

"I am vexed at the emotion you display because in giving expression to your pity for Don José you showed that you felt pity for his daughter too. You know well enough that I was at one time jealous of Annunziata; and perhaps I am jealous still. She is so perfectly beautiful that when you think of her I run the risk of being forgotten."

Tancred stopped his wife's mouth with a kiss. "You my angel of beauty and love! What have you to fear. Are you not the most beautiful and the most perfect of all the women on the earth. If the goddesses of ancient Olympus were to strive once more for the prize of beauty, you would only have to show yourself to put them all to shame."

"Is that true, sir?" asked Carmen, with delicately irresistible coquetry.

"I swear it is, by your beauty."

"Then I believe you, sir. Still, if you wish me to be happy you must never think again of Annunziata."

"That is cruel. But since you desire it, I will even forget her name."

Carmen conveyed her thanks in a kiss.

"Caramba, my young lovers!" Moralès broke in, "it seems that you are paying but little attention to what I have to say. In any case you have wandered very far from the subject."

"We are all attention now, Don Guzman," returned the Frenchman.

"Where did I leave off?"

"You were waiting for the captain."

"Exactly. In about a quarter of an hour the captain returned in company with a second, and followed by nearly the whole crew, who had been present at the funeral. It appears that Don José was the friend, and had been at one time the partner of the owner of the 'Marsouin,' (a fine three-master, my dear chevalier). This old idiot of a captain's eyes were so red with weeping, and his face wore such a lugubrious expression that, laugh at me if you will, I could not restrain my own tears. Why, the very remembrance makes me weep."

Once more the handkerchief was called out to do duty on tearless eyes. This operation performed the Gitano proceeded with his narrative.

"I made my business known to the captain, who informed me, with the utmost politeness, that it was impossible for him to accommodate me; that he had the strictest orders to take no passengers."

"What," said I, "can no exceptions be made?" "In one case only," he replied, "which evidently does not concern you." Of course I had nothing to do but to retire gracefully. And this is my news."

"I find it discouraging in every way," returned Tancred. "What do we care about the presence of a French vessel in port, unless we can take passage by her."

"But, my dear brother, I do not find the matter so difficult as you seem to think, and I am convinced that we shall sail in the 'Marsouin.'"

"Have you any means of causing an exception to be made in our favor?"

"A simple application from you to the captain, would, I doubt not, chevalier, have the desired effect."

"How can that be when you have not succeeded?"

"For the best of reasons. I am a mere stranger to him, while you are not only a countryman of his, but an officer in the royal navy. You may be sure that he would place himself in a very ugly position were he to refuse to take your home."

"Perhaps you are right, Don Guzman."

"Not perhaps, but certainly I am right."

"In any case I will try my luck."

"If you intend doing so the sooner you do it the better."

"Well, let us say to-morrow, then."

"Why not to-day?"

"Well then, this evening."

"Why not at once?"

"How is it you are in such a hurry?"

"We must come to a decision as soon as possible in order to give Carmen and myself time to get ready for leaving."

"Well, I will go at once."

"Not as you are?"

"Am I not sufficiently well dressed?"

"Certainly not, my dear chevalier. For a visit of this kind it is better that you should be in uniform. It will have a certain amount of effect on a plain captain of the merchant service. So while you change your dress I will order round the volante."

"Will you accompany me, Don Guzman?"

"No, certainly not. My presence might have the very worst effect."

"In what way?"

"The captain would find it difficult in my presence to grant you what he refused me."

"That is true, I will go alone."

(To be continued.)

Before the Lights.

I am an "old stager;" and my story is of the stage, "stagey." As early as I can remember, I had a desperate longing for the stage. Not that I was a second master Betty, or believed that I should develop into a Roscius. Neither was I stage-struck, nor desirous of "fretting my little hour" before the lights. At one time, perhaps I would have jumped at a chance of appearing in any character, from a demon in a pantomime, with a hideous mask and nothing to say, up to the great creation of Shakespeare's Macbeth at an amateur performance. But the "desperate longing" to which I now refer was of quite an-

other order. Stagey, it is true; but it was in the ranks of authorcraft I wished to shine. When first the desire seized me, I can well remember the insane attempts I made to interview managers of theatres, under the innocent belief that could I but once obtain admission to the sanctum sanctorum of so awful a personage—situate some where, I knew, in that mysterious region known to outsiders as "behind the scenes"—I could at once convince him that I was the coming genius of the age; that my piece—some farce unduly elaborated, and the big manuscript much thumbed—would make the fortune of his theatre, and (though this I did not add) of myself as well. But experience teaches, and all those pet beliefs fell through one by one, as time after time, I failed, and non-success made heavy the youthful heart that, feeling so hopefully, had commenced so ardently to write for the stage. To "write for the stage!" What a great deal of sound there is in that phrase! but very little more than sound, I soon discovered. And yet I had my "first night" when, as the "author," I was called before the curtain, "before the lights" upon the stage, gained what had been my highest ambition, and made my bow to an audience. If you ask me what led me to take up such a line, I answer that I don't know. None of my family were stage people, but I remember that one of my school-companions lent me a play-book once, and described in glowing terms how he had seen it acted. And then I used to read the bills of the theatres and devour with my eyes the "programme of performance" at some especially favorite house. The great posters upon the street-boardings announcing a new piece by Mr. — had for me a great fascination. I envied the lucky author whose name appeared there—not because it appeared, but for the honor and glory it brought him, and the name it gave him. And again, I thought of the money he must be making, and nothing to do for it. I forgot the brain work, the hard labor, and the intense thought necessary to produce such a piece before payment could be hoped for. "Forgot" did I say? rather let me own that I knew nothing of them. But as I sat one night in the pit of a theatre, making one of a "first-night audience," I thought how easy it would be to write a drama which should bring my name before the public, fill the house as that house was filled that night, and make me an author, too. How I watched that piece to its conclusion, listening to the words spoken by the actors and actresses as though they were so many charmers, and I, as by the magic of their influence, bound to listen! I have done it sometimes since, but not often. The author's craft is known to me, and the "situation" worked up by him no longer thrills me. I guess it before it presents itself to me, but I can yet greet his work as that of a clever man. When the curtain fell on the first night of the new piece I witnessed, I was thrilled with excitement and emotion. The female portion of the audience wiped away some tears caused by the sufferings of the heroine as a much-abused personage—and I felt that a noble thing it was to write a piece which, like that, mingled tears and laughter. And then the author was called before the curtain to bow his acknowledgments, and how I envied him! After that I attended a great many first nights, and each one only determined me to try for a similar honor. With what pride when I had written a farce—my first—I sent it in to the manager of a theatre where I thought it would have the best chance! With what anxiety I waited for an answer! Would it come the next day or the day after, or would it be a week, I wondered. But, no; the next day passed and the day after, and a week went by without a sign. Had it reached him? I asked myself. But it must have, I answered, for I had left it with my own hands. Two weeks, three weeks, a month, and still no answer, and then I called one night and asked to see Mr. —. My name was sent up, politely enough, and soon a message was brought down that the manager was too busy to see any one, but would I state my business? I did; I said that I had called about a farce I had sent in; and I remember how, when I mentioned with becoming modesty my "little piece," I blushed like a school-girl and turned my face away, so that the man might not see it. I then received a promise that the manager would write to me, but before it came I had grown apathetic, for the "hope deferred," which "makes the heart sick," had come with full force upon me. In the first eagerness of writing, however, I had not waited for one to be produced before thinking of another, and about this time I had a second farce ready. Then I addressed a note to the manager about the other, and begged an answer. Yet still I waited, and then, to cut short the story of my long waiting, when the answer did come, the post brought with it my manuscript—rejected! Undeterred, I sent in the second farce, and resolved to wait patiently before I asked about that. To tell the truth, I began to find out that managers did not read pieces every day in the week, though I know now that they might do so every hour in the day if they would, so many things are sent in, so many applications by aspirants after such honors. I waited and waited till more than a month had passed, and then wrote again and again, only to find that the manuscript had been mislaid, and that, having been recently found, I was to have an answer shortly.

Here let me tell those whom this struggle for an author's debut may interest, that it is not panned to exhibit the dark side of the picture to them. There is a bright side which is pretty well known—"success." But it must be struggled for, and those who can enter into the fight with that forewarning, stand the best chance. On every side, however, lie stumbling-blocks,

not the least of which is the course pursued by managers of the present day, to get pieces written by well-known authors, ignoring others, to suit the peculiar talents of the respective members of their company. In two ways this seems to be bad. It affords no opportunity, or very little, for the development of any talent, and restrict the school of acting to a certain line in which an actor or actress is recognized, or has made his or her "mark." The old system, by which a company was got together for what is termed the "run of the business," is done away with. Instead, an actor is now engaged to fill a certain part in a certain piece, and when that is over he is dismissed, unless the management have had a piece written in which there is a part suited to the actor's peculiar style. All will admit that this "runs" the actor "in one groove," and gives him no opportunity for general grasp of character. There are plenty of men upon the stage who can be funny in a part written to be funny, or strong in a part written to be strong; but that should not be placed to the actor's credit; it belongs to the author; but where an actor can make, legitimately, something good out of words and actions that are nothing except in his hands, that man is an actor in the proper meaning of the word; he "grasps" his character, and proves that he does not run in the "one groove" which the stilted style of the present day leads to. In "the provinces," there are companies who act together from year's end to year's end without change, and play innumerable pieces and a variety of characters. Such companies are the "feeders" of the London stage, or would be but that the actors and actresses own it is not worth their while to come to London to play through one piece only, which may or may not give them an opportunity of displaying the talent they may possess. This is the great stumbling-block to authors and to development of the acting art in the future. Criticism may do much in this and other respect to effect a purer silverying of the "mirror held up to nature" through the stage. Kindly disposed, yet uncompromising in the exposure of immorality or tendency to impurity, critics should be, and no editor should fear actions for libel (if he have perfect confidence in his critic), where a jury is set up to judge between the purity or indecency of a piece they possibly never saw.

But to return to my narrative. The answer from the manager came at last, in the shape of a request to call at the theatre at a certain time. What was it for? I asked myself. Was my piece accepted? Would it be played, or returned to me? But this latter thought I partially ignored, though it would intrude itself, because the other rejected piece had been returned unaccompanied by any request for my presence. So, alternating between hope and fear, the time passed, and I found myself at the appointed hour waiting at the door of the theatre once again to see the manager. "At any rate," I thought, "I shall get behind the scenes at last"—and I did. My name having been sent in, I was presently requested to enter the, to me, mysterious—nay, almost sacred—region. I was "behind the scenes." "Good heavens!" I thought, as following the man conducting me, who hastened onward into sudden darkness, while I endeavored to follow as quickly; good heavens! was this the gilded hall or fairy palace I had seen from the pit? Was this dark and evil-smelling place the enchanted region known as "behind the scenes?" I asked myself these questions while following the man who had taken my name, and while I was being led through a forest of trees—among which, oddly enough, stood the elegant furniture of a modern drawing-room. My guide knocked at a little door in a dark corner, and the next second I found myself before a man who sat at a little table scratching long lines across a bulky manuscript. He was heavy-eyed, his face bore an expression of the greatest trouble, and he looked tired to death. It was the manager! the man who, night after night, convulsed the house with laughter—he played low comedy—and whom I had pictured as the incarnation of mirth and jollity. While he went on marking the manuscript—for, of course, I did not interrupt him—I had leisure to observe the sanctum sanctorum I had at last entered. Above the mantel-shelf was a cracked looking-glass minus a frame; in one corner guns, swords, pikes, helmets, shields, and the general armor of stage soldiery; while the room generally was crowded with a heterogeneous mass of furniture. And then I looked at the manager with mingled curiosity and interest. He never spoke for five minutes, and I knew he was a man who took life's troubles roughly, that they pressed heavily upon him. Yet this was the man who was the life and soul of the audience at night. Truly, I thought, "all is not gold that glitters." When he looked up and pushed his work away from him, he passed his hands across his eyes, as though he would wipe away a load of care, and then asked:

"Well, sir, and what can I do for you?"

I explained my business to him, told him my name, and mentioned that I had previously sent in a farce.

"Yes," he said, "yes; I remember; I wasted my time reading it. Not worth the light, sir."

I laughed a little and colored a great deal. Not that I was offended; I rather liked the frank tone in which he spoke.

"Well," I asked, "and with regard to this one?"

"Humph! Better," he said, "decidedly better;" and then added, "I'll play it."

I didn't jump up and seize his hand, nor fall down on my knees to thank him, though it was the consummation of my wishes at that time. I never moved, though I wish my heart

did, for I felt it thumping very hard beneath my waistcoat.

"Yes," he repeated, "I'll do it, but I can't say when. As soon as I want another farce."

After that, I need scarcely add, I went home and wrote with renewed energy, and thought over "old" plots upon which to found "new" pieces. Not farces—no; I meant to aspire to something very different, for was I not an author? And so I had determined to have a big piece—in acts, as I had seen them called; for I had bought plays and studied their construction. And I would have a suffering heroine, and a fight, in which the villain was to be killed by the lover—at least that was my idea of the orthodox then. That, I thought, would bring me fame, and after that money would come.

In about three months more I was sent for again to go to the theatre. The manager had not forgotten his promise, as some of them do. It was at night then, and when once more I found myself behind the scenes, the light there was as broad as the sun at noonday. I was told that the manager would be "off" directly, and so I was left standing alone, "off?" I thought, what is "getting off?" But not liking to ask any one, my ignorance remained unenlightened. As I stood by the scenes, constantly finding myself in somebody's way, I heard the shouts of laughter from the audience, but I could not see on the stage. Some time after a policeman came close to my side and put his hand familiarly on my shoulder. I was almost inclined to resent what I thought was an insult, and did ask somewhat sharply, "What do you want?"

In reply I heard a quick chuckle—I had heard it many a time before, on the stage—and then the policeman said, "Ah, you don't know me;" and so he laughed again.

I knew him then. It was the manager himself, dressed for his part, and I had not known him. I found, too, that he was much more humorous than when I saw him before, and I was glad. We laughed together over the joke and he called me "green." I thought, then that he had mistaken my name, but I did not contradict him.

He told me afterwards that he had sent for me to tell me that he proposed to "read" my piece on the following day, and wished me to be present. When I left him I was very much mystified. I was certain that he had told me he had "read" it; and yet now he said he was going to read it on the morrow. But when the next day came—and I suppose I need scarcely say I was at the theatre—I found that "reading" it meant reading it before the company, or those members of the company required to play it. The manager was present—he played the first part—and several other gentlemen and ladies. One of the latter, who was called Miss Winter, attracted my attention from her exceeding beauty, and before the morning was over, I observed that she became so nervous as to scarcely know what she was doing. I was not soft-hearted, but the young lady interested me, and I took an opportunity of speaking to her. The interest was heightened by a circumstance that occurred at a rehearsal, and it was this: In the farce she had to play the part of an orphan girl, and when she came to speak the line which told the fact, I noticed a quick glance at her dress—plain black—and a sudden paling of her face. I thought she was going to faint, but I did not know the reason and another lady took her by the hand and led her to a chair.

After about a week of rehearsals, the night when the piece was to be played had come. I was not very old then, and though I can look on such an event now with somewhat more of composure (but still with anxiety and care), need I say that my excitement that evening was great? To me, it was as big a venture as any of the big pieces I had witnessed on "first nights" at other theatres. Judge, then, how I tormented myself with thoughts of something that was to happen to prevent its success—possibly its ever being played at all. Would somebody break down in his part, and ruin the "go" of it? But no; it was announced; it must come off. Over and over again I had contemplated the bills of the theatre placarded about the town, to which my name was appended as the author. With what pride I had first read it, and how, whenever I met with a bill in my walks through the streets, I stopped to examine it and look for my name. The advertisements, too, I carefully scanned, and the newspapers became charms to my eyes. And then that night, when the curtain rose on the farce, and the audience welcomed the comic man (the manager) with a round of applause as he entered, the laughter he provoked, the roars from the "gods" (inhabitants of the gallery—I learned the terms afterwards), how my heart beat! And when the curtain fell and the manager, shouted for by his admirers, went forward and took me with him, shall I ever forget it? No; I think not, for it was dearer to me than any of the other receptions I have had. My wife Mrs. —, née Miss Winter, could perhaps tell you more of it; might also tell you how I found out that she was an orphan, who had come to the theatre just as the farce was put on, so accounting for the incident which aroused my interest in her; that interest which culminated in my proposing to take her from the world, so friendless to her, to the warmer world which I could make for her. The two events are almost incidental. One springs from the other, and, old as I am now, and the stage no fairy palace, enchanted or mysterious region but only a world of high hopes and burning hearts (some true ones, some strayed from the path of the noble art), it would be as impossible for me to forget how my love grew for Ellen Winter, as it would be to forget my first appearance "before the lights."