist joint. Our surgeon performed an operation next morning, successfully extracting the bullet, and I am glad to inform you that notwithstanding the extreme heat here, and lively annoyances by day and night attacks, your son is at the present time progressing favourably towards recovery."

Mr. Brownlow was made a sergeant for his gallant defence of the outpost at Mafetung, and in a marvellously short time he was again in the saddle. The action fought at Ramabidikives village on February 15, 1881, brought him his commission as lieutenant. Colonel E. G. Brabant, in his dispatch, states:—

"I wish particularly to bring to notice the name of Sergeant Wallace Brownlow, Cape Mounted Rifles, who commanded the scouts, and by whose courage and intelligence in keeping me thoroughly informed of the movements of the enemy up to the moment of the charge, I was enabled to place the men in the position most favourable to receive the enemy's attack. Sergeant Brownlow came in with the Basutos, one of them falling dead upon him and covering him with blood."

It is not often a soldier's life is saved by his pursuer falling dead in the act of striking him. During his brief career in the Mounted Rifles Lieutenant Brownlow, besides the wounds to his hands, broke his collar-bone, received a couple of shots on his ribs, and was nearly starved by the Basutos, who raided the cattle and provisions of the division he was serving with. When the war ended in 1881, Lieutenant Brownlow left the Rifles and became a journalist on the staff of an Orange Free State newspaper, published half in Dutch and half in English. Making a little money he returned to England, enjoyed a holiday, and then, to please his father, took a position in a banking house in London. A month's trial convinced him that he could never become a banker, and he told the astonished manager that he did not want his month's salary as he was leaving without notice the next day for Canada. Mr. Brownlow paid a short visit to his brother at Montreal, and then started on a gold-mining expedition to the Lake of the Woods, in the Winnipeg district. This lake is about sixty miles long and is studded with hundreds of densely timbered islands. It was practically unknown until General Butler went on the Red River expedition and explored the "Great Lone Land." Mr. Brownlow worked at the mine belonging to the company he had invested in, for ten months, both above and below ground. Then it was discovered that the company was insolvent, the gold yield not being sufficient to meet the expenses of properly opening up the ground, and the capital, as usual, had mostly been collared by the promoters of the company. The men at the mine were left without stores and it was only by the aid of the Indians that they got back to Winnipeg. Mr. Brownlow "roughed it" for a time, doing any job he could get, wood-chopping or pick and shovel work being the chief work obtainable. Then he pawned his gold watch, a gift from his mother, which he prized greatly, and bought a railway ticket to Montreal. He had learnt that his mother was seriously ill, and he had made up his mind to see her again. His brother advanced him the money for his passage, and the winter of 1883 saw him in London. One day Mr. Brownlow noticed an advertisement offering to launch amateurs desirous of becoming professionals into good engagements on payment of a premium of £5. Mr. Brownlow paid the fee and made his first appearance on any stage, as a comic policeman, at the Imperial Theatre, Westminster. Until he saw that advertisement, Mr. Browlow had no thought of the stage as a profession. When a boy he had a sweet voice, and like most sailors, he had learnt to sing a "chanty," but he had never been urged by admiring friends to train his voice, and he had never dreamt of becoming an eminent actor. The Imperial Theatre manager was nothing but an adventurer, the enterprise collapsed, and the only return Mr. Brownlow got for his £5 was the advantage of being able to state that he had had stage experience. In the Spring of 1884 he applied for a position in the chorus of Mr. D'Oyley Carte's Opera Company. His voice was approved by the conductor, and he was enrolled. His good stage presence, and his aptitude for learning soon led to his selection as "understudy" for the leading baritone parts. One evening he played the Mikado so well that Duke Teck, who happend to be present, declared to Mr. Carte that the "understudy" gave a better personation than the original. This royal approbation did however not secure Mr. Brownlow's instant promotion from the chorus. It was not till 1888, when the company was rehearsing *The Yeoman of the Guard*, that his chance came. The singer selected for the part of Sir Richard Cholmondley annoyed Mr. W. S. Gilbert by his restless motions. "Pray look your part, Mr. ——." "For Heaven's sake, don't shift your legs about like that," and similar chidings at last rendered the actor so nervous that he could not assume the impassive dignity becoming to the Governor of Her Majesty's Tower. "Haven't you got a man who can understand the part," exclaimed Mr. Gilbert to Mr. D'Oyley Carte. The manager bethought him of Duke Teck's praise of Mr. Brownlow, and brought him forward. "What's your idea of the character?" asked Mr. Gilbert. Mr. Brownlow replied that he must read the part before he could tell. The lines were handed to him, and as soon as he had read them, Mr. Brownlow could answer the query by stating that Sir Richard Cholmondley was an officer and a gentleman. "That's just it," said Mr. Gilbert, "and all you have to do is to look the part." Mr. Brownlow, now he was permanently established as a "principal," studied singing and acting with assiduity. Both accomplishments depend more upon keen observation and a faculty for imitation than upon school teaching.

Pose is the basis of all acting. The mechanical part is to learn off by heart the position each actor has to take on the stage. Mr. Gilbert has a set of figures which he moves about a model stage until their grouping pleases his idea of the fitness of the situation, then he marks them down for instruction to the actors. Mr. Irving is equally careful about the grouping of the figures during the action of a scene as well as providing for the exits and entrances of the characters. An actor should know his positions so perfectly that he assumes them as naturally as if they were not preconcerted. Then, says Mr Brownlow, "he must pose to suit the character. Every individual has some characteristic attitude, and that must be assumed which is appropriate to the part personated." In fact, Mr. Turveydrop was nearer the truth than he imagined when he insisted upon "deportment" as the essential part of a gentleman's education. Once the right pose is acquired gesture and by-play expressive of the sentiments uttered, come instinctively. "Make-up" is another important matter in acting. Mr. Brownlow read Guizot's history to get an idea of the character of Henry of Navarre, and studied portraits of that gallant monarch before ordering a fair-haired wig and close cut beard and moustache. "It is very easy to play Kings," says Mr. Brownlow, "one only has to be urbane, dignified and courteous." Unfortunately, only a few actors can fulfil these conditions, they being more often didactic, fussy and punctilious. Love-making, everyone will agree with Mr. Brownlow, is an art difficult to make attractive to the onlookers. As Minestra says of Risotto's ogling, it does look foolish from a distance. Mr. Brownlow is glad that he has to sing his impassioned pleading. He thinks it so much easier to put fervour and caressing into words that are sung instead of spoken. Phrasing, he thinks, is the essential point in operatic singing. He took lessons from teachers of high repute in order to learn the art, but as soon as he acquired the method he gave up the lessons, as he preferred to use his own judgment where to impart the expression to the notation. For instance, in singing that charming rondel, "Ma Mie Rosette," he changes the accentuation of each refrain, introducing at times a caressing little trill, fascinating when sung once, but which would be wearisome if repeated at the end of each bar. "The great art," Mr. Brownlow asserts, "is to enunciate the words distinctly and give them their colloquial emphasis, by modulating the voice as much as the notation will allow." Where to take the breath and how to take it when singing is one of the hardest technicalities to master in dramatic singing. Mr. Brownlow has played many leading parts in light opera, but he is perhaps proudest of his success as Richard Cœur-de-Lion, in *Ivanhoe*. The part has the longest dialogue and songs of any character in the opera, and he had to take it at a few hours' notice, yet he sang it so successfully that he was put down to play it alternately with the creator of the character. Mr. Brownlow played William to Miss Nellie Stewart's Blue-eyed Susan in London, and he also won success in the character parts of the Duke de Lougueville in *La Basoche*, and the Chaplain of the Fleet in *The Golden Web*. In the one case he personated an old fop of the ancient *regime*, and in the other a portly old humbug, of the Dr. Johnson pragmatic style. Since joining Messrs. Williamson and Musgrove's company Mr. Brownlow has had all his time occupied in studying the baritone parts of the twenty operas which form their *repertoire*. He likes hard work, however, and is not fond of those brilliant supper parties and wild country excursions which form the delight of eminent professionals like Madame Bernhardt, Mr. Irving, Mr. Toole and others. Mr. Brownlow's greatest pleasure is in long rides, for his training in the Cape Mounted Rifles has made him an excellent horseman.


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