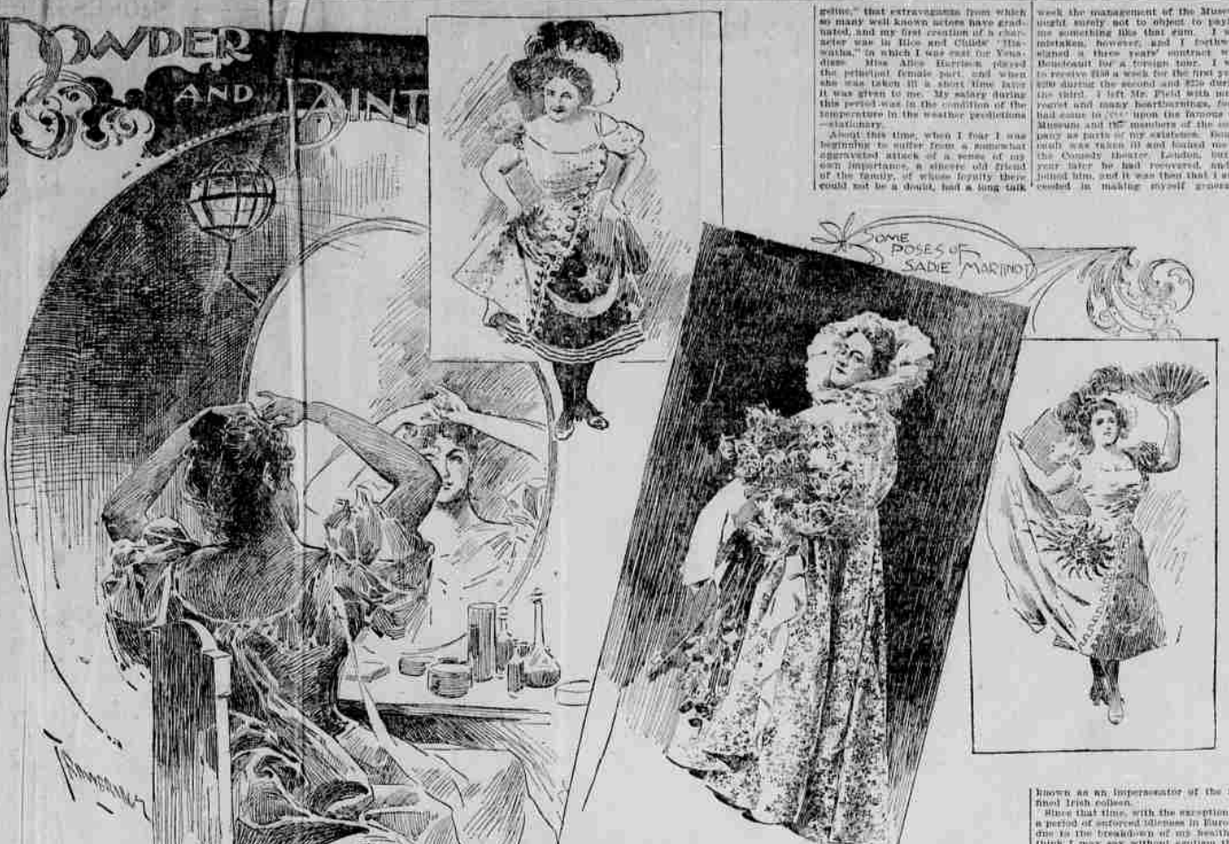

SADIE MARTINOT'S TIPS FOR AMATEURS.

Her Timely Words of Admonition to Stage Aspirants.

Miss Martinot Says Learn as Many Minor Parts as Possible—The Value of Versatility in Training For the Stage.

NEW YORK, Dec. 28.—It is ever a thankless task to proffer advice to those who have up to the present time been too fortunate in their chosen profession that the disposition is supposedly good counsel. However, as I am asked to tell those of my sisters who are still at the foot of the dramatic ladder, as well as those who have in mind the adoption of the stage as a life work, what I conceive to be the most important elements of success, I shall endeavor to do so. It must be understood that I give nothing of what follows as immutoverrible truths. I only state what my observation and experience have taught me, leaving my readers to judge whether or not my deductions are correct.

Like many other actresses, I believe that the "leading part" actress or actor is not of much account. The player who makes a pronounced hit in a certain role which happens to exactly suit his or her personality is not necessarily a great performer, but let that same person score a success in another production in a character of a widely different nature, and I am then prepared to admit that talent and not accident was the compelling force. To be brief, every person on the stage is anxious to be regarded as being versatile, but under the conditions which prevail at present very few of them entitled to that distinction. In the days of stock organizations, when one was obliged to learn at least one new part and sometimes several each week, versatility was a necessity, and those who succeeded in running the gauntlet at a stock house for a season were entitled to consideration as competent all round actors. But nowadays a player is hired for a certain part because of his or her peculiar adaptabilities to it. For a season and perhaps longer he or she may even to appear in any other. As this applies to all of the actors in that company the immediate effect is to produce a better performance and so the public is really the immediate gainer by the change.

But as I am speaking from the standpoint of the people of the stage, and specially of those who may be called entrancers, it is not fair that I should point out the disadvantages in them of contemporaneous methods. You get an engagement to do a certain part on the road. Night in and night out, week in and week out, you play that same role. Next you unconsciously endeavor to improve yourself by little touches which you think out from time to time. At after awhile the undue familiarity with your work is, especially in the case of new people, certain to breed a sort of contempt. This is more apt to be the case if the part assigned you is one which you grow to consider as beneath your abilities. Then you become slipshod in your methods, with inevitably injury to your artistic development.

At the close of your season you look about for another engagement, for actors, like other folk, must have money to live upon. A manager has seen you in your part of last season. He has nothing "just like it," and, although your work pleased him, he is not willing to take any chances and very naturally engages some one whom he has seen in a role similar to the one for an exponent of which he is in search. This may be hard upon you, but it is business. The chances are that you will be confronted by the objection herein suggested until you happen to run across a manager who has a part very much like the one you played last season. Then you may get an engagement. By this time you will have become fairly well identified with a certain class of work, and unless there is something open in your line just at the time when you are out of employment you will find it a difficult matter to place yourself. This condition will grow more marked each year, until you will discover that no one will consider you seriously as a performer of anything except that which circumstances and yourself, taken in connection with present day methods, have conspired to make what might be called your specialty.

What has all this to do with versatility? you will ask. You might also suggest that while I have pointed out the objections and disadvantages I have prescribed no remedy. But I shall try to do so at once. If you had, at the beginning of your career, convinced yourself with some stock company, or even with a traveling repertory organization, you would necessarily have played a wide range of parts, and if your performance had been good, there should be no difficulty in finding employment in any of the several times which you had essayed—that is, provided always that there happened to be a manager who wanted you at the time you wanted him. Now, as to the remedy. The beginner is prone to say that while it was possible some time ago to get an engagement with a stock company it is not possible now, for the very reason I have given that there are practically none of them in existence now. That is, however, a grave error, although it was essentially true five years, or less, ago. There are at the present time more than 40 theaters in this country in which stock companies of real merit are maintained. These houses have regular clientele and are obliged to present a different play each week. The effort is also made to provide as great a variety in the form of entertainment as is possible—comedy one week, drama the next, farce the next, melodrama the next, and so on.

It will be readily seen that an actor in such an organization, if he be conscientious (and if he be not, he should quit the stage), can acquire a vast amount of experience in a single season. No play ever has a run in these houses. The new piece must go on as regularly as Monday comes around. In the very large stock companies, like those, for instance, which are connected with the Lyceum and Empire theaters of this city, the same conditions do not prevail. Their ranks are recruited from among the actors who have made their reputations and whose names have a market value. It is practically impossible for a beginner to get into one of these, and although they are all anxious to do so, it is a fact that they would be better off, from the standpoint of opportunity to acquire experience, in one of the smaller and less pretentious and, it must also be admitted, less meritorious organizations. This may sound odd, but it is true, for in a little company, as I have explained, you must get up in your new part each week, whereas in the Empire and Lyceum one play frequently runs through the greater portion of a season. You would, therefore, be no better off with them than with an ordinary "combination," except for the added care which is given to the production and rehearsal of plays at these two prominent New York playhouses.

It must not be supposed from what I have said that it is an easy matter to get into one of the out of town stock companies, for it is not. But there is still the traveling repertory organization left. True, only small places are visited, but experience can be obtained there as well as in the largest city in the world. One can at least learn the rudiments of the art of acting and make up in a small repertory company, and that is more than sufficient to compensate for all the sacrifice which may be necessary. It is early enough then to begin the search for "higher game," and if she is competent, with the training acquired in the humbler organization, the quest is almost certain to be rewarded with success. Too many players regard the salary without reference to the possibilities for artistic development. The salary is necessary, of course, but it is not the only thing to be considered. I have often taken a part which I liked at a less salary than was offered for one in which I could see nothing which would add to my artistic reputation. In fact, even though it be a bit embarrassing to speak of one's own career, I will state some facts in connection with mine simply for the purpose of demonstrating that the advice which I have herein given is sincere and that, to use a cant expression, I have been willing to take the medicine which I have prescribed.

I was born in New York city, and as my parents were well provided with this world's goods be member of my family had ever associated me with bread winning. After my time at school I went to the Ursuline convent in Westchester, where I studied French, German and music, all of which I found of inestimable benefit to me in after years. I had long ere this begun to suffer from "stage fever," but my opportunities were laughed to scorn by my parents. I was, however, in dead earnest, and my persistence was finally rewarded, for I won my mother over, and she consented that I might try to get a start. I set out boldly to board the managerial lions in their dens. I was but 14 at the time and had had no experience beyond a few amateur appearances. I succeeded in winning the usual stereotyped promises, but did not get an engagement until I saw Mr. Josh Hart of the old Eagle theater. He laughed at what he called my "terrible earnestness" and promised to give me a trial if my parents would personally visit him and signify their acquiescence. This my mother did, and I began my stage career as a chorus girl in the company of English beauties, among whom was thy Maud Branscombe, who played Cupid. The piece presented was "Talon," which won considerable favor.

I well remember my first appearance. At first the house appeared to me to be a mile long, and there seemed to be about 10,000 people in it. I imagined that every one of that magnified audience was looking intently at me and at no one else. After a night or two I began to think that I was of considerable importance, and at even so early a date as that I was inclined to rebel against the unjust fate which had assigned me to the chorus, while others whom I foolishly regarded as my inferiors had "lines to speak." And right here it might not be amiss to remark that that is one of the greatest faults of beginners. They are so apt to think that they are not appreciated at their full worth. I was simply longing for a chance to have a line to say. Well, the opportunity came within two weeks, and it almost took my breath away. Miss Branscombe met with an accident, and the management desired me to play Cupid. I nerved myself for the ordeal and managed to get through. I actually got "notices in the newspapers"—my first, of course. The gentlemen of the [illegible] were good enough to say that I [illegible] acquitted myself very creditably, although now I realize that I had given a very unfinished performance. Naturally I was elated and from that time considered myself an actress.

Then came an engagement with Adah Richmond, who made a tour in a piece called "Chow Chow." The success which I fondly imagined I had scored as Cupid in "Talon" had given me a very exaggerated idea of my value, and I was horrified when I found that my salary was to be but $18 a week. Still I accepted, though I mentally vowed that I was worth five times as much. I had even that charming French actress, Aimee, ere this, and I obtained permission to introduce her famous song, "Pretty as a Picture," and to give an imitation of her. These met with great favor, and I was emboldened to seek an engagement of which the Aimee mimicry should be the special feature. I was fortunate, for I was offered the part of Cupid in "Pique," an extravaganza which was presented at the Globe theater, Boston. I next accepted an offer from John Stetson of $30 a week to join his "Babes in the Wood" company. We made a tour of New England, and when we got back to Boston we produced my old original friend, "Talon." When my contract with Mr. Stetson expired, I again joined Adah Richmond, and this time she paid me $35 a week. My! but I was getting along in the world, or, at any rate, that was what I thought. Later I played Eulalie and Gabriel in "Evangeline," that extravaganza from which so many well known actors have graduated, and my first creation of a character was in Rice and Cliffe's "Hiawatha," in which I was cast for Pocahiddus. Miss Alice Harrison played the principal female part, and when she was taken ill a short time later it was given to me. My salary during this period was in the condition of the temperature in the weather predictions—variable.

About this time, when I fear I was beginning to suffer from a somewhat aggravated attack of a sense of my own importance, a sincere old friend of the family, of whose loyalty there could not be a doubt, had a long talk with my mother and myself with references to my professional career.

It was pointed out by him that my experience had been confined to one line of work and that if I continued in it much longer it would become impossible for me to obtain employment in any other. He also said that the fact that I had come to be recognized as a fairly good performer was a disadvantage unless I intended to stick to extravaganza or burlesque all the rest of my days. His advice was that as I was pretty well known in Boston by this time, I should accept an offer which had been made me by the Boston Museum stock company. The step seemed to me at the time a distinct check to my career, but there was force in the argument, and I joined the Museum forces. But the salary. Whew! That dropped to zero almost. To be exact, I was paid $20 a week. Quite a come down it was, but if there is one thing more than another that I can look back to with pleasure and satisfaction it was my engagement at the Museum, for to that I feel that I owe whatever I may have since become in the theatrical world. My family, my friends and myself had decided that I must have opportunity to display any versatility I might possess, and I certainly got it there.

My first appearance was in a small role in Sardou's "Diplomacy." That was not much like "Talon" and "Chow Chow," but I liked it better than either, and my work gave better satisfaction to my advisers. They told me there was hope of my rising in my profession. After many weeks, in which I played as many different parts, Lawrence Barrett came to the Museum. He was to be supported by our stock company, and you may be sure that all of us were nervous as kittens.

During Lawrence Barrett's engagement with us I played Lady Anne in "Richard III," Jessica in "Merchant of Venice" and equally good parts in several other pieces of his extensive repertory. The result? An increase of salary of $5 a week, so that I began the new season at $25. Matters proceeded uneventfully enough for some time, but I had begun to have sense, and I refused several offers to appear in extravaganza at largely increased remuneration. In fact a season's contract was presented to me at $75 a week, but I had determined to master every detail of acting, as far as lay within my power, before leaving the Museum and commencing a still hunt for the dollars. Dion Boucicault, that wonderful playwright and author, came to the Museum in time, and I had the opportunity in his support to learn all that was worthy in the Irish drama. I did my level best and was amply repaid by his commendation. Fanny Davenport visited us as a star, and I played Hulich with her in "Fiona." She also was very kind to me, and when the next season opened my salary had jumped up to $35, and I was nominally the leading soubrette of the company.

Boucicault, Frank Mayo and many other stars visited the Museum that season, and the opportunity given to appear in a wide range of characters was fully appreciated, I think. I knew that I never worked harder in my life, and I was rewarded by being made the regular juvenile leading lady of the organization. In this capacity it would be useless to attempt to enumerate the parts I played, and it would serve no purpose in this little story. My salary had still further advanced, to $50 a week, and I was as happy as I could be.

Then came my break with the Museum. I felt that when so good an actor and stage manager as Dion Boucicault was willing to pay me $50 a week the management of the Museum might surely not to object to paying me something like that sum. I was mistaken, however, and I forthwith signed a three year's contract with Boucicault for a foreign tour. I was to receive $50 a week for the first year, $60 during the second and $75 during the third. I left Mr. Field with much regret and many heartbreakings, for I had come to [illegible] upon the famous old Museum and the members of the company as parts of my existence. Boucicault was taken ill and foiled me to the Comedy theater, London, but a year later he had recovered, and I joined him, and it was then that I succeeded in making myself generally known as an impersonator of the refined Irish colleen.

Since that time, with the exception of a period of enforced idleness in Europe, due to the breakdown of my health, I think I may say without egotism that my services have been constantly in demand. The remuneration, too, has been most satisfactory, and, by comparison with the old Museum days, almost colossal.

I attribute this to the fact that I was just as valuable in one sort of character as in any of half a dozen others. I found that my musical training was of value, too, for I was, as I think is generally known, the prima donna of the leading comic opera organizations in this country and in Europe.

The value to an actress of every accomplishment that she may be enabled to acquire cannot be overestimated. I had, as I have stated, studied German, and I once sang the prima donna role in that language at the Amberg theater in this city. It was incidentally one of the best paying engagements I have ever had. I had studied French and was familiar with French literature. That was of value to me when I starred in the play which was especially written for me, "Mme. de Pompadour." In other words, no knowledge or accomplishment is useless to an actress. Sooner or later she will find it of benefit.

After my starring tour in "The Passport," I joined Charles Frohman's forces, playing the principal female character in "The Gay Parisians" last season, and this year I am with Charles H. Hoyt's "A Stranger in New York." at his theater in this city. I have reached a point in my career where I can enjoy comparative freedom from the annoyance attendant upon the early struggle for recognition, but as I think it all over I realize now more fully than ever before that whatever success I have had is due to the fact that I had been trained in nearly every form of the drama, and that I was consequently seldom obliged to decline a part on the ground that it did not suit me. How often that has to be done every person connected with the stage knows quite well. Therefore, as a final word of counsel to the amateur or beginner, I wish to repeat: Pay no attention to the salary at the start. Get the experience at all hazards. Play as many parts and as many different sorts of parts as possible, and above all, never allow yourself to be regarded as a "one part" actor or even to be regarded as such.

Sadie Martinot

An Actor's Excuse.

After his first great success, Mr. W. S. Penley had to act in many plays which somehow did not seem to please the public. Some of these he just kept alive by his brilliant "gagging." On one occasion, when a wretched play had been going for some weeks in this manner, the conceited young author came behind and asked Mr. Penley why he "gagged" so much.

"The play will be all right," he said, "if you will only speak my lines quietly and wait for the laugh."

To this Mr. Penley replied promptly: "That's all very well for you, old man. You live in town, but, you see, I live in the country, and have to catch the 12.15 from Waterloo."

Sloane's Reply.

Since mingling with British nobility, his foster parents expressed a wish that Ted Sloane, the famous jockey, had gone to school when a lad to give him a polish acceptable in aristocratic society. Ted's reply was characteristic. He wrote: "If I had gone to school I would now be working for somebody and getting perhaps $10 a week."

Stage Banquets.

Stage banquets where the lovely ones indue feast, are often the cause of envy to the spectators. As a rule a stage feast is the handiwork of a caterer only half skilled, and the tempting variety of the edibles, as well as the crusty loaf of bread, are papier mache imitations of the original.

Fanny Davenport always uses real champagne at her stage suppers, with ere less favored with worldly goods use champagne cider, ginger ale or plain soda, with a champagne label put on the original package. For sentimental wines and whiskies cold tea, tinted sugar and water and plain water are utilized, and many times an empty bottle and a tin cup will serve a comedian to reach a state of intoxication if the clever manner he manipulates the bottle and cup.

The late James Lewis the leading comedian for years at Augustin Daly's theater, New York, was at one time starring in a repertory of Daly's successes. In one play he made his entrance with a bottle of whisky, which he drank on the stage. The bottle was always placed by the property man on the theater on a chair near Mr. Lewis' entrance. On one occasion, in Pittsburg, at the Grand Opera House, through some mistake the whisky bottle was removed and a bottle marked turpentine substituted. Not looking at the bottle, Mr. Lewis made his entrance, but his first drink from the bottle caused the audience to howl with delight, for the wry faces and grimaces made by Mr. Lewis surpassed anything ever seen by the oldest playgoer. Mr. Lewis finished the scene with the audience convulsed, and when he staggered off the stage had to respond to half a dozen recalls. The stage manager met him as he came off and said:

"Jimmie, you outdid yourself. You've made a wonderful hit."

"Hit!" exclaimed Mr. Lewis. "Do you know what I've been compelled to drink? Turpentine! Send for a physician at once."

The property man was summoned, and an investigation showed that the bottle contained the usual cold tea, the only turpentine being the label. Mr. Lewis said: "Well, imagination is a wonderful thing. Every drink I took from that bottle seemed to burn my throat out. I could even smell the turpentine. After this I'll take no chances; I'll have whisky." And he kept his word.

Kellar and De Wolf Hopper.

A good story came to light the other day in which Magician Kellar and De Wolf Hopper figure as principals. When "El Capitan" was in course of preparation, Hopper determined that he must have a real magician's trick to introduce in his set wherein he mystifies the king. He went to Kellar and showed a wonderful mysterious cabinet, or cage, in which men and women were made to disappear so completely and so instantaneously that the spectators couldn't see 'em go. Kellar showed him the working of the cabinet, as to its mechanical features, but still Hopper couldn't fathom the thing.

"It's a good trick," said he, "but I don't want to take anything you are using yourself. Give me any old thing. Something that you've thrown away years ago. I'll do as well as this one."

"I haven't used this for three or four years," replied the wizard, "and thought it would be a good one for you. It won't cost you a cent."

The mysterious cage was duly delivered to Mr. Hopper, but after a month, when "El Capitan" was produced, Mr. Kellar learned that the trick wasn't used. When he saw Hopper, he inquired as to the reason. "Why, you see," said the comedian, "the first is that before I got home I forgot how to do the blamed thing, and for the life of me I couldn't put into the cage. I worked a week on it and gave it up. Why, I've made up my mind that I'm the greatest magician that ever happened. You come and do 'El Capitan,' and I'll go and do your tricks."

Ezra Kendall's Joke.

When Ezra Kendall first took to vaudeville, he was in great demand, and he got his pieces good New York city. He was playing a date at Proctor's, and when his week was up Weber & Fields sent for him and offered him an engagement at their music hall.

"How much do you want?"

"Two hundred and fifty," replied Kendall.

"I'll give you $200."

"Not a cent less."

"Why, you don't have to pay railroad fare or anything else."

"That makes no difference."

"Well, money talks in this world."

"Do you think it does? Try it and see."

"Well, I have tried it."

"Not the right way. Just tack two $100 bills on the scenery and see what kind of a hit it will make for 15 minutes. What you want is the flesh and blood."

Weber & Fields and Kendall quit doing business right there.

Would Be One of a Syndicate.

One scene in "The Whirl of the Town" represents a procession of dime museum freaks, including the tattooed man, the bearded lady, the dwarf, the boy, the bearded lady, the diminutive "midget," the giant and the fat woman. The latter, who weighs the small 38 pounds, is played by Miss Marie Peters. One day, when the company was playing at the New York Casino, Miss Peters boarded a cable car on Broadway, which was overcrowded. Like most women, she looked around the car to see if any of the men would relinquish their seat, and finally her eye settled on a rather handsome young man, modest looking young man, who felt rather uneasy under the glance of the struggling but large-sized woman. He looked hard at the floor of the car and said, "I will be one of four gentlemen to get up and give this lady a seat." Miss Peters suddenly returned to her place and the young man breathed that she wanted to get off at the next corner.

Frank Biegy' School.

Frank C. Bangs, the last surviving member of the famous Bangs-Boucicault quartet—Booth, Davenport, Barrett and Bangs—has come to that sad resort of the old time legit and opened a dramatic school in New York. In his card he announces himself modestly as a "teacher of all that pertains to acting, reading and oratory." Doubtless he will be asked what is meant by "all that pertains to the profession." If Mr. Bangs could teach the budding Bunnie how to do the trick with the bedspread, or the quadrille step, or train the aspiring Juliet to do a saltatorial dance on the balcony, he would be in great demand. Otherwise, it is "Alas, poor Yorick."

Fanny Rice may produce "At the French Ball" in Paris next spring—a kind of "taking coals to Newcastle" engagement.