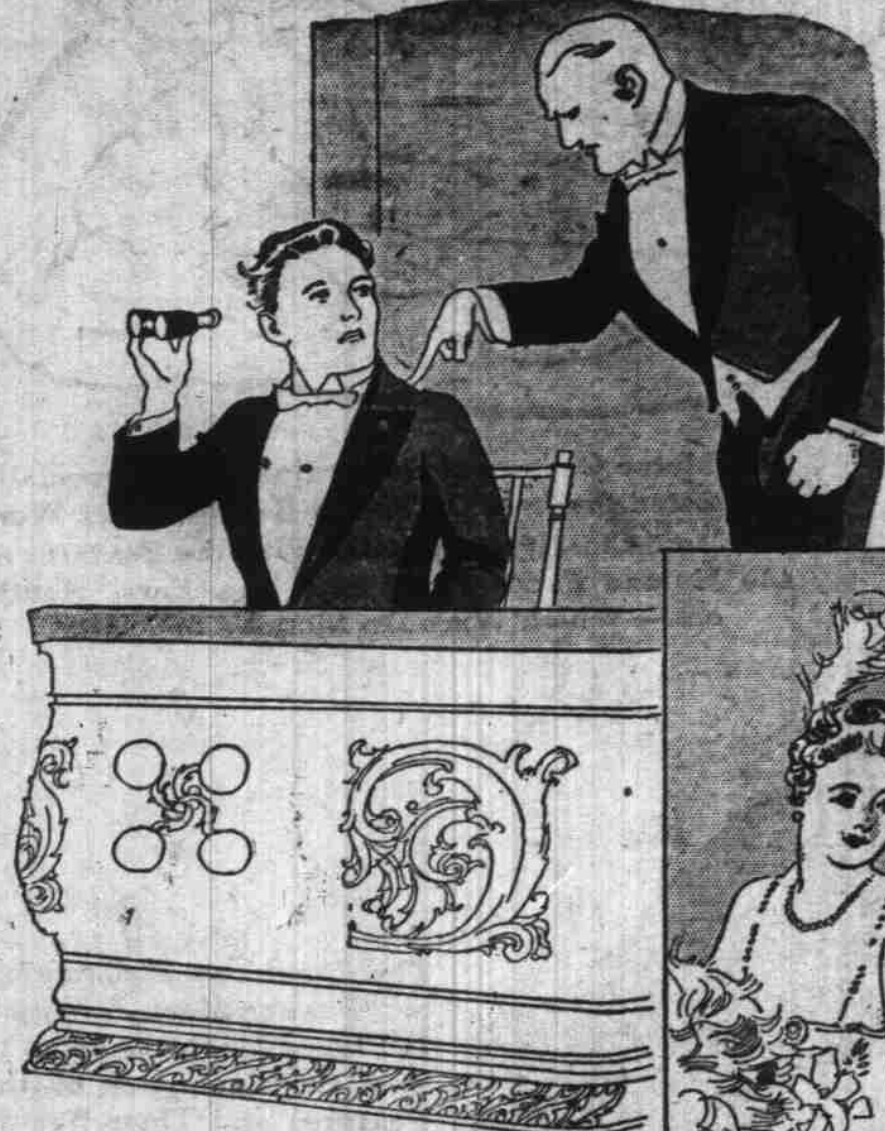


Mrs. Harriman's Stolen Opera Tickets—And What Happened

How Young, Mr. Mecchi Bought an Excellent Box Seat, Settled Himself Joyously to Hear Caruso—and Was Promptly Thrown Out of the Metropolitan Opera House



1—Mr. Mecchi Settled Himself Comfortably in the Box, Glanced About the Famous Horseshoe and Congratulated Himself on What a Fine Seat He Had. When an Attendant Touched Him on the Shoulder and Asked If He Would Kindly Move to the Back of the Box and Allow the Ladies of a Party Just Arriving to Have the Front Seats.

It was Saturday night at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. The famous Caruso, most golden-throated of singers, was to sing. His gifted countrywoman, Claudia Muzio, was the prima donna. The opera was "Manon Lescaut."

From their luxurious limousines the wealthiest men in the world and the loveliest and best-gowned women were alighting and making their way to their appointed places in the resplendent horseshoe. Not a man among them who could not sign his check for millions—not a woman whose jewels were not worth a king's ransom.

But not all those who thronged into the Metropolitan on this Saturday night were millionaire captains of industry or kings of finance. With the leaders of the smart set there came also men and women of the humbler classes of society—people who could afford only seats far removed from the resplendent horseshoe. They came, these workmen and people of modest means, not because it was fashionable to attend the opera, not because they had fine clothes or jewels to display, but to gratify their love for music.

One of these music lovers was a young Italian who had come to this country some time ago to learn American banking methods. Edgardo Mecchi was the young man's name. He had chosen this night for his visit to the opera for two reasons—because Caruso was to sing and because the opera was by Puccini, who had been a friend of Mecchi's father.

He had come early in order to be sure of obtaining a good seat. He was delighted when his inquiries in the lobby resulted in his obtaining one of the coveted bits of pasteboard.

Perhaps it was only good for standing room or a gallery seat—he was not at all familiar with American tickets—but even that was well worth having.

Imagine his delight when the usher led him to a seat in a parterre box! This evening would be one to boast of to his friends and to describe in glowing terms in his next letter to Italy. Could there be any better evidence of the democracy of this wonderful America than the fact that he was to hear Caruso sing from a seat in the famous horseshoe of wealth and fashion of which he had read so much?

Young Mr. Mecchi made a pleasing picture as he settled himself in one of the front chairs of parterre box No. 9. The red curtains of the opera house supplied an attractive background for his dark, handsome face, radiant with eager anticipation of the musical feast.

Perhaps he would have felt less at ease had he known that the box in which he sat was occupied on alternate Saturday nights by the rich and fashionable Mrs. Willard Straight. Perhaps he would have felt some embarrassment had he dreamed that tonight this box was the property of Mrs. Harriman—Mrs. E. H. Harriman, the widow of the great railroad magnate, founder of the Harriman National Bank, and mistress of a million dollar estate on the banks of the Hudson.

But, knowing none of these things, young Mr. Mecchi only settled himself more comfortably in his chair and gave himself up to quiet enjoyment of the brilliant scene that was unfolding all around him.

He glanced at the box on his right. Could that girlish, fair-haired young woman who was just entering be Mrs. Vincent Astor? He thought so, for the box was Number 7, and he remembered having read that this was the one occupied by Vincent Astor, the richest young man in the world.

Just then he felt some one tap him on the shoulder.

"Please let me see your seat check," said an usher.

From the inside of his coat, where Mr. Mecchi had carefully placed it when he sat down, he drew forth the precious bit of pink pasteboard. The usher scrutinized it carefully and withdrew.

By now the great auditorium was beginning to be pretty well filled. It was almost time for the curtain to rise.



2—Hardly Had Mr. Mecchi Courteously Given Way to the Ladies and Moved to a Chair in the Rear of the Box When the Attendant Returned and Asked Him to Step Outside.

Suddenly above the buzz of conversation and the melody of musical noises made by the orchestra as they tuned their instruments he heard the sound of a door opening behind him. Turning his head slightly he saw two magnificently gowned women entering the box in which he sat. The taller of them was very slender. Her gown was of glistening black satin. She wore a tiara of diamonds and about her neck was a wonderful dog collar of the same glittering gems.

This imposing creature took a step toward Mr. Mecchi as though to greet him; then, with a dubious look at the young man, she turned questioning toward the waiting usher. Again the usher touched Mr. Mecchi on the shoulder:

"Would you mind yielding the front seats to the ladies of the party?" he asked. "Certainly not." The young man rose, bowed low with all the grace for which his nation is famous, and retreated to the rear of the box.

The overture began. Young Mr. Mecchi closed his eyes and gave himself up to enjoyment of the concourse of sweet sounds.

Again he felt the now familiar tap of a hand on his shoulder.

"Will you please step outside a moment?" the usher requested. Edgardo Mecchi wonderingly obeyed. Outside the box he faced the usher who had been so attentive to him all the evening, and, also, another man in evening clothes.

"Let us see your seat check."

"Good heavens, gentlemen, why am I annoyed all the time in this way?"

For answer, according to Mr. Mecchi, one of the two men seized the lapels of his coat. The other opened the door of the box, took down his hat and overcoat and flung them at him.

By this time the young opera goer was choking with rage and amazement. But before he could make any protest or offer any successful resistance his tormentors were, so he says, dragging him to the nearest exit. There they were met by an Italian interpreter.

"What does this outrage mean?" demanded the young Italian.

"Rubato!" growled the interpreter.

"Stolen! I steal? How dare you insinuate such a thing!" young Mr. Mecchi stormed.

"No," the interpreter explained, "but the ticket you have was stolen by someone. You may not have a seat in that box. It has already been sold to someone else."

"Then give me another seat," urged Mr. Mecchi.

"That cannot be done."

"Why not?"

"Because the house is sold out. There is not another seat to be had, but we have no objections to your standing."

"But there is a good reason why I cannot do that," Mr. Mecchi replied. "As you see, I am not tall. I cannot see over the shoulders of the crowd."

But this argument failed to convince.

And then, so Mr. Mecchi declares, he was again seized by the lapels of his coat,



3—The Attendants Asked to See His Seat Check and Told Him He Had a Stolen Ticket. Mr. Mecchi Insisted That There Must Be Some Mistake and a Heated Discussion Arose.



Edgardo Mecchi.



Mrs. E. H. Harriman.

With what he says was quite unnecessary violence he was half pulled, half dragged down the long corridor and through the foyer. One of his assailants followed Mr. Mecchi to the last of the series of three doors through which the surprised opera goer was catapulted. There, with what the young man says felt distinctly like a vigorous kick, he was thrust out of the opera house with a force that sent him spinning dizzily about on the pavement. He was able to save himself from pitching headlong into the gutter only by grasping a convenient lamppost.

He stood there trying to collect his scattered senses. When he realized all that had happened so quickly and apparently



4—As the Argument Continued and Mr. Mecchi Protested in Loud and Vigorous Tones, He Declared He Was Roughly Seized by Two Attendants, Hustled Downstairs and Pitched into the Street.



Caruso in His Role in the Opera "Manon Lescaut."

A man in business clothes stood on one side, a policeman on the other. The man in business clothes said, "You wish to buy a ticket? I will sell you this one." "Let me see it," I said. "I read, 'Parterre, Box 9, S.13, March 27, 1920.' Also the price was printed out—\$3.85. I will take it," I said. I handed the man four one dollar bills and he gave me fifteen cents change."

On the strength of the story which young Mecchi told Lawyer Caridi drew and filed papers charging the Metropolitan Opera House management with "ejecting with unnecessary force, a patron who had in good faith purchased a ticket."

"I think I recall the incident," said House Manager Ziegler, of the Metropolitan, when asked to present his side of the story. "The box was Mrs. E. H. Harriman's for that evening. She and Mrs. Willard Straight use it alternate Saturdays."

"We had received a complaint from Mrs. Harriman. She wrote us that her tickets had disappeared and that she believed

they had been stolen. We were watching for some one to present them."

"Occasionally this happens. Tickets are lost or stolen. But in such cases the person presenting them quietly accepts the situation. This young man, however, talked loudly. Employees removed him."

There the matter rests until the court can have an opportunity of deciding its merits. It will be interesting to see exactly what sort of defense the opera house management will make to Mr. Mecchi's suit, for the Metropolitan has always boasted of the warm welcome it assures all music lovers, even though they be not men and women of great wealth and high social position. If Mr. Mecchi's surprising story is upheld by the courts the opera house management will be able to excuse itself only by throwing the blame for the unfortunate affair upon the stupidity and brutality of certain of its employees.

But according to young Mr. Mecchi, no amount of damages can ever quite atone for the humiliation he suffered when he was deprived of the coveted opportunity of hearing Caruso sing "Manon Lescaut."

Mecchi, still weeping, straightened his hat, which had been badly crushed in the encounter, and put on his coat. Again the tall, dark-eyed man spoke.

"This is my card," he said. "I have written on the back of it my lawyer's address. Tell him that I sent you, and tell him that I witnessed this outrage and will testify to what I saw."

Young Mr. Mecchi was late next morning at the Bank of Naples, where he is employed. He was conferring with Antonio Caridi in his law offices at No. 261 Broadway.

"Yes, I am hurt," he told Mr. Caridi. "My hand, as you see, has a long scratch on the back and my head aches fearfully from the shock. But the great pain is in my heart. I was affronted, humiliated. A thousand persons must have seen how I was treated. It is for the mortification to my spirit that I wish to sue."

"Do you know the names of the men who assaulted you?"

"No, how could I? I only know that I asked at the box office for a ticket and was told 'All sold out.' I turned around,

Mme. Claudia Muzio, Who Sang the Prima Donna Part in the Opera "Manon Lescaut."

so without reason, the emotional young man began to weep.

A tall, dark-eyed man with grizzled hair offered Mecchi a steady hand. From across the street a policeman came running to see what the trouble was.

"What is the matter?" asked the tall, dark-eyed man gently.

"I have been assaulted." And then, turning to the policeman, "Go in and arrest the men who did it."

But the policeman was apparently unable to believe that anybody connected with the great Metropolitan Opera House could have been guilty of assault on one of its patrons.

"Aw, g'wan," replied the policeman. "Beat it quick or I'll lock you up."