



A PRACTICAL TEST.

THE curtain rang down, and the play was over. A drama it had been called, but it was tragedy, and its strong climaxes, handled as they were by competent players, were received by the audience with uncontrolled shouts of applause.

My friend Lester and I, old theater goers as we were, thrilled with others at the strong human touch of the actors' art, and were silent as we slowly moved outward in the perfumed crush and chatter of the fashionable crowd. We went to a quiet restaurant we knew of, where the noisier pleasure seekers did not follow, and ordered our chops and ale.

Released from the spell of the counterfeited world in which we had lived for some two hours, the prosaic reality of actual life soon brought us back to our normal condition of mind.

"Doesn't it seem strange," said Lester, who carried all kinds of theories, a head, "that a play like that should impress any one as a true representation of life?"

"So it seemed to me," I answered, in some surprise, for Lester, I had noticed, had yielded as fully, if not more so, to the spell of the performance than I myself had. "The plot was far less improbable than the happenings set forth in our daily papers, the situations were brought about naturally, and the handling of the characters unusually well managed."

"Yes," said Lester, "I know that's true, but you haven't caught my idea. No wonder, though, for I haven't advanced it yet. I was just thinking of the language that playwrights and novelists put in the mouths of their characters. When do you ever hear real people use such stiffed high-down talk? Of course I know it's necessary for them to improve on our everyday slipshod lingo, or the whole thing would be a fiasco, but all the same it isn't true to nature. I refer particularly to strong emotional scenes. In such crises in real life the participants will always lose what little ideas of grammar, construction, and choice of language they generally have, and either stammer out a lot of idiotic commonplaces, simply swear, or turn dumb as brutes. Now, in the novel or the drama their characters always rise to the emergency. That's art, of course, but it isn't truth."

"I don't altogether agree with you," I said. "I think that even in actual life men and women, when they are under some great and sudden danger, sorrow, or other moving sentiment, rise above their petty conventionalities of expression and use language sometimes as passionate, lofty, and dramatic as that belonging to literature or the stage. Modern people have become slaves to the artificial and have frittered away our souls on sordid things. We express ourselves jerkily, shabbily, and poorly. We aim at personae, and brevity, and have a foolish dislike for allowing others to see what is in our hearts. Our whole talk is devoted to diplomacy, deception, and the concealment of our thoughts. But, at heart we are still men and women, and a genuine and powerful emotion will, I think, in five cases out of six, bring to the lips words fully as poetic, melodramatic and 'stagey' as those we heard on the boards to-night or read in books."

"You're wrong, old man," said Lester in his positive way. "We're hopelessly unpoetic in our parance. Get one of us into an end of fifth act denouement, and we either get tongue-tied or talk unintelligible rot. Give us half an hour for preparation, and we might just up something appropriate to say, but not off hand. We let down just as the fellow did who on coming home and finding his horse and family burned up, remarked: 'Well, I declare, this is a disaster! I've just knocked out grammar, and sudden shocks are fatal to syntax. People don't indulge in heroics nowadays. They simply can't do it. The twentieth century atmosphere is unfavorable to them. Remember in the play to-night the pathetic and wonderfully fetching monologue of the artist's wife when he is brought to her killed in the duel? What would a woman of the stage do? Cry, of course, and sob, and wail, and she would be something like, 'Oh, isn't it too awfully awful!'"

"Well," I said, as the chops came up brown and fragrant, "you can't expect people to talk blank verse and indulge in elevated apostrophe and ordinary declamations, but I dare say that the first time you happen to witness a scene with the proper amount of tragedy in it, you'll hear some talk very much the same kind you find between novel covers and across the footlights."

"I guess not," said Lester.

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Lester was a brilliant young man, and had a future before him. He was pursued with some eagerness the phantom of hope, and we confided in each other concerning the cut and fit of our coming laurel wreaths.

Lester was engaged to a girl with the eyes direct from the forehead of a child, and eyes forty-seven fathoms deep. I had looked into them and always felt like drawing back a step or two when I did. Her eyelashes looked to me like rushes on a river bank that were likely to cave in. She was devoted to Lester, and he, well, whenever we met I had girl served up in every possible style and eyes for dessert. I envied him his buoyant happiness, and encouraged him in his belief that the earth was made for her to inhabit.

There was no nonsense, and very little romance about Lester. He was intensely practical, and when he called on the girl he talked about his business and the architecture and design of the home they were to build. It seemed to me, for safety's sake, he should have talked more of stars and roses and affinity and those things. It occurred to my mind that those eyes were out after matter of that sort.

The wedding day was set and a rush of engagements kept me too busy to see much of Lester until three or four days before the time. I was to act as best man, and one afternoon I ran down to his rooms to see him and the arrangements. I overtook him on the street and we walked down together. He carried in his hand a bunch of letters he had just received by mail. Lester opened his door and turned on the light.

"Fumble those things out of the rocker," he said, "and excuse my glancing over this mail."

He quickly drew out of the bunch the square white envelope I knew he

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A little maid of tender years Had such a awful dream— "I just was about to scream, " "Oh, how terrible, Monsieur Administrator, let me be shaved! I, who never have done anything any harm, look like some ferocious assassin with my hair thus! Let me be shaved and decently dressed, so that I may receive some pity when I go to the scaffold! I was by occupation a ladies' hair-dresser, so you can see I was not a scoundrel!"

Marceau was so touched by this strange and pathetic appeal that he granted the favor.

In the stress of affairs he thought no more about the wretched barber, who he supposed had been executed. Shortly afterward the crown jewels disappeared, and though every effort was made, no trace of them could be found.

One day a mulatto woman, who came constantly to the tribune of the Jacobin Club, approached Marceau, who was a member, and said:

"What would you say if I enabled you to recover the missing crown jewels? I know a man who has the secret, but he declares that he will reveal it to no living human being but you. He is under an obligation to you, he says."

Marceau answered:

"Bring him in at once!"

An hour later a man dressed in the uniform of the National Guard entered the apartment, and said, in a faltering voice:

"Monsieur Administrator, I can show you where to find the crown jewels, but you must give me your word of honor not to denounce me."

"Denounce you for rendering such an important service?" replied Marceau.

"You will rather deserve a reward."

"I can take no reward except my life. My name cannot appear in this matter without risking my head."

"Speak! I promise you what you ask," said the magistrate.

"Do you not recognize me, then, Monsieur?" inquired the National Guardsman.

"No, I never saw you before."

"Oh, sir, let me have your word as a magistrate that you will not give me up!" cried the man again.

"Why all this mystery?" demanded the magistrate. "If you know anything, reveal it. If you were an accomplice, I will protect you."

"No, sir," was the reply, "I had nothing to do with it. I am Lamieville, the hair-dresser, whom you allowed to be shaved at the conciergerie. All I have been set free by the popular judges, the tribunal may arrest me again."

"Do not be afraid," said Marceau. "Tell what you know about this theft."

After kissing the magistrate's hand, the hair-dresser continued:

"Two fellow prisoners of mine were talking together one night about the theft, and although they used thieves' slang I was able to understand them. I pretended to be asleep, and I heard them say that all the crown jewels were concealed in two beams of a house in Dash street. Send there as quickly as possible, for they may not yet have been taken away. But I entreat you not to mention my name!"

The search was made, and the jewels were discovered, concealed exactly where the hair-dresser had said they were. The thieves were never traced.

They Were Once Newsboys.

Nearly forty years ago New York City's first Society took shape of a small street, was named Andy Burke. He had been selling newspapers, but the society sent him west to grow up with the country. He succeeded so well that he was made Governor of North Dakota some five or six years ago.

The "Silver Tongued Orator" of Connecticut was a newsboy at the Grand Central depot in New York when he attracted the attention of a gentleman named Waller and his wife, who took the lad home with them, gave him their name and educated him. He is now Thomas N. Waller, a well-known lawyer, who has been Governor of the "Nutmeg State."

Thurlow Weed, who for many decades was a great power in New York and national politics, began life as a newsboy, and so did the late Daniel Manning, who was a Cabinet minister during Mr. Cleveland's first Presidential term.

Ex-Senator David R. Hill was a train newsboy, and his route was between Albany and Buffalo. He worked hard in his business and before he was 14 had made and saved \$500 in profits.

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March 8, 1897. Samuel Pitcher, D.

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Illustration of a man in a top hat and tuxedo, likely the character Lester from the story 'A Practical Test'.