

A COMIC OPERA PLOT.

Donn Piatt's Reminiscence of Persia's Shah at London.

A Private Ballet and What Came of It—The Shah's Medicine for Insubordinate Musicians—Pleasures of the Son of the Sun.

It is the policy of the English government to fetch barbarian princes to London as we care Indians over a continent to Washington, that they may be away by the power of the people that has conquered them.

I doubt whether this policy is of much avail to the governments practicing it. As we descend the scale of intelligence, we find a corresponding ascent in cunning.

Said a chief once, at Washington, "Great father, big chief, much fighters, big guns, way out—no good them—whip 'em all time."

When General Mannypenny, of Ohio, was Indian commissioner he had the strange belief that Indians were human beings, and sought to civilize them through cooking stoves and kind treatment.

I remember Mannypenny brought on a delegation of Indians from the then far West. They were guileless children of the plains.

The first tunnel they were plunged in on the Baltimore and Ohio railroad, they drew their knives and uttered the most fearful yells.

On emerging to daylight the women, on the train were observed clasping with both hands their back hair with an expression of mingled fear and resolution comical to contemplate.

At Washington they were quartered in a hotel. The day after the proprietor of that ornate indigestion remonstrated. He told the commissioner that those Indians were beasts, and never left their rooms save for the purpose of running down the chambermaids, and robbing them of their false hair, and otherwise abusing those foolish virgins.

The commissioner repaired to the hotel, and gave the heads of the nation, through their interpreter, a long, solemn discourse on the usages of civilized society at that hotel.

The next day the wards got drunk and threw the servants, male and female, from the front windows. Fortunately, the awnings below saved the poor creatures from severe harm.

The Indians were at first delighted with their quarters, but soon learned, that a Washington boarding house was a portion of that punishment awarded the wicked hereafter.

The interpreter shook his head at them. He positively declined to say it. At last a chief stepped forward, pointing majestically to the president, and then with scorn at the commission said:

"Big father, little father, be dam." Then, with a deep grunt of satisfaction, they all moved off.

I happened at London when that ignorant, brutal, vulgar barbarian, the Shah of Persia, was being ovated by designing English politicians and their envious followers.

I did not take much interest in the Persian fellow. The polygamous potentate of Persia was to all save England, that had designs on him and his provinces, a very limited production of far less interest to me than Private Daisell, Eli Perkins, or Ward and Grant.

I however heard some stories about the club that were somewhat amusing. I learned that all the precious jewels with which his royal person was covered were false stones bought of the house of bondage, run by Moses & Sons, pawnbrokers.

The most entertaining, however, was a story of how His Royal Scorbatic Majesty fell in love with the ballet of the opera.

He loved all the ballet, for the heart of your Persian monarch is a sort of an omnibus, and always has room for a few more. After each performance this son of the sun and brother of the moon would pace to and fro rubbing his royal hands, and between Persian cries of delight call all his divinites to witness, that he had never seen such ravishing forms—the art of manufacturing legs for public exhibition had not yet reached Persia—not such rapturous jammer. He sent his prime minister, and barber, with a proposition to the ballet. It was to add the entire corps to his seraglio.

The gay young troupe treated the proposition with contempt. Why, each one had a little seraglio of her own, and, besides, they all were under contract with their manager, and there would be the mischief to pay if that were broken; for each member believed, in her terrestrial heart, that she was the bright particular star of the troupe, and anon jealous conspiracies would give way and she beam out as a star.

One little girl, however, and the brightest of all, lent a willing ear to the proposal. Her real name was Susette. However, she wrote it Susette Violanti. This little blonde drove a contract with the tonsorial minister to the effect that his master was to deposit \$3,000 in the Bank of London to her account, and added several stipulations such as suggest themselves to the common ballet mind.

The preliminaries being complete, the ballet dancer was summoned to appear before the Persian monarch, at the palatial residence assigned him by the British government, when it appeared that this honored guest from the land of poetry and dreams wished

to be entertained in his hours of retirement by a dance.

"But, your Majesty," cried Susette, "I cannot dance without music."

"Music!" responded the royal animated show-case of paste diamonds. "Music! of course not, go at once and get some music."

The officious official rushed to the street and captured an astonished hand-organ and monkey.

"That is not music, your Majesty," laughed Susette, merrily, "that is a dreadful noise."

"Noise!" asked the royal brother of the moon and light of all Persia, "what's the difference?"

Susette explained. She wanted certain instruments, an orchestra, in a word, and immediately some of his majesty's suite were detailed as such, and while the instruments were being procured the possessor of fifty paste Koh-i-noors smoked and mused upon the strange results of western civilization as developed in legs and motion.

When the instruments and improvised musicians were brought together, and the order given to play, the noise was more horrible than the hand organ. Little Susette stuck her delicate fingers in her delicate ears and screamed. The begotten Shah was more puzzled than before, and when told that his subjects could not produce the required music, he made a few remarks of a personal nature in his native tongue that caused even the swarthy faces of his faithful followers to pale.

He adjourned the performance for a brief flight, gotten up for his entertainment between a noted peer of the realm and a noted prize-fighter. The alarmed vizier consulted Susette.

"What can I do?" he cried in despair. "His Majesty threatens to bow-sting us all."

"Send for our director," said Susette, "he'll hammer the noise out of those fellows if you pay him enough."

The director was sent for. All musical directors have dirty nails, take snuff, and are ill tempered. Between pinches this potentate of the opera studied the situation.

"I can furnish His Majesty with a very good orchestra of my own," he said.

"But will they go to Persia?" "They will go to the devil if you pay them."

"And be his subjects, liable to the bow string?" "Certainly, with a liberal allowance of beer and tobacco."

"But His Majesty has given his order. He does not permit his orders to be questioned or changed."

The director took huge pinches of snuff. He could not solve the difficulty.

"Musicians," he said, "are not made; they are born. Adam, a man, was created in one day; a first violin is the result of many generations. His Majesty's orders are impossible."

"Perhaps so," replied the poor vizier; "that is our system of government. The shah is born to a right to try the impossible, we are born to suffer from the failure. You can have your own price for the effort, and my head if you fail."

A compromise was agreed on. The director was to furnish musicians of his own while instructing the barbarians.

"Can I wallop them?" he asked. "Undoubtedly."

"That is something. It won't help on the music, but it will relieve my feelings."

The music was procured and the sovereign of Persia made happy in a little ballet of his own. The orchestra to be gotten up out of Persians, as the director prophesied, did not prosper. By the time the shah reached Paris, the first and second violins had disappeared. They were subsequently arrested by the police of London, striving to make a precarious living as musicians, and sentenced to hard labor as nuisances.

The trombone committed suicide, while the bass viol and clarinet were in a hopeless state of idiosyncrasy. The drum alone remained of a sound mind and sound execution. But one can't have an orchestra out of a drum, and so the attempt was abandoned. The regular orchestra performers, however, were happy, content and quite willing to go to Persia or to the devil, as the director had said, upon reasonable pay and unlimited tobacco and beer.

Susette grew in favor, and, without doubt, Persia would have had an English queen but for the unhappy fact that at Paris the shah succeeded in adding two French performers to his troupe.

In the first performance thereafter Susette saw, or thought she saw, her eastern master bestowing too much favor on the newcomers, who really threw their shapely legs—I beg pardon, limbs—much higher than she, and stung by jealous wrath the plucky little Susette planted a succession of right and left blows, and sundry kicks on the persons of her rivals that were more vigorous than graceful. The French rallied and a general engagement came off.

For awhile the shah labored under the delusion that this was part of the ballet, and enjoyed it hugely, but when he saw that two-thirds of his troupe had black eyes and bloody noses, while Susette's lovely countenance resembled a colored railway map of England, the truth dawned on his eastern intellect that he was being treated to a revolt of the harem, and calling in his counsils he immediately ordered the bow-string for the entire troupe. It called out the full force of European diplomacy to save the politest capital of the civilized world the scandal of such an execution. It put an end, however, to the shah's private ballet.

What a shame that these writers of comic opera should cudgel their dull brains for plots when such a charming story as this exists in fact.

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