

whose marked rhythm the stamping foot of the "gods" kept accurate time.

"Couldn't get on in Kilclare without Jerry the Buck," said Mr. Moffatt. "The gallery boys expect it to be played at least once every evening throughout the season."

Mabel had already seen little Corda Trescott. Mrs. Walton had asked the child to spend Sunday with them, and had taken her to church, and for a long country walk in the evening, and had sent her home full of delight and gratitude. Her joy at meeting Mabel again, knew no bounds.

The little creature was so personate that one of the apparitions which "wears upon his baby brow the round and top of sovereignty," and she came into the green-room with her gold-brown curls waving round her delicate face, and crept up close to Mabel's side in shy silence. Cordelia Trescott was one of those beings, the natural refinement of whose aspect is impossible to vulgarise by any outward circumstances. Dress her as you would, surround her with what coarse or absurd setting you might, she shone out pure and delicate as a lily, and could no more be made to look vulgar than the flower itself can.

"Well, Corda, are you going to sing in the choruses? I have never yet heard your voice, you know," said Mabel.

"Yes, Miss Mabel. I know all the music quite correctly, papa sa s."

Presently, a violent shaking administered by the prompter to the sheet of iron hanging over his head announced the thunder with which the awful tragedy begins; and Nix, the indispensable, lightened from a tin tray at the wing, with weird effect. The house was full, and the audience in high good humour. All the old well-know favourites—among whom Miss Lydia St. Aubert was perhaps the chief—were received with enthusiastic applause, and the new comers were greeted encouragingly. When Nix put his head inside the green-room door, and said: "All the witches, please. Everybody-y-y!" Mabel trembled with excitement. She took Corda's hand and followed Mrs. Walton on to the stage, to the quaint strains of old Matthew Locke's music—music more appropriate, perhaps, to the notion of a witch entertained by his Majesty King James the First, than to those wild grim conceptions of the poet's brain, who met Macbeth upon the blasted heath, and subtly tempted him with spoken suggestions of his own unuttered desires.

The gas was turned down very low (according to immemorial usage in the witches' scenes), and when Mabel fairly found herself first on the stage, the front of the house seemed to her unaccustomed eyes like some cave or gulf seen in a dream, and peopled with shadowy pale faces surging out of the darkness. After a second or two, she was able to make out the shape of the theatre, the divisions of the boxes, and the loping crowd of heads that filled the gallery to the ceiling. Then how thankful did she feel to be one of an undistinguished throng, and to know herself an insignificant and irresponsible member of it! "No one will look at me!" thought Mabel, with a sigh of relief. And yet she was mistaken in so thinking. The theatrical public of Kilclare was limited in numbers, and strongly interested in each individual member of Mr. Moffatt's company. They partook, indeed, very much of the sort of spirit that any one who has conversed with actors of the old school may have heard attributed to the players of Bath and York some forty years ago. Centralisation—that modern offspring of steam and the electric telegraph—has affected, not only kings and knisers, potentates and princelings, but the mimic monarchs of the stage. The days are over when it was possible to achieve and retain a high professional reputation as an actor, without having appeared on the metropolitan boards. Still, here and there, in out-of-the-way nooks and corners of the kingdom, somewhat of the old local feeling remains; and it was so in the good town of Kilclare.

Teddy Molloy, seated in the centre of the pit,

had been dispensing to his immediate neighbours such scraps of information with regard to his step-mother's lodgers, as he thought fit to impart: and consequently it was very soon known to a large number of the audience that "the purty girl with the thick dark hair, and the nate little fat and ankle," was a niece of their old and respected favourite, Mrs. Walton. Rumours presently began to circulate that she had been a great heiress, had lost all her property, and was obliged to take to the stage to support herself and her family: which rumours caused much interest in "Miss M. A. Bell," and prepared the Kilclare critics to receive her efforts with considerable favour, whenever she should, essay a part. For it is a singular fact that while few people would submit to have their shoes spoiled, or their clothes cut awry, by inexperienced amateur shoemakers and tailors, on the plea that those artisans had never studied shoemaking or tailoring, yet in things theatrical the public—and the public of bigger places than little Kilclare—often seems as willing to welcome and pay for, prentice work as for skilled labour.

Mabel, however, unconscious of the notice she was attracting, went through her part of the music with conscientious attention to the instructions of Mr. Trescott. She also made the useful discovery that her arms and legs and hands, which might be trusted to fall into easy and graceful postures in private life without any special thought on her part, became awkward and unmanageable on the boards of the stage; and that, as her aunt, quoting from stores of professional tradition and experience, had told her, it absolutely required considerable skill and attention to learn to stand still with anything like ease or nature.

Mabel had begun her apprenticeship.

The tragedy went off with brilliant success. Mr. Wilfred J. Percival, who made his début in Kilclare on the occasion, was received with signal favour. And all the critics (before the curtain) agreed that if his readings were occasionally obscure, and his pronunciation somewhat too trans-atlantic, he yet made up for all short-comings by the splendour of his costumes, the power of his voice, and the extraordinary vigour and energy of his final combat with Macduff. Indeed, the contrast between his tall figure and muscular wielding of the claymore, and poor Mr. Moffatt's diminutive form and feeble swordsmanship, may be said to have almost shed a new and radiant light upon the moral of the play; for it was clear that nothing but the most triumphant virtue on the one side, and the most conscience-stricken villain on the other, could have given the thane of Fife the smallest chance in the conflict. To enable such a Macduff to vanquish such a Macbeth, the former must have a very good cause indeed!

The performances terminated with a farce, in which Mrs. Walton performed a comic servant-girl, to the intense delight of the audience, and in which the sententious low comedian received what the Kilclare Courier called next morning, "an ovation." And then the audience poured noisily out of the little playhouse, and trooped away, scattering streams of talk and laughter through the quiet streets of the town; and then the lights were put out in the front of the theatre, the doors closed with a clang that echoed through the empty house; stage dresses were changed for street dresses, stage paint was washed off, stage wigs were removed; and Mabel, with Jack and Mrs. Walton, walked home through the sweet May night, discussing the events of the evening, in very good humour with themselves and with each other.

(To be continued.)

Those who boast of plain speaking generally like it only in themselves.

An old fellow, who is always perpetrating bad jokes, persists in describing gamblers as birds of par' o' dice; and he accounts for the presence of blacklegs in a sheepfold by citing the notorious fact, that lambs are always passionately fond of gambolling.

"OUR LEADING COLUMNS."

EVERY man, we are told, imagines himself competent to drive a gig, stir a fire, and write a leading article. Of the two former accomplishments, I cannot say much. As I have never pretended to possess them myself, I shall not attempt to impart them to others: but the third is an accomplishment which is so mysterious in the eyes of the uninitiated, and at the same time appears to the presumptuous to be of such easy acquirement, that "a leader-writer" can hardly fail to interest somebody if he attempts a faithful exposition of the sublime mysteries of his craft.

The "leader," as it now appears in the full glories of long primer in our morning and evening journals, is, it need hardly be said, an essentially modern creation. The man who takes up a volume of the *Times* or *Morning Chronicle* for one of the early years of the present century, will be sadly disappointed if he expects to find in either anything resembling the articles which are now provided for him every day. A few bald lines of summary, and a stilted and ungrammatical sentence feebly echoing the gossip of the town, are all that he will find in the columns which are now filled with essays often of remarkable literary ability, and almost always written with force, clearness, and elegance. But it has been by long years of slow and weary progress that the editorial "we" has attained its present position; and even now there are but few persons—beyond the limited number behind the scenes—who have any adequate idea of the combination of industry and talent which has daily to be put in force in order to produce the leading columns of a London morning newspaper.

The great blunder of the newspaper reader is in supposing that there is such a being as an actual owner of the "we," who is alone allowed to use it, and who is the author of all the articles in which it makes its appearance in any particular newspaper. The truth is, that the "we" is a literal fact, and not, as most people suppose, a mere figment invented for the purpose of giving dignity and emphasis to an individual expression of opinion. With hardly an exception, the leading articles of the London press, and especially those dealing with the more important political topics of the day, are the work not of one single person, but of an association of gentlemen, combined for the purpose, almost all of whom have had some hand in the dish which is finally set before the public. These gentlemen are the leader-writers of the press, and the position they hold is a very curious and anomalous one. They are not editors—an editor may be a leader-writer also, though even that is not always the case; but the ordinary leader-writer has no pretensions to the superior dignity. And whilst they rank beneath the editor-in-chief, they place an immeasurable gulf between themselves and his lieutenant the sub-editor, who perhaps comes nearer to the popular notion of what a newspaper editor is than any other member of the staff. The "sub" is regarded by the leader-writer as a mere paste-and-scissors man, and is accordingly treated by him with an amount of contempt, to which, I am bound to say, he is very seldom entitled. The leader-writer has nothing to do with the internal management of the office in which he is engaged; except on rare occasions, he knows scarcely anything of the news which the sub-editor is gathering in from all quarters of the globe for the next morning's issue; and he has only a limited voice in directing the policy of the journal to which he is attached—a policy to which he is not unfrequently personally opposed. What, then, are his special functions?

I cannot better answer the question than by describing the manner in which, every day in the week, the leaders of an ordinary morning journal are produced. Scene the first opens in the "consultation room" in the newspaper office in the city. The time is an hour after noon, and the persons of the drama are some half-dozen gentlemen, of various ages. There is a poet, whose works have never