

Reminiscences : disastrous consequences of ma fist ball

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REMINISCENCES.

Disastrous consequences of my first ball.

By ST.

Undoubtedly one of the first exciting events in one's life is the one, when one begins to walk; most of us can hardly remember this happening, but perhaps in later years we have heard from our parents or relations, with what joy they have watched these first steps. It might, of course, be an insignificant event to the world at large, but in the intimate circle of the family it is nevertheless a great and momentous event.

Grand-parents, uncles and aunts as well as acquaintances are promptly informed, photographs of the "babe" are taken from all angles and exhibited on every conceivable opportunity.

Another event, taking obviously place at a more distant time, but which is equally exciting, and also connected with a pair of legs, — is dancing—. I do not remember those far gone days, when I first "toddled" along, but I have since been told, that on that conspicuous moment, I promptly fell down the staircase, hitting my tender and innocent little head on each particular step, which undoubtedly must have had, in later years, its consequences. In fact an old aunt of mine would have it, that I have never been the same since, but as I do not remember how I felt previously to this accident, I thought it was a particularly nasty thing to say and henceforth I took a violent dislike to her.

One thing, however, I can vividly remember, and that is the attendance at my first ball, as it was connected with some disastrous consequences.

At one time I attended, together with my brothers and sister a dancing-class in my home town; this class was presided over by an Italian dancing-master. I can still picture him in his brown velvet jacket, he was of small stature and his face was adorned with a ruddy coloured pointed beard. He used to carry a small stick of which he made rather free use, hitting the legs of his pupils, when they refused to move in accordance with the rhythm of the music. Maestro Spaghetti, as we called him, had a peculiar habit, he would disappear from time to time, and slanderous tongues would have it, that he went round the corner "to have one;" this assumption was perhaps not far off the mark. For some unknown reason he used to pounce upon me each time he returned from his mysterious errand, leading me furiously round the room, he would shout one-two-three, one-two-three, tickling my legs with his nasty little stick, but I was far more interested to find out what stimulant he took, than of the valse tune played, and I *did* find out, it gave me a profound shock; the great Maestro drank common or garden "Schnaps," if he would have "fortified" himself with a more dignified beverage I could have forgiven him, but vulgar "Schnaps," — it was too bad.

Everything was otherwise most prim and proper, the young Ladies sat most sedately along the wall facing the young Gentlemen sitting opposite them.

There were perfect ball-room manners *de rigueur*, each time one of the Ladies was asked for a dance, a neat bow was made, and afterwards she was politely conducted back "from whence she came," and another bow concluded the ceremony, none of the rough ball-room manners, which are unfortunately so prevalent nowadays. —

After a few weeks tuition it was announced that in terminating the class, a "Grand Ball" would be held at one of the large Halls of the town. This was to be a grand affair, to which former pupils, friends and parents were invited; those were exciting times and for weeks this ball was a daily subject of conversation.

We nearly ruined mother's carpet in order to practice some of the more difficult steps, dances such as jazz, rumba, tango and Jimmy shake were, of course, not known in those days. I remember, however, a dance called "Washington Post," which was rather an exciting one, it consisted of a "hop" about half the length of the room, and after executing a few neat steps you rushed back from your starting point, this was repeated until either your partner was in a state of utter exhaustion or the band stopped playing. It was this particular dance we used to practice with great gusto and poor mother's "salon" used to look like a scene after an earthquake had taken place; pictures suddenly became, for no reason whatsoever, dislocated, a large standard lamp took it into its head to lie down, chairs began to dance too, and the atmosphere was full of excitement.—

Then came the time when one had to choose a partner for this famous "Soirée Dansante," it was

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not an easy matter, as both my brothers and I wanted to invite the same lady, but after many animated discussions, interceded with an occasional fight, I succeeded in being allowed to "approach" the young Lady of my choice.

She was very pretty, she had two lovely blue eyes and a saucy little dimple in her cheeks, and when she accepted my invitation I felt in the "seventh heaven." Her father was a colonel in the army, but the command at home was in the hands of his wife.

So the day of the great event arrived, a cab (taxis were then an unknown quantity) took me and a box of chocolates to the home of my partner. After many handshakes with the various members of the family, the cab took the young lady, myself and the box of chocolates to the appointed place.

The ball proved a great success and the tragedy only occurred subsequently of which more anon. The Ladies looked simply lovely in their pretty dresses, the band played supremely and Maestro Spaghetti never disappeared once, and like a good boy drank tea and lemonade with elderly Ladies, who were present to "chaperonner." I do not think I ever danced better in my life; my feet seemed hardly to touch the floor, it was as if I had wings, and my partner seemed to float through the ether with me. Her frock looked like a mass of flowers, and round her slender shoulders she wore an embroidered silk shawl, it was this shawl which caused the tragedy and cruelly ended a romance which had started in such a promising way and whenever I see a lady wearing a shawl it makes me shudder.

One little happening on that memorable evening pleased me mightily, although it consisted in the fact

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that my fair partner, made, what is call in French a *faux pas* or in English "putting one's foot into it."

Amongst the numerous spectators was my Aunt, — the one who had intimated that my mental faculties were somehow impaired through the fall which I had sustained at a very tender age. — There she sat in all her glory, as if it were *her* show. Her critical eye scanned the happy faces of the revellers, but the happiness of all the young people, which was written on their faces, did not seem to find an echo in her spinster bosom.

Each time I passed her, I noticed a sarcastic smile passing over her *visage*, in fact it was so obvious that my partner asked me, who that lady with the "rhinoceros" face was.

I could have hugged her for that remark, but as it rather cast a slur on my family I had to inform her, that the lady with such "distinguished" features was an Aunt of mine; which brought forth some apologies, which, I need hardly mention, were accepted in good grace.

In fact, this little slip of the tongue, increased her attention to me, and I noticed consequently a little squeeze of the hand, which I took for a happy omen.—

As all good things come to an end, so this "Soirée Dansante" finished up amongst great enthusiasm. Many a parting glance, from a pair of sparkling eyes laid the foundation for future romance.

This time my cab, took us back minus the chocolate box, but with additional weight of happiness and sweet remembrances. It would have been an exquisite home journey, because there was such a host of little incidents to review, but it was marred by the fact that my fair partner suddenly realised that she had left her shawl behind. This discovery seemed greatly to upset her, and I was informed that this precious article adorned various past members of her family, in fact it was considered to be a sort of family heirloom, and the loss of it would be nothing short of a calamity, and might bring bad luck to future generations of the colonel's family.

Acting like a Gentleman, I ought to have instructed the cab driver to return post haste, in order to recover this shawl, which, as it seemed, was of great importance. But there was a snag; I realised that I had only about enough money on me, to pay the fare straight back, and as a return journey would have meant additional fare, I suggested that the lost article should be claimed next day by me. This proposal was

graciously accepted, and we arrived at our destination without any further troubles.

In fact I was quite pleased that I would have another opportunity to show my gallantry, and on paying the fare I warmly shook hands with the cab driver, who, quite unaccustomed to such enthusiastic acknowledgement for services rendered, gravely shook his head; was it a premonition of what was to come?—

As promised, I called the next day, and luckily, the lost article was handed over to me.

Needless to say, that I made use of this almost heaven sent opportunity to add a little *billet doux* with the parcel, which was duly forwarded to the fair recipient.

During the next day or two I was in a state of great excitement, because I was sure that my gallant efforts to redeem this historic shawl, and the accompanying letter would get some acknowledgement; — it did. —

On returning home two days after the event, I found a little parcel awaiting me, somehow or other it looked familiar to me, but after all parcels have a certain similarity. With trembling hands I opened it, and there a short note — not even signed — met my expectant eyes, it read “This does not belong to me!”.

I was at my wits end, what did it mean? I undid the packet and — lo and behold — it contained a pair of red bathing slips — not a costume, with which one is so familiar in this country, often adorning some bathing belles — no, simply an ordinary pair of bathing slips which boys used to wear in those days. —

My sister, who watched me, said afterwards, that my face reflected all the colours of the rain-bow, and no wonder; this was a terrible tragedy, how did it happen? The explanation was simple enough, the cupboard which temporarily harboured the shawl ready for dispatch, also contained a parcel of similar size in which the above-mentioned article was packed, ready for the next bathing season; an unlucky slip of the hand made me take the wrong parcel, thus nipping in the bud a romance which started in such a promising way.

Although a detailed report of this most unfortunate happening was at once sent, and an exchange of “goods” effected, no excuse was accepted, and I was accused of having played a very poor joke; and whenever I met a member of this distinguished family, I was treated with utter contempt. In fact, I felt so miserable that I seriously contemplated to leave this valley of sorrow, to a land where people do not wear shawls nor bathing slips, and even to this day I cannot look a ladies shawl straight in the face without getting the “shudders.”

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

Our next issue will be published on Friday, November, 14th, 1947.

We take the opportunity of thanking the following subscribers for their kind and helpful donations, over and above their subscription: E. Hofstetter, A. J. Wymann, E. Krapf, W. Fischer, W. Flory, F. Matthey, E. A. Mermod, A. Muller, J. J. Huber, W. G. Walter, L. W. Krucker, J. Zimmermann, R. J. Bickel, W. Wagner, A. A. Bodenehr, W. Eichenberger.

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.

Monthly Meeting.

The Monthly Meeting of the Society, held at Swiss House on Wednesday, October 8th, was attended by a large number of members and friends, with Mr. W. Meier, President, in the Chair.

Three new members were elected, *viz.* Miss Irma Abate and Messrs. W. Genggis and J. E. von Felten.

Striking a personal note, the Chairman was pleased to announce the following happy events; the birth of a son to Mr. and Mrs. K. E. Ammann and the birth of a daughter to Mr. and Mrs. F. Burri. He further informed the meeting of the recent engagement of Mr. Marfurt. Messrs. Ammann, Marfurt and Burri are all connected with the Education Committee, the first two being Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively, and the announcement of this triple event was cordially greeted by all present.

Through the resignation of Mr. K. E. Ammann, who is shortly leaving the U.K. to take up an appointment in Switzerland, the Chairmanship of the Education Committee and *ipso facto* the office of a Vice-President, became vacant.

On the recommendation of the Education Committee, supported by the Council, the Chairman proposed that Mr. O. Roethlisberger, who had hitherto been a member of the Education Committee, be elected Chairman and Vice-President. There being no other nominations, a poll became unnecessary and on being put to the vote, Mr. Roethlisberger's election was passed unanimously.

In recognition of his valuable services rendered to the Society, first as a member of the General Purposes Committee, and later as a member and Chairman of the Education Committee, Mr. Ammann was thereupon elected a Corresponding Member, the Chairman, on behalf of the meeting, expressing best wishes to Mr. Ammann for every success in his new sphere of activities.

Professor Dr. G. P. Gooch, C.H., then addressed the Meeting on “The Outlook in Europe.” A full account of this lecture will appear in the next issue of the “Swiss Observer.”

W.B.

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY

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