

**PLAYWRITING: A
HANDBOOK FOR WOULD-
BE DRAMATIC AUTHORS**

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Playwriting: A Handbook for Would-Be Dramatic Authors by A. Dramatist

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A. DRAMATIST

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A HANDBOOK

FOR WOULD-BE

DRAMATIC AUTHORS.

BY

A DRAMATIST.



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THE STAGE OFFICE,
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PREFACE.



IT was many, many years ago that I began my melancholy career as a Dramatic Author; and a hard and bitter-fought beginning I can well remember that it was. I was inexperienced, shy, and foolish; without money, without influence. I knew not a single soul connected even in the most distant way with the theatrical world. I know no one to advise me or give me a hint. For years I danced in impotent frenzy around the high strong walls that guard the city of Dramatic Art. I ran my head against the stones, I tore myself against the spiky gates, I soused myself in the dirty moat, I screamed and cursed, and blubbed. At last, I climbed over and got in. I don't think much of the show now I am in; but that has nothing to do with us here, our object in this little book being merely to discuss the question of getting in; and I enumerate the difficulties that beset me only to show to the struggling young besiegers of to-day how, with the aid of pig-headed obstinacy, sublime conceit, thick skin, and a genius for nagging and boring and worrying human people's lives out of them, it is possible to force even so strongly guarded a portal as the stage door of the present century.

I also hope to show you how to force that door with less waste of time and energy than I spent upon the task myself. Many years of fretful groping, of useless labour, of misdirected effort could be saved to most beginners by a brief glimpse into that strange world they hope to win, by a moment's knowledge of its funny little ways, by a passing insight into the character of its curious inhabitants.

It is this glimpse, this knowledge, this insight, that I propose to give my readers.

Nor do I anticipate that by so doing I shall be the means of overcrowding the Dramatic Market. The road that leads to that market is a very long road, a very stoney road, a very uphill road, a very wearisome to the flesh and heart-breaking to the spirit road; and only a few of the many who start—only the very strong and the very determined, can ever hope to reach the other end. Such strength and determination no book can give you. All I can hope to do is to guide you along the right path, to save you from walking at the rate of five miles an hour down the wrong lanes, and puffing and blowing round the wrong turnings.

THE AUTHOR.





PLAYWRITING.



CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

I WISH it were not so hackneyed a custom, that of quoting *Punch's* advice to people about to marry, and applying it to the particular question in hand, because I wanted to do the very same thing here. I wanted to begin these papers with: "Advice to people about to write plays. Don't." But the idea has been done to death, and so, of course, I can't make use of it.

And it would have been good advice too. Goethe, who, one might think, would have escaped the flints and briars of the literary path if anybody could have done so, said (I am not using the exact words; it is easier to paraphrase than to hunt up a reference), that, if young men only knew what a trying, troublous life an author had to lead, the courts of the Muses would be but sparsely crowded with aspirants. This was spoken of authorship in general, and is certainly true enough of it. But dramatic authorship is to the profession of literature as reversing is to waltzing—an agony within a misery. A man