

A NEW VERSION OF MAUD MULLER.

Maud Muller, on a summer's day,
Mounted her wheel and rode away.
Beneath her blue cap glowed a wealth
Of large red freckles and first-rate health.
Singing, she rode, and her merry glee
Frightened the parrot from his tree.
But when she was several miles from town
Upon the hill-slope coasting down,
The sweet song died, and a vague unrest
And a sort of terror filled her breast—
A fear that she hardly dared to own
For what if her wheel should strike a stone!
The Judge scorching quickly down the road,
Just then she heard his tire explode!
He carried his wheel into the shade
Of the apple trees, to await the maid.
And he asked her if she would kindly loan
Her pump to him as he'd lost his own.
She left her wheel with a sprightly jump,
And in less than a jiffy produced her pump.
And she blushed as she gave it, looking down
At her feet, once hid by a trailing gown.
Then said the Judge as he pumped away,
'Tis very fine weather we're having today.'
He spoke of the grass and flowers and trees;
Of twenty mile runs and centuries;
And Maud forgot that no trailing gown
Was over her bloomers hanging down.
But the tire was fixed, alack-a-day!
The Judge remounted and rode away.
Maud Muller looked and sighed, 'Ah me!
That I the Judge's bride might be!
'My father should have a brand new wheel
Of the costliest make and the finest steel.
'And I'd give one to ma of the same design,
So that she'd cease to borrow mine.'
The Judge looked back, as he climbed the hill,
And saw Maud Muller standing still.
'A prettier face and a form more fair
I've seldom gazed at, I declare!
'Would she were mine, and I to-day
Could make her put those bloomers away.'
But he thought of his sisters, proud and cold,
And shuddered to think how they would scold
If he should one of those afternoons,
Come home with a bride in pantaloons!
He married a wife of richest dower,
Who had never succumbed to the bloomers'
power;
Yet, oft while watching the smoke wreaths curl,
He thought of that freckled bloomer girl;
Of the way she stood there, pigeon-toed,
While he was pumping beside the road.
She married a man who clerked in a store,
And many children played round her door;
And then her bloomers brought her joy!
She cut them down for her eldest boy!
But still of the Judge she often thought,
And sighed o'er the loss that her bloomers
wrought,
Or wondered if wearing them was a sin,
And then confessed: 'It might have been.'
Alas for the Judge! Alas for the maid!
Dreams were their only stock-in-trade.
For all the wise words of tongue or pen,
The wisest are these: 'Leave pants for men!'
Ah, well! For us all hope still remains—
For the bloomer girl and the man of brains,
And, in the hereafter, bloomers may
Be not allowed to block the way!

THE LAST ACT.

By Albert R. Hassard.

"Comedy not tragedy, is your forte."
The theatrical manager emphasized his words with a wave of his hand as he spoke.
"Perhaps," said the young actor, "I was a trifle timid last night, because I was new to these scenes. I think I will not be so nervous to-night. I feel even now more composed. I shall take a little exercise before appearing on the stage. Then, I think, I shall appear more calm."
"It isn't your nervousness that is your fault," replied the manager. "That is indeed your principal redeeming distinction. But you were born for comic acting and not for tragic."
"I don't see how you can say that," returned the actor. "I am sure I was terribly in earnest! My head throbbled all night over the severity of the exertion to which I submitted my mind. Why do you consider I was light?"
"From an observation of your deportment," answered the manager. "You had the audience convulsed with merriment at the very critical conjunctures of the play. For example, when the ghost was evolving and the lights were growing dim, you actually put your hands into your pockets."
"Put my hands into my pockets? What a carnal man! Why, I hadn't noticed that. Besides, what else should I have done? I might, it is true, since from the size of my salary, it would be inferred that I was an acrobat as well as an actor, have placed my head there, but I really did not think of doing so at the time. Was that the only error I made?"
The manager did not discern the irony in the utterances of the actor, but replied: "No, there were still others. When the ghost was speaking you did not seem sufficiently terrified. As it spoke the words 'A fair young form,' instead of throwing out your hands in horror, you looked as if you desired to say, 'Without the large sleeves.' Besides, you didn't die properly. Even after you had swallowed the poison, a smile faintly flickered on your features, and when you were being placed in the coffin I could hear you making some casual observation. The audience nearly laughed itself into tears

when you drew your hand across your forehead just as the doctor was declaring that you were dead."

The actor's face grew pale. He remembers these important trivialities. At the words "A fair young form," he had caught a glimpse of a delicate young beauty in a box beside him, but so large were the fragments of sleeves on her dress that her face was the greater portion of the time obscured behind their expansive proportions. As far as the dying was concerned, this was his first experience of that profound event. Nevertheless, he had done it as he believed it should be done. He died as he had been instructed at the Sunday school. Lying quietly on his back, he had clasped his hands across his breast, and begun to think of the misty darkness and of night and of death's land and the everlasting fires. He had felt the flutterings of viewless wings, and had heard the light patter of invisible feet, and had seen the dim outlines of the spirits hovering near, and as he dreamed of himself being wafted along the mystic journey towards the golden gates of the city far away, he had felt the folly of his imaginings, and a desire to laugh aloud had floated through his mind. When he was being raised into the coffin a cold tremor darted through him, and he directed an attendant who grasped him roughly to seize him a little more gently. He had brushed away an insect which was stepping over his eyeball before he was lifted into the coffin, feeling that "dust to dust" should not be whispered in his ear till he was dead. Inwardly he vowed, on reviewing his mistakes, that he would be more attentive to the duties of death when next he should be given the opportunity. But the manager was not to be soothed.

"As I said," he continued, after a moment's hesitation, "you are mistaken to represent the passions you do not understand. Your department of the drama is the comic, and not the tragic with its tumults of the heart. I think it will be necessary for you to permit us to select your successor. The politeness of the concluding sarcasm was bitter, yet the young actor could not resent it. His bread was the Omega of his philosophy. His position meant his daily sustenance. The preceding day had been the first of his engagement, and although his recompense had yet been but promise, still he had loyally fasted after many days of fasting on the hopes to which his engagement had already given birth. He therefore meekly avoided the sarcastic answer which was forming on his lips, for he knew any pleasure it might give would be expensive, if it should result in even the loss of a meal, and instead asked for another trial, saying that he, should do better the second time."
"I fear for the reputation of the theatre," hesitated the manager, "second-rate actors have a worse effect than no actors at all. However," he concluded, "as we have no substitute ready, we shall perhaps have to give you another trial. But profit by what I have said or you shall not act with us again."
The young actor, at another time, would have replied by ironically anticipating that the threat would undoubtedly possess for him an inspiring effect, but remembering that there was a financial side of his philosophy, quietly thanked his employer for his munificent generosity and, hat in hand, backed respectfully out of the office.

The play was about to begin. A tremendous audience had assembled. The theatre was crowded. The curtain was still down. The galleries were thundering for the commencement of the tragedy. The orchestra was drowning the last blow of the hammers of the carpenters, who were rapidly completing the concluding preliminaries. The players were ready, and were exchanging good wishes with one another, or repeating half aloud the opening sentences of their respective parts. The young actor was standing alone.

"You did well last night," vouchsafed the leading tragedian, "considering that you were apparently a beginner."
The young actor was becoming accustomed to the frigid compliments.
"Really?" he quickly returned, "I would like to say the same of you, but I must confess I did not notice you last night."
The "star" was silenced, but several juniors near by were scathingly criticising his former performance. He could not easily confute their assertions with unnecessarily intruding his personality upon them, so he contented himself with merely passing where they stood, saying aloud as he neared them, as if repeating from his part, "And even fools would dare to criticize."

The orchestra ceased playing. The curtain rose, slowly displaying a stage of glittering brilliancy, and the play began amidst the rustling of the pit, the boxes, the galleries, the wings and the tumultuous throng which had gathered in the "gods."
The ghost scene came and went without any violent disaster. The young actor stood, during its representation, the picture of abject and unutterable terror. That scene he lived. The ghost was not material to him. It was ethereal and mystical—a supernatural visitant from a world which remains unseen. Every word it spoke seemed to come from beyond the grave, and its message was the message of a spirit long departed, and which fixed its habitation in the dust of no kindred clay. So real was it to him that on the fall of the curtain he fainted.

The manager was almost overcome with delight. "You are truly a tragedian," he said, when the young actor had regained consciousness.
"Ah," replied the young man, "there is inspiration in a threat!"
The play continued. Each scene, each act, redounded to the fame of the young follower of Keon. The theatre thundered its acclamation, and every sentence he uttered, every gesture he made, was received with manifestations of approbation.

At the end of the third scene the young actor complained of physical weariness. The prolonged exertion was unending to one of inexperience. On the termination of the second scene of the fourth act, he had to be assisted from the stage. When the next scene was finished it was necessary to administer to him a cordial to revive his exhausted frame. And at the close of the fourth act he was so weak that it was necessary to delay the raising of the curtain for some minutes.

In this act he whispered to an attendant, "I am to die, but I am too wearied to die with tragical precision. And then he whispered to himself, "An improper death means to me dismissal and starvation."

These pleasant reflections should have assisted him in the hour of his extremity.
The dialogue of the fifth single scene act dragged out its tiring length. The modifications of countenance had been monotonously numerous. His laughs were strained, his frowns were harmless, his menaces were unmeaning. Yet, incapable as he was, he was, now required to die. As he crossed the stage he caught the glitter of the manager's eye. He had heard him complain once during the night. He trembled at the look. The gaze of the audience, too, was fixed upon him. With unsteady hand he reached down the vial he was to drink. Returning to the centre of the stage he raised it to his lips and drained it dry.

"My God," he hoarsely whispered, as a quick shiver shook his body, "this isn't water—it's poison—poison!"
No one heard him, for the applause was deafening. Again he spoke. But the sound of applause drowned every other noise. For a moment he stood in indecision. Then he whispered inwardly, "Better die as a tragedian," and reeled wildly and fell violently on the stage.

The manager gazed on the scene from behind the half-drawn curtain. "Ah!" he said joyously, "watch him die!"

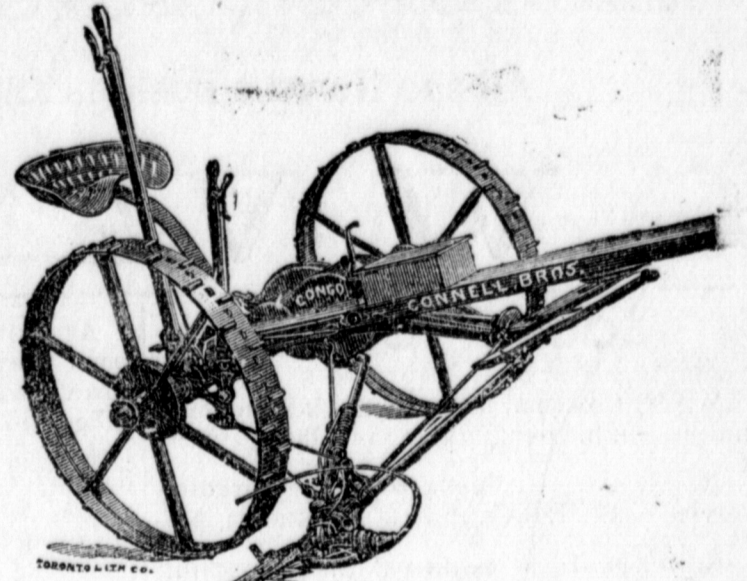
The deadly acid was not long in accomplishing its fatal design. The face of the young player grew purple and then pale. His eyes grew wide and wild. His hands closed. His limbs gathered in convulsions. A ghastly ashen hue overspread his forehead. His cheeks grew livid. His tongue grew dry. An icy perspiration dampened his hair. The cords of his neck stiffened. The blood receded from the fingers, and slowly crept out of the hands. Then the limbs a little relaxed. The hands moved violently. The throat began to twitch. The breath came slowly and feebly, and the heart almost ceased to beat. Straining himself to the utmost he spoke aloud. But, though the audience was quiet, only the manager heard his words. They were hissed across the stage.

"Have—I—died—well?"
Then he ceased to speak. His lips closed. His eyes rolled. His hands fell extended by his side. He breathed no more. The young actor had really died.

The manager rubbed his hands with delight. "He is permanently engaged," he cried aloud.
And then the curtain fell.

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