

(For the CANADIAN ILLUSTRATED NEWS.)

A WOMAN'S QUESTION.

(Imitation of Miss Proctor.)

Before I breathe the vows, dear Jack,
That make me yours for life,
Before the holy words are said
That make me yours for life,
Before, in fact, I quite agree,
Question your soul to-night for me.

I know your heart is all my own,
Or, so at least you say,
I've never faltered in my faith,
Not even for day;
My hope, my trust is perfect, dear,
But, do you care for Lou Devere?

A jealous thought I'd scorn to hide
Within my deepest heart,
For man and wife should never have
A hope or fear apart,
But, then you, dear, folks did say
You flirted in a desperate way.

My every hope, my every dream
I'd sacrifice for you,
And all the blossoms of my life
Upon your path I'd strew,
The only thing I must insist
Is your forsaking clubs: and whist—

I'm not at all exacting, dear,
Ah, that you fully know,
As dear mamma so often says
I do not think of show,
For pride and pomp I do not care
But—won't we keep our coach and pair?

I'd have our love so simple, dear,
So trusting and so true,
That all your world should be in me
And all my world in you,
But, can't we live a little while
At the St. Clair? 'tis all the style.

I'd break the dearest ties for you
Without a single thought,
And friends and kindred gladly leave
As every woman ought;
But dear mamma I cannot spare,
She quite expects our home to share.

Thus all my future, dearest love,
I place within your hands
To love, to honor, to obey
As Holy writ commands,
But then you know you've always said
That you'd be heart and I'd be head.

A. E. B.

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 another 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 somewhere, 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 playbook 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 favourite house. The great posters upon the street-boardings announcing a new piece by Mr.—— had for me a very great fascination. I envied the lucky author whose name appeared there—not because he appeared, but for the honour and glory it brought him, and the name it gave him. And again, I thought of the money he must be making, and with nothing to do for it. I forgot the brain-work, the hard labour, 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 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 some tears caused by the sufferings of the heroine—it is the correct thing to represent your hero or heroine as a much-abused personage—and I felt what 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 determined to make me try for a similar honour. 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 schoolgirl 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 honours. 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 *début* 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 is must be struggled for, and those who can enter into the fight with that forewarning which is a forearming 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 restricts the school of acting to a certain line in which an actor or actress is recognised, 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 respects to effect a purer silencing 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 endeavoured 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 armour 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 that 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 hand 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 coloured 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 know 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 say, 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 unlightened. 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 quiet 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 forme to tell me that he proposed to 'read' my piece on the following day, and he 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 out that 'reading' it really meant reading it *before the company*, or those members of the company required to play

in 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 rehearsal, 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 composure (but still 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 even its 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, announcing the new farce, 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 upon 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 learnt the term 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 friendly to her, to the warmer world which I could make for her. The two events are almost identical. One sprang 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.'

HUMOROUS.

A New Hampshire man sends fourteen of his children to one school, and when they combine against he teacher he knows he can safely bet on the result.

As the Pittsburg murderer passed a group of newspaper reporters, on his way to the gallows, he remarked confidentially: "Give me a good send off, boys." He got it.

TAKE the world right through, and three-quarters of the humans do not earn their bread and clothes. This is what makes it so tough for the other quarter.

We have yet to learn of a sadder boy than he who invested his little all in a snow shovel, Dec. 1st, upon the promise from his father of twenty-five cents for cleaning the walks after every snow storm.

No matter how happy a man may seem, yet his life is not free from hard knocks and disappointments, just as the sublimate plate of hash is sure to have lurking in it, somewhere, a shirt button or a part of a waterfall.

"SAY, POP," said John Henry's hopeful, the other day, "wasn't it the prince of whales that swallowed Jonah?" And John patted his head, and gave him a nickel, and told him he might some day be an alderman; and then as he put on his slippers, and found a small chestnut-bur in each toe, he took that boy over his knee and wrestled with him.

No young man has a right to blow his brains out because his washerwoman does not turn over the points of his piece of cloth evenly, though he has an undoubted right to destroy her on the spot. Duty to his family demands that a turn down collar comes before death, and an approving conscience will pat him on the back for the sacrifice.

As you carried the napkin home from the party, there will be no harm in returning it clean; still strict etiquette does not oblige you to do so. The hostess should have concealed her chagrin at your breaking a prong of a silver fork in picking your teeth, no matter how valuable that article may have been. We would advise you, however, to carry a stout ice-pick to avoid such accidents in the future. One cannot be too careful at a dinner. We have known the falling of an upper set of teeth in a tureen to cast a gloom over a feast that would have otherwise been a success.

A FOND father on North Hill sent his young hopeful of four into an adjoining room to get a book. The boy came back and said it wasn't there. "Yes it is, my son," said the father. "It's on the stand." The boy went back and reported again, no book there. The father got impatient, and sent another child for the book, and in the meantime, the mother brought the book from a different room with the remark, "Here's your book, pa. It was on the mantel." The gentleman composed himself to read, and about ten minutes afterwards discovered young hopeful still standing by his chair and regarding him intently. As he raised his eyes the boy broke out solemnly, "Father, there's a lie out somewhere; and I didn't tell it." There wasn't a dry eye in the wigwag.