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THE BUREAU OF PLAYS

It Brought Out Some Curious Facts

By EDWIN B. HENRY

I started my career as a theatrical manager. I had no trouble in getting actors—indeed, it was all I could do to get rid of those I didn't need. They would beg for a trial sometimes with tears in their eyes, and since I am of a sympathetic disposition my feelings were often racked almost beyond endurance. As for the women who were trying to make a living on the stage, they nearly drove me distracted.

As for getting rid of the playwrights, I found it a much easier matter. Most plays I received were sent by mail or express, and when found unavailable all I had to do was to send them back by the way they had come. True, now and again an author would bring his play to my office and tell me all about how he got on to the theme and the suggestions that led to his happy hits, and after occupying three-quarters of an hour of my time he would go away satisfied he had made an impression that would insure his work special attention. I had a reader whom I kept all day poring over these manuscripts, and after the author's departure I would toss his production on the reader's desk without a word. He knew that he was to look into it and make a report upon it.

After paying my reader his salary for a year I became satisfied that it didn't pay me to keep him. Not that he was incapable of doing the work assigned him, but little or nothing came in that it seemed to me was worth producing. So I discharged him, and after that I relied for plays upon such playwrights as had established reputations.

It was about this time that I became inoculated matrimonially. The young lady upon whom I placed my affections was Miss Jenetta Starkweather and well worthy the love of any man. Unfortunately she had a father who was a very difficult person to handle. In early life he had tried his hand at acting and playwrighting. After a brief time at each he had failed as signally at one as at the other.

It is needless to say that when I was introduced to him as a suitor for his daughter's hand my calling was greatly against me. Few persons have failed in any artistic line who have not blamed almost any one except themselves for their failure. Among actors the person blamed is the manager, who will never assign an aspirant a part in which he can show his powers. Playwrights blame the manager because he will not produce their plays.

Old Starkweather, who, having failed histrionically, turned his attention to the leather business and made a fortune at it, had passed the principal part of his life grumbling at theatrical managers, whom he accused of being the cause of turning him from what he was fitted for to that which was commonplace and altogether uninteresting. Be this as it may, there was not a better buyer or a better seller in the leather district than old Starkweather.

When I applied for the hand of Jenetta the old man looked me over from head to foot, and I could see that something was moving him against me. He spent a long while talking to me about my affairs, then, after a thoughtful pause, said:

"My daughter seems to have set her heart on you; why I don't know. I never could find out why her mother set her heart on me—natural feminine cussedness, I suppose. But Jenetta seems to want you, and her marriage with you will give me an opportunity to go into a line that I have always wished to enter. I wish to prove that the reason there are no good plays on the boards or very few of them is that the plays sent in by playwrights who have not achieved a reputation is owing to the fact that the plays are not read. I am ready to put up the money to hire a corps of readers to read carefully all plays that are submitted for examination and to produce on the boards those that are found to be meritorious. I wish to be a silent partner, having nothing to do with the management of the business. How would you like to be the active partner?"

It was plain that Jenetta might pass peaceably into my possession if I should consent to enter upon a scheme which would take up a great deal of my time to no purpose and would sink considerable money for my prospective father-in-law. I set him down for one of those persons who "know it all" and believed that any attempt to convince him of the futility of his proposed enterprise would be useless. By such attempt I would risk losing his daughter; by consenting I might possess her at once. I was anxious for an immediate marriage and chose the latter alternative.

"I would be very happy, Mr. Starkweather," I said, "to manage your scheme for you. Indeed, it will only be an addition to what I am now doing. We shall at least prove whether good plays are being wasted or whether authors having strong dramatic instinct are being lost to the world on playwrights through lack of encouragement."

"Very well, sir," he replied. "I will

place \$10,000 to your credit at the —th National bank for capital. When do you and Jenetta propose to be married?"

"I believe it is the lady's privilege to fix the day," I replied.

Within a month I became a married man and had the "bureau of plays" in working order. I hired a dozen readers of experience in theatrical matters and another dozen who had never tried to write a play or had tread the boards. When all was ready I advertised for plays. They came in by hundreds. I had each play looked into by an expert and an inexperienced reader, and those that seemed worthy of attention were passed along up through the others till they came to me.

I had had sufficient experience in my business to enable me to take advantage of Mr. Starkweather's enterprise to solve a problem connected with it that had long interested me. I hired a competent person to pore upon the motif of each play—wherein there was motif—and enter it in a blank book kept for the purpose with a brief statement of the machinery or the story or whatever it may be considered by which the theme was illustrated. I had a theory in my mind which I believed would be proved or disproved by this record.

Well, I was surprised to find that though we were obliged to go through a great deal of chaff to get a very little wheat we did get some wheat. Much of this wheat turned out to have been produced by playwrights who had already achieved some success, but what astonished me was that we received a number of plays that were based on an excellent dramatic theme and only needed fixing up by one familiar with the technique of the stage to make them acceptable.

I selected one of these plays by an unknown author and took it to my father-in-law with the suggestion that we put it on the boards. He was much pleased with the result thus far of his scheme and gave his consent to the play's production.

The play was called "The Secret Drawer." The plan turned upon the finding of a lost will. There were a number of fine dramatic scenes in it, the author had succeeded in presenting it in a form to hold the attention of an audience, and I was fortunate in finding actors and actresses well fitted to impersonate the different characters. The piece succeeded and proved fairly remunerative. Mr. Starkweather was delighted at the proof of his statement that to get plays managers must read manuscripts.

The day after the production of "The Secret Drawer," I received a call from a gentleman with long hair and beard, wearing a rusty suit of black.

"What do you mean, sir," he said, "by stealing the plan of my play, rewriting it and putting it on the boards? It was sent you in confidence, and I did not dream of your appropriating it without paying for it."

"To what play do you refer?" I asked.

"To my play, 'The Lost Will.' You have called your version of it 'The Secret Drawer.'"

"My friend," I said after surveying him for some time thoughtfully, "I am only a passenger in this business. You go to John Starkweather, No. 197 B. street, and state your case to him."

"Starkweather, the leather man?"

"Yes."

"He's rich. If he doesn't come down handsomely for this theft I'll sue him." And he went out to find my father-in-law.

A dozen accusations were made—either in person or by letter of our having stolen the themes of plays submitted to us and declined. In several instances certain names in the plays we accepted and produced were identical with names in the plays we were accused of stealing. I referred all the claimants to my beloved father-in-law. Two different authors commenced suit against him for appropriating their thunder. Finally he sent for me. I went to him with the book containing the record of themes and methods of their presentation under my arm.

"What's the meaning of all these charges?" he asked angrily.

"I'll tell you. There are hardly a dozen themes on which to base stories or plays, and every author thinks at least one of these themes belongs to him. There are more than a million authors and not enough themes to go round."

I opened my record book and began to read.

"In 10,000 plays examined 9,247 parents objected to the match. In the same number of plays the theme in 1,542 turned on a lost will; 973 turned on a match essential on account of adjoining estates, 865 on a person assuming to have committed a crime to save the criminal, 691 on—"

"Stop!" exclaimed Mr. Starkweather. "I don't care to have any more of these details. They reduce the glorious histrionic art to the level of the leather business. It reminds me of the causes for our bad debts. There are but a few classes of these causes, the principal one being bad management. What do you think it will cost to compromise these cases of plagiarism, breach of copyright or whatever they are?"

"From 25 cents to \$25."

"What?"

I repeated.

"Pay 'em off and close the bureau. I've had enough of this business."

"I'll do it at once."

As I was passing out I turned and asked.

"Do you still think, Mr. Starkweather, that you were badly treated by managers when they?"

I saw him reaching for an ink well and closed the door behind me just in time to hear the thing crash against a panel.

IN BALKAN WAR.

Prince Mirka of Montenegro Photographed Before Start For Front.



CLAIM VICTORIES OVER TURKEY

Said Turks Are Falling Back to Adrianople, Burning Villages.

London, Oct. 22.—The capitals of the allied Balkan states are claiming victories for their troops over Turkey. From the field headquarters of the Bulgarians comes word that the Turks are falling back to Adrianople in confusion, burning villages and massacring peasants as they flee.

The Greek fleet, says Athens, has blockaded the island of Lemnos, and that Turkish island is being occupied by Greek troops.

The Bulgarians are said to have captured Kirk Killesch after days of severe fighting around that town. The Serb-Bulgarian army claims to have taken 20,000 prisoners, three months food supplies and ammunition for a whole army corps. Kirk Killesch is but thirty-two miles from Adrianople and a report says that the victorious invaders pressed on, stormed the northern forts of Adrianople and cut the communication between that city and the outside world. None of these reports has official verification.

SAY COUNTY WAS LOOTED.

Ohio Examiners Charge Drake Officials With Illegally Paying \$291,148.

Columbus, O., Oct. 22.—According to the report of state examiners, just made public, officials of Drake county are said to have paid out illegally the sum of \$291,148.54 within the last five years. The report stated that the public treasury was "boldly looted" by padding bills, paying for work never done, paying for contracts twice over and for labor and material at exorbitant and extravagant prices.

The alleged corrupt county officials used the basement of the courthouse for drinking and carousing, according to the report, which stated that the "swag" was usually divided at those gatherings. The report stated that in some instances trace could not be found of bridges that the county had paid for. The examination will be continued and action taken to recover \$41,200.05 of the money.

One of the accused is now in the penitentiary, another sentenced and several are indicted.

ALLOW SOCIALIST TO TALK.

Local Textile Strike at Little Falls, N. Y., Assumes Menacing Phase.

Little Falls, N. Y., Oct. 22.—Charles Edward Russell, Socialist candidate for governor, came here and delivered an address to the textile strikers in Clinton park while the local police mingled with the crowd and preserved order. Mayor Lunn of Schenectady also spoke. As far as the clashing between the local authorities and the Socialist agitators is concerned, it is believed the worst is over.

The local textile strike, however, is assuming a menacing phase. At least 200 additional strikers have quit work in the local mills since Saturday, due, it is said, to the work of the Socialist agitators.

The authorities propose hereafter to give the Socialist speakers the freest rein, and there will be no restraint exercised unless disorder is actually created.

TALE OF THE WEATHER.

Observations of the United States weather bureau taken at 8 p. m. yesterday follow:

Table with 2 columns: City and Temp. Weather. Albany 54 Clear, Atlantic City 60 Clear, Boston 50 Clear, Buffalo 62 Clear, Chicago 70 Cloudy, New Orleans 74 Clear, New York 55 Clear, St. Louis 70 Clear, Washington 62 Cloudy

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