

AMATEURS WHO HAVE BECOME LEADERS



Miss Edna Baker, Leading Woman of 'The Arab,' A Victim of the Late Gen. Lew Wallace



Miss Mildred Berger, a New Comic Opera Star Contributed by Milwaukee Society



Mrs. James Brown Potter, One-Time Amateur Who Became Famous on the Continent

From the Parlor Stage to the Professional Footlights Is Oft but a Step, as Is Proved by the Careers of Noted Women

EVERY season, as the big lights go up over the theaters and the names of the headliners glow in effulgent glory to draw the multitudes, like moths, in eager throngs, some new "find" in the way of Thespian genius springs into sudden fame.

Usually the find is a woman, for of the making of the female stars there is, and ever shall be, no end.

Nobody may have heard of her before; but everybody may as well expect to hear of her again—and again, and again, until she shall have accepted the honorable dowager-ship of old women's roles, thirty years from now, or has reluctantly consented to efface herself, like Mary Anderson de Navarro, in the happiness of marriage. But even marriage doesn't always bring oblivion; an Edith Kingdon Gould will revive her triumph at some gorgeous private performance, or a Fay Templeton just can't help returning to the footlights.

These lights have an almost irresistible lure, after as well as before the woman with the least of mimetic gifts has been in the fiery heart of things. And afar, in cities and towns where only pale reflections of their brilliancy are seen, their influence is felt.

Scarcely a great city but has its one or more coteries of amateurs, and scarcely a town but contains a few ardent spirits who long for the life of the stage, and feel convinced they have the talent for it.

It is in those amateur theatrical societies that the solution of the mystery is often to be discovered. Nominally organized for mere diversion, any of these little groups is liable to contain one woman or man who has the true vocation, whose destiny is the glare of the professional boards which, once basked in, seems to hallmark the votaries forever and a day.

THIS season has added its quota of amateurs to the ranks of the regulars, as the last took away at least one who was deeply and sincerely regretted.

Last winter the people in New York who knew Miss Mildred Berger, from Milwaukee, the daughter of the late Dr. Henry C. Berger, all agreed that one whose singing and general cleverness as an amateur equaled hers ought to be on the regular stage. The summer had barely closed when their predictions were justified.

The announcements of the cast of "The Kiss Waltz" included the name of Miss Mildred Berger, who when the curtain went up and the impersonatrix of Mme. Ritz appeared, proved to be the physician's charming daughter. She had passed through the harsh and cruel apprenticeship, such as the stock company of years ago required, and with such excellent results, she simply emerged from the chrysalis of the amateur into the grandeur of the actress in a single night.

So it was with pretty Edna Baker, the niece of the late General Lew Wallace. Her startling rise to leading lady in "The Arab" included no stage intermediate between amateur work and the prominence of the profession's heights. She left her home town, Asheville, N. C., some years ago upon the death of her parents, and lived with relatives in Indianapolis. Last year her ambition backing her courage, she went to New York to study dramatic art. She was thus amateur and student when, a few months ago, Henry B. Harris believed he discerned in her the gifts that make a leading lady. Right from her school he took her, and she carried the leading role in Margaret May's play, "Behind the Scenes" when

it was produced in Philadelphia. The manager had, in Edgar Hiwmy's "Arab," a play that called for an actress of youth and especial talent. September came and the actress was still lacking. Then Miss Baker was sent for, and in three weeks she was facing New York audiences in a play entirely strange to her, and making good with the aplomb of a veteran. She was on the eve of her quick good fortune when the professional stage lost in Jacob Wendell Jr., an actor who was typical of what is the very best among amateurs. He was of an old Knickerbocker family, wealthy, a college and a club man. His pleasure was in the parts he took in the amateur performances of the New York Comedy Club. The great managers of the metropolis used to demand of him, every little while, that he sign a contract for a season; but his social training, rebelled, while his secret cravings urged him to comply.

A couple of years ago he concluded it was vain to fight against a genuine calling to the stage, and he joined the New Theater Company. There was no one who thought of the rich amateur taking apprentice lessons there. By right of talent and thoroughly efficient skill, Mr. Wendell was assigned prominent roles from the very beginning. When, in April last, he was opening the play, "What the Doctor Ordered," with the Astor Theater Company, in Trenton, N. J., his suddenly fatal illness struck him down, the whole theatrical world lamented the loss, not of an aspiring amateur, but of a capable and honored professional.

If the real biographies of all the multitude included under the phrase, the professional stars, could be learned, there would probably be found few who do not, in the first place, have a "hook," or "sneak," a la Dixey, as the hind legs of a mule, or shot up through a transom as chorus, a la Mrs. Shaw. The spark of genius has crowded, for most of them, first in organizations of kindred spirits and

now, very often, guides them to some school of acting where they may be truly excellent professionals while they are still rated as student amateurs.

There's Elsie Janis. From the hour when, as a child 2 years old, she couldn't be restrained from giving imitations of everybody around her, until the late President McKinley urged her to go on the professional stage, she had been destined for mimetic fame.

In direct contrast with such precocious development was the rise to stellar greatness of Mrs. James Brown Potter. A social belle, the daughter of Colonel David Urquhart, of New Orleans, she had married Mr. Potter and taken a prominent place in New York society before she showed any particular interest in the dramatic art. But when she did, she was like a meteor in the modest ranks of the amateurs with whom she was first associated. Her genius was conspicuous for their splendor; her beauty was instantly recognized as being of the type that fascinates great audiences, and her talent was indisputable. The years of humble rehearsal and painful drilling that are the lot of most amateurs—for only a few are chosen by native endowment rather than ardent aspiration—were not for her. Within a short time she went straight to the regular stage, and made her debut in London, in 1887, at the Haymarket, in Wilkie Collins' "Man and Wife." Collins himself congratulated her, by letter, on her success in the role of Anne Sylvester. When she returned to the United States she appeared as a star in a repertoire, with Kyrie Bellew as her leading man.

The story of Mrs. Leslie Carter's thrilling experiences as an amateur learning under David Belasco, with her magnificent red hair and equally magnificent stage presence as her only dramatic assets until hard drilling fanned into flame the tiny twinkle of talent she displayed, is a story often told, and again denied. But that she was the type of the student-amateur who

sprang into prominence from the first of her appearances is a matter of stage history.

Prominence doesn't always mean skill, and critics there were a plenty who could see nothing dramatic about her except her hair and her figure for a good long while, after she had been wearing the lofty laurels of a star. Yet Mrs. Leslie Carter fought her way through to an accepted position on the stage and survived artistic fault-finders until some of the very critics who first condemned her as the rank, raw amateur hailed her as a prize in the profession.

Bianche Waiiat, as an amateur, bravely barbed from the young, her father was warned there, she went to the public schools by day and dreamed of the footlights at night. She was only 14 years old, scarcely out of school and in long dresses, when she made her first amateur appearance; at a benefit performance in the Windsor Theater, on the Bowery, as young as Desdemona as historical accuracy could possibly require for the age and the lady were Desdemona is supposed to have lived, she was one of those amateurs who couldn't be kept away from the regular stage by all the warnings and managers in Christendom, and she wasn't 14 before she was acting with Thomas McDonough in that belted old melodrama, "Siberia."

Edna Goodrich had a similar rise to stage prominence, but from Chicago. She was scarcely out of the Hyde Park School when she was glinting gayly through occasional amateur performances and long-lingering all the while for the larger opportunities of the real stage. She could see the lights of Broadway as far off as Chicago, and they drew her straight to them. Luck? Why, she became one of the "Florodora sextets" although she was too late to land among the original six. Her career has been a succession of comedy triumphs, not the least among them being her marriage with Nat Goodwin, and her whole-hearted grip on the Goodwin fortune. The rest of Edna, and the marriageable Nat, is current news.

Heaven only knows how many actresses amateur companies have been responsible for, but one of them was Mabel Hite, who caught the glamour of the stage at the early age of 11 years, when she played the Lord Chancellor in "Jolanthe." She proved a true comedienne, but went on to stellar heights, until she acted on equal terms with John Slavin in "A Knight for a Day." She is almost the sole example of a successful actress being overcome with a passion for any other art or science. But baseball proved the rival of the stage, and Mike Donlin has her now. He married her.

This country is not alone in the amateur companies that contribute their quota of regular actresses to the boards, for England has always cherished its little societies of actors who hope for real triumphs. To count them all would take a book. Olga



Mrs. Jack Barrymore, Who Followed Her Husband on the Stage.

Netherole may be cited as one of the most conspicuous of the graduates. Educated in Germany, accustomed to the comforts and refinements of such a home as her father, an English barrister, could provide, she had to lead for herself when he died. She had played Leticia Vane in "Harvest" in the Theater Royal at Brighton, and she believed she had talent enough to fit her for the provinces, at least. She had. And she had enough to take her, within a year to London, the Adelphi, and speedily to the leading role in "The Dean's Daughter" at the St. James.

FEMININE THORNS IN THE CZAR'S SIDE



Mrs. George Lee Thompson, One of the American Women Who Scared the Czar



Countess Torby, a Morganatic Thorn in the Czar's Side

LITTLE wonder it is that the czar has placed a ban on morganatic marriages, with especial reference to American girls.

The Romanoffs, as a family, have never been accused of overlooking pretty women. Whatever else might be said of the men, they have proved beyond peradventure that they value a smile more highly than a throne. Grand dukes of the most approved lineage have been ever ready to chuck the royal game and go in for real happiness.

THERE was a reason. Mrs. George Lee Thompson, one of the loveliest of Americans on foreign shores, had captivated the Grand Duke Boris to such an extent that, about a year ago, it was rather more than rumored that the royal rake was going to turn over a new leaf. Nothing came of it for the time being, at least, but there was always

Scarcely a member of the reigning house but has, at one time or another, indulged his fancy in the way of lovely woman. Some have been content with temporary affairs, while others, like his nephew Michael, who married the Countess Torby, have gone into exile rather than give up their morganatic wives.

Now Nicholas, imperator rex, is tired of the whole blooming business, and has served notice that he will have no mercy on the next offender.

danger when such pretty women as Mrs. Thompson, Katherine Elkins and a host like them were adorning Paris.

as a matter of course, rejoiced in the name of Ekaterina and a family of high and noble, though not royal, lineage. The grand duke met her, became infatuated with her, but could not marry her without the consent of his brother, the czar. In other words, he simply couldn't; because the brother would never countenance a match except with a personage of duly accredited royal birth.

The marriage question was somewhat simplified when the young woman went to the altar with a man named Mamontoff, supposed to be the richest man in Moscow, the ancient and honorable capital of the empire.

proud beauty forget her royal lover. It was not even effectual in making her give up her letters. So, according to the choice morsels of gossip that have been floating about in court circles, Mamontoff actually "beat her like a moujik." In other words, he used her like we would a drunken cab driver or the shover of a taxi who has exceeded his cargo capacity.

Having at last acquired the missing papers, he is said to have hurried off to St. Petersburg with them and to have laid them before the czar. The consequence was that Michael was hauled over the coals so hard that he promised to have nothing more to do with the woman.

Such promises have been broken before, and it is not strange that, on the conclusion of a hunting trip, Mamontoff is said to have found the grand duke comfortably ensconced in his home when he arrived rather unexpectedly. After the usual melodrama, Mamontoff made a play on which the czar would have dropped, "I will hitch her to a cart," he is asserted to have declared, "and lash her through the streets of Moscow, according to the old custom."

Thereupon Michael made a quick getaway, with the lovely blonde perched in his arms, declaring: "You will do nothing of the sort, and the holy synod will give you a divorce from Ekaterina."

The divorce part of it was prophetic. Mamontoff was freed, and the grand duke had a woman on his hands whose wrong he could not right. The situation was compromised, it is said, by his giving over to a lieutenant to marry. The young officer was to have a handsome income for setting up an establishment in Orel and keeping strictly to the apartments assigned to him inside of it.

TOO MUCH FOR RUSSIA

A marriage of form followed. But it is not strange that the situation should become irksome to the two principals concerned in it. Only the lieutenant, with a snug income and handsome quarters, appears to have been completely satisfied.

In fact, it was too much even for Russia. One day the colonel commanding the lieutenant's regiment declared that the scandal was growing too great, and he would have to go to St. Petersburg and report to the czar. That was enough to send both Michael and Ekaterina into hiding at Moscow. When the report got to the czar he ordered the marriage dissolved, which was exactly what every one wanted him to do. Michael is said to have immediately bribed an orthodox priest to marry him to Ekaterina.

Everything went lovely until Michael tried to get an extended leave of absence. For once his royal pail was not to be filled. He had to report to the emperor, who is said to have suggested to him that he return to Orel to take leave of Ekaterina, who was then in the cloister of the holy trinity.

Nothing, however, hurried to Orel. When he applied for permission to converse with Ekaterina, the following dialogue is reported to have taken place: "The great sinner," Ekaterina, said a representative of the holy synod who received him, "will have to pray till midnight. Afterward she will be allowed to see you."

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