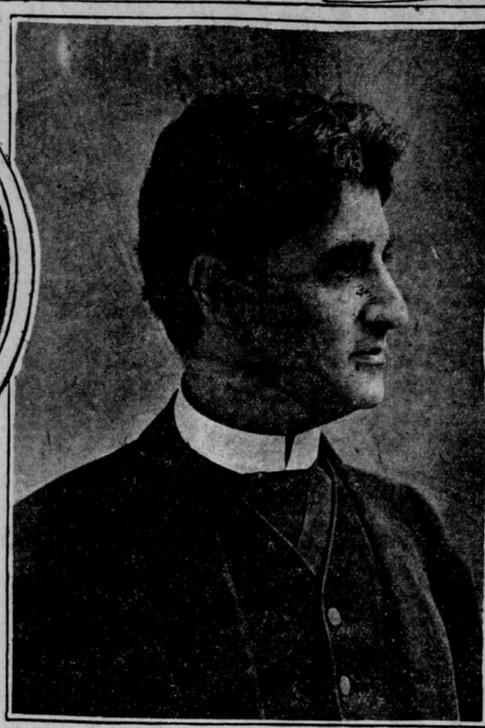


# Mr David Belasco Says = "I have a profound sympathy with Life! Life! Life!"



THE ROOM IS ALIVE WITH IMPRESSIONS



DAVID BELASCO



THE TRUE ARTIST POSSESSES A NATIVE CULTURE



WHEN A WOMAN IS VERY BEAUTIFUL SO THAT HER FEATURES ARE CLASSIC SHE HAS NEVER FELT ANY GREAT EMOTION SHE HAS NO HEART AS A CHILD



I HAVE SEEN ALL THE EMOTIONAL DEPTHS OF A WOMAN'S SOUL IN A FLEETING SMILE

A GREAT painter of worldwide celebrity was commissioned to paint a picture descriptive of Genius, and he produced a portrait of his mother. She was a very estimable old lady, but unknown to fame, save in her relationship to the celebrated artist.

"Why do you call the picture 'Genius'?" he was asked.

"Because," he said, "I contend that the genius of any man is the survival of the feminine soul in him."

I recall the anecdote, for symbolic purposes, in approaching the personality of a man who presents most vividly its personal truth. Nearly all the arts when symbolized in heroic figures are women in form, for artistic men confess a difference from the rest of the world in their alliance to the keen emotions and willful imaginations of women.

The vital spark in any work of art is not a physical strength, but a power bred in the spirit, since ideals are molded, not in the transient lifetime of one man, but in the transit of everlasting life.

We all know that David Belasco is an expert playwright, that he has rarely failed to develop his stage pictures to a foremost excellence of theatrical art; but of his intimate personality, of the inherent qualities in the man, of his actual artistic resources, little, if anything, is known by the general public.

His innate sensitiveness toward any intimate approach of the stranger and his abstraction of all things not immediately bearing upon the work in hand have made him all but inaccessible to the interviewer.

He darts into the theater where a play of his may be running with the manner of a man who is being pursued, and before any one can buttonhole him he vanishes through a secret door leading to a managerial sanctum and is immediately surrounded by his henchmen.

His guardian, "Ben" Roeder, is ever on the alert to throw the curious off the scent, knowing Belasco's extreme sensitiveness. There are some people who attempt to explain this peculiarity in various ways, agreeably and otherwise, but it is as much an instinct of his nature, and quite as uncontrollable, as his short, rapid gait along the street or his indifference to the dilettantism of modern dress.

It was in his workshop at Echo Lake that I learned to understand the reasons for this shrinking attitude, that I was enabled to measure the true values of the man.

In his own atmosphere, where the air is laden with dramatic secrets, he holds his head high, he is erect, at ease, all the rebellion existing in theatrical conditions against art being left behind in the turmoil of New York.

**Suggestions of Emotionalism.**

His face is remarkable for the countless suggestions of emotionalism in it. It bears out the promise of all those swift subtleties of expression that I have seen in the faces of great emotional actresses, without any direct resemblance to any woman I can think of.

While there is the predominant stamp of tenderness in his face, there is also the remorseless cunning of the man who would risk any danger to find out the latent truths of human passions, good and evil.

It is the same enthusiasm of daring research that has incurred the world's obligation to scientists and artists who spend their lives in digging for new discoveries.

In reaching for a sheet of paper on his desk I knocked over a bottle of smelling salts, for in the course of working out a scene, a dramatic situation, he will attain such a pitch of excitement that he literally faints and needs some reviving stimulant at hand.

There is no space in his workshop for any elegancies of fashion. The room is alive with the labor of impressions, hastily scribbled on loose scraps of paper and pinned in every conceivable corner, high and low. Two desks, raised high enough for the writer to work at them standing, are placed at opposite angles, and between the two Belasco moves about restlessly, jotting down an idea at one of these and, having crossed the room, using the other one likewise.

"This is the beginning of my new play," he said, indicating the scraps of paper pinned loosely on the draperies on the walls; some high up, near the cornice, others near the floor. "A complicated manuscript," I said, imperfectly deciphering a note here and there.

"These are just notes that occur to me, bearing upon every phase and feature of the play."

"It looks like interminable disorder."

"It was quite comprehensible when he explained it."

"It is all in order, though," he contin-

ued, amused at the mystery it seemed to be but was not.

**Handwriting on the Wall.**

"You see, every character in the play has his or her space on the wall, and in that space belongs every detail connected with the development of that character."

He dug his hands deep in the pockets of his dressing gown and looked around comfortably at the latent personalities carefully inscribed about him.

"How many acts have you here?" I asked, scanning the walls where they were stretched in chaotic mystery.

"Five acts—there they are, and I can tell at a moment's glance whether these people are going to act well or not," he said, apparently seeing them in mask and gown arrayed before him.

"So this is the way you construct a play?"

"This is one way, the way I work on an absolutely original play."

"And the writing of it is gathered from these scraps on the wall?"

"The writing of it—well, it is far from any literary method."

"Is not handwriting literature?"

"Let me explain myself," he said, and moving rapidly to his accustomed position behind the desk he leaned on it and continued:

"For instance, I am at work on the prison scene in the fifth act of my play. There it is, over there," he said, seizing his pen nervously and pointing it straight out before him. Following the direction indicated I saw only curtains, a mantelpiece, a bookcase, a portrait of Leslie Carter,

"Where is that prison scene?" I asked.

He hurried round from behind his desk with the quick enthusiasm of a child bent on being clearly understood, and tapping a sheet of paper on which was scrawled a much altered diagram, he said patiently:

"There, there is my prison scene!"

"I understand," and he walked rapidly back to his desk, his eyes fixed before him, as he went on:

"Very well. Now there is a woman there who is in great distress. She is in prison." He paused, his hand crept instinctively to his lips, already tremulous with the emotion of her situation.

"Some one is trying to comfort her. He says to her, 'Now be brave, take courage, be brave.'" He passed the back of his hand over his forehead and I saw the woman's agony of mind in his face.

**He Lives the Parts.**

"I will! I will!" he went on, living in the mind and soul of the woman for the moment, his voice suggesting her emotions, "but it is so hard to die; life is so beautiful; I can't die. I don't want to die!"

He sank into a chair as a woman would in terror, limp, without form or fashion.

"Take courage! All will be well; be brave!" and she answered him with an effort at strength that was clearly simulated. "I will be brave. I will try; but I want to live. See how cold my hands are! Oh, I cannot, you must not let me die!"—Then she buried her face in her hands—that is to say, Belasco did all this, and as he sat up in the chair he seemed choked with the emotional effort to realize the situation.

It was not the words he had relied on for effect, but upon accurate sensations as they might occur to a woman condemned to death.

"Is that the way you conceive your scenes?"

"I live them. I breathe the individual lines of every character in my play, imagining the pressure put upon them by given situations."

"And so the lines are written."

"A stenographer will be in the room with me, and as I work out a scene I ignore his presence, and he reports what I do and say. You see, a literary sentence would lack the vivid impulse, the

actual emotion required, for a terse moment. When I am at work on a play, I am, by turns, a saint, a villain, a mother, a courtesan, a king, a beggar. Frequently, when I read what I have said under the influence of acting out a scene, I am afraid to change a word in it, believing finally in the expression of a first impulse. The difference is very clear to an audience between a literary sentence in a play and an acting sentence."

**An Early Offense.**

"What was the first play you ever wrote?"

"'Jim Black, or the Regulator's Revenge.' It was only 14, and it was produced at Mozart Hall in San Francisco. Those were the days when I was feeling a way in the world. I must have been a very morbid, romantic boy. I used to spend most of my time in Chinatown or at the Morgue. I always went out of my way to see the body of some one who had met a violent death, and it was not unusual in those days. I was particularly interested in observing the different symptoms of death by different poisons, like arsenic or strychnine, noting the various contortions of face and limbs."

"You were sensational?"

"No, no; not that," he said, a radiant light of life in his eyes; "there is a great deal of the woman in me. I used to have great fear of death. It was all I could do to pass an undertaker's shop, and yet when I saw a crowd inside, in spite of my fear, I would be drawn there, and the first thing I knew I would find myself standing close to that body, watching it with morbid interest."

"You conquered superstition?"

"I've never done that. I'm dreadfully superstitious to this day. I never pass a nail or a piece of coal or a horseshoe. I've dived into a vase on the mantelpiece."

"Here, I've got nails I picked up in London, even; nothing would induce me to part with them."

"How did you become a playwright?"

"I just drifted into it. I was brought up in the theater, you know, and my eagerness to learn every department of it soon made me useful. I became stage manager of a small traveling company in the West. These were the days when we couldn't afford the luxury of manuscripts, and I

used to run on to 'Frisco, and see 'Frou-Frou,' for instance, or 'East Lynne,' or 'Aurora Floyd,' and write a version in a week. Then I drifted to the Baldwin Theater, where we put on two plays a week with a cast that had since become traveling stars. Those were the days of the stock dramatist; poor Casazuran was the last of the lot."

**Dramatized Novel a Mistake.**

"But the stock dramatist is busy today with the dramatized novel."

"I know, but he's quite a different breed. Those old plays of former years will live and are still going the rounds in theaters all over the country, but the dramatized novel is a mistake; it is ephemeral; it is generally a disgrace to the novel, because it is done too hurriedly."

"Yet it draws?"

"Of course, for the time being. Managers are forced to put on these dramatizations by the great reading public, but there is one man who will stop these dramatic makeshifts, and that is the publisher."

"But the publisher's profits are large!"

"Not when a play is ruinous to the author's reputation, as it frequently must be."

"Then we shall get back to a system whereby the dramatist lived by the work of his own brains, instead of digging the novelist's with a pair of scissors?"

"Original plays will bring about a treaty of peace between managers, publishers, authors and audiences," said Mr. Belasco. "It is generally believed that you are a sort of dramatic Cagliostro; that your magic can make of crude material theatrical miracles," I said.

"Impossible. Mrs. Carter's success, for instance—it was born in her. When I first met her, after five minutes' conversation I made up my mind that I was in the presence of an exceptional, rare creature

ture that mere superficial education does not disturb. Honesty, gentleness, humanity are qualities born in the artist and combine to create magnetism."

"What distinctive quality attracts you most in women who seek stage fame?"

"Voice! A woman's voice must be in harmony with her face, almost one in dramatic influence, inseparable by suggestion, the one from the other."

"And she must have imagination?"

"Imagination is the master of temperament, the spur to all passion and feeling. There are many women with dormant imaginations to whom the stage is a great awakening of their souls."

"There must be great physical endurance also?"

"The artistic constitution is a strange thing. It possesses the vitality of a greyhound, sleepy in manner, storing its powers for the highest leap. It may collapse after a great effort, but a moment's rest, the sound of applause, and the artist is up, refreshed, renovated, stronger than ever. The expression of work is food to artists; they fatten on it. The artistic temperament is like a flower, lifting its tired head at the first grateful morning dew."

"Then your work on a play is all impulse, emotional expression?"

"I don't know. You have seen how I work out a scene; but before I reach that point there is the outline to decide upon. I am very careful to obtain correct information. When writing 'Men and Women' I spent a great deal of time with Mr. Case, the cashier of the Second National Bank. He allowed me to be present at a directors' meeting. Then I read my play to him, when it was written, for fear I might have been inaccurate in fact. I read everything bearing upon a subject I am writing, sometimes boiling down the information of a book into ten lines of dialogue. I usually arrange five manuscripts before I decide on the acting version, and then when I get my people on the stage I study their peculiarities and alter whole scenes, dictating to each actor the new lines as they occur to me."

**Studying Every Detail.**

He leaned his head on his hand and described how the subtleties of human nature receive the touch of life on the stage.

"There are changing expressions of emotion that occur differently under different circumstances," he said, slowly.

"For instance, if a man receives news of the loss of his mother, how will he express it? Is he a stoic, a tender nature, an emotional nature? Will he receive the news with tears or with rigid lines of pain in his face? Or, he has lost his wife—there will be a difference in expression according to the relationship. A sweetheart will express the loss of the man she loves more poignantly than if he were her husband and they had been married awhile."

"And how have you gathered accuracy in these sacred emotions?" I asked.

"I have watched and followed, and squeezed my way in at solemn moments in the lives of men and women."

"For the sake of art?"

"Because I have an insatiable curiosity, a profound sympathy with life, life, life!" he said, looking fixedly at me, his hand buried in his hair, his head bowed low in a pose of concentrated purpose.

There is a deep significance in the process, when it is freely told, of artistic expression.

To the layman it has the significance of the tremendous possibilities of human enjoyment in the hidden springs of his own nature.

To the artist it has the greater significance of professional ambition, for it stimulates and reawakens the deep murmur in his soul that grumbles or an outlet, for a voice.

Belasco described the infallible intuition of the artist when he said: "Because I have a profound sympathy with life, life, life!"

PENNENNIS.

The following interesting figures have been compiled by the French newspaper, L'Avion: Of members of nautical societies there are in France 6900; Germany, 7,000; England, 83,000. Fencing—France, 5,000; Germany, 23,000; England, 5900. Athletic clubs, football, tennis, etc.—France, 20,000; Germany, 10,000; England, 60,000. Gymnastics—France, 41,288; Germany, 55,477; England, 5900. Cyclists—France, 428,000; Germany, 200,000; and England, 180,000.

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