

**AMATEUR AND PROFESSIONAL
STAGE LIFE; OR, THE
ADVENTURES OF BILLY
SHAKESPOKE BEFORE AND
BEHIND THE CURTAIN**

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Amateur and professional stage life; or, The adventures of Billy Shakespoke before and behind the curtain by Anonymous

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ANONYMOUS

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AMATEUR AND PROFESSIONAL STAGE LIFE;
OR, THE
ADVENTURES OF BILLY SHAKESPOKE
BEFORE AND BEHIND THE CURTAIN.

BY ONE WHO HAS BEEN THERE.

(C. A. J. FARRAR.)

*Illustrated with six full-page engravings, drawn by C. W. Reed,
and engraved by George E. Johnson.*

"All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players."

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PREFACE.

KNOWING the interest taken by the average amateur actor or actress in all kind of shows, and things appertaining to the stage, I have put together a number of incidents relating to my own experience, both as an amateur and professional, covering a space of some ten years, in which I had some queer adventures and plenty of up-hill work.

With a fellow-feeling for all amateurs and actors in their struggles and triumphs, I launch this little volume on the broad ocean of literature, hoping that those for whom it was written, — people who are interested in theatrical topics, — will give it a kindly welcome. Should this be done, it will be applause enough for

Yours, truly,

THE AUTHOR.

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ADVENTURES OF BILLY SHAKESPOKE.



CHAPTER I.

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH. — I DEVELOP AN EARLY LIKING FOR
THE STAGE.

BEING the son of my parents, I am by birth and family right a Shakespoke, — a name not unfamiliar to the world in general.

Our ancestral name being so near that of the immortal bard of Avon, determined my father upon naming me after him, and I was in due time christened William, which eventually shortened to Billy.

Whether my patronymic had anything to do with my early developed fondness for the stage I cannot say, but certain it was, that as a youngster I excelled in "spouting," and that in both Sunday and day school where I attended, whenever there were any exhibitions, I was always selected to give a recitation.

Before I was twelve years old I had all the stock speeches of the speakers and reading-books at my tongue's end, and still was not satisfied, but longed to strut my brief hour upon the stage.

About this time, in company with a number of boys, — friends living in our neighborhood, — I started a theatre in the garret of my father's house. An admission to the performances of our talented company cost the beholders two cents, — an enormous sum in our eyes.

We played pieces containing male characters only, and the scenery and costumes were the joint production of the company. Our receipts were equally divided, and were soon swallowed by candy, ice-cream, and marbles.

Our theatre had only been running a month when my parents left Boston, and moved to a town in Vermont, and, being obliged to go with them, our theatrical company burst up.

After getting settled in my new home, with some of the most wide-awake boys of the High School I attended, I formed a Debating Society, and we hired a small room in which to meet, in a building occupied by the bank.

The Debating Society flourished for one winter, and

we adjourned over in summer, and the second winter reorganized as a dramatic club, procuring the services of several young ladies, whom we admitted as members.

I was elected stage-manager of the club, and we took up a drama and a farce in rehearsal.

I followed in the illustrious footsteps of all stage-managers of dramatic clubs from time immemorial, and appropriated all the best parts, without regard to my ability for playing them.

Our first public performance was given in a hall in Masonic Building, and was a success in every particular. The bill consisted of "Box and Cox" and the "Momentous Question."

I personated *Box* in the farce, and *Robert Shelly* in the drama, and brought down the house, as the critics say, in both characters.

It being the first performance of the kind in the town, we had a crowd present, and, to use the words of the reporter for the town paper, "The number of the audience was only limited by the capacity of the hall." Financially, also, our show was a success, as we cleared twenty-five dollars above expenses.

This unlooked-for result was very gratifying to all the club, and at the next regular meeting we voted