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FROM WICKED WOMAN OF THE STAGE TO NEW WOMAN: THE CAREER OF OLGA NETHERSOLE (1870-1951); ACTRESS-MANAGER, SUFFRAGIST, HEALTH PIONEER

The Ohio State University

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FROM WICKED WOMAN OF THE STAGE TO NEW WOMAN:
THE CAREER OF OLGA NETHERSOLE (1870-1951);
ACTRESS-MANAGER, SUFFRAGIST, HEALTH PIONEER

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Joy Harriman Reilly, B.F.A., M.A.

The Ohio State University
1984

Reading Committee:
Roy H. Bowen
George P. Crepeau
Alan Woods

Approved By

George P. Crepeau
Adviser
Department of Theatre

Adviser
Department of Theatre
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1984
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I would like to thank my mother Sybil Harriman for devotion above and beyond the call of grandmotherhood: for taking over the care of Patrick Harriman Reilly at the significant ages of three months and twenty months so that I could pursue my treasure hunt in the archives of Britain and for coming to America so that I could write.

Above all, I want to acknowledge the part played by my husband Richard Reilly in getting this work completed. His emotional support, practical help, faith in my ability and love, kept me going.
VITA

May 17, 1942
Born in Dublin, Eire

1961-1962
The Times, London

1962-1967
J. Walter Thompson Company, London, and Frankfurt, Germany

1971-1980
The Advocate, Newark, Ohio

1977
B.F.A., The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1977-1983
Teaching Associate, Department of Theatre, The Ohio State University

1978
Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, summer workshop

1979
M.A., The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1982
Assistant Professor, Ohio Wesleyan University, visiting appointment winter quarter

1983-present
Associate Producer, WOSU-Radio, Columbus, Ohio

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Theatre

Studies in History. Professors Alfred Golding and Alan Woods

Studies in Criticism and Literature. Professors Roy Bowen, George Crepeau, John Morrow, Yvonne Shafer


iii
PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS


1982  "The Actress Today and in History." Women's Task Force, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio.


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Olga Nethersole in her most famous pose as Sapho.
Author's collection.
INTRODUCTION

Olga Nethersole was an English actress whose greatest triumphs were realized on the American stage. Lewis Strang, a nineteenth-century biographer of American actresses, noted that she was such a frequent visitor and so well known here that "it seemed proper to stretch a point and include her among American players."\(^1\) During her twenty-seven-year stage career, which began with her debut in Brighton in 1887, Nethersole made eleven major tours of America between 1894 and 1914 before she suddenly retired from the stage at the age of forty-four. For her efforts, America yielded the young entrepreneur a fortune, some real estate in the far west, and a reputation as one of the most exciting "emotional" actresses of her time. It is not surprising, therefore, that Olga retained her love affair for all things American throughout her life, noting in 1914 "I have great faith in American women, in American institutions and particularly in the American drama . . . one day American drama will serve as a leading example to the world.\(^2\)


At the height of her career Olga Nethersole titillated fin de siècle audiences with her candid portrayals of scarlet women. Dressed in exquisite gowns and furs and exotic headpieces, and provocatively toying with "the decadent cigarette," she epitomized the Victorian view of the courtesan who entraps weak-willed young men with her serpentine charm. Nethersole made a career of playing Fallen Women, beginning with the Latin adventuress Lola Montez in The Silver Falls in London in 1888 when she was eighteen and ending with Maurice Maeterlinck's biblical Mary Magdalene in New York in 1910. The latter was a turning point in her career and precipitated her eventual retirement from the stage. Her most famous "wicked women" were Alexandre Dumas' Camille, Henry Hamilton's Carmen, Arthur Wing Pinero's Paula in The Second Mrs. Tanqueray and Fanny Legrand (alias Sapho) in Clyde Fitch's adaptation of Alphonse Daudet's novel Sapho. In the latter romantic melodrama she became for one brief moment in 1900 the most famous actress on the American stage when her production at Wallack's Theatre in New York was closed down and she was arrested and hauled into court to answer a charge of lewd behavior.

It was not so much the story (about a simple country boy seduced by a courtesan), which caused the uproar, but the Nethersole production. The lavish costumes and scenery were augmented by the use of a novel spiral staircase, which
highlighted the dramatic ending to the first act, in which the young man is seen, in tableau, carrying the woman upstairs to what was rightly presumed an act of "wickedness" in her bedchamber. This was enough to set off a storm of protest led by the evangelical fury of the daily newspaper, The World, which used the event (and the sensationalized trial) to boost its circulation. Conservative critic William Winter, in The New York Tribune, pronounced Sapho "a reeking compost of filth and folly," and a hotbed of "contemptible persons, gross proceedings, foul suggestions, impure pictures . . . ."3 Despite such diatribes and heated debate blown out of all proportion in the press, the court agreed with Nethersole's argument that the play taught a moral lesson: "As Ye Sow, So Shall Ye Reap," and Sapho was allowed to continue. For the next few years the play's notoriety sent shock waves through conservative communities while guaranteeing huge profits at the box office. All the while Nethersole saw the event as a crusade with herself as martyr taking a stand for freedom of expression on the stage.

Today when Olga Nethersole is remembered it is in that context, as scarlet Sapho, named for the legendary poetess of Lesbos, who seduced young victims with her sensuous

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skill. But Nethersole was an extraordinarily productive woman whose multi-faceted talents cannot be dismissed as culminating in one brief cause célèbre. She serves as an example of a self-made woman who rose to prominence as actress-manager in a profession dominated by men. She worked her way up from stagestruck neophite with no theatrical background or training to become one of the most famous emotional actresses of the day.

Nethersole's portrayals left little to the imagination. Her powerful and passionate displays of emotional virtuosity were particularly suited to the classic mid-nineteenth-century Fallen Women who went from chastely pure to sexually sinful (and permutations of that role) thereby enabling her to run through a wide range of emotions. The more psychologically complex and physically sophisticated New Women of the "modern drama," on the other hand, left her with "a full head of steam on all the time, but no chance to blow off." Her portrayals were characterized by such "shocking" innovations as smoking a cigarette, blowing her nose, turning her back to the audience, crawling on her hands and knees, showing bare feet, horrible death scenes, fainting spells and the "Nethersole Kiss." While her bravura performances drew awestruck crowds in the eighteen nineties,

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*March 1907 clipping, Robinson Locke Collection, 362-363.*
a decade later she was castigated for her emotional excesses and obvious mannerisms.

As manager of her own company, Nethersole was a dynamic, forceful and contentious woman at a time when the female equivalent of the autocratic actor-manager was practically non-existent. She played a significant part in promoting young playwrights, while searching for new plays to showcase her talents. She had total artistic control of her productions, engaging her company, rehearsing the cast and directing the productions, which featured spectacular scenery and opulent costuming. Her designer-made gowns were purchased in Paris and London haute couture houses, and, like those of other fashionable actresses, were responsible for setting fashion trends of the day.5

In her personal life, Nethersole was anything but the scandalous woman she depicted on the stage. A true daughter of the Victorian era, she was a no nonsense woman who believed in the puritan ethic of hard work, healthful living and philanthropy. Even before her professional stage debut Olga had performed in amateur theatricals for the mentally retarded at a "lunatic asylum."6 The experience gave her


first-hand exposure to the problems of the mentally ill and the conditions experienced by the under-nourished, over-exploited nineteenth-century poor. During her theatrical career she nurtured an interest in prison and workhouse reform, visiting prisons, juvenile courts and hospitals in the cities in which she played. She used her status as a celebrity to focus attention on these institutions and called upon her influential friends to provide charitable supports. In one of her proudest achievements, she produced and starred in *The Writing on the Wall* which she had commissioned from a young American playwright in 1909. The drama pointed to the exploitation of the poor by powerful slum managements. It was a direct attack on the powerful Trinity Church Corporation of New York which, motivated by the negative publicity, agreed to spend twenty million dollars on improvements. The role of Barbara Lawrence in that play, a "good" woman who motivates her corrupt husband to reform, was a one-hundred-and-eighty-degree reversal for Nethersole from Fallen Woman to New Woman. As the catalyst of the drama, Barbara was capable of effective action and not buffeted by the vagaries of fate. Nethersole was enchanted by this new role which was much more in keeping with her image of herself off the

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stage. Unfortunately, she was unable to come up with a successful sequel to this play.

In the meantime, the campaign for woman's suffrage was at its most visible. Nethersole, a friend and supporter of the British activist Pankhurst women, became a vocal champion of woman's suffrage. Shortly after, at the outbreak of World War I, Nethersole gave up her stage career to devote herself to "the war effort." Volunteering as a surgical nurse, she subsequently channeled her energies into seeking improvements in health education and maternal and child welfare. For her work in founding the People's League of Health in 1917, a sort of unofficial educational wing of the ministry of health, and for her philanthropy, Nethersole was honored by King George V with the Order of the Commander of the British Empire in 1936. Nethersole did not return to a stage career but continued her efforts on behalf of health reforms until ill health forced her to retire shortly before her death in 1951.

Nethersole shared her life with her friend Kathleen Nora Madge Field, keeping a house in Hampstead and a farm in Cornwall. When not pursuing the limelight she lived the life of a recluse, bicycling, motoring, taking long walks in the country and raising several pampered dogs who received their share of attention on both sides of the Atlantic.

Nethersole's achievement in becoming a top touring attraction and making money at it, is the more commendable
when one takes into account the difficulties single women encountered while trying to make a career for themselves. In *Actresses and Suffragists*, Albert Auster describes the years 1890 to 1920 as a time in which the acting profession was transformed by the major cultural and intellectual changes of the time. He notes that the worst conditions were experienced by those trying to make a living on the road, which was anywhere outside the theatrical district of Manhattan. The hazards included bad food and terrible accommodations, train wrecks, theatre fires and dirty, unhealthy dressing rooms.8 English actor-manager Charles Hawtrey wrote that getting proper eating and sleeping accommodations became a major achievement and that his quarters were overrun by animals and insects. In one instance he found four rats in his dressing room and a woman colleague had to fight off a rat which became caught in her skirts.9 Seymour Hicks, another well-known English actor, noted that his thirty-dollar-a-week salary on the road in America did not go as far as two pounds in the English provinces. He described the tour schedule as grueling with little time for rest. A typical timetable was boarding the

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train immediately after a performance, arriving at the next town around noon the following day, hurrying to the theatre and unpacking his trunks and "swallowing a few sandwiches" before he played the two o'clock matinee. As soon as the curtain fell he put away his costumes and prepared those for the evening performance. "Then a scrambled dinner, back to the theatre . . . and catch a train without any supper." Nutritious food was a problem in a profession which necessitated long hours and unorthodox schedules. Hawtrey recounts that in a small town it was sometimes impossible to get a decent meal. His hotel in Columbus, Ohio, provided only "fried eggs and cereals." While women had to put up with the same lack of sanitary facilities as men, they also had to contend with loneliness and sexual harrassment as well as male reaction to women's demands for equality and independence. Even in the theatre, one of the few professions which had traditionally enabled women to make an independent living and compete on the same ground as men, there was considerable opposition to equal rights as witnessed by the outcry of one male performer that "All delicacies are thus lost. They seem to be contending with

10 Seymour Hicks, Twenty-Four Years of An Actor's Life, (New York: John Lane Company, 1911), p. 87.

11 Hawtrey, p. 276.
the men, and on the same ground."12 These transitional years between the romantic acting style of the nineteenth century and the new realism of the modern era resulted in a mishmash of acting styles particularly evident on the road, which nurtured everything from the genius of a Bernhardt to the primitive posturings of minor players. Actors often had to contend with colleagues who were drunk, ill, tardy and grossly incompetent. Theatre promoters typically advertised their attractions with extravagant claims and blatant puffery. Public relations reached a fine art at the turn of the century, as evidenced by some of the gimmicks to attract audiences. For instance, the Lyceum in Cincinnati offered a live baby to the winning seat holder in one contest.13 One reason why Nethersole succeeded in such a climate was because she was an astute businesswoman who understood the power of the press and made herself available as a vehicle (and target) for numerous gossipy items. Such incidents as a visit to a Yuma reservation in Arizona in 1910 would routinely be covered by the press. The New York Dramatic Mirror reported that Olga had become the godmother of an Indian baby named "Olga-Sing Like a Bird." When the superstitious Indians were asked to pose for pictures of this


13New York Dramatic Mirror, March 27, 1908, p. 6.
event, they became so upset that Nethersole had to calm them by inviting two braves into her private railroad car.\footnote{New York Dramatic Mirror, May 7, 1910, p. 11.} Nethersole was also a tough negotiator who extracted favorable contacts and had supreme confidence in her own ability as illustrated by her assurance to Jack London that he could afford to be lenient in his contract demands because "I will make heaps and heaps of money for you that I am sure."\footnote{Letter to Jack London, August 9, 1910, Jack London Collection, Huntington Library.} It was this kind of tenacity which characterized her business negotiations and helped to prevent the financial disaster and eventual bankruptcy which plagued her popular rival, Mrs. Leslie Carter.\footnote{Austen, p. 54.}

There has been no scholarship devoted to Nethersole either in the area of theatre history or women's studies. The focus of this study, therefore, will be a historical, biographical reconstruction of Nethersole's life and career. It will also offer an analysis of her acting style, determine what influence her career as actress and manager had upon the theatre between 1894 to 1914 and suggest why her contributions have been overlooked in theatre history.

Because of the wealth of turn-of-the-century press interviews and reviews and magazine articles available on
Nethersole, I was surprised to find that except for one chapter which William C. Young includes in his *Famous Actors and Actresses on the American Stage*, (New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1975), the only other contemporary study is an unpublished master's thesis by Ann Everal Callis, "Olga Nethersole and the Sapho Scandal," (The Ohio State University, 1974). Callis' study focuses on the trial itself and concludes that the frenzied press hyperbole of "yellow journalism" was responsible for its over-inflated notoriety. She provides a cursory survey of Nethersole's stage career that contains several errors. For instance, she places the premiere of Nethersole's second most important role, *Carmen*, in England in 1896, ignoring the fact that it first was a highly controversial production at the Frohmans' Empire Stock Company in New York during the Christmas season of 1895. Callis also states that the actress retired in 1913, when she retired in the summer of 1914 following a significant change in her career status from legitimate actress to vaudeville star and a lucrative tour across America. She fails to consider her role as manager and her impact as successful touring star on the theatrical circuits outside Manhattan. This is hardly surprising as she has relied almost exclusively upon metropolitan newspaper accounts of the *Sapho* incident in 1900 and has interpreted
Nethersole's career and talent as perceived through a heated debate between opposing newspaper factions.

A study of the material available on Nethersole reveals considerable confusion and contradictions about her career. Young's chapter, while it pointed the way to several valuable sources, also states incorrectly that Nethersole was under the management of Charles Frohman from 1895 until her retirement from the stage in "1911." Robert Tracy's entry in The Oxford Companion to the Theatre erroneously gives Nethersole's date of birth as 1863 and includes such obvious mistakes as the suggestion that William Winter was a booster of Nethersole's Sapho.

Because there was no obvious resource to draw upon for my research, I pursued every potential source. My most exciting discovery after a frustrating two-year search was Olga Nethersole's surviving relative Mrs. H. W. Green, who is the widow of the actress' favorite nephew and frequent companion Lieutenant Colonel Howard William Green. Unfortunately, Lt. Col. Green died in 1983, shortly before the Green family were informed that I was trying to contact them. According to Mrs. Green, her late husband was an author of books on military history who had been asked by his aunt to write an account of her life. Mrs. Green and her daughter, Bluebell Green Krefting, were able to provide invaluable information on the dissolution of the Nethersole estate, and to answer some personal questions. I am
indebted to Mrs. Green for the gift of a Nethersole diary, as well as the loan of Nethersole's Runner's Bible, a book of inspirational quotations annotated by the actress in pencil, which indicates her personal philosophy of life. The Green-Krefting families have Nethersole's jewelry, antique furniture, photo albums, furs, old family cradle, and a few items of stage clothing in their possession. The walls of their sixteenth-century manor house display three relevant oil paintings, one of "Judge" Nethersole and two studies by Johnston Forbes-Robertson of Nethersole as a young woman and as Juliet. Mrs. Green described Nethersole's farm house in Cornwall as "crammed with antiques," boxes of papers, and memorabilia of her theatrical career. Upon her death in 1951 this treasure trove was unfortunately burned, while some items were sold. The other Nethersole beneficiaries mentioned in Nethersole's 1913 will (the first of eight) are dead or have disappeared. Madge Field and Louis Nethersole, to whom Nethersole left the bulk of her estate, both preceded her in death with no relatives surviving today. Despite Mrs. Green's help I was unable to substantiate several Nethersole claims including a report that she would run for Parliament on a platform of "food, housing and education,"\(^{17}\) that she would manage the careers of other

promising young actresses,\textsuperscript{18} that she would appear in a film of \textit{Carmen} and \textit{Tosca}.\textsuperscript{19} Her family were also unable to provide any specific information about her acting career, the reconstruction of which was a painstaking process. It is still incomplete with some obvious gaps when Nethersole disappears from public mention, usually as a result of illness or exhaustion. There is evidence that Nethersole planned another tour in 1900-1901, which was to include her first visit to the west coast. Instead, it was aborted soon after her arrival in the fall of 1900, presumably because of illness. Her life following the 1910-1911 tour is somewhat of a mystery as, except for the provincial premiere of \textit{The Awakening of Helena Ritchie} in Birmingham, England, in October of 1912, there is no further mention of her career until the 1913-1914 tour. It is likely that she also traveled. Nethersole mentioned that she traveled to the Far East, South America and through Europe during her lifetime.

I have examined diaries, photographs, letters, postcards, programs, scrapbooks, playbills, paintings, route cards, advertisements, newspaper reviews and magazine articles and programs of all her major productions. The bulk of the information on her tours outside Manhattan came from a detailed study of the trade weekly, the \textit{New York Dramatic Mirror}, May 1, 1909, p. 16. \textsuperscript{18}Nethersole, "Sex Dramas," p. 35.\textsuperscript{19}
Mirror from 1894 to 1914. This was an invaluable tool because it provided a consistent view of her productions by, in many cases, the same regional correspondents during this twenty-year span. Moreover, the space devoted to Nethersole in the Mirror reflected the rise and fall of her popularity from a peak of five or six mentions in one issue to nothing at all. During the Sapho scandal, the Mirror also provided reprints of editorials from newspapers throughout the country and a busy Letters to the Editor column.

In addition to my visit with the Green-Krefting family, my research in England included an examination of other major theatre collections. The British Library provided a copy of Nethersole's *An Apologetic Defence of My Statement that a People's League of Health is Necessary and Should be Created as a Means of Raising the Standards of Health of the British Nation* (London: by author, 1917), and its Rare Manuscripts Collection had personal correspondence of Sir Arthur Wing Pinero. The newspaper library at Colindale proved an invaluable source of London newspapers and periodicals. The Victoria and Albert Museum's Gabrielle Enthoven Collection provided photographs, newspaper clippings, programs, and letters from Nethersole to Gabrielle Enthoven and Clement Scott. The Guy Little photo albums of that collection provided picture postcards of Nethersole as well as an autographed postcard to Mrs. Pankhurst, which first suggested an interest in the suffragettes, and which
led me to the newly housed Fawcett Library at the City of London Polytechnic. This women's history resource library proved to be an interesting source of Nethersole material, much of which is uncatalogued. It included a copy of her 1899/1900 Souvenir Brochure of assorted major roles and a four-page *Times Supplement* put out by the People's League of Health on April 5, 1937. The Garrick Club's private library had Pinero promptbooks and photographs of Nethersole. The Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson Theatre Collection had newspaper clippings, photographs, postcards and programs and two pieces composed by Nethersole: a poem in honor of King George V and a piece commemorating the death of her brother, Louis Nethersole. The British Red Cross supplied an index-card noting her work as a "V.A.D." (nursing volunteer) serving under Queen Alexandra's Military Nurses at the New End Military Hospital in Hampstead during World War I as well as information on her decorations for distinguished service. She was awarded the Order of the Royal Red Cross and the British Red Cross War Medal. The Hampstead and St. Pancreas Local Library Collection provided information on the sale of the Hampstead property upon her death. While the Brighton Central Reference Library did not have playbills or reviews of her initial debut, it was able to provide some background on her career. The Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine had a list of objectives issued by the People's League of Health. The Bournemouth Museum Library and the Ellen Terry Memorial
Museum at Smallhythe Place, Tenterden, were unable to shed any additional light on her career.

George Nash, former curator of the Enthoven Collection pointed me to a dusty little bookshop near the British Library, owned by nonagenarian Mr. Andrew Block at 22 Barter Street, where I became the proud owner of my own autographed postcards and pictures of Olga Nethersole. These included the famous scarlet Sapho in the frontispiece to this work. Mr. Nash also introduced me to Sybil Rosenfeld of the Society for Theatre Research who as a child had seen Nethersole perform, and Raymond Mander of the Mander and Mitchenson Collection put me in touch with Diana Forbes-Robertson, the daughter of actor Johnston Forbes-Robertson. Finally, the University of Bristol Theatre Collection provided information on Nethersole's association with Herbert Beerbohm Tree, and Somerset House supplied the wills of Louis and Olga Nethersole and Madge Field.

In America the most comprehensive collection of Nethersole memorabilia is in The Billy Rose Theatre Collection of the New York Public Library. This includes extensive photographs, personal letters, programs and portfolios, the most valuable of which is a four volume set of the Robinson Locke (1856-1920) Collection of dramatic scrapbooks. These provide newspaper clippings of regional as well as metropolitan newspapers, magazine articles, and the only copy I have found of the six acting lessons
prepared by Nethersole on "How To Become an Emotional Actress." The Hoblitzelle Theatre Arts Library of the University of Texas has a collection of personal and stage pictures, magazine articles and newspaper clippings, programs and playbills and correspondence between Olga and Louis Nethersole and drama critic Hilary Bell who was a juror in the Sapho case. Particularly useful was a "route card" of Nethersole's first season in America of 1894-1895. I am indebted to Mr. Milo Shepard, executor of the London estate, for his permission to quote from the London-Nethersole correspondence in the Jack London Collection at the Huntington Library. This correspondence, in which Nethersole commissioned a new play from the author, is of particular significance because it gives an idea of the way she handled such a project. This correspondence also included a "route card" for part of the 1909-1910 season which Nethersole had supplied the author. Finally the R. E. Teichert Theatre Collection, Columbus, Ohio, provided some information about Nethersole compiled from magazines, and the Theatre Research Institute of The Ohio State University provided a copy of Clyde Fitch's typed manuscript of Sapho, the original of which is in the Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

Nethersole performed with many of the leading actors of the day including Squire and Marie Wilton Bancroft, Johnston Forbes-Robertson, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, John Hare, Charles
Wyndham, José Leclercq, Rosina Filippi, Mary Moore, Lena Ashwell, Kate Rorke, Effie Shannon, Gerald Du Maurier, William Terris, H. B. Irving, James Hackett and Edward Mackay. She appeared on the same bill as Ellen Terry and Henry Irving for a charity matinee. She was associated with the managements of Lionel Brough, Charles Hawtrey, Amy Roselle and Arthur Dacre, John Hare, Daniel and Charles Frohman, Augustin Daly and George Alexander. Her acquaintances included Sarah Bernhardt, Gabrielle Enthoven, Margaret and Clement Scott, Edmund Rostand, Elizabeth Marbury, Elsie Janis, Lillie Langtry, Elsie De Wolfe and society women such as Lady Astor and Anne Pierpoint Morgan. Several of these provide anecdotes about Nethersole in their biographies.

Eyewitness accounts of her performances are provided by William Acher, George Bernard Shaw, Kate Terry, Clement Scott, Norman Hapgood, William Winter, Edward A. Dithmar, Elizabeth Marbury, Amy Leslie, Louis V. de Poe, H. Barton Baker and a host of unnamed critics in the press.

Also giving useful background information were three books on the role of actresses during the period between the 1890s to the outbreak of World War I. Julie Holledge's *Innocent Flowers: Women in the Edwardian Theatre* (London: Virago Press Limited, 1981) and Albert Austen's *Actresses and Suffragists: Women in the American Theatre, 1890-1920* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1984) give invaluable data on conditions in the theatre in England and America respectively. Kate Caffrey provides a glimpse of the life which Nethersole would have led as an upper class wealthy, successful, woman in *Edwardian Lady: Edwardian High Society, 1900-1914* (London: Gordon and Cremonesi, 1971).

Olga Nethersole's own articles, cited in the bibliography, provide invaluable insight into both her careers.

This study will begin with a reconstruction of Nethersole's life and career. It will be followed by an examination of her acting style; her role as manager and artistic director; including her search for new plays and the importance of color, costuming and realistic detail in her staging practices; and a discussion of the Sapho affair. Finally, it will examine Nethersole's life beyond the footlights including her interest in woman's suffrage, health education and social reform.

In the area of theatre history the careers of actress-managers have been ignored or overlooked until
recent years. My research should contribute to an area which is rich in promise but poor in substance. In the expanding area of women's studies, the pioneering work of Nethersole should prove an enlightening contribution to the record of women who not only followed successful independent careers but provided employment for other women and men, and sought to raise the general quality of life when this was very much the exception rather than the rule.

Olga Nethersole clearly was a vibrant force in both her careers, with a tremendous amount of energy to channel into both of them. To the question: "is it necessary to have genius?" she once replied: "Yes, it is quite necessary to have a genius for hard work. Genius, you know is an infinite capacity for taking pains." Based on her own definition, Nethersole was a genius in her time, and today her contributions to the theatrical profession deserve to be recognized.

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... an emotional orchid ... 

CHAPTER 1

THE THEATRICAL CAREER OF OLGA NETHERSOLE

At different times during her childhood young Olga thought of becoming a nun, a social worker, a nurse and a doctor. But from the age of seven when she was taken to see her first pantomime her most insistent dream was that of becoming a famous actress. In 1901, having achieved her goal, Nethersole talked about her early childhood to Lavinia Hart in Cosmopolitan magazine.¹ She described herself as an eccentric child who was much more interested in acting out her theatrical fantasies than in running around with children of her own age. Olga's passion for the theatre blossomed in the hostile environment of a conservative English family life where there was not much understanding nor enthusiasm for a little girl's stage ambitions. But despite the initial opposition of her family, and possessed of incredible willpower, persistence and a capacity for hard work, Olga Nethersole fought her way up to becoming one of the most famous actress-managers of the Edwardian era.

Olga Isabel was born January 18, 1870 to Mr. and Mrs. Henry Nethersole of Kensington, London. Her father's position as a London solicitor enabled him to provide a comfortable middle-class upbringing for his four children, Louis, Christine, Leonora and Olga. The youngest child, Olga, was educated in private schools in England and in Holland. When she was sixteen her father died suddenly leaving the family with no visible means of support. By this time her sisters had married and it became Olga's responsibility to support her mother. Whether her brother Louis, who was five years older, shared the burden is not clear. However, Olga was especially close to her mother.

2"Olga Nethersole," Who's Who in the Theatre, 10th ed., (London: I. Pitman, 1947), p. 1091. Some sources incorrectly note that Nethersole was born in 1863. The most noteworthy of these is Robert Tracy's entry in The Oxford Companion to the Theatre. However, there are other obvious errors in his account of her career. The New York Times obituary states that she died at age 80, which agrees with Nethersole's own claims about her age. The Times (London) obituary omits specific mention of her age and date of birth, suggesting some doubt. Her date of birth is not on file with the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, St. Catherine's House, London. The Nethersole heirs confirm the date of birth, but claim that her father was a judge. A portrait of "Judge Nethersole" hangs on the wall of the family home. The discrepancy between their claim and all published sources may be explained by the fact that he was a barrister.

3Olga Nethersole's will, September 23, 1913, Principal Registry of Great Britain, Somerset House, London. Ann Everal Callis in "Olga Nethersole and The Sapho Scandal," (M.A. thesis The Ohio State University, 1974), p. 9 has interpreted Olga's sister's name as "Leonna" from the handwriting in the will.
from whose Spanish ancestry she had inherited her Latin looks and volatile personality. At the age of thirty-one, she claimed that her love for her mother had been "the one grand passion" of her life.4

Because of her mother's strong opposition to a stage career, Olga took a position as governess, teaching French and music to her young charges.5 During her brief tenure as a governess, she was invited to participate in amateur theatricals for a charity fundraiser at an institution for the mentally retarded at Colony Hatch, Surrey.6 Years later she would often refer to the deep impression this first "audience of lunatics" made upon her, awakening her to the terrible plight and appalling conditions suffered by the mentally ill. A growing dissatisfaction with her life as a governess together with occasional exposure to amateur theatricals finally prompted Olga to attempt a stage career. In "My Struggles to Succeed" (an article written for Cosmopolitan), she describes the overwhelming difficulties of breaking into the profession with no experience and no

4Hart, p. 16. I have been unable to discover her mother's name from published sources or from the Nethersole heirs.


6Ibid.
theatrical connections of any kind. Finally, an acquaintance who knew an actor persuaded him to write her a letter of introduction to a London manager. It took her another three months to present the letter at the theatre and six more weeks before she was ushered in to see him. According to her account, events moved rapidly from that meeting. She was seventeen years old when Charles Hawtrey offered her an engagement with his Brighton company.

The fledgling actress' first professional appearance was in a small role in Henry Hamilton's light comedy Harvest. Following the opening at the Theatre Royal, Brighton, on March 5, 1887, the London correspondent for The Stage reported that she played her part with "delightful freshness and simplicity," and The Era also found her "charming." Despite her total inexperience, the latter wrote that the love-making between herself and her partner was "a natural and most effective piece of acting." The production went on a tour of provincial towns including Croydon, Leicester, Liverpool, Leeds, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Glasgow.

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8Spolliver, p. 802.

9March 11, 1887, p. 3.

10March 12, 1887, p. 17.
Hull and Nottingham. Olga's introduction to a stage career was very pleasant for everywhere they went *Harvest* played to full houses and the young novice received favorable notices. The provincial critics praised her freshness, grace and vigor and reported that she quickly became popular with the country audiences. The Scottish houses were especially enthusiastic. In Edinburgh she was hailed as a talented young actress "whose artistic and sympathetic performance is one of the most pleasant remembrances"\(^{11}\) and at Glasgow the response was "a refreshing performance we have not often seen, characterized as it was by rare simplicity and grace."\(^{12}\) By August she had made such a good first impression that she was hired by Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Dacre's company to play Alice Pengelly in the melodrama *Our Joan*. After opening at the Prince of Wales, Birmingham, on August 22,\(^{13}\) the company tour included an engagement at the Grand Theatre at Islington where on October 3 Olga made her London debut. Despite the fact that her role as a simple Cornish lass was not big enough to be included in the plot summary, her performance was singled out as "bright and fresh"\(^{14}\) and

\(^{11}\)Era, April 16, 1887, p. 17.
\(^{12}\)Era, April 23, 1887, p. 18.
\(^{13}\)Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, January 26, 1889, p. 1.
\(^{14}\)Stage, October 7, 1887, p. 15.
"amusing and artless" by the London press. Additional roles in the Dacre company include the Baronet's daughter in *Twixt Kith and Kin* and Claire in *A Double Marriage*. In February 1888 she joined Willie Edouin's provincial touring company to play Agatha in the domestic comedy *Modern Wives* and by June 10 could be seen playing a matinee at the Strand in London. The role was a minor one, that of Nelly Busby in *The Paper Chase*, directed by Lionel Brough. Together with the rest of the cast she was noted as having done an adequate job. By this time the young actress had evidently picked up some rudimentary skills. She wrote subsequently that during her apprenticeship in the provinces she had put all her energy into studying her craft. Instead of gossiping in the green room with other cast members when not on call, she would wait by the prompt entrance to watch the actors and stage manager at work. Like all ambitious young performers her goal was to find a London position as soon as possible and, coincidentally, her big break came once again in Brighton. When the company's leading lady fell ill, Olga was called upon to take her role with twenty-four hours' notice. After staying up all night studying the part and performing it to everyone's apparent satisfaction, she had hoped for some mention in the local


press. But the event passed seemingly unnoticed, until to her great delight, a long and very glowing review was published the following Sunday in the London press by a critic who had unexpectedly been in attendance. Within a month she was offered her first London contract and a role that she considered her "first great triumph."¹⁷ In this account of her early stage career Alfred Dolliver states that her favorable review in the London press prompted three managers to make the trip to the provinces to see her for themselves and that all three offered her contracts.¹⁸ The first of these was an engagement by Messrs. A & S Gatti to play the role of Ruth Medway in The Union Jack at the Adelphi, the popular melodrama house. It starred William Terris as Jack Tar and the cast included Charles Cartwright, with whom she would subsequently join forces on her first overseas tour. The plot had a popular nautical theme about an honest sailor who returns from a tour of duty at sea to find his sister seduced and disgraced. Various complications are introduced when he sets about avenging her honor. The critics agreed that the highlight of the play was the scene in which Olga, as his sister Ruth Medway, confesses her "sin" to her brother. The Times praised the new recruit at the Adelphi for the way she handled her

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Dolliver, p. 803.
emotional scenes and pointed to a promising future.\textsuperscript{19} The Theatre said she conveyed her shame with "exquisite modesty"\textsuperscript{20} and The Illustrated London News was positively glowing, praising "her great earnestness, simplicity and charm. She is certainly the most interesting female character in the play; and, comparatively unknown in London, Miss Nethersole has made a distinct success."\textsuperscript{21} The production was an unqualified hit, winning plaudits from critics and public alike both for the play and for a new electric lighting system which had been installed. A December 3, 1888, program notes that by this date the play had run for one hundred and twenty performances, although Olga's name was missing from the cast list. She had been required to relinquish her role to honor a contract previously signed with Rutland Barrington to create the role of Miriam St. Aubyn in The Dean's Daughter at the St. James.\textsuperscript{22} When that play, which was not a success, quickly folded, she returned to the Adelphi with a contract to play leading roles and opened on December 22 as Lola in The Silver Falls by George R. Sims and Henry Pettit. The program noted that she appeared with the permission of John Hare,

\textsuperscript{19}July 21, 1888, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{20}August 1, 1888, p. 101.
\textsuperscript{21}July 28, 1888, p. 116.
\textsuperscript{22}The Theatre, April 1, 1889, p. 231.
who had also put her under option after witnessing her promising provincial debut. The colorful, action-packed plot of The Silver Falls focused upon an honorable Englishman who unsuspectingly marries a Mexican adventuress with a sordid past. He finally leaves her to find happiness with a pure young woman who is more worthy of his love. This production was a significant one for the young actress as it gave her the opportunity to play her first Wicked Woman, the type of role at which she would excell. The melodrama was a golden success with Adelphi audiences, touted as above average by the critics, and admired for its "robust" plot and lavish picturesque settings which ranged from a pastoral riverside in England to the mountain tops of Mexico. The plot was probably inspired by the colorful life and career of the notorious Lola Montez who made her debut as a Spanish dancer in London in June 1843, and whose life was said to have been even more lurid than this stage version. Interestingly, the program refers to the pivotal role only as "Lola," while The Times critic called her "Lola Hernandez," and the Nethersole obituary sixty-three years later identifies the role as "Lola Montez." Whatever her last name, the play's heroine was punished for her depravity

23The Silver Falls program of December 24, 1888, Adelphi Theatre 1888, Enthoven Collection.

24January 11, 1951, p. 9.
by being murdered off, but not before her wicked ways and
intriguing personality resulted in ecstatic notices for her
portrayer. The Times called her performance "striking" and
announced that a new actress of unquestionable talent had
been discovered who "fully captured the eloquent, beautiful,
cynical and heartless adventuress." It went on to praise
the management for casting her in this type of a role
although she had previously played only farcical comedy and
emotional parts and predicted that "her most effective line
of character is probably that in which she now appears." 25

Her early stage life seemed charmed and she had known
nothing but sweet success in light comedy, farce and
melodrama. Following her triumph as Lola, several critics
noted that the novice actress had made extraordinary
progress in her brief two-year career. In the meantime she
had signed a two-year contract as a "leading woman" with
John Hare's company which was to open the new Garrick
Theatre. 26 This highly publicized event was an important
step in her development, giving Olga an opportunity to work
with leading actors in a serious drama. The Garrick seated
1,200, each with a good view of the stage, featured
cushioned revolving seats in the pit, luxurious boxes with

25December 24, 1888, p. 5.

26Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, January 26,
1889, p. 1.
silk pockets for the programs, was heated with hot water pipes, lighted by electricity and extolled by The Times as the most elegant theater in London and possibly the world.  

The opening April 14, 1889 produced rave reviews for the theatre, and only a mixed reception for the new play by Arthur Wing Pinero. It was a new direction for the playwright whose success at light drama had given him the impetus to attack serious social problems in greater depth.  

The plot of The Profligate focused on a profligate who woos and weds an innocent young girl without revealing to her the details of his sordid past. She finds out what a cad he is from a simple country girl whom he has seduced and abandoned. Olga was cast as the rural lass opposite Johnston-Forbes Robertson with Kate Rorke as his bride. When compared to the performances of her more experienced colleagues, it was evident that her Janet Preece lacked simplicity, and she was given her first major criticism. The respected critic Clement Scott suggested that excessive adulation bestowed upon the inexperienced actress by undiscriminating audiences in the short-lived The Dean's Daughter earlier in the season had gone to her head and prompted her to be "extravagant, excessive and stagy.

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27 April 25, 1889, p. 9.

ever since." He qualified his remarks by saying that if she were allowed to stay with the company at The Garrick she could improve her technique by learning what to leave out.\textsuperscript{29} Despite the mixed reviews \textit{The Profligate} continued through November when it was replaced by an English version of Sardou's \textit{La Tosca} in which there was no role for Olga. The cast featured Mrs. Bernard Beere opposite Forbes-Robertson as Baron Scarpia with Lewis Waller and Rose Leclercq in supporting roles. When Mrs. Beere fell ill, Olga replaced her at forty-eight hours notice and played the part for five days with "startling" success.\textsuperscript{30} In later years Olga would recall the role of Floria Tosca with fondness and the fact that the great Sarah Bernhardt, for whom the role had been written, had seen her in it. One of her most cherished keepsakes was an autographed portrait of Bernhardt as Tosca, in a carved leather frame, which the actress had subsequently given her.\textsuperscript{31} Actor-manager John Hare showed his appreciation for her success by giving her a diamond brooch with the words "La Tosca" spelled out in diamonds.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{29}Untitled clipping, April 24, 1888, Garrick Theatre 1888, Enthoven Collection.

\textsuperscript{30}The Sketch, February 21, 1894, p. 177.

\textsuperscript{31}Hart, p. 21.

\textsuperscript{32}Nethersole, \textit{New York Dramatic Mirror}, April 27, 1897, p. 2.
Her engagement with Hare in London was temporarily interrupted when she decided to join a Garrick-sponsored tour to Australia to open the Garrick Theatre in Sydney. Leaving behind her mother in their flat in Earls Court, she sailed for Australia only to hear when she reached Gibraltar that her beloved mother had died soon after her departure. The news devastated her but her contract forced her to continue with the seventeen-thousand-mile voyage. In Australia she joined forces with former colleague Charles Cartwright and their tour was an overwhelming success. For the first time, Olga was hailed as a great emotional actress with an uncanny ability to recreate grief. It was a bittersweet triumph for the young star who felt that her success was due to the insight provided by her recent, painful loss.33

The Garrick was launched December 20, 1890 with a new Australian play The Idler by native-born Haddon Chambers, in which Nethersole played the role of Lady Harding. Her repertoire included the roles of Mary Blenkarn in The Middleman, Vera in The Moths, Marguerite in The Village Priest, Susan Hartley in A Scrap of Paper, Miriam in The Dean's Daughter, and Leslie Brudenell, the new bride, in The Profligate.34

33Ibid.

Upon returning to London twelve months later, the young actress had not been forgotten and the news of her success in the Colonies had preceded her. She rejoined the Hare company at the Garrick and on January 2, 1892 opened as Beatrice Selwyn in *A Fool's Paradise*, by Sydney Grundy. She was cast as another adventuress, this time a woman who had deserted her first love in order to marry a man with money. H. B. Irving was cast opposite her as the husband who is unaware that his wife is slowly poisoning him. A family friend, played by Hare, discovers her intent and forces her to poison herself. The critical reaction was that of general surprise at the improvement in her acting skills. *The Theatre* reported that she was "a very serpent in the paradise, so gliding, so insinuating, so very lovely and gentle . . . she showed that she could feel passion . . . deeply."  

The *Illustrated London News* summed up the general view that "Miss Nethersole left us an amateur, she returns to us an actress who is exactly suited to the character entrusted to her."  

*A Fool's Paradise* continued through the end of June, but in the meantime she was invited to join Charles Wyndham's select matinee company in *Agatha*, a play by Isaac Henderson to be given May 24. The

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35February 1, 1892, p. 99.

36Untitled clipping, January 9, 1892, Garrick Theatre 1892, Enthoven Collection.
prestigious company assembled by Wyndham included Lewis Waller, Winifred Emery, Rose Leclercq, Mary Moore, Herbert Waring and Wyndham himself. Olga was cast in the leading role of Mercedes da Vigno, a sultry siren with designs on the husband of another woman. Her one redeeming quality is her love for her little son, Leo, played by Minni Terry. It was a good part for the actress because it gave her a chance to show her emotional skills in a stirring scene of repentance in the final act. She considered the role her first big success and The Theatre agreed calling her interpretation "the perfection of art" and pointing out that again she had been successful in a "Bernhardt-like" character.37 A month later the Hare company, together with other well-known performers, including Bernhardt, who was currently in London, participated in a joint benefit for the Actors Benevolent Fund on June 23. The following season Wyndham revived Agatha with members of his former matinee company under the new title A Silent Battle. The short run began at 8 p.m. on December 8. Once again The Theatre singled out the Nethersole performance as promising, predicting "her future as an emotional actress of rare eloquence and power." The critic was not as impressed by the play itself nor by the performances of the other actors and commented that there was something "almost uncanny in the

37July 1, 1892, p. 29.
spectacle of a cluster of stars of greater or less magnitude forming a glorious background for an actress comparatively little known to the public."38

One of the highlights of the 1892-1893 London season was a lavish revival of Diplomacy at the Garrick by the Hare company starring the Bancrofts. It featured Marie Bancroft who was returning to the stage for a guest performance after an eight-year retirement. The play, an adaptation by Clement Scott and B. C. Stephenson of Sardou's Dora, had originally been staged in 1878 with Mrs. Bancroft in the role of the Countess Zicka. Souvenir invitations were sent out for the opening night gala on February 18, an event attended by a glittering society audience and marked by speeches and presentations.39 Besides the Bancrofts, the stellar cast included Forbes-Robertson, Hare, Kate Rorke and Olga in the former Bancroft role of Zicka. As the cosmopolitan elegant adventuress, Olga had the pleasure of wearing sumptuous, fashionable gowns which The Queen in its lavish pictorial display noted was one of the advantages of playing a Wicked Woman, as an adventuress is seldom attired in a dowdy wardrobe.40 The Nethersole Zicka was described

38January 1, 1893, p. 64.
39Souvenir invitation, Garrick Theatre 1893, Enthoven Collection.
40February 25, 1893, p. 295.
as "purring" and having "a snake-like glitter of the eye."
In From Phelps to Gielgud, Sir George Arthur recounts the production history of Diplomacy and his view that Nethersole was the definitive Zicka. Mrs. Bancroft's talents as a comedienne did not translate well, he felt, into conveying the evil machinations of an adventuress. Like certain other wholesome English actresses there would cling to her the aura that she was always "the mother of British children." 41

The Garrick production ended July 14 and after a brief rest the company made a tour of Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Edinburgh and Glasgow. When it was revived the following season, Elizabeth Robbins had replaced Nethersole, who had decided to try management.

Ignoring the advice of friends who were against the move because they felt she would be compelled to choose a play for financial potential rather than artistic challenge, the young actress-manager leased The Court Theatre. 42 Never one to balk at risk-taking, she installed her brother as business manager, hired a company of actors headed by Seymour Hicks, and went into rehearsal for a new play by an untried playwright. The Transgressor, by A. W. Gattie, opened January 27, 1894 and played sixty-six performances,

42 Hart, p. 22.
including matinees, before it closed April 7. While the play was condemned for inexperienced plot exposition, dullness and unsatisfying resolution, Olga's performance was well received. The story, inspired by the novel Jane Eyre, concerned an older man who takes a young bride without telling her that he already has a mad wife in an insane asylum. When she discovers the truth, the bride, Sylvia Woodville played by Nethersole, decides to stay with her bigamist husband. This daring choice is followed by a series of complications which result in the husband eventually leaving his new bride. The Stage praised Nethersole's ability to create something out of nothing and predicted that she had not yet reached the limit of her art. The Daily News said her performance gave evidence of "true tragic power," and The Era enthusiastically praised her electrifying performance saying that nothing in her previous roles had led one to expect it. It described her depiction of bitterness and grief as almost "too keen and real" and certainly all that could be "wrung from the part" within the limits set by the inexperienced author. William Archer said the performance was a major step forward in her career, revealing an "extra-ordinary intensity and

43February 1, 1894, p. 13.
44Cited in The Theatre, November 1, 1894, p. 215.
45February 3, 1894, p. 46.
power of self-abandonment."46 Clement Scott, who had so soundly trounced the novice in her first appearance with the Garrick company a few years before, now called her "an actress of the very first importance." Whereas before he had castigated her delivery as melodramatic, he now said it was full of "disciplined power." It must have given the young actress-manager a great deal of pleasure to read in the Daily News that her work now was "full of fine gradations, grounded throughout by a just sense of proportion and giving evidence of . . . true tragic power."47 The Theatre put it bluntly, asking "Can a great actress carry a dull play?" It pointed out that the audience "quivering from the triumphant assault of her pathos and passion" did not care how silly the plot was, or that the play provided little opportunity for the other performers because "... the play was Miss Nethersole and Miss Nethersole was the play."48 Because of the critical acclaim for her own performance, Nethersole could overlook the very obvious lukewarm response to the play itself, and pronounced herself delighted with her first venture into production. She would look back upon the role of Sylvia, which she felt suited her

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47Cited by The Theatre, November 1895, p. 215.
48March 1, 1894, pp. 159-161.
perfectly, as her "first great triumph." Her first attempt as actress-manager encouraged her to seek out and commission new adaptations and plays to showcase her talents. After the lucrative thirteen-week run, and a tour of the provinces, Nethersole decided that the muses were on her side and that the time was ripe for her first tour to America. She was twenty-four years old. Six years after she had made her daring decision to give up the security of her post as a governess for the hazardous life of the stage, a golden future seemed assured.

The First Tour, 1894-1895

On October 1, 1894, Olga Nethersole, her brother Louis, her maid, and her prize collie arrived on the liner Berlin in New York. Taking an apartment at the Savoy, Nethersole began rehearsals the following day for her American debut. The press reflected some confusion as to which theatrical producer had the actress under contract. Augustin Daly in The New York Times supposedly denied that she was under his sponsorship although he did admit that she was "one of the most interesting figures among the young women on the London stage." Alfred Dolliver insists that Nethersole did come to New York under the management of Daly, who had seen her

49 New York Times, October 2, 1894, p. 5.
50 August 13, 1894, p. 9.
act in London. Louis Nethersole was quoted in *The New York Dramatic Mirror* as saying that he was her business manager and that Marcus Mayer would be her traveling manager, "representing" Augustin Daly. Mayer, who had just returned from a three-month tour of London and Paris, announced that he was the actress's "theatrical manager" and proceeded to whip up interest by declaring that she needed no publicity. "The coming emotional actress" he promised would be "a revelation" to the American public and likened her to Clara Morris at the age of twenty-five. He then gave a series of press interviews reiterating his statement that she needed no advance publicity "She's an actress . . . not a fad. . . . She's not the kind we make posters for." Even in an era well used to extravagant claims and excessive puffery, advance interest in the actress reached such intensity that *The New York Times* noted skeptically that she would have to be super-human to fulfill all expectations. In an article headlined "She must thrill us or fail--What is expected in America of Olga Nethersole," it pointed out that more was expected of this young actress (who was

51Dolliver, p. 803.
52October 13, 1894, p. 4.
53August 13, 1894, p. 9.
55Ibid.
hailed as the successor to Adelaide Neilson), than of any other foreign visiting star. Even Herbert Beerbohm Tree, it noted, had the well-known drawback of having an eccentric personality which must be overlooked. Olga Nethersole's reputation had ballooned to the point that she was too great an actress for any stock company, too strong in the expression of passion and emotion to support any of the firmly ensconced London stars, too original and too greatly gifted to play second fiddle to any other actor.

Despite Mr. Mayer's efforts, or perhaps because of them, the tone of the press comment began to change. Several stories were published about the actress' displeasure with the company engaged to support her at Palmer's. The New York Dramatic Mirror reported that her "supercilious airs" and "imperious manner" were making her unpopular as was her belief that her supporting company was "too American."56 Some of the unpleasantness surrounding her debut, according to Nethersole's own account, grew out of her frustration when she learned that Frank Worthing, who was her protégé, had suddenly been transferred to play opposite Ada Rehan in Love on Crutches. In England Nethersole had encouraged Worthing to try the stage, and after he too had been put under contract to Daly, was under the impression that he would make his American debut opposite her.57

57New York Dramatic Mirror, April 10, 1909, p. 4.
When Nethersole finally did make her debut October 15 in *The Transgressor* at Palmer's Theatre, the event was predictable anti-climax. Her supporting company consisted of Wilton Lackaye, Ida Conquest, G. F. Nash, Mrs. Bowers, J. H. Barnes, E. M. Holland and Grant Stewart. Edward A. Dithmar in *The New York Times* began a lifetime prejudice against the actress by giving her the worst notices she had received in her career. He denounced the play as one of the very worst he had seen and her role as Sylvia Woodville as "illogical, unnatural, and ill-conceived." She was like a "small cyclone" he said in her earnestness and self-abandonment, but he could not honestly say whether she is an actress of extraordinary gifts, a competent, painstaking actress of no large intuitive powers, or an inartistic, overconfident and ill-trained performer. He said she suffered from stage fright and could not have made a worse choice of play for her American debut.\(^{58}\) A few days later he published a second long analytical piece after attending the production a second time. In this review, headlined, "No Further Mystery About Miss Olga Nethersole: A Second View of the Overemphatic Actress from England ... Leaves No Illusion of Greatness," he proceeded to compare her unfavorably to Clara Morris, Mrs. Hading, Mrs. Kendal, Sarah Bernhardt, Rose Coghlan, Julia Arthur, Minnie Seligman and Margaret Mather. Rather than genius, he proclaimed, she

\(^{58}\)October 16, 1894, p. 5.
Theatre Magazine of February 1918 places her Camille in the company of some famous ones.
suffered from affected mannerisms. The New York Dramatic Mirror was kinder saying that it preferred to leave judgment of her emotional skills and famous "temperament" until she had been seen in another play. It felt that she was an actress of considerable emotional power, with "a clear intelligence," but that her performance seemed artificial.

On October 29 Nethersole opened in Camille opposite Maurice Barrymore as Armand. Dithmar was somewhat mollified by her portrayal of Marguerite calling it "capable and zealous" and full of "superior natural intelligence." The New York Dramatic Mirror felt the performance was a "surprise" even to her warmest admirers, and compared it favorably to that of any actress after Bernhardt and Duse.

Following her less than auspicious New York debut, the actress now embarked on the first of eleven nation-wide tours in which the response would be markedly different. On the traveling circuit she would play to crowded houses year after year before adoring audiences and admiring critics. Like other visiting stars who received a cold reaction in

59October 21, 1894, p. 10.
60October 20, 1894, p. 4.
62November 3, 1894, p. 3.
New York City, she would find that on the road she was an unqualified artistic and financial success. Her initial tour opened at the Chestnut Street Opera House in Philadelphia on November 12. Her repertoire on the road consisted of The Transgressor, Camille, Frou Frou, and Romeo and Juliet. She played to large and enthusiastic audiences and continued to Pittsburgh, and Washington, D.C., where the fashionable audience included diplomats and Cabinet members and their wives. President Cleveland's wife invited the young actress to a reception at the White House following one performance. The sumptuously staged productions and the actress's beautiful gowns were singled out for praise by regional correspondents. The tour continued to Baltimore, Rochester and Buffalo, where Bret Hart wrote that, "her methods are different from those of her contemporaries . . . her individuality asserts itself at every moment." Toronto and Montreal in Canada; Providence, Albany, Troy, Syracuse and Utica followed. In the latter, the audience was "perfectly delighted with the performance but not the play." The tour included Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Louis and by March the company was in Columbus and Cleveland. At the end of

63*New York Dramatic Mirror*, November 24, 1894, p. 14. Unless specifically noted, all subsequent information on Tour 1 is taken from weekly editions of the New York Dramatic Mirror from November 24, 1894 to March 23, 1895. In some editions there are as many as four entries on Nethersole. See bibliography for specific citation.

64*New York Times*, December 9, 1894, p. 3.
the month E. T. McDonald noted in Detroit that Nethersole was "a star of the first magnitude whose brilliancy was apt to dim some of the older lights." The much-heralded English actress wore gowns which were described as "poems, bewilderingly beautiful," while great attention was paid to every detail of the stage settings. Following an appearance in Boston, Nethersole ended her financially successful first tour of the States by accepting an attractive offer on the other side of the Atlantic. She hurried home to take over the title role from Mrs. Patrick-Campbell in *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*. The Pinero play had opened March 13 but the actress was forced to give up the role with the Hare company at the Garrick to honor a commitment to Beerbohm Tree. On May 15 Nethersole took over the role of Agnes, a woman who finds that her husband does not live up to her expectations. The play was not nearly as popular as *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, Pinero's provocative 1893 drama about a woman with a past, which had provided instant stardom for the unknown Mrs. Patrick-Campbell. Nethersole, who had a reputation as an actress who excelled in tarnished woman roles, had originally been offered the part by Pinero and John Hare and had turned it down because she was tired of "adventuress" roles.  

artistic blunder. Her lack of insight in choosing appropriate roles and her inability to assess her own strengths and weaknesses, resulted in several misguided choices during her stage career. The role of Paula in Tanquerary would subsequently prove to be one of her most popular roles in America. In the meantime, Mrs. Ebbsmith was neither as trend-setting nor as artistically acclaimed as the previous work. Nethersole's rendition was considered more "strikingly theatrical" when compared to her predecessor's "superbly natural" portrayal.\footnote{66 The Theatre, June 1, 1895, p. 370.} George Bernard Shaw disliked the play and found it even worse with Nethersole as Agnes. He criticized her for having "no sense of character" and said that she "gave us nothing but the stage fashion of the day in a very accentuated and conscious manner."\footnote{67 Dramatic Opinions and Essays (London: Archibald Constable and Company, 1907), I, 107-110.} When the play closed June 14, the Hare company, with Gerald du Maurier, Johnston Forbes-Robertson, and Charles Aubrey Smith in support of Nethersole, went on a short tour of the provinces.

**The Second Tour, 1895-1896**

On August 28, 1895 Nethersole prepared for her second tour of America by trying out a new adaptation of Alexandre Dumas' Denise which she had commissioned from Clement Scott.
and Augustus Harris. The play was to be a feature of her twenty-week tour of the country, for which she had signed a contract with Charles and Daniel Frohman. Daniel Frohman confirms that Nethersole was the Frohman's "first foreign star" and sheds some light on the Augustin Daly mystery. He notes that Daly had planned to put Nethersole at the head of his stock company after a disagreement with Ada Rehan but when they patched up their differences, Nethersole's contract was picked up by the Frohmans. Sailing on the American liner St. Louis from Southampton, Nethersole arrived October 12. Following a preliminary engagement at Hartford on October 21, Nethersole opened a month's run at the Frohman's Empire Theatre with an English supporting company of mediocre players and the American actress Effie Shannon who received the only favorable reviews of the supporting players. Dithmar in The New York Times called Denise "earnest, capable and picture-sque." Once again he saw her performance a second time and said that it was her best work to date in New York. Nethersole's graphic portrayal of the woman's shame was so overwhelming, he said, that every audience member felt like an intruder as she "shed real tears and melted her 'make-up' . . . it was

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68 Nethersole, Letter to Clement Scott; Enthoven Collection.
70 December 3, 1895, p. 12.
realism with a vengeance." However, he pointed out that her exaggerated and detailed depiction of distress obscured the dramatic point of the nobility of her self-sacrifice.71

The New York Dramatic Mirror observed that her great "emotional outbursts" were played with "passionate intensity" throwing out "sparks of real feu sacré." There were moments, too, when her technique seemed crude and included the "mannerisms" of other actresses who had specialized in emotional parts.72

Nethersole's repertoire at the Empire included Frou-Frou, Camille, and the premiere production of Carmen, which had been adapted by Henry Hamilton from the Prosper Merimée story. The public furor caused by the actress's graphic portrayal of the sensual heroine ensured sold out houses for the run. It also drew attention to what would for the next fifteen odd years be known as "the Nethersole kiss." The New York Dramatic Mirror, while admitting that Nethersole was at her best in the love-making scenes, suggested that she cut the length of her kisses in half and thereby considerably shorten the length of the piece.73 On the road with Carmen, Camille, Denise and Frou-Frou, Nethersole drew phenomenal business. At the Harlem Opera

71December 8, 1895, p. 12.

72December 7, 1895, p. 6.

House the actresses' "simulation of passionate wantoness in Carmen" captivated the crowds. In Philadelphia she made over $10,000 in one week. In Cleveland she drew large and fashionable audiences, while in Brooklyn "she was sufficiently realistic to suit her Brooklyn admirers." The tour moved on to Cincinnati and Chicago where her "red hot versions" of Carmen and Camille did very well. Biff Hall wrote in Chicago:

> If any American actress should try to do the things Miss Nethersole does on the stage she would fill the theatre. But no American actress would have the nerve to do so. For which, thank heaven, please arise and join me in singing the "Star Spangled Banner."

By the middle of April the tour reached Kansas City and St. Louis where the repertoire also attracted crowded houses. The success of Carmen prompted Nethersole to try it for a run in London. On May 3 the Nethersole company set sail for Europe on the St. Paul in the company of Daniel Frohman and the Bronson Howards who happened to be on the same booking. To prepare for the June 6 opening a provocative photo of Olga as Carmen appeared in several theatrical newspapers. It showed the actress with one foot up on a stool, displaying her ankle, smoking a cigarette and her head tipped to the side in a "brazen" pose. The "Olga Nethersole Season" opened at the Gaiety and provoked an uproar as a chorus of critics condemned the incredible

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74 Clipping, Nethersole as Carmen, Mander and Mitchenson Collection.
"vulgarity and coarseness" of her Spanish gypsy which was in total contrast to the picturesque romantic version popularized by the opera. The innovative realistic touches of which Nethersole was so proud, such as an exit in which she crawled off stage on her hands and knees; when she turned her back to the house and delivered her lines upstage; dropping her voice to a whisper; biting and scratching her captors; her shrieking animal-like death; and, of course, "the kiss," were severely condemned. The reviewers did, however, note that the production was very popular with audiences. It was her very convincing portrayal of the Spanish gypsy, according to Hamilton Mason in French Theatre in New York, A List of Plays 1899-1939 that "began to establish her in the bad graces of critics, who felt that she was degrading herself and her art to appear in the part of such a trollop."75 George Bernard Shaw ridiculed her "screaming, gurgling, rattling" death scene and asked "what is a critic expected to say to such folly?"76 The paying public provided that answer to Nethersole's satisfaction. They loved the "folly" as demonstrated by sold-out houses during the two-week run. Nethersole added Carmen as a standard and popular part of

her repertoire. Following the close of Carmen, Nethersole rested and prepared for a third tour of America.

The Third Tour, 1896-1897

As a result of the considerable criticism of her mostly British company the previous season (one columnist called it "the rankest collection of British sticks that has ever been seen here"),77 Nethersole decided to hire only three British players who would augment an American company. They were Robert Pateman, Alexas Leighton and Henrietta Watson. Her season would include two new dramas which she had commissioned: The Wife of Scarli by Italian Giuseppe Giascosa, adapted by G. A. Green, and Daughter of France an adaptation of When Greek Meets Greek by Joseph Hatton, by the author.78 At the end of October Nethersole sailed on the St. Paul and opened a few weeks later in Boston as Emma Scarli. This year her repertoire of Fallen Women roles would be expanded to include the dimension of motherlove. A simple domestic drama, The Wife of Scarli avoided numerous subplots to focus on the dilemma of a young wife who falls in love with her husband's best friend. The woman has to choose between her lover and her child, and at the end is

78New York Dramatic Mirror, November 28, 1896. Unless specifically noted, all subsequent information on Tour 3 is taken from New York Dramatic Mirror through May 22, 1897. See bibliography for specific citation.
forgiven and allowed to stay in the home. The critics mostly agreed that it was an accurate, if somewhat dull, depiction of everyday domestic life, except for the denouement which was considered ridiculous and unbelievable. Despite this criticism Nethersole kept it in her repertoire for the season. Daughter of France fared worse. It was a lightweight historical romance of the French Revolution in which a young woman has to choose between two lovers. The woman is merely a pawn of historical events, unable to make satisfying choices. Boston critics were quick to point out that Nethersole was not at all believable in the role of a weak female unable to control her own destiny.

Nethersole and company embarked on a tour of east coast cities to Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Connecticut. Her repertory included Denise, Carmen, Camille, Frou Frou and the two new dramas. Christmas was spent in Toledo and followed by a tour to Milwaukee and Louisville where she played to full houses. On January 2 the gossip columnist of The New York Dramatic Mirror reported that Nethersole was to be married the following Spring in London to a "certain Dr. Oliver of the English East India Service," but Nethersole refused to discuss the report. An attack of acute tonsillitis forced her to cancel her engagement in Columbus and she took a week off to recover in Atlantic City. The tour moved on, playing to full houses in Philadelphia and by the beginning of February was playing to
"very large" business in Chicago. Her third tour included frequent reports of Nethersole presiding at elaborate press receptions and society luncheon parties and making well-publicized appearances at hospital fund-raising benefits. These activities would continue throughout her tours of America and are noted in greater detail in Chapter V. On one of her many sightseeing trips she visited Harvard, where the students "rose in a body and cheered her again and again," according to a report of May 8 in *The New York Dramatic Mirror*. The tour closed in Philadelphia and Nethersole sailed for Europe on May 19, 1897. The newspaper noted that she had played to "astonishingly large receipts" and that it guessed that her season's gross "has not been exceeded by more than two or three other attractions in the country." Her personal profits, it speculated, were "enormous" owing to the skill with which she negotiated favorable terms for herself. The Frohman contract was to expire in May but Nethersole agreed to continue under their management for an eight-week season in London, followed by seven weeks in the provinces.79 In a long interview published in *The New York Dramatic Mirror* of April 1780 Nethersole said a cold on her lungs had been bothering her for most of the year and that following her London season


80 1897, p. 2.
she intended to recuperate in the Alps. She said she would not return the following season as she wanted to try her hand at managing a theatre in London but her future plans did include spending half her time in America, which she felt had improved her skills; "It has broadened my mind and improved my art." The young actress said that she felt her apprentice days were now over and that the time had come to make "a permanent impression with my art, if the power is in me!" To questions about the marriage rumor she answered, "never will I let marriage interfere with my career. That is the supreme thing in my life; I am trying to shape it always upward, that it may culminate on the heights." The article projected Nethersole as a serious and dedicated young actress especially popular with the fashionable theatre-going audiences on the regional circuits outside New York City. By the end of her next American tour this image would change drastically and Nethersole would be arrested, ridiculed and condemned from church pulpits as a notoriety-seeking adventuress.

In the meantime, Nethersole again tried her hand at management. She leased Her Majesty's Theatre from Herbert Beerbohm Tree on September 1, 1898 to stage a lavishly designed production of The Termagant, a new drama which she

81This article provides the first mention of her friend and confidante Kathleen Nora Madge Field being along on the trip.
had commissioned from Louis N. Parker and Murray Carson. The six-week run of the "poetical drama" was, however, a decided flop, memorable only because of a series of exquisite period costumes which Nethersole wore in her role of Beatrix, a princess of fifteenth century Spain. They had been designed to Nethersole's specifications by the artist Percy Anderson and were given considerable press coverage in costume and art magazines. The cast of The Termagant included co-author Carson in a small role, as well as Hamilton Revelle, who would accompany her as leading man in the upcoming tour of America. After thirty-six performances, including matinees, The Termagant died on October 10, 1898, sinking into theatrical oblivion.

The Fourth Tour, 1899-1900

The fourth tour of America was the first under Nethersole's own management. Louis, who had sailed to America in advance of the company to handle bookings and press coverage, injured his leg in a fall from a horse a few days before the others arrived. Marcus Mayer was again hired as company manager for the Nethersole entourage which arrived on the America liner New York at the end of

82The Termagant program, Her Majesty's Theatre, September 27, 1898, Enthoven Collection.

83The World of Dress, I (October 1898): 246.
September.\(^8^4\) The company immediately went into rehearsals in Chicago for Nethersole's newest venture, an English adaptation of *Sapho*, commissioned from Clyde Fitch of the Alphonse Daudet novel. The new production with lavish costumes and sets cost Nethersole four thousand pounds, which she describes in a letter to Clement Scott written during rehearsals, which were attended by the author.\(^8^5\) In the meantime the company opened its season October 16 at the Powers Theatre with Pinero's *The Profligate*. Biff Hall reported for *The New York Dramatic Mirror* that the production was "unmercifully roasted" by local critics but that the second offering, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, fared better.\(^8^6\) On October 31 *Sapho* opened and played to sold out houses through November 10. Biff Hall said the "very swell audience" was delighted with this play although press reaction was mixed. Critics could not make up their minds about the merits of the play itself but were awed by the lavish staging and the Nethersole's emotional displays in the role of Fanny Legrand, the courtesan who falls in love with a younger man. On November 12 the company moved to


\(^8^5\) Nethersole, Letter to Clement Scott, November 12, 1899, Enthoven Collection.

\(^8^6\) November 4, 1899, p. 11. Unless specifically noted all subsequent information on Tour 4 is taken from *New York Dramatic Mirror* to June 9, 1900. See bibliography for specific citation.
Milwaukee's Davidson Theatre where Sapho was presented with "the most gorgeous staging ever seen here" according to Claude Norris. The tour proceeded to Atlanta, Nashville, Louisville, and by the end of November was in New Orleans for two weeks. The Second Mrs. Tanqueray was very popular there and Sapho was described as "sumptious." The Profligate and Camille were also part of the repertory. The tour continued to Atlanta, Nashville, Louisville, Cincinnati and by Christmas was in Cleveland. A nagging cold which had bothered Nethersole in Milwaukee grew worse, necessitating that she take a week's rest at Hot Springs, Virginia, before continuing. In Cleveland, as in all previous cities, Sapho played to "phenomenal" business. New Year's Eve was spent in Detroit where the house was packed on opening night despite newly inaugurated higher prices. Next the company moved to Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C., and again was a great visual and financial, if not necessarily artistic success. Charles Burnham, manager of Wallack's Theatre in New York wrote about the Sapho affair a quarter century later in Theatre Magazine. It was not until Pittsburgh, he said, that criticism of the Sapho plot boomeranged into what would become a colossal cause celebre.

87"Stage Indecency Then and Now: A Play that Made Our Daddies Blush Could Be Read in Sunday-School Today," (September 1925): 16.
Press comments that the play included "meretricious, obscene and vulgar" moments did nothing to dampen the desire for tickets at the box office. As a result, Nethersole's press agent (Mayer) capitalized on the negative criticism with sly references to "risque scenes" in the play and promoted the loose character of the heroine by issuing provocative press releases with photographs of Sapho lighting a cigarette. The demand for tickets to the New York opening was increased by two postponements, caused by Nethersole's supposedly worsening tonsillitis attacks. Although gossip columns reported that Nethersole's illness was a direct result of the emotional trauma she suffered because of negative Sapho publicity, Burnham said the postponement was really due to "the mumps." The demand for tickets continued to grow. On February 5, 1900 Sapho opened at a Wallack's packed with an excited audience waiting for some titillating display of lewd behavior. When nothing much happened, the audience over-reacted to the avant garde design of a new spiral staircase, according to Burnham, and became feverishly excited in the scene where Sapho's young lover picks her up to carry her up the staircase to the bedroom. The next day a wave of negative reaction in the press ranged from bemused boredom to scathing indictments, to evangelistic fervor by The World newspaper, which launched into a yellow journalism
 crusade against Sapho, thereby ensuring its notoriety. It also ensured a phenomenal success at the box office. (A detailed account of the Sapho scandal is given in Chapter IV.) As a result of the furor, every ticket for the next four weeks was sold in one day.

On February 21 Olga Nethersole was arrested with Hamilton Revelle, Marcus Mayer and Theodore Moss, leasee of Wallack's Theatre. The production had been charged with being "a public nuisance" based on an affidavit submitted by The World reporter. By the time the court case was finally decided in Nethersole's favor on April 5, 1899, the play had become a household word. It starred in a series of legal maneuverings, colorful court testimony by the prosecution and dramatic court appearances by the actress; as a source for editorials, cartoons, letters to the editor, denunciations from church pulpits, and violent demonstrations by the upstanding citizens of several concerned communities. It was the most famous play of the decade and made Nethersole the most notorious "legitimate" actress of the day.

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88 Callis gives a detailed account of press coverage of the play and trial in her master's thesis.

89 Burnham, p. 16.
Sapho reopened April 7, 1900 and played to overflowing houses until May 29. While Sapho continued to draw fire in the "Letters to the Editor" columns in major metropolitan newspapers, Nethersole banked her profits from the Wallack's production and from at least four other touring versions, which she authorized. When Nethersole sailed for England June 13 on the American liner "New York" she was dubbed "star litigant of the year" by The New York Dramatic Mirror. The paper reported that Clyde Fitch had sued her for disputed royalties. In addition, Mayor claimed seventeen thousand dollars outstanding when she severed connection with him at the end of the season and sued her for that amount. Nethersole herself had brought several suits against members of the public, including a clergyman, who had libeled her.

News of the Sapho scandal had, of course, spread to London. Nethersole was approached by several theatre owners eager to capitalize on the season's sensation. Nethersole, however, turned down the offer of a June opening at the Drury Lane Theatre, saying that the theatre was too large and that she badly needed a rest. She spent the summer

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90New York Times, April 6, 1900, p. 7.
91June 9, 1900, p. 13.
92See Chapter IV.
recuperating. After fishing in Scotland, Nethersole sailed over to Paris to visit the Paris Exposition and to purchase new gowns for Sapho and her upcoming production of Sudermann's Magda. Her status as a visiting celebrity was reaffirmed when she was invited to participate in a charity benefit with Mounet-Sully, Réjane and Madame Hading.94 At the end of October she returned to New York, sailing from Cherbourg on the St. Paul, for what was to be her customary tour. In what proved to be an omen that she was not physically prepared for the rigors of yet another regional tour, Nethersole was detained by the customs officer and charged with a "large amount" of tax on the new gowns she had purchased in Paris. In her explanation in The New York Times, she confessed that she had inadvertently declared herself to be an American citizen.95 In the meantime, her brother had taken over from the dismissed Marcus Mayer as manager of the tour. Nethersole's plans included the opening of Sapho again at Wallack's for a month beginning November 12, followed by her debut of Magda in Washington, D.C., and her first Pacific Coast tour. Playing opposite Nethersole was a new leading man, Harrison Hunter. He was an American born actor who had spent his career in

95 Ibid.
London and whom Nethersole hired when Hamilton Revelle resigned after the traumatic previous season.96

Despite these plans, announced in The New York Times, all traces of Nethersole and company suddenly vanish from the theatrical media. It is safe to speculate that illness would be the only reason to keep the publicity-conscious actress-manager from cashing in on the incredible notoriety that had been generated by the Sapho affair. There is no mention of Nethersole performances in 1901.97 Her return to the stage and to the Nethersole management on May 1, 1902 of the first English production of Sapho, was accompanied by press references to her year's absence from the stage due to illness. The bizarre customs declaration incident suggests that she may well have been on the verge of a nervous collapse at the time.

Two years after the New York debut, Sapho was presented in London at The Adelphi where it was greeted by incredulity as to what all the fuss had been about. In The Tatler "J.M.B." deplored what he called all the "erotomania" which surrounded it and noted that he was tired of the "lurid studies of primitive feminine types quite foreign to this country." While he admired Nethersole's performance, he did

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97 While there is no record of any major production activity, this does not preclude the possibility of some provincial touring in the British Isles.
not think that Frank Mills, her new American leading man, was abandoned and youthful enough to be convincing as the young lover.\textsuperscript{98} The Era reported that the actress had grown into "one of the finest emotional actresses on the English stage,"\textsuperscript{99} while The Stage felt that her "whirlwind of passionate vehemence and amorous, clinging fervour . . . [was] one of the strongest pieces of acting seen in London for some time."\textsuperscript{100} The Illustrated London News said everything about the production was cleverly designed to showcase the actress's "improved but showy talent" which she carried by "sheer emotional vehemence."\textsuperscript{101} All mentioned the tedious, long-drawn-out scene changes, and the overly long celebration scenes which gave "color" to the production but seemed to go on for ever. No one mentioned the notorious staircase-leading-to-the-bedroom scene, which was probably omitted. \textit{The New York Times} indicated that the London production had been "emasculated" to meet the censor's requirements. \textit{Sapho} was given seventy-one times, including matinees, through July 12. Nethersole may have taken \textit{Sapho} on a tour of the provinces following the close

\textsuperscript{98}"The Return of Miss Nethersole and Mr. Hawtry," 45 (May 7, 1902): 205.
\textsuperscript{99}May 3, 1902, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{100}May 8, 1902, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{101}May 10, 1902, p. 700.
of the London season, although there is no definite proof thereof. Whatever the reason, whether recurring illness, personal travel or preparations for her next venture, Nethersole disappears from public view for twelve months.

A year later the actress-manager appeared at His Majesty's Theatre with Beerbohm Tree in *The Gordian Knot*, by Claude Lowther, Member of Parliament for Cumberland. The play received considerable attention in the press because of the political status of the author, whose first work it was. Of additional interest was the fact that it paired Nethersole as a scarlet woman opposite Beerbohm Tree as a debauched cripple. Full-page sketches were run in several of the theatrical newspapers, and the lavish costumes were, as usual, highlighted in costume magazines. The May 20, 1903 opening attracted one of the "most distinguished and fashionable audiences seen for a long time."

The next morning the general gloom was noted by *The Sketch* which reported that the play was poorly constructed and the plot unbelievable. Even the supremely wicked heroine played by Olga Nethersole as a sort of sensual combination of Sapho, Zaza and Camille could not be saved by the actress's "energy" and "sincerity." The major problem was a weak plot. It featured a nobleman who is led astray by "a

102 *The Queen* (May 30, 1903), 859.
103 May 27, 1903, p. 198.
shameless siren," Gabrielle Melville. The young man's best friend, Roger Martens, played by Beerbohm Tree, in a moment of noble self-sacrifice kills the woman after she refuses to give up her young "friend." He does this by strangling her in her own long golden hair. The New York Times carried a review by The Times, for the American fans of Nethersole and Beerbohm Tree noting that despite the "langurous poses" of Nethersole and the "sense of picturesque character" by Beerbohm Tree the play was not a success.104  

The Illustrated London News said the production was a bore except for the refreshing touch added by Lionel Brough as a funny and rude grand duke. It noted "it is so burdened with dull speeches that no wonder some of the author's Parliamentary colleagues present on the first night mistook His Majesty's Theatre for the House of Commons, and fell asleep."105  The Gordian Knot closed after eleven performances. Once again Nethersole suddenly disappears from public view for what was probably a period of rest and recuperation. 

Despite this artistic and financial disaster, Nethersole produced another lavishly staged and costumed new play eighteen months later. The Flute of Pan, by John Oliver Hobbes, opened November 12, 1904, at the Shaftesbury

104May 21, 1903, p. 7.

105May 30, 1903, p. 818.
The romantic comedy was given an out-of-town tryout in Manchester on April 21\textsuperscript{106} and heavily publicized in the press. John Oliver Hobbes was the pen name for Pearl Mary Teresa Craigie, a writer with a "fashionable following." This time, despite a glittering, fashionable opening night audience, the lavishly mounted production was loudly booed from the upper gallery. According to one critic, the gallery became so noisy that "La Nethersole" became hysterical and "appeared before the curtain with tears streaming down her face and lifting her arms in mute appeal to her tormentors but without effect." She continued with the third act despite the booing until suddenly the lights were lowered and the play was stopped.\textsuperscript{107} The acting was not the problem, according to the press, which passed judgment the next morning. The problem was the play. It featured a silly story about a princess of a small European country who marries a commoner. The production's only redeeming feature was that the role of Princess Margaret of Siguria allowed Nethersole to display a series of richly embroidered costumes which were effusively praised in The Queen and The World of Dress. The Illustrated London News was also quite sympathetic noting that the actress had


\textsuperscript{107}New York Times, November 13, 1904, p. 4.
engaged a first-rate company and spared no expense for "a superb spectacle." It blamed the selection of the play and the fact that the actress herself was not suited to light comedy. Prolonged scenes of marital jealousy did nothing to help the comedy.108 "Gawain," the London correspondent of The New York Dramatic Mirror wrote that as a result of the "booing" incident, both Nethersole and Mrs. Craigie subsequently gave many press interviews and arranged a free performance for the readers of The Daily Express to solicit their "unbiased opinion." He noted

The Flute of Pan is a strange sort of play, full of unreal and mostly uninteresting people, and that I fear that the thousands of pounds the fair and always earnest Olga has spent upon the magnificent mounting and the splendid cast will not be recouped inless it should happen that the ladies should rally round in large numbers, because of the marvellous frocks . . . in the good Olga's case I hold still more than I ever did that her greatest histrionic success will yet be made, and only be made, in impassioned domestic characters of the Mrs. Kendall type.

The Flute of Pan was Nethersole's swan song in the West End. It closed on November 26 after fifteen performances.

The traumatic experience of a second artistic and financial disaster so soon after The Gordian Knot, must have been particularly stressful to the emotionally susceptible actress-manager. The hostile reception to her latest play turned Nethersole's thoughts once again to pleasant memories

108November 19, 1904, p. 721.
of her American tours in the regional theatres of the country where she was feted and treated as visiting royalty and where, more importantly, her elaborate productions reaped golden profits at the box office. Only a few years earlier she had told a reporter, "America has been very good to me, and very inspiring too . . . America has developed me. It has broadened my mind and improved my art . . . you are more responsive to good work on the stage."109

The Fifth Tour, 1905-1906

The following year Nethersole and an English company arrived in America after a four-year absence to enjoy a tour that was as successful and as financially rewarding as she could have hoped for. In her company was former leading man Hamilton Revelle, and Dorothy Grimston, a daughter of Mrs. Kendall. Her husband, B. A. Mayer, was Nethersole's acting manager. The fifth tour was to feature the debut of The Labyrinth by Paul Hervieu. The play was the first of a new repertoire of "problem" plays in which the actress would present moral lessons on contemporary issues such as divorce and the exploitation of the poor. Most of her material would come from translations of respected French playwrights such as Academy member Hervieu, or were new plays written for her by unknown American playwrights. Nethersole wrote

109 Nethersole, New York Dramatic Mirror, April 17, 1897, p. 2.
of her growing awareness of the changing tastes of her audiences in an article she prepared for *The Green Book Magazine* entitled "Sex Dramas Today and Yesterday."

The day of preaching is over; the day of teaching has arrived. I confidently believe that the pulpit has given way to the forum. People now think for themselves, desiring only to be taught, to be aroused to thought. The stage is the greatest forum in the world for the discussion of that which concerns our living, everything that relates to our social condition and its betterment.\(^{110}\)

Nethersole's own growing preoccupation with health and social welfare issues (see Chapter V) would at the same time drastically affect her dramatic repertoire as she capitalized upon her prestige to draw attention to those issues and to use the stage as a forum for change.

Unfortunately, as we shall see in Chapter II, Nethersole was unable to adapt her acting technique to adequately showcase this new repertoire, nor to keep pace with the growing demand for simpler acting methods. And while she continued to charm and impress the unsophisticated audiences on her road tours, the criticism of her "staginess," became increasingly more virulent in New York.

Hervieu's drama, written originally for the Comédie Française, was a psychological study of the effect of divorce upon the children of such unions. Nethersole played Marianne de Pogis, a woman who dares to divorce her husband

\(^{110}\)II (January 1914): 29-35.
for infidelity. When her child contacts diptheria and she returns to nurse him, she realizes that she still loves her former husband and gives in to his amorous advances. She is now married to a man she does not love and may not live with the man who is the father of her child. The problem was an interesting one but was ruined by the ridiculous resolution in which the men quarrel and fall over a precipice. The female characterization added a new twist; while not deliberately wicked, she was not blameless. The play opened October 23, 1905 at the National Theatre in Washington, D.C., where Alfred S. Hewes noted in The New York Dramatic Mirror that it was one of the social events of the season. A large and overflowing house greeted the actress with the British and French embassies both sponsoring boxes. He reported that after a four-year absence, the actress achieved "a distinct success in an emotional role of power and intensity." The elaborate staging included scenery built in England and furniture imported from France.

After it closed October 28, the company moved to Chicago for a couple of weeks where Otis Colburn wrote that her Marianne was "an example of the highest art of modern acting in talky society plays" but disappointingy did not offer opportunity for the "paroxysms or outbursts of emotion"

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October 28, 1905, p. 12.
for which she was famous. Following a side trip on November 13 to 18 to Toronto, where the production was "all that could be desired" and to Montreal, November 20 to 25, where it was felt that although "undoubtedly a great psychological study" it was also "an unpleasant one," the company arrived in New York. Nethersole was peeved that in Montreal a charity performance of the play had been cancelled because of the organizer's objection to its "immorality." The New York reception was only a little less hostile. The Labyrinth opened at the Herald Square Theatre on November 27 and remained there for sixteen performances.

The negative press was led by Nethersole's nemesis, critic E. A. Dithmar, of The New York Times. He wrote that this new version of the Hervieu play was "distorted" by the inept translation provided by W. L. Courtney. Furthermore, he suggested that Nethersole's acting style was entirely inappropriate for this kind of a play and that she was, if anything, even more theatrical and artificial than four years ago. He called for "the strictest observance of naturalistic rules" to make the characters believable.

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112 New York Dramatic Mirror, November 11, 1905, p. 12. Unless specifically noted, all subsequent information on Tour 5 is taken from New York Dramatic Mirror to July 28, 1906. See bibliography for specific citation.


114 November 28, 1905, p. 5.
Most of the other critics were up in arms over the daring treatment of the reconciliation scene between husband and wife. The Theatre Magazine suggested that a chaste reconciliation at the child's sick-bed would have been in better taste than what he described as a "salacious ... disrobing act ... an exhibition of sensual passion, which under the harrow circumstances, was merely disgusting." He failed to take into consideration that the "exhibition of sensual passion" was the Nethersole trademark and one which her audiences wanted to see. Everybody's Magazine was offended by the play's immoral theme but felt that it was dramatically well constructed and well performed. "Miss Nethersole is not a great actress, but she is a remarkably good one," it suggested. William Winter went into his usual tirade over "garbage on the stage" and what he called "the intolerable impudence" of Nethersole's purpose in "undertaking moral preachments in the Theatre." Seemingly undaunted by the play's lukewarm response, Nethersole replaced The Labyrinth with Carmen and Sapho, two guaranteed box office draws, and announced that she had

1159 (January 1906) 3.


obtained the rights to Hervieu's newest drama *The Awakening*. Yet the actress-manager must have been acutely aware that while she was being criticized for her controversial material and "artificial acting style," the same issue of *The New York Dramatic Mirror* was awarding rave reviews to Sarah Bernhardt for *Magda*, *Camille*, *Fedora* and *Phedre*, and at Harvard Mrs. Fiske was being heaped with praise for her contributions to the contemporary stage.

At the end of the New York engagement the Nethersole company toured to Springfield, Massachusetts, January 8 and 9. Despite the passage of six years, this conservative community was still worried about the impact of *Sapho*. In an item headlined "Springfield Won't Stand 'Sapho,'" *The New York Times* reported that the mayor had prohibited a performance of that play and that Olga Nethersole had agreed to substitute *Magda*. Nethersole had successfully presented her version of Sudermann's classic drama about the frustration and guilt of a "world-worn" woman two days before at the Herald Square Theatre. The tour continued to Philadelphia on January 22 for a two-week engagement. This was reported by C. B. Dillingham as "the best . . . ever played by this popular star in this city." Her typical bill consisted of a week of *The Labyrinth*, followed by a second week alternating *Sapho*, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and *Carmen*. Everywhere Nethersole was greeted as a major star with top billing and full houses. She presented the same
program at Baltimore and then made brief stops at Dayton, Toledo, Grand Rapids, South Bend, Milwaukee and Detroit, where they stayed a week. A. Francis reported that her stay there resulted in "extraordinary large attendance," especially for Sapho, and H. A. Sutton said that "tremendous advance sales" at the Grand in Cincinnati was followed by "the most successful tour played by her in the city."

Columbus was followed by a week in Cleveland and one-night stands in Indianapolis, Terre Haute, Springfield and Peoria. In Chicago, the two-week stay beginning April 2, was described by Otis Colburn as "one of the most remarkable of the season" featuring an "elaborate" production of Sapho. A week in Pittsburgh was followed by the first visit to Boston in seven years. Jay Benton noted that Sapho was greeted "by a large and brilliant audience," and twenty curtain calls followed the infamous third act.

Several times during the 1905-06 tour, The New York Dramatic Mirror had run gossip about Nethersole's plan for a season in Paris, where she wanted to perform Carmen in English. The visit finally materialized following her next tour, a year after she had bought a summer villa and established a home on the Basque coast. Following the final performance in Rochester on May 19, 1906, Nethersole left for Paris May 24 and shortly after purchased the villa Lou Basquou from the Marquis de Montbrisson on the coast near Biarritz. Although the villa featured the typical
Basque exterior design it was equipped with every modern convenience inside. Nethersole was enchanted with her hideaway which featured its own private footpath to the sea and a wonderful panoramic view of the Pyrenees. In an interview in Theatre Magazine Nethersole explained that she had been opening her home at Hampstead for shorter periods each summer because the English climate had a depressing effect upon her. The sunny southern climate on the Continent, on the other hand, invigorated her. Henceforward she spent blissfully happy and peaceful summers there, planning her tours, studying new roles and catching up on her correspondence with "literary and scientific" friends.

Her neighbors included the writer Edmond Rostand, to whom she was introduced by Bernhardt, and at whose castle in the Pyrenees she was a frequent visitor. In her free time she rode a bicycle, went for long walks in the countryside with her pet dogs and took sightseeing trips across the border into Spain in her "motor-car." Nethersole was one of a group of well-to-do English and American single Edwardian women who vacationed every summer in the fashionable south

118 Theatre Magazine, 59 (December 1906): 323.

of France. Her friends there included the theatrical manager Elizabeth Marbury and actress Elsie de Wolfe.

The Sixth Tour, 1906-1907

Following rest and rejuvenation in the south of France during the summer of 1906, Nethersole prepared for her sixth tour of America by taking a brief preliminary trip to Dublin on September 17 to 22 followed by Edinburgh, Blackpool, Birmingham, Leeds and Bradford. The upcoming season was to be her most ambitious yet, consisting of a 26,000-mile tour of the United States, her first visit to the west coast and followed by a guest appearance in Sarah Bernhardt's theatre in Paris. The new season would feature two new productions: her own adaptation of Adrienne Lecouvez from the play by Eugene Scribe and Ernest Legouve, and Hervieu's The Awakening. Louis Nethersole took over all arrangements for the tour which she would make in her own specially appointed railroad car, the Iolanthe. Prominently displayed in her traveling living room was her motto illuminated in gold on an olive green background:

120Elizabeth Marbury writes about her memories of Nethersole in My Crystal Ball (New York: Boni and Liveright Publishers, 1923).

121New York Dramatic Mirror, November 24, 1906, p. 10. Unless specifically noted, all subsequent information on Tour 6 is taken from New York Dramatic Mirror to June 29, 1907. See bibliography for specific citation.
It matters not how dark the way,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.122

The season began in Pittsburgh on November 19 where, once again, Albert S. Hewes reported that the Nethersole company was greeted by a large audience. Following stops in Chattanooga, Atlanta, Birmingham, Montgomery and Mobile, the company arrived in New Orleans for the week of December 10. The Christmas season was spent touring Texas; going from Galveston to Houston, Shreveport, Dallas, Fort Worth, Waco, San Antonio and El Paso. On New Year's Eve Nethersole made her debut on the west coast in Los Angeles. Don Carlton reported that the nine performances at the Mason Theatre were "the event of the season" despite a higher ticket price of two dollars, stipulated by the actress. The bill of Sapho, The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, Carmen, Adrienne Lecouvreur and The Labyrinth proved popular, the supporting players led by Frank Mills were considered satisfactory and the scenic equipment and staging was impressive.

Large and appreciative crowds met the company in Portland, Seattle, Victoria, Vancouver, Bellingham, Washington, Everett, Tacoma, Spokane, Helena, Anaconda, Butte and Portland. John F. Logan said in Portland the event was "one of the most important theatrical engagements" of

122New York Dramatic Mirror, February 9, 1907, p. 2.
the season, while Benjamin Messervey in Seattle also noted a marked increase in the size of the audience for the "popular" actress. The Far Northwest had a love affair with Olga Nethersole right from the very beginning and the actress returned the compliment by investing one hundred and fifty thousand dollars of her profits in Washington real estate. W. S. McCrea, who reported that the actress planned to become owner of several business sites in Spokane, noted that she played to capacity houses during her two nights there. From the northwest coast, the tour moved to Denver February 25 for a week and made side trips to Omaha, St. Joseph, Kansas City and St. Louis. Mary Alkire Bell described the settings and costumes at the Broadway in Denver as "sumptious" as ever seen there. The next stop was Milwaukee, which Nethersole had not played in nine years. Charles H. Hughes noted that her return sparked the biggest sale of tickets that he could remember and D. Keedy Campbell wrote from Kansas City that Nethersole established a new record at the Willis Wood for a three-night and matinee engagement with "the house being simply jammed for every performance."

By March 25 the tour was back in the midwest, playing Indianapolis, Dayton and Louisville with "grand" business and arriving in Chicago at the beginning of April for a two-week run. It was there that Nethersole had decided to test her new piece The Awakening. It opened April 8, 1907
at the Powers Theatre. Nethersole took the role of Therese de Megee, a sophisticated married woman involved in an adulterous liaison with a nobleman. She gives up the affair when she realizes that her daughter's happiness is jeopardized by the relationship. Otis Colburn reflected the Chicago reaction with his review that he was offended by the attempted seduction of the wife which was "talked of in language offensive, plain, direct and common." He liked Nethersole's interpretation during moments of grief but was not convinced by her "rage." In Cleveland during the week of April 15 William Craston reported that The Awakening was also not popular although Adrienne Lecouvreur drew large audiences. This trend continued for the rest of the spring tour. Next stop was Philadelphia where "a very large and fashionable" audience was "thoroughly interested" in Sapho, according to John T. Warde. The next engagement at Boston had to be delayed because of the actress's recurring battle with tonsillitis, followed by a brief convalescence in Atlantic City. When she did open there during the second week in May, Adrienne Lecouvreur was popular, The Awakening was not, and the program included The Second Mrs. Tanqueray and Sapho.

At the termination of the tour in Boston May 18, Nethersole and company sailed for France where she hoped to fulfill her aim of presenting some of Madame Sarah's favorite roles in English. The gala opening June 4 featured
The Second Mrs. Tanqueray and was followed by performances of Magda, Sapho, Carmen (which was presented as The Spanish Gypsy), Adrienne Lecouvreur and Camille. "Night Hawk," the correspondent for The New York Dramatic Mirror wrote that the actress "has been easily the dramatic sensation of the past two weeks." He termed her visit "a triumph" attended by large American and English audiences, as well as Madame Sarah herself who was seen enthusiastically applauding on opening night.123 The performances of Camille and Sapho were attended by the widows of both authors. Madame Alexandre Dumas Fils presented the actress with two white roses from her husband's favorite tree and told her "You have genius, madam, you know how to act 'La Dame aux Camélias' as my husband saw her." Madame Daudet, attended by her son, was in tears and said "You have revealed to Paris the real Sapho that my husband conceived."124 The performance of Carmen, seen for the first time in Paris in English, had to be performed without incidental music and under the alias because of copyright restrictions claimed by Albert Carre, director of the Opera Comique.

The Nethersole season received its share of publicity in the London press and Paris' Le Théâtre ran a full page por-

124The Chicago Record, June 27, 1907, Robinson Locke Collection, 362-363.
A color portrait appeared on the cover of *The Theatre* of February 1907.
trait of the actress. The Era reported that Bernhardt applauded louder than anyone at the opening night gala and that the Paris press "showed themselves deeply interested in the celebrated actress's performance, whom they consider very talented and most sympathetic." Nethersole had every reason to be delighted with her "daring experiment," which she planned to repeat, although there is no evidence that she ever did so.

The Seventh Tour, 1907-1908

Tour number six had been such a resounding artistic and financial success that Nethersole began her seventh tour of America in high spirits and intent upon repeating her visit to the west coast. She began the new season somewhat earlier than usual, presenting Carmen in Kansas City on September 12. Her repertoire included a second attempt at The Awakening, and Sapho, Carmen, Camille and The Labyrinth. Mary Alkire Bell wrote that, as usual, the Nethersole season attracted crowded houses during the

125"Galerie du Théâtre," (June 1907) n.p.
126June 8, 1907, p. 11.
127New York Dramatic Mirror, September 21, 1907, p. 4. Unless specifically noted, all subsequent information on Tour 7 is taken from New York Dramatic Mirror to May 23, 1908. See bibliography for specific citation.
week in Denver and on side trips to Pueblo, Colorado Springs and Salt Lake City. By September 30 the company was already in Los Angeles where the reception to her second visit was disappointing. The Labyrinth, according to Don Carson, was not liked and, although The Second Mrs. Tanqueray brought in "satisfactory" crowds, the visit was not as popular as that of the previous year. They moved along the west coast playing one-night stands at Oakland, San Jose, Fresno, and Sacramento and spending a week in San Francisco. Tacoma, Victoria, Vancouver, Everett, Portland and Seattle followed. The general impression was that the actress had an interesting program with Sapho, Carmen and The Awakening, featured a clever supporting company and impressive scenic design. Patronage was excellent in Spokane, Anaconda, Butte, Helena, Portland, Jamestown, Fargo, Grand Forks, Winnipeg, Manitoba and November 25 in Minneapolis. This was followed by short runs at St. Paul and La Crosse, Oshkosh, Fond du Lac, Milwaukee, Dubuque, Clinton, Davenport, Cedar Rapids, Sioux City and Des Moines.

A week before Christmas the company took a break in Cleveland and December 23 Nethersole presented a new one-act play The Submarine, again adapted from the French. The playlet was performed together with a dramatic version of the opera I Pagliacci, adapted by Charles Brookfield. Neither piece was received with much enthusiasm and The Submarine soon disappeared from her repertoire, to be
replaced by The Enigma. In Cincinnati H. A. Sutton had suggested "considerable pruning" of I Pagliacci and in the Detroit engagement January 13 to 18 E. A. Margni reported that the "brilliant reception" played by the company did not extend to The Submarine, which was ascribed as a "tabloid tragedy of the morgue."

Next on the agenda were South Bend, Fort Wayne, Louisville and Pittsburgh where a sprained ankle did not stop Nethersole from playing the role of Carmen seated in a wheelchair. The company played Johnston, Altoona, Harrisburg, Reading and Trenton, before opening the New York engagement February 10 to 19 at Daly's Theatre. This was to be the first showing there of The Awakening, I Pagliacci and a third Hervieu play, The Enigma. None of the three were well received by the New York press. The New York Dramatic Mirror accused Nethersole of using "theatrical tricks" to indicate emotion, and said she never established a sense of reality. The second bill of The Enigma and I Pagliacci fared no better. In the former Nethersole appeared as Giselle de Gourgiran in a "tricky" farce about jealous husbands, lovers and their wives. Her performance in I Pagliacci, which was admired for its attractive scenery and use of extras, was preferred to The Enigma. The drama closely followed the story of the opera, with an added

128 February 22, 1908, p. 3.
prologue and epilogue given by Nethersole dressed as Pierrot and Nedda respectively. The Enigma was dismissed with the comment that it might have worked had it had more rehearsal and been played "with proper spirit." Following the flat reception in New York, the company played a week in Washington at the beginning of March and continued to Boston. There the unpopular double bill was replaced by Camille and Sapho for which there was always a demand. Next the company played Brooklyn for five days, followed by two weeks at the Broad Street Theatre in Philadelphia where The Enigma was inserted back into the program with I Pagliacci, re-titled The Showman's Wife. S. Fernberger noted that the engagement was "very successful financially." The tour continued to Buffalo, Columbus, Dayton, Indianapolis, Canton, Akron, Erie and Jamestown. In Syracuse Nethersole's leading man, Frank Mills, was rushed to the hospital with diptheria and for the rest of the tour her supporting players were described as "lamentably weak." In the meantime the actress's speaking engagements on behalf of her "tuberculosis crusade" were getting as much publicity as her theatrical performances. The season ended at the Brooklyn Theatre May 11 to 16, with Nethersole participating at The Friar's Festival on the afternoon of May 14. The

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129January 29, 1908, p. 3.
130See Chapter V.
organization of theatrical press agents to which her brother belonged donated ten percent of the fifteen thousand dollar proceeds to the Actor's Fund. Nethersole gave a recitation on a program which included Victor Herbert, Eddie Foy, Lew Fields and Joe Weber, George M. Cohan and Louise Dresser. The event was attended by a roster of the best known names in the world of entertainment and high society. Shortly thereafter Louis Nethersole left for Vancouver and Australia to handle the theatrical business affairs of actress Margaret Anglin. Nethersole's customary departure for Europe at the end of the season is not noted that year in the press. It is assumed that she summered as usual in France and she may have spent some time visiting her property in Washington.

The Eighth Tour, 1908-1909

There is no mention of Nethersole's theatrical plans until the following January of 1909 when The New York Times reported that the actress would soon open in a new play with an all-American company.

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131A report in The New York Dramatic Mirror, October 19, 1907, p. 4, Personal Column, notes that she was planning to play an engagement in the "City of Mexico in April before going to Paris." There is no evidence that this plan materialized.

The Writing on the Wall commissioned by Nethersole from William J. Hurlbut was a step forward in Nethersole's determination to use the stage as "a forum" for a play that would present a problem, suggest a solution and teach a moral. In a one-hundred-and-eighty degree reversal from her Fallen Women role Nethersole now presented herself as a New Woman, in this instance a wife who reforms her husband. As Barbara Lawrence, she played a contemporary New York society woman, who is interested in philanthropic pursuits, especially the cause of tenement reform. She is married to a slum landlord who defends his obvious exploitation of the poor by saying that the behavior of his colleagues is even worse. Barbara Lawrence gives a Christmas party for her husband's tenants in a property which has supposedly been renovated with a new fire escape. In fact the old one has merely been painted over. When their own son dies in the fire that engulfs the party, the wife goes into hysterics and the husband is born again, experiencing a spiritual awakening. The play specifically named the Trinity Church Corporation in New York, a notorious slum landlord. As a result of the negative publicity, it agreed to make twenty million dollars worth of improvements to its holdings.133

133Cited in "Programme Notes," The Writing on the Wall charity matinee souvenir program, Wyndhams Theatre, July 1923, Enthoven Collection.
the Wall went exceptionally well and was followed by appreciative curtain calls for Nethersole and the author.134 The play was taken on a tour of one-night performances in New York state, followed by two weeks in Philadelphia where higher-priced tickets did not deter business. S. Fernberger said the audience found the play "intensely dramatic." It gave the actress a chance to display her emotional skills and featured a handsome set and strong supporting company. Next, the play was taken to St. Louis where her coming "was eagerly awaited" and to Kansas City where D. Keedy Campbell reported the usual large and appreciative audiences. From there the company toured Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, Milwaukee, South Bend, Grand Rapids, Toledo, Fort Wayne, Columbus, and Cincinnati. Everywhere the provincial audiences and critics were impressed. A. Sutton wrote from Cincinnati that the audience admired the "serious purpose" of the play. By April 3 they were in Chicago where Otis Colburn said that this "fine, big up-to-date American play" had an emotional climactic scene that allowed Nethersole to display the sort of "genius which won her fame." Following some more one-night performances in New York state The Writing on the Wall opened at the Savoy on April 26, 1909.

134New York Dramatic Mirror, January 16, 1909, p. 6. Unless specifically noted, all subsequent information on Tour 8 is taken from New York Dramatic Mirror to May 29, 1909, p. 3. See bibliography for specific citation.
The general response was that the play was a powerful, although depressing drama. Critics agreed that the actress had several fine moments although her acting was ruined by "affectation." The New York Times was complimentary of the play noting that the topic was more relevant than the usual sentimental themes and that it did provide "a useful service" in hammering home its undeniable lesson. Of the star the reviewer reported a few "superb" moments but was otherwise critical:

her general inclination is toward a sickening sentimentality, with long drawn-out and cloying affectation of speech and manner, or an indefinite speech that leaves half her words unheard. She is insincere, and for the most part plays the woman like a simpering ingénue.\textsuperscript{135}

The review of Nethersole's performance was not softened by his assessment of her supporting players as "excellent" and "convincing." The Theatre Magazine did not even like the play, saying the plot was "a momentary dramatic soap bubble" and nothing "Miss Nethersole is fond of opportunities for agony in her acting, and she played with joy on every heart string of this harp of woe . . . giving abundant symptoms of her grief."\textsuperscript{136} Uncharacteristically, The New York Dramatic Mirror was the most unkind of all, calling her Barbara Lawrence "a triumph of untruth . . . the one moment of

\textsuperscript{135}April 27, 1909, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{136}9 (June 1909): 170.
sincerity was lost in four acts of trickery." It was what had so far been the most devastating notices of her career, The Mirror noted that it had become "the fashion" among critics to write about Olga Nethersole's decline as an actress since the days of her memorable Carmen and Paula. It pointed to her performance in The Writing on the Wall as justifying such criticism:

Olga Nethersole reminds one of a beautiful, exotic flower, forced to a gorgeous bloom far beyond Nature's intent, unlike any of the blossoms about her, unused to the true sunlight and real worlds outside the rarefied atmosphere in which she has chosen to rear herself - an emotional orchid.\textsuperscript{137}

The negative reviews had a sobering effect upon the actress-manager, who released a statement that she was thinking of giving up acting to concentrate on management the following season and would have Mary Mannering under contract to perform in a new play by Asa M. Steele. Two weeks later Nethersole packed her bags and left for Europe, to spend some time at a highland retreat in Braemar, Scotland, followed by her summer home at Biarritz.

\textbf{The Ninth Tour, 1909-1910}

But after an invigorating rest she was back again the following season and there was no more mention of Mary Mannering. Instead, she planned a trans-continental tour with The Writing on the Wall to end with a short season in

\textsuperscript{137}May 8, 1909, p. 3.
New York City. A series of carefully released rumors now circulated in the press, from the topic of her next play (which would deal with "labor problems"), to the news that she would henceforward produce one new American drama each season. Also reported was that she was in negotiation with Herbert Beerbohm Tree for a spring tour of America in which she would appear with him in The Merchant of Venice and The Tempest. This never materialized. Also released was a statement that she would conduct all final rehearsals herself, using an all-American company for her American plays, and augmenting this with English actors for her foreign plays. At the end of September, The New York Times announced that Nethersole and her companion Madge Field were staying at the Plaza Hotel following their trip on the Mauretania in preparation for the upcoming season. Nethersole supervised the final ensemble rehearsals with her new company. American company members consisted of Harrison Hunter as leading man, Albert Perry, George Howell, Hamilton Mott, Joe Wallace, L. Lane, R. W. Bruner, Charlotte Tittell, Florence Huntington and Katherine Wallace. Her English players were Slaine Mills, Charles

139 New York Dramatic Mirror, October 9, 1909, p. 12.
141 October 1, 1909, p. 20.
Millar, Alice Gordon, Lillian Stafford, Constance Raymond and Beatrice Clairemont. Manager of the company was Wallace Munro. In the meantime the New York Dramatic Mirror's "Personal" column reported that Nethersole seemed to cope remarkably well with the severe criticism she had been subjected to ever since she had added Paul Hervieu's plays to her repertoire. It noted that she seemed to be able to adopt a "generous attitude" to her most hostile critics.

On October 11, 1909 Nethersole opened at the Academy of Music in Baltimore with The Writing on the Wall. Harold Rutledge noted that she would also premiere a play by Asa Steele entitled Luck of Wall Street, but despite frequent references to the "new" play throughout the season and that it would be "an individual message to America" and contain "an emotional scene that 'out-Carmen's Carmen,'" it never materialized. The company began by playing short engagements at Norfolk, Richmond, Roanoke, Lynchburg, Charlotte, Charleston, Savannah, Jacksonville, Macon and Atlanta. The first week of November was spent in New Orleans where Jose M. Quintero reported that the actress always proved to be "a magnet of great drawing power" at the Tulane Theatre. "Capacity" short engagements were played at

142 New York Dramatic Mirror, October 9, 1909, p. 13. Unless specifically noted, all subsequent information on Tour 9 is taken from New York Dramatic Mirror to May 14, 1910, p. 4. See bibliography for specific citation.
Pensacola, Montgomery, Selma, Birmingham, Chattanooga, Nashville, Memphis, Yazoo City, Mississippi, Houston, Waco, Fort Worth, Dallas, McAlester, Muskogee, Tuba, Enid, Oklahoma City, Guthrie, Denison, Austin and San Antonio. Lee Landers reported that the three-night plus-one-matinee engagement in Dallas was a great social event with standing room only available. The bill consisted of three performances of *The Writing on the Wall* and one performance of *Sapho*. Following brief stops at Tucson, Prescott, Phoenix and Redlands, the company arrived in Los Angeles for the week between Christmas and the New Year. *The Writing on the Wall* drew capacity crowds, and was augmented with a performance of *Sapho* and one of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. From San Diego, Santa Barbara, Bakersfield, Fresno, Stockton and Sacramento, the company moved on to San Francisco for a two-week stay, beginning January 10. A week of *The Writing on the Wall* was followed by a second week of *Camille*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, and *Sapho*. After playing in Oakland, the company arrived in Portland where John F. Logan reported that the best way to describe her acting was "weird and magnificent" leaving her audience amazed at her strong emotional powers but also "sort of depressed." A four-night stay in Seattle February 8 was followed by more one-night stands at Yakima, Spokane, Wallace, Ida, Missoula, Helena, Tacoma, Great Falls, Butte, Bozeman, Livingston, Billings and Jamestown, N.D. Three-day
stops were made at St. Paul and Kansas City, with side trips to St. Joseph and Omaha. By March 21 Nethersole was back in Cincinnati, also playing at Indianapolis, Dayton, Columbus and Louisville. In the midwest The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, Camille and Sapho were the favorite productions. Carmen and Magda were added to those three for the New York engagement during the last two weeks of April at the Academy of Music. According to The New York Dramatic Mirror the annual New York engagement was later than usual because of the popularity of the Nethersole company in the country. It reviewed her Sapho again noting that the drama still drew good houses: "She enters into the very soul of Daudet's heroine and gives such a realistic exposition of the woman that at every performance tear-drenched handkerchiefs were numerous."

When Nethersole left for her summer vacation in the south of France, she was undecided whether she would return at all the following year, according to one account. She had been invited to be a houseguest that summer in the Rostand castle, where Edmond's son, Maurice, was to translate his father's play, La Samaritaine for her. The original had been performed by Bernhardt in Paris. The actress was also reportedly considering a tour of European
capitals, as well as a visit to Egypt, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro and Australia.143

The Tenth Tour, 1910-1911

The actress did return, however, somewhat later than usual, arriving November 11, 1910 on the Lusitania with the manuscript of what was considered the theatrical coup of the season, Maeterlinck's Mary Magdalene.144 She also had a contract to perform the title role in the poetic drama under the auspices of the Shubert and Liebler organizations at prestigious New Theatre. For the first time in America she intended to devote all her energy to the one play. The New Theatre had been launched the previous season, backed by a group of wealthy theatre patrons who admired the spirit of the European art theatre movement and wished to duplicate the idea of theatre of the highest artistic integrity. Despite the fact that the venture collapsed after two seasons,145 it was a major coup to be invited to perform there as a visiting player in 1910. The announcement that Nethersole

143 New York Dramatic Mirror, March 12, 1910, p. 11.
was to introduce the world premiere\textsuperscript{146} of a new Maeterlinck play to the stage was the big break that the actress had been waiting for and which different critics had predicted during her career. The role of Mary Magdalene, the quintessential Fallen Woman, seemed destined to catapult her to the very top of her profession. The \textit{New York Times} broke the news that Nethersole was to play the principal role in the premiere of the new Maeterlinck play at the New Theatre. It had recently been completed by the Belgian writer who already had two productions performed at the New Theatre, \textit{The Blue Bird} and \textit{Sister Beatrice}. The three-act play, based on the Biblical account of the woman redeemed by Christ, had been translated by Alexander Teixeira de Mattos and would be given with specially composed music played by the Russian Symphony Orchestra under Modest Altshuler. Liebler and Company had arranged for the regular repertory company to go on the road for two weeks while the new play was at the theatre, December 5 for sixteen performances. Nethersole's supporting company for the production included Arthur Forrest, Charles B. Hanford and Edward Mackay. On December 6 the theatrical press passed judgment on the production and the reviews were devastating. While the play

\textsuperscript{146}Hamilton Mason states in \textit{French Theatre in New York: A List of Plays, 1899-1939} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), p. 6 that despite claims that the New York production was a world premiere, a performance had already been given March 12, 1910 in Leipzig's Stadt Theater.
itself came in for a major share of the blame as being too talky with not enough action to be dramatically effective, its essential need for simplicity was missed in the Nethersole production. The New York Times brought out concurrent reviews of Nethersole in Mary Magdalene and Sarah Bernhardt in Rostand's L'Aiglon. While her aging colleague's performance was reported as young and powerful after an absence of five years and proving Bernhardt's continued magnetism beyond a doubt, Nethersole's acting was described as "fussy," "overly-busy," and "never in repose." The Theatre Magazine grumbled that while she "played the part with unaccustomed restraint" her embraces and kisses were too graphic and violent to make it creditable that the courtesan would be able to undergo a spiritual awakening. It praised the beautiful staging but criticized her elaborate gowns as too ornate, suggesting that this was "raiment that only the Queen of Sheba could have devised." The Red Book Magazine carried a detailed account of the production, complete with illustrations, by Louis V. DeFoe. He praised the drama as a work of foremost importance which lent itself particularly well to "pictorial display" which he noted had been taken advantage of with "rich, beautiful and appropriate" scenery and costuming.

147 December 6, 1910, p. 8.
The problem he insisted was that the leading lady had been miscast:

While her interpretation of the role is not always ineffective, she fails to emphasize the full spiritual meaning. . . . But the work itself is so sweepingly and daringly conceived . . . that the shortcomings of no one member of the cast, even when that member happens to be the star, can cloud its significance. . . .149

Compared to the others, The New York Dramatic Mirror review seemed favorable. It suggested that Nethersole was finally fulfilling the "promise of greatness" which had been predicted for her fifteen years before and also praised the "lavish" design and the supporting cast. Disagreeing with De Foe who thought Nethersole was at her best as the sensual courtesan and failed to be convincing as the redeemed woman, it noted:

In the first act, the least satisfactory of the three, Nethersole was her artificial self. The second act was the Nethersole courtesan. The creature of varying moods, the passionate embraces and the famed Nethersole kiss, remarkable as they are and as appropriate as they were in the second act, still offered no promise of greater things. But in the third act Nethersole as the penitent Magdalene displayed her new strength.150

The long-awaited artistic triumph turned out to be a disaster of such massive proportions that it was a blow from which the actress never recovered. It destroyed her reputation and prestige as a serious actress of the era,

149The New York Dramatic Mirror (February 1911): 753-758.
150December 7, 1910, p. 7.
forever branding her style as hopelessly out of date.
Nethersole would try to pick up the pieces in 1913 on the
regional circuit outside New York. But even there she was
clearly relegated to the status of vaudeville performer,
albeit with the lucrative status of a headliner. Soon after
she would use the outbreak of World War I to give up the
stage for good. Her final fall from favor is mirrored in
_The New York Dramatic Mirror_. Following the initial review
of the production the _Personal_ column of December 14 (p. 4)
notes that her debut as the Magdalene is an auspicious one
for several reasons: it is the world premiere of a
Maeterlinck play; she has been invited to perform at the New
Theatre; and "Nethersole's return to the realistic school of
acting--from which she had gradually been drifting." By
January 25, 1911 (p. 5) the same column notes:

> Undaunted by the waste of time and expenditure which
> went for naught in producing Maeterlinck's _Mary
> Magdalene_, Olga Nethersole and the Lieblers have
> begun preparation for Miss Nethersole's immediate
> appearance in Henry Bernstein's _The Redemption of
> Evelyn Vaudry_. The English adaptation has been made
> by Louis Parker. Evelyn Vaudry, like most of the
> characterizations for which Miss Nethersole is
> famed, is an erring woman.

And finally by March 1 (p. 3) an editorial proclaims that
The New Theatre had a "gratifying record of poetic drama"
with every production in "unimpeachable" taste except for
_Mary Magdalene_. In the meantime on December 28 _Mary
Magdalene_ moved to the Opera House at Providence for one
week. After playing two weeks in Boston, where it was again
up against the Bernhardt tour, Mary Magdalene disappeared from theatrical notice and probably closed. There is little information about the substituted production of The Redemption of Evelyn Vaudry except for a brief note in The New York Dramatic Mirror by F. H. Wilson that it made "a decided impression" at the Grand in Topeka, Kansas, on March 23. The information as to her schedule is not listed in the "Dates Ahead" section but included under "received late" indicating that her plans were being adjusted on a daily basis. Don W. Carlson reported that it played "to fairly good business" April 3 to 8 in Los Angeles, which was followed by a couple of performances at the end of April at Oakland--alternating with "Egyptian and Hindu dances." By May 10 A. T. Barnett noted that she appeared at the Savoy in San Francisco but had changed her bill to Sister Beatrice and The Enigma. There is a note that the actress was expected to bring her repertory for three days May 14 to 17, to Seattle and there the tenth tour apparently fizzled out. It is likely that the actress may have stayed in the area for a while because of her business investments.

151 April 5, 1911, p. 19. Unless specifically noted, all subsequent information on Tour 10 is taken from New York Dramatic Mirror to May 24, 1911, p. 25. See bibliography for specific citation.

152 See Olga Nethersole will, September 23, 1913, Principal Registry of Great Britain, Somerset House.
with the Liebler organization for two seasons, the first time she had not been under her own management since 1899-1900. When Mary Magdalene was abruptly terminated Nethersole sued Liebler & Company and the affiliated Shubert organization. The case was decided in the actress's favor in 1913 when a jury awarded her $32,217.32 for the breach of contract plus interest.153

In the meantime Nethersole disappeared from the theatrical circuit for eighteen months and during this hiatus may have pursued her desire to travel. On September 2, 1912 The Times carried the item that Nethersole, "who has been long in America" would begin a short provincial tour of The Awakening of Helena Ritchie by Margaret Deland and Charlotte W. Thompson at the Prince of Wales, Birmingham, "before appearing in London in the winter."154 The Era sent a correspondent to cover the October 7 performance.155 He found the play weak although he was impressed by the actress's magnetic stage presence. The story follows a young wife, who falls in love with another man, after her own husband is imprisoned in an insane asylum for murdering her baby. She drifts into a liaison with her lover when her incarcerated spouse refuses to give her a divorce. Her

154p. 9.
155October 12, 1912, p. 12.
lover leaves her several years later just before she hears that her husband has died and she is a free woman. The subject matter, focusing on the injustice of the divorce laws, was of particular interest to the actress, who had become very interested in this and other major issues of the women's suffrage movement. There is no record that the play moved to London.

The Eleventh Tour, 1913-1914

A year later on October 6, 1913 Nethersole launched her eleventh and last tour of the United States at the Palace Theatre in New York City. It was significantly different from her previous ones, presenting her as a vaudeville star instead of legitimate actress. Times and taste had changed on the "legitimate" stage which had made the cross-over from melodrama to realism and absorbed the dramas of Ibsen, Chekhov and Shaw. Nethersole's most popular repertoire of Sapho, Camille, Carmen and The Second Mrs. Tanqueray was considered dated in a season which would see Pygmalion become the smash hit of the London stage. Nethersole's subsequent decision to try her luck on the lucrative vaudeville circuit was a sound one. She would be playing to large unsophisticated audiences, primed to the larger-than-life style of melodrama and happy to be titillated by the most sensational moments from her Fallen Women repertoire. Nethersole's return to New York sparked
several articles on the advantages and disadvantages of moving from the "legit" stage to vaudeville. Robert Grau in his analysis of "The Legit in Vaudeville" points out that top headliners such as Nethersole—often referred to as the "Monday Act"—could expect to earn at least $2,000 a week for twenty to thirty weeks a season. Their playlets or "acts" were as lavishly mounted as a Broadway premiere and Nethersole's third act from Sapho was reputed, according to Grau, to be "even superior to the famous Wallack's Theatre production."156 Edgar Allen Woolf, a self-styled writer of vaudeville "playlets," tried to analyze what was required for "Success in Vaudeville." He stressed that vaudeville audiences were fickle and demanding, wanting something that moved them, thrilled them and held their attention. Above all, they would not put up with anything that smacked of contrived, phony resolutions and would express their disgust quite vocally. Actors in vaudeville needed clear, audible diction, an ability to display inner thoughts as well as outward actions and a stimulating vehicle that had been pared down to the essentials. In short, it was much easier to fail in the lucrative world of vaudeville than on the legitimate stage.157 All this interest in the cross-over of major stars into vaudeville was good for the box office.

156 New York Dramatic Mirror, November 5, 1913, p. 5.
157 New York Dramatic Mirror, October 8, 1913, p. 4.
Nethersole, always quick to capitalize on good public relations, let it be known that she had hired a well-known press agent to coordinate (and create) her publicity. The New York Dramatic Mirror promptly announced that "Archie Bell is coming from Cleveland to increase the fame of Olga Nethersole." Bell managed to conjure up some controversy with the announcement that he had no intention of handling Nethersole publicity, whereupon speculation mounted that there was a feud between himself and William Raymond Sill, manager of the Palace Theatre. Whether it was Bell or another creative press agent, someone came up with the brilliant idea of associating Nethersole with her French friend and colleague. Dramatic posters and advertisements appeared proclaiming the presence of "The British Bernhardt," and Nethersole's picture appeared in jaunty advertisements with the caption "Now at the Palace in her famous scene from 'Sapho'." Following the October 6 afternoon opening the "vaudeville critic" of The New York Dramatic Mirror noted that this was "an interesting opportunity to judge the sort of drama that stirred us twelve years ago . . . which she played with erotic fervor and feline seductiveness." He was not particularly

158October 8, 1913, p. 10.

159New York Dramatic Mirror, October 15, 1913, p. 23.

160New York Dramatic Mirror, November 5, 1913, p. 23.
impressed with the results nor with the performance of A. E. Willington Barnes as a "dull monotonous" Jean. The actress, he noted, often seemed "very artificial particularly in the passionate weeping of the curtain calls" and except for one or two moments "before the outbreak of hysteria ... rarely went below the surface." The New York Times reported that the actress has grown "quite matronly in appearance" but "lacked none of the old-time fire which she put into the part" and was enthusiastically greeted by a large audience. It noted that very little change had to be made to the third act to turn it into a complete little play. Besides Barnes, her support included Alfred Lonahoe and Constance Raymond, who had been a faithful member of her former company.

After a brief side trip to Keith's in Philadelphia, Nethersole and company moved to the Colonial where on November 3 she presented an alternative playlet. "The Last Scene of the Play" had been adapted by H. Rives-Leigh from a story by English novelist Mrs. W. K. Clifford. Frederick James Smith, vaudeville critic for The New York Dramatic Mirror wrote that Nethersole was far more interesting in this production although the plot was not fast-paced enough for vaudeville. She played a bride who, on honeymoon,
discovers that her husband has murdered his first wife and
detectives are close on his trail. He kills himself and, as
the detectives restrain her, she struggles passionately and
hysterically for the chance to do likewise. Like The
Awakening of Helena Ritchie the dialogue took a stab at the
antiquated divorce laws, but after one performance,
according to Smith, the play was "immediately withdrawn as
over-repellent."163 Before its premiere in New York the new
play had been tried out at Keith's in Philadelphia where J.
Solis-Cohen Jr. noted that her performance was a "distinct
disappointment" as it was "utterly lacking in dramatic
opportunities" and gave her no chance to display her famous
"emotional abilities."164 The vaudeville circuit could not
stand such feedback and the play disappeared from her
repertoire. In the meantime the actress was asked about
her reaction to playing the vaudeville houses. Her response
was gracious and suitably polite:

My audiences are as appreciative as I could possibly
wish. . . . Except up in the topmost balcony I have
never seen the glowing end of a cigar. After all
vaudeville is really not half bad. Strange to say,
I had never before in my life been inside of a
vaudeville house.165

163October 23, 1913, p. 15.

164New York Dramatic Mirror, November 19, 1913, p. 22.
Unless specifically noted, all subsequent information on Tour
11 is taken from New York Dramatic Mirror to June 3, 1914,
p. 19. See bibliography for specific citation.

165New York Dramatic Mirror, October 29, 1913, p. 23.
Nethersole's next stop was the Orpheum at Brooklyn for five days beginning November 10, where J. Leroy Drug reported that her visit was enthusiastically welcomed. The tour of vaudeville houses continued to Providence, R.I., November 17 for five days, Chicago, November 30 for seven days, Milwaukee, December 7 for six days, and St. Louis, December 14 for seven days. Only occasionally was there any comment from theatrical critics in The New York Dramatic Mirror, and then it was brief. V. S. Watkins reported that in St. Louis the Nethersole program played "to high business." The Christmas engagement at Memphis, December 21 for seven days, was reported in some detail because of an unpleasant incident experienced by the actress. Olga Nethersole had denied a report that she was "hissed" during her presentation of Sapho by a group of society women who occupied boxes. Nethersole admitted that when some audience members had disturbed her performance by talking, she asked them to stop. The request, she said, had been applauded by the remainder of the audience. The tour moved on to New Orleans, December 28 for five days and Kansas City, January 11 for five days, where D. Keedy Campbell, who had covered her visits there since her earliest appearances, noted that the capacity audiences were pleased to see her again even though there were other acts on the program.

166 New York Dramatic Mirror, November 12, 1913, p. 22.
Omaha, January 18 for seven days and Winnipeg, January 25 for seven days, was followed by Regina, February 16; Sherman, February 17; Calgary, February 18 and 19 and Edmonton, February 20 and 21, where it was reported by August Wolfe that "although extensively advertised," she never appeared. By the beginning of March she was back in her favorite far northwest, playing Seattle, March 8 for seven days, Portland, March 16 for six days and drawing "big houses" for her Sapho, according to long-time correspondent John F. Logan. Another friend, A. T. Barnett greeted her in San Francisco, April 5 for twelve days noting that she was "the big card." Next stop was Oakland, April 13 for seven days, and then to Los Angeles, April 29 through May 9 and Chicago May 18 for six days, neither of which cities gave her any press coverage. The tour ended in Chicago. It was noted by Walter J. Kingsley in "Summer News in the World of Vaudeville" that Nethersole had enjoyed her coast-to-coast tour on which "day in and night out... Miss Nethersole has preached the ballot for women."167 Nethersole was becoming more and more involved with women's suffrage and her other interests.168 When Nethersole sailed for London on the Cunard's Aquitania the second week of June, The New York Times reported that she had had "a long interview" with

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168 See Chapter V.
Thomas A. Edison at his home in Orange in which they had discussed plans for her to enter the motion picture field with the purpose of "acting in plays that will help educate children." Earlier that spring she had discussed her film plans in her article "Sex Dramas To-day and Yesterday," saying that she intended to film Carmen and Tosca in Spain and pose for a picture display of Romeo and Juliet in Verona. Although there is no indication that these plans materialized, Nethersole was supportive of moving pictures. She wrote:

Many people cannot afford two dollars for an evening at the theatre; almost everyone can afford ten cents. I have always believed in reaching the largest number, with the best you have, at a minimum price.

Nethersole never did return to the stage, except for one brief charity benefit performance in 1923. Her next visit to the United States was a well publicized return trip in September 1926 as a delegate to the International Union Against Tuberculosis in Washington, D.C. At a luncheon at the Plaza Hotel, she explained that she had retired from the stage to pursue her interest in public health. The outbreak of World War I in 1914 was the catalyst she needed to make a graceful exit from the stage. The "war effort" called

169 June 11, 1914, p. 11.
171 Ibid.
upon every English man and woman to do their duty and Nethersole responded characteristically by channeling her energy into volunteer work, joining the British Red Cross Society and working as a surgical nurse at a military hospital in Hampstead. She subsequently founded the People's League of Health in 1917, representing that organization at conferences in Europe and America and arranged for the publication and free distribution of brochures on a variety of health topics. She served as a board member for various philanthropic organizations, delivered public lectures, was involved in penal reform, promoted the cause of women's and children's rights and pressured her influential society friends to offer financial support. These issues will be dealt with more fully in Chapter V.

The actress-manager never married but lived with her life-long companion Kathleen Nora Madge Field at a house in the Parke Lane district of London and at a "country cottage" in Hampstead, Healthland Lodge, Vale of Heath. In her 1913 will Nethersole left the balance of her personal possessions to her friend, as well as the care of her pet dogs. In fact, Field pre-deceased her, leaving Nethersole fifty thousand pounds in trust for life in 1938.172 The actress also owned Trebarfoote

172 The Daily Telegraph, January 11, 1951, p. 7.
Manor Farm, near Poundstock in Cornwall, where she pursued her hobbies of gardening and botany. She was an ardent "dog fancier," owning a magnificent set of kennels. Her beloved "doggies" received considerable press attention and were often featured in photographs of her off-stage life. In a 1914 article, "Stage Women as Ideal Pet Owners," her favorite chihuahua named "Chiquita," (alias "my doggy baby") is shown as the spoiled pet of an indulging mistress. In an incident where the dog had just torn to pieces a costly new Bengal tiger rug from Paris installed in her private railroad car, she is quoted as responding "My child was lonesome when mamma was away, and I don't blame him at all for what he had done." Nethersole also remained close to her brother, Louis, who continued a career as a press agent after his sister's retirement. He handled publicity not only for stage performers but for shows and pageants such as Bertram Mills Circus, the London Horse Show and the Tower of London pageant. He died March 14, 1936 of heart failure following double pneumonia, at the age of 71. Although it is not mentioned in his obituary, he was briefly married

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174 Theatre Magazine 19 (February 1914) 76.

175 The Times, May 15, 1936, p. 19.
to the American actress Sadie Martinot, (1861-1923), who was a minor actress on the American musical theatre circuit during the time he was associated with his sister's career. Her obituary notes that she was the original American Hebe in *H.M.S. Pinafore* by Gilbert and Sullivan. She was committed to an insane asylum in 1918 and died of heart disease on May 7, 1923 at age 61. Her funeral was a simple burial arranged by the Actor's Fund.

Throughout her life Nethersole understood the principle of the press release in promoting her career and philanthropy. She cleverly utilized the society gossip columns as well as regular news channels. Her "raspberry and cream" garden parties and charity costume balls were well covered as well as such statements that she was running for Parliament in 1924 (her platform being "food, housing and education," and about to publish her "memoirs," although these events never seemed to materialize. Her final appearance on the stage was a mammoth public relations extravaganza to benefit the People's League of Health, on the afternoon of July 2, 1923. The souvenir program for

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179 See Wyndham's Theatre, July 1923, Enthoven Collection.
the charity matinee records an extensive list of donations and volunteers involved in the undertaking for which Wyndham's Theatre was loaned by Sir Gerald du Maurier and Frank Curzon. The play was Hurlbut's 1909 drama, The Writing on the Wall and a foreword explained that Nethersole's purpose in presenting it again was to "direct the attention of the public towards the terrible housing conditions of our own country" and not to "pillory a repentant sinner," the Trinity Church Corporation of New York which had spent twenty million dollars to improve some of "the worst slums" in that city within a week of the play's debut. Before the opening curtain there were a series of speeches and presentations of slides by politicians and health workers illustrating the squalid slums that existed in London and in other cities of Great Britain, and charts demonstrating their effects on the physical and mental development of children.

For her volunteer service Nethersole was awarded the Order of the Royal Red Cross in 1920 and made Commander of the British Empire in the Honor's List of 1936.180 In "A Leading Lady's Last Exit," written by H. de Winton Wigley in the News Chronicle181 just after she died, he said

180The Times, January 11, 1951, p. 9.
Nethersole spared "neither her money nor her health" working to help the poor until a year before her death when she was ordered to lead "the life of a cabbage." She died January 12, 1951 just nine days before her eighty-first birthday, at Bournemouth, where she was cremated. A memorial service attended by a cross-section of society, friends and family was held at St. Peter's in London on January 24, 1951. In a "Letter to the Editor" of The Times Dame Louis McIlroy described Olga Nethersole:

She was a remarkable woman with her quiet dignity, beautiful cultured voice and due attention to her dressing. She won the admiration and regard of everyone who worked with her. She has left a memorial behind her, that of a great-hearted woman."

Some fifty-four years earlier the young actress, Olga Nethersole, had indicated her ambitions and provided her own best memorial:

If my life were summed up in one word that word would be 'effort.' If at the close of my career its story can be told in two words, 'effort-accomplishment,' I shall be content.

Olga Nethersole could rest content.

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182 The Times, January 11, 1951, p. 9.
183 The Times, January 25, 1951, p. 8.
184 January 22, 1951, p. 8.
185 Nethersole, New York Dramatic Mirror, April 17, 1897, p. 2.
"... a creature of brain and heart"

CHAPTER II

THE ACTING STYLE OF THE 'BRITISH BERNHARDT'

"It's a wonderful thing to feel and express big emotions but I suspect that it ages one quickly," Nethersole told one reporter.\(^1\) The comment offers some insight into her intriguing personality and the conflict between her practical common sense and her emotional acting style. The actress had a fiery temperament and enjoyed expressing herself passionately. Despite all appearances to the contrary, however, she claimed to stay firmly in control of her stage "emotions." The artistic sensitivity which helped her to analyze and re-create her emotions in minute detail for a performance was tempered by an intelligence which prevented her from getting carried away by her role. Nevertheless, she was the picture of total nervous exhaustion and spent emotion during her curtain calls. Behind the awesome outbursts and torrential tears was an astute sense of their dramatic effect upon her audience. But Nethersole knew her audience and once it was obvious that she was losing her popularity, her common sense took

\(^{1}\)Monocle, "A Chat with Miss Olga Nethersole," The Sketch, February 21, 1894, p. 177.

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over and she relinquished her emotionally draining career with characteristic grace and dignity.

In this chapter I will suggest the strengths and weaknesses of the Nethersole performance, including her emotional style, appearance, personality, acting tools, "mannerisms" and innovations. I will conclude with an examination of one of her two most famous and representative roles: her Naturalism-inspired performance of Carmen. The other famous role, Fanny Legrand in Sapho, is discussed in Chapter IV.

Nethersole was one of the last of a small group of emotionally-charged actresses who spared themselves no histrionic effort in their pursuit of an emotional "realism" in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The expenditure of energy that the "emotional" actress brought to her performance was exhausting and often debilitating. Clara Morris (1847-1925) is the best known in this group, and she was followed by, among others, Olga Nethersole and the actress to whom Nethersole was most often compared, Mrs. Leslie Carter (1862-1937). While both Nethersole and Carter were advertised as following in the steps of the Divine Sarah, "the British Bernhardt" and the "American

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Bernhardt" respectively did not achieve the lasting prestige of their illustrious role model. Nevertheless, for a short time during the final decade of the nineteenth century in America and for a few years after, they matched and even surpassed her in fame and notoriety. Nethersole's sensational Sapho and Mrs. Leslie Carter's Zaza\(^3\) were the talk of the town, the village, the church pulpit and the newspaper editorial. William Winter provides us with this commentary:

> what a comfort it is to consider that Carter and Nethersole are both extant in the same period, and both engaged in the same holy work! . . . to place within the public reach . . . tribulations of courtesans and hussies, the riff-raff of female vanity, folly, and sensuality . . . a class well represented by Carter and Nethersole, with Zaza and Sapho . . . plays that have been and customarily are shown and acted in a shockingly indelicate and offensive manner . . . .\(^4\)

Nethersole and Carter belonged to an emotional school in which performers sought roles in which they could demonstrate a smorgasbord of dramatic reactions and emotional climaxes. Their method was to observe and dissect human emotion in the minutest detail. In order to stimulate themselves they frequently used different devices or

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"tricks." Clara Morris, the "spasm queen," is said to have kept herself and her fellow actors in a continuous state of near hysteria. Lewis Strang quotes the actress's search for a stimulus:

I am obliged to resort to outside influences; that is I indulge in the luxury of grief by thinking over someone else's woes, and then, when everything else fails, I think that I am dead, and then I cry for myself!5

Carter is said to have worked herself into "a state of violent excitement, to weep, vociferate, shriek, rant, become hoarse with passion, and finally to flop and beat the floor."6 Her athletic anguish was matched by Nethersole's emotional outbursts of tears, sighs, screams, gurgles and cacophony of raucous sounds. Yet early in her career Nethersole was pleased that she had become "less theatrical." Working with John Hare's prestigious company of legitimate actors at the Garrick Theatre she had learned (what would later become the Stanislavsky dictum) that "less is more." She wrote that she had learned that "the expression of true feeling is not noisy but quietly subdued and intense."7 Despite this awareness, the evidence suggests that she was often both noisy and intense.

5Strang, p. 236.

6Winter, p. 328.

7Nethersole, New York Dramatic Mirror, April 17, 1897, p. 2.
Nethersole's particular talent for playing the Fallen Woman surfaced soon after her earliest attempts at playing light comedy and farce. Her roles ranged from the brazen hussy who delights in wickedness, Lola in *The Silver Falls*, to the young woman who sins because of a weakness in character, Janet Preece, in *The Profligate*. At the high point of her career, Nethersole dominated her profession as the portrayer of adulteresses in satins, furs and precious jewels. There is a wonderful portrait of her in *Sapho*, lounging on a couch in a fur-trimmed embroidered red gown, with plumes and feathers in her hair. She gazes out at the world like an exotic bird of paradise, through heavy-lidded eyes, provocatively toying with a cigarette,—the female symbol of decadence.8 The most popular of her scarlet women were Camille, Carmen, Fanny Legrand and Paula Tanqueray. For a while after the *Sapho* affair had died down, she tried a change of image by playing the French heroines in new adaptations of Paul Hervieu's plays, such as Thérèse in *The Awakening*, Giselle in *The Enigma* and Marianne in *The Labyrinth*,—women who had to contend with marital problems. These were not well received, nor were her attempts at creating new femmes fatale in melodramas which she had commissioned such as Gabrielle in *The Gordian Knot* and Princess Margaret in *The Flute of Pan*. In 1909, influenced

8See Frontispiece.
by her growing interest in women and children's social issues, Nethersole commissioned the role of Barbara Lawrence, in The Writing on the Wall. Not only was Barbara not a "bad" woman, but she was a New Woman philanthropist who tries to reform her husband, a notorious exploiter of the poor. The Writing on the Wall was commercially successful although it was not so much her portrayal as the impact of the play's crusading message for social justice. Inspired by its success she announced that she would henceforward commission American playwrights to write new American social issues plays for her. Unfortunately, this project never got off the ground and the following year she returned to the Fallen Woman genre by taking on Mary Magdalene with disastrous results. If that play had lived up to its expected potential at the New Theatre, she might have won acceptance as a serious artist on the level of Bernhardt or Ellen Terry by New York and London critics. It is also quite possible that with such a response she would have remained in the acting profession and worked at adapting her larger-than-life acting style to the simple realism of the modern era. Instead, she lost her momentum and her desire to rebound with the determined optimism which she had applied to previous setbacks. Following a half-hearted attempt to sell herself on the vaudeville circuit, she gave up the fantasy of the theatre for the grim reality of working with the poor in the slums of London.
That Nethersole was a handsome woman is evident from the photographs of her private and professional life. Although she gave the illusion of height on the stage, she was of medium build, with an excellent figure and a mass of chestnut hair that sparkled with auburn highlights. Large compelling eyes dominated her face which featured a Grecian nose and large mouth. New York Times critic Edward Dithmar described his first impression of her as an actress with a graceful figure, beautiful blue eyes and clear contralto voice. He did not like her mouth which he thought was too big and which he suspected she emphasized with "some odd device of the make-up." He was right; besides having a wonderful sense of color and style, Nethersole knew how to make the most of her hair, features, and figure. Stage photographs show that she darkened her upper lip and lightened the lower one to give the illusion of a full pout. On his second visit to the theatre, Dithmar gave this description:

a broad, low brow, crowned with lovely reddish-brown hair, a straight nose, pretty eyes, a large homely mouth. . . . She is of medium height, well proportioned with broad shoulders, a small waist, and the muscular neck that denotes unusual vocal power . . . .

Lawrence Strang, who provides descriptions of all the famous American actresses of the day, described her as "strikingly

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9 New York Times, October 16, 1894, p. 5.
handsome" with a slender figure and brilliant eyes which changed color with every emotion. He noted that her "crowning glory" made it unnecessary for her to wear a wig on the stage. She combed her thick hair into a variety of exotic styles and set it off with exquisite, plumed, feathered, beribboned and flowered headpieces. Strang noted that she had a musical voice, a "refined manner" and an air of self-assurance. Yet another writer suggested that she had "a strong face" as well as very expressive blue eyes. Nethersole is described as wearing her hair in a large coil at the back of her neck and that its color was "not quite auburn, not quite chestnut brown." Nethersole did not think of herself as beautiful. She told Cosmopolitan correspondent Lavinia Hart that she had not been pretty as a young girl and, therefore had not had a ready-made path to popularity and success. Nevertheless, Hart found her "magnetic" and described Nethersole at thirty-two as a woman with "a beautiful figure, an exquisite cultivated grace, and features bearing the imprint of a beautiful intelligence." Her face and complexion must have also left their imprint upon the public as there are commercial advertisements of

11Strang, p. 224.

12New York Times, October 2, 1894, p. 5.

Olga Nethersole endorsing such products as "Ponds Vanishing Cream" and "Odol." Her face was illuminated by huge, heavy-lidded eyes, which are variously described as brooding, mystic, Arabic, oriental, dusky and always as expressive. She rolled and flashed them in such Latin roles as Tosca and Carmen capitalizing on her passionate southern European heritage.

Olga described herself as a sad, brooding child who was dispatched to boarding school in Holland at the age of eight. She became fluent in French, German and Dutch and upon her return at the age of twelve spoke English with an accent for several years. This continental influence so early in life helped her to develop into an intense, impetuous, highly emotional teenager who announced at the age of thirteen that she was "seized with a religious fervour" and would enter a convent. For the rest of her life she identified with the Latin temperament and liked to think of herself as hot-blooded and volatile.

There is a strain of Spanish blood in my veins. It surges and flows with great intensity and controls me, particularly when I am acting.

14Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson Theatre Collection.

15Olga Nethersole, "My Yesterdays," The Bohemian (December 1907), Robinson Locke Scrapbooks, 362-363.

She could not understand why New York and London critics found her acting overly energetic and demonstrative and decided that she would never be properly appreciated by Anglo-Saxon audiences. When she finally set up a continental tour to Paris in 1907 she was very excited and wrote:

> I shall be happy to play where I can let myself go into a character and play it as it should be played when an actress feels as I feel.17

Despite the criticism of her melodramatic technique by intellectuals such as George Bernard Shaw in London and Dithmar in New York, audiences continued to flock to her performances. Their taste was for the theatrical and a Nethersole interpretation was guaranteed to be exciting and powerful. Dithmar described the extent of that force in her American debut as Sylvia in *The Transgressor*, October 15, 1894:

> She came in like a small cyclone at Palmers's playing with such self abandoment and tempestuousness that she pulled off her leading man's toupe and left his shoulders smoking, surrounded by a cloud of white powder.18

Not only was he unimpressed by the performance but objected to her theatrical behavior during the curtain calls and "recalls." He said she fluctuated from a woman "about to faint" to showing "an excess of juvenile gratitude, kissing

17Ibid.

both hands to the gallery." Her ability to use the curtain calls for dramatic effect was often mentioned. A suspicious critic for *The Stage* had noted earlier during her London season that audience members thought the performance had been too much for the actress who was seen "to stagger and almost fall" as the curtain came down. He suggested that this effect might be a carefully planned "simulated faint" which was "part and parcel of the performance."\(^{19}\) While this is a plausible explanation given the resulting headlines in the press as well as the actress' own innate sense of what made good publicity, there is the possibility that she may have actually fainted. The physical and mental strain of continuously involving herself emotionally with the "savage abandon of a cataleptic,"\(^{20}\) could well have left her close to passing out. This explanation is supported by Mrs. H. W. Green who has recounted that the actress was continually berated by her physicians for this dangerous practice. Nevertheless, until the end of her career reports of her performances continued to be spiced with accounts of her fainting spells and emotional curtain calls. Particularly after *Sapho*, *Carmen* and *Camille* she was often said to "be in a faint" for an hour.\(^{21}\) Amy Leslie who provides us

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\(^{19}\) *The Stage*, February 1, 1894, p. 13.


with the most comprehensive first-hand account of Nethersole style described the toll her emotion exacted:

Long after Miss Nethersole has finished her theatrical performance of a vividly emotional role she lies under the nervous wear and excitement of her acting. Tears bedew her ivory cheeks and mat her long, soft lashes, and her bosom heaves and breath comes fast and fiery, and the physical emancipation from this dramatic hysteria does not come to the actress for minutes and sometimes hours.22

In his descriptions of the seasons of 1897 to 1900, Norman Hapgood wrote that Nethersole's ability to suggest "abandoned passion and despair" was so detailed and so lifelike that few actresses anywhere could equal it.23

Nethersole claimed that her skill in suggesting these emotions was the result of the guilt and pain she experienced upon her mother's death, shortly after she set sail for Australia. The two had been exceptionally close despite the fact that she had not wanted Olga to be an actress. The personal trauma she experienced was so overwhelming, according to the actress, that she was able to empathize with the pain and guilt felt by the women in her plays. Nethersole wrote:

I think it is always so with art. It is chastened and broadened by the true and deep feeling which suffering engenders.24

22Leslie, p. 300.


24Nethersole, Mirror, April 17, 1897, p. 2.
While the above sentiment is reminiscent of the calculated puffery given wide coverage in the nineteenth century press, it is also true that accounts of Nethersole's emotional virtuosity surfaced upon her return from Australia. The Times said of her performance as the Latin-blooded seductress Mercedes da Vigno in Agnes that "her very form seemed to shrink and collapse under the excess of her emotion." The Era praised her London performance as Sylvia in The Transgressor, a vehicle which it said was not worth much, except for the variety and depth of her emotion.

In the earlier acts she was winning, arch and tender; fascinating in her bright womanliness; sweet, sinuous, and sensuous. . . . In the last act the depiction of the bitterness of grief was almost too keen and real.

Leslie describes Nethersole's "unbridled passion and erotic fervor" as so dynamic that no actress made a stronger impact upon her audiences with the exception of Clara Morris. Leslie wrote "she appeals to the nerves more than to the intelligence or to the sympathies" and "sways certain auditors as if she had put them under a spell." Nethersole did not waste her energy reserves before opening night. When rehearsing a new play, she gradually absorbed the impact of a scene and once all the mechanical details

25The Theatre, July 1, 1892, p. 29.
26The Era, February 3, 1894, p. 11.
27Leslie, p. 297.
had been worked out was free to let herself to at the opening performance. Leslie described her acting as "daring and intense" and of the "vividly naturalistic school."

She weeps real tears and sighs fathomless sighs, her fingers tremble, her eyelids flutter and lips twitch in positive muscular sympathy under the touch of emotion.

This emotional "realism" which was used to describe the talent of Nethersole is more accurately explained as a Zola-inspired Naturalism. The emphasis on re-creating naturalistic detail took precedence over everything else even the playwright's intent. Nethersole was innovative and daring in her acting and staging methods to the point where one critic noted that "her head has been turned by the ultra-realists." This reputation prompted Brooks Atkinson to include her in his 1974 volume on the significant milestones of Broadway theatre. He showed photos of the actress in Sapho and Mary Magdalene "igniting the stage" with some of her sensational effects.

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28 The Sketch, February 21, 1894, p. 177.
29 Leslie, p. 298.
Olga Nethersole as Carmen. Courtesy of the Fawcett Library.
shocked "the puritanically inclined" who were infuriated by such innovations as blowing her nose, smearing her make-up, smoking a cigarette, exposing her bare feet, turning her back to the audience, dropping her voice to a whisper and crawling off the stage on all fours. But by far, the most titillating effect was the "kiss." This phenomenon was introduced in her naturalistic production of Carmen and then incorporated into other dramas. Needless to say, the kiss was a favorite topic in gossip columns where it soon developed an identity of its own as "the Nethersole Kiss." The "kiss" became a yardstick against which to measure how far an actress was prepared to take naturalistic detail. Shortly before the opening of Sapho in 1899, The New York Dramatic Mirror wrote:

If Olga Nethersole will give us a Sapho that will not obtrude the voluptuousness of the part, as in Camille, in other words, if the too famous Nethersole kiss could be done off the stage— if we could be allowed to imagine it instead of having it made the feature of the play—we ought to get one of the stage's most interesting heroines.

But when you see Matinee Boys all about the house timing a kiss with their watches, as though it were some record-breaking feat in athletics, it gets you away from the thread of the plot. . . .

There is evidence that Nethersole varied the kiss to suit her audiences' tolerance. For instance, in Brooklyn the

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32 Oral Sumner Coad and Edward Mims, Jr., The Pageant of America: The American Stage, 1925 (Yale University Press, 1929) p. 293.

33 New York Dramatic Mirror, October 14, 1899, p. 12.
Columbia Theatre reported that the audience was well satisfied with the realism presented even though Nethersole "did not carry the kissing effects to the limits reached in New York." Lawrence Strang, who notes that "the intensely realistic impersonation" of her Camille was the great success of her first season in 1894-95, commended her "ardently passionate" performance. But that was before "the kiss." The inclusion of a three-minute kiss on the lips was shocking even to a biographer of actresses.

I should be pleased to omit any reference to Carmen but the notoriety of the Nethersole kiss will hardly permit that. Nethersole's acting was a study in lasciviousness, marvellously vivid and marvellously true to life. Indeed, therein was the chief cause for censure.

William Winter was appalled by her "graphic" portrayals of sensuality which he found "coarse" and "animal." Nevertheless, he said those attempts were more adept than her effort to portray such commendable virtues as "maternal feeling." He had little patience with the philosophy of Naturalism.

That actress... comported herself in her customary manner,—as made familiar in Carmen, Sapho, and kindred carnalisms—that is to say, with convulsions, shudderings, gurgitations, bleatings,

35 Strang, p. 226.
36 Strang, p. 229.
37 Winter, p. 320.
and such other denotements of 'genius' as are usual with performers of the hysterical order. Delirium, of course, is consummate acting. Persons who go to pieces and hammer on things are, obviously, full of heart, and heart is nature, and tears are real, and so are red noses.38

The extent of Nethersole's emotional realism surprised even Dithmar, her chief critic in America. He said of her Denise in 1895 that her confession scene made him feel "like an intruder, and anxious to get quietly out of hearing."39

The poor girl was a pitiable object to look at. She covered her face with her hands and moaned and sputtered her story. She shed real tears and melted her 'make-up.'40

He called her interpretation "realism with a vengeance" and pointed out that her performance was so detailed that it obscured the dramatic point of the drama.

One who remembers every extraordinary actress seen here in a quarter of a century, Ristori and Seebach, Janauschek, Juliette Clarence, Modjeska, Clara Morris, Bernhardt, Duse (and all the others), must still admit that he has never seen a passage in any play more graphically and powerfully rendered, according to the artist's conception of it. . . . It is a memorable picture of the physical aspects of shame. Every detail is correct.41

Nethersole herself was puzzled by the extent of the criticism and the hostility towards new conventions coming out of the art theatres of Europe.

38Winter, p. 319.
40Ibid.
41Ibid.
When I first came to America, I was shocked to find criticism because I did not always speak my lines with my face to the audience . . . I was openly accused of 'insulting' people who had paid to see me and expected to see my face . . . critics actually expected me to stand down close to the footlights and address my words to the people in the auditorium. I said something about the stage being a room with one wall removed . . . and my words were laughed at as being the veriest nonsense.42

One year after Nethersole's American debut, Mrs. Patrick-Campbell blew her nose on stage and became an overnight sensation as Paula Tanqueray. Sir George Arthur reported that this nasal milestone was the topic of every dinner table.43 Nethersole took over the role and at that time, probably incorporated the nose-blowing into her passionate crying scenes. It was just as controversial in America:

> From the beginning, I was billed as an emotional actress. Scenes in my plays called for big emotional work. I wept and sobbed, but when I brought forth a handkerchief and held it to my eyes and nose, blowing my nose as any sane person would do under the circumstances, I was called "vulgar."44

Nethersole tossed propriety to the winds by flouting another old Victorian stage convention when she stepped out of bed in her bare feet during the final moments of Camille's dying scene. Her argument, although logical was unacceptable to Victorian prudery.


44 Nethersole, "Sex Dramas," p. 32.
People in that condition wouldn't be likely to have stockings on their feet—or even slippers.45

Her burgeoning reputation for "wobbly-hipped"46 displays of erotica were largely based on the kiss, which according to Nethersole, was a chaste affair. In 1908 when the 1896 scandal was no longer a cause célèbre (nor an inducement into the theatre) the actress was quoted in the "Matinee Girl" gossip column of the New York Dramatic Mirror. Nethersole insisted that the "torrid" kiss had been blown out of proportion by an overly zealous press agent. Her current leading man, Frank Mills, testified "The stage kiss, like all acting, is mere make believe." The disgruntled Matinee Girl wrote:

Life is full of disappointments, ... We have been brought up on stories of the Nethersole kiss. Critics have written columns about it as an index of the realistic methods of the modern school of naturalism. One critic compared it in chaste phrase with the 'drawing of a cow's hoof out of the mud.' ... Now comes Miss Nethersole asserting that there is no typically Nethersole kiss. ... Drop a blood-red rose red as the rose she tossed upon the couch of Jean Gaussin in Sapho—upon its grave. Requiscat in pace, the Nethersole kiss!47

Despite Nethersole's assertion that she had told everyone that her kisses were chaste, it is difficult to believe that she tried to quash such a tantalizing and lucrative rumor.

46New York Dramatic Mirror, October 14, 1899, p. 12.
Nethersole was an astute, businesswoman well able to manipulate the news media to her advantage and clever in her marketing techniques, as we shall see in Chapter III. One can only assume that the kiss would have been eliminated, and the furor quietened had she not allowed it to continue for financial advantage.

As a public personality Nethersole projected an image of intelligence, dedication to her profession and concern for her fellow man. After giving her a particularly caustic review, Dithmar noted this fact:

Hostile criticism cannot materially affect this lucky and comely young woman. . . . She seems to be very popular. She is, also, unquestionably, fairly intelligent.48

That Olga Nethersole was an intelligent, serious, introverted woman at heart is evident from her writings and from first-hand accounts by the people who knew her. What is surprising is that she should have been attracted to a life in the theatre, where actresses were invariably classified as provocative, flighty or bohemian and certainly not as studious intellectuals. The study of philosophy was one of her favorite hobbies and by her own account included the daily reading of works by Locke, Hume, Spencer, Reid, Berkely, Kant, Plato, Socrates and Aristotle, as well as the mystic poet Omar Khayyam. Her introduction to literature

was somewhat unpleasant as she was forced to memorize a thousand lines of French literature every time she was caught speaking English at school in Holland. Upon her return to England she developed a passion for everything English, particularly English literature, and planned a course of study at Nuneham College, a women's college at Oxford, to pursue "a life of letters and education." Instead she went on the stage, where her study of philosophy, and her unashamedly serious approach to life and work were considered odd and even "mystic."\textsuperscript{49} She wrote:

\begin{quote}
I was often reproved for being so earnest and taking my work so seriously; but it was my nature to work that way. \ldots \textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

Despite the moments of acclaim, prestige and glamor, it is clear that Nethersole did not consider the business of theatre an easy one. She was forceful in her attempts to dissuade would-be-actors and actresses from trying to enter the profession and quick to point out how difficult conditions were and how ego-destroying the criticism.

\begin{quote}
I could not afford to fail. \ldots I would urge only those whose wills are strong and whose mental fiber can survive the strain through which they must go, in case their condition should be as serious as mine was. I am satisfied in my own mind that whatever small success I may have achieved, is
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{49}Hart, p. 17. Also, Nethersole, "My Yesterdays," Locke Collection, 362-363.

\textsuperscript{50}Olga Nethersole, "My Struggles to Succeed," The Cosmopolitan, 28 (November 1899): 200.
largely due to that same seriousness of purpose that inspired me when I first asked for admittance at the gates of the drama.51

It is evident from her personal writings that she was deeply hurt by all the negative criticism to the point where it affected her health. In public, however, she projected a gracious acceptance, and this attitude was noted in the New York Dramatic Mirror of 1909.

There are few more interesting personalities in the theatre than that of Olga Nethersole. In the face of question [sic] criticism she has shown no resentment. . . . The proof of an artist's strength is found in his or her freedom from the pettiness and the peevishness which doubtful comment or criticism arouses in the narrow and the artistically weak. Miss Nethersole's poise is proved by the courage with which, during the many seasons in which she has been coming to America, she has chosen her repertoire and the generous attitude she had adopted toward her most severe critics.52

Leslie wrote that Nethersole's "passionate attachment for her work" enabled her to surmount the criticism and gave her an aura of "sharp nevritic [sic] intensity which is personal and religious."53 She described the actress as having an "exact and vivacious" intelligence which enabled her to assess her strengths and weaknesses. While this may have been the public perception, the Nethersole errors typically were costly mistakes. For instance, she did not

53Leslie, p. 300.
always make sensible choices in the roles she felt competent to handle. Juliet, the only Shakespearean role she is documented to have performed, is one such blind spot. There is no evidence that she had the opportunity to play Juliet before her first American tour when she included it in the season's repertoire. There is no mention of it in New York reviews, which indicates that she tried it out on the road. Her Juliet is most often mentioned as being performed in excerpt, especially the balcony scene. On December 13, 1895 she played the balcony scene for an Actor's Fund Benefit matinee performance in which Irving and Terry participated. Her Romeo was James K. Hackett.54 Like all serious performers, Nethersole wanted to stretch her abilities so that she would not only be identified with Fallen Women roles. In 1897, she wrote about the role, which was one of her own favorites:

My desire to play tender, girlish parts, like Juliet, would have caused some of my London friends to smile two or three years ago. They thought that any part in which I was at my best must have, as Mr. Pinero expressed it 'a bit of the devil in it.' I was in great danger of becoming what is called in England 'a line actress.' My line threatened to be adventuresses. But, happily I have been able to get away, in some degree from the woman with a past. I am enabled to see the latter parts in perspective and can be deft and delicate with a more certain touch than would otherwise have been the case. As a general principle, the wider your range of parts the better is your art.55

54New York Dramatic Mirror, December 14, 1897, p. 2.
55Nethersole, Mirror, April 17, 1897, p. 2.
Unfortunately, the evidence suggests that despite the worthiness of this argument she was not suited to a cross section of female roles and the innocent, youthful Juliet was not a good vehicle for the Nethersole style of emotionalism, as Lawrence Strang discovered:

Miss Nethersole's Juliet was not highly esteemed. While she had moments of genuine power, her acting as a whole was uneven, besides being hurt by undue force and intensity . . . especially the potion scene, she almost ruined by overacting.\textsuperscript{56}

If Nethersole had capitalized on her natural talent for playing "adventuress and accepted the role of the precedent-setting Paula Tanqueray as Píner\textsuperscript{57} and John Hare had wanted, the entire course of her acting career might have been rewritten.

Nethersole had strong willpower and a sense of purpose and this, together with her intensity, gave the impression that she lacked a sense of humor. Leslie provides the following anecdote to show that, in private at least, that was not necessarily so. Actor Edward Sothern, an admirer of Nethersole's, had waxed rhetorical in an attempt to impress upon her "his own special predilections and abominations." In other words, he was going on and on while Nethersole sat with her eyes glued on his face, giving him her total attention. When he had finally come to an end after twenty

\textsuperscript{56}Strang, p. 228.

\textsuperscript{57}Nethersole, \textit{Mirror}, April 17, 1897, p. 2.
minutes or so, she leaned toward him and whispered: "Tell it all over to me again, in your own way!"\textsuperscript{58}

Despite the general impression that she was a woman of genuine personal sincerity, her acting was continually attacked as artificial and melodramatic and full of "mannerisms." These mannerisms seem to have fluctuated somewhat during the course of her career. She was very stagy and melodramatic as a young actress in Adelphi Theatre melodrama. This is hardly surprising, as her only schooling would have been the acting tips which she picked up by watching the "star" performers in the second and third-rate road companies with which she was associated early on. Once she joined the Hare company upon her return from Australia she began to act in a simpler manner, with less posing, pausing, and gesturing. As she grew more proficient at her Fallen Woman repertoire, the criticism of "mannerisms" was not so strong. Instead, during the \textit{Carmen} and \textit{Sapho} scandals in particular, criticism focused on the moral implications of her repertoire. When Nethersole returned to America in 1905 following a four-year break, with a new repertoire of French adaptations, the reports of a stagy technique began to build again among New York critics until the total condemnation of her style in 1910. The "mannerisms" were pauses for effect, exaggerated

\textsuperscript{58}Leslie, p. 300.
gestures, rolling of the whites of the eyes, the prolongation of certain vowel sounds, and occasional moments of chanting. The Tatler asked:

Why does she do these things when she has so much real talent for the stage? . . . she shows genuine feeling . . . but she spoils nearly everything by wielding the big brush.59

Dithmar had no compunction in pointing out these weaknesses during her inaugural season with reviews that would have devastated a lesser-willed person.

The performance of Miss Nethersole is continuoualy artificial and overdemonstrative in speech, gesture and pose. Her 'business' is excessive; there is too much crossing and recrossing . . . it is quite evident that every effect has been carefully thought out.60

Her acting, he said, was "restless, forcible, picturesque but unmoving," and gave the impression that her mannerisms were second nature.61 Dithmar was right that every detail had been carefully worked out by the actress, who thought nothing of rehearsing all night following a performance if necessary. Nethersole wrote:

Each movement upon the stage, each inflection of the voice is a detail of my art. I know why I do this and that. To me it is right, therefore it would be an injustice to myself to attempt to do otherwise.62


60New York Times, October 21, 1894.

61Ibid.

Nethersole could take some comfort in the fact that Dithmar was her severest critic and once she left New York and went on the road, her press notices were a series of glowing tributes. There is some indication that the big city criticism did have some impact upon her style and that she took it to heart. Following the initial season in New York her performances during the next few years were less often criticized for excessive superficiality. As the actress became more influenced by the Naturalists, she included detailed physical portraits of different emotions at which, according to her admirers, she was very believable. With Sapho she refused to pander to outmoded stage conventions in her attempt to suggest a modicum of sex and sensuality on the stage. She could not understand the prudery that greeted her attempt to suggest real human behavior.

Truth is the keynote of my work. If anything I do has any merit, I owe it to a constant striving after truth—after the real thing.63

Once the mood changed in the new century, and Ibsen, Chekhov, Shaw, and Pinero became acceptable, public prudery was replaced by a greater simplicity coming out of the art theatre movement's search for truth. At the New Theatre's brief two-year experiment simplicity was the key and Nethersole's style was not simple enough.

63"A Few Words with Miss Olga Nethersole," The World of Dres 2 (September 1898): 204.
There was no part of the stage which she left untouched during the course of an act. Her hands were constantly busy, now held high in the air with tense fingers, now pressed against her shoulders with fingers relaxed. Occasionally they paused, but in such queer attitudes that they at once caught the eye and kept it from any other part of the stage. There seems to be no such thing as repose in this actress's dictionary of her art.

To an actress who believed that she was being truthful, this criticism of her technical skills must have been difficult to swallow.

But it was in her great Naturalism-inspired production of *Carmen* that Nethersole managed to infuriate not only every member of the establishment, but every member of the press. Although she did not receive one favorable review in America or England, it played to sold-out houses on both sides of the Atlantic and became a popular part of her repertoire. Nethersole gave her premiere performance of *Carmen* to a Christmas Eve audience composed of many critics at the Empire Theatre in New York, December 24, 1895, under the management of Daniel and Charles Frohman. She had commissioned her own version of the Prosper Mérimée novel from Henry Hamilton, although the plot more closely followed Meilhac and Halévy's libretto for Bizet's *Carmen*. The play begins in a square in Seville where a number of soldiers, including Corporal Don Jose (played by Ernest Leicester) are...

on duty. Dolores (played by the American actress Effie Shannon) gives the corporal a message from his mother and also accepts the corporal's proposal of marriage. The volatile Carmen enters, snubs her muleteer admirer Lucas Mendez (played by Luigi Lablache) and quarrels with Theresa (played by Alexes Leighton), a fellow employee of the cigarette factory. She then flirts with and makes love to Don Jose. Shortly after, Carmen slashes Theresa's face with a knife. She is arrested by Lieutenant Don Manuel Sarceda (played by Thomas Kingston) who puts her in the custody of Don Jose. She uses her sensual charms to win her release whereupon Don Jose is punished by being reduced to a private and imprisoned for a month. In Act II Don Jose is now on guard duty as a private. Dolores tells him that Carmen has become the mistress of Sarceda. Carmen appears and suggests that the smitten Jose further prove his love for her by allowing a group of her smuggler friends to pass through, which he does. The next scene includes singing and dancing in a wine shop where Carmen participates and indulges in the prolonged osculatory (kissing) exercises which amuse the male portion of the audience and horrifies the female witnesses.65

Jose, in a fit of jealous rage, kills the lieutenant. Act III is at the smuggler's hideout where Jose and Carmen have fled. The kissing now becomes less passionate and "of a

shorter duration" as the flirtatious Carmen looks around for new pleasures. She makes arrangements to meet her former muleteer admirer who has, in the meantime, become a famous bullfighter. A jealous fight between Jose and the toreador is interrupted by the news that Jose's mother is dying. After he leaves, Carmen joins the bullfighter in Cordova. In Act IV Jose arrives and stabs Carmen after being rejected by her. In the throes of death, she rejects the bullfighter in order to bestow her last "and most abbreviated" kiss on her slayer. The notorious kisses upstaged the production which featured music and lavish costumes and sets. Comments such as the following were typical:

In view of the number and the duration of the kisses she bestows it is not hard to understand why the men who impersonate the parts of her lovers have clean-shaven upper lips. An ordinary moustache subject to such treatment would soon be reduced to a shapeless hirsute mass. It is no exaggeration to assert that if Miss Nethersole were to reduce the duration of her kisses one-half, the performance would be over considerably more than a half hour before midnight.66

The above comments by the Mirror included the admission that she was at her best in the lovemaking scenes. It also noted the use of her eyes:

Miss Nethersole has a remarkable pair of eyes, which it is her evident determination to work for all they are worth.67

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66Ibid.
67Ibid.
The Theatre Magazine later noted that as Carmen, Nethersole "appeals more to the voluptuous than to the truly artistic sense." Lawrence Strang was uncharacteristically blunt calling the Nethersole version a "filthy" play in which "lust and animal passion were shown with disgusting frankness." In common with several other critics he deplored the fact that the pretty romanticism of the opera version was missing. Nethersole was particularly proud of the costumes and sets and her view of Carmen as a feisty factory worker rather than a pretty gypsy. She wrote that she particularly loved the volatile Carmen and revealed in her "abandoned" Spanish nature:

I tried to realize the kind of woman that Carmen must have been—to dress her as a typical Spanish factory girl would have dressed. While the girls are at work, you know, they take off their skirts and hang them up, working in a sort of blousy chemise and a coarse petticoat, most probably a dirty one.

Norman Hapgood later suggested that despite the negative reaction to the kisses, any critic with a bit of objectivity would have to admit that they were powerful as was her depiction of sensual intensity. Leslie described the

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69 "A Few Words," World of Dress 2 (September 1898): 204.

Nethersole Carmen as "a tremendously stirring example of realism in its loftiest abandon to physical candor."71

Dithmar felt the Hamilton adaptation was "utterly commonplace" and called her Carmen "tawdry."72

The Nethersole concept of making Carmen a dirty cigarette girl was also deplored in London. And what the "more dignified" American critics had said reasonably politely, the London critics said impolitely. The criticism was led by the loquacious George Bernard Shaw:

I must ask the responsible parties, whoever they are, what they mean by this 'Carmen' business at the Gaiety Theatre?73

Truth Magazine suggested Nethersole's Carmen as a model for a cockney "Lizer" at Covent Garden:

Instead of gently taking the imagination to . . . blue skies and piercing eyes and romantic passion, she escorts us with overstrained reality to 'Amstead 'Eath on a Bank Holiday. . . . It is a coster's Carmen, the kind of girl who flaunts round the Dialis [sic] in a gorgeous eye-destroying blue gown and an enormous purple hat. . . .74

Since Shaw's Pygmalion was not a London hit until almost eighteen years later, one wonders what sort of influence Nethersole's Carmen had upon his dirty ragamuffin of a

71Leslie, p. 297.


74Quoted by The New York Times, June 21, 1896, p. 11.
flower girl.75 In the meantime he proclaimed the production a travesty of the original novel. Within that concept Shaw felt that Nethersole's Carmen was inconsistent, combining "the dissolute ragpicker" with elements of the old-fashioned "stage gypsy." He objected to what he called her "blackleaded impressionist make-up" and her "two" expressions:

No. 1 drawn mouth and jaw, with stretched, staring eyes for a tragic presentiment of fate; No. 2 for seduction, a smile with the eyes exactly as before and the lips strongly retracted to display the lower teeth, both effects being put on and off suddenly like masks.76

He was most caustic of her graphic death scene, made up of a combination of "all the stage colics and convulsions ever imagined." After reading his bitingly funny analysis of the production, the others seem tame, yet it must be remembered that as a critic Shaw was ahead of his time and lavished the same kind of vitriolic humor upon all players including Mrs. Patrick-Campbell. Much of the general criticism of Carmen dwelt on the fact that the production made no attempt to be pretty and romantic. The Stage deplored Nethersole's turning of her back on the audience as well as the death scene, which suggested "a cruelly-tortured animal."

Noting that it was "a triumph of truthful detail" it nevertheless suggested:

75Pygmalion was first produced in 1914.

76Shaw, II, 10-15.
About to demonstrate the Nethersole Kiss with Hamilton Revelle in *Carmen* in *Theatre Magazine* of January 1906.
Forgetting that realism has its limits on the stage, as proved by the failure of Ibsen in England, she has seized upon the lowest type of womanhood to stand in place of the ideal Carmen.77

_The Stage_ went on to describe her biting, scratching, shrieking and crying behavior as clever and keeping the audience attention but noted "we do not want such creations."78 _The Sketch_ which had missed the London opening said that it could now sympathize with all the furor this had caused because it had never seen such a display of what amounted to "an uncompromising presentation of a third-rate member of Rahab's profession." It was shocked by her third act exit:

> on hands and knees [it] would probably have excited yells of derision if the darkness had not hidden it from most of the house.79

Like the others, _The Era_ deplored the adaptation but praised the scenery and costumes and the stage business.

Miss Nethersole's Carmen is a leering streetwalker, with a ready mercenary smile, winking at all the men, tickling them, patting their faces, and allowing and taking every sort of liberty . . . Miss Nethersole's absolute misconception of the character is the more regrettable, because in face, figure, and voice she has all the necessary "means" for the embodiment of Carmen. Her appearance is picturesque, and she has the requisite physical ease and freedom . . .

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77June 11, 1896, p. 13.

78Ibid.

79June 10, 1896, p. 255.
He wrote that she robbed the death scene of all "art and dignity" by "squealing long and vigorously" and running to the front of the stage and "doubling herself in half." The arch conservative Clement Scott commented that the Nethersole Carmen made him "shudder" and he felt that she was playing what he called "the New-Woman game" or suggesting how the modern era woman captivated and ensnared the male. He insisted that even in the "most depraved woman there is 'something' of the angel still". The image of an angel was sorely strained by a widely distributed, saucy photograph of Carmen showing an ankle and smoking a cigarette. Nethersole had no qualms about making herself look positively ugly, and adding a slouch to her walk. Another critic described her portrayal as "mad-savage" and suggested that the craze for "ultra-realism is removed by but a hair's breath from frank ugliness and downright vulgarity. It concluded:

Carmen, the old and true Carmen, is an artistic inspiration. Carmen, the new Carmen, is an artistic mistake.

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82Clipping "Carmen," Gaiety Theatre 1896, Enthoven Collection.
83Ibid.
In summary, Nethersole's Carmen was a controversial, innovatively unromantic portrait of a calculating, streetwise trollop. Despite the criticism that it degraded the romantic notion of a Spanish gypsy, Nethersole liked the character and felt that she had done the role justice. She took such a proprietary interest in Carmen that she claimed to have extracted a promise from her friend and rival Sarah Bernhardt that she would not attempt it.\textsuperscript{84}

Her greatest strengths as an actress were the ability to portray real emotion on the stage,--her grief, we are told, could "shame" an audience. She had a strong dynamic stage presence, a musical contralto voice, a beautiful figure and fine bone structure. Her hair and eyes were dominant features. Her greatest weakness was the tendency to be excessively larger than life in the transitional period between late Victorian melodrama and domestic drama and the new twentieth-century realism suggested by Mrs. Fiske. Nethersole's "mannerisms" included posing, pausing, overuse of the eyeballs and sustained vowel sounds used for emphasis. Her ideas, influenced by the Naturalism of Zola and Ibsenism, were ahead of many of her colleagues, but her technical skill in performing them was weak. Having had to pick up all her acting skill by imitating the stars in the companies where she was working, she would have benefitted

\textsuperscript{84}New York Dramatic Mirror, May 7, 1910, p. 8.
from a good training program. Nethersole was aware of the importance of education and throughout her career advocated the establishment of a dramatic conservatory. Despite her lack of theatrical family tradition to provide encouragement and support, she worked hard at honing her craft. Her seriousness and persistence were a substitute for the quality of genius innate in a Bernhardt or Duse. Amy Leslie gives us the best explanation of the difference when she said of Nethersole:

She is a creature of brain and heart, rather than soul.85

85Leslie, p. 298.
"The star is a great favorite . . ."

CHAPTER III

OLGA NETHERSOLE AS ACTRESS-MANAGER

In an article about conditions on the American stage, which Nethersole wrote in 1927, she noted that when she first went into management in 1894, "the starring system was still in vogue," and the star of the company was the manager.1 It was the charisma of the star which drew the audience into the theatre. In the twentieth century this would change and the theatre would be transformed into a place where the playwright and the play became the dominant force. A survey of available material about this era—the final flowering of the actor-manager system—reveals such names as George Alexander, Charles Wyndham, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, Henry Irving, John Hare, Lewis Waller and Charles Hawtrey. The profession of actor-manager was dominated by men. The well-known actresses of the time are documented as associated with their husbands, such as Mrs. Kendall and Mrs. Bancroft; or in great partnerships as were Ellen Terry,

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1 "The Stage in America," Theatre World (April 1907): 11; Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson Theatre Collection.

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and Julia Neilson. There were a few exceptions, such as Sarah Bernhardt, who toured extensively in Europe and America, but then the Divine Sarah was a splendid exception to almost every rule. There were society beauties such as Lillie Langtry and Mrs. Patrick Campbell, who could draw crowds to the theatre at the mention of their names, and there was Olga Nethersole. In this chapter I will show that Olga Nethersole was a popular star herself, an actress-manager who played to huge audiences, a canny business woman with an eye for public relations, adept at negotiating favorable contracts, a demanding employer, a producer with a fine sense of costume and stage design and a booster of new playwrights although unfortunately, a poor judge of new plays. Her lavishly mounted spectacular productions attracted large audiences in England and America. Sir George Arthur points out that the actor-managers constantly sought roles in which they could show off their talents, usually a vehicle with an ostentatious part for the star which took predominance over an often weak plot. Olga Nethersole's "new plays" were no exception; they were chosen to demonstrate her talent. Arthur explains the weakness of this system:

The fly in the ointment of the actor-manager system was that the plays were chosen because the leading part was one in which the man in authority would shine conspicuously; this was not altogether to be deprecated because, as a matter of fact, most plays which are a good commercial proposition, contain a 'fat' part, and with men of sterling merit and
varied gifts, such as Irving, Tree, Alexander, Wyndham— to quote the leading lights—the fat part would swell even larger in its performance. The real misfortune was that dramatists, instead of giving free reign to their pens, were tempted to contrive plays specially adapted for the liking of the prospective purchaser.2

A favorite part that the actor-manager typically commissioned for himself, according to Arthur, was a (self-righteous) heroic husband who "reformed" his goodnatured but frivolous bride, saving her from the influence of a corrupt society. Nethersole had the more difficult problem of finding suitable "fat" parts for a woman. She began by commissioning English adaptations of interesting Latin women, such as Carmen, Fanny Legrand and Camille. Traditionally all the tempting female roles had one characteristic in common, they were adulteresses: Fallen Women. When Nethersole decided to attempt the format which had proved so successful for her male colleagues, that of the heroic spouse reformer, she came up with her commercially popular The Writing on the Wall. As a result of her success as Barbara Lawrence, a woman who converts her husband from his penchant for exploiting the poor, Nethersole became excited at the prospect of doing more plays that conveyed a strong message of morality. It was a

message with which she identified, as she would demonstrate in her subsequent career. Unfortunately, although she commissioned other plays with this mission, none of them worked out commercially or artistically. Despite several references to an upcoming new American play, "dealing with the labor question" entitled Locke of Wall Street by Asa Steele\(^3\) it never materialized or was dropped after a brief unpublicized tryout. A play tackling the specially thorny issue of unjust divorce laws, The Awakening of Helena Ritchie, did not survive either its controversial subject matter nor its didactic and wordy script. Despite, or because of, increasing agitation by the suffragists, the play died soon after its birth at the Prince of Wales's Theatre in Birmingham.\(^4\)

Nethersole took an active rather than a passive role in her instructions to the playwright in her quest for new scripts. She provided them with a scenario,\(^5\) adapted some herself as in the case of her own version of Adrienne Lecouvreur, and thought nothing of meddling with the finished product when it suited her purposes. For instance,

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\(^3\) New York Dramatic Mirror, September 25, 1909, p. 6. The play is also referred to as "Lock" and "Luck." It is not clear which is correct.

\(^4\) The Era, October 12, 1912, p. 12.

she changed *The Transgressor* to a "happy ending" when she took it to America, which is one reason why it suffered such vitriolic reviews. In the London premiere the "Jane Eyre theme" prevails, the mad wife remains alive, her bigamist-husband leaves to escape the law, and the young heroine (Nethersole) is left "wretched and heartbroken," a seduced and abandoned woman. As presented by Nethersole in America, the mad wife conveniently dies and the husband and wife live happily ever after. She apparently felt this would be "more acceptable" to the American public.

Following that highly publicized debut, *New York Times* critic, E. A. Dithmar suggested that Nethersole needed "plays, plays, plays." She took his advice and spent a considerable amount of energy looking for new plays as well as plays which could be translated and story ideas which could be adapted. She approached a cross section of talent from unknown playwrights, and her own company members, to such illustrious names as Alexander Dumas fils, Oscar Wilde, Maurice Maeterlinck, Langdon Mitchell, Edmond Rostand's son Maurice, Jack London and the most popular American playwright of the time, Clyde Fitch.

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8 *New York Times*, October 18, 1894, p. 5.
Nethersole carried on an animated correspondence with Jack London between January 30 and November 17, 1910 during which time he agreed to write a play for her on her suggested topic of "the conflict of the great factors Science versus Religion." Nethersole provided London with an eight-page scenario written in her large scrawling script on her own letterhead, "En route Pulman Private Car 'Iolanthe.'" The correspondence, which followed her on the final stops of her 1909-1910 tour and across the Atlantic, illustrates her vigorous pursuit of a drama that would showcase her talents, deal with a relevant social issue, and provide a new American drama to follow the success of *The Writing on the Wall*. Her March 3, 1910 scenario included the following suggestions:

I think Conditions as we have them and know them today in America. The scene of the play should be a small city, because in the larger cities they have in a measure shaken off the trammels [sic] of fear which makes a Religion a necessary appendance [sic] or foundation or protection in life—then in the second act or third we might take our situation and certain characters to Washington to show how the narrow prejudices can involve the many and stop civilization and progress—then back again for your last act. The man and woman of the play will be bound by reason of their one-ness [sic] in thought and body. They suffer together through this. The woman [sic] suffering of course of a different texture than the man and the man's temptation to lie and be a hypocrite in order to save the woman suffering, and [sic] then the woman rises supreme in her fight for Truth to her Principles of Life.

London sent her a manuscript of *Theft* and another called *The Scorn of Women* neither of which she finally accepted,
Despite the fact that he gave her complete freedom to alter them in any way she wished. In her final letter she told him that she had signed a two-year contract with the Shubert and Liebler organizations and they did not wish to produce his play. However, reading between the lines, it is more likely that she did not like the terms which he had stipulated for the contract, including a two thousand dollar advance.9

There were various reasons why the plays never materialized from the other well-known writers whom she approached. According to the actress, Dumas fils died shortly after she had spoken to him about writing a play for her,10 while Oscar Wilde, who accepted the assignment and advance royalties, deteriorated rapidly in his Paris exile without providing a play.11 Rostand fils had promised to write a play in English for Nethersole and included sketches of his scenario in letters to her but there is no evidence that it materialized.12

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9 Jack London-Olga Nethersole Correspondence, January 30 to November 17, 1910, London Collection, Huntington Library.

10 New York Dramatic Mirror, December 14, 1895, p. 15.


By the time of the second tour in 1895-96 she had a new adaptation ready of Dumas' fils Denise which had been commissioned from critic Clement Scott and Augustus Harris. This was a more faithful and intelligent adaptation, according to Dithmar, who called her portrayal "earnest, capable, and picturesque," and said the production as a whole was harmonious and "gratifyingly smooth." The plot of a young woman, seduced by a French count, who subsequently loses her child of that union, included a tour de force confession scene in which Nethersole could "reveal her shame" in remarkable naturalistic detail. The role of Denise emphasized her skill at playing Fallen Women. It was also overshadowed by the excitement surrounding the presentation of the first dramatic version of Carmen. On the third tour in 1896 Nethersole presented The Wife of Scarli by Giuseppe Giacosa, adapted in English by a "G. A. Greene," a domestic drama about a young wife who has to choose between her lover and keeping her child. The same season she introduced Daughter of France, a historical romance set in the French Revolution. Neither was particularly successful and both were soon dropped. In the meantime, Nethersole had made enough money from her share of Carmen to leave the producing umbrella of the Frohman brothers and to go into permanent management for herself.

\[13\] *New York Times*, December 3, 1895, p. 5.
She leased Her Majesty's Theatre from Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree in September 1898 and commissioned *The Termagant* a "poetical drama" from Louis N. Parker and Murray Carson. While the role of a princess of fifteenth century Spain was the only good part in the play, it allowed her to indulge her love of all things Spanish by showing off exquisite costumes, researched in historical detail. The critics panned the play as an artistic flop.

Undaunted, Nethersole set out on a fourth tour of the United States with a new English version of *Sapho*, commissioned from the popular Clyde Fitch. Although he had agreed to have it finished by July 1899, he had not even begun Act II by the beginning of June. Fitch wrote that in consequence he was "pestered" with daily letters from Louis Nethersole on behalf of his sister:

> I can expect "Olger" to swoop down upon me any moment now! I am being very quiet, working morning and night.\(^{14}\)

Five days before the projected October 30 opening Fitch went to Chicago for final rehearsals. Nethersole was not satisfied with the way things were going and called all-night rehearsals. The play did finally open on October 31 to an audience "which never came out of its trance

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sufficiently to decide whether or not to be shocked."

When the New York opening at Wallack's theatre later resulted in sensational headlines triggered by the "staircase tableau," a "temperamental and indignant" Nethersole did indeed swoop down upon the offending playwright, according to Fitch's biographers, blaming him. All the fuss merely enhanced the play's box office and Nethersole, who had put her own money on the line made a huge profit.

A year after the subsequent London presentation of Sapho in 1902, the ebullient and financially flush actress-manager collaborated with Beerbohm Tree at Her Majesty's Theatre on The Gordian Knot, a costume domestic drama written by Claude Lowther, a well-known member of Parliament, who fancied himself as a playwright. As usual, the play featured a pivotal bad woman role for Nethersole but it also had a nasty role for Beerbohm Tree, as the villain who strangles the adventuress out of selfless regard for his best friend. Despite gorgeous costumes and sets reproduced in detail in the costume magazines, the illogical plot forced the production to close after eleven performances.

15Chicago Tribune, November 1, 1899, p. 4.
16Moses and Gerson, p. 160.
Sketch by C. A. Buchel of Nethersole and Herbert Beerbohm Tree in *The Gordian Knot* in *The Tatler* of May 1903.
Eighteen months later Nethersole tried again with the romantic costume drama *The Flute of Pan*, written by the socially prominent Mrs. Craigie under the pseudonym of John Oliver Hobbes. Again Nethersole wore a series of stunning costumes as a mythical princess who has (largely mythical) marital problems in a mythical kingdom. Unfortunately, there was nothing mythical about the hostile reception given to the production prompted Nethersole to give up trying to produce costume spectacles and return to America where the *Sapho* affair had turned her into a top box office attraction.

At the same time, she attempted to make a shift in her repertory. Influenced by the new drama of ideas and unable to find any promising vehicles, Nethersole settled for making translations of the domestic dramas of French playwright Paul Hervieu, and presented them as contemporary social issue plays. The next three tours to America featured what were generally criticized as crude adaptations of Hervieu's traditional well-made plays. "W. L. Courtney" was listed as responsible for the first, *The Labyrinth*, while the adaptor of the other two was not mentioned. According to Hamilton Mason in his *French Theatre in New York*, the Hervieu plays failed to win any artistic acceptance in the theatre capital because of "public indifference to sociological problem plays" and because of the "ill favor" that Nethersole was experiencing from the
critics following Carmen and Sapho. On the road, however, sandwiched between her popular crowd pleasers of Carmen, Camille, Sapho, her own adaptation of Adrienne Lecouvreur, and The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, the three French plays made money. Following her successful presentation of The Writing on the Wall in 1909 and the non-appearance of Locke of Wall Street. Nethersole gave up the producing arm of management in order to star in the world premiere of Mary Magdalene presented at the experimental New Theatre under contract to the Shubert and Liebler organizations. The resulting debacle was such an emotional trauma that Nethersole became ill and disappeared from the stage for over a year. Eighteen months later in England she attempted to take up the reins of management once more with The Awakening of Helena Ritchie, although there is no indication that her production moved on from its Birmingham debut. A year later the actress returned as a headliner in vaudeville in what would turn out to be her eleventh and final tour.

Nethersole retained a firm grip on all aspects of promoting and marketing her company, assisted throughout her American tours by a series of short-lived "managers." Her brother Louis who was a fairly well-known promoter in London, as well as a member of the fraternal brotherhood of

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public relations men, the Friars, was her usual right-hand man. He served as treasurer for the company as well as taking over a variety of business functions, contract negotiations, correspondence with playwrights, press agent and advance public relations man, as the occasion warranted. From time to time he took off to follow his own career, as in May of 1908 when he left for Australia via Canada to handle the business affairs of actress Margaret Anglin.\textsuperscript{18} In an 1907 interview in \textit{Theatre Magazine}\textsuperscript{19} Nethersole noted that she was one of the few actresses who acted as their own managers. Later she announced that she would take over management of the career of promising young actresses, although this does not seem to have happened.\textsuperscript{20} She selected her own plays, frequently wrote the scenario for the playwrights, and claimed to engage her own company, rehearse the actors, and stage manage her productions.\textsuperscript{21} Each summer she mapped out the following season's schedule, prepared two new productions for the upcoming tour, learned new roles and caught up on her voluminous correspondence.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{18}New York Dramatic Mirror, May 23, 1908, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{19}Theatre Magazine 77 (July 1907): 194.
\textsuperscript{20}New York Dramatic Mirror, May 1, 1909. She announced that she planned to "exploit" Mary Mannering in a new play by Asa M. Steele, i.e., the elusive Locke of Wall Street.
\textsuperscript{21}Theatre Magazine 77 (July 1907): 194.
\textsuperscript{22}Ibid.
The outstanding characteristic of a Nethersole production, apart from the leading lady's display of emotional virtuosity, was the attention given to the lavish costumes. Her favorite place to shop for a production was Paris, where she had many costumes designed by leading fashion houses, and selected antique furniture to complement the sets which were painted in England.\(^{23}\) The first production for which she was entirely responsible, The Transgressor, was immediately noted for its attention to costume and set detail. The Stage wrote of her debut as actress-manager:

> The piece has been admirably staged. The Hall, in which two acts pass, is a wonderfully effective set, in which old oak plays a conspicuous part, while the remaining acts take place in the Drawing Room, a set equally remarkable for its artistic decoration. Thanks to the stage-management of Mr. Hugh Moss, the piece was especially well looked after, and it was, to all intents and purposes, carried out perfectly.\(^ {24}\)

Shortly thereafter Nethersole discussed her staging techniques for the American press:

> I look after the details myself even to stage settings. I want to make my productions as natural as possible. I very often arrange the furniture, etcetera, in a room on the stage, just as I would in my own house.\(^ {25}\)

\(^{23}\) *New York Times*, October 2, 1894, p. 5.

\(^{24}\) *The Stage*, February 1, 1894, p. 13.

\(^{25}\) Ibid.
Fred Gilbert Blakeslee who was hired for a one-night stint as a "super" provides us with this backstage glimpse of a Nethersole production. A manager was sent to hire six men and six women for the one night stand in his (unidentified) native city for a performance which he wrote remained forever "fixed in my memory." According to Blakeslee, it was always difficult to find lady supers, and when six were found who dabbled in amateur theatricals, the manager agreed to their request to replace the six "rough looking" supers with some of their men friends. As a friend of one of the women, Blakeslee agreed to show up at the afternoon rehearsal for the performance in which he was assigned with the others as soldiers, smugglers, and cigarette makers.

The first scene featured a public square with a guard house on one side, a cigarette factory on the other and an arched bridge at the rear. Blakeslee, with some knowledge of military drill, was assigned to sentry duty pacing back and forth. The others were grouped in picturesque clumps on the stage for the curtain rise and shown their subsequent business in the other scenes. That evening they were assigned costumes and made up for the many changes. Having exited as soldiers, they rushed backstage to be made over into peasants, and with the aid of false beards, red

shirts, baggy trousers, over-large boots and slouch hats, then became smugglers. Finally they took on a variety of characters outside the bull ring. For instance, Blakeslee was a blind beggar who received "a circular piece of tin" in lieu of real money from the star. He describes the evening in great detail including the excitement, nervousness and overzealousness experienced by the amateurs which must have been a continual headache for traveling managers. They were lucky when things went smoothly. Blakeslee gives us this dramatic tidbit:

The stage had been set as a smuggler's camp, and near the right entrance stood a tent, in front of which was an open fire with an iron pot suspended over it by means of a tripod. Our orders were, when a certain line was spoken, to rush to the tent, strike it and carry it away. We waited eagerly, and presently our cue came. With a bound, every man of us sprang for the tent, but alas! only four of us could find possible occupation in tearing it down. The other two supes fidgeted a moment and then, apparently both struck with the same brilliant idea, rushed for the camp fire. One of them lugged away the tripod, and pot, while the other picked up the fire and ran off with it, dragging the electric light wire, which caused it, behind him. The audience let out a roar of laughter at the deed of the daring salamander, while the manager, who stood in the wings, emitted a roar of quite another kind.27

Considering all the many technical and performance elements which could go wrong in such elaborate productions as Nethersole's Carmen, it is amazing that they were taken on whistle-stopping tours to the remotest facilities.

27Blakeslee, p. 27.
performers had to be able to cope with many "giggle"-inducing crises. On one occasion for instance, during the emotional climax of Sapho, when the heroine is about to leave her sleeping lover for ever, Nethersole picked up the birdcage to take with her, and the bottom fell out, so that "a stuffed dickey-bird was seen to roll off its perch and bounce along the floor."\(^{28}\) Another time, when as Paula Tanqueray she was threatening to leave, a rope of pearls she was wearing around her neck got caught on a chair and she had to stay in an awkward position until released by another member of her company.\(^{29}\)

Nethersole continued to try to improve her productions during their many revivals. As late as 1910 she added a new "Apache dance" and dancer and singer to the elaborate carnival scene at the opening of Sapho. This famous spectacle featured an "ultra-Bohemian fancy dress ball, of noisy revelry" in which the star, swathed in Egyptian veils, descended an elaborate staircase. Casting these aside to reveal a Greek tunic she was then crowned as Venus on a pedestal, where she recited a poem, illuminated by limelight effects.\(^{31}\) The astounded reviewer of the Chicago

\(^{28}\)Archie Bell, "When the Audience Giggles," *Theatre Magazine* 14 (September 1911): 87.

\(^{29}\)Ibid.


\(^{31}\)Chicago Tribune, November 1, 1899, p. 4.
Tribune said of opening night that only the word "sumptuous" could describe the scenic wonder and remarkable beauty of the scene.32 Clyde Fitch's manuscript notes some of the exotic spectacle of the first scene, which called for a full box set ballroom with a forest of fresh flowers and plants into which a large number of supers "dressed as animals" rush on laughing, shouting, waltzing, and tossing their partners from one to another.33 The revelry continued for at least five minutes with speciality acts and no dialogue.

Nethersole took all this magnificence on the road during grueling cross-country tours of one week, three-day-plus-matinee, and one-night stands, transported by railroad car and steamer. In Baltimore she won raves for her "sumptuous production" of Camille in which the "gowns were marvels of beauty."34 In Detroit audiences cheered her "bewilderingly beautiful" gowns and the "minute attention to the small details of the stage setting."35 In Milwaukee the correspondent reported that the 1899 production of Sapho was "the most gorgeous staging ever seen here."36 and almost

32Ibid.

33Clyde Fitch, Sapho, unpublished ms.; John H. McDowell Microfilm Archives, P. 1917, The Ohio State University, Theatre Research Institute, p. 12.

34New York Dramatic Mirror, March 23, 1895, p. 5.

35Ibid.

seven years later the Chicago correspondent of the New York Dramatic Mirror said of the still "elaborate" production of Sapho that it was "one of the most remarkable" of that season.37 On her first West Coast trip in 1907, Don Carlton noted in Los Angeles that "the scenic equipment and stage setting was excellent"38 and Harry E. De Lasaux reported in San Francisco that "the scenic equipment was of the best."39 Mary Alkire Bell wrote from Denver, where the company passed through on the return trip, that every seat was sold and performance filled for the week's bill of Sapho, Adrienne Lecouvreur, Carmen and The Second Mrs. Tanqueray. The first act of Sapho she said was "as beautiful a setting as ever seen here," and that all the plays were "staged sumptuously."40 The 1909 production was "handsomely staged"41 in Philadelphia and "spendidly staged" in Kansas City.42 Even the critically rejected Mary Magdalene was widely commended for "the scenic part," particularly the first scene set in the "luxurious garden of a Roman scholar" to which the Magdalene arrives "robed in Oriental

38New York Dramatic Mirror, January 19, 1807, p. 5.
39New York Dramatic Mirror, November 2, 1907, p. 10.
40New York Dramatic Mirror, March 16, 1907, p. 4.
42New York Dramatic Mirror, March 12, 1909, p. 11.
magnificence and borne on a litter by slaves." Louis V. DeFoe in Red Book Magazine said that full advantage was taken of "the scenery and costuming which are rich, beautiful and appropriate." Nethersole's influence was evident in the extravagance of the spectacle which some reviewers felt was inappropriate to the concept of the play. But all agreed that Nethersole, who let down her magnificent hair, looked very much like the accepted picture of the Magdalene.

Nethersole was justifiably proud of her ability to look a part, and said that the image would gradually evolve as she was in rehearsal.

I think so much rests with costume, you know. It ought to be part of a part. You know what I mean I never know what I am going to wear until I have been rehearsing some time. Then it grows on me.

For the role of Sapho, Nethersole had four costumes designed for Act I alone, and did not decide which to wear until final rehearsals.

One Mr. Fitch wants me to wear, and I had it made because he wanted it. Another Mr. Mayer prefers. Another my brother thinks best, and the fourth I like myself.

And what is the one you think you will wear?
I have not made up my mind yet ...

44De Foe, p. 758.
46Ibid.
Whose favorite she did select is not clear but the dress's neckline lowered "to the apex of the heart," caused a minor furor. Lavinia Hart was appalled that "she goes so far as to expose all of her limbs and most of her body above the waist . . . in her clinging gauze."\(^{47}\) The New York Dramatic Mirror described her conception of Sapho as:

> a languorous, insinuating siren with a musical coaxing voice and wistful eyes. . . . The actress wore some gowns of amazing clingingness, her first act dress quite out-clinging anything yet seen here in its line. . . .\(^{48}\)

As usual, The Matinee Girl got right to the point—or points—of the matter in her gossipy column:

> I think the crown, the laurel wreath and the sugared bun ought to be bestowed upon the critic who stated in his 'criticism' that Miss Nethersole's dimples were plainly visible through her gauzy gown. Here was a triumph in the way of modern criticism. Here was a discovery worthy of record. It was not the point of the play that this crafty person had found, nor the moral, nor the lesson, nor the thread of the plot, but the dimples. . . . It's getting to be a serious thing to be a critic nowadays. His vision must be as keen as his pen. And he's got to know a dimple when he sees it.\(^{49}\)

As we shall see in Chapter IV, everything about the New York production of Sapho was blown out of proportion. A description of the gowns by a London fashion magazine two years later suggests that they were elaborate and detailed.

\(^{47}\)The World, February 6, 1900, p. 3.

\(^{48}\)New York Dramatic Mirror, February 10, 1900, p. 16.

\(^{49}\)New York Dramatic Mirror, February 17, p. 1900, p. 2.
Miss Olga Nethersole, in bringing out the adaptation of Alphonse Daudet's novel by Clyde Fitch, has heightened the charms of her most dramatic acting by many beautiful dresses. When the curtain rises at Dechelettes in the midst of a masque ball there is ample scope for the display of costumes, and the opportunity has not been neglected, for there are many quite original dresses. Ecclesiastical garments of Abbés and Cardinals are in contrast with a Cupid represented by a full-grown man crowned with roses, which also enwreath the short tunic. So many people contribute to the fun of the evening, among them a Spanish dancer and another in a red tulle ballet skirt, and a low bodice with a species of bolero of chain armour and a metal helmet. Clowns and kings and large wired Swiss peasant headdresses were to be seen in the throng, where the fun never abated. In this first act, Miss Nethersole as Sapho (Fanny Legrand) wears a classic gown of soft white, embroidered with a bordering of flowers, her sandaled feet visible, a scarf of the same thin fabric from time to time enveloping her head and hiding the small green wreath. For a few minutes she wears a sort of burnous [sic] cloak of mauve, covered with gold and steel embroidery. In the second act, at Jean's rooms, she has a cerise gown cut low, with long sleeves, the bodice embroidered in a bold pattern in white and gold carried down the side along the hem. With this she first appears in a long paletot wrought all over with white and golden embroidery, and bordered with dark fur, accompanying a large, soft-crowned toque of cerise. By and by she changes this cloak for a chiffon cape, trimmed with appliques of black lace. We next see her in a simple black silk gown, with a white lace collar, in the third act, which she exchanges for a soft clinging robe of white chiffon laid over faint colouring and bordered with tiny chiffon flowers in relief. This undescribable gown, soft and graceful, opens over lace. The sleeves have the new puff from the wrist to the elbow, and the under bodice is all cream lace. We bid her farewell in a black gown and toque, and an adorable flowing ecru voile circular cloak. Mme. Hettema wears a capital borgeoise French costume—a striped petticoat and shirt, with a brown coat bodice and tunic, and large brown hat. . . . The French femme de menage, in her pink basqued blouse, check gingham skirt and white cap, is a faithful respresentation of the dress of her class.

50 The Queen 111 (May 1902): 816.
Adele Recklies, in her work on the influence that stage costumes had on women's fashions between 1878 and 1914, cites Nethersole as one of the influentially fashionable actresses of the day.\textsuperscript{51} Nethersole's public portrayals of \textit{femme fatales} and leader of fashion did not detract from her private image in England as a respected, prestigious member of society, at home in a world of royal garden parties, society functions, costume balls and philanthropic fund-raising schemes, as we shall see in Chapter V. The leading actors and actresses had become accepted in society life towards the end of the nineteenth century, a situation which was encourage by the knighthoods of Irving in 1895 and Bancroft in 1897.\textsuperscript{52} The Bancrofts rapidly moved into the smart world of the upper crust taking along with them actresses such as Olga Nethersole, who were able to afford fashionable homes, wore designer-made clothes and took their holidays on the Continent. According to Recklies, it was the Bancrofts who first emphasized appropriate contemporary fashions on the stage in their management of the Prince of Wales's Theatre from 1865 to 1880. Coincidentally, the first


time that Nethersole's costumes are noted in the press, was in the glittering revival of Diplomacy at the Garrick Theatre in 1893, one year before she went into management for herself. The society event starred a guest appearance by the Bancrofts as well as John and Gilbert Hare and Johnston Forbes-Robertson. As the villainous countess Zicka, Nethersole wore a variety of stunning costumes, which The Queen suggested emphasized her wickedness.\(^{53}\) It is likely that the impressionable young actress was greatly influenced by the Bancrofts' ideas, and showed that influence the following year with her production of The Transgressor, of which The Queen noted:

> we may admire the actresses' lovely gowns without finding costume and conduct so entirely divorced as they usually are on the stage.\(^{54}\)

Like other leading actresses of the day, Nethersole was known for her stylish clothing and superb taste but that did not prevent her from making herself look "positively ugly" if the part warranted it. She told The World of Dress that she made herself look unbecoming in the first part of The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith, so that there would be a greater transformation later:

> Then I dressed her in a sumptuous red evening gown—for I regard red, being the color of blood, as the symbol of passion or force. I generally

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\(^{53}\)The Queen 93 (February 1893): 295.

\(^{54}\)The Queen 95 (February 1894): 231.
select the colours of dresses according to the mood or temperament of the woman in the particular scenes in which they are to be worn.55

She went on to explain her view that certain colors conveyed different moods and emotions, the demonstration of which was her specialty as "an emotional" actress:

Red, as I tell you, always means virility to me—passionate love, hatred, vengeance—any emotion in which the blood is active. Consequently I wear it often on the stage. I wear pink when I have to play scenes of tender mood, white when the character is of neutral temperament, or hovering on the unknown expanses of life, grey [sic] when sadness is the prevailing note. I feel intensely in colours. . . . As the play proceeds, and the passion of the woman wanes, I change her dress to one of yellow. In this manner I always colour my stage life.56

Nethersole, who did everything with intensity, also took her sense of style seriously and had no compunction about telling the correspondent for The Sketch: "I'm one of the few English actresses who knows how to dress."57 She claimed that the first thing that came to mind when she read a new role was how the character should be dressed.58 The idea for allowing the emotions of her characters to be reflected in the color of their costumes came to her at a yachting party in 1898. While leaning against the railing

55"A Few Words with Miss Olga Nethersole," The World of Dress 2 (September 1898): 204.
56Ibid.
57Monocle, "A Chat with Miss Olga Nethersole," The Sketch, February 21, 1894, p. 177.
58Ibid.
admiring the view she fell into conversation with Chevalier de Martino, Marine Painter in Ordinary to Queen Victoria. When he pointed out the beauty of the horizon to her, she agreed with him and was suddenly inspired:

that's a beautiful bit of blue sky just ahead of us. I've been studying it and I've an idea. I believe colours influence temper. That blue, for instance, makes me feel--spiritual; and the red over there--doesn't, while the grey makes me dull and spiritless. I've been wondering why I shouldn't apply it to my gowns. To Camille for instance, scarlet in the first act; blue in the second--revealing a more spiritual tendency; pink in the third, symbolic of the flesh; and white for the purifying influence.59

With characteristic impetuosity, the actress lost no time ordering a new set of gowns immediately for Camille.

Although the three romantic costume dramas which Nethersole produced prior to and following the Sapho affair were panned by the dramatic critics, they received ecstatic praise in the fashion magazines. Consequently, while her prestige as an artistic producer may have suffered, her reputation as a leader of fashion was enhanced. In The Termagant Nethersole could use her sense of color with a stunning series of medieval Spanish costumes, which she researched in portraits and historical records. She wanted to look as much like "a real Spanish princess in the year 1493"60 as possible and commissioned costume designer Percy

59Ibid.

60"A Few Words," World of Dress, 2 (September 1898): 205.
Anderson to come up with some unique creations. His painting of her was reproduced in the Magazine of Art which noted that it gave the impression of being "a portrait of a medieval saint."\(^{61}\) The World of Dress provides the following description of the costumes:

Her greatest success is perhaps in Act II, when we see her in an exquisite gown of brocaded cloth of gold. The pointed bodice of this is richly embroidered with pearls and diamonds, cut square, and hung with chains of diamonds across the front, the long ends terminating with jewelled tassels falling almost to the feet. Inside the bodice is a chemisette of gold embroidered gauze, and the slashed embroidered sleeves display gleams of the same shimmering material. On her red gold hair she wears a crown of gold with earpiece of latticed pearls, and from beneath the crown falls a veil of gold gauze draping the skirt in a most elegantly regal manner. In the first act Miss Nethersole wears a soft white satin skirt with an over drapery of white interspersed with pale green. The flowing sleeves are held in place by broad bands of emerald-studded gold, and her hair is bound with strings of emeralds. A delicious effect is gained later on in the scene when she stands garlanded with pink roses beneath a yellow canopy draped in masses of pink and white flowers. Her third dress is one of those wonderful purple moonlight pictures in which Mr. Percy Anderson really delights. The underdress is of a bluish shiny silk, with a stole-shaped overdress of purple embroidered in silver, from which falls a crepe scarf of pinkish purple, and the embroidered sleeves touch again on another shade of blue.\(^{62}\)

Her costumes as a princess in The Flute of Pan and picturesque villainess in The Gordian Knot were similarly lavish and detailed. The latter premiere was such a fashionable occasion that The Queen provided two reviewers,


\(^{62}\)World of Dress I (October 1898): 246.
As Princess Beatrix in The Termagant.  
Courtesy of the Fawcett Library.
one for the production and one for the costumes. The former was negative except for the comment that the actress "showed off many wonderful gowns and cloaks" and "died beautifully." The costume writer, on the other hand, went into rapturous descriptions of the gowns noting that Nethersole "certainly understands the art of making her gowns assist in the delineation of character." The World of Dress noted the obvious disparity in costume and drama reviews:

There was a good deal of talk over The Flute of Pan Mrs. Cragie's play at the Shaftesbury, but on one point all were agreed, namely the pictorial beauty of the production. The play was put on with the utmost taste, and the dresses were a triumph.

In private life Nethersole's clothes were as dramatic as they were on stage, and descriptions of what she was wearing were routinely included in the press. She loved beautiful jewels and furs, particularly Russian sable coats, one of which was worth three thousand dollars and disappeared on a train journey on the west coast.

The London fashion magazines were intensely interested in all her clothes both on and off the stage and, in keeping with their coverage of the fashionable actress, commented upon what she would be taking to America the next season. The Sketch describes the silks, velvets, brocades and sables she ordered for her 1896 tour:

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63 The Queen 113 (May 1903): 859.
64 World of Dress 7 (December 1904): 28.
Just imagine, for instance, a silken afternoon gown in ever-varying tones of heliotrope and green—this for the plain skirt, while the bodice is patterned with a design of closely clustering pansies, shading from deepest, richest brown on, through yellow and violet, to palest heliotrope. This exquisite silk gives place, in due course to a vest of white satin, veiled with mellow-tinted lace and turned back with big revers of the pansied silk, the last touch being given by some wonderful old miniature buttons—truly of great price, for they were painted in the time of George I. . . . What woman seeing, or even hearing of these things could possibly remember that Tenth Commandment existed?66

As we shall see in Chapter IV, Nethersole used her flair for costuming to great advantage during the Sapho trial, choosing her outfits with all the finesse of a chess player planning a strategic move. Consequently, her wardrobe received almost as much coverage as the resulting trial. Those actresses, such as Nethersole, who wished to be in the forefront of fashion had to be prepared to pay several hundred dollars for one gown.67 Her colleague, society beauty Lillie Langtry, was another actress who set the fashion with her beautiful gowns. But the vast majority of journeyman actresses could not allow themselves such extravagance. One Elizabeth Tree complained to the New York Times in 1900 that she shouldn't be expected to compete with society women in her stage outfits, when she could only pay forty-five or fifty dollars for one stage costume. She suggested that they return to the earlier custom of owning

one black dress and one white dress and adapting each to the role with a change of ribbons.\textsuperscript{68}

Except for her noted weaknesses for extravagant costume dramas, Nethersole was an astute businesswoman, who demanded value for her money. She wrote later that "in the nineties" receipts of eight thousand dollars a week (or one thousand six hundred pounds) were considered excellent business at the box office. There is evidence that she frequently met that goal.\textsuperscript{69} Out of town correspondents for the New York Dramatic Mirror regularly reported that she played to "phenomenal business" at their theatres. In February of 1896 in Philadelphia she made more than ten thousand dollars during one week "despite wretched weather." Her receipts for the one weekend were Friday evening $1,734; Saturday matinee $1,640; and Saturday evening $1,956.\textsuperscript{70} Under contract to the Frohmans the press noted that her gross for the season (in this case, 1897) was "astonishingly large" and not exceeded by more than two or three "other attractions." It attributed her success to the skill with which she negotiated favorable terms for herself. Once Nethersole took to the road with her own production of Sapho she demanded higher seat prices but this does not

\textsuperscript{68}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{69}Nethersole, Theatre World (April 1927): 11.

\textsuperscript{70}New York Dramatic Mirror, February 15, 1896, p. 12.
seem to have hurt business.71 Her first tour in 1905 following the Sapho affair revealed the financial rewards of notoriety. She played "the best engagement ever" in Philadelphia, "the most successful ever" in Cincinnati and drew "extraordinary large attendance" in Detroit.72 On her first visit to the West Coast in 1906 the box office reported huge advance sales and ticket prices were raised to two dollars in Los Angeles and Seattle. She played to sold out houses all along the coast.73

A tough negotiator herself, Nethersole was quick to sue when she felt that her rights had been violated. The year 1900 turned out to be such a bonanza for Nethersole court cases that she was proclaimed "star litigant of the year."74 In the Sapho trial she was accused of

disturbance of the peace, being a public nuisance, giving an immoral entertainment, and being improperly dressed.75

The result of such notoriety was that, at one point, tickets were sold on the black market for as much as one hundred dollars apiece.76 When an Episcopalian clergyman got

71New York Dramatic Mirror, January 13, 1900, p. 4.
73New York Dramatic Mirror, January 19, 1907, p. 5.
75New York Dramatic Mirror, November 19, 1913, p. 9.
76Ibid.
carried away and proclaimed her an adulteress not only on the stage but in her private life, she slapped him with a slander suit and forced him to turn over the five hundred dollar punitive damages award to a charity. On the minus side, she lost a suit to her manager, Marcus Mayer, who sued to recover commission which he claimed she owed him following the highly successful Sapho season. According to Mayer, his salary was $100 a week plus commission on season profits of twenty-five percent on the first $5,000, after $20,000 profit; and then thirty percent of the next $5,000; and thirty-five percent of anything above. Nethersole insisted that all production costs including her personal expenses had to be deducted before the commission was calculated. She appealed the finding of $3,197.15 for Mayer and lost. The referee noted that her profits on Sapho alone amounted to $192,387.00 for the first season and $141,868.65 for the second. These figures were adjusted by the astute Nethersole to leave a suspiciously low $22,457.06 and $37,720.56 when all expenses were deducted.

Nethersole's first experience with lawsuits began with Carmen when an Estella Jordan claimed that she had written

79*New York Times*, May 1, 1901, p. 9. There is a discrepancy with the *New York Times* of December 5, 1900, p. 5, which gives the first year's profit as $102,387.39.
the script. Nethersole successfully proved that her version was by Henry Hamilton of London. Her most lucrative court case was the one which she won against the Shubert Theatrical Company and Liebler and Company for breach of contract over Mary Magdalene. She had signed a contract for $1,000 a week for two seasons of twenty-five weeks each in 1910 and 1911. When they did not engage her for the second year she sued for the unpaid balance of the first and second year's contract and won $32,217.32.

Despite her volatile combative nature, her relations with the members of her company seems to have been good most of the time. One glaring exception was an incident in which five of them went on strike in 1908 over late-night rehearsals. They had protested those conditions on the west coast but were astute enough not to break their contracts until the company had returned to New York. The disgruntled company members were Adeline Bourne, Katherine Stewart, George Ingleton, Langhorn Burton and Harvey Grant. Miss Bourne was apparently outraged that she had to wear "a circus costume" in Sapho. Clyde Fitch also noted Nethersole's insistence on the pursuit of excellence, grumbling prior to the opening of Sapho, "we are all dead

81 New York Dramatic Mirror, November 22, 1913, p. 5.
82 New York Times, February 28, 1908, p. 3.
Olga Nethersole and company outside Le Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt, Paris, in June 1907. Her playbill is on the left and Bernhardt's is on the right.

Courtesy of Mrs. H. W. Green.
rehearsing at night after the performance till 5 a.m.!!"83 The gossip columnists, who had a field day with the above incident, also noted her generosity to company members. For instance, The New York Mirror reported that her stage manager awoke one morning to find a "a fine banjo . . . in his arms in a Pullman sleeper when he awoke . . . "84 as a measure of her appreciation and her property man received a gold watch as thanks for his services.85 Another year Nethersole gave each member of her company a diamond pin as a New Year's present,86 and when her leading man's baby daughter was christened, she acted as godmother.87 The infant, named Olga Thurza Mills, wore the actress's own antique family robe at the ceremony and was also remembered in her will.88 There are accounts of her company members visiting in her Scottish highland home for summer vacation89 and she remained in touch with when they left her employment. A former actor was sometimes invited back for a guest performance years later as in the case of Hartwig Baruch, who had become the owner of a prosperous brokerage

83Moses and Gerson, p. 159.
84February 20, 1897, p. 10.
88Olga Nethersole Will, Somerset House, London.
business in New York. Nethersole invited him to play Don Jose in Carmen for one guest engagement at Christmas.90

Nethersole was adept at promoting good relations with audiences on the road, community leaders, her society friends and the press. Her visits to Boston and Philadelphia were major social events and her appearance in Washington, D.C., guaranteed a large turnout by the English and French embassies.91 The society columnists noted that like other leading stars on the touring circuit she was a guest of society ladies in every major city and attended a variety of fund-raising charity events. She also gave luncheon parties and receptions herself for which she designed special souvenir programs. On one visit to Cleveland, for instance, it was noted that she provided the entertainment for the Cleveland Hospital, which was a major society benefit attended "by Cleveland's 400."92 The press corps was also not neglected and was treated to press parties and luncheons. Biff Hall wrote about one such occasion in Chicago that it was attended by society and representatives of one hundred newspapers:

the reception which the clever Englishwoman gave to the press league au banquet was a very swell affair. . . .93

92New York Dramatic Mirror, March 20, 1897, p. 3.
93New York Dramatic Mirror, February 27, 1897, p. 10.
Nethersole routinely sent greetings, Christmas cards and notes of thanks to the press and the staff of theatres where she had played. She wrote to the members of the resident St. Louis orchestra that their music had been beautiful:

as if one soul spoke. I was profoundly impressed. Music is the voice of God. 94

In the Boston area she visited the Harvard students who gave her a standing ovation, and gave her own luncheon party at which each guest was presented with "a souvenir card with lines illustrating the different phases of friendship through which she had passed with each." 95 In Canada, she announced that she would respond to Queen Alexandra's appeal for the British poor and unemployed by donating the proceeds of two matinees and then sent off $2,317 by cable to Her Majesty. 96 Following natural disasters such as an earthquake in Italy, she organized a benefit at the Belasco Theatre attended by a society crowd and the diplomatic corps. 97 As we shall see in Chapter V she was particularly active on behalf of her favorite projects of health and welfare education, juvenile justice and "the consumptive crusade."

96 New York Dramatic Mirror, December 9, 1905, p. 2.
It is evident that Nethersole was a dynamic, hard-driving company manager whose busy schedule included not only the incredibly hazardous task of taking a traveling company on the road, but included the marking and promoting of theatre attendance by involving herself in society and press receptions, charitable events and writing notes of thanks to friends and colleagues.

As actress-manager Nethersole had a flair for costuming and the extravagant effects of her beautifully dressed productions took some of the sting out of the fact that the plots were often weak. As a business woman she was undoubtedly a tough negotiator, one of the most astute and financially successful performer-managers in the business. She actively pursued new scripts and although the plays she premiered, designed and produced were not always artistic successes, they fulfilled their purpose: to display her virtuoso emotional talent. The reason she pursued so many French plays is suggested by Hamilton Mason's comment that the French playwrights knew how to write a play with a great part for the star-manager. Their traditionally "melodramatic or passionate appeal" allowed "the most showy outlet for action talent."\(^{98}\)

Nethersole was a major touring star during a time when a strong demand for theatre in the cities and country towns outside New York was supported by a thriving industry of

\(^{98}\text{Mason, French Theare, p. 19.}\)
traveling performers. Their skills ranged from top box office attractions such as Bernhardt, Clara Morris, Lillie Langtry and Nethersole, to second and third-rate performers eking out a subsistence living on the road. Nethersole was also a popular personality off the stage who provided the extra touches that personalized her appeal to the theatre audiences outside New York City. She was "a great favorite" not only with the sophisticated audiences on the eastern seaboard but in the hinterlands of Kansas and Nebraska. As the Kansas correspondent noted approvingly:

She closed a splendid week with a pleasing little speech to the audience asking if she would be welcome next season, and upon a tumultuous reply of applause promised to do better work than now.99

To the no-nonsense pioneering folks on the American frontier such an appeal from a sophisticated, glamorous "star" was irresistible.

"New York's Raging Sensation"

CHAPTER IV

NEITHERSOLE AND THE SAPHO AFFAIR

The Sapho scandal began innocently enough as a promising project for Nethersole, giving her a spectacular role, created by a famous French writer and adapted by a popular American playwright especially for her talents. She had such confidence in its success that she produced it herself, providing it with lavish costumes and sets at considerable financial risk. After a locally acclaimed world debut in Chicago and a financially lucrative tour of the provinces, it opened in New York to a blaze of publicity and speculation. Provocatively advertised as "New York's Raging Sensation," Sapho would become one of the most controversial and widely publicized plays in the annals of the New York stage.

I will explore Nethersole's role in the Sapho scandal, provide a history of the script, discuss her performance on stage at Wallack's Theatre and off-stage at the trial and indicate the role of New York press in perpetrating the controversy. Finally, I will show that despite public

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1New York Dramatic Mirror, February 24, 1900, p. 8.
scepticism, Nethersole saw herself as a sacrificial lamb fighting for artistic freedom on the stage.

Perhaps it was the sort of madness they say appears at the turn of each century, but the effect of the *Sapho* controversy on ordinary people was startling, causing some of them to do most extraordinary things. In St. Louis, for instance, Jessaline Sweeter of the Hopkins Stock Company tried to commit suicide by swallowing carbolic acid rather than appear in the play. In Chicago, two girls were sent to a house of corrections for stealing copies of the book. In Ann Arbor, a bookseller with a sense of drama publicly committed *Sapho* to the flames, while the Vandalia Railroad Company was moved to ban all copies of the offending volume from its news stands. Four hundred and fifty members of the Mormon's Women's Christian Temperance Union marched in protest in Elizabeth, New Jersey, where two days later a couple of boys were arrested for selling copies of the book. Meanwhile, the mayor of Scranton, Pennsylvania,

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5 Ibid.


7 *New York Times*, February 22, 1900, p. 3.
demanded his own private full-dress rehearsal so that he could judge the extent of the depravity in solitude.\(^8\)

Predictably the clergy found in the topic of *Sapho* a wealth of material to illustrate the temptations of the stage, one pristine soul concluding publicly that "there is not a clean theatre on earth. Everyone of them is a pile of dirt."\(^9\)

The Reverend Thomas Chalmers Easton, of the Eastern Presbyterian Church in the nation's capital, proclaimed Nethersole herself to be a "lewd" woman but agreed to retract the accusation from the pulpit when slapped with a twenty thousand dollar slander suit. He added a prayer that the press might be purified.\(^10\)

New scripts of *Sapho* appeared by magic from all corners, such as Mary Wellesley Sterling's stock company edition "cleansed and purified for family theatres."\(^11\) Yet according to Charles Burnham, manager of Wallack's Theatre writing in retrospect about the incident in 1925, this avalanche of public sentiment against "stage vileness" was sparked by an innocuous script which "could be read in Sunday-school Today."\(^12\)

\(^8\)New York Times, February 24, 1900, p. 7.


\(^11\)New York Dramatic Mirror, March 3, 1900, p. 11.

\(^12\)Charles Burnham, "Stage Indecency Then and Now: A Play that Made Our Daddies Blush Could be Read in Sunday-School Today," Theatre Magazine (September 1925): 16.
The organized attacks on *Sapho* had a ripple effect, washing over other well-known performers in what were perceived to be suspect shows. Following "hundreds of letters" sent to police asking them to suppress Mrs. Leslie Carter in *Zaza*, Cleveland police raided the Euclid Avenue Opera House and found that the star was "indisposed" with a severe tonsillitis attack, which kept her from finishing the engagement.\(^{13}\) Lillie Langtry, playing a woman of easy virtue in *The Degenerates*, ran into a hostile public at a Boston charity bazaar and was also the object of protest by the vigilant Women's Christian Temperance Union. Eventually her production was censored in New Jersey.\(^ {14}\) In the meantime, the Broadway Theatre featured its share of titillating shows, according to Brooks Atkinson. The Madison Square Theatre housed *Coralie and Company, Dressmakers*, a French-style farce with adulterous entanglements and a white male in bed with a black female.\(^ {15}\) *Naughty Anthony* at the Herald Square Theatre starred Blanche Bates and Frank Worthing in a comedy about a pair of silk stockings. The highpoint came when Miss Bates raised her

\(^ {13}\)New York Times, March 7, 1900, p. 2.; March 8, 1900, p. 7.

\(^ {14}\)Anne Everal Callis, "Olga Nethersole and the Sapho Scandal" (M.A. thesis, The Ohio State University, 1974) p. 78.

skirts to show them off.16 The Surprises of Love, Wheels Within Wheels, The Girl in the Barracks, Make Way for Ladies, and Mile. 'Awkins all succeeded in infuriating the conservative element in the population to the point where the climate was ripe for a backlash against what was perceived as a new permissiveness. Sapho was merely the final straw that fueled a flame of evangelistic fervor which had been building for some time.17

Ironically, some of the blame must be attributed to Nethersole's own marketing. Burnham postulates that Nethersole's press agent18 got the idea of titillating prospective audiences with hints of sexual explicitness and sent out a steady stream of press releases "with many a sly reference to the risque scenes in which the play abounded." Burnham claimed to have unsuccessfully tried to have this kind of smutty advertising appeal stopped. The technique was so successful that by the time the tickets went on sale, every seat for the first four weeks was sold in one day.19 The play was supposed to have opened January 2220 but owing

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16Burnham, p. 16.
17Ibid.
18It is not entirely clear whether Marcus Mayer assumed this function as part of his responsibilities as tour company manager.
19Burnham, p. 16.
20New York Times, January 21, 1900, p. 16. For tour schedule prior to New York, see Chapter I, pp. 40-43.
to the actress's ill health was postponed to January 29 and again until February 5. Each delay served to heighten the suspense, with reports that Nethersole's indisposition was due to emotional stress caused by attacks on the play. While one report said she had acute tonsillitis, Burnham claimed it was actually an attack of mumps.

One newspaper was so enthusiastic that it printed an opening night review of the event before it ever took place. The Albany Times-Union of February 1, 1900 carried a glowing report of Miss Nethersole's dazzling triumph at Wallack's noting that she created a "furor" in the title role of Sapho in the city where the papers now "proclaim her a peer without a rival." The New York Dramatic Mirror carried a caustic review of the "review" noting that it was obviously a press release prepared by her press agent and run by a slipshod organization as a bona fide review. By opening night the distinguished gathering of social, artistic and literary celebrities, and the large press corps, projected an air of expectancy.

fully imbued with the idea that they were to witness a lewd entertainment, one which they felt it their duty to attend that they might denounce its obscenity should it prove as bad as they really hoped for.

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21 Burnham, p. 16.
23 Ibid.
24 Burnham, p. 16.
The notorious staircase scene from Sapho, as Paula Tanqueray, and posing with her favorite pets, in The Sketch of November 1904.
The closest suggestion of an "immodest" moment, according to Burnham, occurred when the young man picks up the courtesan and carries her up the spiral staircase. He speculates:

the audience was not to be denied its prey and, having come to witness a debauch, seized upon this one scene as something to be decried.\textsuperscript{25}

While the press was divided in its view as to whether the play was "vicious" or just "stupid," it was not divided in its unanimous condemnation of the production. Hyped-up production had been panned before, but it was The World's subsequent and persistent "avalanche of abuse" and daily sensational headlines, according to Burnham, which kept the production very much in the public eye. Four weeks later the play was forcibly closed, the star was hauled into court and Olga Nethersole and the Sapho production were assured a prominent place in the columns of every major newspaper in the city.

Before continuing with an account of the trial, it is necessary to take a closer look at the cause of all this controversy, the Clyde Fitch script. Norman Hapgood provides not only an informative eyewitness account of the Wallack's Theatre production but also offers an invaluable analysis of the original novel versus the new script.\textsuperscript{26} He states that the play was inaccurately billed on the program

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{26}Norman Hapgood, The Stage in America, 1897-1900, (New York: MacMillan Company, 1901), pp. 356-357.
as "a play by Clyde Fitch, founded on Daudet's story with scenes from the original play by Alphonse Daudet and Adolphe Belot." Except for an expansion of Act I, he claims it was a close copy of the French playscript with no fundamental changes of structure. Some minor changes suggested by the novel were incorporated in the Fitch version. The latter he concludes may be theatrically better but it is literally much inferior.

To compare it with the novel would be to contrast an ordinary, insincere made-to-order piece of work, adequate for its purpose, with a masterpiece of finesse, experience, taste and sincerity.27

Daudet's novel Sapho, subtitled Parisian Manners, was published in 1884. Daudet collaborated with Belot on a stage script which opened in Paris at the Gymnase on December 18, 1885, with Jane Hading in the title role, supported by Damala.28 The French version was subsequently taken by Rejâne to England and America. Nethersole may well have seen the original production because she told the New York Times reporter at the beginning of the 1899/1900 season that she had been working on the Daudet novel herself for four years.29

Daudet's novel is a lyrical and sensitive portrait of a young trainee diplomat who becomes hopelessly, emotionally

27Ibid.

28Mason, p. 59.

enslaved by the sensual advances of an older woman. Daudet meant this as a warning to his sons, to whom he dedicated the work on their twentieth birthday.30 In his study of the author's career, Murray Sachs suggests that Daudet's own "long and painful liaison with Marie Rieu" was the model for the destructive relationship between Jean Gaussin and Fanny Legrand. It is, according to Sachs, the most detailed portrait that Daudet composed of the sexes: "man as the victim of woman," or the "weak-willed, gentle, and sensitive male, the domineering, coldly inconsiderate female."31 The bond between Jean and Fanny is, therefore, clearly an intimidating one of "sexual bondage," and not of exalted love. As this is not the thrust of the Clyde Fitch script, Nethersole very likely requested a more "sympathetic" treatment of Fanny, when providing him with her own scenario which would explain the change of emphasis.32 No published version of the Clyde Fitch manuscript exists today, although a typewritten manuscript is on file at the New York Public Library. The production prompt copy remained the personal


31 For an example of one of her scenarios see Jack London's Correspondence with Olga Nethersole, January 30, 1910 to November 17, 1910, Jack London Collection, Huntington Library. Nethersole is specific about the kind of role London is to write for her.

property of Nethersole during her lifetime and it must be assumed that it was inadvertently burned following the dispersal of the Nethersole estate in 1951.33

I am indebted to Ann Everal Callis for her reconstruction of the Clyde Fitch production utilizing the incomplete New York Public Library manuscript, an English translation of the Daudet and Belot script, newspaper articles, reviews and photographs. Her work reveals that "pieces of business, dialogue, scenes and even characters that other sources indicate as part of Nethersole's production"34 are missing from this script, including the controversial staircase scene.

As presented in the Nethersole production, the drama begins at an ultra-Bohemian fancy dress ball in the home of Déchelette, a Parisian rake. Jean Gaussin, a young student from Provence, who is studying to enter the Consular Service, comes to the ball with his Uncle Cesairé where he meets Fanny Legrand. She is the star of the gathering, making a dramatic entrance half way through Act I, draped in the flowing robes of Venus. He is filled with admiration for her wit, beauty and flamboyance and the two are soon dancing a waltz, as Fanny's former lover is observed being

33In her will, dated 1913, Nethersole bequeathed all her playscripts to her brother, Louis, but he predeceased her on March 14, 1936.

34Callis, pp. 51-52.
put under arrest. At the end of the party and the act Jean escorts Fanny to her home. He offers to carry her up to her room and after a half-hearted protest, she consents with girlish frivolity. He does not come down. In Act II Fanny arrives at Jean's lodgings to care for him while he is sick and suggests that she moves in with him. Their domestic bliss is threatened by several complications including Jean's ties from home. In the meantime, Déchelette and his friend the sculptor Caodal come to ask for Fanny's help for Flamant. It seems that not only was he arrested for committing forgery in an effort to pay for his former mistress's extravagant tastes but he is the father of their secret child. Jean is infuriated to find that Fanny is also Caodal's former "model," the notorious Sapho, nicknamed after the legendary poetess of Lesbos because of her sensual allure. To prove that she is no longer the same woman who posed for the artists of Paris and to show her true love for Jean, Fanny fetches her casket of love letters, reads them to him and burns them. She succeeds in placating and making love to him and they leave for their new life in a cottage on the outskirts of Paris. Their happiness is short-lived. In Act III Jean feels trapped; they quarrel frequently as Jean dreams of escape. The only contact with the outside world are the Hettemas, their rustic neighbors Jean's disillusionment is total when he finds out that the child Fanny has persuaded him to adopt in the meantime is her own
by the forger, Flamant. After a violent argument and her decision to accept the inevitable, he leaves. She resolves to atone for her past life by caring for the child. Act IV opens the morning after Fanny has tried to poison herself. Flamant returns and offers to marry her and give the child a home. She agrees and he goes on to Paris with the child. The weak and repentant Jean returns meanwhile unable to exist without Fanny. Purified by their love and, therefore, nobler and wiser, she makes the decision to return to Flamant and her child. She steals out while Jean is sleeping after telling him of her love in a letter. Curtain.

Nethersole's portrayal of the siren Fanny was a masterful combination of dramatic staging and emotional virtuosity. In Daudet's view Fanny was a fading beauty, aware that her power to fascinate and entrap men was rapidly declining. Her advances to Jean were quiet and determined. As presented by Nethersole, Fanny was mistress of her domain, entering to musical accompaniment in a blaze of glory and according to Hapgood, "queen of everything in sight, a right royal star actress." Contrary to Daudet's idea of Fanny seducing Jean in spite of himself, Nethersole's version showed Jean as a country boy falling in love with a softhearted temptress who made a half-hearted attempt to ward him off. The Nethersole Fanny was endowed
with virtues which would "soak the star with sympathy." In the original, an angry Jean forces a desperate Fanny to reveal the secrets of her past and then destroy them. In the Fitch version, Fanny voluntarily offered to show him the past and burns the evidence to prove her love. Another innovation made in the Fitch-Nethersole collaboration was the greater visibility of the little boy in Act III, which enabled Nethersole to demonstrate twinges of conscience and maternal devotion. This was also the highpoint of her performance, earning the most applause. Hapgood said she played a range of emotions from wild pleading to utter despair "with a richness and justness that few actresses anywhere could equal." It is to be expected that Nethersole's production would emphasize her emotional virtuosity. Hapgood compares the old and the new versions:

We see how a warm-hearted, thoroughgoing slave of passion wrecks and empties the life of a healthy and happy boy by loving him; and this moral is told with sympathy for her as well as for him, but with inexorable understanding that his interests are those of humanity; while hers, whosoever is to blame for it, are against the common good. In place of this wholesome theme, painfully, delicately, and honestly worked out, this version gave us the old weak story of a woman, singularly, ideally noble, like most stage courtesans, suffering through the cruelty of man. The body of the story was about the same . . . the soul infinitely lowered.

35Hapgood, pp. 356-360.
36Ibid.
37Ibid.
On a pedestal in Act I of Sapho. Courtesy of the Fawcett Library.
Callis' reconstruction of the Nethersole performance suggests several directorial changes made by the actress, which are missing from the manuscript. Coincidentally, these moments are the ones which proved to be the most hotly debated items in the Sapho fracasse. The first point concerns the flamboyant entrance, which is not described in the manuscript. It does not call for the stairway entrance or her move to the pedestal. Court testimony provides the following description:

The stage is darkened, and there comes the sound of kissing, interspersed with shouts and laughter. This continues for possibly twelve seconds. Then a very strong light reveals Miss Nethersole on a pedestal.38

Callis notes that a life-sized statue was included on the property list and suggests that Nethersole may have had the idea to substitute herself for the statue.39 Callis does not mention that Clyde Fitch himself was very proud of his idea that Sapho recite "Au Clair de la Lune" on a fountain. He told a friend about it early during his work on the script.40 The Chicago Tribune provides a description of the moment before: She came down a broad staircase . . . instantly she was crowned as Venus and set on a pedestal."41


39 Callis, p. 56.

At the end of the act there was another significant variation from the Fitch manuscript, which ended with Fanny and Jean dancing a waltz, while her former lover is arrested. Nethersole added the "staircase scene" from the original novel, which Callis suggests was presented as a "carpenter's scene" in front of the main curtain. This seemingly simple moment of a few teasing lines exchanged between them and Jean carrying Fanny up the stairs takes on symbolic undertones in the original. The "joyful burden" gradually becomes a debilitating weight as he ascends. In the novel:

... he went up the first flight at a breath exulting in the weight suspended about his neck by two lovely, cool bare arms. The second flight was longer, less pleasant. ... At the third flight he panted like a piano-mover. ... And the last stairs which he climbed one by one seemed to belong to a giant staircase ... whose walls and rail and narrow windows twisted round and round in an interminable spiral. It was no longer a woman he was carrying, but something heavy, ghastly, which suffocated him, and which he was momentarily tempted to drop, to throw down angrily at the risk of crushing her brutally.

Widely circulated photographs of this scene indicate a rather short white winding spiral staircase up which Jean

41Chicago Tribune, November 1, 1899, p. 4.
43Callis, p. 57.
44Daudet, p. 13.
bounded, the picture of animal vitality. When he did not come down, it was painfully obvious to the prudish what wickedness was going on there night after night. To some this explicit sex was unforgivable. Act II contained a scene that Nethersole had moved forward from Act III in the Fitch script. This was one of Nethersole's strongest scenes, right after Jean finds out that she is Sapho, the Bohemian artist's model with a history of amorous entanglements. She burns her keepsakes and stops him leaving by seducing him. The two embrace passionately as the curtain falls. Callis speculates that Nethersole moved this highly dramatic moment forward so that it would not detract from the even greater emotional highpoint which follows quickly in Act III. The next act was Nethersole's tour de force, and when she performed only an excerpt, this was the segment selected. It begins with Jean's anger when he realizes that the child she has induced him to adopt is Fanny's son by Flamant. He decides to leave and is reinforced in his decision by the appearance of his Uncle Cesairé who tells Jean that there is trouble at home. After a brief comic scene to provide a respite before the pending emotional climax (Uncle Cesairé plays "footsie" under the dinner table with the silly wife of their drunken neighbor),

45Callis, pp. 61-64.
the child appears and the mood changes.\textsuperscript{46} As Jean prepares to leave, the Nethersole Fanny demonstrated a new strength which comes out of the redemption and purification she has gone through as a result of her strong love for Jean. Nobly she makes a commitment to her son but once Jean has left collapses "raving and broken-hearted."\textsuperscript{47} This scene was so emotionally draining that Nethersole sometimes actually fainted. A small report, easily missed, at the bottom of the opening night coverage of \textit{Sapho} at Wallack's by \textit{The World}, mentions that very few people knew that she had fainted at that performance. It noted that although the curtain rose five times after the act, she made no move to receive applause but lay inanimate on the floor until she was revived, with difficulty, behind the scenes.\textsuperscript{48}

That the Nethersole performance included violent, brutal moments in which the actress showed the side of Fanny that was the streetfighter and survivor, a woman used to abuse in the seamy Parisian underworld, and included a fight in which Jean threw her to the ground, is documented in the reviews. Knowing Nethersole's belief in stage \textit{verite}, her faithful adherence to naturalism, her unsqueamish acceptance of the "truth in life" together with its filth, disease,

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{46}\textit{Fitch manuscript}, pp. 62-68.
\item\textsuperscript{47}\textit{Chicago Tribune}, November 1, 1899, p. 4.
\item\textsuperscript{48}\textit{The World}, February 6, 1900, p. 3.
\end{itemize}
pain and horror, one can surmise that her performance in this regard was overwhelming. The New York Times' Edward Dithmar, complained that her portrayal went too far: he called it too "coarse, vulgar and violent." The New York Dramatic Mirror describes another side of the Nethersole Fanny: "a languorous, insinuating siren with a musical, coaxing voice and wistful eyes," and this with "occasional moments of explosive emotion." The actress seems to have had a unique propensity for attracting opposing viewpoints. The same contradiction is noted two years later when Sapho was presented in London. Clement Scott was outspokenly hostile, calling her performance "crude" and lacking the seductive grace and comic insight of Réjane's acclaimed one. However, he did concede that her pleasing "contralto voice" was "agreeably rich in tone . . . with an occasional surprising poignancy." The Stage reviewer on the other hand liked her "emotional intensity and the full expression of passionate fervour," but not her occasional "harsh and grating tones." In Russia, Stanislavsky would have

49 New York Times, February 6, 1900, p. 16.

50 New York Dramatic Mirror, February 10, 1900, p. 16.

51 Réjane brought the French version to the London Coronet on June 7, 1901. Nethersole opened at The Adelphi on May 1, 1902. She closed July 12 after seventy-one performances.


approved of her "superobjective": from the moment on the pedestal, her motives were crystal clear:

her words and demeanor telling as plainly as possible that she longed to be loved and cared for.

He would not have approved of her inflated starring role, nor the way she took focus within each "big" scene. While he was exploring the idea of ensemble playing, the emotional actress was trading on personality and "star" quality, supported by mediocre players. Nethersole's American company for the Sapho tour featured Hamilton Revelle as Jean Gaussin and John Glendinning as Flamant. Except for Rosina Fillipi and Cicely Richards, the supporting company was insignificant in what was to all intents and purposes, a one-woman show.

It is clear from eyewitness accounts that Nethersole's performance was strong, virile, passionate and singleminded. She was shameless with a passion born out of despair, tenacious and streetwise, seductive with her young lover and gentle with her child. For an emotionally explicit actress the role of Fanny was a dream—no wonder it caused such a rumpus when Nethersole insisted that she played the role for the purpose of teaching a moral lesson. But it is clear that the actress was serious in her belief that she was a transatlantic Joan of Arc and the Sapho controversy was her personal crusade. Her views were publicized in interviews,

54Chicago Tribune, November 1, 1899, p. 4.
letters to the editors of the press and in her own subsequent articles. A full-page debate of stage morals in the New York Herald featured a discussion by "three criticized actresses": Lillie Langtry, Elsie de Wolfe and Nethersole and included what were purported to be the offending passages in Sapho. Nethersole defended her production vigorously and her philosophy that

Truth that is the great thing on the stage and in life. The truthful result is the result which art should strive to portray. . . . I assume that it is to be seriously discussed, naturally because life is serious, and we should aim to show life as it is.\(^55\)

Nethersole argued that "morality" on stage depended to a large extent upon the way it was presented and to what purpose. She could not understand the view that presenting an "immoral" woman was tantamount to presenting an "immoral" play in the eyes of the conservative majority. She defended her heroine:

I would not call Sapho an immoral woman. I would call her an unmoral woman. You would not condemn a heathen for not believing in God, so you could not condemn a woman who has never known what morality is for not being moral. It is not possible. She does not know about it. The distinction does not exist for her.\(^56\)

In her examination of the issues and events leading up to the Sapho trial, Callis concludes that Nethersole's


\(^{56}\)Ibid.
arrest and subsequent trial was the direct result of a "yellow journalism" sensationalist media campaign conducted by Joseph Pulitzer's The World, which set out to close down the production. Sapho became a colorful cause célèbre in which The World could actually take a hand in making news as well as reporting it, a tactic it often employed in its effort to stimulate circulation. The Herald, the only major newspaper whose critic had been favorable to the play, provided the Nethersole viewpoint, while the New York Times for the most part maintained an objective non-inflammatory style. Callis suggests that Nethersole became the target of the "yellow press" because of her ultra-realistic acting style and her professed interest in public welfare. Nethersole's advocacy of her right to present socially relevant issues truthfully on the stage clashed with The World's own editorial view that its "public-spirited readers were the true representatives of the morality of the day." Finally the courts would have to decide whether Nethersole was right and whether the presentation of Sapho had any redeeming social value. In keeping with the tenor of the time, its artistic merits were often of importance.

57 Callis, p. 2.
58 Callis, p. 68.
59 Callis, p. 146.
To return to the drama and events leading up to the trial, it is clear that a hostile climate awaited the opening of Sapho and, much like Nethersole's ill-fated 1894 American debut, public expectations were inflated by excess advance notoriety. The New York Times ran a series of articles condemning the "hysterical" media coverage the Nethersole company had enjoyed on the road. It noted sarcastically that if the praise was indeed accurate, her acting in Sapho must be better than any she had done in New York. It deplored the "hot and futile discussion of the relation of morality to art" which was being debated by newspapers throughout the country and suggested that for the good of the public Sapho should be banned from the theatre altogether. It is not surprising, therefore, that artistically the production itself was somewhat of a fiasco. Not unexpectedly, New York Times critic Dithmar provided an unflattering appraisal of the opening night which was published under the headline, "A COARSE AND SUPERFLUOUS PLAY AND NOT WELL ACTED, EITHER." This negative tone was reflected generally throughout the press although William Winter in the New York Tribune took it to the extreme. He described the latest offering as:

60 New York Times, January 29, 1900, p. 16.
61 Ibid.
a reeking compost of filth and folly . . . this heavy and saphead sentiment and putrid nonsense tells a vulgar, commonplace and tiresome story about a harlot and a fool, showing how in a carnal way, they fascinated each other. . . . Here are contemptible persons, gross proceedings, foul suggestions, impure pictures and, through all a purulent stream of mawkish cant about the moral "lesson" to be derived from the inspection of garbage.63

Winter included Nethersole and Fitch in the same despised category as Ibsen, Maeterlinck and Sharp, labeling them all purveyors of decadent trash. His review was subsequently included in a volume of essays published in 1913 in a chapter entitled "The Sacred Labors of Olga Nethersole."64 It is interesting that the derogatory reference to Nethersole's distinguished contemporaries was omitted from the 1913 volume. Although not as evangelistically motivated as Winter, the New York Dramatic Mirror was also critical of the Fitch script and wrote that the playwright "has been unable to make a decent play of Sapho dramatically or morally."65 The most positive assessment was by Thomas White in the New York Herald who suggested that it was


65New York Dramatic Mirror, February 10, 1900, p. 16.
pointless to argue over whether the play was "moral" or not and that the relevant question was whether the production was worthy of the original novel. He thought that Nethersole's work on the role "far surpassed anything she had ever done here . . . an unexpected revelation of the actress's full powers." In her examination of press reaction, Callis states the most significant coverage was a four and one-half column spread, by The World two days later, headlined "MOB FRANTIC TO SEE SAPHO STORMS DOORS OF THEATRE." The report indicated that the harsh press criticism had actually fueled the desire for tickets, as well as a flourishing side industry on the sale of the novel. Ticket speculators hawked their seats at the theatre entrance, asking four dollars apiece, double the normal price. On the same page The World provided a series of negative excerpts from opening night reviews by the Press, the Herald, the Evening Journal, the Evening Sun, the Times, the Morning World, the Morning Sun, the Evening World, the Tribune, the Mail and the Express and the Evening Telegram. In this "Critics Court" of her peers, The World charged that Nethersole had been convicted of hypocrisy in

67 Callis, p. 48.
68 February 7, 1900, p. 14. Thomas White's quote was run entirely out of context. His review in The Herald had been positive.
her claim that she presented Sapho as a moral "lesson" for the general good. Its sub-headline read: OLGA NETHERSOLE CHARGED WITH ACTING ROLE OF SCARLET WOMAN TO GRATIFY MORBID DESIRES. The World also provided a continuous series of opinions by different members of the public as to whether the play should be suppressed. These were mostly religiously motivated opponents of any form of theatre. They had been provided tickets to see Sapho by The World. Some offered opinions when they obviously had not seen the production itself.

It is clear, however, that while the theatrical press and the religious element were opposed to Sapho, the ordinary theatregoer was thrilled and impressed by the play and Nethersole's performance. The World continued to interview audience members as they emerged from the theatre and also included their views in its daily coverage. The following is a representative example of the layman's view:

I came prepared to hear much that was risqué and was agreeably disappointed. The third act is one of the strongest scenes ever enacted on a stage. Nethersole threw into the situation all her virility and flame of genius. The result was thrilling, wonderful, lasting. The audiences were alive to a full appreciation of the remarkable production.70

70 The World, February 6, 1900, p. 3.
By February 9 The World's thinly veiled hostility was cast aside as it became decidedly more nasty and combative with a sarcastic piece headlined.

THRONGS STUDY 'SAPHO' AT MORALITY SCHOOL

New Co-Educational Institution in Wallack's Broadway, Jammed with Students, Some of Them Standing - Knowledge-seeking Hundreds Turned Away.

For the third time last night Olga Nethersole taught knowledge-thirsty throngs at Wallack's Theatre how to be pure by exhibiting to them the cunning and subtile [sic] methods which fallen women employ to lure the innocent downward to their iniquitous levels. The morality school was more than well attended. Its four walls cracked with the tightly wedged mass of purity seekers. Like diligent students they were in their seats early, waiting expectantly for the curtain to roll up on Sapho, the hallowed teacher of the good.

Outside the tuition fees for the school poured through the box-office windows and smiles wreathed the manager's face. Well they might! Wallack's within a week has become the most prosperous educational institution for the reclamation of humanity that the iniquitous old Rialto has ever known.71

The article went on to note that this "sin-stained" Sapho at the 1,600 seat Wallack's Theatre had taken over as the most popular entertainment ever on Broadway, surpassing Ben Hur and requiring police protection for theatre patrons.

Nethersole's own views on Sapho also received their share of publicity in The Herald.

Sapho is moral in that it teaches with overwhelming force a profound moral lesson—not didactically to be sure but far more effectively by giving a truthful picture of human life, its frailty, its

71The World, February 8, 1900, p. 14.
weakness and the consequences that inevitably follow the breach of moral law. Clergyman talk about these things, but will their words go home to the heart of the hearer with anything like the directness of the words and action of Sapho?72

In the meantime, the New York Dramatic Mirror published an indictment of the "so-called-crusades against disreputable plays" pointing out that a newspaper "attack" on a book or a play was the best kind of advertisement and suggested that the whole Sapho controversy may have been a very clever press campaign which had proved highly successful.73 By February 20 rumors of official sanctions against the production took on some substance when the New York Times reported that a police inspector and four detectives had attended Sapho the previous night.74 The following day, the grand jury began its investigation of Sapho.

On February 21 Olga Nethersole was charged with violation of Section 385 of the Penal Code and arrested with Hamilton Revelle, her leading man; Marcus Mayer, manager; and Theodore Moss, owner of the theatre. The basis for the complaint was an affidavit submitted by Robert Mackay, reporter for The World, who revealed a basic confusion between the character in the play and the actress's own character. A hearing was set for February 23. The indictment accused Nethersole of

72February 7, 1900, p. 10.
73New York Dramatic Mirror, February 17, 1900, p. 2.
indecent postures, indecent suggestive language against good morals and indecent conduct . . . the portrayal of the life of a lewd and dissipated woman, wherein the woman referred to boasts publicly that she is the mistress of a man, and thereafter permits an actor in the presence of an audience to carry her up a staircase in a vile and indecent manner.75

In its report of the incident the Herald provided considerable human interest background information such as the fact that the thirty year old actress was arrested at her hotel, the Hoffman House, and taken to the police court by the inspector in a cab. She was described as "regal" in a purple dress, a purple hat and a mink muff and boa and seemed composed although very indignant. As she left the court she exclaimed: "I think this is very un-American to make this attack on me. I thought that I should find Americans more chivalrous." She was released to the custody of her attorney Abraham Hummel.76

With superb showmanship Nethersole performed Sapho that night in a house that could have been filled four times over.77 The crowds outside Wallack's were so huge that they blocked the sidewalk and stopped the cable cars until policemen cleared the street. After a curtain speech by house manager Burnham asking the audience's pardon for any "nervousness" on the part of the actress, the performance

76*New York Herald*, February 22, 1900, p. 4.
began, with demonstrations and curtain calls between each act. Following the famous Act III curtain, which received ten calls, the actress was induced to respond to the audience. She asked:

'Am I to understand that you are all with me?' to which voices from all parts of the house rang out, 'We are!' The curtain was then lowered, and the applause continuing, it was raised again, and Miss Nethersole pleaded that she be permitted to continue with the play, and ended by saying: 'With you at my back I feel that my fight is won.'

The next day Nethersole arrived in court splendidly outfitted in a grey ensemble with "a sealskin ulster fastened at the waist with a large diamond clasp." There it was revealed that The World had not only taken out the complaint but that it had bought tickets for members of the public who were to be called as prosecution witnesses at the arraignment. These included a Quaker minister, the president of the local Women's Christian Temperance Union, the president of the Society for the Study of Life, the president of the New York Mothers Club, and two drama critics. The defense included assorted drama critics and playwrights and most significantly Police Inspector Walter Thompson, who had been so conspicuously in evidence at the

78Ibid.
play. The World which was infuriated by his appearance for the defense and at his testimony that he had seen every performance but four of Sapho, (which he felt did have "a grand moral," ) reported his remarks under a sensationalized headline. It branded him the POLICE DEFENDER OF EVIL SAPHO. At the request of the defense the case was bound over for a full jury trial to the Court of General Sessions and the four defendants were released on bond after a payment of five hundred dollars each. In the meantime the controversy raged in the newspapers, complete with editorials and a heated debate in the "Letters to the Editor" columns. An indignant British gentleman added his own personal plea for Miss Nethersole in the New York Times. He wondered whether there was any way that "English men and women can make their influence felt" against the "contemptible" crowd of "moral reformers" and asked "if you intend suppressing some of the best art of the world you could begin with a home product." Dithmar responded vigorously to the "impetuous" Englishman's accusation that the critic was hopelessly biased against Nethersole. He wrote that while he had praised her Paula Tanqueray that did

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82 The World, March 3, 1900, p. 12.
84 New York Times, April 1, 1900, p. 18.
not make the actress a representative of some of the "best art of the world." Testily he noted "one swallow does not make a Summer." 85 The New York Dramatic Mirror reproduced weekly a number of editorials about Sapho which were appearing in newspapers throughout the country.

On the evening of March 5 at 7 p.m., without warning, the police commissioner shut down Sapho pending the trial's outcome. Nethersole thereupon announced that The Second Mrs. Tanqueray would be played in the interim. 86 The next night Tanqueray was given with the now customary "ovations" between each act. 87 On March 22 the grand jury returned a blanket indictment against the four defendants charging them with being

persons of wicked and depraved mind and disposition, and not regarding the common duties of morality and decency, but contriving and wickedly intending so far as in them to lay corrupt the morals of divers persons and to raise and create in their minds inordinate and lustful desires . . . did in a certain exhibition commonly called 'Sapho' make divers lewd, indecent, obscene, filthy, scandalous, lascivious, and disgusting motions and assume indecent postures and attitudes and utter indecent, obscene and disgusting words and conversation, offending public decency, the peace of the people of the State of New York and their dignity. 88

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85 New York Times, April 8, 1900, p. 18.
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University Microfilms International
Simultaneously Nethersole's physicians announced that she had collapsed with "nervous prostration" and all performances would be canceled for two weeks. The trial began April 3 and ended April 5, after the defense, in a dramatic gesture, waived the right to call any of its fifty witnesses. This move was at the actress's suggestion, according to the *New York Times*, which noted the incredible excitement surrounding the actress's appearance in the courtroom. It reported that spectators jostled to get a closer look at her magnificent gowns. She wore a long trailing cloak of lavender silk brocade, a lavender velvet hat with ostrich plumes and a sable "colarette" on April 4, and on the final day of the trial arrived in a long sealskin cloak, covering a turquoise gown, with a matching turquoise hat perched on her beautiful hair. Her courtroom demeanor was even more riveting. When asked to read passages from the play to illustrate a point in question, she did so dramatically, with the result that both spectators and court officials were often "visibly moved." Her piercing scrutiny when others were on the stand was also noted, and on at least one occasion a witness was brought "almost to

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90 *New York Times*, April 5, 1900, p. 7; April 6, 1900, p. 7.

91 *New York Herald*, February 24, 1900, p. 6.
a state of collapse" by her gaze. Hummel's closing summation for the defense was itself a masterpiece of dramatic rhetoric, worthy of a stage performance.

As the heart panteth after the fountain . . . as the wearied traveler in the desert longs for the cool waters, so has my defendant longed for this oasis—this moment when she could wash away the stain in this nauseous indictment which is the outcome of venom, spleen and rancor. My defendant is like Caesar's wife—she is above suspicion . . . Ah gentlemen . . . has there ever been a smirch on her pure womanhood? After fame and fortune are hers now comes a charge that she is trying to subvert public morality and forsooth she is dragged into a criminal court. Poor defenseless woman!

At this point the attorney was overcome by the force of his own emotion while Nethersole fell forward on the table in front of her in a flood of tears. Suddenly he pointed dramatically to the sobbing prostrate figure of the actress and called out: "Why you libidinous creature, how did you dare do it?" The trial judge then instructed the jury that he felt the play did present a moral and noted that in the U.S. Supreme Court every day you could see a statue of a woman with more exposed than Nethersole was said to have revealed. It took the jury only fifteen minutes to reach a verdict of innocent.

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94 Ibid.
Cablegrams, greetings and flowers poured into Wallack's Theatre from around the country and overseas once the verdict was known. Four road companies authorized by Nethersole, as well as two Yiddish versions and one in Japanese, starring Sada Yacco, immediately took to the boards, as well as numerous "cheap" versions and the very popular burlesque Sapolio, which starred May Robson. On April 7 Nethersole was back in business with Sapho, promoted by colorful new posters, which had been prepared for the occasion. Her dressingroom and her path to the stage were festooned with flowers and flags and she was pelted with bouquets of violets during "one of the most remarkable ovations that has ever been accorded to an actress in this city." Her tearful address to the audience included her thanks and admiration to the judge who had "removed the shackles that are a detriment to any art." She told her admirers

I am still suffering from the strain . . . yet remembering what has been done for the freedom of art and literature I am proud and glad that I have borne the brunt of this battle.

Nethersole continued the eighty-six-performance run until May 29, playing to full houses at Wallack's. The battle was won and the spoils were sweet: Sapho would be her most popular presentation for the rest of her career.

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95 Hapgood, pp. 353-354.
96 New York Times, April 8, 1900, p. 7.
97 Mason, p. 59.
"My art is the joy of my life but humanity is my religion."

CHAPTER V

BEYOND THE FOOTLIGHTS: HEALTH PIONEER,

PHILANTHROPIST AND SUFFRAGIST

Nethersole's retirement from the stage at the age of forty-four in 1914 marks the end of her theatrical career and the beginning of a new one. The following chapter will deal with her subsequent career beyond the footlights as a pioneering advocate of social reform. Because of the scope of her interests and the way in which they gradually came into focus, this chapter will not follow the usual chronological structure but will be topic oriented. It will attempt to trace the development of each of her interests as they gained momentum. I will document her growing awareness of the importance of good health as her own became less reliable, her gradual championing of the fight against tuberculosis, her interest in slum reform and the juvenile justice system, and her logical support of the movement for women's suffrage. Finally, I will speculate about the private person behind the public personality.
Later in life Olga Nethersole would claim that, had she not been poor, she would have studied to become a doctor.\(^1\) It is a pity that she did not have this opportunity, for she would undoubtedly have made a good one. Instead, her enthusiasm for the theatrical life was gradually usurped by her admiration for "the holiest profession of the civilized world."\(^2\) She spent the second half of her life doing the next best thing; working side by side the most distinguished physicians of her time, raising funds for their pet projects and publicizing the results of their research. Her glowing tributes to them appear in the forewords to her articles, in press releases, reviews, and in the souvenir program of her 1923 benefit performance of *The Writing on the Wall*:

> What class of people are so unselfish, so untiring in their efforts for the good of humanity, as the doctors? We all know at the bottom of their hearts lies the magnificent instinct of Humanitarianism, and that they, believing in Humanity as the Crown of Being, and following in the footsteps of the Christ, devote their brains and their time to the healing of the sick and the maimed.\(^3\)

Nethersole's interest in slum reform, the juvenile justice system, nutrition of mother and child, personal hygiene,


\(^{2}\)Ibid.

\(^{3}\)Ibid.
clean milk and the eradication of tuberculosis, was initially stirred by her travels on the theatrical circuits where she was exposed to life among the industrial poor. Like other impressionable actresses making a living at the turn of the century, (superbly documented in Julie Holledge's *Innocent Flowers: Women in the Edwardian Theatre*), she was appalled by the poverty, filth, disease and ignorance of the slums. But unlike fledgling actresses such as Lena Ashwell, Kitty Marion, Cicely Hamilton and Eva Moore, who were then struggling to make a living on the regional circuits outside London, Nethersole was already a star. Her exposure to the poverty was on a much wider scale. Her forays into the American continent convinced her that conditions over there were almost as bad, although she insisted that the English slums were worse because they were older. While many of the actresses subsequently became militant suffragettes in the cause of the vote for English women, Nethersole became a pioneer in the cause of health and welfare education worldwide. Her prestige as an international star, her expertise in handling public relations, her business acumen and her social contacts, gave her the power to galvanize public support. The mobilization

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5Holledge details experiences of several young actresses in her chapter entitled, "The Actress," pp. 8-46.
of woman power to provide support for the Great War gave her the excuse. She redirected her indefatigable energies from the theatre of make-believe to the theatre of life and proclaimed "My art is the joy of my life but humanity is my religion."\(^6\)

After a hiatus of twelve years, Nethersole returned to America in 1926 to raise money for her current project. Her aim she reported, was to raise $500,000 to establish open air health clinics and holiday camps for sick English children through the People's League of Health.

I have come back . . . to ask my old audiences to give me one more hand, one more round of applause. Every memory I have of America is dear to me. My public here was always kind, very kind. As an old friend and an old favorite I feel I have the right to lay my problems before Americans.\(^7\)

It is not surprising that Nethersole should solicit American dollars to fund a British project. She had always felt at home here, earning a profitable living and learning first hand about the importance of health on her eleven road tours. In one incident, her stage manager complained that one of the actors was lazy, and not pulling his weight like other members of the company. Upon closer examination it was found that he was exhausted and "suffering from incipient consumption."\(^8\)

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\(^7\) *New York Times*, November 28, 1927, p. 7.

\(^8\) Ibid.
an infectious disease and the public knew little about it. This was not an isolated incident, according to Nethersole who claimed to know numerous cases of employees neglecting their company duties or getting drunk because of "physical," not "moral," reasons. In 1904 the actress was invited to speak to the Edinburgh City Council about the disease, which she had researched after discovering that it was not only curable but preventable. At a subsequent lecture, given while on tour in Dublin, she met a bacteriologist, whose international research on the subject had convinced him that sanatoriums, funded by a system of "Worker's Insurance," were essential to combat the problem. She took this message on tour and promoted the prevention of tuberculosis with her own personal campaign.

I studied and agitated. I began to work for laws in England that would make the disease notifiable.

At first her credibility was limited. She found that her interest in public health was neither solicited nor encouraged.

I was not only a woman but an actress—a creature of make-believe. The world did not associate reality with actresses in those days.

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9 Nethersole, *Apologetic Defence*, p. 3.

10 Ibid.


12 Ibid.
In America her growing interest in tuberculosis, children's courts and the English divorce laws was suspiciously viewed by the press who were aware of an actor's penchant for puffery and self-aggrandisement in promoting a theatrical career.

It was during Nethersole's third tour of America in 1897 that a persistent cold forced her to cancel several engagements including the opening night of her three-day stay in Louisville. Almost immediately afterwards "acute tonsillitis" forced the cancellation of her tour to Columbus and she took a recuperative break at Atlantic City. The debilitating schedule, combined with her dissatisfaction with the Frohman management and the urging of her doctors, prompted her to announce that she would discontinue her travels in America until the fall of 1899. She planned a long rest from her road tours, once her contract for an eight-week London season and a seven-week provincial tour had been met. The sabbatical was a period of "absolute rest" at her country cottage in Hampstead followed by a stay in a remote part of the Swiss Alps in an effort to rid

13 New York Dramatic Mirror, January 16, 1897, p. 4.
herself of the cold which had bothered her most of the 1896–1897 season.¹⁶

She recovered sufficiently to go into management in London in 1898 with her own production of The Termagant, leasing Henry Beerbohm Tree's Her Majesty's Theatre. The theatrical agent Elizabeth Marbury, provides an anecdote to show that by this time Nethersole was preoccupied with the prevention of colds and disease. The actress had refused to unpack her trunks when she discovered that she had not been assigned Beerbohm Tree's own dressing room suite. Instead she was given the newly decorated rooms used by his wife. After a total impasse in which Nethersole insisted that her status as manager entitled her to the actor-manager's personal suite, Marbury came up with an idea which she suggested to house manager Henry Dana.

'What are we to do' cried Dana. 'She will not listen to reason and absolutely refuses to dress.' . . .

I knew that she always dreaded disease of any kind. Germs and microbes eternally cast their shadows upon her mind. Contagion was always anticipated. Precautions were invariably taken . . .

I found her still in street dress with tears of indignation coursing down her cheeks. She burst into a tirade about the indignity which the management was striving to inflict upon her . . . I whispered that for a long time I had known that Tree was a victim of incipient tuberculosis, that he coughed incessantly, that his rooms were filled with unsanitary draperies and upholstered furniture, that under such conditions there must be myriads of microbes lurking to do their deadly work, whereas Lady Tree's apartment was hygienic and wholesome.

¹⁶New York Dramatic Mirror, April 17, 1897, p. 2.
As I talked my listener became more and more subdued until finally she clasped her hands saying: 'Poor Tree! How little one would suspect this awful menace which threatens him.'

The actress thereupon unpacked her trunks without delay.

A year later, in 1899, Nethersole arrived in New York with full financial responsibility for her own tour, and brought with her the script of Sapho. Almost immediately the pressures of this situation brought on a recurrence of illness. Nethersole wrote to Clement Scott from Milwaukee, following the opening of Sapho, that she had been ill and was continuing to work "with the greatest effort." Despite a week's rest during Christmas at Hot Springs, Virginia, she retained her "severe cold" on the east coast and her New York opening had to be postponed twice. Rumors abounded that she had tonsillitis, acute depression, and emotional trauma over the controversy aroused by Sapho in Pennsylvania. Wallack's Theatre manager Charles Burnham, who should have been in a position to know the real story, insists that she had an "attack of the mumps." What is

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18Letter to Clement Scott, November 12, 1899, Adelphi Theatre, May 1902, Enthoven Collection.


undisputed is that following the closing of Sapho, and her appearance in court, she had a nervous breakdown which put her under her doctor's order of absolute rest.22 One can speculate that only total exhaustion would have prompted the astute young business woman from turning down the offer to present Sapho in London at the end of that season.23 Instead she opted for salmon fishing in Scotland followed by a buying spree in Paris and returned to America in the fall for what was to be her first west coast tour. It was aborted before the end of the year. That Nethersole had planned to stay for a while is clear from a letter to Gabrielle Enthoven in which she asks her to find a tenant for her "little house" for six months.24 The bizarre customs incident in which the actress inadvertently claimed American citizenship suggests that she had not recovered from her breakdown.25 Following her doctor's advice, she subsequently took a full year's leave of absence and did not return to the stage until May 1902 when Sapho was presented in London.

24 Letter to Mrs. Enthoven, October 22, 1900, Enthoven Collection.
Out for a ride with her dogs. Courtesy of Mrs. H. W. Green.
After *Sapho* was followed by a less fortunate *Gordian Knot* in May 1903 and the disastrous *Flute of Pan* in November 1904 she became resigned to the fact that she would not be able to establish a permanent position as a manageress in London as she had hoped. Instead she decided to return to America, where she knew she would be welcomed by the huge theatre-going audiences outside New York and where her effort would be financially worthwhile.

In October of 1905 Nethersole returned to the United States after an absence of four years and brought with her what one Boston correspondent snidely named her "consumptive crusade." The information which she had gleaned in Dublin in 1904 had been relayed by her in public meetings to such industrial centers as Leeds and Leicester. She was now convinced that one key to the elimination of tuberculosis was good nutrition made possible by unpolluted water, air and food. She had consequently become somewhat of a health fanatic who took along huge sacks of stone-milled flour on tour so that she would eat nothing but her own bread. Even on board ship, she insisted upon stone-milled flour bread baked with her own ingredients.

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28 Told to the author by Mrs. H. W. Green in April 1984.
At this time Queen Alexandra made an appeal for help for Britain's poor and Nethersole donated the proceeds of two matinees in Toronto and Montreal at the onset of the tour. In a typically, dramatic gesture she then cabled $2,317 directly to the queen.29 In March she wrote an open letter to the press urging the formation of a Women's League to fight consumption and pledged to donate a generous amount to such a cause.30 The following month she performed Act IV from Carmen as part of the program for a benefit for the Chicago Tubercular Hospital, which raised $2,000.31 In Boston she met for a "long conference" with the mayor and the consumptive hospital trustees to urge definite action.32 Throughout the tour she made use of her high visibility to publicize her tuberculosis awareness campaign. She also took advantage of the social engagements and society functions to which leading performers were invariably invited to promote her cause. There are accounts of her being fêtéed and hosting numerous receptions on this tour which together with the one immediately following were the most popular, the most prestigious and the most lucrative of her career. The Sapho incident four years previously had

29New York Dramatic Mirror, November 25, 1905; December 9, p. 2.
31New York Dramatic Mirror, April 7, 1906, p. 4.
made her a top attraction on the regional circuit and audiences flocked to see what all the fuss had been about. They found a fairly tame melodrama and higher prices. However, Sapho continued to be a top box office draw for several years, while Nethersole's new repertoire of Paul Hervieu's domestic dramas never garnered much enthusiasm. The 1905-06 season netted enough money for Nethersole to be able to buy a summer home in France near Biarritz\textsuperscript{33} and to invest $150,000 in Washington state real estate the following year.\textsuperscript{34}

During those two tours she first became interested in the juvenile system of justice in various states, visiting children's courts and planning to agitate for reform upon her return to England.\textsuperscript{35} By 1907 her daily schedule included a visit to a hospital, reformatory or prison. Her schedule dumbfounded those members of the press used to periodic public displays of gracious philanthropy on the part of visiting stars. One interviewer asked:

How does she find time for so many other things? It is because she is an artist and business woman, each in the right proportion. Every day's schedule is as definitely arranged and carried out as if vast commercial interests depend upon it. In short, she has reduced living to a science.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{34}\textit{New York Dramatic Mirror}, February 23, 1907, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{35}\textit{Theatre Magazine} 77 (July 1907): 194.
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid.
With the same creative flair that she brought to all her projects whether theatrical or philanthropic, Nethersole instigated a "unique charity" in which she selected a hospital in each city in the tour and arranged for fresh flowers to be delivered to one of the wards for one year following.\footnote{Ibid.} After a year of this kind of activity off the stage, together with her grueling performance schedule, and the difficulties of managing a traveling company on the road, it is hardly surprising that reports of her poor health began once again to surface. In May her tonsillitis became bad enough that she had to miss half a week in Philadelphia and recuperate in Atlantic City before continuing on to Boston.\footnote{New York Dramatic Mirror, May 18, 1907, p. 2.} But this was a minor setback to a tour which packed in the audiences and was an overwhelming artistic and financial success. The company continued on to Paris and a season at the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt which proved to be a glorious finale to a triumphant tour. Her tours were at the peak of their popularity; from this point her career would show a gradual decline.

The 1907-08 season began in September in Kansas City and continued with a whistle-stop tour of the far west. It was an uneventful tour playing to full houses for mostly one-night stands, and three-day and weekly programs in the
major cities. By early February they were back in Pittsburgh, where Nethersole slipped and sprained her ankle on an icy sidewalk but carried on with Carmen at the Nixon Theatre in a wheelchair.\textsuperscript{39} Considering the physical nature of the Nethersole Carmen, this must have been interesting. Around this time the actress was also notified that she had been elected to the National Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis,\textsuperscript{40} whereupon she stepped up her speaking engagements to such civic groups as the Professional Women's Association and the People's Institute Club in various cities on the tour.\textsuperscript{41} In what must have been a particularly deep blow, her leading man, Frank Mills was suddenly stricken with diphtheria in Syracuse, and had to be hospitalized. Her supporting players for the rest of the season were described as "lamentably weak."\textsuperscript{42} In January of 1909 Nethersole presented her own social message play, The Writing on the Wall, to a crowded house of diplomats and society luminaries in Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{43} To her schedule of speaking engagements on behalf of tuberculosis research, the

\textsuperscript{39}\textit{New York Dramatic Mirror}, February 8, 1908, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{40}\textit{New York Dramatic Mirror}, February 29, 1908, p. 4. It is not clear whether this was British or American.
\textsuperscript{41}\textit{New York Dramatic Mirror}, March 14, 1908, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{42}\textit{New York Dramatic Mirror}, May 2, 1908, p. 4.
juvenile justice system, and the divorce law reform, was added an interest in slum reform. Nethersole commissioned the drama from William Hurlbut after discovering that some of the worst tenements in New York City were owned by one of the richest churches. One block was known as the "lung block" because it fostered so many successive cases of tuberculosis. She was delighted with the public response to her drama—which-called-for-action. Trinity Church Corporation which governed the finances of the church subsequently decided to modernize its tenements and the public-minded citizens who saw the play organized committees to inspect tenement house fire escapes, usually within a week of the performances. The merits of the play were debated by such groups as the Socialist Dramatic Movement and Nethersole herself, who became increasingly vociferous about her right to use the stage as a weapon for change.

It is not right to partly remove a bandage from a wound and show it, unless you show also its preventive. It is not even enough to show the cure; I would go further, and in my claim that I have the right to show any sore, mental, moral, physical, before the public. I cannot make it too strong that I must show its prevention.

44 Nethersole, Apologetic Defence, p. 5.
45 New York Dramatic Mirror, November 19, 1913, p. 9.
47 New York Dramatic Mirror, November 19, 1913, p. 9.
The following year Nethersole took *The Writing on the Wall* on tour and, fortified by a new awareness of her power to focus attention on specific issues, continued her campaign for social action on and off the stage. In San Francisco she was invited to take a seat on the bench with Judge Murasky, in whose court session it was noted, she was very attentive and took many notes. She intervened on behalf of an English prisoner in California's San Quentin Prison who was serving ten years for highway robbery with violence, after pleading not guilty. She appealed to the prison committee and to the governor on the grounds that he had been barely over fifteen years old when he was tried and convicted in criminal court, instead of in the juvenile court. He was released, having served four and one half years of his sentence. Nethersole augmented her lectures and interviews with some articles of her own. For instance, in the *Green Book Album* of June 1909 she published a five-page article entitled "State Play versus Factory Labor." The article answered charges of child labor exploitation in the theatre and pointed out that children in a play had a much easier, more rewarding experience, than those working in a factory.

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49 *Nethersole, Apologetic Defence*, p. 4.
50 *Green Book Album* (June 1909): 1297-1301.
Every member of a theatrical company is far more interested in protecting the children of a company from contact with evil influence, than the most bigoted factory inspector possibly could be. The actors understand the children and love them. The factory inspectors do not understand them; their experience with children has been confined to those poor little things whose lives have been crushed by long hours of manual toil in dark and unhealthy shops and mines.51

Nethersole suggested that what was needed was a way to adequately supervise child labor and suggested that the juvenile courts take over this function instead of working only with child criminals.52 Shortly thereafter in England she drew the attention of the Home Secretary to the increase in juvenile crime and suggested her theory that their delinquency was as a result of inspiration that they had received from seeing films. She pointed out that what was needed was a governmental film censorship and legislation to regulate children's admittance to the cinema for certain films.53

In the meantime, women's suffrage as well as related issues such as divorce reform were receiving increased coverage in the dramatic press. Holledge's book provides an excellent background to the problems encountered by women in England and the role that actresses played in the women's

52Ibid.
53Nethersole, Apologetic Defence, p. 5. As of 1917 there was no such regulatory body.
suffrage movement. It points out the financial risk that prominent actresses took when they agitated for the vote. By the final tour of her career, which ended in mid-1914, Nethersole was reported to have preached the ballot for women "day in and night out." She was, in fact, a "suffragist," an active supporter of the vote although not one of the small group of militant "suffragettes" who went to such extremes as barricading themselves to the railings outside the Houses of Parliament, conducting prison hunger strikes and throwing themselves in front of the king's race horse.

As far back as 1869 the National Society for Woman's Suffrage was founded to work for the vote for women. Two years later they were granted the vote in municipal elections but not in national affairs. In 1880 the Isle of Man granted women the right to vote, followed by New Zealand in 1893 and Australia in 1902. But England still resisted what Queen Victoria had called "this mad wicked folly." During the Edwardian age, which began January 22, 1901 and technically ended with the king's death May 6, 1910 (but is usually extended to include the years until the outbreak of World War I), the campaign for woman's suffrage reached a boiling point. The catalyst was Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst who formed the Women's Social and Political Union to

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aggressively pursue the vote. What is generally not realized is that the militant suffragettes formed only one section of a movement that included at least five hundred groups working for the same goal. The suffragist groups spanned a cross-section of society from the intellectuals to factory workers.55 The king disapproved of them all, preferring the pretty, fashionable creatures with whom he had always surrounded himself. They were also not taken seriously by the general public until militant demonstrations, hunger strikes and violence raised the public consciousness. Mrs. Humphrey Ward retaliated by launching her anti-suffrage society of ladies in 1908. However, once war was declared Mrs. Pankhurst announced that the militants would postpone further activity until Germany had been defeated. Women everywhere, including Nethersole, responded to the patriotic fervor which surrounded World War I by volunteering their services in the national interest. The government eventually gave women over thirty the right to vote in 1918 and America followed with the full vote in 1920. But it was not until 1928 that the "Flapper Vote" extended the right to all English women to vote upon reaching the age of twenty-one.56

55One famous group of intellectuals was headed by Mrs. Millicent C. Fawcett, for whom the Fawcett Library in London is named.

Meanwhile, at the end of the first decade in America suffrage agitation was becoming more heated and Sarah Bernhardt very publicly joined "The Joan of Arc Women's Suffrage League." Nethersole in the meantime arrived in America with the script of Mary Magdalene and a contract to perform at the New Theatre in what was projected as her own gateway into the "modern" theatre. But 1911 turned out to be a transitional year both for Nethersole and woman's suffrage. While her career received the coup de grace, the campaign for the vote flourished and special suffrage plays were performed to educate the audience. Following the New Theatre debacle, Nethersole desperately tried to salvage her prestige with a makeshift tour of the west coast. But the times and theatrical tastes were changing even outside the large metropolitan centers. Her performances were now labeled "stagy" and "melodramatic" even as the best of her contemporaries were being showered with praise. While Nethersole was in San Francisco the citizens were publicly wondering whether Sarah Bernhardt would "permit" them to offer her public tribute. Mrs. Fiske's influence on acting technique was widely proclaimed. She wrote her own articles on what constituted a "modern" repertory, and these

59 *New York Dramatic Mirror*, April 26, 1911, p. 27.
did not include the types of plays or roles of which Nethersole had made a career. It is not surprising that as Nethersole's theatrical career declined, her role in promoting social progress took on a new importance.

Her support of the emancipation of women was strong and outspoken. Nethersole had known the Pankhurst women from at least 1903 when she sent an autographed picture of herself as Sapho to "Miss Pankhurst" at her home in Bedford Square, London. In 1913 the actress joined eight hundred women in the Maxine Elliot Theatre, New York, at a rally organized by the Womens Political Union, headed by Mrs. Harriot Stanton Blatch. The event was planned as a show of support for two "white slave trade" plays, the Lure and The Fight which were undergoing the sort of media criticism and public harassment which Sapho had provoked in 1900. Nethersole was a featured speaker sharing the platform with leaders of the Woman's Suffrage party and telling about her own fight in 1900 for "freedom of character and treatment on the American stage." She told of one incident which had particularly rankled her: that the foreman of the grand jury which

60 New York Dramatic Mirror, February 22, 1911, p. 5.
61 May 27, 1903, Enthoven Collection.
Emmeline Pankhurst and her two daughters Sylvia and Cristabel were all active in the movement.
indicted her was also the publisher of a bookstore in which she later found five "non-expurgated" versions of the Daudet novel.

Nethersole endorsed the findings of the Rev. Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, president of the National American Woman's Suffrage Association, who described her work with the Fallen Women of Boston and her view that their "fall" was due to overwork, long hours, lack of proper nourishment and "the stupid monotony of their lives" as much as anything. Nethersole also took the opportunity to ask for support for Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst, who was arriving from England from a speaking tour the following week.

I want to ask you to go next Monday night to hear Mrs. Pankhurst and give a hearty cheer for the little woman who has had the courage to voluntarily starve herself for a cause which represents the future welfare of the race and the betterment of conditions for future generations.63

In the meantime, Nethersole had been appointed to the Divorce Reform Committee in England, presumably as a result of her visibility and public interest in the conditions of women.64 For the rest of her final American tour she continued to speak out vigorously on behalf of suffrage and the divorce laws. On October 19 Nethersole appeared on the platform at Madison Square Garden with Mrs. Pankhurst. Her

63Ibid.
64New York Times, October 10, 1913, p. 7.
stance as a suffragist seems to have become more militant in
spirit as she supported their methods in principle. She
gave an interview to the New York Times which was published
with the headline: WOMEN AS FIGHTERS: Olga Nethersole Says
They Could Defeat the British Army:

We women do not like war, we do not like to fight . . .
but we could do it. Yes I believe the women could
come off victorious in battle with entire English
Army if they were trained.66

She defended militant tactics in England as politically
necessary to draw public attention to the plight of English
women:

It is quite different in this country. The women
are treated differently, and they are going to get
the vote, but in England they must fight for it.
You do not know about many of our laws, you do not
know about the inequality of our divorce laws. A
woman may not get a divorce for what a man may
divorce his wife for without opposition. I am on
the Divorce Reform Committee in England and how
could I help being a suffragist?67

Nethersole announced support of Mrs. Pankhurst's intention
to build an army to conduct "militant suffrage warfare in
the manner of a real revolution." She compared it to the
insurrectionists in Northern Ireland.

In Ulster . . . Sir Edward Carson is inciting the
people to offer armed resistance to the Government
and to devastate the lands. . . . Sir Edward Carson
has not been arrested and thrown into prison and why
should the women be?68

67Ibid.
But she also continued to make it clear that she was not militant herself.

I think war is barbarism - a relic of the dark ages. To think of people planning with the most scientific methods to kill or maim men and then patch them up and send them out if they survive to be maimed again is ridiculous. I don't believe in war at all, but I do not think there should be discrimination against the women when they wage it.69

While Nethersole was expounding on behalf of Mrs. Pankurst and the woman's right to vote and get a divorce, her friend and former colleague Lena Ashwell became active in presenting woman's suffrage plays. The actress had taken over the role of Dolores in the London production of Carmen in 1896 and retained a lifelong friendship with Nethersole. Ashwell had suffered extreme hardship in her own attempt to get a divorce and her subsequent militancy and prominence in the movement as an activist actress would have reinforced Nethersole's own interest in these issues.70

During the final years of her career as actress-manager Nethersole became more outspoken on behalf of those issues which concerned her. It is not surprising, therefore, that the outbreak of World War I caused her to reassess her priorities and resolve to help the war effort. The war, she said, brought home to her

69Ibid.

70Holledge, p. 17.
a sense of values that made an incident like 'Sapho' infinitesimal in its unimportance compared with the great work to be done in making sick people well.71

An ardent patriot, she turned her Hampstead house into a convalescent center72 and in 1916 joined the British Red Cross for whom she worked until the end of the war. She had a full-time schedule as a volunteer nursing assistant on the staff of the New End Military Hospital in Hampstead. At the end of the war she was cited for special devotion and competency and awarded the Royal Red Cross medal for women and the British Red Cross War Medal.73

In the meantime, Nethersole had founded the People's League of Health with the purpose of raising the nation's standard of health. Concurrently she published a manifesto entitled An Apologetic Defence of My Statement that a People's League of Health is Necessary and Should be Created as a Means of Raising the Standard of Health of the British Nation.74 The booklet enumerated her reasons for forming the organization, described her pet projects, and discussed her volunteer work during the years of the war. During the early part of the war she was a recruiter, worked in the


72Told to the author by Mrs. H. W. Green in April 1984.

73Letter to author from Miss M. N. Slade, archivist, British Red Cross Society, January 28, 1983.

74A copy is available at the British Library. See appendix for list of league objectives.
canteen of a munitions factory, organized a traveling kitchen to teach good nutrition and cooking techniques and was a voluntary helper for the government in its task of compiling a National Register.75 The district to which she was assigned was one of the most densely populated slums in London. She wrote

The conditions which I found made me ashamed, and on the first day when I was made actually physically ill by the evil smells, ill-ventilated, unsanitary conditions of the houses into which my work necessitated my going . . . I registered a vow that I would do something at the earliest opportunity to improve the homes and conditions of our workers.76

Her work in the hospital nursing the wounded soldiers further convinced her that the layman knew nothing about practical hygiene. The league Nethersole saw as an "educational limb" of the soon-to-be-created Ministry of Health in 1920. It was organized with volunteer funds and staffed by medical experts who were for the most part invited to join while they were still on duty overseas.77

Five months after the Armistice on April 30, 1919, the medical council of the league met to set formal objectives. This was followed by the establishment of a lay council of representatives from the trade unions, workers, YWCA, women's organizations, teachers, churches, the Army, Girl

75Nethersole, Apologetic Defence, p. 6.
76Ibid.
Guides and Boy Scouts. When King George V asked about her plans, she told him that it was "to devote my life to the health of the people."79 He became patron of the league, adding prestige to a group which already consisted of seventy distinguished medical and scientific professionals.

The People's League of Health set about publishing a series of educational pamphlets on a variety of health topics authored by leading experts in their field. In 1925 a series of lectures was given at the Medical Society of London entitled "What to Eat and Why," under the auspices of the People's League of Health. The texts of these papers by well known physicians and surgeons were compiled by Nethersole into a book which was published by the league as The Importance of Diet in Relation to Health,80 for which she wrote the "foreword." In addition to disseminating educational materials for public use, the league pursued several vigorous campaigns of its own. For instance, it agitated for the purification of milk in dairy herds across the country, (a major cause of tuberculosis), and the distribution of vitamin pills in London hospitals to 5,022

78Ibid.

79Professor James Young, Letters to the Editor, The Times, January 25, 1951, p. 8.

80London: George Routledge and Sons Ltd., 1926.
pregnant women. According to Jane Lewis' *The Politics of Motherhood*, despite the excellent credentials of the People's League of Health advisory committees, the league received little or no help from the Ministry of Health, which looked upon it as a "meddling body." She quotes one ministry report indicating that the official in question was irritated that he was required to "take part in the sacrifice annually offered by the Ministry of Health on the shrine of Miss Olga Nethersole." Nethersole bombarded the ministry with a variety of concerns. For instance, she sent a deputation to then Minister of Health Neville Chamberlain pointing out the dangers of using boric acid as a food preservative. Lewis notes that while the ministry criticized the efforts of such independent bodies as the league, to measure poor nutrition, its own efforts were "notoriously unscientific."

In the meantime, Nethersole launched a fund-raising campaign with all the fervor and creative imagination that she had formally channeled into her acting and management responsibilities. She hosted society tea and garden

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82 Ibid.


84 Lewis, p. 183.
parties, charity costume balls and, ten years after her final tour of *The Writing on the Wall*, she decided to revive it for a huge fund-raising matinee. Frank Curzon and Sir Gerald du Maurier loaned Wyndham's Theatre for the afternoon of July 2, 1923.\textsuperscript{85} The list of ushers, program sellers, and volunteers reads like a who's who of the prominent and titled members of society. Distinguished speakers and the actress herself addressed the audience about the need for continuing work in the slums of London. Lantern slides and photographs of slums in New York, London, and the industrial north of England were shown. The souvenir program included a letter from Nethersole about the goals of the People's League of Health. This last appearance on the stage was a pleasant experience surrounded by friends and colleagues and with no possibility of hostile criticism to mar her performance as Barbara Lawrence.

Nethersole's study of the juvenile system in America also prompted her interest in prison reform. In 1922 she persuaded British prison commissioners to allow doctors and scientists on her committees to visit the prisons and talk to the prisoners about their health. So the king's dentist gave them tips on how to care for their teeth and other eminent physicians discussed the care of the body, and the dangers of physical, mental and alcohol abuse. In the

\textsuperscript{85}Souvenir Program for *The Writing on The Wall*, Wyndham's Theatre 1923, Enthoven Collection.
Composite of Olga Nethersole later in life.
Courtesy of Mrs. H. W. Green.
popular follow-up program, organized by Nethersole, prisoners were encouraged to take written examinations on the subject matter of the lectures, for which they could win money prizes.86

In 1926 Nethersole visited New York accompanied by her favorite nephew, Captain H. W. Green to attend the International Union Against Tuberculosis in Washington on behalf of the league. The visit was the first since her American vaudeville tour of 1914, and was well covered by the press, to whom Nethersole had become somewhat of a legendary figure. They were intrigued by stories of the Sapho affair, the Carmen Nethersole kiss, and her current philanthropy. Her interests were described as promoting clean milk, the eradication of tuberculosis, hygiene instruction in schools, scholarships for teachers to study health problems, pioneer work in prisons and reformatories, children's courts, housing conditions, clinics for mothers with young babies, homes for orphans, workers health insurance and safety laws, and health centers for malnourished children. In an editorial, the New York Times called the former actress of courtesan roles a veritable

86Daily Herald, clipping dated August 1930, Mander and Mitchenson Collection.
"Health Missionary." It subsequently endorsed Nethersole's call for an international league of health, which she proposed at a luncheon party given for leaders of major American medical institutions.87

The former actress regularly represented the People's League of Health on a variety of national and international projects and advisory boards. She was appointed to the General Committee on the Women's Section at the British Empire Exhibition 1924-1925; vice president of the Medical Sociology Section for the British Medical Association's ninety-seventh annual conference in Manchester in July 1929, and represented the league at health conferences in Brussels in 1920, Lausanne in 1924 and Rome in 1928. She presented papers on a variety of topics at conferences in Europe and America. She served on the Council of the Central Chamber of Agriculture in 1931, the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland for the years 1930 through 1932, was vice president of the Royal Institute of Public Health Congress in Eastbourne in 1933 and 1934, and in 1948 was appointed to the British Organizing Council for the Ninth International Congress on Industrial Medicine. She was also a trustee of the British-Serbian Red Cross fund, a member of the National Farmers Union and life governor of Denville

Hall, "Haven of Rest for Aged Members of the Theatrical Profession." 88

In 1936 Olga Nethersole was recognized by King George V in the New Year's Honors List with the order of Commander of the British Empire. The prestigious award was greeted by an outpouring of public affection and praise for her work on behalf of the league which by this time numbered representatives from all major English educational and social welfare groups. At an official luncheon at Claridges, she was honored by representatives of the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal College of Surgeons and the Royal Veterinary College as well as by friends and colleagues. 89 She was cited for her "organizing power" and the "stimulus she has given the medical profession," particularly her campaign to eradicate tuberculosis by purifying the milk of the nation's dairy herds, and the dissemination of proper diet information to the public. Lena Ashwell, now Lady Simpson, also spoke about Nethersole's contributions as actress-manager. Nethersole's response included the rueful comment that when she began pursuing those issues during her theatre tours, "unkind people" used


89 The Times, December 11, 1936, p. 7.
to say that she did it for the publicity. It is ironic that the public acclaim which she won for her work as a philanthropist, eluded her in the theatre.

By the time she died in 1951, just a few days short of her eighty-first birthday, Nethersole presented the public image of a grand old lady, who hobnobbed with the leaders of the medical, scientific and social worlds. To the end she persevered in spreading the league's gospel: "Knowledge is the only armour of defence of which we cannot be robbed by an enemy." Throughout her life Nethersole was a superb communicator, as shown by the various projects that she conducted with finesse. But behind the rosy glow of the footlights and the spotlight on the social worker, Nethersole was just as adept as preserving the private persona. The woman behind the public face was not revealed. She orchestrated the dissemination of publicity so that the public thought they were peeking into the private life of the actress-turned-social-worker. In fact, they were, but there was more to Nethersole than that. Readers of newspaper articles and magazines knew her as a solitary figure, usually surrounded by a litter of ugly-faced dogs, playing card games in her library. She was pictured as an elegant woman, always beautifully dressed, her white hair

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90 Manchester Guardian, unpaginated clipping dated December 11, 1936 Fawcett Library Collection.
carefully styled, and fond of several fox furs draped over her shoulders. She was shown bicycling in the country, driving in her cherished Daimler motor-car, and competing at kennel shows.

From talking to the surviving members of her family, from her own correspondence and that of her friends, the private person behind the public picture is intriguing. Mrs. H. W. Green, who stayed with her aunt-by-marriage on several occasions, describes Nethersole as a person able to charm everyone she met. Unfortunately, she could not charm all of the critics all of the time. It is clear she was very upset at the outspoken criticism of her acting career in London and New York even though she gave the impression that it did not bother her at all. Her long periods of illness following each traumatic production indicate that they were stressful. Such incidents as the one noted by Elizabeth Marbury in which Nethersole was violently upset at not getting the dressing room which she felt was her due, reinforces the view that she was a tough negotiator who demanded her due but became emotionally distraught when she did not get it. Surprisingly, underneath the outward veneer of the daring actress who played risque roles (and was therefore assumed to be similarly lax in her personal life), was a morally conservative woman, who believed in hard work, helping her fellow man and drama that taught a lesson,
offered a solution and suggested the prevention of social problems. An actress-manager who truly believed

Where infidelity is presented lightly and as an amusing thing in musical comedy, that I consider is immoral.91

can hardly be compared with such society butterflies as Lillie Langtry, Mrs. Patrick-Campbell and Mrs. Leslie Carter or such women as Ellen Terry and Sarah Bernhardt who outraged society with their love affairs and Bohemian life-styles.

Nethersole's personal life may well have been unconventional but no hint of public scandal ever suggested it. At one time or another, according to Mrs. Green, Nethersole was engaged to a prominent physician and to the actor Johnston Forbes-Robertson. She refused to marry either one when they wanted her to give up the stage. She wrote:

Never will I let marriage interfere my career. That is the supreme thing in my life; I am trying to shape it always upward, that it may culminate on the heights.92

Although their supposed romance never amounted to marriage, "Forbee" painted several portraits of the actress, two of which hang in the Nethersole family home at Pynchfield Manor, and one which is owned by the Forbes-Robertson


92New York Dramatic Mirror, April 17, 1897, p. 2.
family.93 His daughter, Diana, has confirmed that they were great friends and his wife later testified on behalf of Nethersole in the 1913 Shubert-Liebler suit.94

Instead of marriage, Nethersole opted for a lasting personal relationship with Kathleen Nora Madge Field. Field was the daughter of close family friends, according to Mrs. Green, and readily stepped into the void left by the death of Nethersole's mother. Madge Field devoted herself to Nethersole, traveling with her constantly but staying in the background. Occasionally she is mentioned in the American press accompanying the actress to a social engagement and in one instance her name appears as a supporting role player for Carmen in New York, when she was obviously pressed into service.95

Bluebell Green Krefting, the Green's daughter, and Nethersole's great niece, relates that she often stayed near her aunt during school vacations while her parents were overseas. She recalls that Nethersole was rather embarrassing to a little girl who had to explain away her famous aunt's eccentricities to her curious companions. She remembers Olga as "manly" with a deep theatrical voice, a

93Told to author by Diana Forbes-Roberston in November 1982.


95Clipping December 12, 1905, Robinson Locke Collection, 362-363.
woman who liked to wear a trilby hat. Madge Field, she recalls, wore ties and "mannah" clothes. In her 1913 will, Nethersole left the bulk of her possessions to her "loved and devoted friend Kathleen Nora Madge Field." This included her Seattle property, her silver, furniture, pictures, tapestries, china, antiques, Renault motorcar, Russian sables, any jewels not already bequeathed, her interest in any plays other than Sapho, her theatrical scenery, costumes and properties and her "dear little baby doggie Chiquita, knowing that she will be cared for with tenderness and understanding."  

However, Madge Field died of cancer in 1938, leaving Nethersole fifty thousand pounds in trust for life. Mrs. Green recounts that she stayed with Nethersole to help her over her loneliness. After that the actress did not seem to care too much what happened to her possessions. When she died January 9, 1951, seven additional wills were discovered. None of these were accepted as legal by the court which declared her intestate. The Daily Telegraph

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96 Told to author by Bluebell Green Krefting in April 1984.

97 Olga Nethersole will, 1913, Somerset House.


99 Told to author by Mrs. H. W. Green in April 1984.
noted that she left a net worth of twenty-nine thousand and three hundred and sixty-one pounds.\footnote{100}

For most of her life Nethersole owned a fashionable home at 5 Norfolk Street, adjoining Park Lane, and her country cottage on the outskirts of London in Hampstead. She also purchased a farm, Trebarfoote Manor Farm, Poundstock, in North Cornwall,\footnote{101} to which she eventually retired for good. This, according to her family, was filled with antiques, of which she and Madge Field were avid collectors, and with the memorabilia of her acting career. Following her death the Hampstead home and the farm were sold. The family kept some of the antiques and Nethersole's favorite personal items as well as her jewelry and furs. The huge collection of theatrical records "which filled every closet" were burned, and the remnants of her stage wardrobe and properties were sold.\footnote{102} According to Mrs. H. W. Green, her late husband made the decision to disband the People's League of Health shortly before Nethersole's death because of mounting debts. It had accomplished its goals and the general health was now looked after by the National Health Service.

\footnote{100}{June 28, 1951, unpaginated clipping, Grand Theatre 1887, Enthoven Collection.}

\footnote{101}{Who Was Who, p. 812.}

\footnote{102}{Told to me by Mrs. H. W. Green.}
The actress-manager who had made a career playing "immoral" women subsequently helped improve the conditions which she felt were responsible for their plight. Proclaiming that "the prevention of disease, moral and physical, is now my life's work," the most notorious portrayer of Fallen Woman went from suggesting remedies on the stage to promoting them in real life. The "leading lady's last exit" was marked by articles and letters to the press from Nethersole's former colleagues who eulogized her as a woman with two significant careers.


104 Ibid.
CONCLUSION

At the height of her career in the final decade of the nineteenth century and the first few years of the new one, Nethersole was considered as great as any of the "stars" touring on the theatrical circuit outside New York. She gave these audiences their money's worth, a bravura display of passion and power, liberally seasoned with such thrilling effects as the "fainting" curtain call and the "Nethersole Kiss."

That her performances were also vigorously criticized in London and New York for exaggerated mannerisms and old-fashioned acting technique did not stop their success at the box office. She was one of the exciting international celebrities of the theatre who sipped tea at Buckingham Palace and dined at the White House. As a woman, she spoke out on the issues of the day; as a fashion leader, she was known for her sense of beauty and style. The stage-struck young girl with no theatrical background had overcome heavy odds to make her dream a reality, carving out a career which spanned twenty-seven years and included eleven major tours of America. For at least six of those tours she maintained the "Iolanthe," her own personal railroad car, at an annual cost of thirty-two thousand dollars, traveling an average of four hundred and eighty miles a week for thirty-eight weeks.
of the tour. She was accompanied by a personal entourage which included her manager, secretary, two maids, a butler, a chef, two other servants and her companion, Madge Field. On her first trip to the west coast in 1906, which was described in the press somewhat extravagantly as "the most important transcontinental tour ever undertaken by a foreign artist," she took with her a company of forty, to perform nine plays, requiring seven car loads of scenery and furniture. That she traveled across America in such grand style is an indication of her performing status and financial health. She regularly played the major cities for a week, sometimes two or four weeks, as well as three-days-plus-one-matinee in smaller cities and a grueling schedule of one-night stands at the less important stops. Her initial west coast tour, for instance, included an itinerary of major houses from New York to Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Buffalo, Detroit, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Denver, San Francisco, Los Angeles, New Orleans and Chicago, where she is reported to have grossed receipts of

1Kansas City Post, September 25, 1909, Robinson Locke Collection, 362-363.
2Ibid.
4Ibid.
twenty-seven thousand dollars in a two-week period. While not in the same class with a Bernhardt or Duse, in whose shadow she was forced to exist, Nethersole was certainly as well known as Clara Morris and other contemporaries such as Mrs. Leslie Carter, Mrs. Patrick-Campbell and Ada Rehan. She was several notches above the journeyman actors who made a reasonable living on the regional tours outside New York. Why such a popular artist with such an obvious economic, if not artistic, impact upon her era has disappeared so completely from the history books is puzzling. In my concluding statement I will suggest the possible reasons for this by summarizing all the contributing factors including the critics, the producers, the audiences, her repertoire and acting style and the impact of her career in England and America.

With his usual perspicacity George Bernard Shaw gets right to the heart of the matter when he comments that critical acclaim is required for enduring fame.

Some day they will reprint my articles; and then what will all your puffs and long runs and photographs and papered houses and cheap success avail you, O lovely leading ladies and well-tailored actor managers? The twentieth century, if it concerns itself about either of us,

\[5\]Ibid.
will see you as I see you. Therefore study my
taste, flatter me, bribe me... 6

Olga Nethersole is a classic example of the performer who
had money, success, and applause, but did not have the
respect of the critics and consequently has not survived for
posterity. When one considers that the critic, at the
forefront of change, traditionally has no patience with
outmoded acting styles, this is not surprising. Nethersole
was a remnant of the Romantic era who tried and failed to
make the transition into the modern theatre. Such ascerbic
critics as Shaw in England and E. A. Dithmar in America had
no patience with dated emotional displays and histrionic
outbursts at a time when Ibsen's theatre of realism and the
art theatre movement in Europe were making a decided impact
with their call for simplicity. Conservative critics such
as the English Clement Scott and the American William
Winter, while they abhorred the Ibsonian woman as "an insane
cat" who belonged in "the lunatic asylum,"7 were no more
approving of Nethersole's decadent (albeit purely motivated)
Fallen Women. Their criticism revealed a confusion between
the morality of the stage character and that of the actress
who dared to portray her. Their hostility grew as they

6George Bernard Shaw, Dramatic Opinions and Essays

7William Winter, The Wallet of Time (New York:
fell prey to the sharp reaction against the growing emancipation of women. But as recent scholarship has revealed, critical response in New York City provides only half the picture. It does not reflect adequately the perception of success on the road where large numbers of second and third-rate actors made a passable living. Like Nethersole, names such as George C. Miln, Thomas W. Keene, Frederick B. Warde, Mademoiselle Rhea and Nance O'Neill have vanished today, yet at the turn of the century they had thriving touring careers. When compared to actors such as these, Nethersole would be considered a superior attraction, playing as she did in major houses, able to demand higher prices, and amassing a small fortune. The fact that she was able to maintain several homes in England and France, as well as vacation retreats in Scotland and Switzerland, lease a personal railroad carriage, travel back and forth regularly between Europe and America in such grand style as well as


make business investments in the far northwest, indicates that she was doing more than eking out a subsistence living.

A brief look at her association with theatrical producers indicates that she was considered a valuable property. Her career at one point or another made contact with many of the nineteenth century entreprenurs. While in retrospect her career can be seen as below the stature of a Bernhardt, Irving, Terry and Beerbohm Tree, it is clear that at its outset the American producers put her in the category of top international star.

When Augustin Daly brought her over in 1894, it was rumored that he was thinking of putting Nethersole at the head of his famous stock company and promoting Ada Rehan as an independent star. Nethersole was, therefore, furious when her intended leading man, Frank Worthing, was summarily transferred to play opposite Rehan which explains why there was no more mention of Nethersole with Augustin Daly. For the next two tours Nethersole signed with Charles and Daniel Frohman, the former being a major force in the Syndicate which was formed in 1896. Nethersole also had the distinction of being the enterprising Frohman's first "foreign star,"


12Ibid.
which indicates that he was impressed with her potential. Nethersole's sensational *Carmen* was produced under the auspices of both Frohmans at the Empire Theatre in 1895 and subsequently in London where Charles Frohman eventually controlled five theatres.¹³ Nethersole, by all accounts an ambitious and hard-driving business woman, became dissatisfied with the Frohman management after two seasons, even though her contract was reported as exceptionally favorable. She was determined to go into management herself in the West End of London. Her London experiment began with the *Termagant*¹⁴ in 1898 and ended with *The Flute of Pan* in 1904. In the interim she made a fortune with *Sapho* in New York, brought it back to London, where it played to packed houses at The Adelphi for seventy one performances; and produced *The Gordian Knot*, which played for only eleven performances a year later. However, her *Sapho* profits probably absorbed the brunt of any losses suffered by the other three. In 1905 she signed with Klaw and Erlanger who booked her next immensely lucrative season through the


¹⁴She had previously produced *The Transgressor* in London in 1894.
Syndicate. Why she signed a contract with the rival Lee Shubert and Liebler organizations for 1910 and 1911 is not clear. But her skill as a business woman is again demonstrated when they canceled her contract after the Mary Magdalene fiasco at the New Theatre and she successfully sued for the balance of the two seasons. Her final 1913-1914 tour was on the vaudeville circuit playing different houses, to different audiences and virtually ignored by the dramatic press. While Nethersole's relationship with the important figures who controlled the theatres was often a stormy one, she was most likely signed by them because she was considered a money-making proposition.

Nethersole's own record in producing plays was most successful on the road in America, where it was given major impetus by the popularity of Sapho. Her record in London was poor but hardly surprising when measured against the failure of other actresses to establish themselves permanently as managers in the West End of London. Madame Vestris claimed to have been the first actress to succeed when she


took over the Olympic theatre in 1830. Although a few Victorian stars followed her example for limited seasons it was not until the end of the first decade in the twentieth century that four actresses, Elizabeth Robins, Florence Farr, Lena Ashwell and Lilian Bayliss, succeeded with any permanency. Nethersole's stint as actress-manager began with some promise but ended weakly. J. P. Wearing provides us with an idea of what sort of business could be expected during an average run in London in the decade of the 1890s. The average length was anywhere from twenty-six to forty-seven performances with the median at about thirty-two. Nethersole's record was: The Transgressor (1894) 66; The Termagant (1898) 36; Sapho (1902) 71; The Gordian Knot (1903) 11; The Flute of Pan (1904) 15. While her attempts in London cannot be said to be stellar, this is not surprising given the climate of the male-dominated society and the fact that, unlike her female contemporaries, Nethersole performed alone without the advice and acting support of a regular partner. She ran her company in


the autocratic manner of the well-known actor-managers, selecting roles to display her talents and not worrying unduly about the quality of her supporting players. Like the actor-managers, Nethersole had control over her choice of repertory and it is this area which reveals her major weakness. Although it was her goal "to produce the dramatic masterpieces of our time," she was unable to find one play which has survived the test of time.

Through the ages the commercial theatre has been a tough business in which plays that draw crowds are considered successful and those which fail to draw are not. Charles Frohman, who was probably responsible for more commercially successful plays than any other producer at the turn of the century, wrote:

"American playgoers, and in fact playgoers the world over are not looking for literary fireworks, behind the footlights—they want plays that interest and hold them. They want acting—dramatic incidents—and above all, they want a strong love story." 

When Nethersole adhered to that formula with her classic repertoire of *Camille*, *Sapho*, *Carmen*, *Adrienne Lecouvreur* and *Magda*, she was successful at the box office. Once she

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21Theatre Magazine, 82 (December 1907): 324.
tried to find a new more "modern" repertoire, the results were mixed. The English playwright Arthur Wing Pinero provided her with The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith, The Profligate and most importantly The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, all Fallen Women who were particularly suited to Nethersole's talents. Although the French playwright Paul Hervieu's work was well thought of in France, Nethersole's adaptations of The Labyrinth, The Awakening and The Enigma were not popular with the public or the press in England and America and disappeared from her repertoire in 1909 after only a few seasons. This was due partly to the "crude" English adaptations of Hervieu's work and partly because the general taste had changed. Mrs. Fiske suggests another reason why:

One grows heartily sick of these women. . . . Life's real tragedies are all about us. Observing them we may be pardoned for becoming weary of the French heroine and her affaires de coeur.22

Nethersole also perceived that the mood for romantic, melodramatic heroines had changed to the point where it was all right to laugh over love affairs, but no longer fashionable to cry over them. The supposedly decadent females of the Victorian era, who were punished for their transgressions, were gradually replaced by a more permissive

breed. The giddy females who now joked about their indiscretions and romances in Edwardian drawing rooms were certainly not subjected to the heavy moralizing of the previous century. The Gordian Knot and the Flute of Pan were Nethersole's attempt to move into the drawing room society where she quickly decided that her special skill of emotional identification was not suited to this genre, and had the good sense to leave it alone.

Instead, she looked for plays that would capitalize on the emerging social conscience represented by Ibsen and Shaw. An admirer of both, she announced that she would perform Ibsen's A Doll's House and that Shaw's plays appealed to her so strongly that she "already has one in view." Neither of these projects materialized. Instead, Nethersole decided to promote young American playwrights, a mission which she had proclaimed as far back as 1899 when addressing the graduate club at the University of Chicago. In her address she praised Ibsen as the foundation of future drama, deplored the scarcity of good new plays and called on managers to encourage young playwrights. The tenacity

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24 Clipping 1907, Locke Collection, 362-363.

25 "Address Before the Graduate Club of the University of Chicago," March 3, 1899, Locke Collection, 361.
with which she pursued new plays is illustrated by the continuous eleven-month correspondence with Jack London from January to November 1910, in which she commissioned him to write a play for her on the topic "Science versus Religion." Nethersole provided him with a detailed eight-page scenario, suggesting the topic, the location and the two major characters, one of whom, not surprisingly, would be a woman who suffered and triumphed in the fight to remain true to her principles. When London finally delivered the manuscript of the play, together with his demands for payment, Nethersole wrote back that she had signed a two-year contract with Shubert and Liebler who did not like it, and so she would not be using it. If Nethersole's other business dealings are any indication, it is more likely that she found the financial terms of the proposed contract unacceptable.

Nethersole came up with one commercial success in her search for a new American play, the young playwright William Hurlbut's *The Writing on the Wall*. This succeeded not because it was a well-written or popular play but because its sensational indictment of a wealthy church organization and the idea of slum reform captured the public imagination. The press was lukewarm in its response and critical as ever of Nethersole's increasingly maligned acting style. But the

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26Nethersole-London Correspondence, Jack London Collection, Huntington Library.
play received huge amounts of publicity, and when it was announced shortly after the opening that the Trinity Church Corporation had agreed to tear down thirty-two tenements, Nethersole's image was elevated to that of an American Joan of Arc. By one count, theatre audiences were inflated by seventy-eight clergymen and their enthusiastic congregations. Despite her renewed vigor in the search for the great new playwright, Nethersole had no other commercial or artistic success of any note. Nevertheless, she continued to champion the cause of the American playwright, proclaiming in 1914:

Without a doubt one day American drama will serve as a leading example to the world ... the American drama is coming into its own. It is coming nearer and nearer to the truth. One of these days it will correctly mirror the life of the people in this country.28

Her prophesy was realized only a few years later when the American art theatre movement finally took hold and produced such writers as Eugene O'Neill.

Nethersole's record as a producer, therefore, does not suggest that she had any talent for choosing potentially important new plays or playwrights. The writers she did sign to a contract were for the most part second-rate hacks.


who freely adapted previously successful melodramas to Nethersole's own specifications, or who wrote new plays for her and were never heard from again. Clyde Fitch's adaption of Sapho, Henry Hamilton's version of Carmen and William Hurlbut's The Writing on the Wall were commercial successes of "new" plays which succeeded because of their notoriety in production, certainly not because of their dynamic scripts. The most popular pieces in her repertoire were Sapho, Carmen, Camille and The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, which she performed throughout her stage career.

Described as an actress who could have "reached any height in her profession had she submitted to discipline," Olga Nethersole was, in retrospect, a powerful, dynamic actress who did not reach the levels of "greatness" predicted for her. At her best she startled and hypnotized her audiences with passionate displays of emotion and tantalizing highlights such as the "three-minute" Nethersole kiss. At her worst, she was overly demonstrative, giving to posing and exaggerated mannerisms that suggested outdated acting tricks.

Nethersole's technique consisted of an inner emotional force that welled up into a display of "unbridled passion

and erotic fervor."\(^{30}\) Her strong emotional identification with the role left her exhausted at the end of the performance, in a state of physical collapse. Nethersole explained this phenomenon in a series of lessons which she wrote on "How to Become an Emotional Actress:"

After the third act of Sapho I am absolutely exhausted because of the personal suffering I have undergone in the last scene. I am actually so exhausted that I have to lie down on my back in my dressing room, perfectly quiet, for some little time.\(^{31}\)

Nethersole's "six lessons" indicate that despite all appearances to the contrary these passionate displays were carefully controlled. Her thesis was that an emotional actress must have not only inherent "acting temperament" or emotional sensitivity, but also be able to keep this emotion "under absolute control" on the stage. She writes:

... imagination is a very necessary illusion ... you must live, temporarily, the nature and situations that your part in a play demands. My best illusions in my emotional work are not illusions at all for they are the actual realizations of the emotion my part dictates to me in the play.\(^{32}\)

On the surface this kind of psychological identification sounds remarkably like the techniques which were being tried


\(^{31}\)"Lessons in Acting," February 18, 1900, Locke Collection, 361.

\(^{32}\)Ibid.
at that time by the Moscow Art Theatre. But the difference lies in the emphasis placed by Nethersole on "emotion." Whereas the Stanislavsky company put the emphasis on "thinking" the role Nethersole's goal was to "feel" it and to display these feelings for the enjoyment of her audience. She was also hampered in the execution of this by an old-fashioned, overly busy technique that did not give the illusion of real life simplicity and naturalness sought in the Stanislavsky system. The "lessons" also suggest the source of the often mentioned "mannerisms," when she calls for the use of "well-posed silences and measured pauses that only long stage experience can develop." These pauses and poses were used by Victorian actors to give focus to various moments when they wished to "make a point." Ironically, Nethersole deplored the lack of guidance in the "London system" of actor training where she had acquired most of these habits and where young apprentices were expected to learn their craft by mimicking the habits of the stars.33 Nethersole endorsed the stock company system of training and repeatedly called for the establishment of a school which would provide serious training for actors. Such a system, she felt would earn credibility for the "vagabond" profession with the outside world.34

33Nethersole, "Graduate Club Address," Locke Collection, 361.

34Ibid.
In the meantime, Nethersole's emotionally electric performances, followed by an often spectacular collapse, made sensational headlines and continued to infuriate the more sophisticated critics who felt that this effect, too, was planned.

At the end of the performance . . . Miss Nethersole fainted and lay as one really dead. The curtain was raised . . . revealed the star still lying on the stage and Mr. Hamilton Revelle, her leading man, and another trying, ineffectually, to restore her and get on her feet. It was quickly lowered again and the audience departed.35

Although some critics accused her of perpetrating a hoax, the fact that she did faint from exhaustion is confirmed by Mrs. H. W. Green who has recounted that Nethersole's doctors were in a constant state of despair over these bouts and warned that they would one day be unable to revive her. The sheer force of her acting was so striking that the Chicago Tribune fifteen years later recalled the impact of her 1894 debut:

her neurotic enthusiasm literally electrified the audience. It was something new. People hurried the next day and the day after, and for nine days to tell of the thrill of this night.36

The same critic mirrors the change in tastes with the passage of time, writing with evident irritation about Nethersole's effusive curtain call after a 1909 performance.


36Chicago Tribune, May 2, 1909, Locke Collection, 362-363.
She heaved and trembled, clung to her leading man; was bewildered in her ecstasy of gratitude. She could express her emotion only by coming down to the footlights and spreading her arms wide as though embracing the audience. Once, in this blank-verse attitude, she was so far out that her leading man had to seize her head back to save her from being hit on the head by the descending curtain. . . . Of course, none of us wants to lose so excellent an actress as Miss Nethersole, but if the curtain had struck and killed her that moment she would, at least, have died happy.37

Despite the box office success of *The Writing on the Wall* in that same year, the New York press had become so universally critical of her heavy-handed style that one writer felt compelled to apologize for what seemed to be continuous attacks on her acting. He wrote that, to be fair, there were still "occasional flashes of real fire" in every Nethersole performance but that "she willfully violates almost every known tenet of the dramatic art" and that her general extravagance had "passed the line which separates it from the ridiculous."

The emotionalism of Nethersole's acting puts her in the same school with Clara Morris and Mrs. Leslie Carter with whom she was most frequently compared. However, the "incessant, violent" quality of her style lends itself to comparison with tragedy queen Nance O'Neil, a portrayer of classical, biblical and continental heroines. Like O'Neil,

37Ibid.

38Clipping May 1909, Locke Collection, 362-363.
(1875-1965), Nethersole projected "tremendous natural force" and "awe-compelling power," and was known for her horrifying death scenes.\textsuperscript{39} Like O'Neill, she was not afraid to show the most unflattering portrait of the woman, with smeared make-up, red nose and tangled hair. Like her, she incorporated sensational theatrical effects and even her best performances were marred by mannerisms and technical crudity. All four actresses prided themselves on exceptionally emotional temperaments and powerful imaginations which they "exploited" with considerable success during the period of "romantic eclipse"\textsuperscript{40} between the realism of the twentieth century and the grand manner of the previous one. Nethersole reveals the vestiges of a Victorian attitude when she describes in her most popular roles, Fanny LeGrand, Carmen, Paula and Camille,\textsuperscript{41} as "abnormal" women, whose lives are "cast in a normal position but are "more terrible than their deaths can ever be."\textsuperscript{42} Her moralizing was so highly publicized and so consistent throughout her career that it is incredible that it was not considered genuine by New York critics, nor by

\textsuperscript{39}Shea, pp. 61-68.

\textsuperscript{40}Shea, p. 61.

\textsuperscript{41}Camille was not as much in demand because it had been given so much exposure by other actresses.

\textsuperscript{42}Clipping 1907, Locke Collection, 362-363.
the puritan-minded conservative element, who labeled Nethersole a "scarlet woman." Of the four roles, Nethersole described Sapho as the most taxing, although the "frenetic osculation"43 of the kiss, and her graphic death scene in Carmen kept both favorites with audiences and were considered particular triumphs in France.

It must have been gratifying to Nethersole that her Paris tour where she was the first English-speaking actress with company to perform in English,44 was such a critical and artistic success. A sampling of reviews from twenty-four French newspapers indicates that her performances there were held in the highest esteem, and she was compared favorably with Duse, Réjane and Bernhardt.45 The opening night applause was led by Bernhardt, who "rose from her seat, clapped her hands vigorously and cried repeatedly, "Brava, Nethersole!"46 In France, as she had predicted, Nethersole was appreciated for the very intensity considered excessive in London and New York. Paris critics praised her "continental temperament" and her passionate involvement as "brilliant" and "expressive"

43St. Louis Star, March 14, 1907, Locke Collection, 362-363.
44Toledo Blade, June 1, 1907, Locke Collection, 362-363.
45Clipping 1907, Locke Collection, 362-363.
46Clipping 1907, Locke Collection, 362-363.
contrasted it favorably with the "coldness of the average Anglo-Saxon artist." The Paris critics also agreed with Nethersole's own perception of herself as ideally suited to the role of Carmen because of her Spanish "temperament." Her Carmen was described as warm-blooded and sensational in love-making and horrifying in death.

It was terrible in its absolute truth and naked horror. You head the dying rattle, it was an affrighted sound; you saw the convulsions as of some wounded animal, the horrid shudder, with which the soul left the body of this wild, passionate woman.

To critics who found such a graphic portrayal indelicate, Nethersole defended her interpretation as the death that Carmen must die: not a quiet bedside scene but the "forceful, cruel, going-out of life of a wild creature of the mountains."

As artistic director responsible for sets, costumes, and the staging of her productions, Nethersole was by all accounts imaginative, competent and at times unorthodox. Her staging of the ball scene in the first act of Sapho, when presented in Paris, for instance, was audacious in its conception. She sent her stage managers into the Latin quarter to engage some students, hired an orchestra of

47 *New York Telegraph*, June 8, 1907, Locke Collection, 362-363.


Hungarian gypsies and told both to ignore the fact that they were on the stage at the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt and to have one of their usual celebrations. The resulting slice of life was so exciting, with wild gypsy airs, intoxicated supers, and eager young men vying for the prettiest girls, that when Sapho made her entrance the crowd went wild and cheered themselves hoarse before the action was allowed to proceed. Her stage (and personal) costumes were exquisite creations, authentic peasant dress or society gowns, designed by the Paris and London fashion houses. Extolled by the press, they influenced fashion and were copied by those society ladies who could afford them. Her furniture and properties were genuine antiques which she collected with a passion and purchased in Paris.

Nethersole's contributions to the English theatre were more important initially rather than as a subsequent producer of new plays. She built for herself a reputation for playing adventuresses, providing them with an exotic, seductive quality that English women with their peaches-and-cream demeanor were unable to capture. Her first important success was Lola Montez in The Silver Falls, followed by Floria Tosca, in La Tosca, Mercedes in Agatha and Zicka in Diplomacy. Her repertoire included "betrayed" women, such as Ruth in The Union Jack, Janet Preece in the

50 Clipping 1907, Locke Collection, 362-363.
premiere of Pinero's *The Profligate*, and Sylvia in *The Transgressor*. Nethersole went on to considerable success in the Pinero New Woman roles of Agnes in *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*, and Paula in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. That she gave up the opportunity to create the role of Paula which catapulted Mrs. Patrick-Campbell to instant stardom, was a significant mistake in her career. *Sapho*, *Carmen* and *Camille* were also well received in London, although the latter was compared unfavorably with London performances by the great French tragedians.

In America, Nethersole's New York reputation never recovered entirely from the disastrous opening fiasco of *The Transgressor*, and the press reaction which contrasted venomously with the preceding public relations puffery. While the critics were somewhat mollified by her *Camille* and *Denise*, the *Carmen* notoriety shortly thereafter, followed by the *Sapho* scandal, gave Nethersole the reputation of a publicity-seeking actress trying to overcome outdated acting skills. The public, however, ignored the vitriolic barbs by prominent critics and flocked to her performances. They were entranced by her colorful renditions of tear-jerking heroines and titillated by her sexual candidness, during an age in which it was considered daring for a woman to show an ankle, smoke a cigarette and kiss a strange man on the lips. In a few years' time Isadora Duncan would toss away her dancing shoes and run barefoot in the wind, the Edwardian
lady would take off her corsets and chop off her skirts and the factory girl would purchase tinted face powders, rouge and lip salve, and bob her hair. The mystery of what motivated the bad woman would lose its appeal. Meanwhile the American public outside Manhattan was unaware that Nethersole's repertoire and acting style were going out of fashion. They responded enthusiastically and lucratively to her Fallen Woman repertoire. They were entranced by her dynamic, emotional, magnificent presentations which provided excitement in their lives.

Nethersole's contributions as philanthropist and suffragist were of some value in America where her prestige as a star made her demands public. People listened when she called for clean milk, air and water, better nutrition, equal status for women, a concentrated effort against tuberculosis, reform of the prisons and better living conditions for the poor, women and children. Her campaign to draw attention to the slums had a major impact on public awareness in cities through which she toured *The Writing on the Wall*.

But it was in England following her retirement from the stage that Nethersole made her greatest contribution in this arena, lending not only her moral and financial support to improving social conditions but also her presence for some thirty years to furthering the cause of progress. Because of her genuine sincerity and energetic personality, she
succeeded in bringing to her philanthropy the power of public recognition and the prestige of top doctors, scientists, statesmen and publicists, whom she enlisted to help.

In summary, Nethersole was a powerful, charismatic actress, who sheds a little more light on an ephemeral era, the transitional years between the Romanticism of the Victorian age and the realism of the twentieth century. Her career illustrates the difficulties faced by a performer trying to adapt to the demands of the new modernism, and explains why so few were able to make that transition with any success. Her emotional realism, self-conscious and self-indulgent by contemporary standards, was exciting and innovative at its inception and provided fertile ground for the flowering of the psychological realism that is the basis of acting styles in America today.

Her career as actress-manager illustrates that there were women attempting to make inroads on the exclusive domain of the actor-manager system, something which has yet to be documented with some depth. It shows that these pioneers were also responsible for the encouragement and promotion of young playwrights in their search for a fat part in a significant play. In an age dominated by men, Olga Nethersole provides us with a portrait of a self-made woman who had sufficient insight and inner strength to accept the fact of her fading acting career and to turn in new directions where her forward-looking philanthropy would
eventually benefit everyone, certainly the young performer trying to make a living on the stage.

Nethersole was on several occasions described as a "mystic" because of the depth of her vision and the scope of her dreams.

Some people have called me a visionary; some a faddist, others less charitable, have said that I was seeking advertising. I believe, however, that my work is such that I do not need to advertise in unusual ways; and I know that whether I am [sic] visionary or not—in the eyes of the world—it always has been the dreamers who have accomplished things—the dreamers who put their dreams into practice.51

APPENDIX A

HANDLIST OF PLAYS PERFORMED BY OLGA NETHERSOLE

The following attempts to pinpoint the first time she played each role. However, because of Nethersole's policy of giving new productions unpublicized out-of-town tryouts, and obvious errors and contradictions, this list is neither complete nor completely accurate. Where the information is inconclusive I have supplied available data.

1. Harvest by Henry Hamilton
   Theatre Royal, Brighton: March 5, 1887
   role: Lettice Vane

2. Our Joan by Mr. and Mrs. Herman Merivale
   Prince of Wales, Birmingham: August 22, 1887
   role: Alice Pengelly

3. 'Twixt Kith and Kin by James J. Blood
   Arthur Dacre Company tour
   role: Blanche Maitland

4. A Double Marriage by Charles Reade
   Arthur Dacre Company tour
   role: Claire

5. Modern Wives by --
   Willie EdouIn Company tour: February 1888
   role: Agatha

6. The Paper Chase by Charles Thomas
   The Strand: June 10, 1888 (matinee)
   role: Nelly Busby

7. The Union Jack by Henry Pettit and Sydney Grundy
   The Adelphi: July 19, 1888
   role: Ruth Medway

8. The Dean's Daughter/The Ambassador by --
   St. James': Rutland Barrington Company
   role: Miriam St. Aubyn
9. **The Silver Falls** by George R. Sims and Henry Pettit  
The Adelphi: December 22, 1888  
role: Lola

10. **The Profligate** by Arthur Wing Pinero  
The Garrick: April 14, 1889  
role: Janet Preece

11. **La Tosca** by F. C. Grove and Henry Hamilton (orig. Sardou)  
The Garrick: Replaced Mrs. Bernard Beere in 1889  
role: Floria Tosca

12. **The Idler** by Haddon Chambers  
The Garrick, Sydney, Australia: December 20, 1890  
role: Lady Harding

13. **The Middleman**  
The Garrick, Sydney: Australian tour  
role: Mary Blenkarn

14. **The Moths** by Henry Hamilton  
The Garrick, Sydney: Australian tour  
role: Vera

15. **The Village Priest**  
The Garrick, Sydney: Australian tour  
role: Marguerite

16. **A Scrap of Paper**  
The Garrick, Sydney: Australian tour  
role: Susan Hartley

17. **The Profligate** by Arthur Wing Pinero  
The Garrick, Sydney: Australian tour  
role: Leslie Brudenell

18. **A Fool's Paradise** by Sydney Grundy  
The Garrick, London: January 2, 1892  
role: Beatrice Selwyn

19. **Agatha** by Isaac Henderson  
The Criterion: May 24, 1892 (matinee)  
role: Mercedes da Vigno

20. **A Silent Battle** (formerly *Agatha*) by Sydney Grundy  
The Criterion: December 8, 1892  
role: Mercedes da Vigno
21. Diplomacy by Clement Scott and B. C. Stephenson  
   (orig. Sardou) 
   The Garrick: February 18, 1893  
   role: Countess Zicka

22. The Transgressor by A. W. Gattie  
   The Court: January 27, 1894  
   role: Sylvia Woodville

23. Camille by Alexandre Dumas Fils (adapt. Nethersole)  
   Palmer's, New York: October 29, 1894  
   role: Marguerite Gautier (Camille)

24. Frou Frou by Meilhac and Halevy  
   American tour 1894-1895  
   role: Gilberte Sartorys

25. Romeo and Juliet by Shakespeare  
   American tour 1894-1895  
   role: Juliet

26. The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith by Arthur Wing Pinero  
   The Garrick: May 15, 1895; replaced Mrs. Patrick-Campbell  
   role: Agnes

27. Comedy and Tragedy by W. S. Gilbert  
   John Hare tour: Summer 1895  
   role: Clarice

28. Denise by Clement Scott and Sir Augustus Harris  
   (orig. Dumas)  
   Prince of Wales, Birmingham: August 28, 1895

29. Carmen by Henry Hamilton (orig. Mérimée)  
   The Empire: December 24, 1895  
   role: Carmen

30. Wife of Scarli by Giuseppe Giacosa (adapt. G. A. Greene)  
   Hollis Street, Boston: November 21, 1896  
   role: Emma

31. A Daughter of France by Joseph Hatton  
   Hollis Street, Boston: November 23, 1896  
   role: Mathilde
32. The Termagant by Louis N. Parker and Murray Carson
   Her Majesty's: September 1, 1898
   role: Princess Beatrix

33. The Second Mrs. Tanqueray by Arthur Wing Pinero
   Power's, Chicago: October --, 1899
   role: Paula

34. Sapho by Clyde Fitch (orig. Daudet)
   Power's, Chicago: October 31, 1899
   role: Fanny Legrand (Sapho)

35. The Gordian Knot by Claude Lowther, M.P.
   His Majesty's: May 20, 1903
   role: Gabrielle Melville

36. The Flute of Pan by Mrs. Craigie (alias John Oliver Hobbes)
   The Gaiety, Manchester: April 21, 1904
   role: Princess Magaret

37. The Labyrinth by Paul Hervieu (adap. W. L. Courtney)
   National, Washington: October 23, 1905
   role: Marianne de Pogis

38. Magda by Sudermann
   Herald Square, New York: January 6, 1906
   role: Magda

   American tour 1906-1907
   role: Adrienne

40. The Awakening by Paul Hervieu (adap. --)
   Powers, Chicago: April 8, 1907
   role: Thérèse de Mégée

41. The Submarine (one-act)
    --, Cleveland: December 23, 1907
    role: --

42. I Pagliacci (adap. Charles Brookfield) (one-act)
    --, Cleveland: December 23, 1907
    role: Nedda

43. The Enigma by Paul Hervieu (adap. --)
   Daly's New York: February 20, 1908
   role: Giselle de Gourgiran
44. The Writing on the Wall by William Hurlbut  
Columbia, Washington, D.C.: January 11, 1909

45. Mary Magdalene by Maurice Maeterlinck (trans. Teixeira de Mattos)  
New: December 5, 1910  
role: Mary Magdalene

46. Redemption of Evelyn Vaudray by Henri Bernstein (adap. Louis Parker)  
Grand, Topeka, Kansas: March 23, 1911  
role: Evelyn Vaudray

47. Sister Beatrice by Maurice Maeterlinck  
Savoy, San Francisco: May 10, 1911  
role: Sister Beatrice

48. The Awakening of Helena Ritchie by Margaret Deland  
(adap. Margaret Deland and Charlotte Thompson)  
Prince of Wales, Birmingham: October 7, 1912

49. The Last Scene of the Play by Mrs. W. K. Clifford  
Colonial, New York: November 3, 1913
Olga Nethersole
American Tour 1908-9
25 West 42nd Street New York
Cable Address Nethersole New York

March 14, 1910

Jack London

I cut this out of this morning's newspaper. I send it to you as
an endorsement of my own conviction
as expressed in the Times
which I trust you, which I hope
appeals to you sufficiently to
prove my absence during the next weeks a
sight. You say the play - I expect
to open at the Academy of Music
April 15th New York, for its last
three intended seasons. I cannot go.
In the 2nd of May Shaw
read 'H.M.S. Pinafore again - I think
the last act quite wonderful. I cannot
do something with that situation if
at all. But take it or leave
is up to you.

Courtesy of the Huntington Library.
To His Majesty King George V.

Emperor-King: Day, brother-man,
For so we lose thee best—listen, or maybe scan
These lines which scan, yet flit across life’s little span.

You in the past, after an absence, on returning to these shores,
Did once as Prince behind this City’s famous Guildhall doors
Utter a sentence, a sentence which did run
Throughout these Islands to each British son:
A sentence heavy with a nation’s past,
A sentence pregnant and a shadow cast
Of deeds of valour and of battles fought,
Of millioned armies and of victory bought
With effort, faith, endurance, pain:
With lives of counted millions slain.

These lines, my Lord, soar, yet flit across life’s little span.

Up on that day, by sounding the Reveille,
You, Sire, to one and all of us did say:
“Keep ye your place, your honoured, trusted place,
Through future ages in this great world space
In shipping, commerce, factory, trade,
And of no man living be afraid.

Upon that day, by sounding the Reveille,
You, Sire, to one and all of us did say:
“Keep ye your place, your honoured, trusted place,
Through future ages in this great world space
In shipping, commerce, factory, trade,
And of no man living be afraid.

Upon that day, by sounding the Reveille,
You, Sire, to one and all of us did say:
“Keep ye your place, your honoured, trusted place,
Through future ages in this great world space
In shipping, commerce, factory, trade,
And of no man living be afraid.

That kinsman dreamt, poor simple fool, of world power won by force:
He knew not Brother howl alone must rule with justice as its source.

We arose—

Again you spoke, this time, as King—
“WAKE UP ENGLAND” were the words you spoke.
By those three words you did acclaim
A mighty warning, and with torch aflame
Into the darkness of a people’s brain
Bring Light.

The day you called to England, to her sons and daughters fair,
You roused a slumbering lion, and it moved within its lair;

The years pass on—

That kinsman dreamt, poor simple fool, of world power won by force:
He knew not Brother howl alone must rule with justice as its source.

We arose—

Ulith tightened muscle and with sinews taut,
Ulith faith undaunted thy great spirit caught,
Ulith blood and sweat and teeth firm set,
Ulith smiles and tears and courage yet,
ULie gave up home and loved ones dear.
ULie conquered pain, and cold, and fear;
ULie yielded up the only life
Upon thy altar’s holy strife.
ULie struck and held on till the work was done,
ULie kept the shouting till the game was won.
Thus did we answer thee.

Man-brother, King and Emperor, we hold thee very dear,
Thou hadst the mighty vision, so thee the way was clean.

That early call to England was a gift of priceless worth,
For a yet more glorious England accorded thee its birth.

Thy second call, to Britain, and her Dominions, strong and fair,
Awoke the British lion, and it leapt from out its lair,
To keep life’s social order and the name of honour clean,
To prove to foes and friends alike the fallacy of dream,
To help the smaller nations, to guard the sea, the air,
The women and the children, the Homeland of the Free.

From all our hearts pour blessings, and from every eye a tear
For those who gave to England their precious lives most dear;
For those who stand just waiting, waiting with listening ear;
For those who are ever with us, so near, so very near.

OLGA BETHERSOLE.

Poem to King George V, dated June 28, 1919.

Courtesy of the Mander and Mitchenson Collection.
APPENDIX D
"A year ago a moderate computation yielded not less than a million children of school age at home, in physically or mentally defective or discouraged as to be unable to derive reasonable benefit from the education which the State provides.

Advertising Supplement to The Times of April 5, 1937, published by the People's League of Health. Courtesy of the Fawcett Library.
THE PEOPLE'S LEAGUE OF HEALTH (INC.)

The Inception of the League

The Policy and Teachings of the League

Preventable Disease—Some Startling Figures

How the League Functions

Advertising Supplement Page 2
THE PEOPLE'S LEAGUE OF HEALTH (INC.)

IMMEDIATE PROGRAMME

Endorsements

Knowledge is the only armour of defence of which we cannot be robbed by an enemy.

NATIONAL APPEAL FOR £50,000 for the PREVENTION OF DISEASE by the DISPERSAL OF ITS CAUSES

The League is, from the report of the great National tour just ended, preparing to inaugurate the most extensive and important appeal that has ever been made in the history of philanthropy. The appeal is for £50,000, which will be used to start a movement for the prevention of disease by the dispersal of its causes. This is to be accomplished by the establishment of schools and hospitals, the provision of medical and surgical equipment, and the fostering of scientific research. The appeal is being supported by a large number of prominent citizens, and is expected to be answered by a large number of contributions. The appeal is expected to be concluded by the end of the year.

THE PERSONNEL OF THE PEOPLE'S LEAGUE OF HEALTH (INC.)

DONATION FORM

Advertising Supplement Page 4
Some Startling Figures regarding Preventable Infectious Diseases

INFANT MORTALITY IN 1917
96 out of every 1,000 children born in 1917 died before they reached the age of 5.
100,000 died before birth.
85,700 babies born in the same year in the United Kingdom died before their first birthday.

CHILDREN IN 1917
1,000,000 children were so mentally and physically defective as to be unable to derive reasonable benefit from the education provided for them by the taxpayers.
500,000 children were suffering from mal-nutrition.
3,600,000 were suffering from dental defects.

1,000,000 Men were rejected from the Army as unfit.

TUBERCULOSIS IN 1917
55,239 deaths from Tuberculosis in this Country, including Army, Navy and Civilians, in addition to which 40,000 men were discharged from the Army suffering from that disease in that same year.
92,000 fresh cases of Tuberculosis were notified in 1918.

LUNACY IN 1917
127,000 persons were in Asylums under certification in England and Wales.

VENEREAL DISEASE

Estimate of the Royal Commission in 1916 is that: 10 per cent. of all inhabitants of the large towns in England and Wales have been at some time infected with Syphilis.
250,000 Casuities in the British Army from Venerereal Disease alone would probably be a moderate computation.

HOUSING

More than Half-a-Million Houses short, and of these new occupied immeasurable insanitary dwellings.

Serious and gross over-crowding, spoiling inevitable disease and degeneration of race.

Objectives of the People's League of Health.
Published ca. 1920. Courtesy of the Wellcome Institute.
1. THE objects of the League shall be the raising of the Standard of Health of the British Empire.

2. That the League shall enquire into the social problems which necessarily govern the health of the nation (or community), and shall use its strength and means to improve the social and economic conditions of the masses.

3. That it shall disseminate knowledge on Health—how to obtain and preserve it.

4. That lectures on the following subject, shall be delivered by members of the Medical Profession, for the benefit of the prospective members of the League—

THE CONTRIBUTING CAUSES OF MORAL AND PHYSICAL DISEASE.

5. That the membership shall consist of (a) Active Members, (b) Honorary Members, (c) Associate Members.

6. That men and women desirous of being enrolled as Active or Honorary Members shall attend a course of such lectures, at the termination of which they shall attend an examination to be held periodically by the medical officers of the League, who shall be empowered to invest the successful candidate with a certificate and badge of membership.

7. That men and women wishing to become Associate Members of the League shall attend at least one lecture to be delivered by a member of the medical profession, and shall then be entitled to wear a badge.

8. There shall be at least twelve papers on the subject of which this League is the object, written by twelve Medical Authorities each year, the fees for such papers to be paid by the League.

9. These twelve papers shall be the subject of twelve public meetings to be held by the League in all towns of more than 20,000 inhabitants, throughout the Empire in each and every year.

10. That the said papers shall be published, and each member shall have the right to a certain number of copies, free of charge, for distribution among the public, and the said papers shall be on sale at a nominal sum.

11. The League shall provide the necessary funds for hiring halls, printing literature, lecturers' fees, and other incidentals necessary to the said meetings, which shall also be held at Universities, Schools, Settlements, Government Controlled and other Factories, Public Libraries, Churches, and in the Open Air where possible, in order to reach the masses. Film pictures to be used when practicable to illustrate the lectures.

12. It shall be the duty of each Active Member of the League to organise at least twelve public meetings during the year, in whatever part of the British Empire such members shall happen to be located, at which the foregoing papers shall be delivered and discussed.

13. That Public Exhibitions be arranged by the League (such Exhibitions designed to be popular rather than scientific) in all large centres at intervals, on the following subjects:

1. TUBERCULOSIS—showing all the latest methods of prevention and cure of tuberculosis, at which a special series of lectures shall be given to the general public upon:
   - The Sociological Importance of Tuberculosis.
   - Tuberculosis in the School. Addressed to Teachers and Pupils.
   - Tuberculosis in the Factory. Addressed to Working Men and Women.
   - Tuberculosis in Shops. Addressed to Salesmen and Saleswomen.
   - Tuberculosis in Children. Addressed to Mothers and Teachers.
   - Municipal Control of Tuberculosis.

2. FOOD.—With addresses on its properties and value to the human body, exhibiting a new People's Cookery Book, compiled for health and not for palate, by medical authorities, dealing with Hydrates, Carbohydrates, Proteids, and their proportion necessary to health, Cooking, and the value of Communal Kitchens.

3. HOUSING.—The value of the suburb to the workers and their children.

4. WASTE.—Human and otherwise.

5. TEETH.—Their uses and functions. The results of bad teeth and their relation to oral sepsis and ill health.
6. EYES.—Their connection with headaches, migraine, and gastric troubles when the sight is impaired by astigmatism or unequal focus.

7. PARENTAGE.—Its responsibility and privilege.

8. HYGIENE.—The necessity and value of fresh air, especially at night. AND

9. CHILD WELFARE.—Early impressions of the child, character, and encouragement of individuality.

10. VENEREAL DISEASE.

11. ALCOHOL.—Its value and abuse, and its relation to disease and crime as shown in the direct off-spring of alcoholic parent or parents (abortion in the medical sense), and a weakened power of resistance (moral and physical) when actual disease may be missing. The food value of beer when containing not more than 2 per cent. of alcohol, and when taken in moderation.

12. PHYSICAL EDUCATION and GYMNASTICS.—Out-of-Door Exercise and Recreation.—To preserve mental and physical health.

13. THE VOTE.—Its privileges and responsibility.

14. The said lectures shall be delivered by Members of the Medical Profession, Active and Honorary Members of the League, Trade Union Delegates, and other Lecturers during the run of the Exhibition, the League providing the necessary funds for defraying the expenses of the Exhibition and Lecturers’ Fees.

15. That the Municipal Authorities, Town Councils and Co-operative Societies, the British Federation of Labour, and the Trade Unions, shall be invited and sought to successfully carry on the objects of this league.

16. That the Press shall be invited to co-operate in this work, by making the prospective Meetings and Exhibitions known to their respective readers.

17. That a People’s League of Health Recreation Club for both sexes, with an Information Department relating to Health, shall be established in all towns and cities of over 20,000 inhabitants where the work of the League shall be carried on—the membership to which shall be obtained by two references from (a) the employer, (b) a householder, free of cost of subscription.

18. An object of the League shall be the establishing of a Relief Fund for the benefit of those suffering from Tuberculosis, or wasting disease, or other physical defectives, especially in the early stages when they are still a wage-earning power, and where the wage is not sufficient to meet special diet—
(a) Supplementing wages where the wage earned is not sufficient for a patient’s treatment and needs.
(b) Moving expenses, and excess of new rent over the old, where the medical authorities advise more airy and better rooms, or out of the city, or where, for the protection of other members of the family as well as the patient, a separate bed and room for the consumptive can be obtained.
(c) To provide suitable clothing, especially for those taking the fresh air cure.
(d) To provide special diet in the form of pure milk and eggs.
(e) To obtain more fitting employment than that engaged upon, or country employment, to further the patient’s ultimate recovery.

The method of carrying on the work of this Relief Fund should be worked through the League’s Recreation Clubs, or through Tuberculosis or District Dispensaries, the League requiring a medical report and recommendation as to the fitness of the case for relief.

19. It shall be the duty of the League in its corporate body, and also the duty of every member of the league, to actively work for the betterment of all housing conditions, for the standardized apartment-house for the working classes, centrally heated with hot and cold water laid on to each apartment, free public bathrooms on each floor, and a free public laundry with drying accommodation in the basement for the use of the tenants, a protected playground for children on the roof of each apartment-house, and for bathroom and inside lavatory accommodation in all new houses built for workers. They shall also work for the enforcement of tenement house laws, for schools for mothers and maternity centres, for the pure milk

Objectives of the People’s League of Health, page 3.
supply, for legislation against the exposure to the dust of the streets of foods, specially fruit, vegetables, meat, and fish; for the total elimination of the sweating system, for legislation for the legitimising of all children born of common flesh previous to the marriage of the parents; for the protection of pregnancy of all women workers, relieving them of work for one month before the birth, and one month afterwards in the case of strong normal women, and two months for the more delicate ones, and, in order to arrest the human wasting channel of prostitution, for the State control of the feeble-minded (from which section of humanity the prostitute class to a large extent is fed), for compulsory, secondary, advanced, and industrial and technical schools with university scholarships and privileges for both sexes, and for all trades and professions to be open to women for which they are physically and mentally fitted; for an equal wage for men and women for equal efficiency in work done, and for wages which will allow of early marriages (the foregoing as a safeguard to health and to arrest the Human Waste of Prostitution); for Divorce Reform where one or other of the parties have suffered or are suffering from insanity (temporary or otherwise), habitual drunkenness, epilepsy, syphilis, or are undergoing sentences in prison for crime committed, this primarily for the protection of the future race, cruelty (physical and mental), and desertion after three years; for legislation for workers between the ages of 14 and 18, i.e., that no child shall be employed for profit between these ages, without a certificate from the Medical Officer of Health, showing his or her physical condition and medical fitness for the work offered by the employer, the child to report to the Medical Officer of Health periodically while so employed, and the Medical Officer to have the power to withdraw the certificate if the physical condition of the child so demands; for a six-hours' day of work for all workers between these ages of 14 and 18 years, the six hours to rank as a full day's work with full pay—this to enable such workers to continue their education, and attend classes in the secondary and advanced schools, technical and industrial, without the strain and drain on the vitality of the still growing youth and maiden, which eight hours, after an eight-hours' day of work, necessitate. They shall report to the Board of Health, or other Health Authority in each city, or town, or village, the name of tenement house, shop, factory, place of amusement, or any other public place, or private institution, or worship, where the precautions against the dissemination of Tuberculosis, or other contagious or communicable diseases are not strictly observed, and also point out to the individuals in any public or private place, who may out of ignorance or direct violation of the law, be spreading the germs of such disease, and for higher wages where the trade is proved to be a dangerous occupation to the worker, and to demand that proper precautions against danger shall be observed by the employer, especially those trades which are conducive to Tuberculosis.

20. All persons willing to donate £1000 or more shall be known as Grand Patrons of the League. Those contributing £100 or more, shall be known as Founders of the League; such sums can be allocated to any special branch of the League's activities, i.e., Recreation Clubs, Lectures, Travelling Exhibitions, Relief Fund, Medical Press Agency. Those contributing over and above £1 shall be known as subscribers to the League. Those contributing £1 or more Annually, shall be known as Hon. Members of the League. Those contributing 1/- Annually, shall be known as Active Members of the League. Those contributing 2/6 Annually shall be known as Associate Members of the League. Those contributing 1/- Annually shall be known as Lay Members of the League.

21. The Mayor and Corporations of the Empire to be asked to open Branches of the People's League of Health on the lines indicated as above, and to invite Founders, Subscribers, and Members to their Branches of the League.

As a means of raising the standard of health of the Nation, uniting all classes and bringing about a better understanding, and a higher social life and endeavour, I earnestly beg immediate financial help to carry out the aims and objects of the League.

It is hoped that the many splendid women and men who have devoted their time during the last three years as voluntary workers for their country, may in time of peace become Active Members of this League, and thereby "carry on"

"THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN."

7, HANOVER SQUARE, W. 1.

OLGA NETHERSOLE.

Original Founder and Hon. Organiser.

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