COMPETITION IN SPEED THE NEMESIS OF BRITISH RAILROADS.

Not Much New Traffic To Be Gained, So the Fight Is to Prevent Rivals from Getting Old Customers Away by Offering Faster Service.

[In view of the disastrous wreck of the steamship train from Plymouth to London last week, wherein so many Americans were killed, the accompanying extracts from an article upon "British Railways," written by Ray Morris for the current number of "The Atlantic Monthly," are of timely interest.]

Given a railway system which earns each year just about what it earned the year previous, while the capital charged against it is each year materially greater, how are dividends always to be paid at the "usual rate"?

This is a problem which can be worded in many ways; it is subject to much twisting and turning about, while local conditions may greatly modify either or both of the main premises. But the central fact of it is confronting every British railway manager, and will not down; he has always the skeleton in his closet, and is fortunate if he can keep it hidden. It is not the purpose of the present paper to deal with statistics, but rather to show some of the broad tendencies of British railway transportation in their relation to the situation on this side of the Atlantic, and with especial reference to interesting differences in practice. Suffice it, then, to say, at the outset, that the average capitalization of the British lines, as reported by the Board of Trade, stands at some $273,000 a route mile, while that of our lines is approximately $67,000 a mile.

Taken by themselves, these figures are meaningless. We are comparing single track lines thrown across the Kansas plains, unfenced and unsignalled, with four-track roadways, splendidly built and safeguarded, leading into the heart of London. As our country grows up to its transportation system, the capital account will swell by leaps and bounds, and, in truth, expenditures during the last twenty years have been out of all proportion to the increases in route mileage. We have fairly entered into the period when the characteristic of railway progress is the betterment and enlargement of existing facilities, rather than the opening of new territory with hastily constructed lines. But the fresh budget of capital expenditure charged each year against American railways is bringing constantly increasing returns; the money buys new tools, which enlarge the output of the plant. In England, unfortunately, this is not true. The 23,000 miles of railway in the British Isles cover the country like the filaments of a cobweb; every traffic centre is splendidly served already, and not much new is to be hoped for. Gross earnings increase each year, it is true; but they increase very slowly, while the railway properties, built for all time, three-quarters of a century ago, by engineers who had the hardihood to assume that their designs could not be bettered, cannot now be adapted to economical working, but must be carried as best may be, with their terrific burden of capital cost.

To put the matter in a word, the English managers for the last fifty years have been capitalizing maintenance in order to pay their dividends. They do not call it capitalizing maintenance. Theoretically, the strict upkeep of the line is paid for out of earnings, and the new capital goes into permanent betterments, larger and more powerful locomotives, heavier bridges and many other items that leave the company with new assets to set against the new liabilities. But it is only too evident that, in the face of the sharp and ever present competition in all quarters, these capital costs do not bring new traffic—for there is not much new traffic to be brought—but only serve to retain the existing business, and to keep it from falling into the hands of rival companies. British railways do not suffer from competition in rates; but they are gradually being bankrupted by competition in facilities.

It has often been said that British railway traffic had the characteristics of a retail business, while American railway traffic was analogous to a wholesale business. The extent to which this is true can scarcely be realized by the tourist; the difference is fundamental, and the conditions under which the lines are worked are as wide apart as the two continents. Some of the British lines have recently complained bitterly of the serious inroads into their passenger revenue made by tramways working within a radius of, say, three miles from the cities—a traffic that the American manager never had and does not want. The extreme minuteness, if the term may be used, of the British merchandise business tends to destroy all comparisons with American freight carrying. As a result of these things, visiting railway officers in either country, newly come from the other, are perplexed and dismayed rather than enlightened by what they see. The British manager on a visit to America sees faulty permanent way construction, locomotives built to be "scrapped" after seven or eight years' service, unpunctual passenger trains and a great proportion of the country's mileage abounding in grade crossings and worked without block signals. On the other hand, the American manager in England sees a freight traffic that has degenerated into a parcels business, and a network of lines, extravagantly built and extravagantly worked, handicapped by an official formalism that reaches all branches of the service alike, while the capital account hangs over the lines like a black cloud, certain some day to descend in a storm that will wipe out many time-honored values.

Yet in spite of these very patent defects which so seriously affect the economies of working, the fact must not for a moment be lost sight of that the public service rendered by the British lines, the convenience to the traveller and the shipper are far in excess of anything to be found in this country. The British Isles are absurdly small when compared with our vast areas, and this of course simplifies the operating problems; there are no snowdrifts to delay schedules, no sections of crudely built track awaiting perfection, and the locomotives are never far from their home shops. Yet, even with allowance for these advantages, both freight and passenger traffic are habitually handled with a regularity and certainty that deserve the highest degree of praise. In any large terminal in England the number of passenger trains that arrive either exactly on time or a minute or two ahead is far greater than that of trains even the least overdue; five minutes is usually a safe margin for an important connection. At Finsbury Park, a suburban station just outside of London, trains pass on an average of one every two minutes night and day, yet this tremendous traffic is handled with clocklike precision. This punctuality, moreover, is not confined to the passenger service, and, in comparison with this country, it is in freight working that it is the most marked.

As far back as 1885, when Hadley wrote his "Railroad Transportation," he showed that freight could be received in London late in the afternoon and be delivered at the consignee's door, anywhere south of Scotland, the next morning. The main features of this service have not been changed much in the last twenty years; but it has been polished by competition to a wonderful degree of perfection as regards facilities, although the cost of it, both to the railways and to the shippers, remains an unfailing source of astonishment to the American manager.

One of our great Eastern roads sends out four fast freight trains daily from New York; the London & Northwestern sends out twenty-eight daily! Moreover, the English company cannot dispatch these trains at its convenience throughout the twenty-four hours, for the freight does not come in until late in the afternoon, and it must inevitably be delivered before working hours the next morning. So the trains must be worked on what is practically a passenger schedule, and to accomplish this they must be light. The standard train for this kind of traffic is made up of twenty-four or twenty-five little ten-ton wagons, and in the face of the conditions which have to be met, three tons of paying freight a wagon is considered good loading. That is to say, there must be a locomotive and a train crew for about every seventy tons of fast freight! Incidentally, it may be noted that a single locomotive and train crew handle two thousand tons of paying freight, when grain is moving, on the New York Central; while this record is considerably exceeded by coal haulage over portions of the Pennsylvania system.

Through stress of competition, practically all kinds of freight are hauled in this extravagant manner in British practice, excepting only coal, pig iron, brick, and articles that belong in a similar classification. As a result, the business methods of the provincial shopkeepers have been arranged to fit the conditions. A Leeds tailor carries only a small stock of cloth, his customers ordering by sample. If the order is received by 4 o'clock in the afternoon, the tailor can telegraph the number of the sample to London and receive the cloth by the time he opens his shop in the morning. The purchaser of goods that weigh fifty pounds or so does not feel the freight charge, and gets a service unequalled in any part of the world; but the habitual shipper finds his freight bills extremely high, since the average rate received by the railway companies on the goods moved by these fast trains is not far from a sovereign a ton. It is only fair to say that this rate, besides providing for rapid movement, also includes collection and delivery; but it has remained practically unchanged throughout the last twenty-five years, while every one who has followed the recent arguments against federal rate regulation in this country must have been struck with the great decreases in our own freight rates during a similar period. So far as freight movement is concerned, it is a safe generalization to say that advances in the science of transportation have been applied in this country primarily to the reduction of costs; in England to the improvement of facilities.

The odd part about the extraordinarily rapid movement of British freight is that the shipper, viewed as an average person, is not much interested in it. Of course some commodities must move fast or not at all. Meat traffic from Liverpool to London—"dead meat," as the English describe it, with their wondrously definite habit of mind—must positively reach the city prior to 6 in the morning, for the reason that the trains are run around from the main lines north of the city to the east side markets on the tracks of the Metropolitan and District underground lines, and these tracks must be cleared for the early morning passenger traffic. But the great bulk of the traffic—chinaware, groceries, bicycles, birdcages, and what not—is far less urgent than would appear; several railway managers have told me that only the tiniest proportion of their shippers were really much concerned about overnight deliveries. If the competing railways could agree among themselves to reduce the number of trains, and consolidate into economical loads the traffic that could wait, there would be no real dissatisfaction, and the saving would be tremendous. But this is just the sort of agreement that will never be made, because the fast trains are the only weapon left to competition.

AN EASY WAY OUT OF DEBT.
(A condemned man's wedding in old Newgate Prison.)
In the eighteenth century, by a curious legal anomaly, women were relieved of all debts on their marriage. Women of fashion who had lost heavily at play used often to go to Newgate and marry a condemned criminal just before the cart started for Tyburn. In a recent romance the criminal thus married was suddenly reprieved, and the lady found herself in an unfortunate position, from which she was ultimately released by the discovery that the man was already married. —Illustrated London News.

A NEW CURE FOR IVY POISON.

I woke on the wedding day of the nicest girl in town and found on one side of my face a large and growing patch of blistery red. Poison ivy! Fortunately, my home is under the roof of a good physician; when I appeared at breakfast, very patchy, and supremely cross, the doctor said:

"We'll try the Minin ray."

It was a violet ray of hope, for the Minin ray comes from an ordinary incandescent light through a violet globe and is made to shine copiously on the diseased part by means of a reflector. The whole arrangement is fastened to any electric fixture by a long flexible wire, and can be held at any angle and at any distance from any part of the body.

I knew this light had done wonders for several totally different ailments. I knew also that one of its latest feats had been to heal a case of poison ivy in its last stages, but I was by no means sanguine about its doing anything for me. However, I went into the laboratory after breakfast and let the doctor show me how to hold the light near my face, but not too near, and I sat for fifteen minutes on a laboratory stool, not at all like patience on a monument, and scowling at everything.

But when I left my perch to look in the mirror, I did smile and that not at grief, for I saw that the burning patches which had nearly covered my left cheek were now a dull red and looked as if they had stopped spreading, while the patches under my chin, which I had forgotten to expose, were more fiery than ever and ready to spread all over my neck. You may be sure that I ran cheerfully back to my monument. Later I went to the wedding, where I had a very good time and could not get any one to believe I had been poisoned.—Rachel Capen Schauffler, in Good Housekeeping.

MR. BIRRELL DEFIANT.

A Strong Minister Whipping Thistles with a Smile.

London, June 27.

Mr. Birrell's unique personality is an unfailing source of strength for the Liberal government in the education debate. The son of a Nonconformist minister, he has been in sympathy with free churchmen, whose grievances he has been striving to redress, yet as a man of letters and a genial philosopher he has been the natural advocate of tolerance. An astute lawyer accustomed to hair-splitting argument over phrasing and precedent, he has brought in an undenominational scheme of education at public expense without religious tests for teachers and with absolute control by the servants of the ratepayers, and, having established a rule satisfactory to the Nonconformists, he has provided exceptions to it in large towns, where the parents of four-fifths of the scholars may prefer denominational instruction. The compromise has failed to reconcile the Roman Catholics, has excited the hostility of English churchmen and has been resented by the Noncomformists themselves as incompatible with the spirit of the measure. Mr. Birrell, instead of flinching from this combined attack of opponents and malcontents, holds his ground with invincible courage and scatters among them the hot shot of sarcasm and dry, caustic wit. Beaming benevolently upon the Opposition benches through his spectacles, he confesses that he has expected nothing but coldness and abuse in return for his efforts to secure the rights and liberties of as large a number of demoninationalists as possible, and taunts his critics with their zeal for putting both Rome and Lambeth—Lord Halifax, Lord Wimborne and Dr. Clifford together—on the rates, and with their ingratitude in receiving with indifference concessions which would do much for them while stopping short of giving them complete enjoyment and use of schools supported at public cost. While he has been conciliatory so long as there has been any hope of establishing a concordat on this burning question of dogmatic religious teaching, Mr. Birrell can also be defiant and aggressive when there is need of strenuous action.

The education controversy has revived the spirit of partisanship in religion, and that is the modern substitute for bigotry. There is a great deal of intemperate talk about the iniquities of Nonconformist intolerance and confiscation, and the injustice of according special preferences to Roman Catholics and withholding them from the Church of England. With all this bitterness and heat in and out of Parliament, there is little denunciation of Mr. Birrell himself, whose sincerity and sense of justice are generally recognized. Perhaps it is his saving grace of humor that protects him against attack. Certainly he is more fortunate than Mr. Forster was in 1870 when he affiliated the board schools with the voluntary schools, instead of secularizing education outright. The Nonconformists have not broken away in a body from Mr. Birrell [illegible] has adopted a conciliatory course, as they did from Mr. Forster; and the author of the [illegible] Education act, while harassed, quaint and [illegible]tric, has formed a sententious habit of saying things in an unexpected way. A "Birrell" has come to mean a paradox with a [illegible] side. No speech of his would be complete without one, and his audience is content to wait [illegible] it comes, and enjoys it with keen appreciation. Other barristers may be prosy on their feet, but Mr. Birrell is never dull. He seems to [illegible] of his associates in the Commons, and to conjure Dr. Johnson and the benignant ghosts of his library shelves before him, and to strive to be worthy of their companionship.

Barristers are not ordinarily favorite [illegible] in the Commons. They are supposed to carry their forensic manner from the courts into Parliament and to be unduly argumentative in presenting the case for their party client. A comment frequently heard when a barrister has spoken in the Commons is that he could [illegible] the floor in a minute and reverse his opinion without consciousness of inconsistency. They are seldom ranked among the best debaters, though an exception must be made in favor of Mr. Asquith; and while they speak clearly and fluently, the House empties when they rise to address it. Sir Frank Lockwood in his [illegible] was a great favorite, but that was because he was a volatile humorist and did not have the dry, precise manner of a lawyer. Mr. Birrell is equally acceptable to the benches, and for the same reason. He is a close reasoner, without being diffuse in style or dull and labored in argument, and his phrasing is distinctly literary in form and conspicuous for individuality. With Dr. Robertson Nicoll as one of his chief advisers, he has succeeded in keeping the free churches behind him while he has been making a few restricted concessions to the national schools, and he has not excited personal resentment in any quarter while opposing strenuous resistance to Opposition tactics. Probably no other Liberal could have taken up with equal success this complex subject bristling with prejudice and animosities. The Prime Minister had the judgment required for selecting the best man for the most difficult work, and the good sense to depend upon him implicitly and to support him with authority and power.

I. N. P.

A WOMAN AND HER AUTOMOBILE.

To drive an auto on Fifth avenue at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, is a trick which is calculated to make even the coolest man suspect that he has a few nerves concealed about him. Yet I know a woman who does that trick whenever she feels like it.

She is a slender, delicate Southern girl who, a few years ago, undertook to combine the joys of nervous prostration with those of a severe illness. Her physicians viewed her with something like despair, but nevertheless gave her that great prescription which is the one and only sovereign remedy:

"Get out of doors!"

She was too weak for walking or for horseback riding. They had been her delight as a girl in the South and they made it seem, as she says, positively too inane to sit in a carriage and be "taken about" as if she were helpless.

There remained the one resource of automobiling, and she promptly took it up. She knew nothing about the mechanism of a machine, for her husband was an enthusiast. But she had never run one. The first thing she did was to get a good instructor—not her husband. Several women offer advice on this point.

"Don't let the members of your own family teach you!" say these wise ones. "They patronize you in one breath, as if you were a feeble-minded infant, and the next minute they expect you to compass, in one head, in one brilliant, intuitive flash, the entire science of automobiling. Get somebody who knows his business—and who doesn't know you."

Her first lesson was half an hour in length, and before it was ended an incident had occurred which tested her nerve to the complete satisfaction of her teacher.

She had been running the machine easily enough under his direction, but he kept dinning it into her ears that the most important part of running an auto was not running it, but stopping it.

"You may be able to start it and to steer it and to run it fast or slow," said he; "but if you have not learned to stop it in its tracks, you're not fit to sit in that seat."

Before they had gone much further, a little child suddenly ran from behind a wagon and appeared straight in the path of the woman-driven car. What—she stopped it! And she did it with such startling dispatch that her agitated teacher very nearly went out in a flying shoot over the front.

When he had recovered enough breath to speak, he dryly remarked that her talent for stopping amounted to positive genius. He added that he had taught scores of men to run automobiles, but that he had yet to see the mere man who, before the end of the first lesson could have equaled the stop.—Outing Magazine.

TEN THOUSAND PEOPLE WANT TO GO UPON THE STAGE.

This Is the Time When They Throng the Dramatic Agencies Looking for Engagements with the 25,000 Actors and Actresses Who Have Already Had Experience.

This week the rush begins at the dramatic agencies, and from then until September 1 the offices will be crowded with those players so unfortunate as not to have secured contracts before going to the country for a summer holiday. In those six weeks the destinies of the rank and file of the profession will be decided for the coming year.

If one drops into the best of these dramatic agencies any morning there will be seen dignified groups of well groomed men and women waiting for an interview or passing in or out to drop the brief query, "Anything new?" One may stay for hours in the hope of seeing that wonderful creature of the comic papers—the long haired, haggard tragedian with the frayed trousers and the cheerless look of the empty purse. The clients at the agencies which serve the better class of managers are sensible, conventional looking persons, and apparently matter of fact, for instead of hearing them tell each other in strident tones of "what 'The Peoria Morning Bee' said about me," or "Mansfield was so jealous that he couldn't stand me in his company," one will probably hear the light comedian ask the leading man, "How's little Imogen? She must be quite a little lady now." Whereupon the aforesaid leading man will go into an exhaustive review of little six-year-old Imogen's cleverness and beauty, while the conversation through all the group is about evenly divided between necessary and important details of the work in hand—getting a good engagement—and the ordinary everyday things of life, in which the actor is commonly believed in certain circles to have no part.

Great changes have come in the theatrical world in recent years. The oldtime haphazard manager who took a company out "on a shoestring" and paid salaries whenever he could is gone, and his place has been taken by a business man backed with sufficient capital to face defeat, if defeat comes, in a dignified manner, and knowing that if he forgets to pay salaries the Actors' Society will blacklist him. Companies do not "strand" as they did in the "palmy days," authors do not get beggarly royalties, nor do actors receive insufficient salaries. Everything is now carried on in a businesslike manner, and negotiations, once pursued and concluded on street corners and in hotel corridors or cafés, are now handled in well appointed offices, and with the change has gone the very "actory" actor.

GETTING BUSINESS SENSE.

"The Actors' Society has been of great advantage in elevating actors in a business sense," said William D. Stone, the secretary. "There are more businesslike men who are actors than ever before. Years ago it was a common occurrence to see long haired tragedians strutting along Broadway, but to-day you will find by far the greater number neatly groomed, fashionably dressed and behaving like any ordinary citizen. The whole profession has improved wonderfully in this way. The managers, too, with few exceptions, are business men, which was not always true. It is a rare occurrence now when a company leaves New York to play a season that the actor is not paid in full, whereas there was a time when it was more or less common for them to be stranded all over the country, and the actors brought home by the charity of others. The society places on a delinquent list any manager who fails to pay salaries, and no member of the society will join that manager until the indebtedness is paid. If a company does happen to strand, the society sends the actor his expenses back to New York."

The society has an artistically fitted up clubhouse in 40th street, with attractive clubrooms for the men, a drawing room for the women, a library of three thousand volumes, a writing room and a reading room with all the leading magazines and daily and weekly papers. All this serves to keep the actor off the street. It is a convenient and attractive meeting place, so that instead of street corners the players can meet under their own roof to chat and plan. The engagement department is on the lower floor, and here the business of the society is carried on. The walls are lined with old portraits of Forrest, Booth, Jefferson, Neilson and Garrick, as if only to prove that the fame of the actor is not as transitory as tradition says.

The society obtains from five hundred to seven hundred engagements for members each year. Many managers send first to the society when they are in need of an addition to their companies, as the organization has only experienced actors on its lists, admitting no one to membership who has not had three years' experience on the stage and excluding players who are untrustworthy in any way. In the same way engagements are not offered to members by irresponsible managers. The engagement branch of the society has in every sense proved a success, and many important contracts are negotiated through it. The society has two thousand members in good standing. For the sake of the convenience of managers many engagements are made for non-members. If a manager asks the society to organize a company for him and the members suited to a certain part are engaged elsewhere a non-member is engaged. This is done strictly as good business for all concerned. The society charges its members a commission of one-third of a week's salary. The non-members are charged half a week's salary. That is the fee at the agencies throughout the city, and the agreement usually is that the fee shall be half the second week's salary. Thus, in case of accident, and the actor getting one week's salary, he pays no commission. Mr. Stone, himself an actor, looks after the engagement department of the Actors' Society. He has shown himself a courteous, energetic business man as well as a good actor. He has listed over twelve thousand actors and actresses with their "lines of business," which is the professional term for the distinctions as to the sorts of part they are best suited for, such as leading man, heavy villain, light comedian, low comedian, character old man and so on. A manager will inform Mr. Stone that he needs a leading man and is willing to pay such and such a salary. The available men are informed and the manager interviews them and makes his arrangement. Mr. Stone tells of one stock company manager who endeavored to form a summer company at rock bottom salaries. He was much impressed by a light comedian, and asked him his salary. "Sixty dollars," said the actor. The manager looked him over from head to foot and said, positively, "I am going to put you down in my book as our light comedian at $30 a week." The comedian was angry, but, maintaining his composure, looked the manager over from head to foot, and said, "Well, you can put it down—it's your book." Then he went away.

Mr. Stone is not besieged, as are the other agents, by amateurs struggling to get on the stage, but yet he says: "I estimate there are twenty-five thousand actors of all kinds in this country already and that ten thousand other persons are always trying to get on the stage."

MANY OTHER KINDS.

Besides the Actors' Society engagement department, there are a dozen big agencies for dramatic and musical people and many more for vaudeville players. One agency makes a specialty of "supers," another of chorus singers, another of children, and another of actors for melodrama, and still another for stock company players. Thus each agency has its own individuality and each appeals to the managers in a different way.

Perhaps the most picturesque gatherings are seen in the offices of the man whose business it is to supply "supers," or "extras," as they are professionally termed. To him comes a throng of men of all ages and various conditions, for the $6 a week for evenings and only two matinees is decidedly attractive to persons who are "waiting for something to turn up" or who have fought the fight for success and failed. Many a man solicits insurance or canvasses for book publishers all day and carries a spear in the evening. Many young fellows adopt the "extra" agency as the quickest way of obtaining a position of more importance on the stage. Occasionally the oldtime type of tragedian, hopelessly out-of-date and clinging pathetically to his traditional Rialto garb, is found here, reduced by time, circumstance and a younger generation to sustain naught but thinking parts in the productions of the day.

This type of player so dearly beloved by the comic paper artist is occasionally seen at the older agencies, where oldtime acquaintance stands him in good stead. The fluffy haired type of actress is not seldom found at the agencies which make a specialty of forming stock companies, but, on the other hand, the men who are habitually members of stock companies are the most conventional and practical looking men of the lot. They are usually family men, not competent to draw very large salaries and willing to put up with the arduous work of a change of play weekly for the sake of enjoying family life.

At the vaudeville agencies the atmosphere is less refined and courteous and the types distinctly "showy." Dramatic people in the strict sense of the term are practically never seen in them, as the comparatively limited number of temporary recruits to the variety stage from its more dignified sister prefer to transact their business by letter. Usually they are guaranteed a certain number of weeks' engagements in advance, after which they return to their customary fields of labor.

Many of the ten thousand who are trying to get on the stage besiege a motherly little English woman, an accomplished, musician, who makes a specialty of engaging people for musical productions. Two or three times a week she tries voices at her office, and those who look well and sing well are put on the lists for future reference, which may be in three hours or three months. But when the agent says, "You have a fairly good voice; I think I can get you something in the chorus," the candidate nearly always replies, "Oh, I wouldn't think of going in the chorus." But almost any one desiring to enter the musical comedy field has to make up her mind to enter the chorus—or stay out of musical comedy.

One girl asking a well known agent to get her an engagement for next season said, "Of course, I wouldn't think of going back in the chorus." He had heard the same remark from hundreds of girls before, but he bravely argued with her, being pretty well convinced that the chorus was where she belonged. "Oh, no," she said. "I must have a speaking part. "But you've never had a speaking part," replied the agent. "Certainly, I did," she answered, "I was understudy at the Hippodrome." "That was a shouting part, and then you couldn't be heard," said the agent, and she's still in the chorus.

Chorus girls of beauty and voice are hard to manage, as they too often show a marked aversion to leaving New York. Some of the better known chorus and show girls, who, like the leading actors, do not need to visit the agencies, simply refuse to leave the city.

LITTLE THINGS COUNT.

"Appearances are very important," said the agent for the chorus. "The other day two girls came here to accompany me to a theatre to meet a manager. It was raining and the girls appeared in old frocks. I made them go back home and put on pretty frocks, as I knew the manager would reject the girls, even with good voices, because they looked careless. I had one girl's voice tried for a big musical producer. She had a beautiful voice, but he declined to engage her because her white petticoat showed underneath her walking skirt. 'She would be untidily dressed on the stage, as well as off,' was all he would say.

"We have many amusing experiences here, and I remember one girl here last week who was not at all pretty, though she had beautiful hair, and a trial proved that she had absolutely no voice whatever. I asked her what she thought she could do on the stage and she said, 'Well, I've been told that my hair would get me through.'"

Another specialist has an agency for stage children. Here each day gather the little girls and boys who are open to engagements. They, too, are dressed in the spick and span of fashion, but they do not have the ease of the older players. They are self-conscious and many are a bit "stagy." The little girls look tired and strained, and the agent will say that after they are thirteen they usually lose their ability. Few ever attain any distinction as adults. Nearly always these children are accompanied by their mothers, and the stage mother is the bane of the life of the manager who has children in his company. If the agent has arranged for the child to go to the manager's office, the mother accompanies her. The manager says, "Well, Gretchen, did you ever play in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream?'" Before Gretchen has a chance to reply the mother pours forth a flood of eloquence, beginning with "Yes, Gretchen, you did so and so," and showing not only that the child played in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," but that the full splendor of the play's beauties was never realized until this child wonder had danced across the stage and said three whole lines. Of course the manager is bent on hearing the child talk so that he may gauge her voice and intellect. But every query to her is answered by the doting mother, until the manager closes the interview in disgust and telephones the agent "never let that woman near me again." The agent knows only too well that the child's chances of securing an engagement have been ruined by the tactless mother standing in the girl's way.

The horror of the agents who engage children is a doting mother whose every other sentence is, "Yes, Maude Adams is clever, but you ought to see my Mamie." She changes the name of the player first mentioned to fit the conversation. No matter who is spoken of, from Eddie Foy to Forbes Robertson, the reply always comes, "But you ought to see my Mamie." Up the stairs the refrain comes as the happy parent approaches, and whenever there is a pause in the general buzz of conversation the eloquent phrase is heard again. As she departs it floats up the stairs once more. Its only use is that it clears the agency of loiterers in short order.

The children who seek to go on the stage are nearly always from non-theatrical families. Usually it is the necessity of a widowed mother that brings the child to the dramatic agency. This is by no means always so, however, as was shown in the recent visit of a German woman who brought her little Lena with her and poured forth for the benefit of the agent a voluble stream of broken English about the refulgent genius of a pathetic and stupid looking hobbledehoy child, all awkward elbows, knees and feet. The fond parent ended her outburst by slapping a fat bankbook on the agent's desk and exclaiming, "Dere, dot's my bankbook and it is all for Lena to get on de schtage. Dree tollar I give if you make Lena an actress." The agent took one last look at the bewildered Lena and, pushing the bankbook back in the mother's hand, sent her away.

When the agent calls for sixty or seventy children to join a big production they come from all parts of the city, these baby Thespians, and no adult actress of a jealous disposition ever cast such a scornful or pitying glance at the trembling amateur as does the little miss who has had a season's experience, on her little neighbor who sits, round eyed and awed, for the first time in the presence of the stage manager.

One little girl presented herself for an engagement and said she could sing and dance.

"Have you had any experience?" she was asked.

"Yes, ma'am, lots," was the confident answer.

"Well, what experience have you had?" the agent continued.

"Oh, I've danced and sung around the hand organs on our block," answered the child earnestly. Another one said she had been in a drill at school.

These children wanted to start in one of the big extravaganzas where the chorus children are paid $5 a week and $10 if they have an important work to do. Children having parts of real value in the play receive from $20 to $50 a week, $40 being considered a good salary.

The dramatic agent's mail brings many humorous letters from stage aspirants. The other day one received this letter:

Dear Sir: Three times to-day I came to your office to speak to you about going on the stage, but each time my courage failed me and I did not enter. I write to ask you if you can give any encouragement to one who aspires [illegible] the age of Lillian Russell. Yours very truly,