

## II. THE INSIDE WORKING OF THE THEATER.

BY GEORGE PARSONS LATHROP.



THE STAGE-DOOR KEEPER.

THE theater, viewed from "the front," is a texture of illusion and mystery. Looked at from "the back," its illusion vanishes, but a great deal of mystery remains—the mystery involved in the smooth running of so complicated a mechanism, and reproducing night after night, or day after day, the brilliant, composite, living effects which grow out of that mechanism.

Every important theater has a character and an atmosphere of its own; and these, and the influence they exert, depend chiefly on

the ideals, higher or lower, and on the character, of the manager. A competent manager, who joins with the ability to guide the policy and oversee the business or financial working of his theater the more difficult, delicate, and far-reaching function of handling as an artist himself the resources of art at his command, will achieve things as distinctive as the compositions of a particular painter, sculptor, musician, or poet. Because of the vital influence he may thus bring to bear on the fine art of acting and on the drama, and because the more the thinking public knows regarding the life of a good stage, the better will be the kind of encouragement it is able to give, it seems worth while to sketch briefly, to disclose even a mere glimpse of, the way in which matters go on in such a theater as Augustin Daly's.

Daytime in a theater is the dark time, a twilight that reigns unbroken while the outer world is gay with sun, and yields only to brief



John Moore. William Gilbert. Charles Leclercq. Augustin Daly. May Fielding.  
 James Lewis. George Parkes. John Drew. Charles Fisher. Virginia Dreher.  
 Mrs. Gilbert. Ada Rehan.

MR. DALY'S COMPANY IN 1884.

From a photograph retouched in crayon by Napoleon Sarony.

glories of *matinée*-time, except when displaced by the full dazzle of the night hours from eight to eleven. The material habitation, the building, of Daly's, which, as in all such cases, one should regard as secondary to the life within it, since a playhouse, however beautiful, is only the body that the indwelling life of art needs, stands on histrionic ground, occupying the place of the old Wood's Museum and Theater. The structure and its atmosphere have been transformed in the twenty years since Mr. Daly first made it his stronghold; and by gradual accretion, the annexing of first one and then another adjacent lot or strip, it has become a most interesting labyrinth, full of nooks and corners, offices and store-rooms, passages, cellars, lofts, and outlets, that are saturated with theatrical memories and associations. The very shadows teem with that mystery of management and artistic creation which, as I have said, survives the loss of external illusion which one experiences on being inducted into the interior workings. This whole territory now covers about half an acre, an immense, rambling expanse and height and depth, of which no one who knows only the auditorium and the foyers—the latter alone capable of holding the entire audience—has any conception. For example, the entrance-foyer and the main seat-floor, which one approaches so easily by a system of graduated steps and planes that they seem to be nearly even with the street, are in reality on a level with the second story of the neighboring buildings on Broadway.

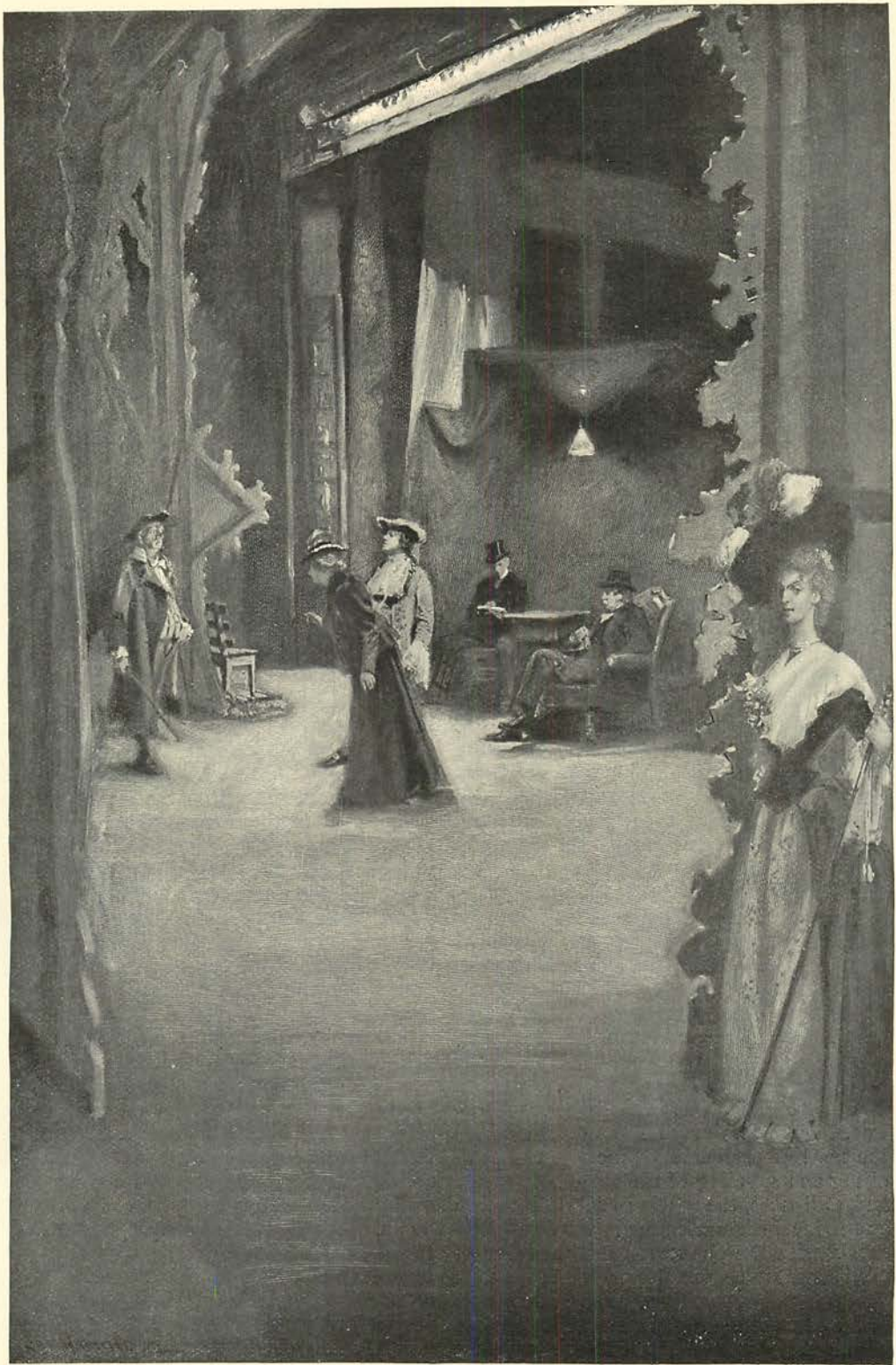
To transact the ordinary business of the theater here involves as much running to and fro, as much climbing up and down, and communication by message, as would the personal overseeing of a large hotel, and the visiting of its various parts. One may spend most of his time within this great inclosure, yet have more exercise in walking than is obtained by most citizens engaged in other business. An interior private-telephone system connects the different quarters of the theater, and quickens the despatch of inquiries and orders; yet every one engaged in the practical affairs of the place must be ready to go to any point quickly by means of his legs. Curious enough it is to see others, or to feel one's self, moving through this twilight shadow-world at all hours of the darkened day, up and down unexpected steps, along corridors, plunging down abrupt descents with little light, or winding up the corkscrew iron staircases that run from earth up through the various grades of green-room

and dressing-rooms, the stage, the upper dressing-rooms and store-rooms, the platforms from which the drops, the "flies," and the curtains are manœvered, to the paint-room, paint-bridge, or paint-loft, as you may choose to call it, highest toward the sky. Every one, however, soon acquires an automatic faculty of skimming through and up and down these regions with little effort and little risk, and I have never heard of an accident occurring by any misstep in the maze.

A point which merits emphasis, too, is that this particular building, although in a manner so complicated, and not originally planned for such an expansion of activity and resources as it now represents, is one of the best adapted for its purposes that could be, and in its arrangements is much superior to some of the more modern theatrical edifices that have since grown up in great number.

The remark is often made, even by habitual playgoers, "I suppose there is not much going on in the theater during the day"; and when the mistake of such an inference is pointed out, the question is asked, "But what do so many people as are employed there find to do?" It would be more pertinent to inquire, "What *don't* they have to do, and how do they find time to accomplish it all?"

Let us begin with the manager's day, since he is the head on whom everything depends, especially in this case, where the whole theater is but a complex radiation from his one individuality, and the expression of it. He is always in his office by nine o'clock in the morning, often earlier, and has been known, on occasion, to arrive at six or seven, when the mechanics and other stage-hands and house-hands are just beginning their tasks. First there is the usual correspondence and private business to be attended to, all letters and details of this sort being promptly put through, in order to keep each day's affairs finished, so far as possible, before those of another can accumulate. In addition to other things, there is a constant stream of applications for places in the company, or for other positions. These come steadily by mail, from beginning to end of the season, at the rate of perhaps twenty-five a week. Every one is answered without delay. Those with whom appointments are made are usually seen immediately after the correspondence is disposed of. When it is remembered that, as a rule, nothing can be known of the applicants except what may be guessed or discerned from their letters, and that each one has to be personally and criti-



DRAWN BY JAY HAMBIDGE.

A DRESS REHEARSAL OF "THE COUNTRY GIRL."

cally observed in a very brief space of time, it will be seen that this second function in the process of the day is an exacting one, which would be something of a burden to any one whose perceptions were not extraordinarily keen by nature and agile from long practice. The figure and face, the voice, the past achievements, and—not least—the *temperament* and the histrionic possibilities, of each candidate must be taken into account and judged within a few minutes.

This over, it is time to prepare for rehearsals, which, in fact, are the heaviest labor in all the twenty-four hours for everybody concerned. They occur every day, sometimes taking up portions of the piece then running, for alterations or improvement, or for the training of a company of new actors to take the piece out on "the road." Sometimes it is one of the many rehearsals which must precede the bringing out of a new play already announced for some time ahead; or of a few trials of a drama not yet fixed for any date, and perhaps destined later to be given up altogether. When several or frequent changes of bill are contemplated, each play that is to be given must go through its course of preparation in advance, the different ones proceeding in this way simultaneously, instead of each being put off until a short time before performance. Hurry and imperfection are thus avoided, and the actors also have time to grow into and feel at home in their parts—not merely to know them, but to *be* the persons of that drama. Various plays are therefore ready at the same time, waiting their turn to come before the public or to meet an emergency. It is generally taken for granted, outside, that the famous plays of the repertory, those which have been given scores of times or have had long runs, do not need all this drilling when they are taken up again. But the notion is quite incorrect. After a long interval, even the principals in such a production, though they may be letter-perfect, feel the need of preliminary practice, the exercising and suppling of the part, so to speak, and, still more, the getting back to its mood and living in it again; for it is this identification with the character, this renewing of the imaginary personality, which is the vital element. Then, too, there may be new people in the cast for the revival, and these need to be carefully worked into relation with the others. The "business" of the scenes, also, while it may be very well remembered and recorded, is so delicate a matter, the right effect of it is often so elusive, that it is

highly important to have it all studied and enacted anew repeatedly, until it is once more thrilled with the life-current of the personages and the situation.

These few hints will show how large a place and how much time rehearsals must occupy in the diurnal routine. The most important are usually called for ten, or not later than eleven, o'clock, and last for two, three, or four hours. Partial rehearsals may be called for noon or one o'clock. Sometimes, on the eve of a new and elaborate production, the company may be at work all day until five o'clock, giving the afternoon to dress rehearsal. Then, again, the training of understudies or new members goes on all the time; and there are the choruses and dancers—constant and important elements at Daly's—to be drilled every day. It is a never-ending thing. Frequently, too, while one play is being rehearsed on the stage another play is undergoing the same process in the ample foyer eighty feet distant. There have been as many as four rehearsals carried on at the same time in this building, some of them being minor ones, or for dance and chorus. In the dimly lighted foyer one might pass a troop of graceful figures swaying and springing in time with piano music, or, near the other end of the theater, might hear mysterious voice-tones, and the plaintive solo of a violin, from unseen depths where, in the green-room, appropriated for the nonce, members of the company, ranged along the low wall-bench like a row of birds on a telegraph-wire, were learning a song for the stage.

Just when and how Mr. Daly makes ready for the rehearsing, no one but himself can tell; but, as the hour approaches, he banishes everything that may disturb the creative mood, and at the rehearsal itself, seated in a low easy-chair which has become the cathedra of this stage, or moving about rapidly and energetically to illustrate his meaning in the business and the gesture or the tone and the emphasis he desires, he develops that abundance of thought and suggestion, and definite, comprehensive plan, which command the admiration of every one, and show how thoroughly he has matured the whole conception in advance. The text is at his tongue's end, and, as a rule, he can correct, or at least detect, any error of memory in the various parts. His work, indeed, is not simple rehearsing, but *directing*; it is the work of a master.

It is one of the strict contract rules of this theater that every member of the company shall obey, under penalty, the directions of



ORIGINAL IN POSSESSION OF MRS. GEORGE MARSTON WHITIN.

ADA REHAN. FROM THE PAINTING BY JOHN S. SARGENT.

the manager as to the performance and "business." His word is law. Yet I have never seen any one accept a change or suggestion more swiftly or completely than he does the instant he sees that it will affect detail of scenery, furniture, bric-à-brac, in the setting, down to an inch or an angle. It might be supposed that the strictness of his direction would restrain his artists or discontent them. If this happens at times, it must

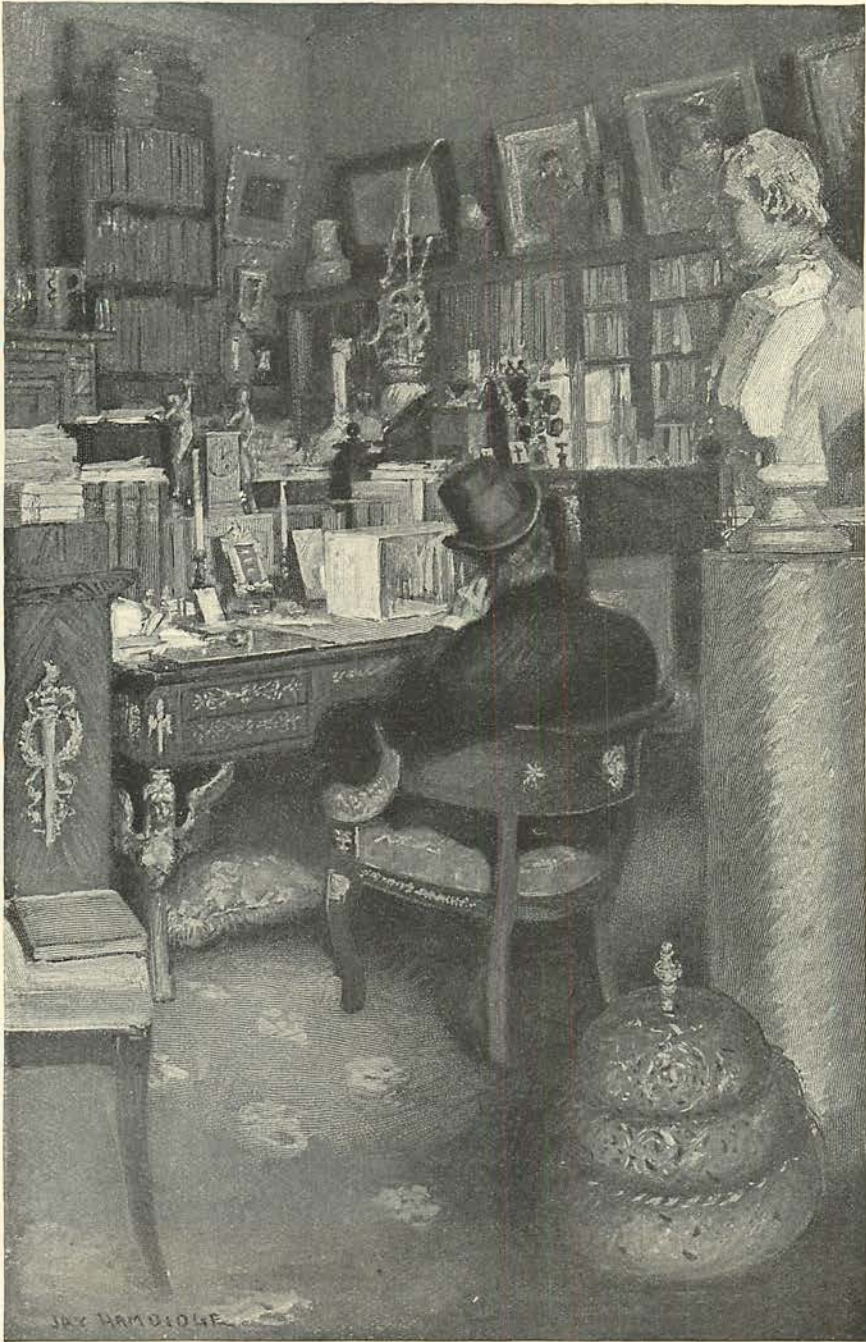


DRAWN BY JAY HAMBIDGE.

THE PROPERTY-ROOM.

the artistic result favorably. His grasp of the total situation is extraordinary; and he has a peculiar gift of enforcing perfect precision and quickness of action, so that nothing on his stage can ever "drag." He also plans, notices, and controls every smallest

be said that the general tenor of feeling has been, for these many years, one of satisfaction at receiving such thorough training; and it is certain that he has preserved and brought out a wonderful variety of individuality in his players. One of his most efficient men said



DRAWN BY JAY HAMBIDGE.

THE OFFICE-STUDY.

to him: "I have had some experience, and you see what I can do, so far; but you must shake me up and limber me." It is this shaking up and limbering, as well as the gentler modes of development he so well understands, which the progressive and capable among his people are apt to enjoy and profit by. George

Clarke, the dean of the company, if not also of the profession in New York, speaks of having twice left Daly, although, on the whole, he has played with him the greater part of the time since the latter began his career as a manager, and adds: "I could not keep away from him. I was able to make a great



DRAWN BY JAY HAMBLIDGE.

THE WOFFINGTON ROOM.

deal more money elsewhere; but I never found elsewhere the artistic atmosphere, the home of art, that remains unchanged here always." It is, in truth, an academic school of the histrionic art, and of the finest art of theater management. A stranger wrote to Mr. Daly, asking whether he knew of any night-school of acting which he could attend, as the correspondent was a very busy man during the day, but wished to learn the profession of acting after business hours. Mr. Daly's reply, brief, but courteously worded, was

that he knew of no night-school of acting except a good theater in action at night.

But his own theater in action by day is the most wonderful school of acting known to me. There is none in the country where the great art is taught and made real as it is here, every day but Sunday, and almost every hour of the day.

The physical and mental effort, and the strain on the nerves, of rehearsal would exhaust any man who is limited to average or what we call normal powers; and after



undergoing this, Mr. Daly takes a little of what he deems rest—that is, the occupying himself with innumerable other matters of moment, alone. Proposed plays pour in almost as numerous and steadily as applicants for position. These must all be read, and *are* read and carefully considered, by the manager, although in some instances many days, weeks, or months may be requisite for reaching a final result. Besides the play-reading and all that it involves, the manager plans and attends to all the scenery, costumes, furnishings, and small “properties” (objects that are to be used on the stage) in each play about to be produced. He gives directions regarding the scenery, using books, engravings, photographs, to explain his ideas. He must see the tiny models of scenes, like those of toy theaters, and criticize or change them. Then he must know all that is going on in the paint-room afterward, see the scenery placed upon the stage, and alter and perfect it. Mr. Henry E. Hoyt, the scenic artist, said to me one day: “The old idea of scene-painting was that you must use gaslight, whitewash, and no brains to speak of; but that’s all done away with now.” Scene-painting has become a very subtle and difficult art, and the paint-room is a place where its problems are slowly, steadily, laboriously, solved on a great scale. Every bit of scenery now must be a picture, or part of a picture, done with extreme nicety. The manager watches its growth, too, with constant care. And then there is the carpentering of the scenery, the building of the framework for the canvas, involving numberless details, which must go on and be supervised at the same time with the painting. Oftentimes one will find the whole of the stage in odd hours covered with lumber, and painted canvas, and sawhorses, and busy workmen, and long planks sliding up or down between the back part of the stage and the paint-loft through a great opening overhead. The cellar, too, is suddenly invaded by a gang of workmen, who hammer and saw and fit things together for rocks, bridges, runways, or other massive paraphernalia. I have known Augustin Daly to begin a regular set-to rehearsal of the scenery for a new production, after the play of the evening was over and the theater closed, at midnight, and continue there, working with the scene-painter and the stage artisans, setting and resetting and correcting the disposition of the flats and side-pieces, and so on, and giving orders for changes and retouching, until seven o’clock

in the morning. He then breakfasted, rested for a while in his office, attended to the usual morning business at nine o’clock, and was on the stage again at eleven, to direct a long and critical rehearsal of the entire company!

What more shall we say of the manager’s work, except that, besides going over, cutting, and rearranging every play he produces, he is also a playwright? He has created original plays and numerous adaptations, which any one who is at all conversant with theatrical writing knows perfectly well involve almost as much originality and skill as the composition of something wholly new. Further, he orders and supervises all the costumes, and studies and directs the selection of incidental music—a most important element—and the manner of performing it, picking out himself the special music he wants. He arranges every particular of varicolored and changing lights for the stage at every point throughout the play, guards against every infraction of his orders, and is in front and behind the scenes seemingly at once. He has an extraordinary faculty of appearing always in every part of the theater where his presence is most needed, exactly at the right moment—or what may seem to others, just then, the wrong moment.

This manager is a general; his ability is nothing less than that of a great commander, when you reflect that he is managing and directing every day some two hundred people on his actual list—people by the very nature of their artistic gift most sensitive and susceptible, or if they are employed in the business and mechanical departments, subject to incessant drain on their physical endurance and their excitability from the numerous and unexpected calls upon strength and patience that such a life makes.

Others are on hand simply to carry out the manager’s ideas and system without flaw, if possible; to aid him and the public in every way. Some of them keep track of the rehearsals and watch them. Others help in making ready for productions, in looking up materials, historic points, costume, or doing the various literary work always going on in artistic theaters. Some watch the performances and the audiences; for every separate audience is like a separate individual, and its varying impressions must be noted in order to ascertain the effect of “the piece,” and its likelihood of vitality, apart from the immediate sale of tickets. Others watch and minutely study the players themselves, since the work offered by them each night is affected by the mood of every actor and

actress, and the mood of the whole company, and the influence which the particular audience at that performance has upon them. The best company in the world may flag or fall off at any one representation, owing to a variety of causes, the perfection of a play performance being as difficult and dainty as the blending of a harmony of colors at haphazard, no matter how much care and effort and good will may have gone to the preparation. The precise note of each person in the cast, and the chording of all of them together,—or the discord,—can be judged in its impression, from night to night, only by skilled and patient observers "in front," who are part of the theater.

Mr. Daly's office is a secluded study, a spot so quiet and esthetic that one would hardly believe, even when beholding it, that it is in the heart of throbbing, noisy New York. It holds its place in what would be taken outwardly for a private residence, on the Twenty-ninth street side of the theater territory, and is a delightful museum of old Empire furniture, rare and standard books relating to the stage, innumerable bric-à-brac and quaint mementos from all parts of the world, portraits, clocks, musical instruments, desks, tables, secretaries, portfolios, and cupboards. In other portions of the theater are other smaller treasuries of rare objects, pictorial, literary, and artistic; and one such cave of marvels and gems of association, in the upper regions, is used on special occasions for supper-parties of a few old friends after some great success, or to celebrate the coming of a new year. This is the Woffington room.

It is in this room, where Woffington's lovely face looks down upon the revel, that Mr. Daly has for seventeen years gathered round him the loyal members of his company each last night of December to say good-by to the old year and welcome the new.

Here James Lewis, and John Drew, and Charles Fisher, and Charles Leclercq, Sidney Herbert, and George Clarke, and Herbert Gresham, Henry Widmer, and Richard Dorney, Mrs. Gilbert, and Ada Rehan have lent their happy presence to those yearly gatherings; to which, with the exception of Mr. Daly's brother, Judge Joseph Daly, and one other "auld acquaintance ne'er forgot," no stranger has been admitted.

Besides these annual festivals many famous little suppers have been given here; notably, certain "after-play" reunions, at which Henry Irving, Ellen Terry, Coquelin, Boucicault, Jefferson, Sir Eyre Shaw, the Lon-

don fire magnate, Edwin Booth, Lawrence Barrett, General Porter, General Sherman, John Hare, and John Russell Young, have been in turn honored guests.

Then is the soul of the theater opened to those who are present; and it is an ideal, artistic soul that reveals even far more than the stage can reveal; and the manager becomes the witty, brilliant, genial talker, the exquisitely courteous host, that he always is when the incessant cares of his work, and his natural shyness with all but intimates, are thrown aside.

The theater contains all the scenery, and most of the costumes, of all the chief productions that have been given here since it was opened. There are great rooms filled with massive furniture and genuine porcelain and metal-work of incalculable value, besides an "armory" devoted to a big collection of armor and weapons having intrinsic worth as well as stage serviceableness. The rooms above the marvelous office contain a copious and unmatched "wardrobe," and an apartment for fitting new costumes, besides a music-room for the director of the orchestra, and a place for copying. In addition to all this, a big hall in a neighboring street is used for storing another great mass of furniture and properties.

I have said nothing of the work of printing, of the program, the bills, the posters with pictures, the planning of routes through the country, and the details of tours and transportation, all of which come under the manager's immediate observation and decision; or of the fact that he goes with his regular company when it travels out of New York, even for a day, in order to see that everything is done as he wishes, and that the standard of high workmanship in every particular is maintained. Still, I think enough has been said to indicate that the willing and enthusiastic labor performed in one great American theater—the only theater, thus far, which has gained lofty and general fame in Europe, and has planted itself there, too—is a labor of conscientious devotion to art. All such devotion is good for the people, and for their souls, through their senses. It will do the people good, further, to know that the inner life of a great theater is governed by the strictest code of good manners and good will; that the prevailing tone of Daly's Theater is absolutely that of a circle of self-respecting acquaintances; that there is no fooling and no dawdling; that tobacco and liquor stop at the threshold; that there is no running in and out of visitors, and no loafing

at the stage-door. This very important means of ingress to the labyrinth, by the way, is made impregnable by a strong and faithful keeper, a man of remarkable stature, old Owen, who is uniformed, and carries always a small official baton of dark wood encircled by five rings of brass that somehow give it a very convincing air of authority. Both he and Richard, Mr. Daly's colored personal attendant, are regarded as "institutions" of the theater, one of them having been with him for twenty, and the other nearly thirty, years. I mention them because it is a distinctive element in the atmosphere of Daly's that in every department there are people who have been there a long time, and that

there is a prevailing sentiment of loyalty to the establishment, as though it were home or government or country, which is quite in keeping.

No loud talking, noisy laughter, or other disturbance is tolerated behind the scenes, in the green-room and dressing-rooms, or elsewhere. The whole place is dedicated to honest, hard work and high aspirations; so that, notwithstanding all the ambitions, hopes, disappointments, triumphs, or heartburnings which inevitably enter into the composite life of a number of players, wherever they may be gathered together, the reigning spirit here really is quieter, sweeter, and more earnest than that of most drawing-rooms.

LINES TO A CHILD.

BY ROBERT BURNS WILSON.

DEAR little face,  
 With placid brow and clear, uplifted eyes,  
 And prattling lips that speak no evil thing,  
 And dimpling smiles, free of fair-seeming lies,  
 Unschooled to ape the dreary world's pretense!  
 Sweet imager of cloudless innocence!  
 The tenderest flower of Nature's fashioning,  
 A dewy rose amidst the wilderness,  
 Amidst the desert a clear-welling spring—  
 So is thy undissembling loveliness,  
 Dear little face!

Dear little hand!  
 How sweet it is to feel against my own  
 The touch of this soft palm, which never yet  
 The taint of soul-destroying gold hath known!  
 Here Nature's seal of trustfulness is pressed,  
 Even as her loving touch the lily blessed  
 With stainless purity—even as she set  
 The golden flame upon the daffodil,  
 And heaven's clear blue upon the violet.  
 May her best gifts be for thy clasping still,  
 Dear little hand!

Dear little heart,  
 That never harbored any ill intent,  
 That knows no bitterness, nor doubt, nor care,  
 But only young life's nestling wonderment,  
 And strange, new joys, amidst thy incomplete,  
 Unfledged emotions and affections sweet!  
 Veiled, by the un-lived years, thy field; but there  
 The sowing for thy harvest hath begun.  
 When thou shalt reap and bind, may no despair  
 Rise from that ground betwixt thee and the sun,  
 Dear little heart!