

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE OF THE STAGE

What the Entertainers Do When the Audience is not Looking at Them.



"NO, NO, NO, NO, NO! That isn't a bit like it. Can't you learn anything at all? I told you not to deliver the speech until you're away down stage. Here, I'll show you."

The scene is the stage of the Metropolitan theater, but the house bears little resemblance to the brilliantly lighted auditorium as it looks when a fashionable audience is gathered to see the play. Now, the shades are up at the side windows and everything has a sickly hue in the pale, white light from outdoors. The gilt and paint look cheap and tawdry and the huge vaulted auditorium is full of dark, puzzling shadows. Up in the balcony a woman is dusting chairs. On the stage a single "bunch light," composed of half a dozen incandescent lamps inclosed in a white tin hood at the top of a tall iron stand, casts a yellow glare over the foreground. Beneath its rays and in the middle of the stage, almost in the footlights, sits a man in his shirt sleeves. He is the stage manager of the company, and it is he who spoke.

He impatiently leaves the little table at which he has been sitting and, repairing to the back of the stage, comes down towards the footlights as he has been trying to teach the girl before him to "Welcome to our land, prince,"

she says, in a delicate, miming manner, that is intended to be the perfection of feminine grace and charm. "But who are your companions? There, do you see what I mean?"

The girl, his pupil, murmurs a bashful assent and goes back to the rear of the stage to try it again. The other men and women of the company sit or stand about the bare, dreary stage and look on with indifferent amusement or interest. They are clad in their street clothes. Two are laughing over a letter in a corner beneath an incandescent light and one young woman is crocheting. The others, serene, stand uncomplainingly about, waiting for "Miss Stupid," as one of the girls calls her in a whisper, to "do it right." Down in the orchestra pit the leader is rehearsing with his men.

"Now, on 'We must part forever,' come in strong. Try that once more. No, no, forte, forte!" Once more the strain is played. "Now the next cue is 'A strange drowsiness steals over me.' That continues until 'I see it all.' Now we'll try that."

The side the public sees is but a small part of the business of the theater. All day long and often for a good part of the night the work of preparing for the few brilliant hours before the public is carried on. The audience which sits in the plush chairs and see the smooth performance, in which everything seems to move so perfectly, has little idea of the amount of labor necessary to achieve those results. After the final curtain has fallen and the audience slowly files out in the street again while the orchestra sends with it the melodies of the evening, there are few who give a thought to the men and women who have worked hard to give them the evening's entertainment.

The work begins long before the theatrical season opens, altho for the actors and actresses there is little to do until two weeks or so before the opening. The manager and his assistants, however, must plan and order the necessary display printing, engage the members of the company and do an

endless amount of corresponding and negotiating over the booking of the route and a thousand business details, while the press agent or advance agent or business manager, as he is severally styled in different companies, is hard at work turning out columns of "new and original matter," setting forth in superlative terms the particular attractiveness of this particular attraction. Some of this he sends out in advance to the printers or lithographers and the greater part he keeps for use on the road during the season.

Usually, "seven days ahead of the show" travels the advance agent or business manager, as he may call himself. His duty is to make smooth the way for the company and arrange every detail so that when the aggregation following him arrives in town they may find everything ready for their reception. He sees that the display printing has been forwarded to the city by the printers or lithographers and that the town is properly "billed." He furnishes the reading matter and cuts of photographs for the newspapers, and uses all his cleverness in securing the publication of as much about the attraction as he can. He confers with the local manager regarding the scale of prices for the engagement and the advertising and other business details and also arranges with the railroad company for the arrival and departure of the company and its transportation to the next "stand," besides making a contract for the transferring of the baggage and scenery. Before he leaves the city he mails back to the treasurer or manager of the company a statement showing the name and location of the theater at which the company is to play, the dates and number of performances of the engagement, the scale of prices, the arrangements for the arrival and departure of the company and a list of the principal hotels, with the rates charged by each and its location as regards the theater and the station.

For the information of the stage manager or stage carpenter he also sends back the exact stage dimensions of the theater and other mechanical details, including the hour at which the orchestra is to rehearse with the company. All this done, the advance man goes on his merry way.

The company arrives. The first rush is for the mail. Everyone is looking for a letter from home and somehow

everyone expects to find one in every town, even the he or she may have received one only the day before and may really know there is none waiting here. The mail disposed of, the next question is the hotel. Many persons have an idea that the management of a theatrical company decides at what hotel its members shall stay, and pays for their board and lodging. This is not so. The members of a company, almost without exception, go to whatever hotel they please. The management of the company cares not a whit where they stay, except that prominent members of the company who are being paid good salaries are expected to patronize good hotels, for appearances count for much in the theatrical business. The list of hotels which has been sent back by the advance agent has been carefully studied and minds are pretty well made up before the arrival. Those in the company who have never been to this particular city before receive advice and information from the hardened roadsters, who know just what room they want in some favorite hotel in every city in the country.

The hotel question settled, the actors and actresses, with the stage manager and such others as are needed, repair to the theater, if there is a rehearsal called. They are soon at work, while at the barnlike door perspiring transfer men wrestle with the trunks and scenery, and the property man inspects the collection of miscellaneous articles which has been gathered together by "house props" in accordance with the list furnished the theater by the advance agent. This list, called the "prop plot," is sometimes brief and difficult to fill, sometimes long and simple. There is no limit to a real property man's ingenuity, and he can make or furnish anything called for.

If the company is one which is obliged to draw upon the population of each city for "supes," there must be a rehearsal of them, and in the case of very heavy productions, such as some of Mansfield's or Irving's, this is hard, serious work. The "supes," divided into groups of standard bearers, legionaries or what not, are patiently drilled into a faint comprehension of what they are expected to

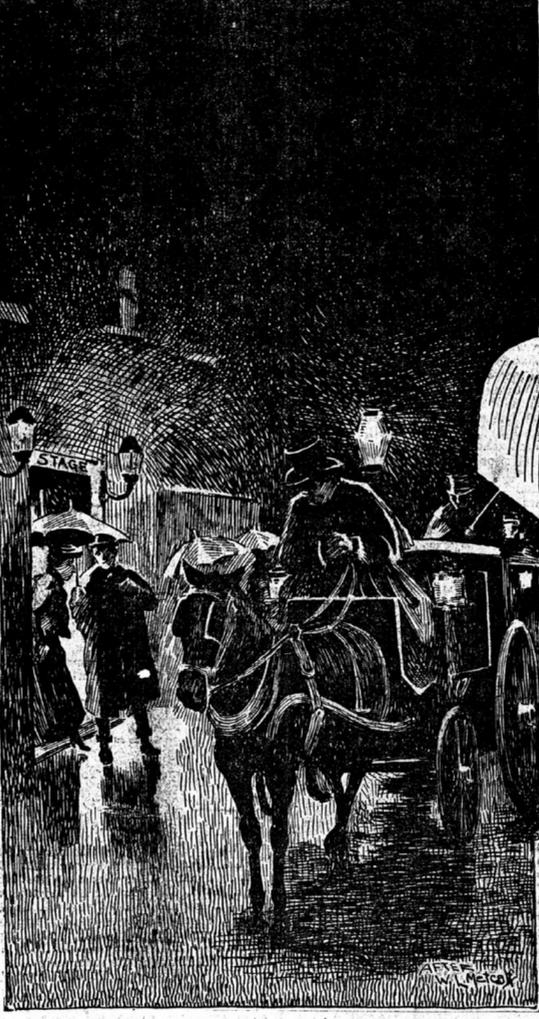
do. They usually forget when evening comes, and the woe of a "sneep captain" are many.

Perhaps an hour before the curtain rises the members of the company repair to the theater and leisurely don their grease paint and costumes. The scene for the first act has been set earlier in the day, and now receives its final inspection by the stage manager or the star.

During the act there is no work to be done by the grips or stage hands, and they sit about the stage back of the high walls of canvas or crowd into the wings to watch the show, or gather out in the alley by the stage door and tell stories. There is always an alley in front of the stage door.

A stage door without would be unheard of. The electrician is sometimes idle during the act, sometimes kept busy at his big switchboard with light effects or about the stage with flood lights or spotlights. Very heavy productions usually carry a full force of stage carpenters, electricians and grips, and all that is demanded of the theater is a "clear stage."

Some three minutes before the close of the act, the stage manager or his



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assistant, if the stage manager himself is not on the scene at the time, sounds the warning bell for the curtain. This is done from an electric button in the first entrance, near the switchboard. This rings a bell far up in the fly gallery above the stage, where a man waits by a huge windlass. When the warning bell sounds he takes up his position at the windlass, and just as the final word of the act is spoken and the bell rings again he turns the crank, and the curtain is lowered. The heavy bar at its bottom has no sooner touched the stage than he usually gets another bell, which orders him to pull it up again. Sometimes after a particularly exciting scene he is obliged to raise and lower the curtain five or six times, and when the applause finally subsides and the actors leave the stage he is worn out. There are few persons who do not know that a drop curtain in a theater does not roll up, but is pulled up straight like a window. Nothing in a modern theater rolls up.

The moment the curtain is down for the intermission there is hurrying on the stage. The star and the members of the company rush to their dressing rooms, if there are changes of cos-

tume or makeup to be made, and the "grips" fall to work on the scenery and the length of the engagements it plays in different towns, as well as upon the character of the places visited. With a star of the first magnitude or with any first-class company playing a large number of week stands, with perhaps a few engagements or two or three weeks and only a few one night stands it is pleasantest. With a small, "by-night" aggregation which visits only the smaller towns and whose season of thirty or forty weeks is made up almost entirely of one nighters, it is—well, the comic papers hit it about right.

There is a fascination about the life that is well-nigh irresistible, and anyone who has ever been on the road must always cherish, half dormant within the gipsy longing for the road. There is a charm even in the one night stands. Being in a different town or city every day for two or three months is interesting, and after years of it the old theatrical man cannot settle down. He must be on the go. Life on the one-nighters is hard, tho, and it is a mystery how the actors and actresses stand it. It is particularly severe on young girls, often frail, delicate creatures, who are obliged to live in cold, dirty, draughty theaters, chilly railroad cars and poor hotels. Oftentimes the company must turn out to take a train at 4 a. m., perhaps in bitter winter weather and then must ride for hours in cold day coaches, without breakfast, because there is none to be had.

Whether or not life on the road with a theatrical company is pleasant depends upon the nature of the company and the length of the engagements it plays in different towns, as well as upon the character of the places visited. With a star of the first magnitude or with any first-class company playing a large number of week stands, with perhaps a few engagements or two or three weeks and only a few one night stands it is pleasantest. With a small, "by-night" aggregation which visits only the smaller towns and whose season of thirty or forty weeks is made up almost entirely of one nighters, it is—well, the comic papers hit it about right.

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The theatrical profession is like a little world of its own. There are luxury and destitution, affluence and poverty, happiness and misery, virtue and vice, genius and incompetence, all to be found side by side. Many persons have an idea that all actors are alike and all actresses are alike, and speak of them as of some group of animals. For the most part the people of the stage are like children, happy, easily pleased, thoughtless, happy-go-lucky, always optimistic, always joyous. Many a great of them, contrary to popular belief, live lives of remarkable simplicity. The owners solely because of their inability to prove who they were.—San Francisco Bulletin.

—Charles McMurdy.

To Prove Who You Are Is More Difficult than You Would Think

PARADOXICAL as it may seem, the most difficult thing to prove in a court of law is who you are. It is a simple matter if you have still living plenty of relatives of an older generation; but suppose your parents and uncles and aunts are dead, it becomes well-nigh impossible. As a matter of fact, your knowledge of your identity is absolutely hearsay. You know your father and mother called you their son, and to that fact you may testify if the question of your identity should ever come before a judge and jury. But the testimony goes before the jury with the warning from the judge that it is only hearsay, for you have no personal knowledge of the matter.

Official town or parish records are valuable, but by no means conclusive. Suppose you are John Smith, son of Robert and Mary Smith, born at Albany on Aug. 1, 1865. The record of births in the bureau of vital statistics at Albany will prove that a son named John was born to Robert and Mary Smith on that date; the register of the church may prove that John, son of Robert and Mary Smith, was baptized on a certain date, but they do not prove that you are the John Smith of whom these are records.

To establish the connection between you and the person mentioned in the records—in other words, to prove your own identity—is the difficulty. If your mother is alive she can do it; if any relative who has known you since you were born is alive he can do it.

The successive suits for the estate of A. T. Stewart failed on such grounds as these. The plaintiffs, cousins of the late Mrs. Stewart, were unable to prove their relationship. It was necessary in one of these cases that a man should prove his late father and A. T. Stewart to have been brothers, but he had no personal knowledge of the matter; he had heard his father in Ireland refer to A. T. Stewart as his brother, but the court would not let him testify even to that, and, as the defendants denied the relationship, the case fell to the ground.

The identity of a person becomes even harder of proof after he is dead. In the Royal Arcanum there are several hundred thousand dollars of death benefits tied up because of the inability of heirs to prove that the insured man is dead.

Very often it is necessary to success in litigation over an estate to prove not only who were your parents, but who were your grandparents. Family Bibles, with the records therein, help out in this, but are not at all conclusive. Birth and marriage certificates are accepted as corroborative, but it requires quite a mass of such matter, together with at least some witnesses who can testify of their own personal knowledge, before a court will accept such a fact as proved to its satisfaction.