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S. SCOTT DURHAM, — — ONTARIO.

THE STROLLERS

By FREDERIC S. ISHAM,
Author of "Under the Rose"

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PROLOGUE.

OLD Drury Lane rang with applause for the performance of Mme. Carew. Of British-French parentage, she was a recognized peer among the favorite actresses on the English stage and a woman whose attractions of face and manner were of a high order.

The bill for the evening under consideration was "Adrienne Lecouvreur," and in no part had the actress been more natural and effective. Her triumph was secure.

The player had every stimulus to appear at her best on this particular evening, for the audience, frivolous, volatile, taking its character from the loose, weak king, was unusually complaisant through the presence of the first gentleman of Europe. As the last of the Georges declared himself in good humor, so every toady grinned and every courtly flunky swore in the billingsgate of that profane eloquent period that the actress was a "monstrous fine woman."

With rare discretion and spirit had the latter played, a queenly figure in that ribald, gross gathering. She had reached the scene where the actress turns upon her tormentors, those noble ladies of rank and position, and launches the curse of a soul lashed beyond endurance. Sweeping forward to confront her adversaries, about to face them, her troubled glance chanced to fall into one of the side boxes where were seated a certain foreign marquis, somewhat notorious, and a lady of insolent, patrician bearing. The anticipated action was arrested, for at sight of the nobleman and his companion Adrienne swayed slightly, as though moved by a new overpowering emotion. Only for a moment she hesitated; then, fixing her blazing eyes upon the two and lifting her arm threateningly, the bitter words flowed from her lips with an earnestness that thrilled the audience. A pallor overspread the face of the marquis, while the lady drew back behind the draperies almost as if in fear. At the conclusion of that effort the walls echoed with plaudits. The actress stood as in a trance. Her face was pale, her figure seemed changed to stone, and the light went out of her eyes.

She fainted and fell, and the curtain descended quickly. The woman by the marquis' side, who had trembled at first, now forced a laugh as she said: "The trollop can curse! Let us go." Together they left the box, the marquis regretting the temerity which had led him to bring his companion to the theater. He, too, was secretly unnerved, and when they entered the carriage they seated themselves as far apart as possible, the marquis detesting the lady and she for her part disliking him just as cordially.

Next day the critics referred to the scene with glowing words, while in the coffee houses they discussed the proposition. Should an actress feel the emotion she portrays? With a cynical smile, the marquis read the different accounts of the performance when he and his companion found themselves in the old stagecoach en route for Brighton. He felt no regret for his action—had not the Prince of Wales taught the gentlemen of his kingdom that it was fashionable to desert actresses? Had he not left the "divine Perdita" to languish after snubbing her right royally in Hyde park?

Disdainfully the lady in the coach regarded her husband, and it was evident



The bitter words flowed from her lips.

that the ties of affection which bound these two travelers together on life's road were neither strong nor enduring. Yet they were traveling together; their way was the same; their destination—but that belongs to the future. The marquis had been relieved in his mind after a consultation with a distinguished barrister, and, moreover, was pleased at the prospect of leaving this island of fog for the sunny shores of France. The times were exciting; the country on the verge of proposed electoral reforms. But in France the new social system had sprung into existence and—lamentable fact!—duty toward one's country had assumed an empire superior to ancient devotion toward kings.

To stem this tide and attach himself closely to King Charles X. For this he had espoused a party in marrying a relative of the royal princess, thus enhancing the ties that bound him to the throne and throwing to the winds his Perdita, whose charms had once held him in folly's chains. Did he regret the step? Has ravening aspiration any compunction, any contrite visitings of nature?

As the coach sped over the road the lady by his side smiled disagreeably from time to time, and my lord, when he became aware of it, winced beneath her glance. Had she fathomed his secret? Else why that eminently superior air, that manner which said as plainly as spoken words: "Now I have learned what to do if he should play the tyrant. Now I see a way to liberty, equality, fraternity!" And beneath the baneful gleam of that look of enlightenment my lord cursed under his breath roundly. The only imperturbable person of the party was Francois, the marquis' valet, whose impassive countenance was that of a stoic, apathetic to the follies of his betters; a philosopher of the wardrobe, to whom a wig awry or a loosened buckle seemed of more moment than a derangement of the marriage tie or the disorder of conjugal affection.

Not long thereafter the player left for America, where she procured an engagement in New York city, and, so far as London was concerned, she might have found rest and retirement in the waters of Lethes.

CHAPTER I.

IT was a drizzly day in the Shadeno valley. A mist had settled down upon the old inn; lost to view was the landscape, with its varied foliage. Only the immediate foreground was visible to a teamster who came down the road, the trees with dripping branches and the inn from the eaves of which water fell to the ground with depressing monotony, the well with its pall for watering the horses and the log trough in whose limpid waters a number of speckled trout were swimming. The driver drew up his horses before the Travelers' Friend, as the place was named, and called out imperatively:

"Hello, there!"
No one appearing, he leaned over and impatiently rapped on the door with the heavy oak butt end of his whip. Still there was no response. Again he knocked, this time louder than before, and was preparing for an even more vigorous assault upon the unresponsive entrance when the door swung back and the landlord, a tall, gaunt individual, confronted the driver.

"Well, I heard ye," he said testily. "Are ye coming in or shall I bring it out?"

"Bring it out," was the gruff response of the disgruntled teamster. Shortly afterward mine host reappeared with a tankard of generous dimensions. The teamster raised it slowly drained it to the bottom, dropped a coin into the landlord's hand, cracked his whip in a lively manner and moved on. The steam from his horses mingled with the mist, and he was soon swallowed up, although the cheerful snap of his whip could yet be heard. Then that became inaudible, and the boniface, who had stood for a brief space in the doorway, empty tankard in hand, re-entered the house, satisfied that no more transient patronage would be forthcoming at present.

Going through an outer room, called by courtesy a parlor, the landlord passed into an apartment which served as dining room, sitting room and bar. Here the glow of a wood fire from the well swept hearth and the aspect of the varied assortment of bottles, glasses and tankards gave more proof of the fitness of the appellation on the creaking sign of the roadhouse than appeared from a superficial survey of its exterior and far from neat stable yard or from that chilly, forbidding room so common, especially in American residences in those days, the parlor. The ceiling of this dining room was blacked somewhat, and the huge beams overhead gave an idea of the substantial character of the construction of the place. That fuel was plentiful appeared in evidence in the open fireplace, where were burning two great logs, while piled up against the wall were many other good sized sections of hickory.

Seated at a respectful distance from this cheerful conflagration was a young man of perhaps five and twenty, whose travel stained attire indicated he had but recently been on the road. Upon a chair near by were a riding whip and hat, the latter spotted with mud and testifying to the rough character of the road over which he had come. He held a short pipe to his lips and blew clouds of smoke toward the fire, while upon a table, within arm's length, rested a glass of some hot mixture. But in spite of his comfortable surroundings the expression of his face was not that of a person in harmony with the Johnsonian conclusion, "A chair in an inn is a throne of felicity." His countenance, well bronzed as a weather tried trooper's, was harsh, gloomy, almost morose; not an unhandsome face, but

set in such a severe cast the observer involuntarily wondered what experience had indited that scroll. Tall, large of limb, muscular, as was apparent even in a restful pose, he looked an athlete of the most approved type, active and powerful.

Mine host, having found his guest taciturn, had himself become genial, and now remarked as he entered:

"I hear things are kind of unsettled in France. I see in a Syracuse paper that Louis Philippe is no longer king; that he and his queen have fled to England. Perhaps now," inwardly congratulating himself on his shrewdness, "you left Paris for political reasons?"

The stranger deliberately emptied his pipe and thrust it into his pocket, while the landlord impatiently awaited the response to his pointed query. When it came, however, it was not calculated to allay the curiosity of his questioner. "Is it your practice," said the young man coldly in slow but excellent English, "to bark continuously at the heels of your guests?"

"Oh, no offense meant! No offense! Hope none'll be taken," stammered the landlord.

He recovered himself and his dignity by drawing forth a huge wine colored silk handkerchief set with white polka-dots and ostentatiously and vigorously using it. This ear-splitting operation having once more set him up in his own esteem, he resumed his attentions to the stranger.

"I didn't know," he added, with an outburst of honesty, "but what you might be some nobleman in disguise." "A nobleman?" said the other, with ill concealed contempt. "My name is Saint-Prosper, plain Ernest Saint-Prosper. I was a soldier. Now I'm an adventurer. There you have it all in a nutshell."

The innkeeper surveyed his guest's figure with undisguised admiration. "Well, you look like a soldier," he remarked. "You are like one of those soldiers who came over from France to help us in the Revolution."

This tribute being silently accepted, the landlord grew voluble as his guest continued reserved.

"We have our own troubles with lords, too, right here in New York state," he said confidentially. "We have our land barons, descendants of the patrons and holders of thousands of acres, and we have our bolters, too, who are making a big stand against feudalism."

Thereupon he proceeded to present the subject in all its details to the soldier—how the tenants were protesting against the enforcement of what they now deemed unjust claims and were demanding the abolition of permanent leaseholds; how they openly resisted the collection of rents and had inaugurated an aggressive attitude against tyrannical landlordism. His lengthy and rambling dissertation was finally broken in upon by a rumbling on the road, as of carriage wheels drawing near, and the sound of voices. The noise sent the boniface to the window, and, looking out, he discovered a lumbering coach, drawn by two heavy horses, which came dashing up with a great semblance of animation for a vehicle of its weight, followed by a wagon, loaded with diversified and gaudy paraphernalia.

"Some troopers, I guess," commented the landlord in a tone which indicated the coming of these guests was not entirely welcome to him. "Yes," he added discontentedly, "they're stage folk sure enough."

The wagon, which contained several persons, was driven into the stable yard, where it was unloaded of "drops" and "wings," representing a street, a forest, a prison and so on, while the stagecoach, with a rattle and a jerk and a flourish of the driver's whip, stopped at the front door. Springing to the ground, the driver opened the door of the vehicle and at the same time two other men, with their heads muffled against the wind and rain, leisurely descended from the top. The landlord now stood at the entrance of the inn, a sour expression on his face. Certainly if the travelers had expected in him the traditional glowing countenance with the apostolic injunction to "use hospitality without grudging" writ upon it they were doomed to disappointment.

A rustle of skirts and there emerged from the interior of the coach, first, a little, dried up old lady whose feet were inclosed in prunella boots, with Indian embroidered moccasins for outside protection; second, a young woman who hastily made her way into the hostelry, displaying a trim pair of ankles; third, a lady resembling the second and who the landlord afterward learned was her sister; fourth, a graceful girl above medium height, wearing one of those provoking quilted silk hoods of the day, with cherry colored lining, known as "kiss me if you dare" hoods.

Then followed a dark, melancholy individual, the utility man, whose waistcoat of figured worsted was much frayed and whose toothpick collar was the worse for the journey. He preceded a more natty person in a bottle green, "shad belly" coat, who strove to carry himself as though he were fashionably dressed instead of wearing clothes which no longer could conceal their shabbiness. The driver, called in theatrical parlance "the old man," was a portly personage in a blue coat with velvet collar and gilt buttons, a few of which were missing, while the ruffles of his shirt were in sad plight, for instead of protruding elegantly a good three or even four inches, their glory had gone and they lay ignominiously flattened upon the bosom of the wearer. A white choker rivaled in hue the toothpick collar of the melancholy individual.

The tavern's stable boy immediately began to remove the trunks into the main hallway. This overgrown, husky lad evidently did not share his employer's disapproval of the guests, for he gazed in open eyed wonder at the sis-

ters, and then, with increasing awe, his glance strayed to the young girl. To his juvenile imagination an actress appeared in the glamour of a veritable goddess. But she had obviously that tender consideration for others which belongs to humanity, for she turned to the old man with an affectionate smile, removing from his shoulders the wet Petersham overcoat and, placing it on a chair, regarded him with a look of filial anxiety. Yet their appearance belied the assumption of such relationship. He was hearty, florid and sturdy, of English type, while she seemed a daughter of the south, a figure more fitting for groves of orange and cypress than for this rugged northern wilderness.

The emotion of the stable boy as he gazed at her and the forbidding mood of the landlord were broken in upon by the tiny old lady, who in a large voice remarked:

"A haven at last! Are you the landlord?"

"Yes, ma'am," testily replied that person.

"I am pleased to meet you, sir," exclaimed the melancholy individual as he extended a hand so cold and clammy that shivers ran up and down the back of the host when he took it gingerly. "We are having fine tragedy weather, sir!"

"A fire at once, landlord!" commanded the would be beau.

"Refreshments will be in order!" exclaimed she of the trim ankles.

"And show me the best room in the house," remarked her sister.

Mine host, bewildered by this shower of requests, stared from one to the other in helpless confusion, but finally collected his wits sufficiently to usher the company into the taproom with:

"Here you'll find a fire, but as for the best room, this gentleman," indicating the reticent guest, "already occupies it."

The young man at the fire, thus forced prominently into notice, arose slowly.

"You are mistaken, landlord," he said curtly, hardly glancing at the players. "I no longer occupy it since these ladies have come."

"Your complaisance does credit to your good nature, sir," exclaimed the old man. "But we cannot take advantage of it."

"It is too good of you," remarked the elder sister, with a glance replete with more gratitude than the occasion demanded. "Really, though, we could not think of it."

"Thank you; thank you," joined in the wiry old lady, bobbing up and down like a miniature figure moved by the unseen hand of the showman. "Allow me, sir," and she gravely tendered him a huge snuffbox of tortoise shell, which he declined, whereupon she continued:

"You do not use it? New fashions, new habits! Though whether for the better is not for me to say."

She helped herself to a liberal portion and passed the box to the portly old gentleman. Here the landlord in a surly tone told the stable boy to remove the gentleman's things and show the ladies to their rooms. Before going the girl in the provoking hood, now unfastened and freeing sundry rebellious brown curls where the moisture yet sparkled like dew, turned to the old man.

"You are coming up directly? Your stock wants changing, while your ruffles"—laughing—"are disgraceful!"

"Presently, my dear; presently!" he returned.

The members of the company mounted the broad stairway, save he of the disordered ruffles, who wiped his heavy boots on a door mat and made his way to the fire, where he stood in English fashion, with his coat tails under his arms, rubbing his hands and drying himself before the flames.

"A disagreeable time of year, sir," he observed to the soldier, who had returned to his seat before the table. "Twice on the road we nearly broke down, and once the wagon dumped our properties in the ditch. Mennwhile, to make matters worse, the ladies helped reproaches upon these gray hairs. This, sir, to the man who was considered one of the best whips in old Devonshire county."

The other did not answer immediately, but regarded the speaker with the look of one not readily disposed to make acquaintances. His conclusions were apparently satisfactory, however, for he presently vouchsafed the remark:

"You are the manager, I presume?"

"I enjoy that honor," returned the loquacious stranger. "But my duties are manifold. As driver of the chariot I endure the constant apprehension of wrecking my company by the way-side. As assistant carpenter, when we cannot find a stage it is my task to erect one. As billposter and license procurer, treasurer and stage manager my time is not so taken up, sir, as to preclude my going on and assuming a character."

"A life of variety," observed the young man politely, if indifferently.

"Yes; full of ups and downs, as the driver of the property wagon said when we entered this hilly district," replied the manager, with the contentment of a man who has found a snug haven after a hard ride in a comparatively unbroken country. "Affluence we may know, but poverty is apt to be our companion."

To this the other deemed no response necessary, and a silence fell between them, broken only by the simmering water in the iron kettle, the sputtering of the sap in the burning logs and the creaking without of the long balancing pole that suspended the moss covered bucket. The wind sighed in the chimney and the wailing flames sprang to meet it, while the heart of the fire glowed in a mass of coals between the andirons.

The old gentleman before the blaze began to outlive the kettle in steaming. From his coat tails a thin veil

of mist ascended, his face beaming through the vapor with benign felicity. Then he turned and toasted the other side, and the kettle reigned supreme until he thawed once more and the clouds ascended, surrounding him like Jupiter on the celestial mount. At that the kettle hummed more angrily, and the old gentleman's face beamed with satisfaction.

"A snug company, sir," he said finally, glowing upon the impassive face before him. "Like a tight ship, can weather a little bad weather. Perhaps you noticed our troupe? The old lady is Mrs. Adams. She is nearly seventy, but can dance a hornpipe or a reel with the best of them. The two sisters are Kate and Susan Duran, both coquettes of the first water. Our juvenile man is a young Irishman who thinks much of his dress and little of



With awkward fingers he released the dress.

the cultivation of mind and manners. Then," added the old man tenderly, "there is my Constance."

He paused abruptly. "Landlord, a pot of ale. My throat is hoarse from the mist. Fancy being for hours on a road not knowing where you are!"

An aroma from the kitchen which penetrated the room seemed especially grateful to the manager, who smiled with satisfaction as he conjured up visions of the forthcoming repast. By his Falstaffian girth he appeared a man not averse to good living nor one to deny himself plentiful libations of American home brewed ale.

"Next to actual dining," observed this past master in the art, "are the anticipations of the table. An excellent dinner is in progress, if my diagnosis of these penetrating fragrances be correct."

And it was soon demonstrated that the manager's discernment was not in error. There was not only abundance, but quality, and the landlord's daughter waited on the guests, thereby subjecting herself to the very open advances of the Celtic Adonis. The large table was laden with heavy crockery, old fashioned and quaint. An enormous rotary caster occupied the center of the table, while the forks and spoons were—an unusual circumstance—of silver.

When the company had seated themselves around the board the waitress brought in a sucking pig, done to a turn, well stuffed and with an apple in its mouth. The manager heaved a sigh.

"The lovely little monster!" said Kate admiringly.

"Monster!" cried Susan. "Say cherub!"

"So young and tender for such a fate!" exclaimed Hawkes, the melancholy individual, with knife and fork held in midair.

"But worthy of the bearer of the dish!" remarked Adonis so pointedly that the landlord's daughter, overwhelmed with confusion, nearly dropped the platter, miniature porker and all. Whereupon Kate cast an angry glance at the offender, whom "she could not abide," yet regarded in a certain proprietary way, and Adonis henceforth became less open in his advances.

Those other aromas which the manager had mentally classified took form and substance and were arranged in tempting variety around the appetizing and well browned sucking. There were boiled and baked hams speckled with cloves, plates of doughnuts and pound cake, beet root and apple sauce. Before each of the guests stood a foaming mug of home brewed ale that carried with it a palpable taste of the hops.

"There is nothing of the stage repeat about this," commented the manager.

To which Kate, having often partaken of the conventional banquet of the theater, waved her hand in a serio-comic manner toward the piece de resistance and observed:

"Suppose, now, by some necromancy our young and tender friend here on the platter should be changed to a cleverly fashioned block of wood, painted in imitation of a roasted porker, with a wooden apple in his mouth?"

The manager, posing the carving knife, replied:

"Your suggestion is startling. We will obviate the possibility of any such transformation."

And he cut the "ambrosian fat and lean" with a firm hand, eying the sucking steadily the while as if to preclude any exhibition of Hindoo mysticism, while the buxom lass, the daughter of the boniface, with round arms bared, bore sundry other dishes from place to place until the plates were heaped with an assortment of viands.

"Well, my dear, how are you getting on?" said the manager to the young actress. "Glad you are helped himself. How do you like everything you eat?"

Har...

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