

DIVING for Money

by *Walter Anthony*



A MAN sitting near me at the Orpheum the other afternoon, watching Annette Kellermann's black gilded body flash like a fish's in the water, said gleefully: "Think of all the fun she's having!" The act had progressed so smoothly, with such an absence of pose and pretentiousness, that the speaker's companion had missed the marvel of it. He remained unaware of the hazard that lurked in each leap into the small tank, and had missed the graceful skill that was being exhibited in the arcs and smirks and vainglorious bows wherewith vandyke eyebrows are wont to spoil their acts. He missed the merit in the turn because Miss Kellermann seemed oblivious to it herself. Perhaps he wanted to see her break her neck or maybe he expected the pretty swimmer to enforce with immodest coquetry the anatomical disclosure of the act. The answer to his criticism, in any event, was the remark of my neighbor, who said: "Think of all the fun she's having!" This lineal descendant of the water god, this siren daughter of Poseidon, seems to enjoy her dip with all the enthusiasm of a youngster diving to the pebbles of a river bed for coins. It seems merely incidental that the water is trucked and set in the Orpheum stage and that several thousands come daily to watch her splash. She puts on head to her spectators, but being by a mermaid diving from moon bathed rocks, for all the attention she bestows on the multitude.

And each time she dives she comes up with a little sack of gold and silver. I suppose that adds to the fun of the thing. It used to when you and I were kids, diving in the still waters of a pool for a dime that some spendthrift philanthropist with a taste for inexpensive entertainment had tossed in as bait. But the rewards of pearl divers are scarcely to be compared to Miss Kellermann's profitable plunges, and diving for dimes is a pastime she has left far behind her with her penny bank of tin and her dolls and pinafores. We figured it up, Miss Kellermann and I, during an interview at the St. Francis. Every time she splashes from springboard to the friendly waters she finds a little sack with \$7.65 in it. Not that it is a tangible, coarse sack of reality filled with vulgar gold dripping wet. It is more like a promise or an "I O U" or a draft. This is the way it figures up:

"I dive 14 times every performance," said Miss Kellermann. That makes 28 plunges every day. Seven days of diving makes 196 leaps from the springboard. When she has accomplished that many the Orpheum, like a fairy godmother, hands her \$1,500. By a process of computation, the intricacies of which were still possible for us conjointly to unravel, we found that \$7.65 was the tangible material reward for each sticking.

"I never looked at it that way before," said the pretty swimmer, who sat a garbed match of Venus, beside a statuette of her only rival. "But I remember well enough the first time that the pay envelope was put in my hands. I did not think till then that there was so much money in all the world. It seemed a miracle, and I read it out on my bed and counted it and played with it and wondered if I wasn't dreaming."

YOU would find Miss Kellermann's frankness almost disconcerting. It is not regarded in polite circles, I'm advised, as the proper thing to ask a comparative stranger how old she is, how much she earns, whether she was ever troubled with bowed legs or is

susceptible to cramps. But with Miss Kellermann you need go to no trouble of apology for impertinence nor lay diplomatic traps to catch intimate statistics. You need only ask and she'll tell; and the asking and the telling are more like the conversations of the immature. She is quite guileless and her sense of modesty, which is great, is neither prudish nor forced. She is without self-consciousness. She is of that type of woman that does not command respect—she wins it.

Not that she is unsophisticated, either. She is wise with the intuitive wisdom of her sex. Once she said to me in discussing her act: "It would spoil the turn to pose and strut. I do not play to the men; I play to the women. A woman sees through another woman's tricks right away. If I were vain enough to try to engage the men's attention to my act by making the diving a consideration second in importance to the physical exhibition, I'd lose the respect of the women and I wouldn't dare do that. Often I am criticized for not coming out and taking 'curtain calls' after the act, or for not standing around bowing after my dives. That would be a silly thing to do, wouldn't it? What business would I have coming before the curtain with my bathing suit dripping wet and my hair matted by the water to pose and bow and wave my hands as though I were a trapeze performer?"

So Miss Kellermann romps through the act, stands perched for an instant on the springboard's edge; slips in graceful curves into the water, and disappears like a frightened seal. It is all over before you quite realize that you have seen a wonderful exhibition of fancy diving presented by a beautiful woman of faultless form, or that you have been witness to the strokes of one of the world's greatest swimmers.

MISS KELLERMANN was gowned in a lavender dress, and she wore on her head a miraculous bonnet. She said she made it herself. But if it were not for her assurance I should have preferred to believe it the result of a spell woven by some milliner whose province was poetry. My description must needs end here. I should like to tell you more about the dress and the bonnet, but my sartorial vocabulary and powers of description falter. Moreover, I am afraid that even the artist will fail to convey an inclusive suggestion of the way in which the dress and bonnet "became" the wearer. There are limitations in all arts, and drawing is no exception. You are entitled, however, to the information that by some mysterious weavings of fate just the right colors and fabrics had assumed just the right relations and shape for the woman who donned them.

One question brought out the secret of Miss Kellermann's artistic tendencies. Her mother was formerly the head of a conservatory of music in Sydney, Australia. Her name, Alice Charbonnet, is not unknown to pianistic fame. Even sensitive Paris recognized her ge-

nus and presented her with high honors for her achievements in music. Her mother's father was chief justice of New Caledonia, and her mother's mother was born in England of French parentage. Indeed, the genealogy of Miss Kellermann is interesting and baffling. Her ancestry had a habit of being born in the wrong country. Her mother's people were journeying through America, and here in Cincinnati her mother saw the light. Her father's mother was born in Spain of English parentage. Perhaps such vague terrestrial ties may account in some psychological way for Miss Kellermann's preference for the water.

Her mother's musical attainments exerted a double influence. They surrounded her with artistic environment and then drove her out of it.

"Think," she said, "of living under the same roof with eight active pianos, a half dozen tortured fiddles and a dozen or more ambitious vocalists. Life in our conservatory at Sydney was one long orgy of music. The pianos were going all the time; fiddles were being scraped to the bone in adjoining rooms, and the place was full of unrecognized Melbas. 'One thing I will not be,' said I to myself, 'a musician.'"

"It never occurred to me that I'd ever become a swimmer. My legs were terribly bowed, for one thing; and even iron braces failed to straighten them out. I took to swimming and to toe dancing as a means of strengthening my legs. My father encouraged me in this. He was a fine swimmer himself, and fond of all kinds of athletics. It is from him I inherit my disposition to muscular sports. These exercises and the braces straightened me up, and when I was 15 years old I received my first offer as a professional swimmer. There was in Melbourne a great aquarium and I was hired for \$25 a week to frolic with the fishes in the 60 foot glass tank which was the main feature of the institution. Before that time, I had swum in a five mile race in the Yarra river and covered the distance in 3 hours and 45 minutes. That attracted some attention to me, but when I proposed to my family accepting the professional engagement with the fishes and eels in the big Melbourne aquarium there was a terrible to-do. It was as though I were about to become a clown in a circus or do something else shocking. However, I did, and my first engagement was a success. Even the eels got to know me after a few days, and the fishes would swim unconcernedly, eyeing me as though I were one of them, only bigger. They'd eat crumbs out of

my hand. I think I could have trained them to do stunts in a little while."

After winning all the Australian championships there was nothing for the pretty swimmer to do but try other waters. So she went to England. Australia is proud of its people who do things and Miss Kellermann had justified her choice of a profession. "They are a grand people," said the little Australian, about her home folk. "They were proud of me when I went away after bigger records."

"The English sportsmen are from Missouri," said she. "When I attempted to swim the English channel there was a tugboat loaded with 200 men to watch me try. I was 10½ hours in the

water and missed making the trip by only a fraction of a mile."

Then the tide turned, and neither man nor woman can breast the tide rip of the English channel. So the plucky swimmer was pulled from the waves and taken by a little towboat to the tug against her will.

"After you've been in the water," she said simply, "for an hour and a half you get your second wind; then the rest is just the same as walking. Only you get so terribly hungry. Why, the champion Burgess ate the meat of four chickens in the Seine annual race. That was about one chicken an hour. You are not permitted to put your hand even on the sides of the boat that ac-

companies you on long endurance swims. They pass food to you from the boat in bottles or in small pieces, which you devour while you tread water. You devour ravenously everything from hot chocolate to crackers or chicken."

TO think of struggling across the billows of the channel; or breasting the waters of the Seine or swimming that endurance testing route from the Charlestown bridge to Boston light, and then to glance at the trim, feminine form sitting conventionally in the St. Francis apartments was to get a shock. It seemed impossible that anybody other than a giant or a fish

could do it. Miss Kellermann has an interesting theory to account for her own prowess and for her ability to perform such marvels.

"Swimming," she said, "once you have secured that mysterious breathing power called the 'second wind,' is the only sport in which a woman can compete with a man. In short sprints, which I do not try for, a man will gather together his brute (she said "brute") strength and will beat a woman. He will do it because he can gather more vitality and energy for the short test. But in long distance swimming a woman's superior power of endurance will tell against a man's strength and place her abreast of him.



Annette Kellermann

