

Reminiscences

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REMINISCENSES.**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 occurrence.

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 place obviously at a much later 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 little head on each particular step, which undoubtedly must have had in latter years its consequences. As a matter of fact an old aunt of mine would have it, that I have never been the same since, but since 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 took part, together with my brothers and sister at dancing classes 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 whenever they refused to move in accordance with the rythm 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 insinuation 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 stimulant 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 ballroom 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.

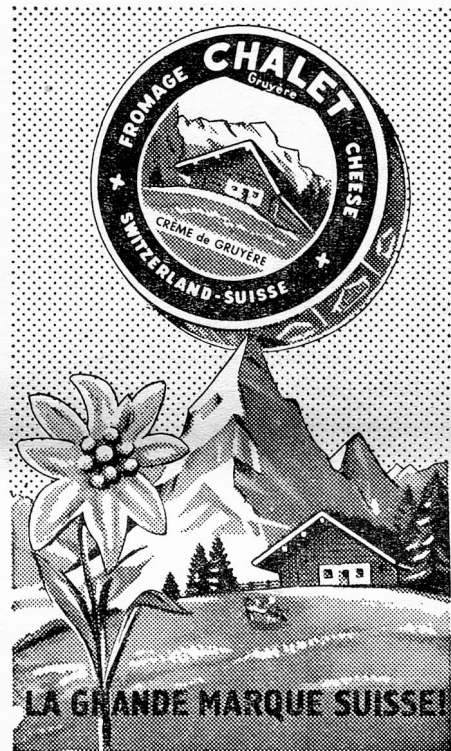
After a few weeks tuition it was announced that in terminating the class a "Grand Ball" would be held at one of the large halls of the town. This was to be a grand and important affair, to which former pupils, parents and friends were invited; those were exciting times and for weeks this ball was almost 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 rock 'n roll 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 one rushed back from the starting point, this

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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 earth-quake had taken place; pictures 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 pregnant with excitement.

Then came the time when one had to choose a partner for this famous "Soirée Dansante", it was not an easy matter, as both my brothers and I wanted to invited 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 a pretty young lady, 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.

Then the day of the great event arrived, a cab (taxi were then an unknown quantity) took me and a box of chocolates to the house 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 as "chaperons". I do not think I danced ever 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 small happening on that memorable evening pleased me mightily, although it consisted in the fact that my fair partner made, what is called in French a *faux pas*, or in English "putting one's foot into it".

Among the many spectators was my aunt — the one who had intimated that my mental faculties were somehow impaired through the fall which I had apparently sustained at a very tender age. There she sat in all her glory, as if it was *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 profuse apologies, which I need hardly say, were accepted in good grace. In fact this 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 amidst great enthusiasm. Many a parting glance from a pair of sparkling eyes laid the foundation for future romance.

This time the cab took us back, minus the box of chocolates, but with an additional weight of happiness and sweet remembrances.

It would have been an exquisite journey home, because there were such a host of little incidents to recall, 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 had adorned various members of her family, in fact it was

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considered to be a sort of heirloom, and the loss of it would be nothing short of a calamity.

Acting like a gentleman, I ought to have instructed the cab driver to return post haste in order to claim this shawl, which as it seemed was of great importance. But there was a snag, I realized 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 the next day by me. This proposal was 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 a warm 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 my dancing partner.

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

On returning home two days after despatching the shawl, I found a little parcel awaiting me, somehow or other it looked familiar to me, but after all parcels always have a certain similarity. With trembling hands I opened it, and there a short note, not even

signed, met my wondering eyes, it read "This does not belong to me"!

I was at my wits end, what did it mean? I unwrapped 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 belle, 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 rainbow, 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 up 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 had 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 bad 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 lady's shawl straight in the face without getting the "shudders".

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At the General Meeting to be held in Basle on the 28th of February, 1958 it will be proposed to make a contribution of Sfs. 2,000,000 (as last year) to the Pension Fund, to allocate Sfs. 3,000,000 (against Sfs. 2,500,000) to the reserve for new buildings and to place Sfs. 8,000,000 (against Sfs. 4,000,000) to Special Reserve Fund. It is further proposed to pay a dividend of 9% (as last year) and to carry forward Sfs. 1,936,611 (against Sfs. 4,992,577 last year).

Before closing the accounts for 1957 the Board transferred Sfs. 2,000,000 (as last year) from tax-paid internal reserves to a Special Reserve.
London, 5th February 1958.

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