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Charlotte Corday

How an Attempted Picture Play Was Spoiled

By F. A. MITCHEL

Morieville is situated in a region where the sun shines oftener than anywhere else in America and where the surrounding scenery is more varied and beautiful. This city, devoted to the work of producing picture plays, looks out upon mountains on the one hand and undulating tracts on the other. The latter is partly wooded, partly cultivated, and a river runs through it, connecting several lakes.

Morieville itself is a very singular city, containing a singular population. There is every variety of dwelling in it from an Indian tepee to a Chinese palace, every variety of fortification from a Roman oppidum (walled inclosure) to a modern bastion. If there is anything required that Morieville does not contain it is improvised. A scenario, one scene of which was laid in the United States senate chamber, having been chosen for production the senate chamber was constructed not of stone, but of stucco, canvas and other such like materials.

One of the famous speaking plays of its day was "Charlotte Corday." The scene was laid in Paris at the time of the French revolution and involved the assassination of the leader of the reign of terror, Marat. The woman who played the part of Charlotte was considered a wonder. During her performances she seemed to be the person whose part she was enacting. The play had a very long run, and every month during the time it was on the boards the leading lady, whose stage name was Marguerite Stanley, put more intensity into her part until her audiences were often thrown into a cold shiver.

"Charlotte Corday" was especially adapted for a picture play, and Morieville was considered as the best, really the only, place to make the photographs.

John Esterbrooke, who took the part of Marat, though a finished actor, did not produce the impression effected by Miss Stanley. While she became more and more tragic, he seemed to lose force. The real reason of his apparent deterioration was that so real was her impersonation of her character that he became afraid of her.

There was another matter that influenced Mr. Esterbrooke. He thought he saw signs that the girl was in love with him. While on the stage she played Charlotte to his Marat. At other times she purred to him like a kitten. He was not in love with her, and could not divest himself of the feeling that if he did not respond to her preference a time might come when, while she was under the powerful emotion induced by her part, she would make of it a real tragedy.

Such were the conditions when it was decided to produce a moving picture play of "Charlotte Corday." Miss Stanley was on the same train with Esterbrooke. Another member of the company, Estelle Springer, who was supposed to be in love with him, was also of the party. Esterbrooke took a seat beside Miss Springer and remained there all the way to Morieville. During the ride Miss Stanley remained in her seat reading a novel, a traveling cap pulled down over her eyes. When the journey was completed she left the car with the others smilingly, and if jealousy had been excited in her none of the party noticed it.

"Charlotte Corday" was to be a five reel play. Often many pictures were taken of a single scene before the desired effect was produced on the films. This was wearing on the performers, especially on Miss Stanley, whose emotional part required so much intensity, and every time a picture was made that intensity must be excited. This naturally called for periods of rest. They were usually passed in automobile rides over the beautiful country.

By this time a rivalry appeared to have sprung up between the two aspirants for Mr. Esterbrooke's favor. It was observed in Miss Springer, but not in Miss Stanley—that is, the latter's feeling for him was only supposed to exist by him, and he spoke of it to no one. On one or two occasions she asked him to ride with her, that she might talk over such changes in their behavior before the camera from what they had been used to on the stage as might be advisable. On their return from these rides Esterbrooke looked serious, but kept his own counsel as to the cause. Actors are apt to have hearts thrown at them promiscuously from young women in their audiences, and Esterbrooke was no exception. He had found it advisable to pay no attention to such advances and never mentioned them to others.

Historical plays do not adhere very closely to history. If they did it would be impossible to treat the theme so dramatically. In the dramatization of the story of Charlotte Corday, Marat meets Charlotte at a cafe on the Champs Elysees and admires her. He has no special word for her, she sitting at another table alone, while he is dining with a party which includes Miss Springer, who took the part of a Mme. Du Four. Marat's efforts to cast his admiring glances at the girl who is later on to assassinate him, without attracting the notice of those at his

table, is one of the main features of this scene.

The fact that the Champs Elysees is in Paris instead of Morieville made no difference to the management. The tables of the cafe under the trees, the broad avenue leading up to the present site of the Arc de Triomphe, were all before the camera, and so well reproduced were they that one familiar with Paris would scarcely believe that the photograph had not been taken from the original. Beyond was the Place de la Revolution, today the Place de la Concorde, and instead of the fountain now standing in its center was the guillotine.

The life of the picture and at the same time a contrast with the instrument of death were the gay companies dining within and without the cafe. The men wore the cocked hat, the ruffled shirt bosom, the long double-breasted waistcoat, the high coat collar and the tight trousers in vogue at the end of the eighteenth century. The women wore the short waist dresses and poke bonnets. The revolution had either guillotined or drawn into exile most of the refined women of France and brought into prominence those whom we would now call "fast" if not abandoned. Such were the persons eating and drinking at the tables on the Champs Elysees in sight of the machine that was every day ridding France of its aristocrats.

Within this effective scene was a more minute one—the group about Marat, with Charlotte Corday at a neighboring table. Both the face of Marat and that of Charlotte were a study, the former unconscious that the girl he admired was to kill him, the latter aware of his presence when ready to strike the fatal blow.

The author of "Charlotte Corday," the picture play, introduced one scene that rendered all this thrilling. Amid the gayety about the tables, reckless men and brassy women talking, lounging, drinking, Marat and Charlotte the central figures, there is a commotion about the guillotine. A beautiful woman is strapped to it, the ax falls, and by one of those quick transitions common in moving pictures her head appears to roll into the basket.

Such is an imperfect word description of one of the most notable scenes ever attempted to be placed on the screen. The company chosen to enact it before the camera were gathered and taking their positions. Marat was being posed; Charlotte was setting herself; men and women were arranging themselves in groups. Then, when all was ready, the signal was given and the company, consisting of hundreds of persons, was under fire of the camera. The pantomime had continued for some time when the photographic director called a halt. Going to Marat he led him apart from the others and whispered something in his ear. While he was doing so Marat cast a frightened glance at Charlotte. The manager went back to his position of observation, and the photographing recommenced. The chat, the laugh, the conviviality went on, each actor or actress intent on his or her part, for in a picture play everything counts; there is no deadwood.

When the scene of the execution came the only attention paid to it, except on the part of Charlotte, was that a number of persons raised their glasses, and the pantomime indicated that they were drinking to one more aristocrat put out of the way. As for Charlotte, a close observer would have seen a deep purpose in her eye. As the head of the guillotine's victim fell into the basket she rose, ran like a flash to the table occupied by Marat, at the same time drawing a dagger from underneath the kerchief crossing her breast and plunged it into his heart. An indescribable confusion followed. The buzzing of the machinery moving the film ceased. Every one ran to Marat, the men standing, the women screaming, for all knew that this was not the assassination scene, and it was believed that he had been really struck down. He never spoke again.

As to Charlotte, she withdrew a little from the group about the man she had killed and stood trembling. Then for the first time it was noticed that there was a wild look in her eye. She was led away, and none of the company ever saw her again.

The picture play of Charlotte Corday was never put on the screen for the public. The films were run through before the management, and the murder scene was pronounced a wonder. But there was so much objection to it on the part of Miss Stanley's relatives and others that the films were destroyed.

Nevertheless it has been whispered that the films comprising this scene of an actual tragedy were not given over to destruction. It is claimed that private exhibitions of this unintended part of the play have been given for managers and their friends. Whether or not this is true, there can be no doubt that so realistic a scene, embodying a tragedy, has never been put on the films.

One question—a psychological one—has never been settled. Was Marguerite Stanley's set the result of an insanity caused by so long playing so emotional a part, or was it caused by jealousy, or was it a combination of both? Esterbrooke was the only person that suspected she was in love with him, and had she been would not she have shown it to others? But its appearing only to him does not prove that it did not exist. It seems most likely that the act was the result of insanity, caused by the prolonged repetition of a single act of a highly emotional nature, but momentarily intensified by jealousy.

GLASS IN THE EARLY AGES.

It Was Always Colored and Opaque, at a Rate, Until the Year 600 B. C.

Somewhere in the neighborhood of 2,500 years before the Christian era are found records of the existence of glass, the earliest in history. Some well preserved specimens have quite recently been discovered in the sepulchers of the period of 2500 B. C. The glass of Egypt was generally opaque, rarely transparent, always colored and used for the making of articles of adornment, such as beads, vases of blue glass with finely chased wavy lines in white, light blue, yellow, black and red.

It was not until nearly 2,000 years later—or 600 B. C., to be exact—that transparent glass came into use for the manufacture of bottles and goblets. By this time, however, Egyptian glass had been extensively exported to Greece and Italy, the furnaces of Alexandria, under the Ptolemies, producing glass vases of beautiful design.

To the Phoenicians have many authorities awarded credit for the discovery attributed to the Egyptians, and it is certain that Sidon, the capital of Phoenicia, was at a very early period famous for glass; are made by Artax and Irenawus from the sand brought down from Mount Carmel.

While specimens of Egyptian and Phoenician glass were found in Greece in the time of Herodotus and Aristophanes, it was not until 350 B. C. that its manufacture in the form of engraved stones and cameos became common among the Hellenes, the sphere of Archimedes, for example, being made of this substance.

From decaying Rome the manufacture of glass was transferred to Constantinople, thence in the seventh century to Venice, which for many hundreds of years was to remain the center of the industry, the Venetian goblets and drinking cups being exported all over the world.—Exchange.

THE FRANKING PRIVILEGE.

How It Has Grown Since Its Origin in Revolutionary Times.

It was first granted to Revolutionary soldiers during the war, then to cabinet officers and members of congress for official correspondence and public documents. At first members of congress only had the privilege during the session of congress, but later it was extended to cover the whole year and private correspondence. The first four presidents had it for life, and it was granted to the widows of some former presidents. But abuse grew up, and the privilege was considerably curtailed.

At present the following mail matter may be sent free: All public documents printed by order of congress, the Congressional Record and speeches contained therein, franked by members of congress or the secretary of the senate or clerk of the house. Seeds transmitted by the secretary of agriculture or by any member of congress procured from that department. Letters and packages relating exclusively to the business of the government of the United States, mailed only by officers of the same, and letters and parcels mailed by the Smithsonian Institution. All these must be covered by specially printed "penalty" envelopes or labels.

The vice president, members and members elect to congress may frank any mail matter to any government official or to any person correspondence not over four ounces in weight upon official or departmental business. All communications to government officers and to members of congress are required to be prepaid by stamps unless inclosed in "penalty" envelopes furnished for replies.—Philadelphia Press.

Marconi's Greatest Pleasure.

"Nothing ever gave me greater pleasure," Signor Marconi once told Mrs. Alec Tweedle, who tells it in her reminiscences, "My Tablecloths." "I had a certain £100 I earned for writing an article. Oh, dear, I was proud of that £100. An American magazine wrote to me for something and offered 20 guineas. I refused and never gave the thing a second thought. They wrote again and offered me £50, and again I refused. I am not a literary man, only a very busy one. To my surprise these American people called £100, or a shilling a word. It seemed so delightful that I accepted and wrote the article, and that £100 earned by my very own pen was an immense joy. I really don't think anything ever gave me greater pleasure."

A Legend of Lace.

According to Melchior de Vogue, the legend of lace is as follows: A Venetian sailor gave his ladylove a frond of spreading seaweed to keep him in memory while at sea. But the girl found that the seaweed was rapidly drying up and disappearing. So she caught the fine branches and leaves of the plant with thread against a piece of linen and, working on, with her thoughts following her lover, invented lace.

Different Now.

"Is this cellar perfectly dry?" inquired the prospective purchaser. "Well," responded the talented agent, with a knowing wink, "it always had been until the prohibition law went into effect."—Richmond Times-Dispatch.

Back Yards in Texas.

A Texas rancher's wife complained that she didn't have enough room in the back yard, so as an addition he has just purchased 40,000 acres.—Pittsburgh Post.

Finish every day and be done with it.—Emerson.

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