

FATTEST and FAIREST of COUNTRY BOY'S GIRLS

by Walter
Anthony

MISS NELLIE FILLMORE is the largest—I almost said the fattest—the noisiest, heartiest and one of the merriest of all the flock of stage butterflies I ever tried to pin to an interview page. And she would be my favorite of "The Country Boy's" relatives had not Eida Furry, the slipperless ingenue, become an unconscious rival.

Miss Nellie weighs 250 pounds. That I inferred, was a circumstance due mainly to her interest in science and psychology, which has led her to a complete demonstration of the reality of the relation between grins and girth.

Miss Fillmore has established beyond peradventure of a doubt the soundness of the principles enunciated in the ancient injunction "laugh and grow fat."

Henry B. Harris, whose production supports Miss Fillmore at the Columbia, assisted unintentionally in the demonstration.

"I was having luncheon with Mr. Harris," said Miss Fillmore, "just before we weighed anchor to sail west. 'What's the matter, Nellie,' he said, 'you are not eating much. Why should I?' I asked, 'How much do you weigh?' said he, 'One hundred and ninety eight,' said I. 'A good boarding house keeper should weigh more,' said he, reflecting. 'I'll tell you what I'll do. For every pound over 200 that you can make an affidavit to, I'll add a dollar a week to your envelope receipts.' 'And then,' said Miss Nellie, 'we started west, I laughed at Mr. Harris' wild offer and began to gain on him. From 200 I went to 210, thence to 215. I added weight every pay day and the envelopes grew fatter accordingly. I got up to 250 and then Mr. Harris quit. He took advantage of my sex, repudiated his agreement and here I am with the habit fixed, still gaining weight. Officially I weigh 250 pounds, but let me tell you, confidentially that Mr. Harris owes me \$20 a week. Seeing that additional weight doesn't get me anything any more I have tried to reduce, but it's awful work. If I take a Turkish bath and reduce three pounds I am so pleased with myself that I gain five. Everything I eat seems to agree with me; I can't worry because I have never spent any money with the doctors; if I take reducing exercises, and roll around on the floor, climb ladders and do other horrible stunts, I only add bruises, black and blue marks all over me and do not lose an ounce. There seems to be nothing left for me to do but to keep on making a piker of Mr. Harris and adding to his indebtedness."

It's embarrassing, sometimes, the things one writes in duty, when he discovers where the lightning has struck.

The critic makes friends without meaning to, and enemies just the same way. It is part of his job. He finds himself condemning the things he would be happy indeed to encourage and encouraging total strangers who sometimes think him kind. Thus, when the lines of duty are found to have fallen inside the lines of desire a double pleasure is enjoyed.

For instance, I did not know that Miss Eida Furry had been Louise Dresser's understudy when she was here last winter with De Wolf Hopper in "The Matinee Idol." Now it so happened that my opinions of Miss Dresser as an actress were pleasantly endorsed by her refinements as a woman. As an interviewee she was quite ideal. I recall the circumstance that she permitted, indeed encouraged, me to do all of the talking. It was the first time that had ever happened to me. No wonder I remembered it. Wherefore, yielding to the impulse, I said a fraction of the nice things possible about Miss Dresser in the interview of months ago admitted her generosity in attention and attempted, with but partial success, it's true, to disclose to the reader a suggestion of Miss Dresser's good nature and patrician elegance. Strange as it may seem to those who know the profession in its

usual manifestations, Miss Dresser remembered the interview, told her former understudy what a really charming critic I was, and then I, unknowingly "made good" by declaring last Tuesday morning that Miss Furry was an excellent Jane Belknap.

I do not insist, mind you, that I am a charming critic. Indeed, I do not assert that I am a critic at all. I merely declare that Miss Dresser thinks I am, and told Miss Furry so, and that I, as good luck would have it, recognized the charm that lies in Miss Eida's pretty portrait of Miss Belknap.

The episode would be quite without interest to anybody but for the fact, previously hinted, that when a critic says complimentary things of players, as a rule, complain that there were not more adjectives of adulation used, and feel unhappy that the fullness of their genius was not more completely revealed to the slow mind of the reviewer.

Should the critic condemn, he is either venial, villainous or vicious. Any deviation from such experience makes it memorable, and so it has been here set down as a tribute to the gentleness of Miss Dresser that she told Miss Furry preposterously flattering things about me which diffidence and a dimly awakened sense of truth forbids publication. But I am certainly happy that Miss Furry's talents as actress established my reputation with her as a critic.

So, shortly, we felt like old friends—if one may say "old friends"—in the face of a miss who is in her first real role and in the third season of her stage career.

Naturally I asked Miss Furry about her beginning. It was so recent that one might imagine she left her dolls at the stage entrance.

"I have six uncles," said Miss Furry, "and they are all Baptist clergymen. You may imagine I encountered some opposition in my stage ambitions."

"How did you circumvent fate and an inherited distaste for the theater?" "Well," said she, "I ran away from home to circumvent fate and went to New York."

Through the impishness of heredity, no doubt, she inherited no "distaste for the theater" from her Baptist genealogy.

"Mutual friends introduced me to Miss Dresser in New York. I told her what I wanted to do, and she gave me a little part in 'The Matinee Idol.'"

In thus taking a chance with a young recruit, Miss Dresser, likewise, as it turned out, gave Miss Furry an opportunity to play Mrs. Burton in "The Matinee Idol," for, agreeable to her generous nature, Miss Dresser was ill in San Francisco for three days and nights, during which time her understudy, Miss Furry, played her role.

Sir Edward Fitzgerald, who was a famous Irishman on the banks of the Lakes of Killarney. My mother won't permit any of us to forget that. I've got an uncle in Ireland whom I am going to see some day. He is 108 years old and is still at his anvil. My mother is 75. Every summer when I leave her to begin another season she starts to weep and declares that I'll never see her again. 'Go along,' says I. 'You've been handing me that for 30 years. We'll have to shoot you.' Then she laughs and I laugh, and that's better than feeling miserable."

WING to her parents' implacable opposition to her stage career Miss Furry assumed another name. It was Miss Curry. It was as Miss Curry that she played in San Francisco a small role of an antique matron whose

hands without danger. It wasn't likely that I'd ever have to appear as Mrs. Burton.

"But there came Miss Dresser's sweetness. She was quite ill here, you remember and was forced to retire from the cast for three performances and so the understudy got a chance. Now please don't think I made an unprecedented hit, surprised the manager, delighted the audience and made Miss

Fillmore

to a little and which the public seems to care for."

Anyway, as nothing succeeds like success, and as parental opposition can not eternally face a pretty countenance in anger, it has happened that the Furrys in Altoona, Pa., have been persuaded that a stage career is not incompatible with the Baptist training in morals, and have become reconciled to their girl, who is struggling successfully to become a somebody in the great big world of the drama. Hence Miss Furry now uses her real name, and her family in the manufacturing town of Altoona are, I hope, having some difficulty in hiding the pride they should feel in the career of the daughter who didn't inherit a distaste for the theater.

LIKEWISE Miss Fillmore told me that she was the only black sheep in the family. Discounting the fact that she has uncles in the business of quenching thirst, she also laid claim to inherited ecclesiastical tendencies, an assurance which on the face of it was true, if exuberant kindness of heart and an amiability which sees the best in everything are part of an ecclesiastical equipment. "Two of my aunts are sisters of charity," said she. "We are a temperate tribe," she went on, "and so it may surprise you to know whom I married."

"To be honest about it," said I, "I must admit that I do not know much about your career."

I said it with shame, for after seeing Nellie Fillmore's Mrs. Bannan at the Columbia any one will tell you that Miss Fillmore is past mistress of comedienne.

"You haven't been west before, have you?" I asked.

"Bless you heart," said she, "I was here playing before you were born. I was Little Jennie in 'Muldoon's Picnic' so long ago that I hate to talk about it. Barry and Faye were the producers of the piece. Ten years later I came

Dresser furious with jealousy. Nothing like that ever happens in good theatrical society. What did happen was that I did not fall, and that I had a chance to show that I could do better things in time than grotesque character ladies and roles involving only the imagination and a physical presence."

Miss Furry smiled as she thought aloud, "and it seems truly good to be back in San Francisco, where I made the position even in my amateur

lines were supposed to be funny.

"But they were not," said Miss Furry, "at least they were not funny when I said them. It was evident to me that I was not cut out for a character actress, though goodness knows I had a fright of a makeup. Why Miss Dresser and Mr. Hopper permitted me to remain in the role I do not know, except that it was very small, and they had to have an understudy for Miss Dresser, whose health being good, made the position even in my amateur



Nellie Fillmore



Eida Furry

back here in the same piece with Yank Newell—everybody knows him—and played Jennie's mother. Not many actresses have remained on the stage long enough to play the mother of a juvenile role that they acted in their youth. But I soon began to get—stout and went into character parts. I never played anything else and don't ever expect to. Could you ever imagine me as Juliet?

"ALL of my stage experience until I went with 'The Country Boy' a few months ago has been gained with Mr. Hopper, except last season when at the close of my engagement I went to Mount Vernon and played 'stock' during the summer. The experience was good, for I played all variety of roles from a sweet thing of 15 to an Indian squaw. One of the few shocks of my brief career was out of this stock experience, when an elderly lady, a steady patron of the house, assured me that of all my characterizations that of the squaw was best."

Miss Furry impresses the interviewer as a very much-in-earnest-girl, who took to the stage in answer to a beckoning which was instinctive. She has a firm hold on herself, rising principally from a disposition to regard herself not too seriously, and an ability to tell jokes at her own expense. That accounts for what I noticed last Monday night, that she was a human ingenue—a very rare materialization on the stage where fluffy dresses, youthful sweethearts and hissing utterance usually announce a monstrosity of giggles.

As for Miss Fillmore's sense of humor it is prodigious. It embraces everything and everybody. It bubbles over in laughter, beams in good humor and is a charitable veil behind which she hides from herself the defects of her friends. Nothing can withstand Nellie Fillmore's disposition to take things as they come.

"You certainly should know about me," she reminded again. "Since my first appearance here I have been com-

ing to the coast for 25 years, with this lapse of 10 years counted in. I was with Katie Emmett in 'Waifs of New York,' and with E. D. Stair in 'Behind the Mask.' If I only kept a scrapbook I could write a history of the stage and begin it before you began to weep. But I don't keep scrapbooks."

"I married Blanche Bates' half brother, Charlie Raymond, in 1884."

"Where is he now?" I asked.

"If I was sure he was dead I could tell you," she answered merrily.

Charles Klein's recently written drama, "The Gamblers," with Jane Cowl, Charles Stevenson, De Witt Jennings, George Backus, Charles Burbridge, George Wright Jr., Mary Barry and Orme Caldera in the leading roles, will be produced at the Cort this season.

The season of hand concerts will be brought to a close at Idora park tonight when Ohlmeyer and his militant orchestral band will play their final program. Manager York expects to establish in the big amphitheater a new attraction to fill out the remaining two weeks of the park's season.

H. B. Warner, star of "Allas Jimmy Valentine," the current Cort attraction, is an English actor, and still a young man. Warner won his first American fame as leading man with Eleanor Robson in "Merely Mary Ann" and "Salomy Jane." He is the son of the late Charles Warner, who was famous for his work in Zola's "Drink."

Louis N. Parker's drama, founded on the life of the great English statesman, Disraeli, David Belasco's production of William C. de Mille's "The Woman," A. E. Thomas' comedy, "What the Doctor Ordered," and Edgar Selwyn's "The Arab" are some of the new plays in New York which are being subjected to the judgment of the playgoer.

In the construction of the new Alcazar theater the contractors are well up in their time limits and it is reasonable to expect that the playhouse will be ready for occupancy early in December. The most complete and perfect stock house in America is promised.

