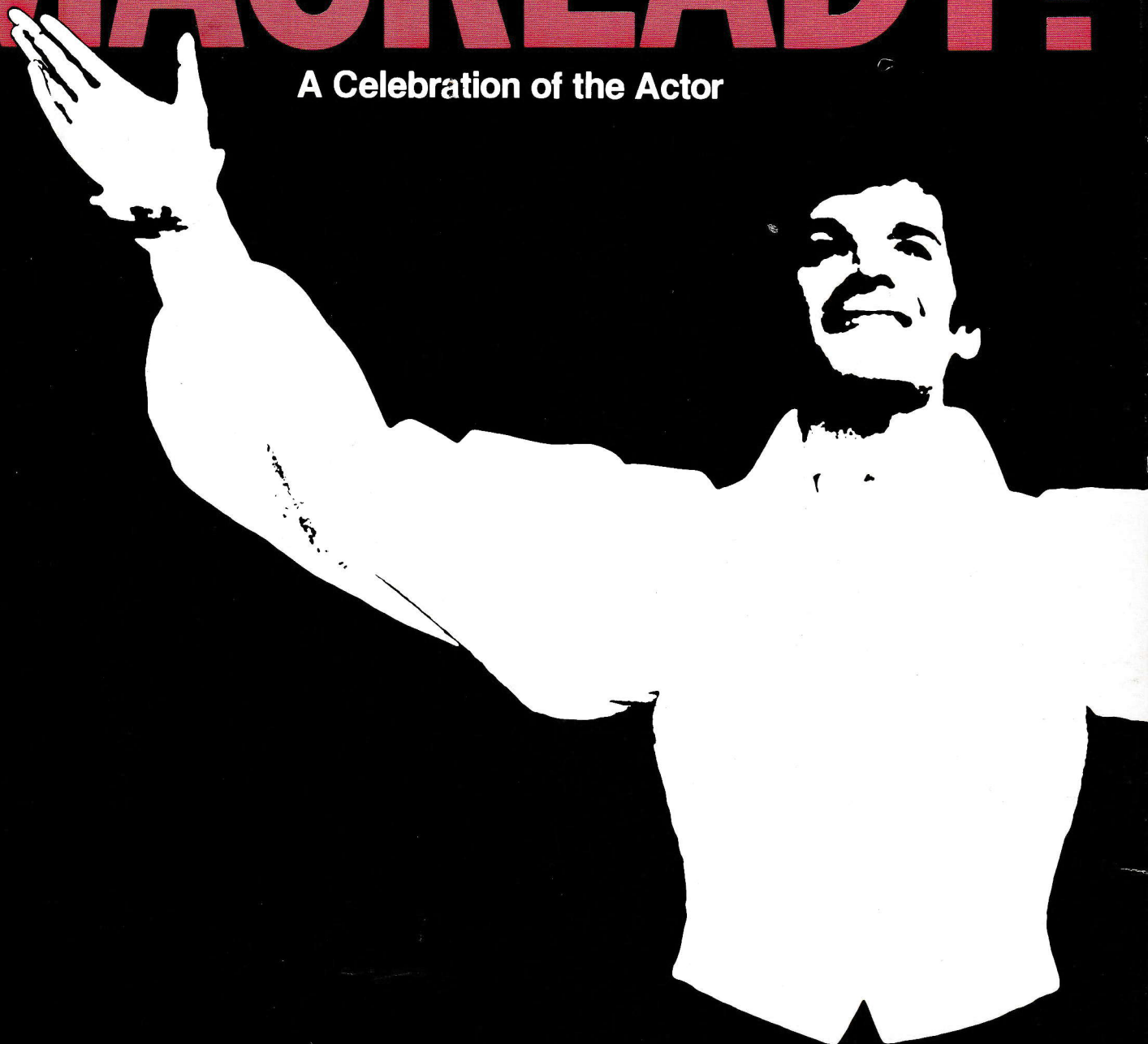


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# MACREADY!

A Celebration of the Actor

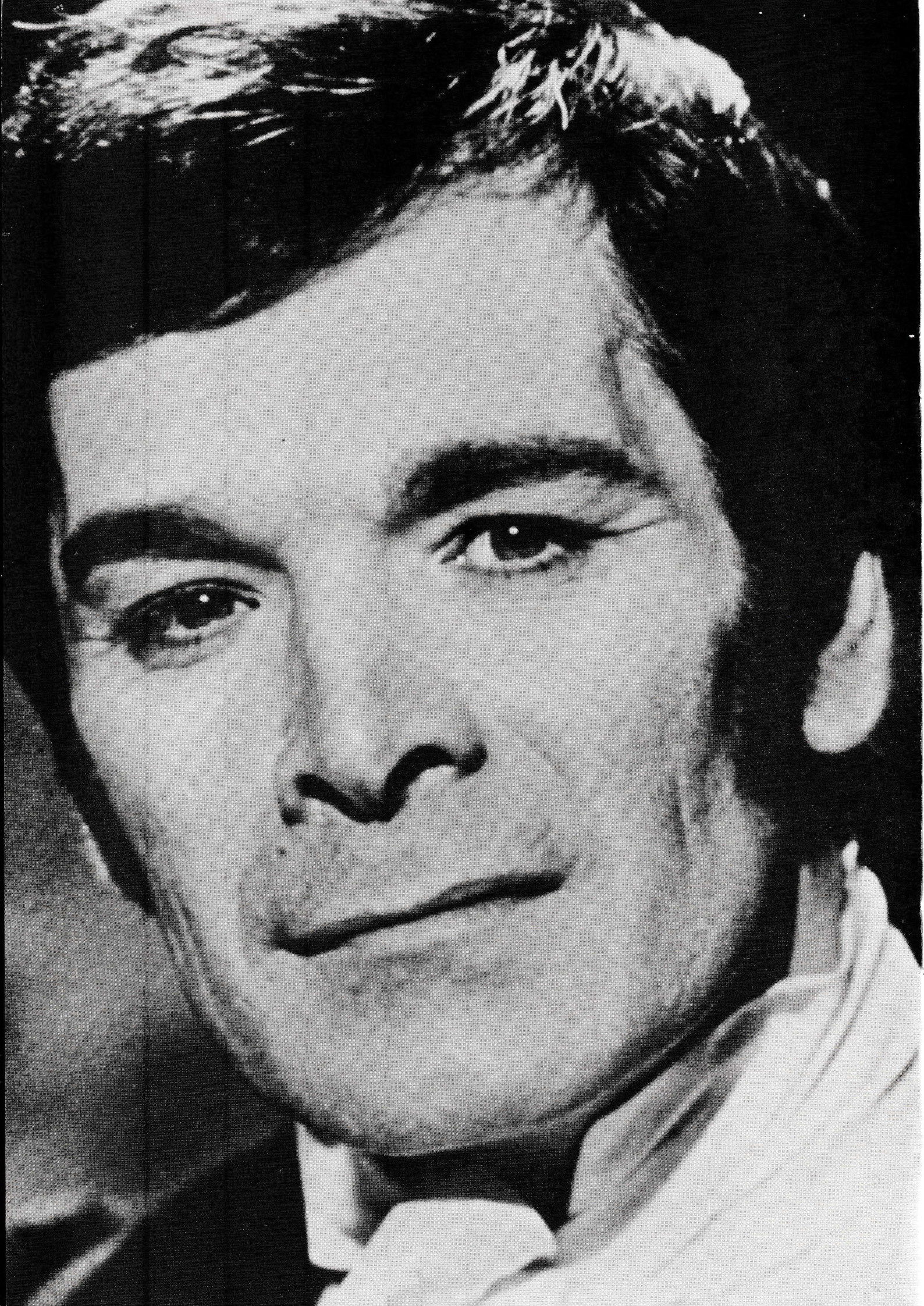


Written and performed by

**FRANK BARRIE**

Based on the diaries of  
William Charles Macready  
1793-1873.







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# FRANK BARRIE

**F**rank Barrie joined the Bristol Old Vic straight from University and quickly became established as the leading man. During three years with the company he enjoyed a wide variety of roles including Oedipus Rex, Richard II, Richard III, Grandier in *THE DEVILS*, Nigel Barton, Alfie and Long John Silver.

From Bristol he was invited by Laurence Olivier to join the National Theatre and played leading roles with the company for four years. Among the most notable were Mirabell in *THE WAY OF THE WORLD* opposite Geraldine McEwan's Millamant, Wendoll in John Dexter's production of *A WOMAN KILLED WITH KINDNESS* opposite Joan Plowright, Camille in Jonathan Miller's *DANTON'S DEATH* with Christopher Plummer, Ganya in *THE IDIOT*, Brachiano in *THE WHITE DEVIL* and Bassanio to Olivier's *SHYLOCK*.

He was the first member of the company to star at the Young Vic in *BYRON*, *THE NAKED PEACOCK*. Other leading London appearances include Crichton in *THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON*, the name role in Moliere's *DON JUAN*, Barelli in *RULES OF THE GAME* with Paul Scofield, Oberon in *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*, Gabriel in *PARADISE LOST* with Sir John Gielgud, Lord Rosebery opposite Margaret Lockwood in *MOTHER DEAR* at the Ambassadors and Major Ross in *THE CRUCIFER OF BLOOD* at the Haymarket.

On Broadway he won great critical acclaim for his Mercutio in *ROMEO AND JULIET* and for his Lucio in Sir Tyrone Guthrie's production of *MEASURE FOR MEASURE* which subsequently toured all over the Western World.

Some of his favourite roles include Hamlet, Macbeth, Malvolio, Jacques, Benedick, King Lear and Coriolanus, one of his many roles for television. In musicals, he appeared as Macheath in *THREEPENNY OPERA*, Ramble in *LOCK UP YOUR DAUGHTERS*, Noel Coward in *COWARDY CUSTARD* and as himself in *MAX WALL AND FRIENDS*.

Frank lives in London with his wife and daughter.

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## FROM THE DIARIES OF WILLIAM CHARLES MACREADY

**Dublin, March 3rd, 1833**

I AM FORTY YEARS OF AGE! Need I add one word to the solemn reproof conveyed in these, when I reflect on what I am, and what I have done? What has my life been? A betrayal of a great trust, an abuse of great abilities! This morning, as I began to dress, I almost started when it occurred to me that it was my birthday.

**Louth, November 29th, 1834**

Walked with Mr. Robertson to the post office and to the theatre, which answers also the double purpose of a Sessions House; it is not the worst I have seen. Went to the theatre — dressed in magistrates' room — 'quite convenient'. When ready to go on the stage, Mr. Robertson appeared with a face full of dismay; began to apologise, and I guessed the remainder. 'Bad house?' 'Bad? Sir, there's no one!' 'What? nobody at all?' 'Not a soul, sire — except the Warden's party in the boxes.' 'What the d—! not one person in the pit or gallery?' 'Oh yes, there are one or two.' 'Are there five?' 'Oh, yes, five.' 'Then go on; we have no right to give ourselves airs, if the public do not choose to come and see us; go on at once!

**London, October 10th, 1836**

"Acted Macbeth as badly as I acted well on Monday last. The gallery was noisy, but that is no excuse for me: I could not feel myself in the part."

"I could have acted very well if I had prepared myself as I should have done. Without study I can do nothing. I am worse than a common nightly drudge."

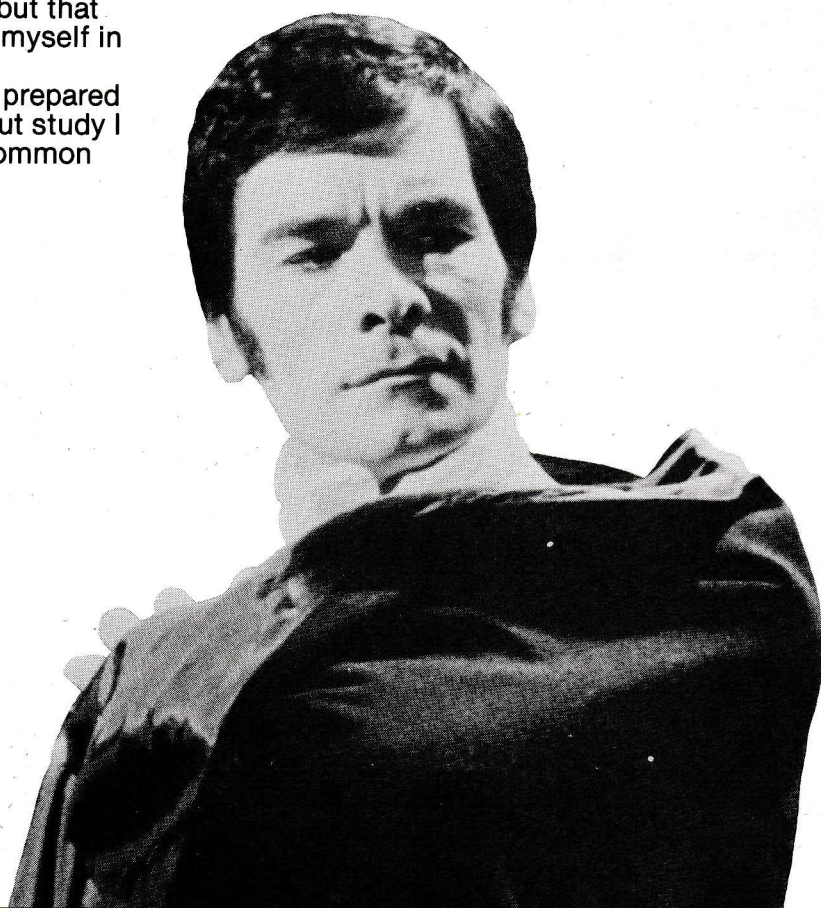
**June 5th, 1839**

Had a long rehearsal of four acts of KING HENRY V. Tried on the armour of Henry and dined in it ....

**November 22nd, 1851**

Returning from rehearsal today I saw a poor-looking man with four children of different ages, one in his arms, straggling after him. 'Need and oppresssion stared within their eyes', they were on the other side of the way and I DID NOT LIKE, i.e. was ashamed to cross over to them. I said to myself, if I had met them and no one saw me, I would give them something. I went on with active combatings in my mind and was going RIGHT ON, or rather wrongly on, with the conclusion that they had passed, and that perhaps they might not be legitimate objects of charity, when the principle of RIGHT BEFORE ALL came to my aid, and forced me back. I followed them and gave the poor man something.

*Illustrations of Macready from the book "Mr. Macready" by J.C. Trewin published by George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd. Permission has been granted to reproduce such illustrations.*







Engraving of a miniature of  
William Charles Macready by  
Robert Thorburn, A.R.A., 1843



## WILLIAM CHARLES MACREADY

When William Macready died in 1873 he left behind generations of actors who would follow him through performances of Shakespeare's best. He also left behind a Theatre that would never be the same again.

It was a man of conflicts who so drastically revolutionised the Victorian stage. A man who was despised by his fellow actors and adored by his audiences; an actor who hated his profession but loved Shakespeare; a stage manager who reformed a stage of minstrels and fools into that of a great art.

He was born of acting parents in 1793, and began an education at Rugby, which was never completed. After his father was thrown into debtor's prison he managed the family's struggling provincial theatres.

Drawn irrevocably away from his dreams of a gentleman's world at the Bar, it was not long before the young Macready was acting himself, throwing his heart into his lines as diligently as he threw himself into life.

From the fame of a country lad performing in second rate theatres, in 1816 Macready finally (as he put it) "achieved the crowning object of every player's ambition — a London engagement".

His first performance, at Covent Garden as Orestes in "The Distressed Mother", began the embarrassingly long list of villains he was to play.

For three seasons Macready was cast as the "baddie" in every performance, then, at what he considered to be the keypoint in his life, he was persuaded to play Richard III. On opening night, he was the first leading actor in the history of the Covent Garden to be called before the curtain.

Macready was a pioneer of the stage in all senses of the word, insisting actors who worked with him imagine themselves as the characters they assumed.

An acting cast had never before been pulled so tightly into line, and had never experienced such intense dislike as that of this gentleman actor who loathed the stage.

But Macready's greatness was unquestioned, and for thirty years he was the "Eminent Tragedian" of the English stage.

In 1820 he began experimenting in Shakespearean restoration. Forgotten characters were reintroduced, bad lines corrected, and fussy melodies removed from works corrupted by the secularity of the times.

When he took up stage managership in 1837 and again in 1841, this time at Covent Garden and old Drury Lane instead of tiny provincial theatres, he finally staged these plays in the form he had always wished.

In more typical Macready changes, prostitutes were removed from the audiences. Playbills advertising performances did nothing but state what was offered; unusual in that time.

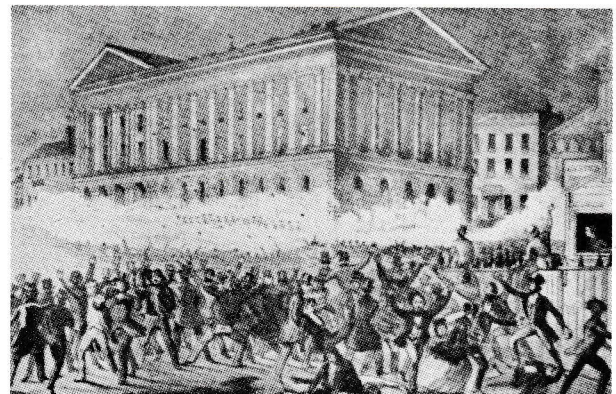
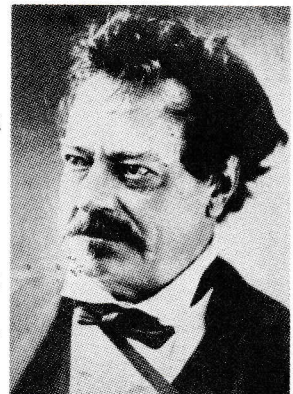
Macready became furious if he wasn't given time to change from stage costume into gentleman's clothes before a curtain call, and he

would never accept a present of greater value than the cost of a ticket. His diaries are full of self-recriminations for his fiery temper and quick tongue.

As actor-manager, he turned his mind not only to the artistic side of the theatre, but to such problems as ticket sales, actors' wigs, and the diversity of plays he must present.

In spite of the failures, the running battles with the Press, and the personal rivalries with other actors, Macready's skill could not be denied. Any stage was dominated by his presence; a further grievance to his opposites, who deemed his stage manners unbearable.

Amongst these was American actor Edwin Forrest, who blamed Macready for his failure on the English stage. As a result, Macready's New York performance of Macbeth turned into the worst riot in theatrical history. A demonstration in protest of his treatment of Forrest turned into a bloodbath, in which thirty-one people were killed and hundreds wounded.



A year later at the age of 57 he retired, little knowing he would live another twenty years, or that he would survive most of his family and fellow actors.

For his Farewell Benefit, the Poet Laureate Tennyson wrote:  
"Thine is it that our drama not die  
nor flicker down to brainless pantomime  
And those gilt gauds men-children swarm to see."

Not only had Macready upheld the truth in acting, but he had set the foundation of modern theatre.

Finally, he settled down to the life of a Victorian gentleman, a role Macready had always wished to play.

Although he never ventured back to the stage, the public had not seen the last of him. Macready's legend follows the generations of actors, and his influence on Theatre itself is unchangeable.

BY DOON MCCOLL