



I decided to take up a career as a dramatic reader, and told Mr. Frohman so, when he offered me a part in "Shanandoah."

# MY CAREER

By MARGARET ANGLIN

How I Nearly Became Leading Lady



I entered an engagement with the delightful and lovable James O'Neil, playing the role of Mercedes in "The Count of Monte Cristo."

JAMES O'NEIL once told me that I would "go far" as I had the "Irish Sea" in my voice.

Now there can be no reasonable question as to my being a full-blooded and whole-hearted Celt, for I am Irish through at least fifty generations, and I glory in that fact quite as much as I do in being a Canadian. Yet to this day I do not know just what particular application of the phrase Mr. O'Neil intended; and I may as well further confess that I did not at first understand whether he meant the dry "C" or the wet "Sea."

In the years since Mr. O'Neil first made this remark I have asked a number of my friends if they had any idea as to what "having the Irish Sea in one's voice" might really mean. One kindly old lady professed to know. "It is because your voice is so liquid, my dear," she said. Another laughingly declared, "It is because your voice is always so limpid and fresh," to which an effervescent and irresponsible debutante retorted, "Oh, how could it be fresh, if it is the ocean?"

Full of youthful ambition and more than desirous of knowing all my assets, I wrote to a poet whom I knew, and this is the reply I received. You will perceive when you reach the end of his "Pegasisusian" fight that this poet had a sense of humour, or, better still, he was gracious enough to credit me with one!

"Did you ever live in the far-out, quiet country," he began, "at a distance, say, of a quarter or half a mile from the shore of a large body of water, an open bay, a sound, a great lake or an inland sea? Then you may have heard the witching sound that so often has come to me in the creepy silences of the night, and of which I am reminded never so much as by the symphonious intonation of your voice."

"I have heard it," he enthused, "in the perfect silences of country nights near the shores of the great lakes, when there was no last breath of air stirring and the water was so calm and still that it scarcely lapped the moonlit sands. This eerie echo of a sound seemingly came from nowhere in particular—just sensuously permeated surrounding space with a soothing, lulling, sleep-inviting murmur, as of water purling over the stones of a brook, as the distant hum of honey bees across broad fields of luscious clover, the languid, elusive coo of a lonely dove in its far-off cote, the purring drone of lightly touched harp strings over wastes of water, filling the air with a perfume of melody rather than distinctive, vibrant sound, the enchanting harmony of the eternal stars singing together in the rapturous glory of the wondrous summer-autumn nights."

"That, if you please, is 'the Voice of the Sea,'" he concluded, "the sea that you have in your voice. And considering the origin of your ancestry, I can see no reason why it should not very logically and appropriately be the Irish Sea."

Needless to say, I did not pursue my enquiries. I have a sense of humour.

Let me confide in passing that, much as I should like to write of the romantic side of the stage, I fear me there was little enough of romance connected with my earlier days in the theatre. There ever was an abundance of hard, nerve-trying work and a certain amount of varying degrees and sorts of disappointment. But the lurid theatre of occasional fiction I have never known.

It was Mr. O'Neil who first taught me to read Shakespeare; and he further endeared himself to me by the painstaking care he exercised in his instruction. Later I had the pleasure of acting in one of Shakespeare's plays with Mr. O'Neil, having the role of Ophelia in "Hamlet."

All through my early years on the stage I never once gave up my great ambition to act in Shakespeare's plays. The opportunity came immediately following my first engagement with Mr. O'Neil, when I went with Mr. William F. Connor, who later became and now is Madame Sarah Bernhardt's manager.

M. Connor offered to star me through the Lower Provinces in a repertoire of several light comedies. My appetite for Shakespeare being stimulated by having played Ophelia, I made the stipulation that "As You Like It" should also be played, and accepted the engagement on this condition.



Margaret Anglin: a rare and very beautiful photograph.

Thanks to the careful instruction of Mrs. Wheatcroft, I was so perfectly familiar with the lines of *Rosalind* that I think I could almost have delivered them backward; in all frankness I am constrained to say that the other members of the cast were not so well prepared on the night this play was first put on by the company. Rather, as I recall, there were not a few copies of the lines posted about the stage in accessible places, but out of sight of the audience.

NOTABLY in the Forest of Arden scene the memories of my fellow actors frequently were refreshed throughout by consulting their parts, which were pinned at reading height upon the "forest" limbs and branches, but which were made inconspicuous from the footlight point of view by conveniently concealing leaves and boughs.

Yes, we played "As You Like It" that wonderful "first night," but I shall never say how. The audience nevertheless probably had very decided views as to our presentation of the play.

Leastwise, one theatrical critic—or was he only an all round reporter—formed a more or less determinate opinion of our work that night, and, further than that, he displayed the courage of his convictions in print. For lo! with a dignified gravity worthy the pen of a Samuel Johnson, he announced in the columns of his paper the following morning that "Miss Anglin and her Company played 'As You Like It' last night at the Opera House, as they liked it."

This review at least had the quality of stimulating my imagination, and one can easily fancy the trepidation with which I approached my first appearance in this play upon the stage of the Opera House in St. John, which town I had left only a very few years before as a child.

It was during my tour with Mr. Connor that we came to a small town about which I recall

an amusing incident. It is not necessary to designate this place more definitely than to indicate that it is located quite near the border—on which side I shall not say.

When we reached this town we were not a little amused by an odd and rather smile-provoking character in the person of the manager of the local play house. This man evidently believed that advertising pays, for upon the band of his hat he had printed the potent words, "Theatrical Manager." Most certainly, at any rate, he was possessed of a mentionable pride in his calling and also was admirably unafraid to display it, at least to all who cared to read. And one scarcely could fail to do that, for the lettering was of the extremely conspicuous, glaring type.

Among the multitudinous local activities practised by this manager was that of going about the business streets of the town selling tickets for the performances at the Opera House.

"Show to-night! Show at the Op'ry House to-night!" he would call.

In the accomplished tones of a professional town crier he would call out the announcement of the current attractions as he walked up and down the village thoroughfares. He carried with him a board upon which was fastened a plan of the seats in the play house.

Whenever he sold a seat to a passer-by he would take a pin out of his hat—which was a veritable pin cushion—and stick it in the number of the seat corresponding with the purchaser's ticket.

THAT he did not, as is the common practice, use a pencil to mark out the number of the disposed of seats, was probably due to the fact that to do so would have necessitated the use of a new house plan for each performance. Whereas by employing pins he made each succeeding "stick in" easier to accomplish,

providing his nerves were steady enough to connect with the prior puncture.

Nevertheless, whatever comment one may be tempted to make upon this primitive and somewhat original method of theatrical book-keeping, it may be said in all fairness that it was as dependable and satisfactory in the end as some methods—or lack of them—which I have at infrequent times encountered in later years.

It was during that same season with Mr. Connor, and while I was appearing as *Galatea* in "Pygmalion and Galatea" that I received a letter from Mr. Daniel Frohman, in which he said that he might offer me a role in "The City of Pleasure," a play being put on at the Lyceum Theatre in New York City.

THIS proposition persuaded me to take an early train for that city. But, much to my consternation, I found upon reaching the Lyceum that the part which had been proposed for me had, for some reason, been entirely eliminated from the play. And there was expectant I, sans part, and also, sans engagement, but not without a very large and obvious disappointment, so obvious that Mr. Frohman promptly essayed to cheer me with the promise that I should have the part of *Flavia* in "The Prisoner of Zenda" in one of his "road" companies.

And just here occurred an incident which goes to prove how very small, after all, the world really is. One will meet people of remote days and places and equally remote associations in the odd corners of the world and under the most unexpected and unusual circumstances. On my way home from the Lyceum Theatre that day I met a Canadian friend, and with her was a lady I did not then recognize. As she was the daughter of an old acquaintance of my mother, I came to believe, in the light of the following experience, that she was under the impression that my wholly unintentional lack of recognition was purposed as a personal slight.

At any rate, I was so flushed with high spirits as a result of Mr. Frohman's proposal that I confided to my friend the good news that I shortly was to enter an engagement in "The Prisoner of Zenda," but thoughtlessly neglected to say that it was not with Mr. Sothern's Company, which, it should be made clear, was not then playing "The Prisoner of Zenda."

About a month following this meeting with my Canadian friend I was informed that the "road" company would continue the engagement with the lady who had been and then was playing the part of *Flavia*. That in itself was disappointment and chagrin enough.

But what immediately followed made my thwarted expectations seem quite trivial by comparison. It would seem—for I know of no other channel through which the matter could have been mentioned—that the unrecognized lady of the street car had soothed her unwarranted feeling of pique by gossip to the effect that I had boasted of my coming appearance in Mr. Edward H. Sothern's Company, as she no doubt at that time assumed that he still was playing in "The Prisoner of Zenda."

Be that as it may, there appeared in the daily press a most discomfiting story conveying the idea that I had announced myself as the soon-to-be leading woman with Mr. Sothern, upon the retirement of his wife, Miss Virginia Harned. This, of course, had no least foundation in fact, but was based, it would seem, upon the ingenious and wholly justified statement made to my friend that I was to play *Flavia* in "The Prisoner of Zenda." This her uninformed companion, as I have explained, probably had interpreted to mean that I was posing as the prospective leading support of Mr. Sothern. In any event, that was the burden of the press comment.

And the writer of that newspaper article, indubitably a past-master in the exquisite art of satire, evidently was in one of his most gloriously mordacious moods, when he wrote the story, and for half a column he fairly chortled in a philippic of banter and ridicule of the idea that Miss Anglin had presumed to proclaim herself as engaged to play leading woman with Mr. Sothern.

This press notice was so irritating that I made persistent effort through every known channel to discover the origin of the annoying canard, but without success. Possibly it was somewhat due to the fact that I could not locate the source of the story, and so be (Continued on page 47)

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