

ROMEO AND JULIET IN THE FAR WEST.

BY C. C. CLAWSON.

In the early days a theatrical treat in the mountains was of rare occurrence, and the troupes that had the nerve to venture into the distant mining regions were generally well paid for the long journey and risks taken to get there.

I will never forget the first time I saw "Romeo and Juliet" (or "Julio" as the miners put it) played in the mines. I was out of luck in the diggings, and had drifted into a newspaper office, and was then on the New Northwest, at Deer Lodge Montana, setting type, looking up mining news, and running to stampedes when the spirit so moved me.

Well, Laura Agnes returned to the office with the cosmetics fairly running from her face, bearing the announcement that hall the was secured, and that we could go on with our good words. The paper was to come out that afternoon, and Miss Stevenson returned to the wagon to gather together her little baggage and wait the appearance of the paper, feeling satisfied that she had found friends in a strange land.

Laura Agnes made good use of the river that flowed by their camping-ground; for in the morning, when she strode into the office in good attire, her complexion brilliant as a rose and her face full of smiles, I didn't at first recognize her as the woman who sat on the ground by the freighter's wagon on the evening before crunching slaps and sipping coffee from a tin-cup.

Well, Laura Agnes found the editor in his den, and bearded him. She interviewed him as to the prospects of getting a paying audience in town, the price of handbills, local blasts, etc., and was in ecstasies when she learned that no first-class troupe had played there since the immortal Jack Langrishe had swept the town of its last dollar.

glory and shine forth 'mid the valleys of the everlasting Rockies. She made an impression on the editor, I think, (those actresses are such winning things—he was a bachelor, and a long way from home)—for he told Laura Agnes that, if saying good things of her would bring her good luck, then she might count on a house that would do her eyes good.

When Laura posted off to see about the hall, I took occasion to mention the little history of her that I had from the freighter, and that I thought it my duty to inform him of the state of Laura Agnes' finances; that I believed she owned just half a dollar and a half interest in a small church. The editor was a man noted for his kindness of heart and a desire to see everybody prosper, and he only replied that if she was down we must help her on her feet again, but that we must keep her misfortunes to ourselves, for if they were made public it might work disastrously to her.

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In the meantime Laura and her tag had taken rooms in the highest priced hotel in the town, and she was treading majestically to and fro on the balcony, where she could be seen to the best advantage from the street.

When the paper made its appearance that afternoon, Laura must have been astonished to learn that she had played before all the crowned heads of Europe, had crossed the ocean and startled the greatest cities of the east with her wonderful acting. (It must be remembered that the people in that far away mining country didn't pretend to keep posted in stage business, and they did not think it strange that they had never heard of this particular star before.)

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"OPERA MAD! OPERA MAD!" OR "ROMEO AND JULIET"

Greted the eyes of the Deer Lodgers at every turn the next day, and some of the bills found their way into the nearest mining camp, ten miles away. The theatre was all the rage. The price of admission was fixed at one dollar, which was next to nothing in those days, and the large hall was jammed with an anxious audience long before the curtain rose.

It seemed days to that fretful mass of people before the time came to get a sight of what was in waiting behind the black muslin curtain. At last the bell jingled "all ready." The curtain slid hurriedly to one side. For a quarter of a minute after the stage was exposed you could have heard a canary feather drop. Then there came one spontaneous outburst that shook the very ground the building stood on.

Romeo was a cheap man in every sense. His foundation was a block of wood in which two sticks were inserted for legs, on which rested a bust of some kind, and on this a block for a head, and over this a false face and one of Laura's wigs. A huge mustache set around on one side of his mouth did not help his looks. He was dressed in a red-cambrie gown. And this was the man who was to personate Romeo—a perfect block-head in every respect.

"That's a wooden man too dead to skin," some one in the crowd ventured to remark when the outburst had subsided, and this brought forth another roar of applause. After this was over a miner rose up in a back seat and shouted:

"We've seen Romeo, now bring on your Julio."

This was followed by cheers, and cries of "Julio!" "Julio!" After a minute or two the curtains of a little dressing room in the farthest corner of the hall parted, and "Julio" strode majestically across the stage, and made her bow, 'mid the wildest uproar.

When the audience had calmed down a little she explained that she was supposed to be a young lady who had gone opera-mad, and was practicing with an imitation Romeo prior to going on the stage. A lady in town consented to play a piano for the occasion, and Laura Agnes played in a manner that surprised everybody, after which she made love to Romeo in such a manner that kept the house in a continuous roar.

But Romeo couldn't be prevailed upon to return her demonstrations of love; and, when she would rush at him with outstretched arms and beseech him to speak to her, to embrace her just once, he could only stare at her with those frightful eyes of his, but it invariably brought down the house. Once, when she rushed at him, threw her arms about his neck and called upon him to embrace her, a man on a front seat became so out of patience at Romeo's indifference that he sprang to his feet and shouted:

"Go for her, or let some one there that can."

But Romeo couldn't be persuaded to embrace his dear "Julio," neither would he give way to any one that could.

Between acts, Laura Agnes sang and played and spun strange yarns until midnight, and it was only with the greatest reluctance that the seats were vacated then. If ever an audience got the worth of the money invested it was that one, and for an hour after the theatre closed you could hear men up and down the street giving vent to their feelings in loud "haw-haws."

Laura announced an entire change of programme for the next night, but the following day a petition was presented to the successful Laura requesting her to stick to the programme of the previous evening and give them "Romeo and Julio" over again. And her fame went out into the mountains that day, and the second house was even greater than the first.

But Laura Agnes' success didn't end in Deer Lodge. She made a tour of the Territory and everywhere was greeted with the best of houses. It was at Pioneer, however, where the admiration for Laura's acting swept the whole town off its feet, and brought downfall to Romeo.

Pioneer is an extensive mining camp fifteen miles westerly from Deer Lodge. At that time there were seven or eight hundred miners there, and not a stinky one among them. The mines were rich, and everybody made money, but they only made it to have the fun of spending it. Some of the miners had been at Deer Lodge when Laura played there and when she passed through Pioneer on her way to the Missoula country a committee of miners waited on her, and promised her that if she would play there on her return, every man in the diggings would go to hear her. The town had a commodious hall, in which the miners delighted to hold high carnival once a week.

Laura fulfilled her promise, and was on hand at the appointed time. The people went wild. Mining and business of all kinds suspended, and Laura Agnes realized what it was to play to an audience of gold miners who didn't care for expenses, so they had fun. The hall was filled, and men climbed on top of each other's shoulders to see Laura when she made love to Romeo. Between acts the house was emptied and the saloons filled, and when the last scene was over the town was in a glorious state of intoxication. In the excitement of the closing scene, Romeo got separated from Julio, and was borne by the boys to a saloon. There treating was going on, and Romeo was stood up at the bar and made to take part in the midnight orgies of the miners. He was drenched with whisky until the paint came off his face, and not a dry stitch was left on him. While in this condition he was pushed against a man too drunk to know the difference. He

imagined he was assaulted by one of the boys and he pitched into Romeo, while the crowd stood back and urged him to give it to him for insulting him. Romeo went down in the battle, and when his adversary was done with him he was completely demolished. His red coat was torn to shreds, his nose bit off, his eyes gouged out, and his cheeks smashed in. The pieces were gathered up and laid away behind the bar, and the miners went on with their drinking and carousing till the break fast bells brought them to their senses.

In the meantime Laura Agnes had become uneasy about Romeo, and had sent a man to look him up. When he found him lying all in a heap in the saloon, he said he never could break the sad news to Julio. It was suggested by some one that Romeo be gathered together and returned to his mistress, and suitable apology be made. He was stretched on a board and carried by two men to the hotel, while a crowd followed at their heels to see the fun. Laura was at the breakfast table, with a good many others, when her dead Romeo was carried in and deposited in the center of the hall. Then one of the pall-bearers addressed her in the most solemn tones:

"Madam, it becomes my most painful duty to present to you the remains of your beloved Romeo. He would run with the boys last night, and would drink, and would fight, and this is what is left of him."

The actress gazed at the figure a minute, then raised up and assumed a stage attitude, and gave a scream that brought a rush to the dining-room. She fell upon Romeo, and besought him to speak to her just once.

"Dead, dead, dead, my Romeo, my dear Romeo; speak to me this once; tell me you love me; it cannot be that he is dead; Romeo, Romeo, my darling Romeo; yes, yes, he is dead, dead, O Romeo, Romeo, speak—"

And the woe stricken actress, with tears streaming down her cheeks, tumbled over on the dilapidated form of Romeo, and was to all appearance dead as a mackerel. The miners couldn't stand this last act and made a rush for the door, their solemn faces and glistening eyes telling that they were striving to suppress their emotions. No sooner was the room cleared than Laura sprang up from the floor, wiped her eyes, and sat down to the breakfast table again, laughing at the manner in which she played it upon the boys. The miners returned to the saloon a sad looking set, where they raised among themselves a purse of dust large enough to buy a regiment of Romeos.

When the stage called at the hotel that morning to take Laura Agnes on her way back to Deer Lodge, the miners gathered round to bid her good-bye, and as she took her seat the purse was tossed into her lap, and Laura was gone from their gaze.

This remarkable woman left the mountains with many regrets and many dollars, and I never heard of her again until two or three years ago when I saw an announcement in a Salt Lake paper that she had made an engagement to play a season there. But she had changed her name somewhat.

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(From the Boston Globe.)



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