

A DIP INTO THE PAST WITH CLARA MORRIS

BY

FRANK MORSE



Clara Morris . . .

THE older generation of actors may or may not be better exponents of dramatic art than the thespians of the degenerate present, but one thing is quite certain; they are decidedly more punctual in the matter of engagements than some recent glittering additions to the theatrical milky way, whose names might be mentioned.

Miss Clara Morris sent me word last Monday morning that she would be glad to see me in her apartment at the Raleigh at 1 p. m. I sent up my card at 12:55, and received in response a message saying that the actress would be through with breakfast in five minutes. And she was.

She received me as though we were old friends and mentioned half apologetically that she had risen late, as the rehearsal the night before had lasted until 1 in the morning. I was the victim of a situation and lost no time in setting it before her.

"The art department," I told her, "in the exercise of more energy than patience, and being short of 'copy,' insisted that I should give them the illustrations for my story in which you figure before I left the office. As a compromise I gave out as a heading for the page, 'A Dip Into the Past With Clara Morris.' You see I am putting my trust in you to 'cover up.'"

Miss Morris looked interested. "A newspaper office seems such a wonderful thing to me," she said. "I always think of it as the center of many wires, which are being worked for the one great object that must not fail, 'getting out the paper.' If a city is destroyed carrying with it the office of the paper, the first thought of its makers is to somehow publish the 'story of the disaster.' In that the newspapers are like the stage. No matter what happens or who 'drops out' the paper must be printed and the play must go on."

"You seem to know the 'inside' of I observed.

"Practically not at all," she replied. "Of course I do not, like

many of 'the public,' suppose that men walk about the offices wrapped in dignified thought. I know on the contrary, because my husband has told me, that they go about with their coats off and swearing most of the time."

"That has been known to happen," I admitted apologetically.

"Why, of course," said Miss Morris cheerfully. "I am told it has to be done. When I was engaged to marry Mr. Cockrill, he was city editor on one of the Western papers. He was seldom, if ever, known to use profane language away from the office, but when he was down in the composing room he would swear most frightfully. They told me he had the reputation of being the most vigorous swearer on the staff. And when anything went wrong with the —, with the —"

"Make-up," I suggested.

"Yes, that's it. Well, when anything went wrong they would send for him to come down and exercise his talent." Miss Morris smiled. "Our engagement did not last long," she said. "We were both very young and very positive in our views. We could not be together a minute and avoid quarrelling. We were like two tom cats, ready to pounce at one another the moment one advanced a theory on any subject whatsoever that did not match the other's opinion. It was a great relief to both of us when we broke the engagement, but we remained great friends. He was one of a delightful circle of newspaper men I knew in those days and of which only Henry Watterson remains. Cockrill, Watterson, and Colonel Platt—"

"Donn Platt, of the Washington Capital?" I asked.

"Yes, we called him Colonel."

I had settled myself comfortably for a discussion of the old days in Washington, when she had played before the audiences that were drawn from Donn Platt's enthusiastic readers, when, as I reflected complacently, how well such a chat would fit under the head I had given the art

department, I chanced to think of an important commission I had forgotten.

"I have been asked to secure your photograph," I said; "do you know where I can get a good likeness?"

She mentioned the name of a New York photographer.

"It is the least offensive of all I have had taken. Not that I have

spent much time in posing, as the results have always been even uglier than the original. Heaven chose to make me homely, but I give you my word that during my life I have known two women more homely than myself. The photographs of

one were some years ago sent out labeled with my name. The other was my understudy during an engagement in the Southern States, where I became quite ill and had to leave the company. Later I learned that my name had not been withdrawn from the advertisements or programs and this other one played under my name. The manage-

ment instructed her to imitate me as closely as possible, and I am told she succeeded very well. In many of the towns they played, the newspaper men would come around to interview 'Miss Morris' whose work they had enjoyed the night before. You may be sure 'Miss Morris' felt obliged to decline. She had a remarkable series of nervous headaches and other ailments that kept her closely confined to her room. I received a number of letters from people who had seen 'me' play during that engagement and one was from a woman who said that she had seen me before in 'Camille' and other plays, but that until that last night she had never known that I had black eyes," and Miss Morris smiled.

This led me to mention a magazine story by Miss Morris that I had read, and, being on the subject, I mentioned the fact that her stories were being used in Washington, which was news to her.

"I write them," she said, "and then forget them. I do not follow the publication arrangements very closely. How do you like them?"

"I read them as well as 'read copy' on them," I replied, briefly, which testimonial Miss Morris acknowledged with a quick smile.

"I'm so glad you do," she said. "People have said many kind words about my acting all my life, and now praise of that does not very much interest me. But a word of praise in the line of my new ambition is more than acceptable."

This led to a discussion of several of her new stories, and one in particular reminded Miss Morris of a wedding between an extremely bashful young man and a rather strong-minded young woman. The lady in question had issued an ultimatum to the effect that her future lord and master should be solemnly received into the church before the marriage ceremony was performed.

"When he went to the church," she said, "to—to—what is it people do when they enter a church?"

I applied my powers of thought to a solution of this problem.

"Oh, you know what I mean," exclaimed Miss Morris, evidently annoyed by her treacherous memory.

"Of course I do," I agreed; "but somehow, you know, er—"

"Oh, what is it?" she said, impatiently. "Just a minute—drunk—drunk—confir—that's it; confirmed, of course. I always have to think of a drunkard before I can remember the word confirmed."

I chuckled.

"Now, please don't give me away," she said.

"Don't ask me to promise," I replied; "it's too good to keep."

"It's a terrible admission!" she said.

"Well, the young woman got her lover into the church," Miss Morris continued, "and assisted him with her moral support while he—now, what is that word? Oh, yes—abjured—abjured the flesh and the devil. He went through the confirmation ceremony successfully, but the clergyman looked forward with apprehension to the wedding. You see, the groom was as eager to succeed as he was ignorant of the details, and he either answered the questions out of turn or had to be jogged by the bride before he responded. When the momentous question was asked, 'Wilt thou, John, take this woman?' the clergyman's prophetic fears were realized. 'Oh, yes,' he broke in, eagerly; 'yes, of course; I abjure them all!'"

Miss Morris intimated at the close of our conversation that the present engagement might prove her last appearance on the stage. The rehearsals for "The Indiscretion of Truth" have tried her more than any she recalls during her long and active career. Moreover she undoubtedly prefers magazine and newspaper writing, and is quite willing to give all her energy to the new field. There were five good reasons apparent to me as I said good-by why I should not wish her the success behind the automobile advertisements she has enjoyed behind the footlights, so I didn't. FRANK MORSE.

HUMBUGGING THE PUBLIC THAT LIKES TO BE HUMBUGGED

WAS P. T. Barnum correct when he made his famous remark, "The American people like to be humbugged?"

Something for nothing! That seems to be the cry from Maine to California. Not only are the residents of the rural sections the victims, but the much-vaunted intelligent city man is just as "easy" as his country-bred cousin.

Once in a while some courageous man allows his name to go before the public as an easy mark and then the people wake up to the fact that they have been swindled. Such a case happened a few years ago in Lambertville, N. J. One Benjamin Mitchell was the person hardy enough to make the disclosure. He heard that a certain New York firm would give 125 useful household articles in return for \$1 and the names of ten persons to whom catalogues could be sent. Mitchell sent the money, and in return received 125 sewing machine needles, worth in all about 25 cents. Even he had to acknowledge that each one of the 125 needles was a "useful household article."

He felt that he had been swindled, and so made the matter public. Had he stopped to do a little figuring it would have convinced him that there must be something shady about the transaction, but no, he could get something for nothing, and so swallowed the bait, at the same time furnishing names of ten more possible victims.

It was but a short time ago that a couple of these sharpers offered to send to any address a well-executed steel engraving of Christopher Columbus for the small price of \$1. Orders came to them from all over the coun-

try and each purchaser received a 2-cent Columbian stamp neatly stuck on a piece of white paper. They got their steel engraving, but were out 95 cents.

One night in a little country town a well-dressed man stood in a buggy and told the people funny stories, joked with them, and finally getting down to business offered to sell a box of corn salve that was worth a quarter for 10 cents. Some few of the people bought at this price and then he announced that as business did not seem to be very good that night he would advance the price to 25 cents and throw the money away. He actually sold any quantity of the salve at this advanced price (although these persons had seen other get the same thing for 10 cents), and kept his word by throwing the money received back of the buggy on the ground. Business was so brisk that he did not have time to make change.

After talking in his glib way for a while he told them he was going to advance the price to 50 cents a box and would make each purchase a present, something valuable; in fact, he was going to give them back their money and something besides. This he did, and many were the 50-cent pieces he turned into his coffers, only to take them out and pay them back to the people with prizes averaging from 10 cents to a quarter in addition.

Then came the project. He wanted twenty men in that crowd to come up and give him \$1 each, and those twenty men were each to receive a prize out of the hat in front of him, which was filled with bills of all denominations. As each man came forward, and they did come forward, he would ask them: "Do you give me this money outright,

to do what I want to with it?" and would invariably receive the reply: "Yes, it's yours."

After the twenty persons had contributed their money he proceeded to empty the hat of the money, placing therein boxes of the corn salve, asking the crowd at the same time what to do with the money that had been given him. Some wag or confederate in the crowd called out: "Put it in your pocket." "That is good advice," the faker returned, "and as I promised every one a present out of this hat I will allow my wife to make the presentations while I go into the hotel for a drink."

Did these twenty people think that man was standing out in the damp night air for his health?

Many and varied are the "get-rich-quick" schemes that have been "worked" and the supply of people whose sole desire is to get rich, without working appears to be inexhaustible. Probably the simplest scheme was the advertisement that appeared, reading as follows: "Do you wish to become rich? If so, send 10 cents for my pamphlet telling how to accomplish this end. The simplest and surest way ever devised. Address—"

The inquisitive one who desired to become rich quick sent his 10 cents and received in return a two-page pamphlet, bearing on the inside this pertinent advice: "Go to work and save your wages." Surely as sound advice as could be given, but hardly of value to the victim.

A young woman stenographer, finding that business was pretty dull, and that time was hanging heavy on her hands, was looking through an almanac which,

among other things, gave the horoscopes of persons born between certain dates. Suddenly the idea presented itself of pretending to be an astrologer and sending out these horoscopes for 10 cents a piece. No sooner was it thought of than she proceeded to put the scheme into operation. This she did by advertising extensively in all country papers telling applicants to send photographs and dates of birth with 10 cents in silver, and they would receive a complete horoscope in return. Upon receipt of the sum she would immediately copy from the almanac the horoscope of the person, and thus, at the expenditure of a little time, made 8 cents profit on each applicant.

Before the postoffice authorities stopped her use of the mails she had gathered together thousands of dollars, and her mail had increased so that she had to go for it with a carriage.

What was it that induced the people to send their money? Was it curiosity, or was it that liking to be humbugged that Barnum spoke of, or was it just to see what game the fellow had?

Barnum found his fortune on a humbug, and admitted afterward that he was almost ashamed at the way the general public was taken in. This he accomplished by the aid of the very clever Japanese, whose skill in the making of monsters and fabulous animals had long been known, and the use of extensive advertising. Some sailors, returning from a voyage to the far east, brought with them and sold to Barnum what was supposed to be a mummified mermaid which they had purchased from the Japanese, but what was in reality only a Japanese image very cleverly constructed to represent

that mythical female. Immediately Phineas proceeded to get out flaring advertisements of the Japanese mermaid; the only one in existence, and which could be found only at the American Museum, Barnum's fourth venture in the amusement field, and about the worst collection of humbugs and frauds ever gathered together under one roof.

Newspapers throughout the country copied the mermaid's notices, as they were novel, and caught the attention of the readers. Soon the fame of the museum and the mermaid was wafted over the entire country, and when Barnum started the curiosity on a tour of the country he directed his agents to everywhere advertise it as "From Barnum's Great American Museum, New York."

The effect was instantaneous, and money flowed into Barnum's treasury. The majority of the people knew well that no such thing as a mermaid ever existed, but, notwithstanding that fact, they stepped up cheerfully and helped to build Mr. Barnum's fortune. Was this held against him? Not at all. For when he started in the circus business the people went to his show again and again, even though he had humbugged them in the first instance.

During the season of the country fairs the faker can be seen in all his glory. It is there that the farmer comes after gathering his crops for the year, and, if the year has been a good one, is quite willing to play along again and again, even though he had humbugged them in the first instance. Here we have the "cane rack" with its profusion of canes. It seems a very

simple thing to ring one cane out of the many, and then there are canes with prizes attached—a \$1, \$2, or \$3 bill is attached to a cane that at the best would barely pass through the ring, yet the incentive, "something for nothing," urges the victim to try and get that particular cane. The average person does not feel that he has had his money's worth until he has been humbugged two or three times.

From the country fair to the city is not a very far cry, and it was only a short time ago that one of the brightest of New England lawyers was taken in in the desire to get "something for nothing." He was approached in his office by a well-dressed stranger who told him that he wished to get some legal advice as to the collection of an inheritance in England. The lawyer became interested in the stranger's story and agreed to accompany him to New York, where he was to meet a representative of the English lawyers.

This lawyer was empowered, upon the presentation of a diamond-studded Masonic charm which was to prove his identity, to place at his client's disposal \$10,000. Unfortunately the charm had been pawned and it was necessary to raise \$300 to redeem it, and if the lawyer would kindly consent to put up the necessary amount a fee amounting to thousands of dollars would be his for his services.

The bait was tempting and "Humbuggetus" claimed him for her own. He accompanied the man to New York and there met the supposed lawyer from England. What happened there is not known, but it is known that the fortune did not materialize and that the con-

fidng lawyer was out \$300 and did not receive his fee.

Was Barnum correct? After reading the foregoing can anyone doubt that the great circus man knew his public and knew it well when he made his well-known statement, and in the language of one of his followers: "I tell you, now, it ain't no use to talk; you can't run a show widout a humbug any more don you kin talk widout wind. You hear me!"

RECORD OF GREAT FIRES.

- Richmond, Va.—Theater, governor and many leading citizens perish; December 28, 1811.
- New York City—600 warehouses destroyed; loss, \$20,000,000; December 15, 1835.
- Washington, D. C.—General Postoffice and Patent Office burned; December 15, 1835.
- Charleston, S. C.—1,153 buildings consumed; April 27, 1838.
- New York City—45 buildings burned; loss, \$10,000,000; September 6, 1839.
- Pittsburg, Pa.—1,000 buildings; loss, \$2,000,000; April 10, 1845.
- New York City—1,500 dwellings destroyed; June 28, 1845.
- New York City—302 stores, four lives; loss, \$6,000,000; July 19, 1845.
- Albany, N. Y.—600 buildings, steamboats, piers, etc.; loss, \$3,000,000; September 5, 1848.
- St. Louis, Mo.—15 blocks of houses, 23 steamboats; loss, \$3,000,000; May 17, 1849.
- San Francisco, Cal.—2,500 buildings destroyed; many lives lost; loss, \$3,500,000; May 2-5, 1851.
- San Francisco, Cal.—1,500 buildings; loss, \$2,000,000; June 22, 1851.
- Washington, D. C.—35,000 volumes Congressional Library burned; December 24, 1851.
- Syracuse, N. Y.—100 buildings; loss, \$1,000,000; November 8, 1856.
- New York City—Crystal Palace and exhibits destroyed; October 5, 1858.
- Portland, Me.—Almost destroyed, 10,000 people made homeless; loss, \$15,000,000; July 4, 1859.
- Chicago, Ill.—Great fire, 17,450 buildings and 250 lives lost, \$3,750 people made homeless; loss, over \$200,000,000; October 8-9, 1871.