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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A PIRATE OF PARTS ***

A Pirate of Parts

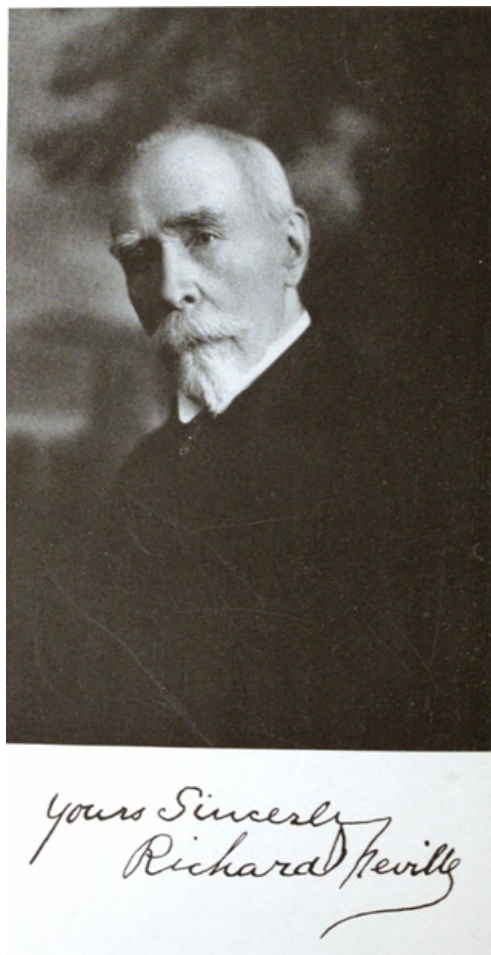
By RICHARD NEVILLE

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"One man in his time plays many parts."

—SHAKESPEARE



*"All the worlds' a stage
And all the men and women merely players"*

To my sister, Mrs. Mary Hughes, who for years has been associated with several of the most notable presentations on the American stage and with many of the most prominent and talented of American players, both male and female.

"BILL OF THE PLAY"

- [I.—Is all our company here?—*Shakespeare*](#)
- [II.—What stories I'll tell when my sojerin' is o'er.—*Lever*](#)
- [III.—Come all ye warmheart'd countrymen I pray you will draw near.—*Old Ballad*](#)
- [IV.—Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of ground.—*Shakespeare*](#)
- [V.—I would rather live in Bohemia than in any other land.—*John Boyle O'Reilly*](#)
- [VI.—What strange things we see and what queer things we do.—*Modern Song*](#)
- [VII.—He employs his fancy in his narrative and keep his recollections for his wit.—*Richard Brindsley Sheridan*](#)
- [VIII.—Every one shall offer according to what he hath.—*Deut.*](#)
- [IX.—One man in his time plays many parts.—*Shakespeare*](#)
- [X.—Originality is nothing more than judicious imitation.—*Voltaire*](#)
- [XI.—All places that the eye of heaven visits are happy havens.—*Shakespeare*](#)
- [XII.—There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio.—*Shakespeare*](#)
- [XIII.—Life is mostly froth and bubble.—*The Hill*](#)
- [XIV.—Nature hath fram'd strange fellows in her time.—*Shakespeare*](#)
- [XV.—Come what come may, time and the hour runs through the roughest day.—*Shakespeare*](#)
- [XVI.—A new way to pay old debts.](#)
- [XVII.—The actors are at hand.—*Shakespeare*](#)
- [XVIII.—Twinkle, twinkle little star.—*Nursery Rhymes*](#)
- [XIX.—Experience is a great teacher—the events of life its chapters.—*Sainte Beuve*](#)
- [XX.—I am not an imposter that proclaim myself against the level of my aim.—*Shakespeare*](#)
- [XXI.—I'll view the town, peruse the traders, gaze upon the buildings.—*Shakespeare*](#)

[XXII.—Is this world and all the life upon it a farce or vaudeville.—Geo. Elliott](#)
[XXIII.—All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players.—Shakespeare](#)
[XXIV.—There's nothing to be got nowadays, unless thou can'st fish for it.—Shakespeare](#)
[XXV.—Joy danced with Mirth, a gay fantastic crowd.—Collins](#)
[XXVI.—Say not "Good Night," but in some brighter clime bid me "Good Morning."—Barbauld](#)

A Pirate of Parts

CHAPTER I

"Is all our company here?"

—MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

Yes, he was a strolling player pure and simple. He was an actor by profession, and jack of all trades through necessity. He could play any part from *Macbeth* to the hind leg of an elephant, equally well or bad, as the case might be. What he did not know about a theatre was not worth knowing; what he could not do about a playhouse was not worth doing—provided you took his word for it. From this it might be inferred he was a useful man, but he was not. He had a queer way of doing things he ought not to do, and of leaving undone things he should have done. Good nature, however, was his chief quality. He bubbled over with it. Under the most trying circumstances he never lost his temper. He laughed his way through life, apparently without care. Yet he was a man of family, and those who were dependent upon him were not neglected, for his little ones were uppermost in his heart. Acting was his legitimate calling, but he would attempt anything to turn an honest penny. In turn he had been sailor, engineer, pilot, painter, manager, lecturer, bartender, soldier, author, clown, pantaloon, and a brass band. To preach a sermon would disconcert him as little as to undertake to navigate a balloon. He could get away with a pint of Jersey lightning, and under its stimulating influence address a blue ribbon temperance meeting on the pernicious effects of rum. Where he was born no one could tell. He claimed laughingly that it was so long since he was first produced he had lost track of the date. A friend of his maintained that he was bred in the blue grass region, he was such an admirable judge of whisky. On that score he might as well have been born in the County Galway as in the state of Kentucky. He had a voluminous shock of red hair; his name was Handy, and no one ever thought of addressing him otherwise, even on the slightest acquaintance. When he had an engagement he was poorer than when he was out of a job. He was a daisy of the chronic impecunious variety.

The summer of —'7 was a hard season with actors, and as Handy was one of the guild he suffered like the rest of his calling. He was not so fortunate as to have country relatives with whom he might visit and spend a brief vacation down on the old farm, so he had to bestir himself to hit upon some scheme or other to bridge over the so-called dog days. He pondered over the matter, and finally determined to organize a company to work the towns along the Long Island Sound coast. Most men would have shrunk from an undertaking of this character without the necessary capital to embark in the venture. Handy, however, was not an individual of that type. He was a man of great natural and economical resources, when put to the test. Moreover, he had a friend who was the owner of a good-sized canvas tent; was on familiar terms with another who was the proud possessor of a fairly good-sized sailing craft; his credit at the printer's was good for twenty or twenty-five dollars, and in addition he had eleven dollars in hard cash in his inside pocket. What more could an enterprising man, with energy to burn, desire?

On the Rialto Handy picked up seven good men and true, who, like himself, had many a time and oft fretted their brief hour upon the stage—and possibly will again,—who were willing to embark their fame and fortune in the venture. They knew Handy was a sailor bold, and so long as they had an angel in the shape of a vessel to perform the transportation part of the scheme without being compelled to count railroad ties, in case of ill luck, sailing was good enough for them. Besides, time was no object, for they had plenty of it to spare.

They were all actors like Handy himself. The stories they could unfold of barn-storming in country towns in years gone by would fill a volume as bulky as a census report. Moreover, they could turn their talents to any line of business and double, treble, quintuple parts as easily as talk. They were players of the old stock school.

One of the company played a cornet badly enough to compel the inhabitants of any civilized town to take to the woods until he had made his departure; another was a flutist of uncertain qualifications, while a third could rasp a little on the violin; and as for Handy himself, he could tackle any other instrument that might be necessary to make up a band; but playing the drum,—the bass drum,—or the cymbals, was his specialty.

A company was accordingly organized, the day of departure fixed, the printing got out—and the printer "hung up." The vessel was anchored off Staten Island, and was provisioned with one keg

of beer, a good-sized box of hardtack, a jar of Vesey Street pickles, a Washington Street ham, five large loaves and all the fishes in the bay. The company, after some preliminary preparations, boarded the *Gem of the Ocean*, for such was the pretentious name of the unpretentious craft that was to carry Cæsar and his fortunes. Perhaps Handy's own description of the first night's adventure might prove more interesting than if given by another.

CHAPTER II

"What stories I'll tell when my sojerin is o'er."

—LEVER.

"Well, sir, you see," said Handy some weeks after in relating the adventure to a friend, "we had previously determined to start from Staten Island, when one of the company got it into his head that we might show on the island for 'one night only,' and make a little something into the bargain. Besides, he reasoned, all first-class companies nowadays adopt that plan of breaking in their people. Some cynical individuals describe this first night operation as 'trying it on the dog,' but as that is a vulgar way of putting it we'll let it pass. We turned the matter over in our minds, and almost unanimously agreed that it was too near the city to make the attempt, but the strong arguments of Smith prevailed—he was the one who first advocated it—and we therefore resolved to set up our tent and present 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' with an unparalleled cast from the California Theatre.

"You must remember we desired to have the company hail from a point as far distant as possible from New York, and we could hardly have gone further or we would have slid right plumb off the continent. But we told no lie about the company being unparalleled. No, sir. You couldn't match it for money. It was what might be legitimately considered a 'star cast company.'

"One of the company was a dwarf. That was lucky, or we would have been stuck for a *Little Eva*. So the dwarf was cast for *Eva*; and he doubled up and served as an ice floe, with a painted soap box on his back to represent a floating cake of ice in the flight scene. He played the ice floe much better than he did *Eva*. But that's neither here nor there now, as he got through with both. What's more, he's alive to-day to tell the tale. Between ourselves, he was the oddest looking *Eva*—and the toughest one, too, for that matter—you ever clapped eyes upon.

"In the dying scene, where *Eva* is supposed to start for heaven, we struck up the tune of 'Dem Golden Slippers' in what we considered appropriate time. Well! whatever it was—whether it was the music, the singing, or little *Eva's* departure for the heavenly regions—it nearly broke up the show. The audience simply wouldn't stand for it. Just at that impressive moment when the Golden Gates were supposed to be ajar, and dear little *Eva's* spirit was about to pass the gate-keeper, a couple of rural hoodlums in the starboard side of the tent began to whistle the suggestive psalm, 'There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night.' When I heard it I felt convinced it wouldn't be safe to give that programme for more than one night in any town.

"We hurried through the performance for two special reasons: first, because the audience evidently did not appear to appreciate or take kindly to the company from the California Theatre, and secondly on account of the rising wind which was beginning to blow up pretty fresh, and the tent was not sufficiently able-bodied to stand too much of a pressure from outside as well as from within. Consequently we rang down the curtain rather prematurely on the last act. It is nothing more than candid to allow that the audience was not as quiet at the close as in the earlier scenes of the drama. We had no kick coming, however, as the gross receipts footed up seventeen dollars and fifty cents.

"We struck tent without much delay and managed to get our traps together. We were about to carry them down to the *Gem of the Ocean* when Smith, the property man, approached me with the information that there was a man looking for me who intimated that he was going to levy on our props. 'What's up?' I asked.

"'Don't know,' answered Smith, 'but I think you had better see him yourself.'

"I did, and it proved to be the sheriff, or some fellow of that persuasion. He came to make it warm for us because, forsooth, we showed without a license. And this, mind you, in what we regard as a free country. Ye gods! Well, be that as it may, you can readily see we were in a bad box, and how to get out of it was the perplexing problem that confronted me.

"I claimed ignorance of the law, but it was no go. I then attempted a bluff game, but it wouldn't work for a cent. I tried him on all the points of the compass of strategem, but he was a Staten Islander, and I failed satisfactorily to inoculate him with my histrionic eloquence. The members of the company, however, were not wasting time and were getting the things down to the dock, only a short distance off.

"Finally, as if inspired, I suggested to the official that we drop over the way, to Clausen's, and talk the matter over. I was thirsty, and I had an instinctive idea that my political friend also was. He hesitated a moment, and then started across with me. We walked slowly and talked freely. At

length we got down to hard pan. I was ready to settle up and pay the license fee, but he wasn't ready to receive it. The fee, I think, was five dollars, but he wanted something in addition for his trouble. He didn't say as much, but I knew that was what he was hinting at. These politicians are so modest. I know them from past experience.

"When we reached Clausen's we retired to a quiet corner in the back room and continued our conversation. I set up the beer, called for the cigars, and then motioned for another round. The sheriff was quite agreeable. Suddenly it flashed through my mind that I did not have one cent in my clothes. Sy Jones, whom we had appointed treasurer, had taken possession of the gross receipts. I was nonplussed for the time being. What to do I couldn't tell for the moment, but I didn't communicate that fact to my official friend. We had some more refreshments, and then I excused myself for a minute and went out into the yard back of the house. As fate would have it, the fence was not high. Without much hesitation I took chances, sprang over it, and started for the water-side as quickly as my legs would travel.

"I knew exactly where the *Gem of the Ocean* lay. The boys had worked like beavers in the interim. They had everything stowed away snugly. It did not take me long to get aboard with the rest of the boys.

"'Get to work and cast off as quickly as you can,' I whispered, rather than yelled. It was an anxious moment, I tell you, for just at that moment the front door of Clausen's power house was flung wide open and loud and angry voices were borne on the night wind to where we lay. 'Push her bow off, for the Lord's sake!' I yelled, while I was busily engaged in running up the jib.

"It wasn't then a question of sheriff alone. Clausen, the German saloon-keeper, and his gang were coming down on us like a pack of wolves on a sheepfold. Clausen, naturally enough, was considerably put out, simply because I was forced through the contradictory nature of conflicting circumstances to arbitrarily stand him up for the refreshments and smokes, and he appeared desirous of getting square. Fortunately for us, the high wind that had threatened to blow over our tent was off-shore, and by the time the Staten Islanders reached the end of the dock we had a good breeze full on the sails and were laying our course for the hospitable shore of Long Island."

CHAPTER III

"Come all ye warm-hearted countrymen, I pray you will draw near."

—OLD SONG.

"About daybreak we passed through Hell Gate, with a kiting breeze, and were pointing for Whitestone, where we proposed to show the following night. We reached there some time in the forenoon. Fancy our dismay when we learned that North's Circus was billed there the same evening. North had chartered a steamer and was bent on precisely the same lay as we were, with this difference, that he was more thoroughly equipped for the undertaking. As soon as we made this unpleasant discovery our spirits fell to zero and our hearts slipped into our boots. Some of the people were so discouraged that they were in favor of giving up the 'snap' there and then, but the more optimistic ones determined to stick it out, and stick we did.

"Along in the afternoon we saw the North steamer come along with flags flying and a band playing. If we hadn't been on professional business ourselves we possibly might have enjoyed the exhibition. We should have left Whitestone right away, but the wind had died out and there wasn't a capful of air stirring. Some of the members of the company expressed a desire to go ashore, but I objected. I had made up my mind to start with the first breath of wind that sprang up. To profitably employ our time we set to work to fish for our supper. Our larder was not over and above flush, and a few fish would prove quite acceptable. Just about sundown a breeze sprang up, and we took advantage of it. We hoisted anchor and stood up the Sound with every stitch of canvas set and drawing.

"I forget just the name of the next stopping place we reached, but I should judge it was a point opposite, or nearly opposite, to Greenwich or Stamford. We remained on board until about eight o'clock next morning, and then a little party went ashore to reconnoiter. The town proper was only a short distance from the little harbor. Imagine our feelings when we ascertained that North had billed this town also, and was to show there that very night. This was too much for poor, trusting human nature. The opposition show itself we wouldn't have minded, but the colored printing, streamers, and snipes that adorned the fences, barns and hen houses almost paralyzed us.

"In sheer desperation we brought the tent ashore and prepared to tackle fate and the opposition, and trust to luck. We put out no bills, and got ready to make much big noise of the proper kind when the opportune moment arrived. We hired a wagon from an enterprising farmer for our band; then sent complimentary tickets to the dominie to come to see 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' for our familiar old drama, notwithstanding the wear and tear of many years of barn-storming, is still regarded as somewhat of a religious entertainment. We toiled like beavers to work up business for the night. The attraction pitted against us was strong, but what of that? Desperation gave us strength, and we hoped for the best.

"Along in the afternoon as I was about to board the *Gem* I was astonished to find no appearance of the North circus steamer. It was nigh on to high water, a dead calm prevailed, and the atmosphere was hot and misty. I thought little of it at the time, until I reached the deck. I knew that, allowing a fair margin for delay, a power craft could run up in short order, and an hour or so would be ample time to put up the tent and get everything in readiness for the night's performance.

"While I sat at the head of the companionway meditating over the situation and drawing consolation from a bit of briarwood, the property man hailed me from the shore. I immediately manned the dingy and rowed for the shore to ascertain what was the matter. When I got there he informed me that some of the inhabitants from the interior had got in town to see the show and were anxious to buy reserved seats. I inquired if he had accommodated them. He told me he had not done so, as he had an idea that it was the other show they were looking for. However, he was not certain on that score. For the time being, however, he put them off with the explanation that the ticket register was out of order and the tickets were not yet ready. The family wagons and carryalls were beginning to come in, and by four o'clock or thereabouts the little place presented quite an animated appearance. The prospects for a crowd were good. Every minute I expected to hear the sound of the steamboat's whistle at the point announcing her arrival. It was getting along well in the afternoon when the thought entered my mind, 'Now, if by any chance the steamer should be delayed, what course would I pursue?'

"The more I turned the subject over in my mind the stronger I became impressed with the idea that desperate cases necessitate strenuous remedies. The heat of the afternoon became oppressive, and the haze had become a thick fog over the water. Occasionally it would lift slightly and then settle down more dense than before. Five o'clock came, and still no steamer. About ten minutes later we heard a sound that nearly knocked me out. It was the steamer with the other fellow's show. We heard the blow, but could not get a glimpse of the blowpipe. We could hear, but could not see. We remained on board some time, and then all hands went ashore. The fog still hung over the water and the whistle continued to blow. We resolved to play a desperate game. So long as the fog continued we were all safe, as I felt satisfied the captain of the steamer would not dare venture to run in closer to the shore at that stage of the tide, especially in such a fog.

"We hurried up to the tent and began to sell tickets. Buyers naturally made inquiries, but the ticket-seller economized considerably on the truth in his answers. We paid the farmer for his wagon that had been used by the band one half in cash and the balance in passes. Sharp at eight o'clock we rung the curtain up to a jammed house of the most astonished countrymen, women and children you ever set eyes upon. They did not know what to make of it, but they swallowed it all in the most good-natured manner possible. We introduced bits of 'The Old Homestead,' 'The Two Orphans,' 'Rip Van Winkle,' slices of Shakespeare, Augustus Thomas, George Ade, and other great writers, so you see we were giving them bits of the best living and dead dramatists. Our native Shakespeares do the same thing nowadays in all of their original works, and that's no idle fairy tale. We sandwiched comedy, drama, tragedy, and farce, and interlarded the mixture with Victor Herbert and Oscar Hammerstein's opera comique and May Irwin coon songs. Such a presentation of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' was never before presented, and I am free to confess the chances are never will be again. We actually played the town on the other fellow's paper. It wasn't exactly according to Hoyle, but then any reasonable thinking man will concede that necessity knows no law, and as the country people came to see a show it would have been a grievous sin to have disappointed them.

"It did not take us long to strike tent and hurry on board when the curtain fell on the last act. By this time the fog had lifted. As there was a breeze we made sail and stood out for the open sea. It was near the top of high water as we passed the point, and there we saw the steamer going in. She had run on a sandbar in the fog and was compelled to stay there for high water to get off. That's how the other fellow got left and how we turned his mishap to our advantage."

CHAPTER IV

**"Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of barren ground....
The wills above be done, but I would fain die a dry death."**

—TEMPEST.

By midnight the *Gem of the Ocean* was well out in the Sound. A stiff breeze was now blowing, and the little craft was footing it at a rapid rate. Handy was now in his native element. He and his company felt that they had turned a clever trick. It was an achievement worthy of the most accomplished barnstormer. The idea of playing the town on the other fellow's paper, ye gods! it was an accomplishment to feel proud of; something to be stored away in the memory; something to be set aside for future use when nights were long and congenial companions were gathered about a cheerful fireside to listen to stories of days gone by.

Supper disposed of, the company were grouped together near the companionway smoking the

pipes of peace and anxious to discuss the next managerial move. Handy, of course, was the prime mover in all things—the one man to whom they all looked to pilot them safely through the difficulties they expected to encounter. So far they considered he had made good. He appeared to be in the best of spirits. Seated on an up-turned bucket, drawing meditatively on his well-seasoned briarwood, he looked a perfect picture of content. Not so, however, the "little 'un," as the boys playfully addressed the dwarf. The motion of the vessel did not harmonize with peculiarities of his interior arrangements, and unless the *Gem* stopped rolling and pitching there was evidently trouble ahead. Matters were approaching a crisis with him. He had little or nothing to say. In fact, he was doing his best, as he afterwards admitted, to keep his spirits up while he manfully struggled to keep material matter down.

"Is it always as rough as this, Handy?" he asked in a plaintive voice.

"Rough as this, eh, my bold buccaneer," responded Handy, cheerily; "rough as this? Why, there's scarcely a whitecap on the water. You ain't going to be seasick, are you? Well, at any rate, if you are, possibly it may be all for the best. 'Twill make a new man of you."

"Maybe he don't want to be made a new man of," suggested the low comedy man.

"Oh, cork up and give us a rest," appealed the Little 'Un, somewhat testily. "I'm all right, only I don't relish the confounded motion of the craft. First she rocks one way, then another, and then again she seems to have the fidgets, and pitches in fits and starts. I don't see any sense in it. Steamboats don't cut up such capers, at least, none of those that I've had any experience with."

"Brace up, my hearty," said Handy, removing the briarwood from his lips. "Brace up. You'll feel all right anon."

"Anon isn't half bad," again jocularly interposed the comedy gentleman.

The wind was gradually freshening. There was by this time quite a sea on, and the Little 'Un was beginning to succumb to the influence of prevailing conditions. A sudden gust struck the *Gem*, and, yielding to it, the group that was sitting so contentedly a few seconds before about the companionway went rolling in a heap down to leeward in the cockpit. This was altogether too much for the Little 'Un. He picked himself together as well as he could, and doubled over the rail, Handy holding on to his extremities. It was a trying scene for a time, and Handy had the worst of it.

"Steady there, now, old fellow, you'll feel all serene when you give up. There's no danger."

A minute or so later the poor little chap was taken from the rail as limp as a wet rag, and was stretched out on the deck with a coil of rope for a pillow.

"When you get me on a snap of this kind again," he began in a feeble voice, after he had somewhat recovered, "you just let me know. No more water adventures for me. I know when I have had enough. Dry land for mine hereafter."

Handy endeavored to console and cheer him up, but in vain. The poor sufferer was completely used up. He had yielded his gross receipts to Neptune, and would, at that particular moment, have mortgaged his prospects in the future to have been able to set foot on terra firma. With some little difficulty Handy and one of the crew succeeded in getting him below and stowed him away in a bunk.

The wind increased during the night, and by two in the morning it was blowing a half-gale. The *Gem* was trimmed down to close reefs, and all but the crew and Handy had turned in—but not to sleep. Handy, who was an experienced sailor, remained on deck all night. He was never away from his post. He was as good a sailor as he was bad as a financier. This speaks volumes for his abilities as a mariner.

The night passed over without mishap, and shortly before sunrise the wind gave evidence of going down. There was, however, a high sea running, and though the little craft behaved nobly and was skillfully handled, yet to men unaccustomed to go down to the sea in ships calmer weather would have been acceptable. Daylight dawned at last. Later the sun made his appearance, red and fiery, looking as if annoyed at the capers old Boreas had been cutting up during the night. The wind went down as the sun rose higher, and long before noon all was calm and peaceful. The spirits of the company were restored. As the morning passed jokes and merriment helped to dispel the unpleasant experiences of the storm of the previous night. Handy's good humor was particularly conspicuous, as he had a cheerful word for all. His spirits were as buoyant as the craft that bore his troupers.

At breakfast—or after breakfast, rather—the momentous question rose as to where the next stand should be made. The company had already tested its ability as well as the forbearance of two audiences, and financially, if not artistically, came out fairly well. It is only fair to admit, however, not one individual member of the troupe made what is designated as a personal success. There was now money in the treasury, and plenty of confidence to go with it. The consensus of opinion, however, appeared to be that "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was a little too risky to repeat. It was admitted that *Eva* was not what might be described as a howling success. Moreover, the boxes that did duty for ice floes were fortunately, or unfortunately, left behind on the golden sands of Long Island. In addition to that, the artist who performed the dog act and who as a barker in Coney Island might be considered clever in a way was now as hoarse as a second-hand trombone from a third-rate pawnshop let out for hire to a broken-down German band. An hundred and one

difficulties were interposed against the further presentation of the well-worn old drama. It was finally decided that *Uncle Tom* should be relieved from duty, for the present at least, and the play and the public given a rest.

CHAPTER V

"I would rather live in Bohemia than in any other land."

—JOHN BOYLE O'REILLY.

The main point to be decided was the selection of the town in which the next exhibition should be made. Various places were named, their resources summed up, and the peculiarities of the inhabitants canvassed. None of them seemed to the assembled wisdom of the company to fill the bill. Handy apparently appeared to take slight interest in the deliberations, but his active brain, notwithstanding, was at work. He was considering the situation, and quietly letting his companions ventilate their views before offering his. At length the exchange of opinions reached the stage when the sage deemed it was proper to speak.

"Eureka!" he exclaimed, "I have it."

"Suffer us not to remain in ignorance," urged the comedian. "Do not dissemble—enlighten us."

"Newport!"

"Newport!" they all repeated in surprise.

"Newport!" Handy replied calmly, and the company looked at each other and then turned their gaze on Handy.

"He's off his base," said the dwarf. "Why, we wouldn't take in money enough to pay for the lights. Newport! Great Cæsar's ghost!"

"We'll never get out of the place alive," volunteered the dog-man.

Handy merely smiled as he listened to his companions' objections, but he was firm in his resolve to have his way.

"Newport, my friends," began Handy, complacently, "is our mutton; and when I explain my reason for the selection I think you will concede the wisdom of my choice. Society, or the blue blood of the country, as it is regarded by some, make annual visits about this time to Newport, to enjoy themselves and to be amused and entertained. We can give them an entertainment such as they have never seen before, and possibly may never see again. However, you never can tell. Anything and everything in the way of novelty goes with them. It matters not what it may be so long as it is odd, new, or novel. Remember, we live in a changeable, hustling, ragtime age. Coon songs are almost as popular with the best of them as grand opera, and more readily appreciated. If we don't surprise and amuse them I shall be very much disappointed. A tent show in staid, fashionable old Newport is an unheard-of undertaking, and we will have the honor, and, I may add, the profit of inaugurating the fashion. There's the rub. The very novelty and the boldness of the undertaking cannot, in my humble judgment, fail to appeal to these pleasure-seekers. Of course, we can hardly expect them to invite us to remain for the rest of the season. But let that pass. That's another consideration. It is a one night only racket, and trust me we'll do business. When they will have the—the a—well, call it pleasure of listening to that strenuous band of ours on parade, it will be the talk of the town. Mark what I say," and Handy smiled.

"Good heavens, Handy, old man!" exclaimed the Little 'Un tremulously, "you are not going to let that band loose on the unsuspecting inhabitants, are you?"

"Such is my fell purpose," he replied.

"Is there a police force there?" queried the comedian; "for if there be you can hand me my divvy right now. Tie the *Gem* up to the first rock we come to and put me ashore. No Newport for mine, thank you."

"Say, what is the matter with all of you? Does the name of Newport faze you? Don't you know that human nature is the same the world over in all time and in all places, and that the venturesome fellow appeals to all classes—rich as well as poor? Let me tell you, boys, if you will stand by me in this deal I'll pull you through all right. Besides, the success of our Newport date—and in the height of the season, too—will be something to boast of when we get back to the Great White Way. It sounds big—some style about it, and, take it from me, boys, style is everything in our profesh just now. You may have no talent, and not be able to act even a little bit, but if you have style and cheek and put up a good front you can count on an engagement every time. That's the kind of stuff stars are made of now."

Handy's matter-of-fact argument was sufficient. He carried his point. The company agreed to do Newport and take chances. It had previously been decided to shelve "Uncle Tom's Cabin." So that perplexing matter was settled. The important consideration, however, arose, what should they

substitute. A variety of pieces were named, but no decision was reached. Handy's wonderful fertility of resource at length came to the rescue and brought forth, much to the amazement of all, "Humpty Dumpty." They had, it is true, no columbine, but a little thing like that did not trouble the irrepressible Handy.

"Do not the annals of the American stage lay bare the fact," quoth he, "that on one occasion in Wallack's old theatre, when it was located downtown on Broadway, near Broome Street, in New York, during the run of John Brougham's brilliant burlesque, 'Pocahontas,' with the famous author himself in the cast as *Powhattan*, and Charles Walcot as *Captain John Smith*, the extravaganza was given for one night only without a *Pocahontas*. And the records say it was the most remarkable and amusing performance of its entire run."

Plays with and without plots are frequently presented nowadays in many of our so-called first-class theatres, with players of no experience and little natural ability. The public accepts them because they are offered nothing better. But that's neither here nor there at present. In "Humpty Dumpty" they had a good standard name. Just old enough to be new.

"It is true," Handy argued, "we have not the necessary stage equipment for a metropolitan production. The only thing we have, for that matter, is the name. That is enough for us, and we are going to do the best we can with it. Ordinary actors, together with all the necessary equipment of props and scenery, might be able to attempt a presentation of the famous pantomime, but it takes your strolling players, bred and brought up in the old stock school, to turn the trick without them."

It was a lazy day on board the little vessel. There was no wind. The sun poured down his rays so fiercely that it was almost unbearable. It was a dead calm. All the sailing vessels within sight were motionless. Not a sound disturbed the monotony of the scene, save the distant beat of the paddles or propellers of an approaching or receding steamboat. Newport, the gay world of the summer metropolis of fashion, loomed up in the distance, looking as beautiful as an alliance of art with nature could make a favored location. This was the Mecca toward which those on board directed their eyes and thoughts.

Evening came, and with it a refreshing breeze. Once more the *Gem* was under headway, and shortly after sundown the little vessel was safely in port, her anchor dropped, and the sails snugly furled. As soon as everything was made shipshape on board, Handy and a member of the company rowed ashore to see how the land lay from a stroller's point of view as well as to select a site for the tent.

CHAPTER VI

"What strange things we see and what queer things we do."

—'TIS ENGLISH, YOU KNOW.

It was the height of the season. The colony was alive with the wealthy and fashionable ones of the republic. Thousands of bright lights shone through the clearness of the purple night, and music filled the summer air with melodious sound. Life, apparently devoid of care, and pleasures with youth, beauty and excitement, were blended in harmonious ensemble. Handy took in the entire situation. He read, and read correctly, too, the constituency to which he was about to appeal. An ordinary theatrical company going there and hiring a hall, he concluded, would be nothing out of the usual run, and the chances are the performance would fall flat, stale and unprofitable. The possibility for the success of the tent, on account of its novelty, appealed strongly to his optimistic imagination. He was determined to carry the place by storm. A vacant lot close to one of the fashionable drives was secured for the scene of the thespian operations.

"Here pitch we our tent," said Handy, "and don't you make any bloomin' error about it. 'Tis the boss place. Elegant surroundings; magnificent locality, easy to reach, and lots of room for carriages to come and go!"

It may, perhaps, be as well to mention that the date selected for the entertainment was Saturday, just two nights ahead. For that same night a grand operatic concert was announced, under the patronage of an aspiring clique, in another part of the town. Good artists, though somewhat ancient, were billed to take part in it. The craze for the antique then, as now, had no such potency as may be positively relied upon. Well-seasoned age has its disadvantages. Fashion is ever capricious in the selection of objects for its recognition. So far as Handy was concerned, the operatic enterprise did not in the least disturb his mind.

It was rather late when he got aboard. All hands, however, were on the look-out for him, anxiously awaiting his return. He briefly summed up the result of his work on shore; explained what he purposed to do, and concluded by impressing upon the members of his company the necessity of making all preparations with a view to rapid movements both before and after the performance.

After all the others had turned in for the night Handy remained on deck cogitating over his plans

and perplexing his brain over approaching futurities. At length he too stretched himself out for sleep. He was up with the sun. Like a celebrated statesman of bygone days, he was going to make the greatest effort of his life.

By noon next day he received from the local printer the proof sheet of a bill of the play. It was a curiosity in its way, and a copy of it may interest the reader. It read as follows:

THE INDEPENDENT THEATRE!

THE GREATEST SHOW OF ITS KIND ON EARTH!

FUN UNDER A TENT.

On this Saturday Evening

**Will be presented for the first and only occasion,
Under the Distinguished Patronage of Everybody,
the Great Spectacular and Classic Pantomime
HUMPTY DUMPTY,**

By a company of well trained star artists.

THE ONLY SHOW OF ITS QUALITY IN EXISTENCE.

Those who see the performance will never forget it.

SECURE YOUR SEATS EARLY.

*By special request of a number of distinguished visitors the
performance will not begin until 8:30.*

Carriages may be ordered for any hour.

**Box sheet ready at noon Saturday, corner of Vanderbilt
and Astor Avenues.**

When Handy read the programme to his company they were so astonished they scarcely knew what to say. At first they appeared to regard it as a joke. Handy's manner betokened earnestness. His companions thought it best to withhold their curiosity and await further developments. Their manager they knew to be a man of action—a species of Oscar Hammerstein in embryo, with a blending of Wilkins Micawber and Mulberry Sellers mixed in.

The company employed the afternoon in folding circulars and programmes. Handy himself was deep in the study of the élite directory, and under his direction a large number of envelopes were carefully addressed. The work went on systematically. Night at last arrived, and all hands enjoyed a respite from clerical labor. At nine o'clock the company went ashore, carrying with them their tent, costumes and properties—such as they were. It was a busy night on land, and their strenuous exertions, under the cover of darkness, accomplished wonders under Handy's guidance. It was next door to daylight when they got back to the ship to take a rest before the arduous work of the eventful day began.

Before noon the canvas showhouse on the corner was the principal subject of conversation throughout the town. During the night the strollers had set up their tent, and there was scarcely a house in town in which they had not placed handbills and circulars announcing the coming performance. No matter where an inhabitant wandered one of the "Humpty Dumpty" programmes was sure to be found. The people at first glance regarded the announcement with some degree of doubt, but the appearance of the tent, with the flags flying, dispelled that fear. The tent seemed to have got there by magic. Like the palace of Aladdin, it had sprung into existence during the night. Its appearance excited curiosity and provoked gossip, and the announcement of "Humpty Dumpty" was a puzzle. With the most unparalleled nerve messenger boys were dispatched to the fashionable cottages with circulars soliciting patronage and inviting attendance, and a considerable number of the cottagers, attracted by the novelty of the undertaking, concluded it would be a good joke to go to see the extraordinary show.

"We'll paralyze 'em," said Handy to his fellow-players, as they were grouped together on the stage preparing red lights, which he proposed to use as a species of illumination. "Wait until I let the band loose in the streets, and if it don't fetch 'em, well, I'll quit the business."

"Handy, methinks we made a bloomin' blunder," remarked the Little 'Un. "We ought to have billed the town for a week."

"A week?" queried the property man in some surprise. "Why so, may I ask, my noble critic?"

"Well, to be frank with you, because if we did, methinks after once or twice having made acquaintance with our band, 'tis dollars to doughnuts they would have substantially staked us to

leave town."

Handy looked at the speaker with a glance of mingled cynicism and humor, and turning to the treasurer inquired, "How is the advance sale?"

"Ninety-seven and a half dollars," replied the secretary of the treasury.

"Good enough! We're away ahead of expenses now."

At eight o'clock there was some excitement noticeable down near the water convenient to one of the avenues. A few minutes later and the band, led by Handy, came forth. As the musicians marched the crowd increased. Up the principal street the strollers paraded, preceded and accompanied by a crowd of urchins and curiosity seekers. People came to the doors to look and hear, and many windows had their occupants. The streets were crowded, and by the time the band reached the tent it was fairly well filled. It might be as well to say that the majority of those who went to witness "Humpty Dumpty" did so for the pure fun of the thing, and determined to have the lark out. There was no orchestra, for the orchestra was the band, and the band had to do the acting.

The curtain went up somewhere about the hour announced. Had poor dead and gone G. L. Fox, the original *Humpty*, and the greatest pantomimist of the American stage, been living and among the audience, he could not have failed to enjoy the performance. It is impossible to describe it in detail.

After a brief period the most friendly relations were established between the people before and beyond the footlights. Remarks full of fun and humor were freely exchanged. Handy played *Humpty*, and introduced by way of variety a breakdown that, in the manipulation of his legs, would have made Francis Wilson grow green with envy. Smith was the *Pantaloon*, and obligingly entertained the audience, by special request, with the song of "Mr. Dooley," in the chorus of which the audience joined with vigor. The song is not new, but Smith's particular version, as well as his vocal rendition, was. The dwarf, who posed somewhat as a magician and sleight-of-hand man, undertook for some reason or other to attempt the great Indian box trick. Two gentlemen from the audience were invited to come on the stage to tie the performer with a rope. This was a most unfortunate move. Two well-known yachtsmen, and good sailors to boot, saw the chance for additional fun, and accepted the invitation with alacrity. They set to work and knotted the little man so tightly that he yelled to them, for heaven's sake, to let up. The audience could restrain itself no longer with laughter. It was plainly to be recognized that the show was fast drawing to a close.

"Stand him on his head," spoke some one at the rear of the tent.

"Pass him along this way, my hearties, and we'll take a reef in his dry goods," cried out someone else.

"We won't do a thing to him," chipped in a third humorist in the center of the tent.

The tent was convulsed with laughter and merriment had full swing. It was indeed a most remarkable performance, and the best of good nature prevailed. At the moment when the hilarity was at its height a commotion was heard outside of the tent. The band, or a portion of it, burst forth once more in the street with the most discordant sounds mortal ears ever heard. This brought the performance on the stage to a close.

"I would never have been able to get them out of the tent," explained Handy afterwards, "only for my letting the band—that is, the worst portion of it—loose on the outside."

To make a long story short, as the saying goes, the poor players cleared over three hundred dollars by the night's show, while the distinguished artists who gave grand opera in homeopathic doses in another end of the town sang to almost empty benches. Handy told no untruth when he announced on the bills that "those who witnessed the performance will never forget it."

Years have rolled by since this company of poor strolling players attempted "Humpty Dumpty" in Newport, but the memory of that night still remains green in the minds of many.

CHAPTER VII

"He employs his fancy in his narrative and keeps his recollections for his wit."

—RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.

A more delightful morning than that which followed the night of the strollers' eventful performance it would be difficult to imagine. It was the Sabbath, and the spirit of peace seemed to exercise its influence all around. The sun shone brightly; a gentle breeze diffused its cooling power, and the surface of the water was calm and placid. The graceful yachts riding at anchor were decked as daintily in their gay bunting as village maidens celebrating a fête. There was little of active life afloat or ashore. Those on board the pleasure craft presented an appearance

different from that which characterized their movements the days previous. It was, indeed, a day of rest.

Among the fleet of pleasure craft lay the *Gem of the Ocean*. She was not a comely craft; her sides were weather-beaten, and her general appearance homely and unprepossessing; but the same waters that bore the others bore her. In her homeliness she presented a strange contrast to her surroundings. In the composition of those who were her occupants there was still greater difference. The men who trod the decks of the yachts were seekers after the pleasures of life, while those on board the *Gem* were engaged in the hard struggle to win bread for the loved ones who were miles and miles removed—living in want, perhaps, yet hoping for the best and for what expectancy would realize. The one set comprised the lucky ones of fortune—the butterflies of fashion; the other the strugglers for life—the vagabonds of fate. Yet these vagabonds had homes and mothers, wives and children, to whom the rough, sun-browned, coarsely clad men of the *Gem of the Ocean* were their all, their world, and on the exertion of whose hands and brain they depended for food, raiment, and shelter. These poor strolling players had homes,—humble, it is true,—but still they were homes, which they loved for the sake of the dear ones harbored there.

The forenoon was spent in letter writing. How eagerly these letters were longed for only those who hungered for tidings from absent loved ones can explain. There is a magic influence in these silent messengers. Freightened with consolation, joy, or sorrow, they are anxiously awaited. How much happiness do they not bring into a home when laden with words of tenderness and affection! Home! ah, he is indeed no vagabond who has a home, however modest, and dear ones awaiting to welcome him when he returns, tired and weary with his struggle in the race for advancement.

Before midday the occupation of the morning was completed, and after a hearty meal the company gathered aft to pass away the time and talk over the past as well as to ventilate the prospects for the future. They were enjoying one day's rest, at least. Seated in the companionway was Handy, the high priest of the little organization.

"Do you think, gentlemen, on mature reconsideration," began Handy, "we might take another shy at 'Uncle Tom,' and do business?"

The subject was thrown out for general discussion. The Little 'Un was the first to respond. He had been an *Uncle Tommer* for years, and his views consequently on the matter were regarded with consideration.

"Gentlemen," he commenced, "the 'Uncle Tom' times are dead and gone. The play has had its day. To be sure, if it was resurrected and put on with what might be called an elaborate presentation, with a phenomenal cast, it might catch on for a brief spell. Of course, the cast would be an easy enough matter to get, as casts go. Stars nowadays, such as they are—Heaven save the mark!—are more plentiful than stock. But let them rest at that. I have known the time when there were as many as fifty *Uncle Tommers* on the road—all doing well, if not better. There were no theatrical syndicates in those times to limit the enterprise and energy of the aspiring though poor and ambitious manager. 'Uncle Tom' audiences were different from those who attended other theatrical snaps. There was so much of the religious faking mixed in with the old piece that it caught the Sunday-go-to-meeting crowd and drew them as a molasses barrel will draw flies. That class of people reasoned that 'Uncle Tom' wasn't a real theatre show—it was a moral show. What fools we mortals be? Didn't some poor play actor say that, or did I think it out myself? Well, no matter now. But don't the newspapers tell us that there was a big bunch of people in New York City at one time who used to flock to Barnum's Museum, which stood opposite St. Paul's Church, on Broadway, and how they'd scoop in the show there simply because old Barnum called his theatre a lecture-room. It was the lecture-room racket that caught them. The old showman was a cute one—slick as they made 'em. When the museum burned down, didn't he go to work and sell the hole in the ground the fire made to James Gordon Bennett, the elder, founder of *The Herald*, and got the best of the famous editor in the sale into the bargain. Ah, those were the good old times!"

"The palmy days of the drama, I suppose," interjected Handy.

"Palmy fiddlesticks!" laughingly chimed in one of the group.

"Oh, joke as you may, boys, but I am giving you the straight goods," continued the Little 'Un, handing out a little bit of reminiscent news of days gone by that will never be duplicated.

"He's dead right. Speakin' of those days," added Smith, "I remember well the times gone by in the old Bowery Theatre on certain gay and festive occasions to have seen as many as seventeen glasses of good old Monongahela whisky set up in the green-room and not a man took water when called upon to do his duty. They have no green-rooms any more. But let me tell you that's where the managers of the present day take their cues from, for those after-performance first-night stage suppers that are frequently given for the entertainment of the principal players, a few select friends, and a big bunch of newspaper scribes. On the stage, mind you, not in the green-room, for the green-room is now a thing of the past."

"Were you in the old Bowery shop then?" inquired Handy.

"Was I? What! Well, I should smile! You know me. Say, you may talk of the realistic drama of these degenerate days—why, they aren't one, two, nine with the shows of days gone by. Oh, you may laugh about stage realism and chin about real race-horses in racing scenes, and real society

women to play real ladies, real burglars to crack unreal property safes, and real prize-fighters to do their prize-fighting fakes, in addition to attempting to act, but let me tell you fellows that the managers who are gone never missed a trick when they had to do a realistic stunt."

"Well, you ought to know, Smith," said Handy.

"Why, hang it, man alive! they did everything in the show business as good then as they do now; and what's more, they didn't have to import actors from abroad nor send over to the other side for stage managers to teach the company how to act. Was I in the old Bowery in them days? Was I? Sure, Mike! I went in there as a call-boy. Let me see—when? Oh, yes, I remember. It was the season that 'The Cataract of the Ganges' was brought out. Yes, sir, and they gave the 'Cataract' with real water, too, and make no bloomin' error about it either!"

"Oh, come, come there, old man! Draw it mild. Don't pile it on too thick," interposed the doubting Thomas of the party and the most juvenile member of the troupe. "We can't stand all that. We are willing to swallow the whisky in the green-room, but water on the stage—oh, no! that's a little too much of a good thing. Why, my gentle romancer, the Croton water pipes weren't laid in the city in them days. Then how the mischief could they give the waterfall scene? With buckets, tubs, or with a pump—which? or with all three combined?"

For a moment the speaker was nonplussed for an answer. He felt embarrassed, and looked so. He was about to make reply when another of the company who, by the way, was an old-timer like himself, boldly came to the rescue.

"He's right," boldly asserted the new contributor to the conversation, "dead right. I remember the stunt myself."

It may be as well to state that Smith's veracity about theatrical things in general was not what it should be. His stories never could keep companionship with truth. He had so ingenious a manner of prevarication that he actually believed his own tales. If what Smith at odd times, when he happened to be in the vein, related of himself was true, then he might be credited with having acted in nearly every city this side of the Rockies and have supported all the great stars. He was closely approaching his fiftieth year, yet he maintained he had participated in the principal theatrical productions of a generation previous, with the most reckless disregard of probabilities. He seemed to have no appreciable estimate of time or place when relating his marvelous experiences.

"Yes, sirree," said Smith, "I can call the turn on that trick. Why, the thing is as fresh in my mind as if it only happened last night. Maybe you don't believe me. Well, every man is entitled to his own belief, but let me explain how I remember it so well."

"Fire away! We're all attention."

"Well, it happened in this way. I was engaged in the old National Theatre in Chatham Street at the time when the 'Cataract' was brought out, and it made old man Purdy, the manager, so hoppin' mad to think that his Bowery rival should get the bulge on him with a scene like the waterfall that he determined to see Hamblin and go him one better. Now what do you think he did?"

"Put on the piece with two cataracts," innocently suggested Handy.

"No, he didn't put on no two cataracts either," replied Smith, somewhat indignantly.

"Well, then, be good enough to let us know how he got square."

"He went to work and announced the production of 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves,' with forty real thieves in the cast. How was that for enterprise, eh?"

"Great! Were you in the cast?" inquired the low comedy gentleman.

"Nit! I wasn't of age then. You can't be legally a criminal under age. Don't you know there's a society for the protection of crime?"

"Excuse me. No reflection, I assure you. I did not intend to be personal. I was merely trying to find out how the old man filled out his cast."

"Well, my boy," replied Smith patronizingly, "think it over a minute, and you will realize that the morals of the old days were in no respect different from those in which we now live. Thieves, then as now, were a drug in the market, and the City Hall stood precisely where it stands to-day. Thieves in those times frequently masqueraded as grafters."

"Smith," said Handy, "you take the cake," removing the briarwood from his mouth to knock the ashes from the bowl preparatory to loading up for a fresh pull at the weed.

It was in this harmless manner the afternoon was allowed to slip by in the exchange of yarns. Many strange and comical experiences were related by the happy-go-lucky little group.

The shades of evening began to fall before there was any perceptible lull in the gossip. The past was being rehearsed and made food for the present. How often do we not recognize that men live over again their past in recalling their experiences in the dead years that have passed away for ever! How fondly do they revive old memories, though many of them perhaps were associated with pain and sorrow! The poor players lived their lives over again in the stories they exchanged

on the deck of the *Gem of the Ocean* as she lay at anchor off Newport that peaceful Sunday evening.

CHAPTER VIII

"Every one shall offer according to what he hath."

—DEUT.

All hands, at Handy's request, turned in early, as he was determined to make an early start down the Sound. He had not yet decided where his next stand should be. The selection lay between Stonington and New London. If fortune continued to favor him he felt confident of accomplishing something worth seeking for in either place. There were certain reasons, however, why one of them should be steered clear of; but Handy's memory as to names was somewhat vague, so he resolved to sleep on the thought before he determined on his course.

Handy was the first man up and stirring next morning. The others, however, were not far behind. The wind was favorable and the indications were all that a sailor could wish for. After a hearty breakfast the anchor was weighed and the *Gem* was once more under way, with all sails set. The Little 'Un was somewhat timorous and apprehensive of a repetition of the trouble that overcame him the night before they played the Long Island town on the circus man's paper, but he appeared to be satisfied by Handy's assurance that it never stormed on the Sound in the daylight. His looks indicated that he had doubts as to the truth of the assurance.

The run down the Sound was uneventful. There was no one sick on board, and all were in a cheerful mood when they came to anchor in the Thames River, off New London, the town in which Handy finally determined next to try his fortune. The company had been out at this time nearly two weeks. Though all its members were strong and hearty, their sunburnt looks and somewhat dilapidated apparel did not contribute to the elegance of their personal appearance. Most of them looked like well-seasoned tramps. Handy recognized this. He also knew that though the Nutmeg State was at that time regarded as a paradise of tramps, the inhabitants did not, as a rule, take kindly to the knights of the road. This may be uncharitable and unchristianlike, but people have got to accept the situation as they find it.

No one went ashore until after nightfall. Then Handy and Smith made a landing in the small boat, and surveyed the situation. An available vacant lot was picked out. Ascertaining there was to be an agricultural fair there the following Thursday, that night was selected for the Strollers' next effort. On the prospectors' return to the vessel a council of war was held, at which the plan of operations and course of action were freely discussed.

"It won't do," said Handy, "to try them on 'Uncle Tom,' and I hardly think they'd stand for 'Humpty Dumpty' as we give it. I've been here in the good old summer days before many a time and oft, and I am conversant with the kind of audience we've got to stack up against. On mature reflection, I have come to the conclusion that a variety or vaudeville entertainment this trip will be most likely to appeal to their sensibilities. Song and dance, imitations of celebrated histrionic celebrities, coon acts, legerdemain exhibitions, the famous Indian box trick, and——"

"Easy there," interrupted the dwarf. "Who's goin' to do the box trick?"

"Why, you, of course," replied Handy.

"Not on your life. Count me out on that stunt, Mister Manager. New London is a seaport town. There are vessels in port and sailors on shore. My Newport experience has taught me a lesson. The sailor men there tied me up so darned tight that you'll never get me to undertake any such job as that again within a hundred miles of seawater."

"But——"

"No buts about it. I know when I've had enough. Skip me."

"Then I'll do the act myself," retorted Handy, with a slight exhibition of feeling.

"K'rect, old man. You're welcome to the stunt. I pass every time when there's any rope-tying business in a seawater town."

"Smith, you can give them a banjo solo, do a clog dance, and afterwards wrestle with your celebrated imitations you know so well, and do so badly, of John Drew, Dave Warfield, Nat Goodwin, Sarah Bernhardt, and Sir Henry Irving."

"But I never saw Irving or Bernhardt," interposed Smith.

"Neither did the audience. What's the matter with you? And for a wind-up you can give them a stump speech, and I'll bill you as Lew Dockstader, second. We have got to make up our programme, please remember. If you don't want to take a shy at Dockstader, name someone else equally prominent. It's all the same to me. When I do that Indian box trick I propose to bill myself as Hermann XI. Darn it, man, we have to have names! This company, bear in mind, is made up of

an all-star cast."

"All right then, say no more," said Smith.

"Say," continued Handy, addressing the ambitious young man of the troupe, "don't you think you could manage to take off Billy Crane? And give them some exhibitions of his genius in scenes from his many-sided repertory, and we'll star you on the bills."

"Excuse me," replied the comparatively juvenile and promising artist, "but might I inquire who is going to look after my wife and the kid if that New London congregation should tumble to the joke? No, sir. Mr. Crane, permit me to inform you, is a fearless and experienced yachtsman; every hair in his head, nautically speaking, is a rope yarn. He is, as well, a good actor, and New London is a yachting port. Not on your life! Billy Crane is too well known here, so in justice to my physical welfare I must decline the honor of being so presented."

"Well, gentlemen," returned Handy somewhat dejectedly, "these unseasonable, frivolous, and unbusinesslike objections are really disheartening and unworthy of a conscientious member of the histrionic calling. Let me tell you that you are the first actor I ever heard of ever having declined the distinction of being elevated to the position of a star. In the words of the immortal bard, 'Can such things be and overcome us like a summer's dream without our special wonder?' Go to. Were it not that my hair is red and I have no suitable wig—and what would Sweet William be without a wig?—I'd do Crane myself."

After further discussion on minor details the programme was arranged for Thursday night. The next day posters were in evidence all through the town. The fair grounds were literally strewn with handbills. Handy was a great believer in printer's ink, and he used his paper with a lavish hand. The show was announced for two nights—Thursday and Saturday. The variety entertainment was billed for Thursday night, and "Pinafore," with an all-star cast, was promised for Saturday evening. The company had no knowledge about the "Pinafore" scheme. When Handy was questioned about it, he satisfied his questioners with the assurance that it was all right, and he would explain matters later on. His assurance was sufficient. The company knew their man.

Wednesday night the tent was put up. That day Handy succeeded, for a consideration, in inducing the country band that played during the day at the fair to perform a like office for his show at night, and do the duty of an orchestra for the performance.

The afternoon of the day of the show an unexpected storm loomed up, which threatened the enterprise with destruction. It seems that Handy had visited New London before with a somewhat similar venture, and had been compelled by financial circumstances which he was unable to control to depart the town in a hurry, leaving behind him an unpaid printer's bill. Now a slight omission of that character very easily escaped Handy's memory. The printer, on the contrary, being a thoughtful man, on finding that Handy was the manager of the new all-star theatrical outfit, made his appearance with the sheriff and a writ of attachment. For a time the aspect of affairs was anything but cheering. The printer was as mad as the traditional hatter. Fortunately the sheriff, who was an old Bowery man in days past, and a pretty decent and sympathetic kind of a fellow, discovered in Handy an old acquaintance, and magnanimously came to the rescue and volunteered to help him out of his difficulties. The kind-hearted official guaranteed the payment of the printer's bill, to be taken out of the first receipts that came in at the box office. This arrangement being mutually agreed upon, the preliminary work progressed actively.

The night brought a crowd, composed mainly of the country people who had attended the fair. It was the biggest, best natured, and most easily entertained audience a theatrical company ever played to. There were more bucolic auditors gathered together in the tent than the troupe had seen previously. Handy had the country band well in hand. He made them play down the main street and parade up to the tent. Then he got them inside and astonished his auditors with such a liberal manifestation of music that those present could not well decide whether they had come to listen to a concert or have an opportunity to see the real "theayter" actors. Handy evidently was determined to furnish them with music sufficient to last them until the next Fair day. The band played so long that the town element among the audience became somewhat unwelcomely demonstrative.

The curtain at last arose, and the variety portion of the entertainment began. The tent was well filled,—the front rows of seats being unpleasantly near the stage. The minstrel act in the first part was something unique and original. The country people took it seriously, but the town contingent, recognizing the fake element, started in to indulge in guying the performers. This incensed the countrymen. They had paid their good money to see the show without being subjected to annoyance from the town fellows. One particularly strenuous young New London dude had his derby smashed by an excited rustic who determined that his Phoebe Ann should enjoy the entertainment even if he himself had to make peace by teaching the city chap the way to behave himself and keep quiet. He evidently meant business and apparently had many friends who were not only ready, but willing, to assist him.

All the acts were short—very short—and between each of the acts there was more music by the band. At length the performance was brought to a close. Before the curtain fell Handy came forward, and, after thanking the audience heartily for the magnificent attendance and generous support, announced that on Saturday evening he would have great pleasure in presenting, providing negotiations in contemplation were perfected, for their consideration, the melodious

and tuneful grand comic opera, "Pinafore," in the presentation of which the company would be reinforced by several valuable additions, who were expected to arrive early on Saturday from the Metropolitan Grand Opera House.

"Great Scott—'Pinafore!' You don't mean to say," asked a friend a short time after hearing of Handy's moving adventures by land and water, "you had the nerve to attempt 'Pinafore' with your small band of strolling players, eh?"

"Play 'Pinafore!'" replied the irrepressible Handy, with a smile. "Of course, not. Never intended to. You see this was the situation; and the man who isn't equal to the position in which he places himself is bound to come out at the wrong side of the account book, when he is compelled to settle up. The 'Pinafore' announcement was for the edification of the New Londoners. I recognized the fact that the country people in their innocence and goodness of heart would take kindly to the entertainment we had prepared for them, but for the town chaps it was an altogether different proposition. When I announced 'Pinafore' I felt satisfied they would defer their energies and lay low for the 'Merry, Merry Maiden and the Tar,' determining to have a little fun of their own kind with us on Saturday; but after the performance we struck tent and by early morning we were once more out on the Sound for fresh fields and pastures new."

CHAPTER IX

"One man in his time plays many parts."

—AS YOU LIKE IT.

If the "boys" of New London looked forward to having a good old summer time with Handy and his all-star company the following Saturday evening, they were woefully out in their reckoning. Though "Pinafore" was announced with due managerial formality, perhaps somewhat ambiguous, for that particular occasion, when the time for presentation arrived there was not a vestige of either tent or performers. After the entertainment on the night of the fair the company went aboard the *Gem of the Ocean*. Handy alone remained ashore. As he had been manager, advance and press agent, and principal performer, he concluded to add another to his many responsibilities and become night watchman. The tent, stage properties, etc., had to be guarded, and he undertook the duties of guardian.

"Let no one turn in until I get aboard," said he to Smith, "and you row ashore in an hour's time. Mind, don't be later than that, and you needn't get here sooner. Tell the boys I have some work for them to do before they lay down to rest. Take a bite and a sup and join me here in an hour."

The two men parted; one with his companions for the boat at the end of the pier and the other to play the part of watchman over his outfit. A few of the town chaps lingered in the neighborhood of the tent.

In the country, as in the city, it is remarkable what a fascinating influence players exercise over young fellows who are ambitious to be regarded as the knowing ones regarding everything appertaining to the playhouse. How glibly the beardlings of the twenties or thereabouts will use the names of actors with whom perhaps they have never exchanged a word, in the silly belief they are raising themselves in the estimation of their auditors. It is an odd conceit, yet it prevails with the would-be fast young men of the present day. To hear some of these mollycoddles prate one who was not acquainted with their weaknesses would imagine these chaps were on intimate terms with players—who, as a rule, are slow to cultivate new acquaintances, attend strictly to their own business, and do not particularly relish that particular class of hanger-on. No man knew this type better than Handy. However, he never antagonized them. That he considered would not be wise policy. He good-naturedly humored them with much superficial gossip that really meant nothing. His good nature never forsook him, and he always had his temper well under control. He knew to a nicety the side his bread was buttered on. That happy-go-lucky disposition of his stood him in good stead many a time, and his free-and-easy manner of drawing people out frequently served as an aid to determine his future course of action. The limited exchange of conversation he had with the loungers satisfied him that he was right in his estimate that there would be a hot time in the old town on Saturday night if he remained. Finally the last dallier had his say, and, after an exchange of cordial good nights, departed.

Smith was at this time about due, and as he was noted for his promptitude, he was on hand to keep his date when the hour expired.

"What's the lay now, Handy, old man?" inquired Smith, as he joined his manager.

"Only this, and nothing more," replied the veteran melodramatically. "There's blood upon the face of the moon, an' blow my buttons, if your Uncle Rube is going to supply the gore. See!"

The answer was not altogether satisfactory, and Smith apparently was unable to grapple with the problem. It puzzled him; but then Handy himself was at all times more or less of a conundrum to him.

"Now then, bear a hand, send the boat back and get the company ashore as speedily as possible.

We have a few good hours' work on hand before we turn in."

Smith made quick time, and it was not long before the members of the all-star combination began to materialize out of the obscurity of the night as noiselessly as shadows.

"Say, boys," began Handy, in a low tone of voice confidentially, "we move to-night, and I want you to strike tent, pack and get everything aboard without delay. I'll explain all later on."

"Move to-night!" repeated Smith. "Don't we play here Saturday night?"

"Nary a play," responded the manager.

"But you announced 'Pinafore' from the stage!"

"Of that fact I am well aware," replied Handy, "but don't you know that 'Pinafore' is an opera, and let me further inform you that disappointments in opera are quite the regular thing. In fact, an impresario cannot get along legitimately, my boy, in grand opera or in fact any old kind of opera, without disappointments every now and then. The public expect operatic disappointments. They come naturally, and sometimes come as a godsend. You never can tell when a particular opera is announced what you are going to get."

"Then why don't you substitute something in place of 'Pinafore?'" meekly suggested the Little 'Un.

"Pardon me, my unthinking friend, but you lose sight of the fact that substitutions are always unsatisfactory, if not positively dangerous. Besides, they are strong evidences of weakness. We are nothing if not strong and resourceful. Suppose I substituted 'Faust,' for instance, and announced it with Melba as *Marguerite*, and suppose again that the famous Australasian prima donna caught an attack of the American grip that same afternoon, it would hardly do to substitute Marie Cahill or May Irwin to take her place, that is, provided we could have induced either of those distinguished artists to become the great diva's substitute. Oh, no! 'Tis out of the question. But, come, get a move on you. Let us be just to a public that has treated us well."

The members of Handy's company were under good discipline. They were satisfied that he had valid reasons for this sudden change of base, and therefore, went cheerfully to work. Handy himself started for the water-side, and after a brief absence was once more among them, doing the work of two men and encouraging his companions by energetic action and example. Their task was accomplished without the aid of light save that which was afforded them by the bright stars overhead. It was an hour before dawn when everything was placed on board and the tired strollers had gone below to court the rest and repose they both longed for and needed.

"Let her swing out in the stream away from the dock, captain," ordered Handy, when they were ready to start. "The tide is nearly flood and we can drop down the river with the first of the ebb. We can get outside early and then determine where next we'll make for."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the skipper.

CHAPTER X

"Originality is nothing more than judicious imitation."

—VOLTAIRE.

Next morning when the company appeared they were not a little surprised to find themselves far out to sea. The day was bright and all hands were in a cheerful mood. The first question asked of the energetic manager was "Where next?" He turned toward the inquirer and replied he never discussed business on an empty stomach when he had the opportunity of doing so on a full one.

"Lay her course south by east, cap," was his brief order to the sailing master. "Rather fancy we'll run in somewhere near Oyster Bay—where, I'll tell you later on."

When breakfast was served ample justice was done to the repast. Here, be it said, the company lived well. The best the market afforded was not too good for them. Handy was as capable a judge of a beefsteak as any man on the boards, and he bought the best. His companions knew it, and were willing at all times to go with a commission to the shop.

"Were you ever in the market, governor?" inquired the Little 'Un at the close of the meal.

"Yes, sir. I have frequently been in the market," was the prompt reply, "but like many other willing and anxious individuals somehow or other, no one ever reached my price."

"Oh, I didn't mean that, old man. I simply meant were you ever employed in a meat market, for that was as nice a piece of steak as I ever tackled, it was so tender and juicy. Unless a fellow was a judge he never could have picked out such a choice cut."

"Oh, I did not quite comprehend you! I now catch on. Well, you all, of course, know that I served in the army and—"

"I told you," whispered Smith, in a humorous aside, "he was a butcher."

"And, as I was about to remark, I had much experience in the commissariat depart——"

"Say," interposed the Little 'Un, who had frequently been an unwilling and tired listener to very many of Handy's well-worn war stories, "are you agoing to ring in a war story on us, old pard?"

"Well, I was merely about to explain that in keeping with my army experience that——"

"Nuff sed," remarked the dwarf, rising from his seat. "Good morning!"

"Some other morning" echoed Smith, and he too rose from his seat.

"Me, too. Ta ta! Tra la la!" lilted the light comedy man, as he pushed his empty plate to one side, and one by one the remainder of the Pleiades rose in solemn silence before Handy had time to realize that his war stories were away below par among the members of his company.

Handy remained alone for some time below, probably turning over in his mind the problem of the next venture, and then went on deck. He found his companions taking things easy in free and easy positions aft. It was a forenoon to satisfy every desire of those who love the open air. The wind was light—a nice sailing breeze—and the sun was not too warm. Few words were spoken, save inconsequent remarks now and then on some passing sail. The monotony of the situation was finally broken by the manager, as he proceeded to unburden himself of his intentions for the next entertainment.

"Our next move will be to play Saturday night, that is, to-morrow, in one of these little towns near by on the Long Island shore, and with that performance bring our tour to a close, return to the city, get a few more good people and lay out a new route. We have done fairly well, all things considered, on this trip, and we can afford to strengthen our organization and give the public something better, if not stronger. The pieces we have been presenting are rather ancient,—almost too classic,—though I must admit we offered them in a somewhat original manner. We must, however, keep pace with the times—be up to date. The simple life is all very fine in books, but, my friends, 'tis the strenuous life that produces the stuff. Excuse slang, but it is much employed nowadays, and vigorous emphasis is used even by the most refined. If we don't get new attractions I am afraid we may have to resort to giving away souvenirs. Souvenirs have, in their day, had all the potency of a bargain counter in a popular department store well advertised. Personally, I do not take kindly to the souvenir business. It isn't professional."

"That's all right," conceded Smith, "but an old piece frequently becomes new when you subject it to unique treatment. Now, for example, I don't think anyone has any kick coming at the original manner in which we gave 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' and 'Humpty Dumpty.' No one ever saw them so presented before. Of course, if we had one of these modern Shakespeares, that the commercial managers keep on tap, we could have a piece written for us while we were under way to the next night stand. But that's out of the question. I would like, in common with the rest of the push, to know what is going to be our next offering."

"Let me see. Just a moment's pause," replied Handy thoughtfully. "We might do a bit of a tragedy if we had the props, but we haven't got them. Besides, the trouble with most tragedies, as a rule, is the long cast, and in addition they do not give a compact all-star organization such as ours a chance to show what we really can do. We gave them our version of *Uncle Tom* nearly two weeks ago; and outside of Brooklyn, I conscientiously believe that once a year is often enough for the remainder of Long Island. On mature consideration, therefore, I have come to the conclusion that our best offering would be a minstrel grand opera concert entertainment. We have made an impression in that direction, and I am in favor of that which will sustain the reputation we have so admirably earned."

"Who's going to sing the solos, old man?" asked the Little 'Un. "You know, boss, the boys ain't much on the sing. They can work along all right with a good strong chorus when they once get started and warmed up, but when it comes down to the fine single throat work I am afraid we'll get in the soup."

"He's dead right," put in Smith, "the single singing—solos, I believe they call them—in the first part will be a hard nut to crack. We can't give a minstrel show without a first part. They'd never believe we were operatic minstrels without it, even if we didn't black up."

"Hold! Enough!" cried Handy, in his favorite Macbeth voice. "You make me a bit tired with this kind of baby talk. Haven't you fellows got common sense enough to know that it is not absolutely necessary to have a voice to be a singer? Suppose a singer once had a voice and lost it, would that be a good and sufficient reason for him or her to get out of the business? How many of them do it, eh? It is just the same with the singing trade as it is in our overcrowded profession. How many of the so-called actors that inundate the stage quit the boards when they know—if they know anything—they have no talent for it. You fellows give me a pain. Voices and singing! Pshaw! I'll fix all that! I'll give a couple of you good high-sounding Eytalian names, and I'll announce you as hailing from the Royal Imperial Conservatory of Stockholm, and I'd like to see the Long Island jay that will say you couldn't sing, even if you had as little music in your voice as the acrobatic star of a comic opera company."

"And now will you be good?" playfully chirruped in Smith.

"Now, Nibsy, you will have to tackle a solo; and as you are to be announced as a foreigner, you

must treat your audience to something different from anything they have heard before. As you will sing it, of course, none of those present, with, possibly, the exceptions of a few, will undertake to understand what you are driving at. A few will pretend they do—there are know-alls in every audience; the majority will take their cue from them, and that will settle the matter."

"I tumble. But might I ask if you have any choice in the operatic selection."

"No; none in particular, only that you must avoid any of the very familiar airs from 'Faust,' 'Trovatore,' or 'Lohengrin.' These great works have been so hackneyed by frequent repetitions at the Metropolitan Opera House and Hammerstein's, and Sunday sacred concerts, that they have been worn threadbare and become as commonplace as 'Mr. Dooley' or 'Harrigan.' Now let me think. Ah, yes! Have you heard that comparatively new opera by Punch and Ella called 'Golcondo?'"

"Search me. No."

"Well, then, I don't think the audience have either," replied Handy, "so your first solo will be from that delightful composition!"

"And for the encore, what?"

"The last part over again, if you can remember it, and we'll help you out in the chorus."

"Say, can't you let me know the name I am going to honor? And, by the way, there's one thing more I wish to be enlightened on. Will it be necessary for me to speak with a foreign accent before the show, in case I come across any of the inhabitants of the town before I go on?"

"Oh, no! That is not absolutely necessary. Don't you know that many of the Eytalian opera singers in these days are Irish, some are English, a big bunch are Dutch, Poles or Scandinavians, and quite a sprinkling of them Americans. No, it isn't essential to use the accent in private. You will be announced as Signor Nibsinsky!"

"Is that an Eytalian name?"

"Oh, Nibs, don't be so specific. Nibsinsky is as valid a name as any artist might select to adopt. I give it the Russian smack because of my Russian proclivities."

"Say no more, old man. Let it go at that."

"So far as the chorus is concerned, we know where we stand and what we can do—and the audience will before the show is over. As for jokes and funny business—they are easy. But, say, we ought to ring in a couple of instrumental solos. The banjo, of course, will do for one. It is new, because it is very old. So that's all right. For the other—now, let me think. By Jove, I've struck it! Little 'Un, you can do a violin solo in great shape."

"What! Me do a violin solo," answered the dwarf. "Why, you know very well I can only play a little bit, and only in an amateur way. Oh, no! Oh, no! Not this trip."

"Easy there, my festive fiddler. Easy there, and loan me your ear. I'll arrange that all right. You will be announced as a pupil of the great Ysaye, and of course, being a pupil of that wonderful magician of the violin, you must start in with a classical selection from one of those old masters. Which of them there's no use wasting time over. They won't be recognized. Then when it comes for you to get in your classic work, all you've got to do is to play as crazy as you can, bend your body, hug your fiddle, make your bow saw wood over the strings, look at times as if you were going into a trance or a fit, do any blame thing that may appear eccentric—for that, you know, is one of the characteristics of genius and originality—and you'll catch the crowd every time."

"But, say, Handy, what about the wig?"

"Oh, that's all serene. We've got it. You don't for a moment imagine I would have you go on as a star fiddler without a bushy head of hair! Not much. As the poet sings—"There's music in the hair."

"That settles it. My mind is easier now."

"But that's not all. When you get through with your classical gymnastics on the instrument, I will come down to the front and announce that you will kindly give an imitation of an amateur player wrestling with 'Home, Sweet Home.' There will be your great opportunity. The worse you play it the more successful you will be, for, don't you see, you will be closer to nature. I think that will be a great stunt. Don't you, boys?"

They all thought it would be immense; at least, so they said. The Little 'Un himself fairly chuckled with glee at the prospects of being an amateur virtuoso of the fiddle, even for one night only. The remainder of the programme was quickly made up. One or two brief sketches and a rather rough and tumble arrangement for the close, which the enterprising managers designated as "The Strollers' Melange," completed the night's entertainment.

CHAPTER XI

**"All places that the eye of Heaven visits
Are to the wise man ports and happy havens."**

—RICHARD II.

By midday the *Gem of the Ocean*, aided by a favoring wind, made good time and Handy determined to run in to a convenient little cove near Oyster Bay. He knew the locality and felt satisfied that if he had his usual share of luck he could make good and therefore add something to the company's treasury. By one o'clock the anchor was dropped and he and Smith made a landing and both started to do the usual prospecting. They were successful beyond their expectations. The little town which they proposed to honor with a visit was not far from the water. A small grove and a hill shut it out from a view of the Sound. The main road ran down to a narrow inlet which served as a kind of harbor for fishing boats, oyster sloops and clammers. Handy's well-trained eye lighted on an eligible site for the tent. It was a nice level plot with a fence about it. A good-natured Irishman named McGuinness owned the property, and Handy lost no time in opening negotiations and getting on his right side.

"An' yez want the use of the lot for a concert minstrel entertainment?" inquired the proprietor.

"Yes," replied Handy, "and for to-morrow night."

"An' yez are going to give the show under the cover of a tint?"

"That's about the size of it."

"Have yez got the tint?"

"We have, and the show that goes with it, and what's more, after you have witnessed the performance you'll say it is the best that ever struck the town. Moreover, I want you to bring your whole family with you and have seats in the first row for all of them."

"Well," said McGuinness, "I don't mind lettin' yez have the use of the lot, an' I'll do all I kin, in a quiet way, to help yez along, but there's one thing I want to be afther tellin' yez, an' it is this, that I'm thinkin' there will be the devil to pay whin Mr. Dandelion finds out there's going to be a minstrel entertainment here."

"How's that?" inquired Handy, "and who is Mr. Dandelion?"

"He's a very dacint kind of man, as min run at present," replied McGuinness, "even if he is a Methodist preacher, but he hates showmin like snakes. He don't seem to want the young people to have any fun or amusement at all, at all, shure. That's why I'm afraid he will raise ould Harry when he finds yez here. An' then again, don't yez see, there's a fair goin' on in his church, an' to-morrow is to be the big day, and iv yez are goin' to have your show to-morrow night, don't yez see he may think you would draw off some of his customers? Well, I don't go to his church, God help me, so yez kin have the use of the ground. But looka heer. Whisper, if it's all the same to you, don't put up the tint till after nightfall. I'll see yez again. I'm goin' home now," and Mr. McGuinness walked slowly up the road.

"Smith, me boy," spoke Handy, as soon as Mr. McGuinness was out of hearing, "we have struck a bonanza. Are we in it? Well, this is the best ever! Say, old fellow, when that sky-pilot casts his eyes on that tent of ours to-morrow morning there will be something doing about these diggins, and don't you forget it. Why, the amount of advertising he will give the show will do us more service than if we planted twenty acres of posters all over the fences that adorn the smiling landscape of this peaceful and prosperous community. Let us go aboard at once. The main biz is done. It's a dead sure cinch, Horatio."

No move was made on board until ten o'clock. The place was then as still as a country churchyard, and scarcely a light was to be seen in any of the houses when Handy and his company took possession of the lot and began the preliminaries for the following day's operations.

A few hours of energetic work and the tent was set up, and later on the stage properties, costumes and musical instruments were all safely lodged under the cover of the canvas. Two of the organization remained on guard and the others returned to the *Gem*.

The unexpected appearance of the tent next morning took the inhabitants completely by surprise. No one could tell how it got there. Like a mushroom it came up overnight. The farm-hands on their way to work halted to look it over; the oystermen and clammers on the way to their boats loitered near the spot to inspect it, and by nine o'clock most of the boys and girls within a mile of the place spread the news broadcast that there was an actors' show in town. About ten o'clock the news had reached the dominie, and half an hour later he was in consultation with the leading lights of his congregation. The consensus of views induced them to call upon Mr. McGuinness. The tent was on his property, and he, they concluded, when appealed to would no doubt order the trespassers off. They considered it an abomination, from their standpoint, for him to permit show-actors to offer an entertainment, and more especially on the last day of the church fair, when a numerous gathering was expected. A committee was accordingly appointed to wait on Mr. McGuinness, but unfortunately that gentleman was nowhere to be found.

At two o'clock in the afternoon Handy gave a free concert in front of the tent. The audience, it is needless to say, was not a critical one and was easily pleased. When it was over and the energetic manager announced a display of fireworks in the evening, both before and after the performance,

there wasn't a youngster within the sound of his voice who did not spread the cheering information far and wide. Those who came to attend the fair in the little church performed that duty early in the afternoon and afterward arranged to visit the tent show of the actors later on in the evening. The display of fireworks was not what one might expect to witness at Manhattan Beach in the height of the season, when that popular resort was swept by ocean breezes and when the renowned Pain was there, but there was sufficient red fire burned to light up the surrounding country. There was a crowd outside and when the doors were opened there was a rush for seats.

The house or tent was filled in a short time, and the audience was treated to a polyglot entertainment of the most remarkable character. Nibsinsky's Eytalian selections were listened to with some degree of attention and a considerable measure of perplexity. He could not be considered a success and no inducements could compel him to repeat the performance. But these things will occasionally happen even with some of the latest edition of stars! Ysaye's musical prodigy made some extraordinary exhibitions with his classical contortions, but his imitations of an amateur violinist with "Home, Sweet Home" won the approval of all present and brought down the house. It was voted the best thing of the whole show. The familiar choruses too pleased the young folks, so much so that they all joined in and had a jolly time. The grown people laughed heartily over all the threadbare jokes that were given, and which have been passing current in every minstrel show and country circus from the days of Dan Rice down to Lew Dockstader.

"It was, I have an idea, the worst show we ever gave," declared Handy a few days after while speaking of it, "but the people seemed to like it. Just as it is in New York, it is a difficult matter to strike public taste. That's what makes the manager's life like unto that of a policeman's—not a happy one. The people who paid to see the show made no complaint, and I don't think that I should."

"Do you think the dominie's opposition hurt your entertainment much?"

"Hurt it! Not in the slightest. On the contrary, I believe it benefited it. His opposition advertised the entertainment, and, by the way, advertising is another of these vexed problems most difficult of solution. I felt I owed his reverence something for what he unintentionally accomplished in our behalf, so how do you think I got square with him?"

"That's too much for me, old chap," answered his friend. "How?"

"Well, the next day was Sunday, and before we got away I called on Mr. McGuiness, to return him thanks for the way he treated us. 'Mr. McGuiness,' said I, 'you have been kind and generous to my little company of players, who are doing their best to make an honest living in their own peculiar way. I now come again to you to ask that you do me one more favor.' 'What is it?' said he. 'It is this,' said I. 'Will you accompany me to call on the dominie? He helped me with his opposition last night, and I want to get square with him if I can.' McGuiness hesitated. 'Oh, don't fear,' I assured him. 'I mean no harm. The fair at the little church, I learned, was to swell the fund that's being raised to help the widow and orphan. I want you to go with me to ask the dominie to accept the offering of a few poor strolling players to increase the fund.' McGuiness thrust his hand toward me, but said nothing. I could see he was affected, for there was a watery look in his eyes. We walked together in silence down the road until we reached the little church."

"And the dominie?"

"He met us like a man. And when I explained my errand, and handed him our little dole, and turned as if to leave, big, good-hearted McGuiness, his voice somewhat affected by his feelings, said, 'Howld on a minnit; I don't know, dominie, what he's givin' you, and what's more I don't care, but you can count on me, dominie, for double the amount.'

"I don't know when I felt so happy, as I walked down to the shore, between the dominie and McGuiness, for I felt we had done an act that men might well feel an honest pride in, while we made two men friends in that little village who might otherwise have remained estranged."

CHAPTER XII

"There are more things in Heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

—HAMLET.

The sun was making a golden set behind the skyscrapers of Manhattan as the *Gem of the Ocean* tied up to a wharf in the East River. The cruise was at an end. Taken as a whole, the venture had been successful. Those who embarked in it were once more back in sight of the great city, with lighter hearts and heavier pockets than when they left not quite a month before. All had had an agreeable time, and, what was of more importance, a profitable experience. Anxious ones were awaiting them. The strolling players, contrary to the practice of many of their guild who start out on similar ventures, did not return empty-handed. They had practical results to vouch for and explain their absence. Their endeavors had not resulted in all work and no pay. If they had

anxious moments and at times hard work, they had their recompense and earned their reward, and there were homes in which assistance was needed. They were solicitous, too, to hasten to the cherished ones who were waiting to welcome them, for strange as it may appear to the unthinking, the poor players who fret and strut their brief hours upon the stage have homes—homes that they prize beyond aught else and which to many of them are perhaps more dearly prized than is the marble palace by the millionaire. No one knew this better than Handy. He therefore lost no time in bringing his craft into port.

"We can't complain, boys," he exclaimed, "after all is said and done, of our undertaking. Here we are again under the lee of the big city, with money in our pockets and our homes close at hand. You are not sorry you took the chances," he continued, as the company gathered together before separating. "May good fortune always smile upon enterprise."

"Amen!" responded Smith, who regarded that ejaculation as the proper climax to his manager's peroration.

In half an hour the company were all ashore, each member homeward bound, and possibly turning over in his mind the many eventful episodes of the trip preparatory to relating them to those who might question them about the exploit. Stories of this character lose nothing by repetition.

Handy and his fellow-craftsmen had not been home a week when their adventures became the talk of the town, especially among the theatrical fraternity. As usual in somewhat similar cases, every impecunious player became desirous of immediately starting out upon the uncertain sea of theatricals. They reasoned that if a man like Handy could succeed, why could not they also turn the trick? Could they not even improve on his tactics? Of course they could! Were they not, they argued, better actors and had they not more experience as managers? Of course they were, and had! Where Handy had made twenties and fifties, might not they pick up hundreds? Of course there could be no doubt on that score. All this kind of speculation in words, however, ended only in talk. Those who indulged in it were mere theorists—not men of action and active brain like the commander of the *Gem of the Ocean* expedition, who put into execution his plans after he had well considered them.

When the veteran made his reappearance on the Rialto he looked as if he might be at peace with all mankind. He had nothing worse than a smile, even for his enemies. But then his enemies were few. His proverbial good humor and honesty of purpose disarmed the envious. The influence of kindly smiles and generous impulses go further in this matter-of-fact world than many people are willing to acknowledge. A cheerful and encouraging word frequently helps in the accomplishment of a task which without its influence might fall flat. Handy's dominant quality was his uniform good nature. He rarely looked on the dark side of life. He, no doubt, knew what it meant, but he never paraded his hardships before the world or bored friends or acquaintances with the hard luck of his lot. At times he was blue—what man at odd times is not so?—but at such periods he veiled his heart, face, and feelings and drew the sunshine of a smile between his disappointments and the outside world. With such a disposition success, as a rule, is but a question of time.

When he made his first appearance among his confrères his manner was a study. His face, from constant exposure in the sun, was bronzed and ruddy and his general get up was what his old friend Smith pronounced "regardless." In fact, Handy looked so well he scarcely recognized himself. He generally felt well, but to look the part and feel it is altogether a different proposition. His adventures with his all-star company had been so freely discussed in every haunt where actors most do congregate that inside of a week after the Pleiades returned the frequenters of the Rialto had the story by heart.

The grand comic opera episode at Oyster Bay especially appealed to a number of Handy's admirers. There were several who intimated that he go right in for grand polyglot opera and try and get hold of the Metropolitan Opera House. He smiled knowingly at the suggestion, and furthermore gave his volunteer advisers to understand that, in his estimation, that institution was under the control of much more accomplished fakers than his ambition aimed to reach. Besides, he reasoned, he was not the kind of man to attempt to take the bread and butter away from some other fellow. "My policy," said he, "is to live and let live; and if you cannot get enough people with the long green, as they call it, to at least guarantee the rent for the sake of art, fashion, and display—or as the English song puts it, 'for England, home, and booty'—the next best thing to do is to buy, borrow, or beg a tent and start out and go it alone in the open."

One evening as Handy was on his way homewards he accidentally ran across a friend who, as the saying goes, had seen better days, and who had at various times a widespread acquaintance with the ups and downs of theatrical life. This man's name was Fogg—Philander Fogg. In his way he was as much a character as Handy himself. The ways of each, though, were dissimilar. Fogg was what the Hon. Bardwell Slote would designate as a Q K (curious cuss). He on one occasion distinguished himself as an amateur actor, and barely escaped with his life in New Jersey for attempting to play *Othello* as a professional. In person he was tall, very slim, very bald, slightly deaf, and as fresh as a daisy. He had a general and miscellaneous acquaintance. His friends liked him because of his inability to see a joke. The consequence was they had many amusing experiences at Fogg's expense. The gossip of the stage he cherished and cultivated. This made him a favorite with a large circle of female acquaintances who go in for all that kind of thing. People living, as it were, on the fringe of society, who lay the flattering unction to their souls that they are living in Bohemia, and they are never so happy as when they are settled in the company of some pseudo-player discussing the drama and ventilating the small talk of the stage.

When Handy encountered Fogg the latter appeared in a hurry. There was nothing new in that, however. No one who had any acquaintance with him knew him to be otherwise. There are such people to be met every day and everywhere. He was a type.

"The very man I was looking for," was his greeting, on meeting Handy. "I want you to help me out. Great scheme! I'll take you in. I'm in a great hurry now to keep an appointment. Important, very important! Where can I meet you to-morrow forenoon? How have you been? Are you up in Beasant—no, Col Damas, I mean? Don't you do anything until you see me! Can you get Smith to —"

"Hold! Enough!" interposed Handy. "Fogg, what do you take me for? A mind reader or a lightning calculator? Now, then, one thing at a time! What's up?"

"I am going to have a testimonial benefit, and I want you to manage the stage and play a part. Do you catch on?"

"Business," answered Handy. "Anything in it, or is it a thank-you job?"

"Why, my boy, there's a cold five hundred plunks in it. Society ladies on the committee. They will dispose of the tickets. One of them wants to act. I've promised to let her try and give her the opening. 'The Lady of Lyons' will be the play, and I will be the *Claude*."

"Well, Fogg, may the Lord have mercy on the audience—as well as on *Melnotte*."

"Oh, hold up, old chap. Don't be rough on a fellow. You know very well I have played much more difficult roles. Haven't I played *Hamlet*?"

"You have, indeed," answered Handy, "and played the devil with him, too."

"This is positively rude," replied Fogg, "and only that I am aware you mean no real unkindness I would feel very much put out. I know you don't really mean it."

"Of course I don't. It was spoken in the way of fun. Now, let me know in what way I can help you and you can count me in. Business is business, old pal, and I know you will do the square thing."

"There's my hand on it. Now I must be off. Meet me at my apartment to-morrow forenoon at eleven and we'll go over the details."

"Count on me. I will be there. So long."

CHAPTER XIII

**"Life is mostly froth and bubble;
Two things stand like stone—
Kindness in another's trouble
Courage in your own."**

—THE HILL.

Next forenoon, promptly at eleven o'clock, Handy was at Fogg's house. A ring at the door-bell was responded to by that gentleman in person. Half a minute later both were settled down in Fogg's Bohemian quarters, which consisted of a small reception-room and still smaller bed-chamber. The reception-room was not luxuriously furnished, but it was by no means shabbily equipped. A piano stood in one corner, a writing-desk placed close to the window, and a well-used Morris chair were the most conspicuous articles of furniture. Photographs in abundance were scattered all around on the walls, and on a table there were enough old playbooks to make a respectable showing in a second-hand book store. The two men had not been seated more than five minutes when the bell at the hall door was rung, and in an instant Fogg was out of his chair and on his feet.

"What's the matter?" inquired Handy.

"I guess," replied Fogg, "that's the committee. They promised to be here at this hour. Excuse me for a moment," and before Handy could say another word Fogg was half-way down the first flight of stairs. The noise of the opening and closing of the street door was heard, and then succeeded a buzz of female voices accompanied by a patter of feet on the stairs. Before Handy had time to prepare to receive visitors, the door opened and Fogg, his face lighted up with the broadest kind of a smile, made his appearance, and ushered in the committee, which consisted of five blooming matrons who were instrumental in talking up and arranging for the proposed complimentary benefit. The ladies were not young; in fact, it was a long time since they had been. But their hearts were juvenile and they themselves were sympathetic and generously inclined. Handy was duly introduced, and then the female philanthropists and lovers of art commenced the business which brought them there, somewhat after this fashion:

"What a unique little snuggerly you have here, Mr. Fogg," began one.

"It is so artistic, don't you know, that it is too awfully sweet for anything," replied another.

"Ah! there's one of the best photos I have ever seen of the divine Sarah. Where did you get it, Mr. Fogg?" added a third. "That one of Maude Adams is fair, and that of Mrs. Fiske there in the character of—I forget the name—does not do her justice."

This medley of inconsequential conversation and chatter continued for fully half an hour without one word being spoken on the all-important subject they had presumably been brought together to arrange. They touched on everything theatrical, according to their lights, but that in which their friend was most interested. At length Fogg, in sheer desperation, broke the ice, and in a somewhat hesitating manner explained the way in which he had induced his friend, Mr. Handy, to be present at the conference and give them the benefit of his vast managerial experience and acknowledged histrionic ability in arranging the programme of the proposed complimentary testimonial. Moreover, Mr. Handy had postponed an important engagement in order that he might have the honor of managing the stage at the rehearsals as well as on the evening of the performance.

The ladies were in ecstasies.

"Oh, how charmingly delightful!" ejaculated the most rubicund of the committee. "And so you have finally determined, Mr. Fogg, on 'The Lady of Lyons' for the attraction."

"Yes, ladies, I have. A determination with which I feel satisfied you all will concede. Revivals of well-known successful plays are rapidly coming into fashion, and it is well to keep up with the progress of the times. I might mention a number of old plays managers have in contemplation but as Shakespeare says—I think it was the sweet Bard of Avon that so expressed himself—'Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.' That is why I have selected Bulwer's great romantic and poetic masterpiece—'The Lady of Lyons.' Besides, ladies, bear in mind it will afford Miss Daisy Daffodil a magnificent opportunity to appear as *Pauline*, a character, ladies, which has claimed the histrionic talents of many of the bright luminaries of the stage from the days of the glorious Peg Woffington to those of Leslie Carter."

"How well, how touchingly, Mr. Fogg speaks, and what a fund of valuable and truthful information he has entertained us with," said Mrs. Doolittle, the chairman of the committee. "A better selection than 'The Lady of Lyons' could not have been made, and what a splendid opportunity it will be for dear Daisy to show off that light blue watered silk of hers. It is so suitable to her complexion."

"Yes, dear," responded the lady sitting near her, "but will it light up well? I am given to understand that the electric light is most trying on blue. Now, don't you think that——"

"No, I do not, my dear. Pardon me, but I know what you were about to say. You were about to remark that——"

"Ladies," said Mr. Fogg, rising to the occasion and in a polite manner, "will you kindly excuse me when I venture to suggest that the matter of toilet is a thing you can arrange between yourselves and the fair young star, let us proudly hope, that is to be. But as my friend here, Mr. Handy, is a very busy man and his time valuable, might I suggest that we get down to business?"

"Quite right, Mr. Fogg," one of the ladies answered. "Let us amuse ourselves with business."

"How many will the house hold, Mr. Fogg?" inquired Mrs. Doolittle, in a rather authoritative manner, thoroughly in keeping with her exalted position as chairman.

"About eleven hundred," said Fogg.

"Only eleven hundred!" exclaimed the stout lady.

"Altogether too small."

"Certainly it is," continued the weighty one. "The Metropolitan Opera House should have been secured."

"Ladies," interposed Handy, "excuse me for buttin' in, but business is business, and that's the humor of it. Let me tell you, in all frankness, that if you can fill the house, take my word for it, as a man of some experience, you will have reason to congratulate yourselves on a great accomplishment. Bear in mind, ladies, that benefits are benefits, and that the theatre-going public take little or no stock in them. Unless you can rely on your friends coming up to the scratch—pardon me, I mean box office—and before the night of the show, mind you—you stand a good chance of getting it, as the poet touchingly tells us—I don't know what poet—where the chicken got the axe. Them's my sentiments!"

Handy's review of the situation and his matter-of-fact way of placing it before the committee caused some agitation. At length Mrs. Doolittle arose.

"Let me assure you, Mr. Handy, we have hosts of friends, and when they see our names on the programme they will be sure to come. Don't you agree with me, ladies?"

"It would be real mean if they didn't," volunteered the heavyweight lady of the committee. "But I know they will."

"Of course, ladies, you know best," replied Handy, "but my advice is sell all the pasteboards you can before the show, and don't depend any on the public the night of the show, when you intend to pull 'The Lady' off."

Handy's practical admonitions and advice evidently were not appreciated in the spirit in which they were tendered. The ladies' stay after the episode was not prolonged. Mrs. Chairman Doolittle remembered she had an engagement in the shape of a pink tea, and must speed homeward to make a change of dress. The remainder of the committee considered that as their cue for departure, not, however, without reassuring both Messrs. Fogg and Handy that everything would be all right.

Handy and Fogg were once more alone.

"Well," said Fogg, "what do you think of it? A great scheme, eh?"

"What's a great scheme? I pause for a reply!"

"Why, the testimonial benefit, of course!"

"Say, Fogg. Are you right in your head? Is your nut screwed on properly? Is this a joke? The ladies are all serene and mean well—but darn it, man! you don't mean to tell me that you believe there's five hundred in this snap?"

"Why, certainly I do, and more."

"Cents."

"No. Please be serious. Dollars."

"Well, let us get down to cases and figure it out. What'll be your expenses?"

"Oh, 'way down. There's \$75 for the house, dirt cheap—the ladies have a pull with the landlord; \$65 for the orchestra; stage hands, \$15; advertising and printing, \$60; flowers, \$20; costumes, \$11.75; sundries, \$10. How much is all that?"

"Let me figure it up. Have you a pencil? Never mind, I have one. Well, that, my friend, foots up \$256.75."

"Why, that ain't much."

"No. 'Tain't much for a Vanderbilt, but then, the Vans' ancestors put in some lively hustling in days of yore, and the Vans of the present day are now taking solid comfort and shooting folly as it flies out of the result of the old Commodore's hustling on land and water. An' now let me ask you, have you got the dough to go on with this great scheme of yours?"

"Well, no, I haven't got the dough, as you call it, but I have the tickets, and the committee propose to sell them to their numerous friends. I tell you 'tis a dead-sure thing."

"I notice in your expenses you allow nothing for your company."

"The company have all volunteered. Most of them are amateurs."

"And where does your humble servant come in?"

"Why, I propose to make it all right with you out of my share."

"Ye gods on high Olympus, look down on us in compassion and smile!" spoke Handy in the most tragic voice of which he was capable of employing. "Has it come to pass that a verdant experimentalist like you, Fogg, could intimate to a veteran of my standing that I should take my chances of remuneration from the proceeds of such a quixotic scheme? Go to, Fogg! I love thee, but never more be officer of mine." Then laying aside his serio-comic manner and assuming one that more easily appertained to him, he continued: "Fogg, old pal, I told you that you could count on me to help you out, and you can. I will manage the stage, but skip me on the acting. If the stuff comes in, I know you'll do the square thing. If the receipts are shy, well and good. You'll get left as well as I. Get the old girls to sell all the tickets they can—beforehand. Mind now, beforehand. Depend on nothing from the public for a benefit, and as for the night sale, it won't amount to a paper of pins. I've been there before, old man, and I know of what I speak. Let me tell you—some friends of mine once upon a time got up a benefit for a widow. They gave a good show, had lots of fun, but——"

"But what?" inquired Fogg anxiously.

"Oh, nothing! Only they landed the poor woman fifty dollars or so in debt. That's all."

"Holy Moses!" was all the response that Fogg could make; but he evidently was doing a great deal of thinking. In this state of mind Handy left him.

CHAPTER XIV

"Nature hath fram'd strange fellows in her time."

—MERCHANT OF VENICE.

Within two weeks the preliminaries for the testimonial were arranged, the night appointed, and the tickets in circulation. The company, as intimated, was made up principally of amateurs. As they were to receive no remuneration for their valuable services they received about five tickets each free to sell or dispose of as they would among their friends. Through some unaccountable oversight, they neglected to specially mark or punch these complimentary tickets. This oversight led to serious embarrassment subsequently. The demand for tickets increased as the date for the performance approached, but none of the applicants appeared anxious to part with money in return for them.

Strange as it may appear, there is a class of people—and a very large and numerous class, too, and one not confined to any particular locality or special grade of society—that will willingly spend double the price of admission for seats in one way or other for the sake of having the reputation of being on the free list of a theatre. This statement is not an exaggerated one. Had Mr. Fogg decided to manage the business details of his entertainment and suspended the free list, as he should have done, he might have fared better; but who can tell what the future has in store for any of us?

It was with considerable difficulty the rent was raised, and that difficulty being overcome, everything looked bright to the sanguine Fogg, who was really a most optimistic individual, and rarely lost heart.

At length the night of the great event arrived. All day Fogg had been as busy as a bee. He had been to see the costumer, perruquier, leader of orchestra, etc., and enjoined each of them to be on hand early. Handy, always prompt and businesslike, was on the stage at seven o'clock. A few minutes later Fogg himself appeared, almost exhausted with the onerous duties of outside management, but for all that as cheerful and as confident as any man of his peculiar temperament could be. One by one the different members of the company appeared, and by half-past seven there was the usual commotion and excitement behind the scenes always attendant on an amateur entertainment. All the members of the committee were on hand to encourage Mr. Fogg and congratulate him in advance on the prospects of a grand success. Handy, perceiving that the time for the rising of the curtain was approaching, crossed over to where Fogg was engaged in earnest conversation with Mrs. Chairman Doolittle, and suggested to that gentleman that it was getting near the time to ring in the orchestra, and that he had better go to his dressing-room and complete his make-up.

"All right," said Fogg. "Please excuse me, Mrs. Doolittle. Mr. Handy, I will now leave charge of the stage to you. Ring in the orchestra at eight o'clock sharp. I'll be ready."

"Correct," replied the stage manager. He then proceeded to take a survey of the front of the house through the peep-hole in the drop curtain. The house was filling up nicely, but, as Handy subsequently remarked, the audience had a peculiar look that did not recommend itself to the veteran's practiced eye.

"How it is?" inquired someone at Handy's elbow. On his turning about he found it was his old friend Smith, of the *Gem of the Ocean*.

"Hello, old pal! Well, I don't know how to size it up. There's a fair crowd, and if it is all money it's a good house. But it doesn't look to me like a money house. The people in the audience appear to be too well acquainted. They act as if they came to a picnic."

"Can you blame them?" replied Smith, who had a very low estimate of amateur actors.

"I guess I'll ring in the spielers. Time's up." Suiting the action to the word, he pressed the button. A few seconds later and a German professor with blond hair of a musical cut approached the prompt stand.

"Ees dot Meister Vogue somewheres about here, I don't know?" he inquired.

"In his dressing-room," curtly answered Handy.

"Ees dot so? Veil, then, I am Professor Funkenstein, und mein men der money want before dot overture."

"You're in a large-sized hurry, ain't you?" replied the stage manager. "Can't you hold on until the show is over? What's the matter with you? Don't you see the house we have?"

"Mein freund, dot's all right. But mein men der money wants. Don't dink I'm a fool because I'm a German man. I my money wants, too."

"Mr. Handy, why don't you ring in the orchestra?" spoke Fogg, who had just come from his dressing-room made-up for *Claude Melnotte*. Catching sight of the leader, he exclaimed: "What's the matter, Professor?"

"The matter is, Meister Vogue, mein men der money wants before they goes out. Dot's vot's der matter!"

For a moment Fogg gazed at the orchestra leader in surprise, and then indignantly declared: "This is simply outrageous! What do you take me for, sir?" Then turning to his stage manager: "Mr. Handy, have you got a slip of paper, in order that I may give this man an order on the box office? How much is your bill? Ah, yes, I remember—seventy-five dollars. Here, take this and go and get your money at the box office," as he handed the order to the professor, who instantly

made a hasty retreat through the nearest exit leading into the front of the house, Fogg disappearing at the same time in the direction of his dressing-room, to add the finishing touches to his make-up.

By this time it was nearly twenty minutes past eight o'clock, and the audience had already begun to manifest indications of impatience.

"Handy," whispered Smith, "I'm glad I came. If I am not greatly mistaken there will be a lively time here to-night. Mark what I'm telling you."

Just then another individual approached the stage manager and inquired for Mr. Fogg. He introduced himself as Mr. Draper, the costumer, and he was anxious to see the star of the evening, to "put up," as he expressed himself, for the costumes before the curtain went up. At this stage of the proceedings Fogg, now fully dressed for the gardener's son, appeared. He was immediately buttonholed by the costumer for the amount of his bill.

"After the performance, when we count up, my dear Mr. Draper," pleaded Fogg, in his most insinuating way.

"After nothing. Now, now!" emphatically declared Draper. "What do you take me for? I'm no sardine. You pay now, or by chowder! you can play 'The Lady of Lyons' in your shirt tails! You promised me the stuff in the afternoon."

The audience by this time had become restless and somewhat demonstrative. To add to the complications, Professor Funkenstein reappeared in a most excited frame of mind. He had been to the box office, but the bill-poster had anticipated him, and had threatened to clean out the ranch if he didn't get his money. The treasurer, who was an amateur, settled immediately with the knight of the pastepot to save the house from destruction. After the box office man had settled with the bill-poster there was only \$5.25 in the drawer. That was at once secured by the florist in part payment on account of flowers that were to be presented to *Pauline*. The florist had been given the tip by the bill-sticker, and he got the balance of the cash on hand by also threatening to inaugurate the cleaning-out process.

The uproar in the front of the house increased. The stamping of feet, the beating of canes on the floor, and the catcalls in the gallery made terrific disturbance.

"You're a sweendler, Meister Vogue!" exclaimed the excited orchestra leader.

"I'll make it all right with you in the morning, sir," replied Fogg indignantly, "and I wouldn't have your contemptible Dutch band to play for me now under any circumstances. Please call the people for the first act, Mr. Handy. I'll show you. We'll play the piece without your music."

"And you'll play it without costumes, too," interposed Mr. Draper, "unless I get my money."

"An' begor, yez'll play it wid only sky borders and wings, iv I'm goin' to get left," yelled the stage carpenter. "Murphy, run off thim flats."

By this time poor Fogg was nearly out of his mind. Surrounded by a number of excited creditors behind the curtain, and frightened by an uproarious, turbulent, and noisy audience in front, the unfortunate fellow recognized in his bewildered condition that he would have to go before the curtain and dismiss the public. But what explanation could he offer? His friends were there to witness his humiliation. He wrung his hands in despair, wished he had never been born, and mentally resolved never again to accept the tender of a benefit. Handy watched him intently, and in his heart felt genuine sorrow for the sad predicament in which the poor fellow had placed himself. Touching Smith on the shoulder, he walked back on the stage, his friend following him.

"Smith, this is a hard case. It makes me feel sad, and we must manage somehow or other to get the unfortunate devil out of the hole. This is the worst ever. Do as I tell you, but be careful and let no one get on to you. You noticed that small bottle of red ink on the prompt stand. Get it quietly, and let no one see what you are at. Be very careful. We must devise some way of pulling him through. It's a big risk, but I'll take it. That's all. Go now and take your cue from me."

Things were growing from bad to worse on the stage, and the commotion and disorder in front of the curtain were increasing. Handy moved down among the excited crowd that surrounded Fogg, and got close to him. Smith, after exchanging a knowing glance with Handy, also edged his way into the group.

"Great Heavens! Fogg, my dear fellow!" suddenly exclaimed Handy, seizing him in an alarmed manner, "are you ill? What's the matter?" Then in a hasty whisper he said: "Act now, d——n you! if you never acted before. Go off in a fit, drop and leave the rest to me."

"Oh, nothing, nothing!" replied Fogg, with a strange stare. Then looking wildly about him, he uttered a weird scream and fell in a heap on the stage. In an instant Handy was on his knees beside him. So was Smith, and before any one could realize the situation, the bottle of red ink in his hand had dexterously performed its office over the mouth of the prostrate actor.

Bending over him, Handy whispered: "Keep still! and act out your fit and I'll pull you through." Then addressing those about him, he said: "Will some one of you gentlemen kindly fetch a glass of ice water and a little brandy? This is a bad case, I'm afraid. A serious affair. Send for a carriage. He must be removed to his house at once and a doctor called in. Poor fellow, the strain was too much for him. Ah, and by the way, will one of the gentlemen be good enough to go out in

front of the curtain and explain to the audience the sad mishap which has befallen our esteemed friend? Please break it mildly in the announcement. The chances are it won't prove fatal, but I'm no doctor, so my say don't go for much. Poor old chap!"

It was not without difficulty that the man who volunteered to quell the storm in front could get a hearing from the audience. At last he succeeded, and after he explained the suddenness and severity of the attack, the storm subsided and the people went quietly out.

On the stage poor Fogg lay stretched out, Handy supporting his head. He was a sight. His mouth was liberally marked with Smith's home-made blood, for the carmine had been generously though dexterously employed. Everyone expressed sympathy for him. Handy, with the assistance of Smith, succeeded in getting him to his feet and managed to get him to the stage door in his *Melnotte* garb. Mrs. Doolittle's carriage was outside waiting, and he was assisted into it. As Handy was about to follow, Fogg leaned over and whispered in his ear: "For the Lord sake, Handy, bring my street clothes from the dressing-room, or I'll never be able to leave the house." Handy pressed his hand, Smith went after the clothes, and the three then drove to Fogg's home, and the carriage returned to the theatre for the lady chairman.

"Well," said Handy, when within the safety of the star's quarters, "I've played many parts in my varied career, but this one is the limit. It beats the deck. Fogg, you will have to keep the house for a week, at least; then go and rusticate for another week, but above all things, for heaven's sake don't recover too hastily!"

"Oh, bless my soul!" remarked Fogg, as he surveyed himself in the mirror, "you have ruined Draper's *Melnotte* blouse. What the blazes did you inundate me with that confounded red stuff for?"

Handy looked at him seriously for a minute, and then replied: "There's gratitude for you. Ah! well, it's the way of the world all over. Help a man to get out of a scrape, and do you think he will appreciate your meritorious act? Not even a little bit, and the chances are he will begin to find fault with your manner of saving him. Darn it, man! that fiddler, costumer, and stage carpenter would never have swallowed an ordinary, common garden, every-day fit, but when they saw the gore, the blood-red gore, they caved-in. It was a demonstration in red, and it did the work. And now, then, when you are going to have your next testimonial you can get someone else to manage your fits. Come, Smith. Good-night, Fogg!"

CHAPTER XV

**"Come what, come may,
Time and the hour runs through the roughest day."**

—MACBETH.

Never be it said that fate itself could awe the soul of Fogg. Next day, when Handy called on him, he found his irrepressible friend preparing to saunter forth. That he failed to appreciate the humiliation of the previous evening there was not the slightest reason to believe. His restless spirit, however, was too strong to compel him willingly to remain indoors. He was nothing, if not active. In fact, he was miserable unless when employed in some optimistic scheme. No matter how impracticable it might appear to others, he invariably perceived a means to circumvent its difficulties. He believed in taking the biggest kind of chance on the smallest possibility of success. He was a remarkably unique proposition.

"Hello, hello!" exclaimed Handy. "What's all this about? Up and dressed. Say, don't you know you're a sick man?" Fogg gazed at his friend more in surprise than anger, and turned his head aside. "Did you hear what I said? You don't mean to tell me that you are going out in the streets to-day?"

"Why not?" replied Fogg.

"After what took place last night?"

"I must, you know!"

"With a busted blood-vessel in your innards and a—a—a——"

"Oh, come now, Handy, this thing has gone far enough. I appreciate all you did for me in an emergency, but there's no necessity for keeping up the deception any longer. I tell you I have an important engagement——"

"Hold! Avast heaving and take a hitch," interrupted the veteran. "Give me no more of that important engagement business in mine. I have some say in this matter, I have."

"You have—and how, pray?"

"Well, I'll give it you, and straight, too."

"Go on, then."

"Well, you were to have taken a benefit last night, weren't you?"

"I'm listening."

"An' you didn't, did you?"

"Well, no—not exactly a—benefit," replied Fogg slowly, with a sickly smile.

"And why didn't you?"

"Well, you are aware of the reason as well as I," Fogg answered, slightly irritated; "because I didn't have the necessary funds to carry out my plans, therefore——"

"Rubbish and stuff!" retorted Handy contemptuously. "You always get things mixed."

"What do you mean?" inquired the mystified Fogg, looking more perplexed than ever. "I do not quite understand you!"

"No, I didn't expect you would. Not be able to give a show without funds! Fiddlesticks! You make me tired. Darn it! Any one could do the turn with funds, and if you had the funds you wouldn't need a benefit—unless, indeed, you needed them to take a pleasure trip to Europe or to buy an automobile. But the man who can pull off a venture of that kind I regard as a financier; a man to be respected; a man of mettle—I mean the kind of mettle that's next door to genius, so to speak. By the way, old man, how do you spell that mettle—mettle or metal?"

"I would spell it B-R-A-S-S."

For a moment, Handy was completely put out, then extending his hand, he said: "Fogg, you may not know it, but you're a humorist. That wasn't half bad, as we say in England. I was never there, but it goes, all the same."

Fogg smiled, but Handy looked serious. He was in a troubled state of mind on account of Fogg's expressed determination to leave the house. He remembered all too vividly that he had been chief engineer of Fogg's escapade of the preceding night. He had to economize on truth; originate a fit, burst a blood-vessel, and carry out several minor details to make the undertaking thoroughly convincing. These, of course, he was willing to father, and, for that matter, felt a certain pride in their performance, when he remembered they resulted in relieving the troubles of a friend. But he was hurt when he came to reflect that the friend for whom he had undertaken so much had so little regard for the fitness of things and embarrassments of the situation as to venture forth the following day. It was too much for his sensibilities.

"The idea, Fogg, of showing yourself in public to-day, or to-morrow, or even the next day, is simply preposterous. It is out of the question. I may almost pronounce it like flying in the face of Providence. Remember, you are still a sick man, and I am sponsor for your illness. Bear in mind, you were taken out of the theatre as good as a dead one, in the garb of *Claude Melnotte*."

"Yes; and thanks to that infernal Smith," interrupted Fogg, "the suit is as good as ruined, with the stuff he spilt over it."

"There you go again. Why, you unthinking ingrate, only for that marked feature of the episode, you might at this moment be laid up in the hospital, if the stage hands, fiddlers, costumer, and bill-posters got in their work. Instead of that, here you are where sympathizing friends can visit you and hearken to your tale of woe. Don't you see," continued Handy, "if you are met on the street people will be likely to draw their own conclusions and regard last night's emergency illness as a fraud? You know how uncharitable even the best of friends are at odd times. While if you keep within doors and recover slowly, no such uncharitable fancy can be conjured into existence. Besides, the time spent in convalescence may be employed by that fertile brain of yours in devising some scheme for the future. I never willingly was party to a fraud, but when a friend gets into a bad box it becomes a human duty on the part of another friend to help him out. The end in view justifies the means. Friends don't go to that trouble, as a rule, but they ought to. Then you must have some consideration for dramatic consistency. Even actors can not burst blood-vessels with impunity over night and then go gallivanting about town next day. And again, is all this fine advertising you are going to get out of last night's realism to be thrown away and go for nothing? Oh, no! I guess not! My dear Fogg, you have got to be repaired before you are again seen in public."

Handy's eloquent and forcible argument convinced Fogg that a week indoors was the proper course for him to pursue, and also be guided solely by the veteran during his convalescence.

"Now, then, get to bed at once. You cannot tell who may get it into his head to call upon you. It is more than likely that Draper will be here after the *Melnotte* outfit."

"Goodness gracious, I forgot all about that!" exclaimed Fogg.

"I thought so. Never overlook details. If you had traveled over this broad land of the free and the home of the brave as extensively as I have, you would recognize their importance. They are, my dear boy, most important factors of success in the show line, as in every other business. You can start a show without money if you are careful in the arrangement of your details beforehand. I might be able to give you some useful advice on that subject, which would prove serviceable if you ever contemplate going on the road."

"I did have an idea of that kind," replied Fogg. "I think there's money in it. Don't you?"

"Well, that depends."

"On what?"

"That I can't precisely explain. I have seen some of the worst so-called actors that ever trod the boards catch on with the fickle public, while counting railroad ties was the reward for some of the most talented in the business. It isn't talent, ability, or merit that always tells in this world. Don't you know that? To be sure, if you have money to back any one or all of them up, together with grit enough to hold on until the tide turns, you may stand a chance. But sometimes, even then one gets left."

"Pshaw! I've known fellows without any one of these qualifications you have enumerated succeed—fellows who had neither friends nor capital to aid them," responded Fogg, as he removed his coat. "How do you account for that, old man?"

"Easily enough," answered Handy, seemingly not a bit put out. "They must have had those magnificent endowments which may be tersely summed up in the simple words 'cheek' and 'push,' qualities sufficiently potent to transform a mouse-trap into a fortune or a tobacco patent of some kind into a grand opera house. These are, my boy, the magician's wand. Hurry up and peel off your vest. Cheek is the capital with which the impecunious push ahead while modest merit remains in the background waiting for a chance. There, now, don't stand and stare. Pull off your shoes. You're too slow. As I was saying, cheek in business generally is the *avant courier* of success. Catch on to my French? Say, what's the matter now—burst a button off your pants? Never mind. You'll have plenty of time to make repairs during the week. Remember what I tell you. Cheek backed up by energy will win every time, and don't make any mistake about it. There, now, lie down and give me a chance to mend you and help to get your business affairs in some kind of shape that will be intelligible. By the way, have you such things as a pipe and tobacco on the premises?"

"Yes, you will find them on the shelf yonder. But see here, Handy. I don't half like this quarantine business—lying down and playing sick when I am as well as you are!"

"Then why in the name of Christopher Columbus' cat didn't you think of that before you went off in that fit last night! What did you do that for, eh? A joke? The punishment fits the crime, my friend, and you might as well make up your alleged mind to that fact, and that you'll have to take such medicine as I prescribe for at least a week to come."

Just then was heard the ring of the hall bell, and shortly after a servant-like knock at the door of the apartment followed. Handy motioned his patient to lie down and keep still, and then called, "Come in!" The door opened and a servant popped in her head and informed the two friends that down-stairs was a man named Draper, who wanted to see Mr. Fogg.

"Draper! Draper!" repeated Handy, as if endeavoring to recall the name to his recollection. "Fogg, dear boy, do you know any one named Draper?" Then turning to the servant: "Are you certain you got the gentleman's name correct?"

"He towld me his name was Draper, and sure that's all I know about him."

"Will you be kind enough, like a good girl, to skip down-stairs and ask the gentleman to send up his card?" said Handy in his most persuasive manner.

The lady who officiated as menial evidently did not relish another journey up and down-stairs, but Handy's winning way and manner of appealing to her had the desired effect. She condescended to oblige, but with a look, however, that might readily be mistaken for one other than pleasure over the job, with an accompanying murmur of words that sounded very much like "people puttin' on airs."

"Why, Handy, you know very well who that is down at the door," said Fogg, raising himself in bed.

"Know! Well, I should smile! Why, of course I know. But, my boy, I need a little time to get things straightened out before we receive visitors. Lie down and keep quiet. I'm running this show. These *Melnotte* duds will have to go to the wash. Ten to one that's what Draper has called for. That fellow has an eye as sharp as a hawk."

"What has that to do with the case?"

"This, if you are anxious to know. Draper would get on to that red ink stain quicker than a wink. You couldn't fool that gentleman on ink for blood. Just cast your eagle eye over it." He held the blouse up for inspection. "Why, it looks more like cranberry sauce on a jamboree than human gore. I will stow this away in the closet, and now bear in mind it has gone to the wash."

"Oh, all right!"

"Come in." This in answer to a knock at the door, and Bedelia, for such was the lady attendant's name, reappeared.

"The man down at the door below sez as how he has no card wid him, but that yez knows him very well already. He sez he's a customer."

"A what?" yelled Handy.

"A customer," shouted back Bedelia.

"A customer," echoed Handy, and then in his most agreeable manner continued: "Now, my gentle friend, for I know you are gentle, and therefore must be a friend, did not the man in the gap below tell you he was a costumer, and not a customer? Think, for the difference between the two is of some degree of importance."

"Well, sur, I may not be as well up in the new-fangled ways of spakin' as some other people are. Begor! with yer cawn'ts an' shawn'ts, an' chawnnces, an' the divil only knows what in the way of pronounciayshon, a dacint, hard-workin' gerl can't make out half what's said nowadays. You call the man down-stairs wan thing an' I call him another, but both of them are the same man. Arrah! what's the matther wid yez, at all, at all?"

With this withering invective, Bedelia looked as if she could annihilate Handy.

The veteran in an amusingly polite manner arose and bowed. "All right, Bedelia, and if it's all the same to you, you may as well waltz the customer up."

"Well, sur," she answered, with what she possibly considered satiric dignity, "I'll sind him up, but I would like yez to understhand that I've plinty to do widout climbing up and down two pair of stairs waitin' on show-actors," and she then hurried out and bang! went the door.

"Fogg, my boy," said Handy, with a smile, "that handmaiden is a passion flower. 'Twould be an injustice to the more modest posy to designate her a daisy."

He was about to indulge in a laugh, when a masculine knock at the door interrupted. Moving quietly across the room, he opened the door. A nod of recognition and the costumer entered.

"Will you kindly take a seat, Mr. Draper?" he said in a subdued voice, as he motioned the visitor to a chair beside the bed.

"It's awfully kind of you, Draper, to call," said Fogg in a feeble tone of voice, at the same time extending his hand. "This is a bad blow. Who would have thought this time yesterday that I would now be——"

"Hush!" interrupted Handy gently. "You must keep still and not grow excited. You know what the doctor said." Then turning to the costumer, Handy explained Fogg's condition, the possible effect excitement would be likely to produce, and the evil consequences that might ensue. "He is not yet quite out of danger, but I guess he'll pull through, provided he will keep still and obey orders. The doctor says——Oh! by the way, Mr. Draper, you didn't meet the doctor on your way up, did you?" inquired Handy meekly, as he placed the invalid's hand back under the coverlet.

"No!" replied Mr. Draper, "I did not. What physician is attending him?"

"Oh! Doctor—ah—Doctor——Some German name. Hold on! That last prescription will tell us." But somehow or other Handy could not lay his hand on it.

"Never mind. Don't put yourself to any trouble. It doesn't matter."

"Oh, by the way, Mr. Draper," and Handy bent down toward him and in a low tone of voice said, "That *Melnotte* dress our poor friend had on at the time of the occurrence was so soiled that we had to send it to the laundry before returning it. It will be all right, though."

"Darn the thing!" replied Draper, somewhat indignantly. "You don't mean to think that is what I called around for. No, sir." Then rising from the chair, he turned toward Fogg. "Now, then, old chap, get all right again. Your friend here will look after you. I merely dropped in to pay a little friendly visit." He turned to leave the room, at the same time beckoning to Handy to step outside the door.

The two went out together, and though the time Handy remained away was brief, Fogg's anxiety magnified it and it made him restless. At length Handy returned, and with much more subdued demeanor than before he went out. He appeared grave and thoughtful.

"What's up now?" inquired Fogg, half raising from the bed. "What did Draper have to say? Is it that which disturbs you?"

Handy remained silent for a time. "Yes. It is not only what he said, but what he did that knocks me."

"I am really sorry to hear you say so," sympathetically replied Fogg.

"You know when we went outside"—and Handy breathed a heavy sigh and paused—"Draper placed his hand on my shoulder and said, 'Mr. Handy, you are a friend of Fogg?' I nodded an assent. 'I don't suppose,' he says, 'he has any too much ready money for an emergency of this kind, so that when affliction pays an unwelcome visit and sudden sickness crosses the threshold a few dollars at such a time come not amiss.'"

"Good-hearted fellow, after all."

"'Now,' he continued, 'don't let anything worry the poor devil. Let him consider the bill for costumes chalked off. Here, put this ten dollars to the best advantage you can use it for any little necessaries that may be wanting in the sick-room.'"

"You don't mean it!" cried Fogg excitedly.

"Oh, hang it, that was too much for me!" And Handy began to pace the floor nervously.

"And what did you do when he offered the money?"

"Do!" replied Handy indignantly. "Do! Why, I declined to take it, of course. I can do a good many things; but no—not that, not that."

"Right!"

"I told him you were not in need of anything. You had all you wanted. That was a lie, of course, but then there are times and circumstances when a lie may counterfeit truth. I insisted I could not accept it. What do you think he said?"

"Can't imagine."

"'Well!' he replied, 'if he doesn't want for anything, what was the benefit got up for? Here, take the stuff, and have no more silly nonsense about it.' He then thrust the money into my vest pocket and hurried down the stairs."

"Handy, you amaze me!"

"There it is," and he threw the bills on the bed to Fogg, and walked the room with pain distinctly written over his usually happy face. "The world is not so cold-hearted after all. Those we least suspect have hearts to feel for sufferings of others, and what is more, they have a practical way of expressing their sympathy." Then turning to Fogg, he added with much feeling: "This incident saddens me!"

"You are right. This money must be returned. I cannot take it," and Fogg too became thoughtful.

For the first time the evil of the fraud which had been perpetrated became forcibly evident to both men. One genuine act of kindness had stripped deceit of its covering more effectively than the logic of a hundred sermons.

"Perhaps the next experience," said Handy, still in a reflective mood, "will be the appearance of that tough stage carpenter who threatened to compel you to describe the beauties of your palace by Lake Como with sky borders and wings, with a supply of delicacies from his humble home, or maybe a contribution in cash exceeding the sum you agreed to pay him for his labor, in order that he might show his kindly disposition to assist when misfortune overtook you."

Both were visibly affected. The deception they practiced, though it brought a certain temporary relief from an embarrassing situation, also carried with it its own punishment. For a time they remained silent.

"Handy," began Fogg, "if the thing had been real and resulted fatally, I verily believe that old man Funkenstein would have volunteered to furnish the music for my funeral, and not have charged my friends a red cent."

"Sure! And what's more," replied Handy, the humorous side appealing to his fancy, "let me tell you, as a dead one you would have drawn a darn'd sight bigger house than you ever can as a live actor."

Notwithstanding his troubles, Fogg appreciated the humorous sally of his associate. He threw himself back on his bed and enjoyed a hearty laugh. Handy permitted him to enjoy his merriment and then reminded him that although to the outer world he was on the blink, so far as prosperity was concerned, the enforced inaction of the sick-room would never bridge over the difficulties that encompassed him. He reminded Fogg that he was financially dead broke. It is true he was in the great city, the mecca toward which all strolling players turn their eyes as well as their toes when they are in financial straits, but the fact of being in the metropolis was not sufficient. It was necessary to set about doing something.

"Let me tell you, Fogg, that thinking without action to back it up cuts no ice. Never did—never will. You may think until doomsday and accomplish nothing. I will point a moral without ornamenting a tale, by relating an experience I once had when I was out West some time ago with a company and got stranded, and if you will loan me your ear I will a tale unfold. What say you?"

"Proceed."

"First let me dispose of a quiet pipeful of tobacco to collect my scattered thoughts and I will unbosom myself."

CHAPTER XVI

A New Way to Pay Old Debts.

After Handy had complacently smoked a pipeful of Fogg's tobacco he laid the comforter aside

and started in one of those characteristic chapters of incidents to be found scattered here and there on the pathway of nearly every player who amounts to anything either at home or abroad.

"You may remember that a few years ago I got together a company with a view to endeavor to enlighten as well as to instruct the public of the so-called wild and woolly West."

"Yes."

"Part of the company I picked up here, the remainder I managed to scrape together in Chicago. Times were not good; actors were easily had, and were willing to take long chances on the prospects of even getting bread and butter. Please don't take me too literally. They were well aware of the fact that if the money came in they would surely get their share. All who know me are pretty well satisfied on that score. Deal squarely with the people about you, is my maxim, and they will stand by you when the pinch comes. I have gone on that principle all through my varied career and I know the benefit of what I speak."

"Yes; all things considered," replied Fogg, "you have been on the Square."

"Good! You're improving! Well, as I was saying, I got my company together and set out. We opened in Denver. Did fairly well; pushed on still further. Struck bad business, and at the end of a couple of weeks landed high and dry on Saturday night in a far Western town—No need of mentioning names."

"As soon as that—two weeks?"

"Just two weeks. Oh, don't affect surprise. I've known companies to go where the woodbine twineth on the third night out. There is nothing new in that. Well, the night I have reference to was so bad, that is the receipts were so slender, that we didn't take in money enough to pay for the gas, and remember we were under contract to play the following Monday in a city not more than fifty miles or so away."

"Well, you had all Sunday and most of Monday to get there, and keep your date. There's nothing in that," remarked Fogg, with a smile.

"Very true; but, my optimistic friend, permit me to inform you that my company was not solely made up of pedestrians, and, moreover, walking in midwinter as a rule is not good. So you may readily recognize I was in a perplexing predicament. After I glanced over the box office statement I hardly knew where I was at. As I thought the situation over before me arose the stern reality of a large-sized board bill, for bear in mind I had guaranteed to pay the traveling and hotel bills of the company. Hotelkeepers are such matter-of-fact and precise individuals in their peculiar ways of dealings that it is difficult for those of empty pockets to get along pleasantly with them."

"Absurdly so," admitted Fogg.

"Pleased to hear you say so, but then, my boy, you never ran a hotel."

"No, but I kept the books of a traveling politician one season!"

"You did?"

"Fact."

"You weren't traveling with a show?"

"Nit, I was attending political conventions."

"Oh, that settles it. That was a dead easy job. The party put up the dough and the public in the end pays the score. That's another proposition altogether. But the poor player who—well, no matter. No use in becoming sentimental or spoony about it. Now, own up, my position was unpleasantly embarrassing, wasn't it?"

"It was not exhilarating."

"No. There was nothing cheering about it. However, I put on no long face, though between ourselves I wished some other fellow stood in my shoes."

"How considerate for the other fellow!"

"Well," continued Handy, "that's neither here nor there, but I made up my mind to get out of that town bag and baggage and keep my date Monday night, all the samee."

"I admire your pluck."

"Pluck? Nothing of the kind. Pluck had nothing to do with the case. It was tact and resource that came to my assistance. Season your admiration for a moment and I'll give you a wrinkle worth remembering. After a bite and a snack I went to bed, not to worry, but to sleep. Let me say, by way of comment, that a few hours' rest is a powerful rejuvenator. You can do much better work in the morning after a good night's sleep than if you had passed weary hours tossing and tumbling about in bemoaning your hard luck and picturing to yourself what might have been if you had done so and so. All rot. Let the other fellow do the worrying. Remember, my boy, the past is irreclaimable, the present the life we are struggling in, and the future what we make it, or rather try to make it."

"Handy, I had no idea you were such a philosopher!"

"Indeed! Well, experience teaches me to be practical," replied the veteran, "and I trust I may be able to prove to you the truth of what I say. As I told you, I retired to my bed to sleep, and sleep I did, as soundly as if I owned one-half the town and had a mortgage on the other half. Next morning I got up refreshed and with a good appetite for breakfast. After the morning's meal I settled myself down to the enjoyment of a cigar. At that stage of the game I could not afford to be seen smoking a pipe. Never give your poverty away to the world unless you can make final disposition of it. Then came the real task—the crisis."

"The tug of war, eh?"

"Just so. The tug of war, so to speak. I braced the landlord! I invited him to take a chair beside me and began the siege."

"Commenced operations. Fire away."

"I had already made a study of the man, and had well considered my plan of attack. I opened by telling him frankly I was in trouble. The week's business had been bad, receipts next door to nothing, my share slim. To make a long story short, I confessed I could not settle my bill."

"That must have been an interesting communication for mine host of the inn. How did he take it?"

"Well, his reception of the information somewhat surprised me. I anticipated a storm; but no. He was perfectly calm. I waited for a reply, but he simply remarked, 'Well?' I then enlarged on my ill-luck, bad business, terrible weather, and wound up with a pathetic story of our situation. 'Well,' he again exclaimed, 'I will hold the baggage and stuff until you can settle up.'"

"The old, old story," plaintively exclaimed Fogg.

"I felt that was coming, but I also judged from the manner of that decision, cold as it was in all the integrity of its meaning, that I had a practical man to deal with. Take my word for it, Fogg, it is always better to have business dealings with a man of that type than with one who, while he loads you up with sympathy to beat the band, doesn't mean a word of it. To settle there and then for board and get our things out of quarantine was out of the question; to attempt to play our next stand without our 'props' and things was equally difficult."

"Of course, but then," said Fogg, "hotelkeepers never take these things into consideration."

"No, never. 'Mr. Breadland'—that was his name—'I have a proposition to make,' said I, 'and as you seem to be a practical man, you will, I have an idea, recognize its practicability. The situation is this: I owe you money. The amount I am unable to pay just now. You say you propose to hold on to the baggage belonging to the company as security for the debt.'"

"You state the case precisely," said he.

"Now, then," I continued, "the stuff you propose to seize you don't want, and you only mean to hold the things as security for the payment of the board bill—an honest debt." He nodded his head while he scrutinized me closely. "Now, what would you say if I could point out a way to you by which you could still have security for the indebtedness, I could have the baggage and things, and you get the money owing to you?"

"My friend," said he, "I don't want to hold your stuff. It's no earthly use to me. I only want the coin that's due me. If you can show or point out to me any feasible plan by which that end may be reached, I rather think you and I may come to terms."

"I guess I can. To be sure it may cause you personally some little inconvenience for a few days, but the scheme will work out all right."

"Let me hear it," says he, looking me squarely in the face.

"It is this: We are billed to play Monday night in Bungtown. The chances are we will have a big house for the opening. We stay there three nights. Now, then, my proposition is that you send your clerk along with the company; I will place him in the box office, where he will have control of the receipts, and each night after the show is over he can take for you a percentage of the share coming to me, and continue to do so at each performance until your bill is all paid. How does it strike you?" Well, sir, it set that countryman a-thinking and pulling his whiskers so vigorously that I feared his goatee would give way. I knew almost to a dead certainty that I had won. The man, Fogg, who hesitates gives way in the end, always.

"Breadland reflected a minute, then spoke out: 'I'll do it,' he said. 'Tis about the easiest and safest way of getting hunk.'"

"One thing more, Mr. Breadland," I added, when I felt satisfied that luck was running my way.

"What is it?" he inquired.

"The hotel bill, as you are aware, is made out to cover all charges up to and including lunch to-day. After the train which leaves here at three this afternoon there is none other until to-morrow forenoon, and as the company has done a deal of traveling and the people are pretty well tuckered out, a day's rest and a good night's sleep would not be amiss, and it would enable us to give a rattling good performance to-morrow night."

"I agree with you,' he replied.

"I thought so, but perhaps I didn't make myself as clear as I might. Your good nature, however, emboldens me to respectfully suggest'—and this I said in the most tender and convincing manner I could employ—'that for the sake of art and good fellowship, for this little extra hospitality you make no addition to the hotel bill. Let it stand as it is.'"

"What!" exclaimed Fogg, in open-mouthed wonder. "Did he show you the door?"

"Not a bit of it. I told you he was a plain, practical kind of cuss, with a tender spot in his heart. He looked at me with a calm, queer, but not mischievous twinkle in his eye. I stood the gaze with the most innocent assumption of impudence, waiting for the verdict. It came in a moment, accompanied with a hearty laugh as he said: 'By jingo, you deserve to get ahead! You won't fail for want of nerve. It's your long suit. I'll have to go you,' or words to that effect. 'Come,' he said, rising from his chair, 'I'll blow you off,' and he led the way to the bar."

"You don't mean to say he stood treat into the bargain?" asked Fogg, in surprise.

"Sure; like a prince, he did; and what's more, he made the remainder of the day as pleasant as if every member of the company was a first-floorer, paying bridal-party rates.

"That little episode made me very solid with my company. They knew the actual condition of the exchequer, for obvious reasons, and wondered how I was able to make things all right without the necessary wherewithal. That's management, my boy. They never considered for the life of them, that three-fourths or more of the business of the world is managed and conducted on credit and promises to pay. I was merely working out the principle in my own little bit of a way. So the day passed agreeably. The people knew that everything in the hotel was all right and that I had the railroad fares snugly stowed away in my inside pocket."

CHAPTER XVII

"The actors are at hand; and by their show you shall all know that you are like to know."

—MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

"We got into Bungtown early next day. I went at once to the theatre. There I was happy to learn that the advance sale was good and the prospects for the evening's performance A1. We opened to a full house, and the audience appeared to enjoy the entertainment. The following evening did not pan out quite so well, in consequence of a torchlight procession through the streets and a big Grand Army parade. The night after—our farewell performance. Great Scott! A rainstorm thinned the attendance to the proportions of a fashionable church in the metropolis during summer, when the popular preacher is absent on vacation abroad, seeking after the health he never lost. How I felt can be better imagined than described. I was up against it for fair. As I told you, I was unable to settle the hotel bill at the last town, and in addition we had now the handicap of an extra hotel and railroad fare for Breadland's clerk, who according to agreement was to travel with the show until the whole account with Breadland was squared up."

"The prospects were not encouraging."

"No; but we managed, somehow or other, to get out of town; though when everything was fixed, including a few dollars to Breadland on account, it was a close shave. Fortunately, the railroad fares to our next stand were light and we had three days there. It was in that sylvan retreat by the flowing river we nearly met our Waterloo. Speak of bad business. It was something weird."

"Misfortune and you must have been running a race."

"Yes, with the filly away in the lead. But we managed to play right on. Sunday morning found me once more *hors de combat*, with another hotel bill unpaid and an almost empty treasury to meet it. I nearly gave up in despair. Remembering, however, that despair never yet pulled a man out of a hole, in sheer desperation I resolved once more to fall back on the expedient that carried us over the sea of troubles that beset us before we reached Bungtown."

"Great Heavens! you don't mean to say you proposed to carry another hotel clerk on your staff?" queried Fogg.

"I had to do something. Necessity is the prompter of ingenuity, and the suggestion came from that source. There is no use in going further into detail. I convinced the landlord and secured another secretary of the treasury to look after the income, and we got out of town next morning as happy as clams at high water. Well, without mincing matters, I must say we had as rough a road to travel any band of poor strolling Thespians ever struck."

"Misfortune still in the lead?"

"I should say so. Listen. We ran into the Gulf Stream of a red-hot political campaign, and I needn't tell you these torchlight processions, firework displays, and fife and drum corps knock

the life out of the show business. Where we made a few dollars in one place we dropped them in another. Had it not been for a small reserve fund I had carefully treasured up for extra hazardous emergencies and my peculiar talent and diplomacy in dealing with hotel men, I verily believe it would have taken us all the winter to have reached a hospitable haven of relief, for the walking was wretched and Western railroad ties too far apart for decent pedestrianism."

"By Jove!" smiled Fogg, "you must have had an anxious time from the word go."

"Oh, that goes without saying. I managed to pull through and reached good warm-hearted Chicago with nine hotel clerks on my staff, all acting as treasurers, assistant treasurers, auditors, ticket-sellers, bookkeepers and financial agents, each one wondering why the box office department was receiving accessions to its ranks in the face of such bad business."

"An' did they never tumble to the little joker?"

"Well, I candidly admit it required the exercise of considerable tact to keep them in complete ignorance of the true situation."

"Of that I have not the slightest doubt."

Handy was silent a moment.

"Fogg, did you ever worry over a promoter's prospectus of a proposed financial scheme prepared for the edification of the public with the laudable intention of separating people from their money?"

"Some," answered Fogg, slightly mystified at the change Handy had given to the conversation.

"That being the case, you can call to mind how eloquently the promoter labors to convince prospective investors how they can get in on the ground floor and lay the foundation of a fortune to be made out of a hole in the ground?"

"I've heard of such things."

"Do you know how it was done?"

"Search me."

"Well, I, too, can do a little in that line myself. I did some of the most expert word painting to my assistant financial agents or their representatives and held them together and in good fellowship until I reached my harbor."

"If the question is not an indelicate one," said Fogg hesitatingly, "might I inquire if you ever paid up?"

"Every dollar," quickly responded Handy. "When we reached Chicago we struck smooth water and entered upon a prosperous sea for four weeks. Money fairly poured into our coffers. One by one I sent each hotel clerk back to his employer, with a check for the money I owed him in his pocket and a receipted bill in mine. I squared up with every one I was indebted to. You know when we make money we make it fast."

"And part with it as readily," added his friend.

"That has nothing to do with the case, my boy. Now, let me ask you if you think I told you this moving tale of ups and downs for the mere fun of its recital, do you?"

"Well, partly fun, kill time, and partly to a—a—a——"

"Yes, go on. Partly to a—a—a——what? Why don't you finish the sentence?"

"To illustrate the principle of a novel way to pay old debts, eh?"

"Right you are," replied Handy emphatically. "And let me add, so far as you are personally concerned——" For the first time during the narration he looked thoroughly in earnest.

"I'm listening."

"When you ever get in a bad box or are up against it, don't lay down and brood over the hardship, but set to work with a will to get square with your troubles as becomes a man."

CHAPTER XVIII

**"Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are."**

—NURSERY RHYMES.

Three weeks after "The Lady of Lyons" episode Handy was once more in harness and equipped for the stage. He had captured what is technically known as "an angel" and was fairly well provided for another brief campaign. His friend Smith was engaged to accompany him and to

officiate as general utility man in the broadest sense of the term. Fogg, who had been instrumental in lassoing the "angel," was engaged to be leading man of the new organization. An "angel" is one of those peculiar individuals who have stage aspirations, with money to burn; is ambitious to act, or try to, then fret a brief season behind the footlights, in nine cases out of ten fails and is never heard of more. The "angel" is generally a woman with a "friend." Her stock in trade to embark in an arduous profession requiring talent, industry, patience, intelligence, perseverance, and self-reliance consists chiefly in a good wardrobe, cheek, self-assurance, vanity, and ready cash.

It is a well-known fact that the capital stock of an "angel" melts, thaws, and resolves itself into disappointment after she has had a short practical experience on the boards. The exacting demands of the theatrical calling dims the luster that lured the deluded one recklessly to enter the seemingly attractive circle, to appear as the make-believe heroines of romance on the stage. A few weeks—perhaps not so long—at one of the theatrical factories to be found in nearly all of the large cities where *Juliets* are prepared at short notice, *Camilles* manufactured for immediate use, and actors in every department of the calling are turned out by some superfluous veteran of the stage at so much per lesson, generally in advance, fits the aspirant for a debut on a starring tour. How many enterprises of this character have started out, with thousands of dollars to back them, too, and returned to the city with rudely dispelled hopes and empty purses, it is difficult to estimate. Every season brings forth a fresh crop. The industry has grown with the times, and the appetite for theatric fame has not in the least diminished. The number of fallen "angels" scattered throughout the country would cut a respectable figure in a statistical report.

It is only a few short years ago, in one of the leading theatres of the country, a playhouse which was subsequently trampled out of existence by the march of trade, that five *Juliets* to one *Romeo* made an afternoon pitiful by the incongruity of the representation of one of the sweetest plays of the immortal bard. Every act introduced a fresh *Juliet*, as if to demonstrate the unfitness of each aspirant to present adequately even the slightest phase of a character which requires the art of a consummate artist to interpret properly.

Much has been said and written about the unworthiness of traveling companies in the country towns. While much of this may be true, even in the large cities as absurd exhibitions of acting may be witnessed as anywhere else. No one knew this better than Handy. To give him his due, he was usually careful in the selection of his companies. He never went half-way to work about it. When he desired to organize a troupe he endeavored to gather about him the best from his point of view.

"Indifferent and bumptious actors," said Handy to a friend, "are always looking for what they call big money. Their seasons, therefore, are short. They learn nothing from experience. They know it all. Yet they will hang on the ragged edge of starvation for weeks rather than come down in what they are pleased to name as their figures. A really good actor has little difficulty in securing an engagement at a reasonable salary. I know them, and they can't fool your uncle."

It must be admitted that Handy's experience in this line was somewhat extensive. To go into the detail of advance work and rehearsals is unnecessary. They may be left to the reader's imagination. They are, therefore, passed over in order to get more quickly to the opening night and the birth and death of a star.

"Camille" was the drama in which the "angel" decided to make her debut. The aspiring amateur, if a woman, generally makes choice of "La Dame aux Camellias." Why she does so, if not to bring to her aid a display of rich and elaborate costumes, it is difficult to say. In making such selection she unconsciously contrasts the possession of rich silk and satin frocks, together with valuable jewels, with the poverty of her histrionic resources.

The little town of Weston was the place selected as the scene of operations. The advance man, or press agent, had played his part well. "Camille" met the eye on every fence and blank wall in the place. Dodgers literally floated in the air and the town was so adorned with snipes that the uninitiated might reasonably conclude that paper costs nothing and printers worked for fun. To Handy's indefatigable exertions this was in a great measure due. Three nights he devoted to the work, and actually painted Weston red with "Camille."

"If you want to have a thing done well," he exclaimed, "you must do it yourself or see personally that it is done. There is no use in having printing unless you get it up where the public can see it. Billposters are peculiar people. They are in certain respects economical, and they have their own peculiar ideas of saving. That perhaps is the reason why you see so few posters stuck up for public edification and so many of them stowed away somewhere on out-of-the-way shelves in billposters' studios. They are queer fellows, these bill-posters. I've never been able to understand them. I've been, in various capacities, with many theatrical companies that were amply supplied with all kinds of printing to start out with, but when I went about town where we played looking for it I had to search pretty closely to find where it was pasted up. I therefore, in this case, determined to pay personal attention to that part of the business myself." This information or explanation was imparted to *Camille* through Fogg, by the way of a preliminary endorsement of Handy's remarkable energy.

Fogg was enthusiastic in praise of the manager's clever publicity display.

"I never saw a town so well billed in my life," said he, "and as you know, Mr. Handy, I have had some experience in such matters. Don't you agree with me, Miss De la Rue?" The last inquiry was

addressed to the "angel" star, who was standing by his side, apparently as nervous and fidgety as if she was about to undergo an examination in a law court.

"Yes, indeed; I think the place is awfully well done," she replied, rather timidly, "but I didn't notice as many of my lithos around as I expected."

"What!" replied the manager in surprise. "Why, there ain't a saloon or cigar shop that ain't got them up. I know, for I've been in all of 'em."

Handy spoke the truth. It is a fact that cigar shops and liquor stores are the principal galleries in which the pictorial printing of theatrical celebrities and theatrical combinations are placed on exhibition. There is more money thrown away uselessly in such places, in the way of expensive printing and lithographs, than managers seem to realize. Even some of the shrewdest men in the business are not altogether free from the weakness of adorning these establishments with high-priced pictorial work. The practice at one time had at least the merit of novelty, but since it has become a regular thing it has lost much of its efficacy and ceased to be remunerative. But what is the use of objecting? Stars would be nothing more than mere rushlights if the highly colored lithos did not proclaim their prominence in the theatrical firmament to those who are ever ready to pledge women in song or story in the flowing bowl. Of course, in the interest of art.

"Do you think, Mr. Handy, that we shall have a good house?" inquired the "angel," as she stood on the stage before the performance, in a highly nervous, hesitating manner. "I should dislike to appear before a small audience; it is so discouraging, you know, to an artist."

"A good house?" echoed the optimistic manager. "We'll turn 'em away, and you can bank on it," he replied, with an air of confidence that reassured the bird of paradise and brought a smile to her face.

"I'm so glad to hear you say so! But I'm ashamed to admit it. But to you, of course, as my manager, I may confide and confess I feel awfully nervous."

"Happy to hear you tell me so, miss. Remember one thing, that all them as amounts to anything are taken that way on a first night. For instance, take Sarah Bernhardt. Well, she's a holy terror on a first night. There's Francis Wilson—well, it isn't safe to be near him when he comes off the stage of a first night. Then there's Joe Murphy, the great Irish comedian; when he plays a part, it is said, he becomes so nervous that he goes about giving every member of his company a ten-dollar bill. Sir Henry Irving was another of those so affected that he wanted to make a speech to the audience after every act, and only for the restraining influence of Bram Stoker, he would. Charley Wyndham, now Sir Charles, makes himself believe he is an incarnation of David Garrick. Nat Goodwin is that nervous of a first night that he wants to play 'Macbeth' with Maude Adams as *Lady Macbeth* the next time he produces a new piece. All the result of nervousness, I assure you. I am affected that way myself on every first performance I appear in. It is, strange to say, the greatest evidence we have of the possession of that gift of what is regarded as genius. That's what's the matter!"

"You really think so? Oh, it is so consoling to hear you say so! I feel easier in my mind after you telling me and placing me on the same footing with the great ones of our profession. I'll go and dress now."

The "angel" star hurried off to her dressing-room. Smith, from among the manifold duties he was called upon to perform, had just returned from the front of the house, where he had been looking after things, as he himself put it. He approached Handy and in an enthusiastic manner informed him he thought the capacity of the house would be tested.

"Oh, that won't surprise me," replied Handy. "Give me 'Camille' every time for a country audience, providing the billing is all right. 'Camille' is old enough to be young."

"Do you think we're going to give a good show?"

"As to that, I'll speak to you later on. That's another proposition. Now, then, get a move on you. Hurry up and dress, and above all things, see that your props are all right."

Smith was property man as well as prompter—two important offices which in any well-regulated theatrical company would require the services of two men. In addition to these, he undertook to double a couple of the minor parts. He was an old hand at the work, and doubling and trebling did not in the slightest disturb him. He was not always as careful as he should be in the matter of detail, and in several instances his attempts at faking did not pan out as he originally planned them.

CHAPTER XIX

"Experience is a great book, the events of life its chapters."

—SAINTE-BEUVE.

By eight o'clock the house was well filled. The signboard bearing the legend, "Standing Room

Only" was put out in front to catch a few more. It was such an audience as would make any manager's heart rejoice. The curtain rose promptly on the first act. To say the act went off tamely would be simply admitting the truth. Camille was not only uncertain in her lines, but she was suffering from a bad attack of stage fright. Were it not for extraordinary exertions on the part of the principal members of the company—a confidence acquired of long experience—the star of the evening would have twinkled out of existence and "Camille" would have been presented in one act instead of five. The unfortunate "angel" realized for the first time in her life, possibly, that the calling she had selected to adopt was not all her fancy had painted it. The so-called coaching and training she had paid for proved of little or no practical value. She was *Camille* only in costume—if in that; the *Camille* of the dressmaker—nothing more. The audience, moreover, were not slow in recognizing this fact also. That day has gone by, apparently, when tyros may sally forth from the city and win country audiences with fine dresses, pretty faces, cheek, and inexperience. The theatre-going public knows the trick. The days of such barn-storming are passing away.

Mr. Fogg, who was the *Armand*, did not make a profound impression. The part suited him like an ill-fitted garment, and he felt it. The realization of that fact took all the vim out of him. If the real truth was known, he, no doubt, wished himself back in his little second-story back in the big city, gossiping of what he might, but could not, do if he had the chance. Handy was cast for the part of the *Count de Varville*. He was not great in the character, but he could wrestle with it. Was there a role in the whole range of the English drama he would decline to take a fall out of if circumstances demanded?

"Say, you'll have to throw more ginger into the part, old fellow," said Handy, as the hero of the carmine blouse of benefit memory walked across the stage, looking very disconsolate after the first act. Neither he nor the star received the slightest applause during their scenes.

"Wait until the fourth act, the great act of the piece," replied Fogg, "and I'll fetch 'em. You just watch me."

"All ready for the second act," cried out the call-boy. A few seconds later the curtain went up and the play proceeded. Nothing of particular moment transpired during the act. The audience sat through it as tamely as if listening to a funeral sermon. *Camille* was painfully tame; *Armand* as harmless a lover as any respectable parent could desire. The remainder of the cast, influenced, no doubt, by the shortcomings of the principals, became listless and merely walked through their parts as they spoke their lines.

At the close of the act a number of people left the house. They evidently had had enough and did not care for more. The "angel" also had had enough of "Camille," and wished the whole thing was over. Fogg also had had enough of *Armand*, and mentally avowed that never again would he undertake a stage lover to an "angel" without experience. In passing, it may be added that an experienced "angel" would not accept Fogg for a *Claude* at any price. Handy had enough of both of them, with something to spare. In desperation he even expressed regret he did not have a hack at *Armand* himself and infuse some life into it. If he had there would have been fun, for Handy's lovers were fearfully and wonderfully made.

The third act passed pretty much as the two preceding acts, only more so, with fewer people in the house to see it. A number of noticeable yawns evidenced the frame of mind of those who remained.

The curtain went up on the fourth act—that in which Fogg was going to do something. He had in the meantime been bracing up. When he made his entry and spoke, his manner of speech was somewhat thick, but his acting was more energetic. Fogg never could take anything stimulating without its going to his head, and as his brain exercised a peculiar influence over other members of his body, they all contributed their aid to illustrating his actual condition. He at length appeared to wake up to the actualities of the situation. So had *Camille*, so had the *Count de Varville*, and so had the audience—particularly the audience. Fogg strenuously warmed up. The first genuine manifestation on the part of the audience occurred when *Armand*, rising from the card-table and making a stage crossing, caught his foot in a hole in the carpet, caromed against the card-table, upset it, and measured his length on the boards. The audience burst into laughter. Audiences really enjoy such contretemps, cruel as such accidents or mishaps may be to the luckless player. Fogg arose and, wisely affecting not to notice the storm in front of the footlights, continued the scene. At length the moment was reached for him to shower gold on *Camille*, and by such insult endeavor to provoke a quarrel with *de Varville*. Hastily and clumsily drawing forth the property purse or bag of coin which Smith had prepared, he burst the fastening and showered the contents on the unfortunate *Camille*. Lo and behold! the property coin proved to be medium-sized brass buttons with long shanks. A far-sighted humorist among the audience caught sight of them and, with utter disregard of the dramatic situation and ignoring the consequences of his interference, unloosed his tongue and in a peculiar treble voice called out:

"Button, button; who has the button?"

The audience caught the ill-timed humor of the situation, *Camille* nearly collapsed, and the people on the stage with considerable difficulty restrained themselves from taking part in the prevailing hilarity. It was some time before the slightest semblance of order could be restored in front. Eventually, when something like quiet was restored, the act was played to a finish, in a somewhat fitful and highly nervous manner.

Behind the curtain there was a very lively condition of things. *Armand* was furious; *Camille* was

engaged in giving a practical demonstration of hysterical stunts. She declared she would not go on any more. She was going to quit right there and then. It required all of Handy's persuasive eloquence to prevail on her to finish the performance. *Camille* seemed to be firm in her resolve.

"'Tis only the dying scene," urged Handy. "It's dead easy, and the merit of it is that it is the best act of all for you. Only for those unfortunate buttons everything would have gone off all serene. We were getting into the spirit of the thing when the mishap broke everything all up. I'll kill that blithering property man when I lay hands on him."

Fogg had already started on the warpath after Smith, but Smith, having an intuitive knowledge that a meeting between himself and his leading man would result in strained relations, and not doubting for an instant that discretion is the better part of valor, beat a hasty retreat from the theatre, costumed and made up as he was, not even remaining long enough to wash the make-up from his face.

It was debatable for several minutes whether the "angel" would finish *Camille* or some obliging member of the company would undertake the job. None of the ladies appeared ambitious to shuffle off the mortal coil of the *Lady of the Camellias*. Finally, after a successful siege of coaxing, pleading, imploring, and entreating on the part of Handy, the "angel" consented. The curtain went up. *Camille*, under the circumstances, did the best she could in speaking the lines. An occasional titter from the audience conveyed only too plainly the information that the button incident was not yet forgotten. Notwithstanding, poor *Camille* struggled bravely on. It was uphill work, but she persevered. At length the fateful moment arrived for *Armand* to make his entrance. No sooner did he set his foot on the stage in view of the audience than again the voice of the serio-comic humorist in front, in the same weird tone, was, it must have been drowned in the laughter of the assemblage.

"Ring down the curtain," piteously pleaded *Camille* in an undertone from her deathbed.

Handy stood in the wings, ready for any emergency likely to turn up, and in a very audible prompt whisper replied: "Go on, go on with the scene. Die as fast as you can. Don't give them any fancy dying frills, but croak at once and have done with it."

Whether the people in front overheard the manager's imperative prompting or that the echo of "button" was still ringing in their ears, the death scene of *Camille* was presented as it had never been before—with peals of laughter. *Camille* made a final effort, and then fell back on the bed. There was something in the realistic manner of the act that caught the quick perception of the audience. The people on the stage also were attracted by it, and they gathered about the fallen star. The curtain was rung down on the double-quick. The poor girl remained motionless in the position she had fallen. The effort had proven too much, the strain too great—she had been completely overcome, had broken down and collapsed.

Handy and Fogg later in the night were seated together in a little back room of the hotel. Fogg was crestfallen—Handy thoughtful. Only a slight exchange of conversation passed between them. At length the silence was broken.

"Fogg," asked Handy, "do you believe in a hereafter?"

"What a singular question."

"Never mind about its singularity. Do you?"

"Certainly I do."

"In heaven, and all that kind of thing?"

"Yes."

"Then take a friend's advice. Never again undertake the support of an 'angel' until you reach heaven. They have no buttons there."

The humor was wasted on Fogg. He was too humiliated to relish any kind of a joke. After lingering a short time, he retired. The veteran remained thoughtful, taking some consolation from his briarwood and a steaming hot Scotch. For some minutes he continued in what for some reason or other is known as a brown study. How long he might have continued in that condition it is not necessary to speculate on. A tap at the window aroused him from his reverie. He glanced in the direction from whence the sound came. There he beheld the well-known face of his first lieutenant, Smith. He motioned Handy to come to him. Handy was too comfortable where he was. He bade Smith come right in. Smith shook his head and pantomimed Handy to survey his get-up. The latter recognized the situation, swallowed the contents of his glass, and stepped outside. The meeting was not at first particularly cordial, but when Handy comprehended the predicament in which his friend had placed himself he laughed.

"You're a beaut, you are. It's a mighty lucky thing Fogg didn't catch you, let me tell you. If he had, it's dollars to doughnuts there would be a funeral in the Smith family in the near future; and what's more, you wouldn't have a word as to choice of vehicle in which you went to the cemetery. But say, why on earth are you masquerading about the streets in that get-up?"

"Oh, cut all that!" replied Smith, "and tell me how I'm going to get my street togs. They are in the dressing-room at the theatre, and I can't go gallivanting through the streets in this rig. Do you want to have me pinched and locked up, eh?"

"Didn't you come from there in 'em?"

"Sure I came in 'em. I had to. I would have come out without anything, I was so scared of that lunatic Fogg. But, say, you got through with the show all right."

"Oh, yes. Oh, yes! We got through with the show all—wrong, but——"

"But what?"

"The season is closed."

"Closed!" repeated Smith anxiously. "You don't mean it?"

"Yes, but I do mean it. The game is up. No more 'Camille.' The 'angel' has fallen. She has had all the starring she wants, and starts heavenwards to-morrow on the Pennsylvania limited for the Lord knows where."

"An' Fogg—whither goest he?"

"He accompanies her as a kind of guardian angel."

"An'—an'—a—the—salaries, what about them?"

"They remain."

"With whom?" asked Smith.

"They are all right. The 'angel' does the decent thing, and puts up for the entire week."

"An' then——"

"Oh, you want to know too much! Maybe I will try and fill in the dates myself. I don't exactly know yet, but for mercy sake, come in with me and run up to my room, wash the grease paint and make-up off your mug, and I will let you have my ulster to cover you while you go back to the theatre and get your clothes."

On his return, Smith rejoined his manager and they spent the night together. Next morning Handy was up early, and after a conference with Miss De la Rue and Mr. Fogg he called on the landlord and settled the hotel bill. He then accompanied the "angel" and Fogg to the station and saw them both safely on the train. The lady resolved to abandon all histrionic ambition, and never after sought the fickle fame of the footlights, and Fogg ever since shows an affected contempt for anyone who sees anything to laugh at over the button episode of his extraordinary one-night season with the "angel" *Camille*.

CHAPTER XX

**I am not an imposter that proclaim
Myself against the level of my aim.**

—ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

After Handy returned to the hotel, having parted with his "angel" and his star at the station, the first man he met was his landlord, a somewhat smart and shrewd, speculative individual, who was not adverse at odd times to trying to turn an honest penny by occasional incursions into the alluring and fascinating domain of speculation. He had a weakness for the theatre, the race-track, the stock market, the trotting circuit, etc. He was willing, when the opportunity presented itself, to put a trifle into any of these hazards by way of a flyer, as he termed it, provided he thought he saw a chance to make a little something on the side. He had already made a small stake on stocks, secured a fair return from an investment in oil, and came out about even on the race-track. Up to this time, however, he had never indulged in the luxury of a theatrical venture, notwithstanding the hankering he had at times to dabble in that direction. As soon as he saw Handy he called him aside and began a little preliminary skirmishing, and in a roundabout way started in to lay bare the strenuous thoughts that were agitating his mind. He opened up the subject by inquiring when the company proposed to go back.

"On the 2.30 train," answered Handy, not knowing or caring whether there was a train at that particular hour or not. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, I was just thinking"—and the landlord spoke with measured care—"I was just thinking, as I said, that perhaps you and I might be able to arrange some kind of a deal to give a show at Gotown, make a stake, and whack up on the profits. What do you say?"

"Gotown! Gotown!" replied Handy. "Never heard of it. No, I guess not. You see, times are pretty brisk now; good people are in demand, and if we remain away from the city for any length of time some of the company might lose the opportunity of a steady engagement for the season. No, I can't take the risk."

Handy was anxious, nevertheless, to make the venture, and he felt satisfied the company would stick by him.

"There's money in it for the two of us," urged mine host of the inn. "The outlay will not be much, and the profits will be all ours to split up. It will be the first show that was ever given in the place!"

"What!" exclaimed the veteran, in surprise.

"It will be the first show ever given in the town."

"You take my breath away. Say, you don't mean to tell me there is one town in the United States that has escaped the showman?"

"Yes. Gotown has, an' I'll gamble on it," said the landlord.

"Stay! There must be some kind of a rink there?"

"No."

"No rink."

"No."

"A museum, then—moving-pictures snap?"

"No."

"Has there been a circus there recently?"

"Never had a circus within miles of it."

Handy seemed puzzled. He looked at the landlord, and his face bore a quizzical expression as he said: "Say, mister, what in thunder kind of a place is this Gotown, anyway—a cemetery?"

The landlord laughed, Handy wondered, and neither spoke for some time. It perplexed the veteran to reconcile with his mind the fact that there happened to be hid away, a town in the United States that had not yet been tapped by the industrious and ubiquitous showman. Reflection, however, might have convinced him that it was not such an extraordinary circumstance, after all. In this glorious and growing country cities and towns spring up in an unprecedentedly brief period through the magic influence of intelligence and industry. The discovery of some product that for ages has laid sealed up in the secret laboratories of nature in a little time has transformed the seeming sterility of a wilderness into the productiveness of a cultivated garden. The labor of brains and hands, preceding the employment of energy and capital, breaks the silence of time and makes way for the music of practical development. Active brain and toiling hands had won from mother earth rich stores and transformed the apparent barrenness of the ground convenient to where Gotown sprang up into the nucleus of a flourishing city. Someone had struck oil.

"Is it a cemetery? you ask," said the landlord, after he had enjoyed Handy's amusing inquiry. "A cemetery, eh? Well, all I can say is that you'll find in Gotown the liveliest lot of ghosts you ever tackled in your life, if you visit the place. Gotown, a cemetery! Well, I'll be darned if that ain't the best I've heard in a blue moon!" and again he started in laughing. "Why, bless your soul, man, no one has had time to die there yet. Not on your life! Gotown will be Petroleum City before it gets out of its knickerbockers, or I'm a Dutchman."

Handy opened his eyes in surprise. The actual situation flashed suddenly on him.

"Struck oil there, eh?"

"Rich."

"Many wells?"

"Let me see! There's the Anna Held, the Billy Brady, the Bob Hilliard, the Peerless One, the Teddy on the Spot, the——"

"Oh, never mind the names. Skip them. Oil wells by any old names smell just the same. How many of them?"

"Ten, fifteen—maybe double that. Can't exactly tell. They are boring all the time and striking it rich."

"Nuff sed. And you tell me they never had a show there?"

"Why, darn it, man! the town was only christened about a year ago."

"Then we'll confirm it and open its gates to the histrionic industry of the country. I'll have a talk with the company. But we will have to arrange about some printing."

The gleam that illumined the landlord's face at the mention of printing was a study. Handy was somewhat mystified, and he was still more surprised when the landlord, with a knowing look—a look all landlords seems to hold a patent on—bent over and said: "Leave that to me, and you'll be satisfied. We'll get the winter's supplies out of this snap. Come, let's have something." With this hospitable suggestion, both men made a flank movement in the direction of the café.

"Now, then," began Handy, "did I understand you to say you could fix the printing?"

"You did."

"How?"

"Well, I will put you wise in that direction. Will you smoke? All right. Now, then, light up an' we'll take a comfortable seat by the stove."

"Lead on, Macbeth, and—well, you know the rest of it."

Drawing up a couple of well-seasoned chairs, they both settled down for a practical business talk.

"I have," said the landlord, "in the storeroom a stack of printing. I came by it in this way. There was a show out here about a year ago. The company got stranded; could go no further, and, to make a long story short, when the troupe started to walk home the printing remained behind. Exhibit No. 1."

"I'm on. Proceed."

"Let me further elucidate. I had a partner who at one time was in the bill-posting profession—it is a profession now, isn't it?" Handy smiled. "Well, he had a bit of money—not a great deal, and he invested in the line of publicity. Well, he was called away suddenly. He didn't exactly die—but that's of no consequence, and his assets dropped into my hands for safe-keeping. Among the valuables was a lot of miscellaneous printing of all kinds, plain and colored—and of all sorts and sizes—a dandy assortment. Exhibit No. 2."

"Fire away!"

"Furthermore, old Phineas Pressman, the town printer here, owes me a bill. It isn't much, but little as it is I can't squeeze a red cent of ready money out of him, and I see no earthly way of getting square with him only by giving him an order for whatever new printing stuff we may require, and in that way change the balance of trade in my direction. Exhibit No. 3. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly."

"But you don't seem to enthuse over the prospects."

"No," answered Handy calmly. "No, I'm no enthuser. I was just turning over in my mind your proposition. As I have not seen your paper, how it would suit, I can't imagine what it looks like."

"What in thunder has that got to do with the case? Paper is paper, printing is printing, and pictures are pictures, ain't they?"

"Quite correct, my friend. But you must bear in mind that they might not fit any show that the company could do itself credit in."

"Stuff and nonsense! You make me slightly weary," replied the landlord. "Suppose it don't—what then? If the printing don't suit the play or the entertainment, what's the matter with the entertainment being made to fit in and suit the printing? Don't they all do it? What do you think printers and lithographers butt in and become theatrical managers for? For the sake and love of art, eh? Rot! You know as well as I do that this pictorial work you see stuck up all around hardly ever represents the thing they give on the stage and to see which the theatre-going public puts up its good coin to enjoy. Why, bless my soul, Mr. Handy, there's hardly a show on the road to-day that don't lay its managers liable to arraignment for obtaining money under false pretenses by the brilliancy of the printing and the stupidity and poverty of the performance."

"You talk like a reformer!"

"Reformers be hanged! I was about to tell you that some time ago there was a movement on foot in one or two of the Western States to secure the passage of a legal measure compelling showmen to actually present on the stage what their pictorial work on the dead walls and billboards promised. If the shows now going the rounds were half as good as their printing, they'd be works of art."

"Say, boss!" remarked Handy admiringly, "you have the real Simon pure theatrical managerial instinct in you, you have. You haven't always been in the hotel business?"

"Nix, I had at one time the candy privilege with a circus, and I had to keep my eyes open, I tell you."

"Shake, old man," as Handy extended his hand. "When you began talking printing I knew you were on to the racket and understood something about the theatrical biz. Why, you're one of us. You belong to the profesh."

"Oh, give us a rest with your nonsense! What are you chinning about? I am just a plain, common, every-day innkeeper."

"Suppose you are. Let it go at that, and let me tell you times are advancing. We live in a great age—a progressive and changeable age. There was a time when theatres and theatrical companies were managed or directed by men who were actors, or had been actors, or by men who had a love for the business, and had some particular talent or fitness for the trade; but nowadays all that is changed, and all sorts of chaps have butted in for the sake of what's in it for them. It is not, let me tell you, an unusual thing to find the druggist of yesterday, or the commercial

drummer, or newspaper man of the week previous, become the impresario of an opera troupe or the manager of a playhouse the following week. This is a most changeable as well as progressive and strenuous age."

"You speak like a philosopher, Mr. Handy."

"Do they tell the truth?"

"They are credited with doing so."

"Then you can safely bet on my talk."

"Now, then—what about Gotown?"

"I'm with you. We'll tackle Gotown on miscellaneous paper. There's my hand on it."

That afternoon Handy and the landlord started for the scene of operations, to look the place over. Before going, Handy had an interview with the members of the company, unfolded his plans to them, and drew a flattering picture of the prospects of success. A few of them hesitated and decided to go home, but enough remained to enable the veteran to carry out his scheme. To Smith was entrusted the duty of ascertaining the strong points of the individual members of the troupe and finding in what particular line their talents would show to the best advantage.

"Try them in song and dance," were Handy's instructions to his lieutenant, "and all that kind of thing. We will have to fake this show in red-hot style. We are not going to play to any Metropolitan Opera House, Dan Frohman, or Dave Belasco audience. Don't forget, old man, we are going into a mining district where we will have the first go at it. Quantity not quality must be our motto. Remember, above all things, Smith, that the corned beef and cabbage of the menu will be more acceptable for a starter than the roast beef and plum pudding of dramatic art. Take your cue from the great far West. The young towns out there have all gone through a similar experience, until now they have become so fastidious that nothing less than grand opera, with a bunch of foreign stars, or a presentation of imported plays and play actors can satisfy their cultivated tastes. Let your show dish be well hashed and don't, above all things, neglect the histrionic pepper and mustard. The more highly seasoned it is the more kindly our patrons will take to the theatrical feast we will be compelled to give them."

"Leave that to me."

CHAPTER XXI

**"I'll view the manners of the town,
Peruse the traders, gaze upon the buildings."**

—COMEDY OF ERRORS.

Handy and the landlord spent the late afternoon and a good portion of the night in Gotown. It was a strange, straggling-looking arrangement of recently put together frame houses, cranes, derricks, and piles of lumber. So newly built were the habitations that many of them were devoid of paint. It was to all intents and purposes an active, stirring, busy little place—a hive of industry. Handy and his friend made a casual survey of the locality, paid visits to a number of saloons,—the town in that respect being well equipped,—and made several acquaintances. From what they had seen and heard they came to the conclusion they could "pull off" a fairly good-sized stake as the result of their venture.

Without going into detail to any great extent, the two men made the following agreement: Handy engaged to put up his experience and the services of the company against the landlord's capital. That is, mine host of the inn was to defray all the expenses of the undertaking, including cost of transportation, board, and lodging for the company that was to supply the entertainment. Of whatever came in the landlord was to take half and Handy the other half. From his share of the proceeds Handy was to make good to the company.

"It seems to me," remarked Handy, "we stand a purty fair chance to do something here. But, say, we haven't yet seen the hall or theatre or ranch we're goin' to show in."

"That's so," replied his companion. "Let's just cut across lots here and go and see Ed McGowan. This way," and they made a bee-line through a field.

"Ed McGowan," repeated Handy. "Who is he?"

"Big Ed? Why, he bosses the job of the crack gin-mill of the outfit, and runs things."

"A good man," says Handy, "to be on the right side of, if he's all right."

"Is it Ed? You bet! Why, Ed is the Pierpont Morgan of the whole lay-out. He's nobody now, apparently, but wait 'till he gets his fine work in an' he'll own the whole shooting-match. Mark what I'm a-tellin' you."

"Is the hall convenient to his laboratory?" quizzically inquired Handy.

"Darned if I know. When I was up here a couple of weeks or so ago Ed told me he was goin' to put up a hall or something where the boys, as he called them, could have a dance or a slugging match, or a show,—any old thing, in fact, that came along in the way of diversion and amusement."

"Say, boss," said Handy, somewhat puzzled, "are you serious or are you stringin' me?"

"I don't understand."

"We start even, then, for blow me if I understand you."

"Please explain yourself."

"I'll do my plainest!"

"Skip the prelims and get down to facts. I ask you to point out the hall we're to give the show in, and you treat me to a ghost story about some fellow named Ed McGowan who thinks about putting up one where the boys can have a dance, see a show, take part in a slugging match or indulge in any other eccentricities too superfluous to enumerate. I confess I have been on many wild-goose chases in my somewhat long and varied career, but this takes the gingerbread. Now let me ask you frankly, is there a hall at all, at all, in the place?"

"I don't know."

"Great Cæsar's ghost! What? Don't know? Say, is there an Ed McGowan, then? Boss, I'm growin' desperate," and the veteran looked as if he was.

"Sure there is," replied the landlord, with a laugh.

"Then for the Lord's sake lead me out of this wilderness of doubt into his presence."

Not another word was spoken until they crossed the threshold of Ed McGowan's barroom. It differed little from other places of its class, save that it had a bigger stove, a greater number of chairs, a more extensive counter for business purposes, and a more extensive display of glassware reflected in the mammoth mirror.

"Hello, hello, Weston, old fellow! Glad to see you!" was the salutation that rang out in a cheery voice after the newcomers had made their entry. "What in thunder brings you up to these diggin's?"

McGowan had a playful little way of addressing his friends by the name of the places from which they hailed. He was a good specimen of man, and could tip the scales at two hundred. Above middle height, he was a big, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, bow-windowed, good-natured kind of chap—one who would travel a long distance to do a good turn for a friend and travel equally far to get square with a foe. At the time of the entrance of the theatrical projectors, big Ed was vigorously employed in getting something like a shine or polish on the top of his bar.

"Just a minute an' I'll be with you," said the big fellow, after the first greetings were exchanged. "Let me get things a bit shipshape an' I'll join you," and with that he gave another strenuous sweep of his muscular arm along the woodwork. "I want to have things looking trim before the night services begin. What's your weakness now, Wes?" he added. "A little hot stuff, eh? I thought so. I knew how that proposition would strike you. I've got something on hand that'll warm the cockles of your heart. Got it in a week ago. It's the real thing—it is. And your friend—the same? Good. Patsy, make three nice hot Irishes. No, not that bottle—you know the one I mean. J.J. Yes! That's it."

By this time McGowan had completed his arduous labor and joined his comrades in front of the bar.

"Well, old man," he said, slapping Weston in a friendly manner on the shoulder, "how is the world treating you, anyhow? Ain't you lost a bit up here in these diggin's?"

"Oh, I have no kick coming," was the reply. "Mr. McGowan, I want you to shake hands with my friend, Mr. Handy, of New York."

"Glad to know Mr. Handy. You hail from the big city, eh? I'm a New Yorker myself—left there some time ago. A good many years have rolled on since then. I suppose I'd hardly know the place now. Set them over yonder, Patsy, near the stove. Come, boys, sit down. Just as cheap to sit as stand, and more comfortable. Well, here's my pious regards, and, as my old friend, Major Cullinan used to say, 'May the Lord take a liking to us, but not too soon.' New York, eh?" and McGowan's memory seemed, at the sound of the name, to wander back to old familiar scenes of days gone by.

"Yes," said Handy; "hail from there, but I travel about a good deal."

"A traveling man—a drummer, eh?"

"Well, I do play a bit on the drum at times," said Handy, with a smile, "but I'm only a poor devil of an actor, if I'm anything."

"An actor, and a New Yorker. Shake again. Put it there," as he extended his hand. Then looking at Handy closely for a moment, he turned to Weston and said: "Say, Wes, I know this man, though he don't seem to know me."

"Indeed, Mr. McGowan, you have the best of me."

"Sure," responded McGowan. "Well, here's to our noble selves," and the trio drained their cups. "An' now, Mr. Handy, to prove my words that I know you. You used to spout in the old Bowery Theatre? Ah, I thought so. Knew Bill Whalley? Of course you did. Poor Bill—he's dead. A good actor, but a better fellow. He was his own worst friend. And there was Eddy. Eddy. Eddy. He was a corker. Yes, he cashed in many years ago. Then there was Mrs. W. G. Jones. God bless her! Dead. God rest her soul. She was the salt of the earth. And what has become of J. B. Studley? Wasn't he a dandy, though, in Indian war plays? You bet! Jim McCloskey, I think, used to fix them up for him. And will you ever forget G. L.—Fox, I mean. There never was his equal in funny characters, and as a pantomimist no one ever took his place. They tell me the old spout shop is now turned into a Yiddish theatre. Well! well! well! How times are changed! I suppose the fellows I knew in days gone by are changed too—those of them that remain, I mean. The ones that are dead I know are."

"Yes," replied Handy, "you'd find New York a much changed city since then. It was, I believe, Dutch originally; then for a time the Irish had a hack at it; but all the nations of the earth having sent in their contributions of all sorts and sizes and tongues, it's purty hard now to make out what it is."

"Wonders will never stop ceasing, will they? Well, Wes"—and Big Ed turned and directed his attention to the landlord—"what did you come up here for? You came up after something. What's the little game? Want to buy land?"

"No. I'll tell you. Our friend here, Mr. Handy, at my suggestion, made this visit with me to see you on a little speculation of our own. Mr. Handy a week—not quite a week ago—came out to my town with a theatrical troupe to show for a week. The company played one night, when the staress grew tired and quit after the first heat and went home to mother. This brought the season to a premature close."

"Nothing particularly new in that," answered McGowan; "but continue."

"Well, under the circumstances we—Mr. Handy and myself—got our heads together and came to the conclusion to run up here and have a talk with you and see if we couldn't make some arrangements to bring the company up and give a show."

"I see. That's the racket, eh? Where did you propose to give it?"

"In that new hall of yours, of course."

"My new hall, eh?" replied McGowan, in surprise, and laughing. "Why, Wes, the gol-darned thing ain't built yet, but the men are at work on it. If it was ready I'd like nothin' better than inauguratin' the place with a show, for between ourselves I'm a bit stuck on theatre-acting myself. I'm sorry. The carpenters started in over a week ago and this is Tuesday."

"And is there no other place?"

"Let me see. No, I don't think so. Kaufman's barn was burned down last week, so you couldn't storm that now. Siegel's wouldn't be just the place, and, besides, they have other cattle there now, so that's out of the question. You might get a loan of the church—no, the church is not a church. We only call it so for respectability's sake. It is used for almost any old thing on week days, and on Sunday a dominie from an adjoining parish tackles sermons once in a while. But then, I hardly think it would suit. But hold on a minute—when did you expect to come here?"

"Well, we thought of getting here Saturday night."

"Saturday night!" exclaimed McGowan, in surprise. "Why didn't you say so at first?"

"What's the matter now?"

"Saturday night! Why, I thought you meant to descend on us to-morrow night. 'Nuff sed. Say no more. The academy will be ready for you."

"The what?"

"The Gotown Metropolitan Academy of Music will be ready for inauguration by a company of distinguished actors—all stars, more or less—from the principal theatres of the metropolis—next Saturday night," replied Big Ed in a grandiloquent outburst.

"You don't mean it, Ed?" said the Weston landlord, somewhat amazed at the suggestion.

"Can't be did," said Handy.

"Can't, eh?" remarked McGowan, with a smile of contempt on his cheery face. "You don't know Gotown, my friend. Come here," he continued, as he rose from his chair and moved toward the door and motioned his friends to follow. "It is purty dark outside, but no matter about that. Look out yonder and tell me what you see?"

"Not much of anything now, but the faint outlines of a bunch of houses, cranes, derricks, and things, and a lot of lights," replied Handy.

"Right you are in what you say. Now listen to me and hear what I have to say. Had you stood on this same spot you are now standing on, a year since, and in broad daylight, the only thing you'd

have seen, barrin' the ground, would be the cattle in the field—and darned few of them, at that—and a few houses here and there, miles apart. A year ago, my friend, lacking a few days, Gotown didn't exist. Isn't what I'm tellin' him true, Myles?" said the speaker, appealing for corroboration of his statement to one who was evidently a steady patron of the McGowan establishment, and who was about to enter.

"That's about the size of the truth of it. A year ago, come next Saturday night, we christened her, all right, all right."

"What's that you said?" asked Handy, suddenly brightening up. "A year ago, did you say? Christopher Columbus! if we only had a place to show in we could celebrate the centennial anniversary of Gotown."

His hearers burst into laughter, and Big Ed concluded that the way Handy took in the situation was worthy of a treat on the house, to which the newcomer, Myles O'Hara, was specially invited.

"Say, Myles," inquired the boss, as they stood in front of the bar, "how long will it take to finish the Academy?"

"Inside and outside?"

"Yes. Both. Complete."

"Well, that depinds. As Rafferty has the contract, I should say three days."

"Three days!" exclaimed Handy and his friend from Weston.

"I'm spakin'!" replied Myles, in a consequential manner. "An' be the same token, I know what I'm talkin' about. Three days sure, an' mind yez, Ed, I don't say that bekase I work for Rafferty. I'm not that kind of a man."

"An' make a good job of it?" asked McGowan.

"Well, he may not give you much gingerbread work in the shape of decorations, but you'll have a dacint-lookin' house enuff for an academy of music."

"Ed," interposed the man from Weston, "if you could only get the place ready, what a Jim Dandy house-warming we'd have, in addition to the celebration commemorating the birthday of the town! Do you think the job can be put through on schedule time?"

This made Myles a trifle irritated. "Arrah, what are yez spakin' about? Look-a here, me frind, I'm givin' ye no ghost story. Didn't Rafferty put up ould Judge Flaherty's house inside of a week, and moved in the day it was finished, an' thin have a wake there the next evening," argued Myles, by the way of a clincher to his argument.

"All right, Myles, I know you know what men can do if it comes to a pinch," responded Big Ed, somewhat nervously. "But let me ask you, could a stage be put in the hall for the opening?"

"A stage—do yez main an omnibus?"

"No, I don't mean no omnibus," replied the big fellow, with a humorous twinkle in his eye.

"A scaffoldin', thin, I persume ye main," continued Myles.

"Oh, darn it, no! I mean a stage—a stage for acting on."

"Oh, I see now. I comprehind. A stage for show actors," replied O'Hara, as if a sudden light had dawned upon his not particularly brilliant imagination. "Let me ask yez, what's the matter with a few impty beer-kegs standing up ag'in' the wall, an' in the middle, with beams stretched acrost them and fastened on with tin-pinny nails, and afther that some nice clain boards nailed on the top ov thim? Wouldn't thim be good enuff for show actin'?"

"Don't say another word, Myles," said McGowan. Then turning to Handy and his friend: "We'll guarantee to have everything all right on time, so far as the academy is concerned, and if you fellows do the rest and provide and arrange the entertainment, we'll make Gotown hum on Saturday night."

"You mean it, eh?" asked Weston.

"I'm chirpin', I am," replied McGowan.

"Next Saturday night?" inquired Myles.

"Sure."

"It's payday, too."

"So it is," said McGowan cheerily.

"An' yez know what payday means in a new town wid a show on the spot."

"I should say I did."

"Well, as I was about to say," continued Myles, "wid an entertainment on hand, indepindint of its bein' the anniversary to commimorate the foundashon of the place, I think Gotown will make a

record for herself on that occasion."

"Myles, you've a great head," laughingly suggested Big Ed, at the same time slapping the speaker playfully on the shoulder. "Wouldn't you like to take a hand in the entertainment yourself, with Mr. Handy's consent, and make an opening address?"

"Ed McGowan, ye're very kind, but spakin' is not my stronghowld; but let me be afther tellin' yez I kin howld me own wid the best of 'em, no matter where they're from, in the line of a bit of dancin'," and O'Hara stepped out on the floor and illustrated his story with a few fancy steps of an Irish jig which made an instantaneous hit with the crowd.

McGowan laughed outright and applauded; Weston joined him in appreciative merriment, while Handy merely contented himself with a smile, as he was mentally absorbed in a study of Myles O'Hara. Handy was a man of emergencies. He thought quickly and acted promptly. He rarely missed a point he could turn to advantage. He fancied he saw in Myles O'Hara an auxiliary that might prove valuable. Handy's company was weak in terpsichorean talent, and he determined to strengthen it by securing local talent through the services of the representative from Gotown.

"Mr. O'Hara," said Handy, addressing Myles, "did I understand you to say that you were something of a dancer?"

"That you did, sir; an' so was my father afore me, God rest his sowl! Let me tell yez that at sixty-eight years the owld man was as light on his feet as a two-year-owld."

"Then, Mr. O'Hara, might I take the liberty to suggest that in honor of the day we are going to celebrate you will give your friends an exhibition of your skill at our entertainment next Saturday night?"

"Arrah, what the divil do you take me for? Is it a show actor you want to make out of me, I dunno?"

"Oh, no, indeed, Mr. O'Hara!" replied Handy, in his most complaisant manner of speech. "I would not undertake that job. But I thought on that eventful occasion——"

"And," broke in McGowan, "if you do, it will make you solid with the boys. You know they like you purty well as it is, but when they hear you are going to take part in the anniversary entertainment you can have anything you want from them."

"Are yez sayrious, I dunno, at all, at all?" inquired Myles, somewhat dubiously.

"Am I?" responded McGowan. "Now, Myles, you know I have always had a great regard for you, and do you think I'd speak as I have done unless I was in earnest?"

O'Hara reflected a moment, then turning to McGowan, said: "Ed, look-a here."

"Yes, Myles, what is it?"

"Bethune ourselves, an' on the level, what d'ye think the owld woman would say?"

"Be tickled to death over it."

"An' the childer—what about thim?"

"They'd be no standin' 'em. Why, man alive, they'd be as proud as peacocks."

"D'ye think so?"

"Think so, no; I know so, sure!"

"That settles it. Say, Mr. Handy,"—addressing the manager,— "have yez a good fiddler that can play Irish chunes?"

At this juncture Weston took a hand in the discussion, and, with an anxious desire to solve the musical problem, suggested: "We'll fix that all right, all right, as we intend to have the Weston Philharmonic Handel and Hayden Society—I think that's the name of the union—to operate as an orchestra, and Herr Heintzleman, the leader, who is a corking good fiddler, will play the dance music for you."

"Heintzleman!" repeated Myles, in apparent disgust. "No, sur! No Heintzleman for mine. Not much! What! Have a Pennsylvania Dutchman play an Irish jig for me? Arrah, what the divil are yez all dreamin' about?"

"Hold on, Myles, hold on! Don't get mad. Keep yer shirt on," interposed McGowan, as a peacemaker. "Myles, you and Dinny Dempsey, the blind piper, used to be good friends. Now, suppose we get Dinny. How will he suit you?"

"Now yez are spakin' something like rayson, Ed McGowan. If Dinny Dimpsey does the piping work, I'll do the dancin'."

"Is that a go, Myles?"

"There's me hand on it."

"Then Dempsey will be hired specially for you, even if I have to put up for him myself."

"But he must come on the flure wid me."

"Sure, Myles."

"An' another thing, he must come on sober. I won't shake a leg or do a step if Dinny has any drink in him beforehand. Yez had better understhand that."

"That's a go. I promise you shall have Dempsey, and, what's more, I guarantee he will not have a sup of anything until after the show; but after the show is over he can have all he can conveniently put under his skin."

This brought the preliminary proceedings to an end. By the way of closing the bargain, all hands, on the invitation of the proprietor, stepped up to the bar and made another attack on McGowan's best. The evening was drawing to a close; night had set in, and Handy and Weston, having finished their business, were anxious to get away. Gotown was a short distance from the railroad station. After they had lighted their cigars they were ready to start homeward bound.

"Hold on a minute and I'll walk over with you to the train."

Patsy came from behind the bar and helped the boss on with his coat, and the three started away.

On their way across lots they talked of many things appertaining to the forthcoming entertainment.

"By the way, Mr. McGowan," said Handy, "is there any danger about the hall not being ready for us on Saturday night?"

"Make your mind easy on that score," replied McGowan, with confidence. "When I get back to the store and give it out that I must have the hall finished by noon on Saturday, in order to celebrate properly and in A-No. 1 style the anniversary with a show at night, why, man alive! I'll have more men to go to work to-morrow morning than would be wanted to finish two Gotown Metropolitan Academies of Music in the time specified. Yes, sir; when I tell you a thing like that you can bank on it. You don't know me yet, Mr. Handy. But see here, I won't promise to furnish the scenery and other fixin's. Another thing, we don't go much on paint up here. Ain't got no time to waste over ornamentation yet, but I suppose we'll have that weakness in due time. So you'll have to fix all trimmin's yourselves. Yez needn't be too particular. We'll have to make allowance for that. Give the boys plenty of fun and life and they'll excuse the pictures and gingerbread. If the acting is good and strong you need have no fear. It is only when the acting is weak and of an inferior quality that fine clothes and grand painted scenery is necessary to cover it up. At least them's my sentiments. You must have some stuff down in your town, Wes, in the theatre that'll help us out?"

"That'll be all right. I'll attend to that part of the job," replied Wes.

"Is there any particular style of entertainment you would suggest?" inquired Handy.

"No," answered Big Ed. "No, so long as it is good, plain, old-fashioned acting, it will be all right. Only don't attempt to give us any of the new style, the bread and butter and milk and water kind of thing they are dealing out in the theatres in the big cities these days. Let me put you wise. We don't go much on style—we believe in the simple life. But whatever you act, give it to them good and strong. Well, here we are and here's your train. Got your tickets? Yes! All right. Skip aboard. Saturday morning I'll be on the look-out for you. So long! Good-night! Safe home!"

CHAPTER XXII

"Is this world and all the life upon it a farce or vaudeville where you find no great meanings?"

—GEORGE ELIOT.

When Handy and his pro tem landlord arrived in Weston they discovered the ever-faithful Smith at the station awaiting them. He had been on the look-out for over an hour. As he had nothing in particular to occupy his mind, the railroad station was as interesting a place as any he could find in which to loiter. The evening was not particularly agreeable; Smith, however, did not mind a little thing like that. He could stand it; besides, he was most anxious to meet his manager immediately and ascertain what the future promised from actual and personal observation. He was pleased when the train rolled in and the two advance men alighted. Few words were exchanged between Smith and his principal, but few as they were, he was convinced that the visit to Gotown was satisfactory. The trio reached the hotel in time for a substantial supper. That disposed of, and when the dishes were cleared away, Handy began to unburden himself:

"I wish to see the members of the company to-night, Smith, and have a talk with them. We have secured the opening night in a brand-new house next Saturday night—the Gotown Metropolitan Academy of Music. Don't look surprised. It is a fact. The place isn't quite completed yet, and may not be altogether finished when we open it. However, that cuts no ice, for I never in my experience found a newly built theatre to be altogether ready at the time it was announced to open—but the place opened, just the same."

"Is it really a new house, Handy?" inquired Smith, somewhat in doubt.

"It will be when it is finished."

"Have you seen the builder's designs? What kind of a place is it, anyhow?"

"Designs be hanged! No. They build without plans in Gotown. The place is growing so almighty fast they have no time to waste preparing plans or designs. The builder thinks them out as he works along."

"But there's a hall?" inquired Smith, doubtingly as before.

"I told you," replied Handy, a little vexed, "it isn't there yet, but we will find it there when we arrive. Don't you want to risk it, Smith?"

"Of course I want to go, but there are some who hesitate."

"Who are they?"

"I'd sooner you would find it out from themselves."

"That's it, eh? Mutineers on board. Well, all I can say is they can fly the coop at once, and take the next train back." At this point a knock was heard at the door and three members of the company entered. "Ah, good-evening, gentlemen!" said Handy blandly. "Be seated."

Then in his own peculiar manner he described his visit to Gotown, the kind of a place it was, and the prospects of the proposed venture. They listened attentively to his story. When he informed them that to the company was given the distinguished privilege of opening the new establishment, they signified their willingness to take chances. There was one, however, who showed the white feather. From his manner it was evident he was the one disturbing element in the otherwise harmonious organization. He exhibited his ill-concealed contempt of the scheme by smirks, smiles, and shrugs. He could hardly be considered an actor. His best attempts at acting were bad—at times they reached the limit. Off the stage he was a snob by affiliation and a gossip by inclination. He drifted into the profession on the tide of his own vanity and continued in the lower ranks through the merit of his complete unfitness to advance a rung higher. There are many of his kind in every calling.

"I wish to say one thing right here and now," said Handy, and with firmness. "I want no unwilling volunteers, and I am not offering bounties. This Gotown venture promises well. I told you what I could and would do if things panned out all right, and what I would do, anyhow, no matter how things went. I think from my standpoint the proposition is a fair one. You are the best judges from your point. Anyone who don't wish to go, needn't. That's all."

"Well," replied Smith promptly and cheerfully, "I guess if you can stand it, we can; at least I speak for myself."

Those present, except the individual indicated, coincided with Smith.

"May I inquire," asked the member of the company indicated, "what manner of entertainment you propose to present at this a—a—Gotown place, Mr. Handy?"

"Certainly you may," answered Handy calmly. "It will be one in which there is no part for you, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"Only this: Gotown or no Gotown, you are not in it. I have been studying your actions for some time. As an actor, we can dispense with your services. There is no position in this company for disturbers or gossipers."

"I think this is the——"

Handy continued, not paying the slightest attention to the speaker's interruption: "The next train leaves at 10:13 for the city—about an hour from now. Your ticket will be given you at the station, and you can leave here. You are no longer a member of this company."

This episode, instead of weakening Handy in the estimation of his people, tended rather to strengthen him. It proved that he could wield power when he considered it necessary to do so. Notwithstanding that the departing one was unpopular with his associates, he had managed through insinuating manners and slippery speech to create petty dissensions. After he departed he was voted very much of a bore by those who remained. Handy, on the contrary, did not even once refer to the subject. The act he considered from a purely business standpoint. He had matters on hand of greater moment to engross his attention.

All told, his company numbered seven acting members. He had no advance man or press agent. He did not need either. Weston he made business manager—he himself was director in general and actor in particular. So far everything was all right. What puzzled him most was the class of entertainment he had to supply. His company was not such as he considered an adaptable one; it was not such as he had when he made the descent on Newport. The dwarf was not there; neither was Nibsy—both valuable people from a strolling player's standpoint. It is true he had his loyal friend Smith, and Smith could be relied upon for any emergency. With the ability of the remaining members of his troupe he was comparatively unacquainted. In no way disheartened,

he determined to do the best he could. A scene from one play and an act from another, with a liberal sprinkling of songs and dances and monologues sandwiched in between the so-called dramatic portions, he concluded, would be as good a bill of fare as he could supply. This, with the assistance of the Handel and Hayden Philharmonic Orchestra, ought to in all reason satisfy Gotown and its audience.

"We are not so all-fired badly fixed, after all, Smith, old boy," said Handy, in his customary optimistic manner, as they sat together reviewing the situation. "With seven people we can attempt almost any practical play. We played, you remember, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' with that number. We also got away with 'Monte Cristo' with seven. Of course it wasn't as well done as James O'Neill does it, but that's another question. Let me see! How many did we have when we presented 'Around the World in Eighty Days'?"

"Fourteen," quickly responded Smith, "but that included a grand ballet."

"Ah, that's so! So it did," said Handy, "but we lost money on that venture. There's nothing in these big companies. Small, compact, but strong utility companies win every time. Charley Frohman will tell you the same thing."

"Seven is none too many for our work, Handy."

"No. It's about the proper figure. With judicious and intelligent doubling, a good manager might tackle almost anything. Say, Smith, did you ever have a shy at *Richmond*, in 'Richard III'?"

"Well, I should smile," responded Smith, with a delighted expression on his face. "*Richmond!* one of my best roles. Say! How is this," and immediately he struck a theatrical attitude and began: "Thus far into the bowels of the land have we marched on without impediment; Gloster, the——"

"Hold! Let up right where you are," interrupted Handy. "I know the rest. Say, Smith, my boy,"—and the manager looked earnestly at the would-be *Richmond*—"I am going to give you the opportunity of your life."

"How's that?"

"We will present for the first time only the great fifth act of 'Richard III' out of compliment to the people of Gotown, and you will be the *Richmond*."

"Oh, come off!" answered Smith. "Why, darn it, man! 'Richard' will be all Greek to them—the Gotown public don't know anything about Shakespeare. Maybe never heard tell of him."

"But they will know all about him after we introduce him. But that has nothing to do with the case. Now let me enlighten you. I am afraid you don't catch on to the situation. I will explain: Don't you see *Richmond's* first speech, 'Thus far into the bowels of the land,' is typical of the miner. He makes his living by driving into the bowels of the land, don't he?"

"You bet he does, and good money, too," answered Smith enthusiastically.

"Into the bowels of the land, or earth, as the case may be, have we marched on without impediment." Handy paused here for a moment to catch his wandering thoughts in order to explain his text. "You see, Smith, *Richmond* marched on without impediment. So does the miner at first, when he has only to wrestle with the soil, sub-soil, and all that kind of thing. Then comes Gloster, the bloody and devouring boar, typified again by the hard and flinty rock the miner frequently encounters. For a time there's a fierce struggle between *Richard*, as represented by the rock, and *Richmond*, as personified by the miner. It's about an even bet as to who wins out. The play all over; don't you see? There's a purty lively scrimmage between the two. 'Tis nip and tuck for a time. At length *Richard* caves in, and *Richmond* wins out. So with the miner, the rock resists, then finally yields, and after that the milk and honey of enterprise in the shape of liquid oil flows forth. Am I clear or crude, dear boy?"

"Both!" exclaimed Smith, holding up both hands. "Handy, why in the name of heaven were you not born rich instead of great?"

"Smith," continued Handy, "you will be the miner, I the rock—*Richmond* and *Richard*."

"Handy, you ought to print a diagram to explain the act. The audience may not be able to understand it if you don't."

"Map of the seat of war, eh?"

"Sure."

"Smith, did you ever look over a war map in any of the newspapers that had special correspondents on the spot?"

"Certainly I did."

"And read his description of the scene of action?"

"Yes, of course."

"And scan the scare headlines, telegraphic accounts of the battle, split up and continued into different parts of the paper?"

"Took in the whole shootin' match!"

"And after reading all this fine descriptive work did you chance to cast your eagle eye over the editorial columns?"

"Sometimes I did and sometimes I didn't. Generally I give the editorial comments a rest."

"Now, then, let me ask you, after studying the war maps, and the diagrams, and the big heads, and telegraphic dispatches, and our own specials, etc., etc., and so forth, what conclusion did you come to on the subject?"

"That there was a big battle fought somewhere in which there were many killed and wounded, perhaps."

"Now in a few words you tell the whole story, and you tell it well and without illustrations or diagrams, and without any unnecessary frills by the way of editorials. So will we give the fight to a finish on Bosworth Field without any pictorial work. We'll just give it."

"'Tis your idea, then, to give the act simply with the combat without explanation?"

"Not exactly in the way you put it."

"Say, Handy, an idea strikes me. What do you say to the suggestion of doing the combat scene with two-ounce gloves. A great scheme, eh? Don't you think so? 'Twould be modernizing the piece and bring it down to date."

"Shades of Shakespeare, angels and ministers of graces defend us! Smith, Smith, my boy, don't talk tommy-rot! Gloves instead of swords! Go to. Don't you know, my friend, that a glove fight might leave *Richmond* open to a challenge from some ambitious and undeveloped Gotown pugilist, and then where would we be—I mean you? Oh, no! But I tell you what wouldn't be altogether out of place."

"Well, let us hear it."

"We might be able to impress some young limb of the law, in the shape of a lawyer, into the service, who no doubt might, after a brief study of Professor John Phinn's vocabulary of Shakespeare, be willing to go on and tell who *Richard* and *Richmond* were in their day, and how *Richard* got the stuffin' knocked out of him because he was crooked and a tyrant and a monopolist. And, moreover, as all lawyers like to show off in the spouting line, when they get the chance, he might say a good word or two for the immortal Bard of Avon. Not that Shakespeare wants it, but merely as an evidence of good faith."

"Bully! The more I see of you, Handy, the more convinced I am of your remarkable genius."

"Oh, that's all right, Smith. Now, then, let me ask you. Can Daisey De Vere"—the only woman remaining of the company—"sing and dance?"

"She has ability and she is willing to stand by us."

"Has she the experience?"

"Plenty of it, such as it is. And she's anxious for more if she gets the show. Besides, Daisey is a good, straight girl, and these are the kind, I am sorry to say, that have the toughest time in getting ahead, but when one of them gets there it's all smooth sailing afterwards. Yes, Daisey can do anything and everything a decent girl can try to do. You can't faize her. You may put her down for anything to help out. She's been there before."

"What kind of a voice has she—a singing voice, I mean?"

"That depends."

"Depends on what?"

"Well, you see, if she is going to sing in girls' duds, she's a contralto; but then, if she has to do her stunt in boys' clothes, she is a female barytone."

"Oh, she knows a trick or two," said Handy, smiling. "She must have traveled some."

"You bet. She's a traveler for fair. She will go anywhere, and she's at home wherever she lands. She has one trunk in Chicago, another in Cincinnati, a valise in Buffalo, a grip in St. Louis, and other ventures she has in safe-keeping for her elsewhere. Her parents live in Chillicothe. She has a brother in Frisco, an aunt in New Orleans, an Uncle in Boston, an——"

"Hold, for pity sake!" interrupted Handy. "Let up! I don't want to have a geographical inventory of the girl's parents, relatives, and personal effects to ascertain what she can do histrionically."

"Well," replied Smith, somewhat nettled, "you can make up your mind she has wide experience."

"I should say so. With trunks and relatives waiting for her like open dates all over the country in most of the big cities, I guess Gotown won't scare her. There is one point, however, I can put you wise on—she will leave no trunk behind her in Gotown."

"You never can tell in advance, Handy; you were always optimistic. Why can't she, if she has a fad in that direction?"

"Simply, my friend, because there ain't a hotel in the place, that's why."

"What!" cried Smith, in amazement, "no liquor stores in Gotown?"

"I didn't say that. I said there were no hotels."

"What's the difference? Don't you know there are no saloons in New York now? They are all hotels. The law is strict on that score, and if Gotown is regulated on the same plan and there are no hotels, I'm beginning to have my doubts. Say, old man, this is no prohibition colony you're steering us up against, eh?"

Handy looked at Smith in mild surprise and without moving a muscle of his face; but there was a quiet meaning in his eye that spoke more forcibly than mere words. At length he broke the silence.

"Smith, I'm afraid you are not well. Get thee to bed. Rest your altogether too active brain. The Pennsylvania air is a little too much for you. I can get along without further assistance. Good-night! See me in the morning."

CHAPTER XXIII

"All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players."

—As YOU LIKE IT.

Handy and Smith parted for the night, and then the veteran set to work to concoct one of these very remarkable programmes for which his name had become more or less famous in different parts of the country. It is true he was considerably perplexed over the difficulties that confronted him. Perplexities, difficulties, and Handy were old acquaintances, however. They had met many a time and oft in the past, and he had weathered the storm and as a rule came out a winner. It was hardly possible that his customary good fortune would desert him on this trying occasion. With the sole exception of Smith, he was absolutely unacquainted with the theatric abilities of his company or how far he could rely on them to carry into effect his stage directions. Daisey de Vere, judging from the elaborate characteristic account Smith had given of her, rather appealed to him. He felt satisfied she would fill her place in the bill of the play, come what might. She had to. From the diagnosis furnished by his lieutenant he thought she would pan out all right. He knew he wasn't going to offer an entertainment to a houseful of metropolitan first-nighters, with attendant critics from the newspapers to display their erudition next morning in cold type and hot words. He already considered Daisey as a chip of the old block.

It was well into the night when the indefatigable manager got through with his pen, which at best was a work of labor to him—and hard labor at that. It is only fair to admit that he had meager theatric resources to draw upon and be able in any way to whip it into shape to fit the exigencies of the approaching occasion. He derived considerable comforting consolation from the reflection that Gotown was virgin soil upon which he was called upon to operate theatrically. As the result of pondering with his brain and manipulating with his pen, he succeeded in evolving a draft of a programme as mixed and varied as might be expected from the all-star company gathered together at short notice for a benefit or testimonial for some popular unfortunate player—with several loopholes for such changes, alterations, additions, subtractions, multiplications, and divisions as might suggest themselves or be forced upon him later on. From the coinage of his active brain he succeeded in bringing forth and committing to paper something like the following as his programme for the inauguration and opening night of the Gotown Metropolitan Academy of Music:

IMPORTANT NOTICE

COME ONE—COME ALL—BE ON HAND

GOTOWN METROPOLITAN ACADEMY OF MUSIC

Proprietor and Owner..... Mr. Ed. McGowan

**Mr. McGowan takes pleasure in announcing that he has engaged
the celebrated Actor-Manager, Mr. Sellers
Micawber Handy, and his talented company
of performers to appear**

NEXT SATURDAY EVENING

To celebrate the anniversary of the founding of

GOTOWN

By the official inauguration of the
METROPOLITAN ACADEMY OF MUSIC

To make the event worthy of this occasion
this highly talented and distinguished bunch
will be presented under the direction of Mr. Handy

IN A VARIEGATED PROGRAM

Made up of selections from undeniably good sources, ancient
and modern. In consequence of the length and richness
of the Bill, details will not be given out
until the night of the Show. It may be mentioned, however, that

Singing and Dancing

as well as Acting in all the various departments of Tragedy,
Comedy, Burlesque, Grand Opera, etc., etc., will be
introduced in the most approved and up-to-date
style that circumstances will permit

LOCAL CELEBRITIES

Have generously volunteered their valuable services to lend a hand and do something

LIST OF PRICES

First half of the house, with seats	\$1.00
Second half, back to the wall	.50
Seats in the windows, with steps to get at them	.50
Seats in the balcony, first two rows	.75
General admission, with a chance for a seat	.25

Tickets in advance may be purchased beforehand at
Ed. McGowan's Spiritual Emporium

Tickets bought of speculators on the outside will be refused at the door

The entertainment will start at 8 o'clock and wind up when the audience have all they
want

P. S.—Don't miss this chance, for it will be the only anniversary
of its kind with which Gotown will be honored in a long time to come.

The Weston Handel and Hayden Philharmonic Society will handle the Music

After Handy had finished his herculean labor in concocting this extraordinary playbill, he leaned back in his chair and read and reread it over and over again, to assure himself it was all right. Then with the consciousness that he had done his duty, he lay down to rest for a few hours to recuperate before he again took up the thread of that busy life which, though at times it brought him sore trials and tribulations, never appeared to have robbed him of that measure of contentment and cheerfulness with his lot which was his chief characteristic in sustaining him through the temporary storms of adversity which he encountered.

CHAPTER XXIV

"There's nothing to be got nowadays unless thou can't fish for it."

—PERICLES PRINCE OF TYRE.

The following day was a busy one in thought and action. Notwithstanding the disposition and energy of the Gotown proprietor in getting the Academy of Music ready, there were many things to be considered apart from the mere putting up of the structure itself. And these were as necessary as the house proper. In the first place, there was not a stitch of canvas prepared for the scenery; the lighting of the house had to be considered, and the arrangements for the seating had not been mentioned. These were some of the perplexities that confronted Handy.

The first thing he did to prepare himself for the work before him was to take a bath. He was a great believer in hygiene, and cold water for bathing purposes he considered the best of medicines. The bath taken, he sat down to a good plain and substantial meal, with an appetite to enjoy it. Then, after carefully loading his briarwood, he summoned his man Friday for consultation.

"Now, then, Smith, we have some work ahead this trip, I can tell you, and no mistake; and I hardly know where to begin. Anyhow, call a rehearsal for one o'clock."

"A what! A rehearsal?" replied Smith, amazed. "A rehearsal—rehearsal of what, and may I inquire where?"

"That's so," said Handy thoughtfully. "That's so. Never mind putting up the call, or better still, go and see the members of the company and tell them to be ready for the call. I'll decide later what I want them to do."

The next move of the veteran was to call on the manager of the Weston Theatre to see if he could have the use of the stage for the afternoon. He found he could not, as the company then playing there wanted it for the rehearsal of a new play they had in rehearsal. If the next day would suit, the stage was at his disposal. This was an agreeable surprise to Handy. It suited him much better, as it gave him a little more time to think over the bill he should present at Gotown. He hastened to the hotel and instructed Smith to call the people for rehearsal at the Weston Theatre at eleven o'clock next forenoon.

This piece of business off his mind, he sought his partner in the Gotown venture, to ascertain about the Handel and Hayden Philharmonic. Weston had just returned from a visit to Herr Anton Wagner, the leader and president of the society.

"I have just parted with the boss of the spielers," said Weston, "and I am a bit disappointed. I don't think we can get them to do the street parade stunt, but for the night job they will be all O. K."

"What do you mean by the street parade stunt?" inquired Handy, in some surprise. "That's a new one on me."

"Well, I thought it would be a great scheme if we could get the Phillies to get out their wind instruments and play a few tunes through the main street from the station up to the new Academy the afternoon of the show. You know I have a couple of dozen army overcoats in the storeroom. The spielers could wear them. Then when they got to the Academy they could shed their street armor, hide their wind instruments, and start in on the string instruments in their glad rags."

Handy smiled, and asked: "How did you succeed?"

"Couldn't work the street racket."

"Why?"

"Because the men had to work at their regular jobs. Wagner is a shoemaker. He works the trombone in the streets and the bull fiddle under cover. The man that works the cornet in the outside operates the fiddle on the inside, and he's a dandy at it. He's a tailor, and a good one. He made the coat that's on my back; the man that—"

"Hold on. That's enough!" broke in Handy. "I'm just as well pleased you didn't get them to do that street stunt. But you are sure there will be no disappointment for the night's performance?"

"Sure. They are all anxious to go. But Herr Wagner wants his name to be mentioned on the bills as leader and president of the Handel and Hayden Philharmonic Society."

"All right. He will have a line on the bills."

"He gave me a pointer, too, and asked me to speak to you about it."

"What is it?"

"The man that works the fiddle,—Wagner calls him his first violin,—is an Irishman. His name is Nick Cullen in the shop, but when he tackles the fiddle in public he is known as Signor Nicola Collenso. If you give him a place on the programme you can put him down for a violin solo on the stage."

"Tell him to meet me to-morrow on the stage of the theatre at twelve."

"Good! Nick will be tickled to death."

"Now, then, old man, we're all right so far as the entertainment is concerned. That don't bother me a little bit. But the Gotown Academy sits heavily on my mind, and all on account of minor considerations and the shortness of time in the way of lighting, tickets, seats for the audience and scenery. We can't act in the dark, the people who pay for reserved seats won't care for standing two or three hours, no matter how good our bill of fare is, and there ought to be something in the way of scenery, else those who pay their good coin may kick. Do I make myself quite plain?"

"Very. And have we to supply all these?"

"You bet! Who else is going to do it? This Gotown proposition was yours. I am willing to do all I can. This is Wednesday. There's no time to waste."

"So am I willing. But you are bossing the job. Tell me what you want me to do and I'll do it."

"Then take the next train for Gotown; see McGowan, go with him to the printers at once and get out the tickets, so many at one dollar, so many at seventy-five cents, the rest at fifty and on all of these have reserved seats in big type. You can then have as many as you think we need for general admission. Have no reserved seats printed on them. I will give you the copy for the printer before you go. When does the train start?"

"About half hour from now."

"Find out from McGowan all about the lighting of the place, and what arrangements he has made about seating the crowd; and be sure you ascertain if there is any danger of the house not being ready for us. You know we have no written or regular contract, as all well regulated companies like ours should have. If any other little thing occurs to me I'll wire you, and if anything really important takes place up there that won't hold over until you get back, wire me. Here's the copy for the tickets. Have them printed at once. Get the different priced tickets on different colored cards. Red, white, and blue—and green. Now, then, go, and good speed and good luck."

On the second visit to the theatre Handy was pleased to notice that everything was arranged for him to have the use of the stage next day. Though the manager was perfectly agreeable about it, he was noticeably worried about something, and Handy recognized it at once. Like Gilbert's policeman, the manager's life at times is not a happy one.

"You seem to be put out about something, Governor?" All managers of theatres as a rule are governors, through courtesy, and they like to be so addressed.

"I am. Say, let me ask you a question. Did you ever have a date broken on you at short notice?"

"Did I?" exclaimed Handy, with a smile. "Disappointments and I are old acquaintances."

"You can then realize my feelings. The last three days of next week in the theatre are open, and this is the second troupe that broke with me, and next Thursday is a holiday. Like a fool, I made no effort to fill the first part of the week, relying on the holiday night, Friday and Saturday's two performances to make up the difference. Isn't that tough?"

"That is tough," answered Handy sympathetically. "That is pretty hard. Why don't you wire——"

"Oh, don't talk to me about wiring or telegraphing or mailing. I have been doing that for nearly a week, until I am nearly gone daft. Of course I could get the regular fake, or barn-stormers or turkey companies—you know 'em—but none of 'em for me. I want companies I know something about."

"Quite right. People you can rely on," continued Handy. "You are in a pretty bad fix, and if I can help you out in any way I'll be only too happy to do so. To be frank with you, this Gotown venture has been worrying me more than I care to admit. You know we open the new Academy of Music there Saturday night, and the reason the proprietor is in such haste to do so on that date is because Saturday is the anniversary of the founding of the town."

"I don't see there's anything in that to worry you. You're dead sure to get the crowd."

"Oh, that's all right! But then I am awfully afraid the scenery won't be ready. It was ordered only a short time ago. The owner of the theatre knows nothing about our business and left it until, I am afraid, it's too late. So now you can see the fix I am in."

"That's too bad, too bad! Where do you play after leaving Gotown?"

"Oh, after Gotown, eh?" and Handy became thoughtful and silent for a moment, and then slowly and deliberately explained: "Oh, after Gotown we are going to lay off for a week and add three or four new members to our company. They are not exactly new, for they were with us before, and are all good, reliable people and are up in the stage business of 'Down on the Old Farm,' a rattling good piece."

It might as well be explained now, as later, that up to the time that the Weston manager made known his troubles and his open dates Handy had not the slightest thought of "Down on the Old Farm," and did not have a date after Gotown.

"Say, Mr. Handy, how large is the stage of the new Gotown house?"

"Well," said Handy, after casting his eyes meaningly around the stage, "I should say that it is about the size of this one. Perhaps a little deeper." He had, of course, never been inside of the Gotown establishment—it being yet unbuilt.

"Now, then, I tell you what I'll do. I can help you and you in turn can assist me. I have no attraction here for Saturday night. You can therefore make use of what scenery you require, under the circumstances, without the drop curtain; but I have a first-rate green baize in the storeroom and I will loan all of it to you. My property room is well stocked, and you can have the use of the props. Moreover, I'll send my stage manager up to Gotown to help you—on one condition."

"Name it, Governor."

"That you will fill my dates of three nights of next week with 'Down on the Old Farm' in this theatre."

Handy was dumbfounded at the proposition. It seemed almost like a glimpse of heaven. He was almost overpowered, and in a somewhat hesitating manner replied: "It is very kind of you, Governor, but I cannot give you an entirely decisive answer just now; but this, I assure you, you may make your mind easy. I must, if only for courtesy sake, consult my partner, who is now in Gotown. Besides, I must see the Gotown manager. I may be magnifying the disappointment about the scenery. The kindness of your offer and your generosity in putting your scenery at my disposal appeals to my heart. I think I can give you an assurance that your date will be filled for the last three nights of next week with 'Down on the Old Farm.'"

"I can rely on your word?"

"Here's my hand. The usual terms, I suppose?"

"I'll go ten per cent better."

"Get out your printing at once for 'The Old Farm,' and make all necessary arrangements. I'll be off to Gotown at once. I'll run down and send my man up to get the scenery ready for Gotown tomorrow afternoon."

Handy made hasty steps down to the hotel, consulted with Smith, and instructed him to go up to the theatre and take a look over the scenery and props.

"Our end of the work here is all right, Smith, my boy, but I am a bit nervous about the Gotown lay-out. Not that I doubt Mr. McGowan's intentions, but I am afraid he has bitten off more than he can chew. However, there's no need in bidding the devil good-morrow till you're up foreinst him, is there?" Then slapping Smith heartily on the back he cried: "And we are all right for next week, too. We play the old stand-by 'Down on the Old Farm' at the Weston the last three nights. Come down with me to the station and I'll tell you more. I am off for Gotown. Will see you to-night, if I can; but if not, I will be with you the first thing in the morning. There's no time to lose."

CHAPTER XXV

"Joy danced with Mirth, a gay, fantastic Crowd."

—COLLINS.

It was a surprise when Handy's cheerful face was seen on the threshold of McGowan's emporium.

"Well, I'm blest! Look here, Wes, see who's here! In the name of fortune, what wind blew you in?"

"Oh!" replied Handy, in his usual good-humored way, "I was growin' lazy workin' so hard, and ran up to see how the Academy is growing."

"Fine as silk. We are putting in overtime on it to-night in the way of gasfitting. You know, Handy," said McGowan, confidentially, "these gasfitters, like plumbers, are curious critters and need watching, and I'm going to have them work night and day until they get through. I wouldn't, between ourselves, have this anniversary celebration fall through for any amount of money, but ___"

"Ah! I was expecting that."

"That but?"

"But we haven't a stitch of scenery for the darn stage. That's what's worrying me, and I can't see me way to mend it."

The veteran smiled, and then calmly asked, "Is that all that perplexes you?"

"And isn't that enough?" exclaimed his friend.

"Well, under ordinary circumstances," replied the veteran, "it would be more than enough; but let me relieve your anxieties. All the necessary scenery, properties, including a green baize curtain, latest style, will reach Gotown Friday night on special car."

Weston opened his eyes and mouth in wonder and exclaimed "What!"

McGowan, on the contrary, became serious and asked, "Handy, say, are you kiddin' us?"

"I am telling you the truth."

Then he explained to McGowan how, through the kindness and patriotism of the manager of the Weston Theatre, he was able to do the trick.

McGowan looked at Handy a moment, then caught him in an embrace and let a yell out of him

that could be heard a half mile distant.

"Patsy!" he yelled out, "get a move on you. Call in Hans to help you, and I'll take a hand in myself. Handy, you're a bird! All present step up to the bar and drink the health, prosperity, and good luck of Mr. Handy and his friend, the manager of the Weston Theatre. This is on the house."

As soon as things quieted down and Handy had a chance to have a chat with his partner, Weston, he learned that the show promised great results financially.

Now that the scenery problem was solved, everybody seemed happy. Big Ed was the happiest of the lot. He shook hands with everyone who came in as the night grew older, and his description of the special car, and the green baize curtain, just like any first-class theatre in New York, Boston or Philadelphia, was glowing and picturesque. He was determined to show the people of Gotown and the remainder of the county that Gotown was in it with both feet, and when she started out to do things that she could do it and make no mistake about it.

Handy and Weston took the late train and reached Weston shortly after midnight, and retired for a good night's rest.

Next morning as Handy and his host sat together at breakfast, he explained the arrangement he had entered into with the regular Weston impresario. "The deal wasn't quite closed. I wanted, as I told him, to consult you, my partner in the Gotown proposition. I wished to give you a chance to go snacks with me in this new venture, if agreeable, on condition that you be as light as possible on the company for board and lodging while they are not working."

Both of them then set out for the theatre, where they found Smith and the company. Smith was in consultation with the stage manager of the house. Between them they had already selected three drop scenes—a parlor, a drawing-room, and a landscape or wood, two pairs of wings, two fly borders, and a pair of tormentors, the green baize curtain, and the stage carpet.

"Say, Wes, how does this strike you?" asked Handy, in a stage whisper.

"Great! but how did you do it?" he replied, in a manner bordering on amazement.

"Hush! You never can find out how to get out of a hole until you first get into one."

"Big Ed McGowan will be the most surprised man in Pennsylvania when he sees all this landed at the doors of the Academy."

"Oh, Mr. Smith! have you had a talk with the people, and how do they stand?"

"Prepared for anything, and are eager for the fray," answered Smith, in a breezy off-hand manner.

"Good! Now then sit down at the prompt table there and make notes," directed Handy, "of our lay-out. We open with a grand overture by the Handel and Hayden Philharmonic Society; and as a matter of course, on account of their patriotic kindness in volunteering for the celebration of the anniversary of the foundation of Gotown, they will have an encore and will then play a medley of national American airs, 'Yankee Doodle,' 'Hail, Columbia,' 'Patrick's Day,' 'The Watch on the Rhine,' 'The Star Spangled Banner,' and 'Dixie.' Then the curtain will go up on 'Box and Cox.' You'll play *Box*, Diggins will do *Cox*, and Cromwell will play *Mrs. Bouncer*."

"Hold on, sir," said Smith. "Cromwell can't do *Mrs. Bouncer*—he has a moustache, you know."

Handy smiled. "Let him shave it off. Don't you remember that in Augustin Daly's theatre, in the very heyday of its glory, Mr. Daly would not allow any actor to wear hair on his face? Cromwell is too good an actor to hesitate to make so slight a sacrifice in the interest of art. Tell him I said so, Smith."

Smith smiled, and in a stage whisper said: "He heard all you said. Yes, Mr. Cromwell will shave."

"Then will follow Miss De Vere in one of her coon songs, after the style of Fay Templeton, May Irwin or—What's that, boy?" addressing a lad who approached the prompt table.

"There's a man back at the stage door, sir," replied the boy, "with a fiddle case under his arm, who says you have a date with him."

"Oh, yes! That's all right, my boy. Where is he?" and Handy walked back with the boy. "Is this Signor Collenso, about whom I have heard so many pleasant things?"

"Say, Mr. Handy, me name is plain Bill Cullen for every-day work, but for professional purposes in the music line I discovered that it pays to put on a bit of style, and that's how I came to ring in the Collenso."

"Quite right, my dear fellow! All artists of more or less great ability, especially in the musical line, make such alterations. For instance, Lizzie Norton is twisted into Mme. Nordica; Pat Foley changed into Signor Foli; and when Ellen Mitchell became great, she dropped the old name and Italianized it into Melba. Oh, that's all right."

"Yes, sir; I know all that, and there are others. But when you and I are talking, let us give the Italian cognomen a rest. Now, what do you want me to do?"

"What can you do?"

"Oh, something of everything—classic and otherwise."

"What can you do in the classics, for example?"

"Selections from Mendelssohn, Paganini, Schumann, Rubinstein——"

"Say, my friend," asked Handy, in some surprise, "do you play such music?"

"Oh, yes, whenever I get a chance in public; but when alone they are my favorites. But, then, for encores I give them 'Killarney,' 'Molly Bawn,' 'The Swanee River,' 'Mr. Dooley,' 'Harrigan'—anything that's popular and what they call up to date."

"All right, Cullen. I'm busy just now. Will you call around to the hotel to-night and we'll have a chat, and fix things up?"

"Sure. I'll be on hand. About eight o'clock."

Handy then returned to the prompt table.

"Where were we, Smith? Oh, yes! I remember; we were giving Miss De Vere a dance. Well, after Daisey's dance will come Señor Collenso's violin solo, selection from Paganini. Then will follow the talented young Gotown lawyer in a dissertation on Shakespeare, and also inform them about the mill between *Richard* and *Richmond*. Smith, have you all that down?"

"Every word of it."

"And then will come the fight between Richard and *Richmond* with broadswords, in which you will have the opportunity of your life. The curtain will drop here, and then there will follow the intermission."

"Are you going to have much of an intermission?" inquired Smith.

"Oh, ten or fifteen minutes or so. You know we must give Big Ed, the proprietor of the emporium, as well as of the Academy, a chance to do a little bit of business. Besides, it's awfully dry work listening to good music, fine songs, and strong acting without something to help you to thoroughly enjoy them."

"That's true. That's a great first part, Mr. Handy. Music, song, vocal and instrumental; dance, oratory, and tragedy. Great, great!"

"Miss De Vere will start in after the intermission with that beautiful and thrilling song, 'Down in a Coal Mine.' Some member of the company, whoever knows it, can recite 'Shamus O'Brien,' or some other equally popular recitation."

"These two numbers will be sure to catch 'em," remarked Smith, with a broad grin of appreciation.

"Then will follow a dance, 'The Fox Hunter's Jig,' by Mr. Myles O'Hara, a prominent citizen of Gotown, who has in the most generous and patriotic manner volunteered to add to the festivities for this occasion. It will be his first appearance on the stage. The music for this event will be supplied by the celebrated Irish piper, Mr. Dinny Dempsey, who will also be seen on the stage in native Irish costume and full regalia. Then, Smith, you can trot out one of your well-known comic monologues that you are so famous in. After that we'll wind up with 'The Strollers' Medley,' in which all the company will take part, and Daisey De Vere can do a favorite stunt of dancing now and then to fill up the gap. Now, then, go to work. Get the people busy and have them in good working order. Call a full dress rehearsal at one o'clock on the stage at the Gotown Academy of Music, so that we'll all know what we've got to do at night. I think that's all just now."

There wasn't an idle hour for the remainder of the day and the greater part of the next by the company, under Smith's guidance, preparing for the anniversary event in Gotown. There were rehearsals, and rehearsals, and more rehearsals.

Friday evening, between eight and nine o'clock, Handy, his partner, and the stage manager of the Weston Theatre, arrived in Gotown with the borrowed scenery and props. Ed McGowan and assistants were at the station with three wagons to convey the stage accoutrements to the newly built temple of Thespis that was to open its doors to the public the following night. It was an all night job of preparation, but there were many and willing hands to do what they were bid, under the direction of Handy and his pro tem stage manager.

A student of the drama, had he been present, might have been carried back in thought a century or over, when many of the great players of days that are no more had to go through somewhat similar experiences. The Booths, the Cookes, the Keans, the Kembles, the Forrests, the Jeffersons, the Wallacks, and other great actors whose names are written on the imperishable tablets of fame have traveled over just such roads. Smith and the company, after a good night's rest and a hearty breakfast, reached Gotown early in the forenoon.

At fifteen minutes past seven o'clock the doors of the Metropolitan Academy of Music were thrown open, and at eight o'clock there was not an unoccupied space in the house. The Handel and Hayden Philharmonic musicians took their places in front of the stage and began the overture. It consisted of a medley of familiar airs. The audience was so well pleased with what they heard that the musicians had to let them have it again. Then the curtain went up and "Box and Cox," a rather original version of the old farce, opened the show. It created some laughter,

but the people came there to be pleased, and they were. "Old Black Joe" was sung, with an invisible chorus, and brought down the house. Daisey De Vere's coon song, with original business and grotesque imitations, made another big hit. Signor Collenso's classic—and it was well rendered—was tamely received, but when he treated his auditors to "Molly Bawn" and the "Boys of Kilkenny" they went into ecstasies. This was followed by the appearance of the rising young lawyer, who paid a glowing tribute to Shakespeare, and then introduced *King Richard and Richmond* to fight it out to a finish on Bosworth field for England, home, and booty. It was certainly a most elaborately grotesque combat. The people in front liked it apparently, and goaded on the combatants to redoubled efforts, and when the tyrant king was knocked out three cheers and a tiger were given with a vengeance, and the curtain fell on the first part amid uproarious applause.

There was intermission of fifteen minutes. On the reappearance of Daisey De Vere, when the curtain went up, she was accorded a greeting that showed she had won her way to the hearts of her audience. With her interpretation of the onetime popular song, "Down in a Coal Mine," she completely captured those present with her vocalization. She had to repeat the ballad that good old Tony Pastor made popular in days of yore, when she had warmed up to her work, her "I'll tell you what I'll do. If you'll all join me in the chorus, I'll give you two verses when I get my second wind," set them all laughing, and clinched the hold she had already secured. The recitation of "Shamus O'Brien" seemed tame by comparison. But when Myles O'Hara gave them a vigorous and athletic exhibition of the "Fox Hunter's Jig," as Myles' father danced it in the Green Isle long before the O'Haras ever dreamt of emigrating to the land of the West, the applause was once more renewed. Dinny Dempsey supplied the music on the Irish pipes, which was in itself a novelty so appealing that he had to repeat, and Myles to dance, until both were fairly used up. It was eleven o'clock and after when Handy and his company started in for the wind-up, with their familiar old stand-by, "The Strollers' Medley." What it was all about no one present could tell. Only there was plenty of fun and merriment in it. There was a song, and a chorus now and then, a bit of a dance occasionally, and Daisey De Vere did a few grotesque steps and Handy entertained them with a comic speech. All were in the best of humor and heartily enjoyed what they saw and heard. Joy danced with fun, and the crowd was indeed a merry, happy, and fantastic gathering.

Before the curtain fell Big Ed McGowan came on the stage. His appearance was the signal for a great outburst of cheers. When something like quiet was restored, he thanked the audience, on behalf of the company for their splendid manifestation of appreciation and grand attendance at the great entertainment. He then invited all hands present to join and sing "Should auld acquaintance be forgot?" It is needless to add that it was sung with a vigor, strength, and heartiness which still remains a cheerful memory in Gotown.

CHAPTER XXVI

**"Say not 'Good night,' but in some brighter clime
Bid me 'Good morning.'"**

—BARBAULD.

In a small back room in McGowan's hospitable hostelry Handy, Weston, McGowan himself, the members of the company, and a few others were gathered for a little bite and a sup before the players returned to Weston. It was a convivial party—not noisy nor boisterous. Just cheerful, good-natured crowd. All were happy over the night's fun. They showed it in their smiling faces and laughing eyes. Strange as it may appear, the most thoughtful appearing one in the assemblage was the veteran himself. McGowan noticed his demeanor more quickly than any of the others, and by the way of cheering or bracing him up he rose from his chair and proposed for a standing toast the health, wealth and prosperity of their friend who afforded them the enjoyment they had that night,—“Our friend, Handy! May he live long and prosper.”

It was given with a hearty response. A speech was then called, when Handy with much reluctance rose and said:

"Friends—I take the liberty of calling you friends after the generous treatment you have given me and my poor humble little company to-night—we are only a troupe of strolling players trying to do the best we can to please you, to make you cheerful, to banish dull care from your minds in your leisure hours, and make you laugh with happy hearts. No one was ever hurt or harmed by an honest laugh. No time was ever wasted that brought with it, through the agency of song, music and acting, brighter thoughts and happier feelings. And, after all, that seems to me to be the mission of the players. I am no speech-maker, my friends, I am speaking to you as the words come from my heart, and my heart is full and happy to-night. All the world, we are told, is a stage, a place where everyone must play his part. And how true are those words both men and women know. I feel as if I had played many and many parts. I have had my ups and downs; my joys and sorrows, and sometimes I have supped bitter in sorrow. But no matter, I presume we all have the same story to tell. I am not going to bother you with a recital of any of them. Let them pass, just as the summer storm passes away when the sun peeps out from behind the clouds and lights up everything with its radiance and makes us all cheerful, contented and happy. Ah, boys! I have been many years on the road, traveling over this broad land of ours. Aye! a poor player. I

have grown old in the line of making laughter for others and lending a hand to bring merriment to my aid. The frost of years is beginning to lay its mark already on my once fiery locks, and the time is drawing near when I will have to make my final exit and quit work; and when a man stops working nature is finished with him, and when nature is through with him it is pretty near time to go. Well, so be it. In years long gone by I came across a little poem which I carried about with me months and months, in the war campaign of the sixties, for, friends, I served my time as a drummer boy with the old Army of the Potomac. Well, this is a little gem, at least, I thought it so then. I think it so now. It was written by a woman. It is said it was the last she ever wrote. I read it and read it until I committed it to memory. 'Tis short, very short. If you wish to hear it, I'll recite it for you now. Yes?

"Life! we've been long together
Through pleasant and through cloudy weather;
'Tis hard to part, when friends are dear,
Perhaps 'twill cost a sigh, a tear.

"Then steal away—give little warning,
Choose thine own time,
Say not 'Good night,' but in some brighter clime
Bid me—'Good morning.'"

END

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