

IN THE HOT LIGHT OF STARS

Clara Morris' Thrilling Experience with Three Notables of the Stage.

CHARACTERISTICS OF DRAMATIC IDOLS

Playing "Queen Mother" to Booth's and Bandmann's "Hamlet"—Pictureque Temper and Philosophy of Couldock.

There was one star who came to us every season with the regularity and the certainty of the equinoctial storm, and when they arrived together, as they frequently did, we all felt the conjunction to be peculiarly appropriate. He was neither young nor good looking, yet no one could truthfully assert that his engagements were lacking in interest—indeed, some actors found them lively in the extreme. Charles W. Couldock was an Englishman by birth and had come to this country with the warm-hearted, but being of a naturally quick and irritable temper, instead of trying to control it, he yielded himself up to every impulse of vexation or annoyance, while with ever-growing violence he made mountains out of molehills, and when he had just cause for anger he burst into paroxysms of rage—even for a moment he was as much as a god. His eyes were of such intense color, and his face, when it came from the lips of one whose silvering hair shows his days have already been long in the land of God whom he is defying. And yet when Mr. Couldock ceased to use plain, everyday oaths, and brought forth some hard-earned ones, they were of such intense color, and his face, when it came from the lips of one whose silvering hair shows his days have already been long in the land of God whom he is defying. And yet when Mr. Couldock ceased to use plain, everyday oaths, and brought forth some hard-earned ones, they were of such intense color, and his face, when it came from the lips of one whose silvering hair shows his days have already been long in the land of God whom he is defying.

openly admitted—and I went on too soon in consequence. Aside, he swore so the air seemed blue—my legs shook under me. I did not know whether to speak or not. He rose, and putting his arm about me, he led me off the stage (I was playing his daughter) and as we crossed the stage this is what he said—the words in parentheses being aside to me—the other words being aloud for the audience:

(What in h—!) My little one! (You double d—d fool!) My bird, what brings you here? (Yes, what the blankety, blankation does bring you here, crummiest girl!) Get back to your nest, dearie! (And stay there, d—n you!) as he gently pushed me off the stage. Next day, when the prompter showed him his error, he admitted it at once.

He knew much sorrow and trouble, and before that last long streak of good fortune came to him in New York in "Hazel Kiser" he knew a time of bitter poverty—Eliza had died—a sweet and noble woman—and the loss was terrible to him. I was just winning success in the east, when I was

me!" He was furious—he stamped his feet, he turned to the manager, and all this infernal nonsense? I want a woman for this part! What kind of a witch's broth are you serving me, with an old woman for my Ophelia and an apple-cheeked girl for my mother! She can't speak these lines! She—dumpling piece!"

Mr. Ellisler said quietly: "There is sickness in my company. The heavy woman cannot act—this young girl will not look the part, of course, but you need have no fear about the lines; she never loses a word."

"Curse the words! It is that that little girl shall not read with the sense, one line—no, not one line of the Shakespeare!" His English was fast going in his rage.

Mr. Ellisler answered: "She will read the part as well as you ever heard it in your life, Mr. Bandmann"—and Mr. Bandmann gave a jeering laugh and snapped his fingers loudly.

It was most insulting and I felt overwhelmed with humiliation. Mr. Ellisler

sleep, only to dream of Mr. Booth holding out a hideous mask and pressing me to have the decency to put it on before going on the stage for "Gertrude."

When the dreaded Monday came—oh! a blizzard came with it. The trains were all late—or stalled entirely. We rehearsed, but there was no Mr. Booth present. He was held in a drift somewhere on the line, and at night, therefore, we all went early to the theater, so that if he came we would have time to go over the important scenes—or if he did not come that we might prepare for another play.

He came, on, how my heart sang! This would be worse for him even than it had been for Mr. Bandmann, for the latter knew of his disappointing queen in the morning and had time to get over the shock—but poor Mr. Booth was to receive his blow only a few minutes before going on the stage. At last it came—the call.

"Mr. Booth would like to see you for a few moments in his room." I went—I was cold all over. He was so tired—he would be so angry, I tapped. I went in. He was

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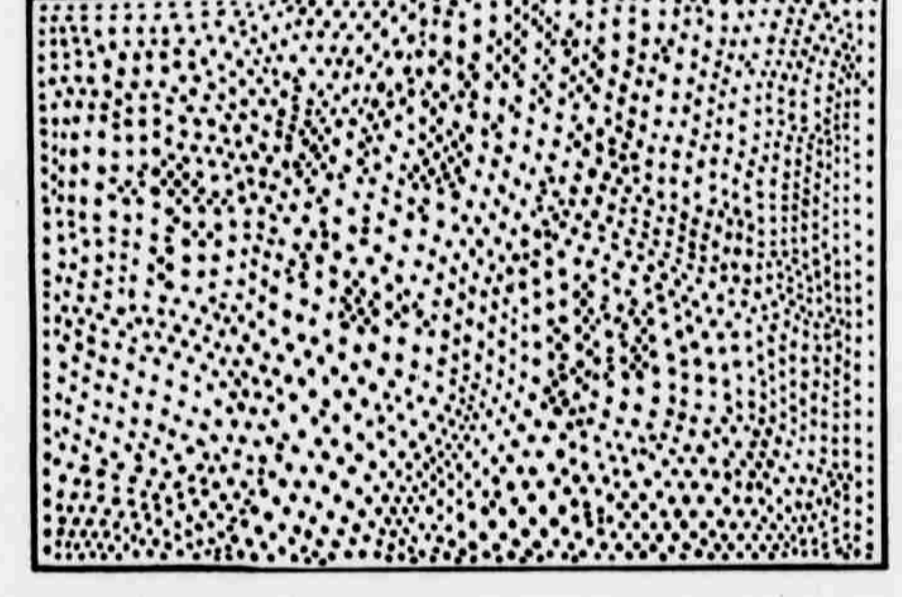
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dumbfounded one day at seeing Mr. Couldock, standing bowed and broken before me, asking me for help.

A star—dear God! could such things happen to a star? I was so hurt for him for his broken pride. When I could speak I simply told him my salary, and that two (my mother and myself) were trying to live on it. "Oh, he cried, 'crummiest girl—why don't you demand your rights—your name is on every one's lips—yet you are hungry! Shall I speak for you?'"

Poor old gentleman! I could not let him go empty away. I took one-half of my rent money and handed it to him. I dared not ask my landlady to favor me further than, in one scene he had to promise to save his beloved Ireland. He quite that. His face lighted up radiantly—it might have been hundreds from his look. "Dearie!" he said, "I'll pay this back to the penny!" You can ill spare it—I see that, crummiest girl—but, oh, my land! it is worse to see another hungry than it is to hunger yourself—I'll pay it back!" His eyes filled—he paused long, then he said, pathetically: "Some time, crummiest girl—some time!"

My landlady granted me grace. Months passed away—many of them—waves went over me sometimes, but they receded before my breath was quite gone—things were bettering a little, and then, one day, when I came home from work—a man had called in my absence—at old man, who had left this little packet—and, oh! he had been so anxious for its safety!

I opened it, to find \$25. all in bills of ones and twos—such a pathetic story these small bills told for the "crummiest girl" with the thanks of the obliged, Charles W. Couldock!

He had kept his word—he was the only man in this profession who ever repaid me one dollar of borrowed money. Mr. Couldock was like some late ripening fruit, that requires a touch of frost for its sweetening. In his old age he mellowed—he became chaste of speech—his acting of strong, lovable old men was admirable. He was honored by his profession in life, and honored in death—he would not have asked more.

Some Hamlet Experiences.

Occasionally, one person united two "lines of business," as in case of Mrs. Bradshaw, who played "old women" and "heavy business." Both, and when anything happens to disqualify such a person for work the inconvenience is, of course, very great. Mrs. Bradshaw, as I have said before, was very stout, but her frame was delicate in the extreme, and her slender ankles were unable to bear the great weight, and one of them broke. Of course, that meant a long lying up in bed, and for her, and as soon as I was sorry for ever so many other people. Right in the middle of her imprisonment came the engagement of the German actor, Herr Daniel Bandmann. He was to open with "Hamlet," and gracious heaven! I took a great deal in the way of being asked to do strange parts to startle me, but the queen mother—did it. I was just nicely past sixteen, but even I dared not lay claim to seventeen, and I was to go on the stage for the serious Shakespearean mother of a star.

"Oh, I couldn't!" "Can't be helped—no one else," growled Mr. Ellisler. "Just study your lines—right away—and do the best you can."

I had been brought up to obey—and I obeyed. We had heard much of Mr. Bandmann—of his originality—his impetuosity, and I had been very anxious to see him. After that cast, however, I would gladly have deferred the pleasure. The dreaded morning came. Mr. Bandmann, a very big man, to my frightened eyes, looked gigantic. He was dark skinned, he had kinkly, flowing hair, his eyes were of the curious reddish-brown color, of a ripe chestnut. He was of large voice—large of gesture. There was a greeting, a few introductions, and rehearsal was on, and soon, off as soon as I came forward. He glanced down at me half smiled—waved his arm, and said: "Not you—not the player-queen, but Gertrude."

I faintly answered: "I'm sorry, sir, but I have to play Gertrude."

"Oh, no, you won't!" he cried, "not with

angry: "Very well, as I have no one else to offer you, we will close the theater for the night."

But Mr. Bandmann did not want to close—not he. So, after swearing in German for a time, resumed rehearsal and when my time came to speak I could scarcely lift my drooping head or conquer the lump in my throat.

Trial and Triumph.

Then came the night—a big house, too, I remember. I wore long and loose garments, to make me look more manly, but, alas! the drapery Queen Gertrude wears passed under her jaws from ear to ear, was particularly becoming to me, and brought me uncommonly near to prettiness. Mr. Ellisler growled, but said nothing, while Mr. Bandmann sneered out an "ach Himmel!" shrugged his shoulders and made me feel real nice and happy, and when one considers that without me the theater must have closed or changed its bill—even while one pities him for the infliction, one feels he was unnecessarily unkind.

Well, all went quietly until the closest scene—between Hamlet the queen and the ghost. It is a great scene and had some very effective business. I forgot Bandmann in "Hamlet." I tried to show shame, pride and terror. The applause was rapturous. The curtain fell—and why?

"What in the name of heaven was happening to me?"

I was caught by the arms and lifted high in air—when I came down I was crushed to Hamlet's bosom with a cracking sound of breaking Roman pearl beads, and in a whirlwind of "Himmels!" "Gott's!" and things! I was kissed with frenzied wet kisses on either cheek—on my brow—my eyes! Then disjointed English came forth: "Oh, you so great—you kine applecheeked girl! you maker of the fraud—you so great nobody! ach! you are free—you have pride—you are a Gertrude, who have shame!" more kisses, then suddenly he realized the audience was still applauding—loudly, and heartily. He grasped my hand—he dragged me before the curtain—he bowed—he waved his hands—he threw one arm about my shoulders!

"Good Lord!" I thought—he isn't a going to do it all over again—out here, is he? and I began backing out of sight as quickly as possible.

It was a very comforting plaster to apply to my wounds—was such a success as that, but it would have been so much pleasanter had I not have received the wound in the first place.

Saint Edwin.

And just one little month after the departure of the impetuous German, who should be announced, by Mr. Edwin Booth, I felt my eyes growing wild as I read, some one behind me said: "Would you like me to d—n an old Brad's bones for you, Clara? I swear Gertrude is hard lines on you, and that's a fact!"

"Oh!" I thought, "why don't her blessed old bones mend themselves! She is, not lady—but they are! Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

In after years I knew him better and I treasure still the little note he sent me in answer to my congratulation on his escape from the bullet fired at him from the gallery of the theater in Chicago. A note that expressed as much gentle surprise at my "kind thought of him," as though I only, and not the whole country, was rejoicing at his safety.

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dressed for Hamlet, but he was adding a touch to his brows and snipping a little at his nails—hurriedly. He looked up, said "Good evening!" rather absently—then stopped—looked again, smiled, and waving his hand slightly, said, just in Bandmann's very words: "No, not you—not the player-queen—but Gertrude."

Tears gushed to my eyes—my whole heart was in my voice, as I gasped: "I'm so sorry, sir—but I have to do Queen Gertrude—you see." I rushed on, "our heavy woman has a broken leg and can't act."

A whimsical look, half smile, half frown, came over his face. "That's bad for the heavy woman," he remarked.

"Yes," I acquiesced, "but if you please, I had to do this part with Mr. Bandmann, too, and—and—I'll only worry you with my looks, sir, not about the words or business."

He rested his dark, unspeakably melancholy eyes on my face, his brows raised and then knitted themselves in such troubled wise, as made me long to put an arm about his shoulders, and assure him I wouldn't be so awfully bad.

Then he sighed and said: "Well—it was the clearest scene I wanted to speak to you about. When the ghost appears you are to be," he stopped—a faint smile touched his lips—even reached his eyes, he laid down his scissors, and remarked: "There's no denying it, my girl, I look a great deal more like your father than you look like mother—but, and he went on with his directions, and considerate gentleman that he was, spoke no single, unkind word to me, though my playing of that part must have been a great annoyance to him, when added to hunger and fatigue."

When the closet scene was over—the curtain down—I caught up my petticoats and made a rapid flight roomward. The applause was filling the theater. Mr. Booth—turning—called after me: "You—er—Gertrude—er—Queen! Oh, somebody call that child back here!" and some one roared: "Clara, Mr. Booth is calling you!"

I turned—but stood still. He beckoned—then came to me—took my hand, and saying, "My dear, we must not keep them waiting too long," led me before the curtain with him. I very slightly bent my head to the audience, whom I felt were applauding Hamlet only, but turned and bowed myself to the ground, to him whose courtesy had brought me there.

When we came off he smiled amusedly—tapped me on the shoulder and said: "My Gertrude, you are very young, but you know how to pay a pretty compliment—thank you, child!"

So, whenever you see pictures of nymphs or goddesses floating on pink clouds and looking idly happy—you can say to yourself: "That's just how Clara Morris felt when Edwin Booth said she had paid him a compliment."

Yes, I floated, and I'll take a solemn oath, if necessary, that the whole theater was filled with pink clouds the rest of that night for the girls are made that way, and they can't help it.

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