



De Wilde Pinx. **MR CHERRY as LAZARILLO.** Bond Sculp.
Here, Sir, here are three of them.
Two Strings to your Bow.
 London, Published by John Cawthorne, No. 35, Catherine Street Strand, Mar. 25 1806.

ANDREW CHERRY.
 From de Wilde's portrait.

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Andrew Cherry

ALTHOUGH *The Monthly Mirror* reported in 1801 that a new theatre was planned at Swansea and *The Cambrian* declared in 1804 that Charles Collins's wishes were about to be realised, the 'New Theatre' was not erected until 1807.¹

This eventually came about through the efforts of Collins, and a number of influential gentlemen who formed themselves into a tontine for the purpose. A method of association very popular at the time, the tontine's appeal lay in the element of chance involved. The subscriber who happened to live longest became the owner of the property. Five hundred shares were issued at £10 each, and half of them were taken by great landowners like the Duke of Beaufort, Lord Dumfries, Sir William Paxton and Thomas Mansel Talbot.² As soon as the building was commenced, the owners received eager applications for the post of manager. They selected a Drury Lane star for the post.

They could not have made a better choice than Andrew Cherry. He was as shrewd as Watson and as genial as Masterman. He knew exactly how to please a fashionable audience without losing his independence. His retort to a manager who wanted to take advantage of him a second time—'You shall not have two bites of A Cherry'—illustrates both his wit and his sturdy common sense. Ann of Swansea was not flattering him when she called him, 'a good comedian, an excellent manager and a worthy man.'³

That such a well known actor and author as Cherry should have been attracted to this theatre is sufficient indication of its status. He knew his profession in all its stages; he had started as a stroller, married his manager's daughter, been praised by Tate Wilkinson and had completed his apprenticeship by acting with success at Chester, Dublin and Manchester. From 1802-7, he played leading comic parts at Drury Lane and wrote several very successful plays. One of them, *The Travellers*, was given there on

The dagger's point that shines with Cornish tin,
 The poison'd goblet—dash'd with Maidstone gin;
 Those dreadful instruments of death and pain
 By which we oft have died—to live again;
 No peril there, we view—OUR awful pause
 Waits but the thunder of your kind applause.

Then, he tells us something of his audience:

The fabric you have raised, oh now protect
 From that theatre dry-rot called neglect;
 But you, ye Fair, be to our efforts kind
 And hither come, the Men can stay behind;
 Cheered by your presence, each succeeding night,
 The Actor's fire will aid the poet's flight.

Like the Committee of the Tontine, Cherry aimed at raising the standards of this theatre to heights not previously seen in Wales. Acting, plays, dresses, scenery were all to be 'correct.' He knew, of course, that this in itself would not be enough: only novelty could satisfy a fashionable audience.

He himself was probably the most interesting of all the novelties provided. His fame as Drury Lane comedian and leading dramatist was sufficient to draw crowded houses. One critic said Cherry was a host in himself because his plays and his songs were received with as much applause as his acting. Twenty years earlier, a fellow actor had noticed Cherry's habit of introducing jokes of his own into the lines. At Swansea, this trait had full expression. His topical and local references were always loudly applauded, especially when he took his favourite part of 'Puff' in *The Critic*. One of the most interesting was his remark of September 2nd 1807:

Old Mother Nature in a fit of lavish profuseness bestowed her choicest blessings on the Cambrian coast. . . . There is no expressing the indignation of the great Bonaparte in finding it impossible to land his myrmidons on the Cambrian coast; it has quite defeated his purposes of aggrandisement to his followers, as he purposed creating a Grand Duke of Oystermouth Castle and a Supreme Elector of the Mumbles.⁹

Cherry built up a strong company of actors. Of his family, Miss Cherry was the most praised and *The Cambrian* paid her this quaint compliment; 'She possesses the simplex munditus of

Horace and attracts the audience by a graceful timidity.' The Bath players, too, continued to come to Swansea as soon as their own theatre had closed for the summer vacation. In addition, any stars who happened to be touring the country were quickly engaged. Incedon's performances have already been mentioned. Four years later, Bannister gave a week's entertainment at Swansea and played in the same season at Carmarthen, Haverfordwest, Brecon, Abergavenny and Cardiff.¹⁰ In the stock company were four young actors who were later to be stars themselves: Edmund Kean, Sheridan Knowles, John Vandenhoff and John Cooper.

Cherry's association with Kean is in many ways the most interesting in this chronicle. They were both ambitious men, but that was the only characteristic they had in common; the one was genial and witty, the other, moody and withdrawn. It says much for Cherry's tact as well as for his circuit that he was able to keep Kean satisfied for over two years. In many ways, this seems to have been the happiest time in the great actor's life.

Son of a dipsomaniac and a prostitute, Kean had a great variety of experience behind him by the time he reached twenty. He had known the life of the squalid streets and the nice respectability of a middle-class home. As a child, he was something of a prodigy and had enjoyed singing lessons from the great Incedon and had been taught swordsmanship by Angelo. As a youth, he had known all the hardships of a stroller's life and had wandered with companies from Sheerness to Belfast.¹¹

He had been playing in J. B. Watson's theatres for one year, when Cherry engaged him in 1809 at a salary of twenty-five shillings a week. He was married and had for a wife an Irish girl of twenty-nine who had thrown up her post as governess to try her luck on the stage. She was now expecting a child and their journey to South Wales was most difficult. They had to claim an advance of four pounds from Cherry and steal away from Birmingham early one morning before their creditors were awake. They made their way to Bristol, took ship for Newport and tramped on to Swansea.¹²

Cherry had had to apologise for their non-arrival on June the twelfth and the first notice of a performance by Kean occurs on

fact has lain concealed since October 1810, and the text of the advertisement may be interesting proof of the association between Sarah Siddon's sister and the greatest actor of the English stage:

Mr Kean
His Benefit is fixed for Monday 15th inst. when will be
played A NEW DRAMA
(written by a Lady of Swansea)
called,
ZAFFINE or The Knight of the Bloody Cross.
To which will be added the favourite farce, The Padlock.²⁰

The Cambrian had nothing but praise for the new play:

The new drama is the effort of a lady whose former effusions have been read with general interest. The great variety of dramatic situation with which this piece abounds evince her perfect knowledge of effect; the language is strongly pointed and flows with an ease and grace that is peculiar to a practised pen. The characters are most judiciously grouped, the plot interesting and affecting, and developed with truth and nature. . . . In those scenes where the child's character (Master H. Cherry) was prominent, we never witnessed more effect and the applause was general and unqualified. . . . A repetition of this piece would no doubt ensure a crowded auditory.

Kean's other friendship was with Sheridan Knowles, who is remembered to-day solely as a dramatist. Knowles joined Cherry at Waterford in 1810 and came to Swansea for the summer season. He was engaged to play second tragedy and leading singer, but while his acting only drew two notices, his singing was frequently mentioned in *The Cambrian* reports. These were the days of the Napoleonic Wars and the reporter was glad to say that Knowles rendered the songs of Count Roland ('The Free Knights') in a style 'truly British without the fritterings of any foreign school.'²¹

Kean urged Knowles to write a play and the consequent, *Leo the Gipsy*, was given at Waterford by Cherry's company. Kean liked the principal part in it so much that, years after, he wanted to perform it on the London boards and, when he was famous, commissioned the Irishman's best known play, *Virginius*. When they last performed in Swansea on October 26th, 1810, they were mere strollers and had little idea of what was awaiting them. With Cherry, they journeyed to Ireland and, in July 1811, left him in order to better themselves.²²

When the pair departed, Andrew Cherry had to look round for promising young actors to take their places. Those he engaged only played with him for a short time but do credit to his judgement. Both were very young and had but little experience. John Vandenhoff had been educated at Stonyhurst and had taught classics for a short time before making his first appearance on the stage at Salisbury in 1808. Like Kean, he had played with J. B. Watson before joining Cherry. He spent only the season of 1811 at Swansea and for his benefit on September 9th, gave *The Wonder, A Woman Keeps A Secret*, with Mrs Vandenhoff as Violante. John Cooper must have joined Cherry at about the same time, for he is said to have succeeded Kean as leading tragedian. The newspaper reports do not name him, and it is possible that he only joined the company at the end of the season. At any rate, a contemporary says that 'in consequence of the laurels he had gained with Cherry, he was sought with avidity by the Liverpool and Scots managers.'²³

Cherry had to give such talented actors good plays. He was of course, in the happy position of being able to put on his own compositions and to write new ones when necessary. *The Soldier's Daughter* had already been given at Swansea by Phillips's company in 1805 and 1806, but it was also performed there on July 17th 1807, and June 20th, 1809. His dramas were not closet pieces, but were written solely with an eye to good business in the theatre. His play, *The Travellers*, is full of claptraps, and merely gave the public that combination of music and spectacle that was now expected. It had been written at the suggestion of the composer, Corri, and gave opportunities for including the national airs of all lands from China to Peru. A Chinese prince is travelling with his beloved who is disguised as a page. In their retinue comes an Irishman who acts as interpreter but knows nothing but the blarney. Such a hotch-potch of comic situation, pretty scenery, and suitable music had been extraordinarily successful in London. The two Swansea performances were markedly family productions, for in addition to taking parts, Mrs and Miss Cherry themselves 'tastefully executed the Chinese, Turkish, Italian and English costumes.'²⁴

He also wrote one play that was given its earliest performances

Towards the end of the Swansea season, Cherry attended the Mayor of Carmarthen's annual dinner, and his proposal to erect a new theatre in the town was put to the meeting. A number of gentlemen, led by Lord Cawdor, approved, and subscriptions given there and then, more than half filled the table. He brought his company to Carmarthen on October 4th 1809, and played in a theatre that was elegantly decorated and had its boxes enlarged. It was here that Kean acted Ponder to his wife's 'Tyfany in the new comedy, *Man and Wife*; here, too, *The Britons' Jubilee* was first given. Many ladies of distinction and gentlemen 'possessing a critical knowledge of theatricals' were glad to patronise the performances.³⁰

The company moved on to Haverfordwest and in February 1810, Kean took the part of Sadboy in *The Young Quaker* there. The playbill for this night reveals another familiar name in J. Potter, who kept the booking plan at his printing house. By Easter, the players had reached Waterford, where Cherry hoped for good patronage from the garrison. He stayed in Ireland for four months, and in that time, also played at Clonmel. Kean was so well received that he sent Mrs Clarke a newspaper cutting and wrote, 'I shall go to Swansea next summer and then my engagement with Mr Cherry closes. . . . I have a most magnificent stage wardrobe.'³¹

After the summer season of 1810 at Swansea they went again to Ireland but their reception was rather discouraging and Kean is said to have quarrelled with Cherry. By July 1811, the company was back at Swansea and they ended their season on October 1st, when two actors Santer and Stuart received a second benefit, because heat, illness and accident had kept many supporters from the first.³²

What Cherry did from October 1811 to January 1812 is not clear. Perhaps his dropsy was so bad that he was unable to travel very far; possibly he did not contemplate going to Ireland again after the earlier fiasco. Whatever the cause, he went to Monmouth at the beginning of 1812. The gentlemen made him welcome and the Mayor willingly granted him permission to open. Maddox fitted up the theatre for him and just when everything was ready, the manager died of dropsy on the brain.³³

Under him, the South Wales circuit had taken quite an important place among the provincial theatres. It had helped to train two men who were to be the leading actor and foremost dramatist of their day, and trained others who were to star at Covent Garden and Drury Lane. It had seen the first performances of five original plays. Had Cherry lived another ten years, he might have built a circuit of theatres with a literature of its own, a circuit that might have faced the opposition that was to grow during the next thirty years.

As it was, he died and left his family in poor circumstances. All his money had been lavished on his theatre and his widow was without resources. Efforts were made for her relief and the Lord Chamberlain signed a licence for a play to be given on her behalf at the Little Theatre, in St James's, Haymarket. Out of respect for the memory of the man who had restored the fortunes of Drury Lane with his plays, Mrs Siddons came out of her retirement to perform. Even these well-meaning efforts were unavailing; Mrs Cherry suffered the fate of most strollers and died in a garret.