

at each instant, and culminating in a crash so dreadful that the simultaneous discharge of a thousand cannon would have seemed puny when compared with it.

Deafened, dizzy, and confused, I dismounted from my frightened horse, now wholly unmanageable, and hurried on foot to a spot whence, as I remembered, Edith's home was in sight. The air was thick with dust and withered leaves, but as the prospect grew clearer I could see no trace of the bungalow, of its homestead and gardens, or of the thriving tea plantations and verdant meadows around it. Vainly did I strain my eyes to catch one well-known feature of the familiar scene. Nothing was visible save a dreary waste of stones, mud, and rocks filling up half the valley, and above which hung a cloud of tawny dust that was slowly subsiding.

As I stood stupidly gazing on the scene of ruin, I caught sight of a man, bareheaded, and with a scared white face. I knew him. It was the young clergyman who had come over from Nynce Tal to perform the marriage ceremony between Edith and me.

"Mr. Edwards?" I said inquiringly as I neared him.

He caught my hand, covered his face, and burst into tears. Then for the first time I realised what fear was.

"For pity's sake, tell me all!" cried I hoarsely. "Is Miss Warren—is Edith safe? What has—"

"Of all beneath that roof—the roof of Mr. Warren's hospitable house—I alone am spared," answered the clergyman in broken accents; "Death, the grim mower, has garnered in his harvest there."

The cause of the disaster was but too evident. A stone avalanche, or *moraine* as it is called in Switzerland, had rushed down from the unscaled heights of the huge mountain towering above Yirmi Sou, and had overwhelmed all beneath it.

"I caught a glimpse of Miss Warren in the garden, as the stony flood burst on us with its deafening roar," said the clergyman as he grew calmer; "it may be that God's mercy has spared her life too."

And indeed I have much to be thankful for, since my dear Edith was found, fainting but unhurt, at the foot of a tall cedar, the only tree left standing, wedged in between fallen rocks. But the other inmates of the house had perished, nor were even their bodies ever extricated from the mighty mausoleum which Nature's own hand had piled above them. Edith and I have been married these five years, but our home is in England, not in India; and sometimes, when I see a shadow come across my wife's fair face, I know that she is thinking of those who sleep below the cruel stones at Yirmi Sou.

## HOW TO ACT A CHARADE.



UT we must do something to amuse them!"

"Well, play forfeits."

"Round games."

"Have some music."

These are imaginary proposals, made during the discussion of preparations for some pleasant home party—and yet not

imaginary, for they have been said thousands of times, when that most momentous of declarations that heads this article has been made.

Then all at once some one exclaims, "Why not act a charade?"

A dead silence falls upon the group, as visions of long studies of difficult parts, careful dressing, costly robes, elaborate scenery, and possible failures, float before them.

And so it has been hundreds of times. To act a charade sounds so formidable a matter, that it is too often condemned as an impossible feat, when equal parts of courage and knowledge would have enabled those who undertook the task to give half an hour's genial and innocent pleasure to their friends, and turned a possibly dull and stereotyped kind of party into a pleasant entertainment, that would have dwelt in the remembrance of those who enjoyed it, and been marked, so to speak, with a white stone in their mental calendar.

I say equal parts of courage and knowledge, for I

have no hesitation whatever in saying that what I may call an extempore charade is the best of all.

Why? Because it makes no call upon the performers for preparation in the way of study or dress. It is hit off on the spot; and in addition, any little blunders that may be made are unnoticed by the audience, or if they are, instead of covering the blunderer with confusion they only add to the general hilarity of the meeting.

To act a charade extempore certainly requires a little courage, but to quote the old French proverb, *Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte*, and as soon as the first plunge or step is made, and the actor launched in the part he or she has undertaken to play, the greatest difficulty is passed.

The reader may say, "Yes, this is all very well, but suppose one breaks down."

Let me say to every one, at once dismiss that thought, nay, kill it, for it is one that ought to be destroyed, whether in relation to acting a charade, or in any of the more serious concerns of life. Forget the possibility, and you will succeed. For proof of this, watch any group of children, cultivated or uncultivated, and notice their sports, and you will see for yourself that they are all naturally actors, and love nothing better than playing at make-believe—acting, in short; and their little brains never fail them in supplying language with which to illustrate their sport.

Why is this? Simply because the idea of breaking down never enters their minds.

But you may reply, "Exactly; but if they find anybody is watching them, words fail, they look shamefaced, and break down."

I grant it, this is so, and therefore I say to you who attempt charades, make use of your more mature strength of mind, and crush that idea of failing. This applies to you, young lady, who sit down to the piano and dash off that brilliant arrangement of Schubert or Osborne or Czerny. You get on magnificently till you blur one chord with that wrong accidental; are terribly conscious, grow nervous, hesitate, get those pretty little fingers into knots amongst the black keys, and finally break down; when, if you had only boldly played on, the chances are that not one of your listeners detected the false chord, and if one did happen to hear it, he was too indulgent and pleased with the performance for it to dwell one instant in his memory. So with charades: boldly attack your part, and you must succeed.

I will tell you why: All you have to do is to realise your part; ask yourself how So-and-so would behave if he or she did such-and-such things, and act—yes, literally act, or do accordingly. For mind this: the best acting is that which is, so to speak, not acting at all, but a faithful repetition of nature; and the more a part is distorted and made extravagant and burlesqued, the less it appeals to the feelings and amuses an audience. In fact, it is common to say in relation to the stage, "How beautifully So-and-so acted! it was nature itself." Years ago, to take another line of appeal—to the eye—our artists, under the idea that they were being humorous, used to draw exaggerated representations of the human form, with distorted features. These were never laughable, as they have since learned, and our best caricaturists now give nature itself, finding in its many phases true mirth of expression.

I say this because, in charades that I have seen acted, people have imagined that it was necessary to paint or burnt-cork their faces; to devise stuffed and outrageous costumes, such as no individual ever wore; and to behave when acting in an impossible, incongruous manner, distorting face and body, labouring to leap and bound about, and putting themselves in a violent perspiration, under the belief that they were very funny, when they were not humorous at all: in fact, their antics had an effect upon the younger part of the audience that was the reverse of pleasant.

I should divide charades, for those who wish to act them, into two classes—the extempore and the prepared; and for both depend upon it that the more simple they are, the better.

I place the extempore first, because I have no hesitation in saying that it is by far the better—is the easier to perform, and affords from its imperfections the most amusement to the looker-on.

But the reader will say, "This requires clever people."

My dear reader, you are a clever person, and in some one individual point far more clever than your neighbour, though he may excel you in some point in his turn. It is far from my wish to inculcate conceit, but

too much self-depreciation, in the face of the wondrous mental organisation with which we are all endowed, is—I have no hesitation in saying it—wrong.

We will say that we are now at a party—you and I—and the question arises, "What shall we do next?" You propose a charade, and after reading this paper you will, I hope, be self-assured enough to feel that you can carry one through, and be ready to inoculate others with your spirit.

It is decided upon; four performers hastily get together—say two of each sex—leave the room, and go, say, into a back room.

The first question is, What is to be the word or words? and we think that is a puzzle.

Why, almost anything will do. Look round the room, and take almost the first noun you see. There are a dozen things that suggest a charade: easy-chair, side-board, Brussels carpet, book-case, hassock, paper-weight, corn-ice, hearth-stone, bell-handle, hearth-rug, lamp-shade, plate-glass.

There, I have named a dozen that I see around me as I write—objects that I have taken at random, objects that are perfectly familiar, and strike the eye in an instant. Some rooms would offer a greater variety and better subjects, some less. But there they are, without preparation or thought; and though of the above dozen some are far better than others, I maintain that four people of ordinary ability can out of either of them construct and act an amusing charade that shall puzzle the audience.

In fact, I have seen this done on the spur of the moment, and those who engage in it are so thrown upon their own resources that after the first plunge, when they find they are compelled to swim without corks, they get on admirably; the more so, that all are fighting for the same end, and naturally help one another.

Now let us take one of the above suggestions, and see what we can make of it. Here is one chosen at random; and we suppose that in five minutes—better still in two—we have to make our *début* with Act the First. Say, Brussels carpet.

Act I.—Brussels.

Mind, we are two of each sex, and the first lady assumes the part of an old woman, with trembling voice, very proud of the lace shawl she wears.

The second lady is a quizzical old maid, and disbelieves everything that is said to her, declining to give credit to the old lady's assertion that the shawl is real Brussels lace.

The first gentleman is an old retired officer, whose great regret is that he was not at Waterloo, and in his conversation he can mention the ball at Brussels.

The second gentleman can play a clumsy servant of the first lady, who gets into great disgrace by treading on the end of the shawl as it trails, and the scene can close with a mock chastisement of the clumsy fellow by the irascible officer.

Act II.—Car.

First lady and gentleman are sitting at table—lady writing, and gentleman reading paper, humming as he does so the first verse of "The Low-backed Car."

The lady is indignant, and keeps appealing to him to leave off, as she cannot get on with her letter; and he keeps promising to be quiet, but keeps on as if he could not contain himself, singing this bit of a song. Amusing quarrel ensues, during which, enter the second lady, as maid-servant, to announce a strange man. Strange man enters. He has come about the disgraceful behaviour of the gentleman in assaulting him—he being a tramway-car conductor—and he demands compensation, or will have summons issued. Lady faints; gentleman indignant; quarrel ensues; and the visitor owns that he has made a mistake, and gets turned out.

Act III.—Pet.

Elderly lady's cat or dog is seriously ill, and she is nursing it, baby fashion, with shawl round it, while second lady feeds it with spoon and cup. Doctor and assistant arrive. There is an examination. Doctor declares it is a tooth that must be extracted. Assistant is sure that the last joint of the tail is dislocated. The ladies moan over their pet, and the doctor and his aid prepare for a double operation, which can be made ludicrous with mock instruments—fire-irons, sugar-tongs, &c. &c. In the midst of it the animal, glad enough to escape, rushes out of the room, pursued by all the actors.

Act IV.—The whole, BRUSSELS CARPET.

The ladies, as two servants, are seated, wondering when the family will come home, when one gentleman, made rough-looking, and wearing an apron, comes and announces that he is sent by the upholsterer to fetch the Brussels carpet to beat and lay down again before the family return. He can roll up the hearth-rug to carry it off, and is tying it up with string, when the other gentleman, the servant next door, arrives, and begins telling the maids of a cunning robbery that took place across the square, where, under the pretence of taking up the carpets to clean, some thieves bore off every one, and of course did not bring them back. As he relates this, the man in the apron is trying to steal off unseen with the rug, when the visitor catches sight of him, cries "Stop thief!" and all join in pursuit.

The conversation in each scene really would suggest itself, and the natural ability of the actors would make all four very amusing, while, as will be seen, the preparations are almost *nil*. Handkerchiefs form aprons, caps can be borrowed of the maids, and a coat off will suggest a man-servant, even as the actor's demeanour and play of voice and facial muscles make him old or young. Some may argue that the above example is too long—has a syllable too much, and that it would be too easily guessed. To which I reply that for my illustration I have taken a word at random, to show what can be done in this extemporary manner; and as to the guessing, don't be too hard on your audience: if they cannot find out what you have been aiming at, they will not like it half so well.

My second class of prepared charades is a very extensive one, and might be dealt with in a long treatise. For my part, I am going to be very brief, and to refer you to the many thousands of printed

charades that you may study and learn, if you are not content to act the two that have already appeared in CASSELL'S FAMILY MAGAZINE. My advice, however, would be to all: Do not aim at being too pretentious; and any attempt at making scenery is a mistake, for this reason, your most elaborate attempts can but be very feeble imitations of scenic effects, and after great labour you will find yourselves disgusted and out of heart with what has given you infinite trouble.

I say the same with respect to dresses, and maintain that, for home representations, if you are provided with a double drawing-room with folding-doors, or your rooms are separated by an arch, across which a curtain can be drawn, you have, with the ordinary furniture of the room, which you can move to suit your piece, all that can be required.

As to the dresses, use your ingenuity and what is around you. Wonders in ornaments can be cut out of coloured paper. Curtains make the most magnificent of robes, even as table-covers form mantles that would set off the Grand Panjandrum himself, "with the little round button on the top." I have seen a magnificent pirate made up with burnt cork, a white apron with a belt over it, a pilot jacket, a black patch over his eye, and gorgeous high shining boots made by binding some black American cloth round his legs.

Old-fashioned ladies' costumes and an antique bonnet are treasures for average purposes, and, to give the technical term to them, "properties" of value. Great effects have been produced with that old umbrella that has been relegated to the lumber-room; while a gentleman who puts on a coat that is too small for him, buttons it to the chin, and wears gloves with holes, and a dilapidated hat, appears in a costume that is certain to win applause, while it is one that is easily obtained.

In conclusion, let me say that word-perfection, or knowing a part by heart, is not necessary; for in a friendly audience, even blunders, as I have before intimated, add greatly to the social amusement. To recapitulate once more, let me strongly advise charade-actors never to be *outré* in action or costume, but to do what they have to do in Shakespearian fashion—"Hold the mirror up to nature."

A moment's reflection will show how good this advice is; for walk through the streets at any time, and you will find characters and costumes that, if brought together in some little home charade, would be certain to amuse far better than anything you can invent. Above all, never attempt to dress up one sex to represent the other. It is displeasing, and in the very worst of taste; and if a charade cannot be acted without this infringement of propriety, it had better never be acted at all.

The field is a very wide one, but so full of amusing examples that no home, however few its members, need despair of contriving a very pleasing charade, and acting it with *éclat*; while the best part of acting a charade is, that if my advice be followed, it will be found that the actors derive as much amusement from their task as those who look on.

GEO. MANVILLE FENN.