

mouth is to be electrified by the grand amateur performance of "The Rivals." For the last ten days dress makers have been busy, costumes have been sent for, rehearsals have been going on. A crowded house is expected—a very little goes a long way in Baymouth. There are daily rehearsals and daily squabbles; despair and frenzy on the part of M. Durand, chronic sulkiness on the part of the performers.

The manager's task is a Herculean task, the drilling of these raw recruits a formidable and thankless undertaking, but after a fashion he accomplishes it.

Among the refractory corps, Frank Dexter is perhaps the most maddeningly pig-headed. Frank, who takes umbrage at the manager's most innocent remarks, who stands in the wings and scowls like a demon daily during the love passages between *Faulkland* and his insipid *Julia*. And perhaps since the character was first performed it was never rendered so utterly flat, stale, and vapid as in the hands of Miss Marie Landelle. *Faulkland* may rave, may glare, may spout his gloomy speeches as impassioned as mortal man may, he awakens no answering response in that cool bosom.

Miss Landelle, her radiant hair falling like a glory about her, her beautiful eyes fixed upon him, repeats her lines without falter or mistake, no more emotion in face or voice as if she were a talking doll. And it is a noticeable fact that, except when they address each other in character, they seldom address each other at all. M. Durand is scrupulously polite to mademoiselle, his cousin; he has a trick of furtively watching her, too, which Frank sees with silent rage.

A sort of restraint is growing up between him and Reine also, which Longworth sees, and of which he highly approves. The manner of this last gentleman is that of a duellist on guard, coldly courteous, but ever watchful and suspicious. Frank, on the contrary, makes open war, rebels boldly, and in sight of all, against the self-constituted authority of the stage-manager.

"Frank, *mon cher*," will say M. Durand, in his bright, eager way, "don't stand in that rigid and unnatural attitude. Stand at ease. Don't use your

legs and arms as if they belonged to some one else, and were made of glass, and you were afraid the slightest movement might break them."

"Mr. Durand," Frank replies, with elaborate politeness, "will it suit your convenience if I have a few of my limbs amputated? My legs and arms appear to have ruined your peace of mind ever since this performance began. I will cheerfully submit to the operation sooner than they should continue to cause you the perpetual suffering they seem to do."

Or it will be this—

"Monsieur Dexter," Durand will say pathos in his voice, despair in his face, 'don't stand with the back of your head to the audience. I beg of you, I entreat of you, turn a better face to the house.'

"I have'n't got any better face," returns Mr. Dexter, with sudden smothered fury; "if the house doesn't like my face, the house needn't look at it. What do I want standing staring at your audience, and be hanged to them, like a gaby, when I've got nothing to say to them?"

But the evening is here, and a great throng with it. Baymouth musters well to enjoy the blunders and break-downs of the amateurs. At eight every seat is filled, and the orchestra is in full blast—silent expectation of fun to come fills the house.

Behind the scenes dire confusion and flutter obtain—people with painted faces and wigged heads rush frantically to and fro, little yellow covered books in their hands, gabbling idiotically. M. Durand in the dress of the sombre *Faulkland*, is ubiquitous, gesticulating, imploring, beseeching, trying madly to evoke order out of chaos. In the midst of the confusion worse confounded, up goes the curtain, and on go *Fag* and the *Coachman*.

And here the fun-expectant audience are not disappointed. Memory and voice forsake these two poor players instantaneously at sight of that sea of eager faces and twinkling eyes. In vain the prompter roars in a husky and frantic whisper, painfully audible to all present but the two unfortunates for whom it is intended.

"Come off!" at last despairingly is the cry, and *Fag* and the *Coachman* go