Summary Article: Kemble, Roger
From The Columbia Encyclopedia

1721–1802, English actor and manager. During his years as the leader of a traveling company, he married (1753) Sarah Wood, 1735–1806, an actress. They had 12 children, thus founding one of the most distinguished families of actors ever to grace the English stage. Five of their children became famous; the best known of the children was Sarah Kemble (see Siddons, Sarah Kemble).

The eldest son, John Philip Kemble, 1757–1823, made his London debut (1783) as Hamlet. He was a stately, formal actor, the era's foremost exponent of the declamatory school of acting, and suited only for tragedy; his best role was Coriolanus. At the Drury Lane from 1783 to 1803, he became manager in 1788 and often played opposite Sarah Kemble Siddons. He managed Covent Garden (1803–8) and, when it was destroyed by fire, built a new one, opening it in 1809. George Stephen Kemble, 1758–1822, their second son, was also a Shakespearean actor, well known in later life for his girth and for his performance as Falstaff, especially at Covent Garden (1806) and the Drury Lane (1816). He also managed (1792–1800) the Edinburgh theater. One of their daughters, the actress Elizabeth Kemble, 1761–1836, married the actor Charles Edward Whitlock and with him went (1792) to the United States, where she acted in several roles. Perhaps best known for her performance of Portia, she retired in 1807. The youngest son, Charles Kemble, 1775–1854, made his debut in 1794 in Macbeth at the Drury Lane. He was known for his many Shakespearean roles and particularly acclaimed for his comic portrayals. He also managed (from 1822) Covent Garden.

(Frances Anne Kemble), 1809–93, elder daughter of Charles Kemble, made her debut as Juliet in 1829 under her father's management at Covent Garden. Her success was immediate, and her stature as an actress grew in both comedy and tragedy. She was the original Julia in The Hunchback, written for her by Sheridan Knowles. She scored a great success when she made a two-year tour of the United States with her father. In 1834 she married Pierce Butler, a wealthy Philadelphian with rice and cotton plantations in Georgia, where she lived for a time and where she formed a lasting antipathy to slavery. During the Civil War she was in England, writing against slavery for the London Times. Her Journal of America (1835), Journal of a Residence on a Georgia Plantation in 1838–1839 (1863, ed. by John A. Scott, 1961), and Records of a Later Life (1882) are much-used sources on the era. Her sister, Adelaide Kemble, 1815–79, was, during her brief career, an opera singer. A brilliant mezzo-soprano, she debuted (1838) in Italy as Bellini's Norma and appeared at Covent Garden. She was married (1843) to Edward Sartoris.


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