

CHAPTER I

THE press about the doors of the theatre increased as the day wore on ; and many of those waiting in the front ranks of the queue gave place to newcomers and abandoned their advantage. It was a hot day of July, and the sun poured down fiercely upon the torrid steppes of the Strand. Whirling dust and a venomous breath of the drought bore witness to the enduring heat and its harvest of flagging energies and leaden steps. The bevy of young girls lingering about the stage-door of the Casino Theatre envied its sisters who had gained admission to the sheltered corridor, and waited their turn before the dread tribunal. Voices were to be tried to-day ; new engagements made for the great dramatic spectacle which should delight London during the autumn months. Advertisements for artistes attracted many aspirants. From suburban purlieus, from offices, from remote country parsonages, even from the kitchen and the scullery, the would-be famous came. All types, all conditions of girlhood and womanhood were to be observed in the throng. Bedraggled mothers, abandoning hope upon the threshold, but too weak to draw back,