

OBSERVATIONS

BY SARAH B. HARRIS

"The Second in Command"

Dramatists are confined to comparatively few situations, and to the illustration of a few primary and essentially human characteristics. A play is not a novel that this man and that one can pick up from the shelves of the book store and take home with him. A play is something which a thousand or more people must agree on a certain date to see. Unless a thousand people consent to simultaneously spend sums ranging from fifty cents to two dollars, the purchaser of the play will lose perhaps twenty, perhaps fifty thousand dollars.

A few people are interested in dress reform, a few are interested in woman suffrage, many more are kept awake by the fluctuations of the markets, but it is doubtful if a thousand people in Lincoln are a dollar's worth interested in any one of these subjects.

Love, war and religion are the themes to which the drama is restricted. Even comedy parodies love or war. In the case of a book a customer can buy it when he likes and read it when time and opportunity suit. But in one-night stands a thousand people out of thirty thousand must see the play on a given date. It is therefore incumbent on the manager who accepts the play to be sure that it appeals to an emotion common to all patrons of the theatre. Otherwise it does not matter how well the play is written or how intensely interesting it may be to a few; the only object to attain which all plays except amateur performances by undergraduates are produced, is defeated. The butcher, the baker and the undertaker are in business to make a living. The actor and manager are in business to make a living. The public believes, apparently, that editors and managers conduct papers and theatres to do good and for art's sake.

But bread with butter on it and Rocky Ford melons taste just as good to editors and managers as to other people and cost them the same price. Art for art's sake is enough for a few wild-eyed devotees of anarchy or transcendental painting, but most people desire to make a living, and afterwards, incidentally, as Carnegie builds libraries, benefit humanity, or work for art entirely.

Moreover great fortunes are not made by selling splendid monuments to a purblind people, but great fortunes are made by selling them steel rails, wheat or corn. Pre-eminence is bestowed upon the man who satisfies the simple desires of a million people. This is why such a play as "The Second in Command" is a success. The hero of this play is a failure. He is a very fine fellow. Most men are failures, however brilliant their success may appear to the public and even to the man's intimates. Most men regard themselves, in the privacy of their own moments of reckoning, as very fine fellows but failures. If it were otherwise there would be more suicides. It is a desperate moment when we realize that we have fallen below the average in character and attainment; and the desperado at bay kills himself. But in those moments when we confess to ourselves what we are and what we planned to be with all the impetus of youth to accomplish its ideal, we admit that we are failures. The finest artist, the most devoted and acute statesman, the most honored and the most accomplished and honest of the sons of men admits to himself that his own life has been a disappointment and a partial failure. Major Christopher Bingham is a fine fellow, a noble, brave, modest, unmelodramatic hero. Yet he was baffled and buffeted by fate, just as three-fifths of the men and women who listened to him are.

He was a lover, loyal, unselfish, persistent; he was a soldier by profession, predilection and talent, yet the war office persistently ignored his services and passed him over for more fortunate men. Unlucky in love and in his profession, he yet shut his teeth and did his best just as so many heroic men off the stage do. Nevertheless it is a comfort to see our lives, our pallid, outstripped, beaten efforts made into an epic or put on the stage as the deeds of a modern knight where all can see that our deeds are worthy the iron cross.

The author of "The Second in Command" realized that it is the martyrdom of everyday life that men endure with a smile on their stoic lips that is worthy dramatic celebration and will surely be rewarded with a sympathetic appreciation. Mr. Robert Marshall, the author, knew that his play would be seen and listened to by an audience composed of failures. And he subtly made the failure a hero and the sole recipient of the full measure of our sympathy. It is better than the old way where the hero got everything: the queen of the tournament, decorations for gallantry on the field of battle, wealth beyond the dreams of avarice and election to a post of honor among his fellows. After such a play the audience went home questioning the hero's deserts, and every man subconsciously contrasted the stage hero's luck with his own winnings or losses from time and life. Our sympathy is with the baffled and the buffeted, especially when the object deserves success as well as we do but is baffled by an ungrateful, undiscerning world, just as we are.

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Sidewalk Space

The rights of the citizens to an unobstructed clean passage through the streets of Lincoln is the right oftenest overlooked and withdrawn. Some of the merchants in the wholesale district have requested the city council to extend their sidewalk privileges, which means to take them away entirely from the pedestrians in that quarter. It is questionable if the council have the right to give away what belongs so inalienably to the whole people as the streets and the sidewalks. Whether the council has the right or no, if the request made by the wholesale merchants is granted they will monopolize the space just the same as though it had been granted them by the owners.

The tendency of modern councils is to scrutinize such petitions carefully before granting them, and to resist the attempts of the few to encroach upon the plain and constitutionally guaranteed rights of the many. By the postponement of the decision in regard to the request for sidewalk space it is evident that the council is taking time to consider the matter. If the members of the council decide to give the wholesalers space that they have not bought and which belongs to the city or to thirty-five or forty thousand people, they can not urge that it was for want of consideration or meditation upon the subject. If the merchants in question need more room to handle their goods, there is doubtless adjacent real estate that may be bought for the purpose. There is no need of taking up a subscription for them. They are not objects of charity and they would be the first to resent the suggestion. They have sufficient capital to extend their business in whatever direction the trade demands; if it is more room for unloading, there is always the next lot or the expedient of an archway under the building. The citizens of Lincoln are gratified to know of the growing needs

of the wholesalers and regret to know that they who do not receive dividends on their business are requested to furnish the room for its accommodation.

The wholesale merchants are not the only ones who have designs upon the people's highway. The sidewalks are piled high first with this merchant's goods and then with his neighbor's. Small boys, in the universal way of a boy at work, slowly nail on covers and drag the boxes out of the way, in the meantime taking pleasure in making the barricade impassible. Women pedestrians are forced out into the street. If they elect to stay on the walk they are forced to edge their way between boxes with nails projecting in all directions. Many skirts are torn, but the good-natured victims know no relief and accidents of the sort are the only incidents that relieve the monotony for the small boys at their unwelcome tasks.

In refusing the privilege of the sidewalks to the wholesalers, the citizens would appreciate it if the council could see some way to protect the pedestrians from the insidious dry-goods box operated by the small boy plague.

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Cost of the Boer War

The war department of the English people is better, more highly organized, than ours. An English peer or member of the house can find out at any time how much money the department is spending and where and how. When a member of our congress asks the secretary of war how much the war has cost, the secretary replies that we do not keep our books that way. If the member will limit his desire for statistics to the more modest ambition to know what the department has spent in a year for the army of the United States and of the Philippines, it is possible to furnish him with such information.

According to the English government budget for 1902 and 1903, which was presented to the house of commons last month, there is a deficit in the war department of more than \$225,000,000. To pay it, the chancellor of the exchequer recommends an import tax on grain and flour. Not since 1869, when the famous corn laws were repealed, has a tax been laid upon bread.

This budget proposes a tax of six cents per hundred-weight on all imported grain, ten cents per hundred-weight on imported flour and meal, two cents on dividend warrants, four cent stamps on letters instead of two cents, as at present, two cents on the pound sterling increase in the income tax.

In addition Sir Michael Hicks-Beach proposes to suspend the sinking fund and to issue a new loan of \$160,000,000. The duty on sugar is not increased and no increase of tax is proposed on wine, beer, tobacco and tea.

The English national debt is now \$3,739,000,000—nearly four times as large as the national debt of the United States, less cash in the treasury. The cost of the war in Africa and in China for the three years so far has been \$825,170,000.

Of course all the Irish members will be opposed to the imposition of a tax on anything for the purpose of defraying the expenses of the war. They are opposed to the war and will be of no assistance in any measure proposed for the purpose of paying war bills. John Redmond said, after the budget was read, that his constituency was opposed to the war and that the Irish members gave notice that they would oppose all taxes imposed for the payment of war bills.

It has been frequently observed that the English parliament has troubles of its own, and that the party in power, whether liberal or conservative, has to do the work and take the blame for inevitable and unavoidable action just as the administration labors in the face of opposition and criticism in this country. It is indeed fortunate for King Edward that he belongs to no party and that both liberal and conservative claim him as

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