

When Stage Stars Are in Eclipse

Interviewer Who Meets Theatrical Celebrities When the Spotlight is Turned Off Chats of Their Whims and Peculiarities.

BY LEONE CASS BAER.

When interviewing duty's to be done (To be done) My life is not always a happy one (A happy one!) (Apologies to Gilbert and Sullivan. "Pirates of Penzance," and De Wolf Hopper.)

IT IS if you can get people to talk. It is, also, if you can get them to stop talking when they're come to the end of their sentence. But, like the poet's inevitable brook, most of them keep on babbling along till the interview is all overflooded.

Scenario writers, wrongly informed fictionists and what-nots of the modern-day story world would give out the impression that it is easier to find an auk's egg than to get audience with a celebrity. It is easier than that far-famed pastime of taking candy from an infant. Always provided you hold credentials that will let the aforementioned celebrity know that his or her brilliant utterances will reach the light of day in print, so that he who runs may read, provided he can read or wants to read. I've had to sneak up and waylay but one subject for an interview. That one exception was Lily Langtry (Lady de Bathe), England's Jersey Lily. Somehow the idea prevails that the interviewed one is always in a condition of hauling back on the halter and that the managing editor says, "If you don't get the interview you needn't show up tomorrow for work." That's the way it happens only in stories about newspaper life.

What really happens is this: The progressive company manager tells the local theater manager and he tells the city editor that Mister Calling will be very glad to see a representative of the paper. The city editor tells me. It's one of those "Captain tells the boss and the boss tells the mate" cycles. I go to see Mister Calling and out of the book and entire unexpurgated history of his life he gives me I cull and pick a few things that might prove interesting reading. Fairly tame proceeding, eh? Never yet have I had to peer through keyholes, hide in closets, disguise my voice on the phone or sneak in with the bell hop when he takes up the ice water.

As I said before, the only piece of unorthodox work to which I must confess was when I pulled a story from the unwilling lips of Lily Langtry. All the days of my life I shall remember it. The statuesque lady friend of kings and a few emperors has a horror of what she calls newspaper persons in general, and a particular antipathy for a petticoated writer. I use petticoated merely figuratively, because, of course, two years ago we weren't wearing 'em. Lady de Bathe adores publicity, but she wants to blue pencil and edit all that's written of her and the writer is limited to only two subjects, her horses and dogs or her theatrical successes. Well, she had come to Portland in a terribly bad vandyville sketch, one of those obvious things with plot and lines and situations butterflicked to fit the fair Lily. Up in Seattle some bold bad newspaper had said she was aging, or showed signs of wear, or some such little observation, and Lily had renewed her vow to say nothing for print.

Which for an editor to hear was just like shaking a red rag in a bull's face. Interviewed Lily should be. And I had to do it. All the usual channels—managers, stage door tenders and private secretaries—failed. So I walked over to the Portland hotel, told the clerk where I was going and why, and then I waited like a female Raffles for my titled prey (titled by marriage only). I had timed my wait so that soon she came sweeping along the corridor, preceded by an ebon maid and her private secretary. Lily's private secretary, not the maid's.

Way up near the elevator I halted her. I had planned this knowing that in traversing the hall's length one or both of us could get a lot said. And we did. Her ideas on the American press and public wouldn't get past the censor board. But before she bade me good-by at her door, saying she "hadn't the slightest doubt but that I was a most estimable person, still she absolutely could not talk." I had got enough for a big story.

From the sublime, a memorable wonder day with Sarah Bernhardt, to the ridiculous, a chat with the racing horses in "The Whip" have my interviewing peripatetics carried me. I've met and talked with Adele Blood's perfect knee, Wilton Lackaye's ego, Kitty Gordon's back, Anna Held's eyes, Billie Burke's red curls, Eddie Foy's kids and Nat Goodwin's last three wives. In print I have embalmed the Milwaukee-Wisconsin Russian accent of Olga Petrova, the handmaiden dimples in Leslie Carter's shoulders, Margaret Hillington's realist husband, Valeska Suratt's pearls and bad grammar, Marie Lloyd's abominable Scotch whisky and original ideas on matrimony, and Julian Eltinge's corsets.

Every actor and actress is bounded on the north by his present play, on the south by past successes—with scrapbooks to prove it—on the west by future starring plans—usually with David Belasco—and on the east by exaggerated ego, vanity, grease paint, superstition, a country place, a limousine and an idea for the great American Drama. The average actor, the little fellow, sticks to one of these boundaries for his interviewish observations. It's only the big ones who dare to think for themselves and dare to get away from the beaten track of bromidic speech. For instance, Mrs. Fiske will not talk of the stage or her theatrical life. She is the best side-stepper I ever met. Of the Humane Society, of ever met. She is a national officer, she will talk for hours. The last time she was here I angled for her ideas on Ibsen and for two solid hours she told me about her plans for a society for the prevention of cruelty to cats. She darts away from a subject for which she has no taste with the alertness of a trout, and it's done so prettily and smoothly that one can only smother chagrin and try a fresh tack. Mrs. Fiske is one of the most intellectual, personally charming and gracious women of the stage it has ever been my rare good fortune to know. I recall that her sense of humor was particularly touched on the occasion of her most recent visit when the interviewer she gave me happened to be placed next to a local furrier's ad. The headlines on one story read: "Mrs. Fiske Declines Killing of Fur-bearing Animals," and the furrier's

ad said: "Buy your Furs Early."

I'll be an old gray-haired woman before I forget my last interview with that debonnaire bon vivant of the calicum, Wilton Lackaye. He was the bright and particular star in that constellation of six which visited the Hellig in "Fine Feathers." Individually and collectively they gave me stories. Max Figman and his pretty wife, Lolita Robertson, talked about their baby, little Maxine; Rose Coghlan, dear old soul, reminisced; Robert Edeson told me of a fishing trip he was planning to our Northwest streams; Amelia Summerville looked pleasant; and Wilton Lackaye had so much to tell me that before he'd got started the dinner gonged and I accepted his bid to watch him carve. It was right in the middle of the soup, I think, that a weird and fearful wall smote my tympanum. The cabaret maids had come in and an intentional blonde, large enough to drive a jitney bus, was warbling a southern melody. Mr. Lackaye first discovered it was southern. Also the singer was a Southerner, he said. No, he didn't know her, but he could tell by the way she rolled that final r. Not only was she southern, but she was a Virginian. He knew everything. To prove it to doubting me, he said he would ask her as we went out. So he did. With a nasal twang that jarred the lady told him she was a native of Seattle, and Portland was the furthest south she'd ever been.

Blanche Bates is wonderful copy, particularly out here where she was raised. She has a wide vocabulary, opinions of her own and interviewing her is a rare delight. Emma Trentini, called the "little devil of grand opera," has a reputation for carrying her title into her private life. She is, on the contrary, a most fascinating little woman, natural and tremendously earnest. She is one of the few artists who do not backbite their fellow artists. She loathes American cooking, and no



Blanche Bates, a Bonanza for the Interview Seeker



Emma Trentini, Who Bares Her Title of 'Little Devil'



Madame Tetrazzini, Revels in Staged Interview



Richard Carle, Appreciates a Favor



Wilton Lackaye, 'Who is Never Wrong'



Lily Langtry, Who Dislikes Talking for Print

David Warfield, Who Prefers Telling Stories



Margaret Hillington, Whose Husband Talks for Her

Gertrude Elliott, Lady Robertson, will chatter about her babies, her lovely English home and domesticity; Forbes-Robertson, her husband, one of the finest gentlemen I've ever met, talks amiably on everything, but prefers sticking to discussions of the theater.

Tetrazzini, whose waist line has run to top notes, always stages her interviews. She is surrounded entirely by her manager, her private secretary, her husband and his private secretary, two maids and a boy who took my name, address, condition of previous servitude and future plans, before he admitted me. And when I did meet the purple-clad and voluble Tetrazzini she spoke English most brokenly. Margaret Hillington's interviews are always filtered through the lips of her husband, Edward Bowes, whose knowledge of the stage has all been gained since he married Miss Hillington. It is disconcerting, to say the least, to listen to Mr. Hillington talk about the dramas, with his wife punctuating his utterances with "Yes, Eddie," and "Indeed, you're right, Eddie."

Richard Carle I interviewed through the closed door of his dressing room. Richard was "indisposed" and a masseuse was getting him in trim to go on for the evening show. So I'd ask questions, the valet would tell Richard, and back through the same channel would come to answer. Richard sent me a lot of notes and a framed photo on which he'd scribbled: "To the best preparator I ever met—through a closed door."

David Warfield loves to tell funny stories. Some of them really are funny. Always he is an interesting figure, and to Pacific Coast people he has a unique fascination aside from his personal achievements. He is modest and gentle and to talk to him is a joy. E. H. Sothern talks about Shakespeare and Julla Marlowe, while Miss Marlowe talks about Shakespeare and E. H. Sothern. May Irwin is a joyous big girl, and her chatter ranges from her famous cook book to the prize piglets on her big farm. (N. B.—Miss Irwin really is a landed proprietor.) These are just a few, picked at random from memory. Some day I'll dig up another list.

matter where she goes she carries along her cooking apparatus and her maid concocts for her wonderful Italian menus. Sarah Bernhardt is interesting from every angle, though she has none herself, rather taking on flesh as the years creep on. She has lived such a wonderful and eventful life! Like all the really great ones of this world, she is approachable and gracious. She speaks so little English and menu-French is all I know, so Lou Tellegen, her handsome and certainly talented leading man, acted as interpretative medium when I interviewed her. It was my great privilege to spend many happy interesting moments with this great woman, and a picture of her, Tellegen and myself, taken at the foot of the statue of Sacajawea, a photo on which she wrote a lot of nice personal things, is another of my treasures. Maude Adams will not talk back for print, but she will talk delightfully and at length if she feels sure it isn't going to be read. Maxine Elliott I met in the same way, with the understanding that nothing she said would be printed. Her sister,