



"Heard those kids' tales years ago."

# Stories I Have Heard and Told.

By CYRIL MAUDE

I ALWAYS think that the cream of a humorous story becomes somewhat thin when set forth in cold type.

To my mind it lacks atmosphere—the merry twinkle in the eye of the teller; the facial expression, that emphasising of the peculiarities of the characters in the story which a good raconteur can always convey, and the delight of being able to cap one story with another when in congenial company. Consequently I am not quite sure that my stories will prove so entertaining as might be desired. Not that I consider myself a good raconteur. Any little conceit I might have had in that direction was knocked out of me some time ago, when, after telling stories which I thought were funny for half an hour at a children's party, I overheard one youngster contemptuously say to another:—"Bit of a silly ass, isn't he? Heard those kids' tales years ago."

And I fear that the cry of "cheatant!" may be repeated by some of the readers of these stories. But perhaps there may be one or two stories of merit which will lead such readers to be indulgent.

Appropos of the party incident already mentioned, I think the precociousness of the present day youngster is one of the most amusing features of this age of ours. I remember on one occasion watching a clever little girl dancing during a rehearsal. Afterwards, I complimented her upon her skill, saying:—"I suppose you are going to be a great dancer some day?"

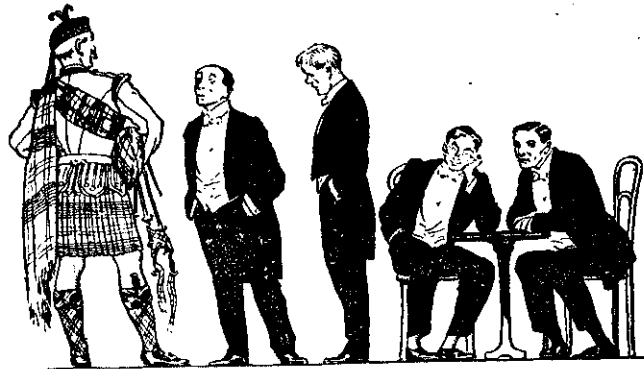
"Oh, yes," she replied, promptly. "I don't want to go in for this talking stuff."

Speaking of children, I might mention that some time ago we wanted a boy who, in order to comply with the licensing laws regarding theatres, should be

nidget. I doubt if he stood much over two feet in height, and he looked a miniature edition of Albert Chevallier. I asked his father if he had been on the stage before.

"No, sir," he said; "but he's been on an inquest!"

Not the least of the troubles of a theatrical manager is the task of dealing with stage aspirants and budding dramatists. Oh, that terrible heap of plays which confronts me week after week,



"The Cook o' the North."

scarcely one in twenty worth reading. But they must be examined, otherwise one might miss a gem. One play which was submitted to me consisted of 28 acts, and I calculated that it would have taken about twelve hours to play. Another aspiring playwright promised to book all the seats in the first two rows of the dress circle if I would produce a play he submitted to me, and probably he still thinks me a very poor business man for not accepting his offer and the play, which he assured me would beat the record of "Charley's Aunt." I am afraid, however, that my friends would have seriously considered the advisability of placing me under restraint had I produced that play.

This proffered bribe reminds me that a stage-struck country youth, learning that Mrs Maude was very fond of country life, offered to send her a couple of pigs if she would give him an engagement.

I think, however, the following letter constitutes the most extraordinary application I have ever received for an engagement. At any rate, it is surely the worst-spelt epistle on record:—

"Sir, - I think I should like to be on the Stage I am young 19 I have never been on the Stage yet But several People Persuade me to I am Lady Helpe here whear I am Leaving My Home is not in London would you kindly right back and Let me now wheather you have a vacancy I have good voyce for singing. Yours respfully."

In my book on the Haymarket Theatre, published some years ago, I have devoted a chapter to an effort which Frederic Harrison and myself made to produce George Bernard Shaw's play, "You Never Can Tell"—a play which was withdrawn at the eleventh hour, owing to the amiable differences which arose between the author and myself during rehearsals. I am reminded of this episode by a story which Mr Charles Hawtrey tells concerning "G.B.S.," once described as "one of

the most perverse of men." It concerns the same play, "You Never Can Tell."

Hawtrey, according to his own words, was seized with a mad idea to produce this play. "I wrote to Shaw," he says, "and asked his permission. He answered that he would come and read it to me. He did, and began by saying that sometimes he thought it was the best play that was ever written, and at others he considered it the greatest trash. Any-

Scrooge. I read about in the 'Christmas Carol.'"

With reference to "The Second in Command," I might recount the following amusing experience. When we had the dress rehearsal at the Haymarket Theatre a junior officer of cavalry was present. He watched the proceedings with much interest, and at the end of the evening was questioned as to what was his opinion of the new play.



"He promptly produced two tickets."

how, he was of opinion that it was a pretty poor play, and that if I produced it—well, I must take the consequences. Some time afterwards I asked Shaw if I could compress the last act. He declined to allow one line to be altered or cut out. In view of certain contingencies, I had at last to tell him that I

"My dear fellow," he said, "if you only tone down the yellow stripe on the orderly's overalls, the piece will go like beans."

I am rather fond of Shetland, and have visited that part of the kingdom for fishing. Once I imported a servant from those distant isles, whose admirable waiting at table had much impressed me. Importation, however, did not improve him, and he had before long to return to his native land. One night I asked whether he would like to go to the Haymarket. He betrayed no enthusiasm.

"But wouldn't you like to see me act?" I asked, rather nettled.

"I will go if you want me to," was his only reply.

I should like to mention that there are one or two mysteries connected with the Haymarket which we have not yet solved. They concern articles left behind by patrons. Perhaps one of our quaintest discoveries was made under a circle seat on a very hot day in June. It consisted of an extremely neat pair of corsets, entirely innocent of covering of any kind, next to which, with rose, blushing cheeks, lay a large ripe apple. The mystery of these corsets and that apple has never been cleared up.

Nor have we yet been able to find out why some good lady patron of our pit was kind enough to leave us a souvenir in the shape of an extremely "fetching" pink silk petticoat and a pair of goshoses, size three. A veil of mystery we should also like to pierce hangs over a neat parcel which, upon opening it, was found to contain a framed photograph of an extremely pretty girl with lovely eyes, around which were carefully wrapped a large pair of what hosiers technically term "gent's knitted nightsocks."

During the run of "The Little Minis-

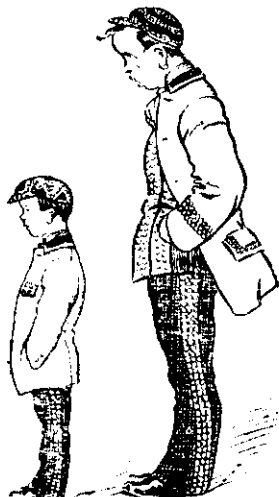


"Ye'r wouldn't be very fat if you'd been without scittles as long as him."

temper always strongly appeal to me. It was rather a shock, however, to learn on one occasion that a little girl about twelve years of age, who had witnessed my performance, remarked to her mother as she left the theatre:—  
"What an awful old man he was, mamma, and how glad I am that he is not my daddy! He's almost as bad as old

ter," the entire company became very, very Scotch, and it was decided that at their Christmas gathering the bagpipes must figure largely on the programme. A piper from the Scots Guards was secured, and he strutted up and down, playing for all he was worth. Everybody was hugely delighted.

"Wait a minute, boys," said one member of the company, an ex-Army man;



"He looked a miniature edition of Albert Chevallier."

over 13, but who should only look about eight years of age, and we inserted an advertisement to that effect. Among other applicants was a little costar lad who was brought by his father—both being glorious in their multitudes of "pearlies." The youngster was quite a