

A PIERRETTE'S DIARY LEAVES

Shifting Scenes from Here and There in Vagabond Stage-Land

By GERALDINE DUFE

MONDAY aft.—I have read the posters, that are striking one in the face everywhere, dozens of times. I have tried my utmost to convince myself that I and the Miss Margy Gordon, they announce as the accompanist of Mortimer and Windsor's troupe of pierrots, are one and the same. This afternoon, too, I had a rehearsal with most of the artistes, and yet I have to pinch myself again and again to assure myself if it is a reality and not just all a strange dream. For a fortnight ago I was a journalist, working hard for a provincial paper.

To make the record clear, and perhaps, too, to add to its interest, I must explain a little. As I have already written, a fortnight ago I was Isabelle Murray—journalist.

Perhaps I had better begin at that memorable afternoon just at the point when I was in the doctor's consulting room, waiting in an agony of suspense on his verdict, for I had felt for weeks wretchedly ill, and just at that stage that I couldn't go on any longer.

"You are on the brink of a bad nervous breakdown, Miss Murray," my medical adviser declared, indifferently, as he put his stethoscope back into his waistcoat pocket. "You will be laid up for months, and probably never get perfectly well again unless you go right away now to the country or the sea for at least two or three months."

Cold water seemed suddenly to have begun dashing down my spine. How easy it was for him to prescribe! Two or three months by the sea or in the country! Had the man no sense? Surely he must understand that to me this was impossible.

I felt cross and bitter when I reached home. I lived—a not very welcome guest—at the house of my married brother, my only relation in the world.

There was a letter in the hall for me, and I little thought as I tore it open, what a change it was going to bring into my horizon.

It was from my dearest friend, a clever pianist, who earned her living by the piano. She was in a horrid difficulty, she wrote. She was obliged, owing to the fact that she was quite unexpectedly to be married at once, to break her engagement with Mortimer and Windsor to join their troupes that summer. She had been in the habit of doing this for several seasons. "They have always been so kind, I am really distressed," she continued, "I do wish I could find a substitute. What a pity you couldn't go! You play so brilliantly, and are such a splendid accompanist, but of course that is out of the question."

I do not remember if I finished the letter then. I fancy I dashed out to the nearest telegraph office and sent off a wire to the effect that I would take the engagement in my friend's place.

There was no difficulty about it. My kindly editor agreed to keep my post open for me; and that is how I came to be one of Mortimer and Windsor's troupe.

We have arrived at a little seaside town where we are to spend a week—such a delightful place it is.

There is a beautiful horse-shoe bay, flanked by magnificent mountains, and there are quaint trams, for all the world like toast racks, by which you can travel round the coast. There are beautiful walks and splendid sea bathing—ah, already I am beginning to feel better.

MONDAY night.—My first appearance is made, and once I have got over the strangeness, I know I shall enjoy myself.

I enjoyed myself to-night.

One of the men who has been a long time with Mortimer and Windsor has charge of this troupe, and arranges everything. As with ordinary theatricals, you are fined if you are late, so, of course, I was at the pavilion, where we usually perform, in good time. I am allowed to wear my ordinary clothes, if I like, or the regular pierrette dress. As I am acting a part, I thought I would wear the dress, and I find it rather becoming. There are three girls, including myself, and four men in this troupe. One of the men—he is billed as the golden tenor—has a really beautiful voice; another is a baritone, and the rest are comedians. One of the girls is a comedienne, and the one with whom I stay plays the banjo. She is billed—in special large type, for she is a star—as Miss Gwen Raymond, banjo expert.

I thought when I saw the poster that this did not mean much. It was probably just Mortimer and Windsor's eulogistic way of describing a fairly good banjoist.

She had not got through her first item, though, before I changed my mind. What Gwen Raymond does not know about banjo playing isn't worth knowing. She brought down the house. The golden tenor even did not get the applause that was accorded to her. She interested me strangely, partly because I was sharing 'digs' with her perhaps, but she seemed to fascinate the audience in the same way, for she was recalled and recalled. We felt she was in some intangible manner removed from the rest of the troupe.

She was very tall, and she did not wear the pier-

rette frock, but her white muslin dress was perfectly cut, and her abundant dark hair was dressed in a classical coiffure that few could stand. She was such a contrast to the little comedienne with her Lily Elsie coiffure, and her display of teeth that rivalled that of a picture post card beauty. Gwen Raymond is a lady, I thought it in the station, I was perfectly sure of it when I had had a meal with her.

She is a very reserved girl, and I cannot gather much about her. She has always played and loved the banjo ever since she can remember, she told me, but she has only played professionally for about three years. She gets engagements on the halls in winter. Tricks go down better with an audience than anything. Passing and turning the banjo over the head, then catching it again, keeping up the air of what one is playing all the time never fails to go down well. This is only an easily acquired trick, though it looks so clever. I do not know whether Gwen Raymond is her real name or not, and I do not like to ask. Somehow, though she is all that is kind and nice, one dare not question her. What is her real name and history, I wonder? I can't think it is Gwen Raymond. I feel convinced, too, that turns on the halls and at pierrots' entertainments are completely out of line with her life at one time. Perhaps, by and by, I will learn more about her.

FRIDAY morning.—I am having a lovely time. I get a delightful swim every morning. That makes me feel fit for anything all day.

At present there are some army officers staying at the railway hotel. They seemed greatly interested in our performance. The little comedienne imagines that she is the draw, but I know differently. It is to see Gwen Raymond they come. They tried to strike up an acquaintance with her, but she would have nothing to do with them. She let them see plainly that she did not want to know them, and yet she was not rude. She has the manners of a princess.

We leave here on Sunday. The troupe is changed each week, sometimes entirely, sometimes only in part.

To-night I am to have an adventure—an adventure from which I hope to extract a great deal of fun.

Just out of the town there is a magnificent old castle—Broadwater Castle it is called. It is most delightfully situated, and commands one of the loveliest views imaginable.

Well, to-night at the Castle there is to be a fancy dress ball, and I am going to it!

How have I got an invitation to a ball to which only the elite of the neighbourhood are invited? Ah, that is a dead secret at present, and I can't confide it even to you, my dear diary—just yet. I'm going as a pierrette. I wanted Gwen to go with me, but she won't. She says she doesn't care for balls now.

I am in a wild state of excitement, I suppose it is the sea air that is doing it, but I feel to-day my old reckless, mischief loving self. This ball will remind me of my journalistic work—but it will be all fun and no worry getting the dresses of the distinguished women present, and no aftermath with an irate editor over important people missed out or details given incorrectly.

I hope there won't be a lot of encores to drag out the concert to-night, I shall be aching to get to the end of it.

SATURDAY 2 a.m.—The ball is over, and I am back in my tiny bed-room with its coved ceiling, but I can't sleep. I must write down all about this wonderful, never to be forgotten night.

Directly our entertainment was concluded, I took the tortoise shell pins, I always affect, out of my hair, and let it hang down my back, for despite my twenty-six years I look infinitely better with my hair down than up. Gwen laughed when she saw me.

"Why, I should hardly know you," she exclaimed. "Well, good-night, and good luck to you, you certainly look as if you were in for a good time. I'll wait up for you, and hear your news."

"Do," I called back, "I won't be late. Late hours are forbidden me at present, you know."

I had heard the Castle is a dream of loveliness, and my profession, of course, has taken me to many exquisite scenes, but I was not quite prepared for the bewildering beauty of the one on which I entered.

The long pink and silver drawing room, with its folding doors thrown back, was used as the ball room. It was filled with a gay throng—gypsies, elves, forest sprites, Puritan maidens, brigands, and Indian princes were gliding over the smooth floor. The French windows were open, and led on to the terrace, beyond which the Broadwater stretched out its unruffled surface. A crescent moon, like a lamp of silver, swung in a sky of turquoise.

The dancers were engaged in a waltz that was just reaching a climax when I entered the ball room. I was only there a few minutes when a very tall man, evidently representing Devilshoff, asked me if I had not got a partner, and, without waiting for me to reply, disappeared, and reappeared again with a

bored looking man, apparently a courtier of George the Third's time.

"Captain Fieldglass would like to dance with you," he said, and vanished, leaving Captain Fieldglass and me feeling distinctly awkward together.

"It is another waltz, I believe," Captain Fieldglass observed at last. "May I have the pleasure?"

How beautifully he spoke, and yet his voice was tired, but just the kind of voice I expected to accompany his sad blue eyes. They were the most beautiful eyes I think I have ever seen—deep as the Broadwater, yet translucent and tender as a little child's.

He waltzed divinely, and we had only taken a few turns when I fancied he began to look not quite so bored as he did at first.

"You dance perfectly," he remarked then, "you must get a lot of practice."

"I don't," I replied, "I am far too busy. I am a most industrious young woman, you know."

"Yes," he said, "I suppose you are at school still, and busy there. I expect you'll enjoy to-night. It is good to meet someone who genuinely enjoys this sort of thing as you seem to do."

I remembered my hanging hair and short skirts then, and laughed as I answered, "I have left school long ago. Just at present I am a pierrette."

He laughed too. "Yes, of course. You really are refreshing, you are entering so thoroughly into the spirit of this ball."

It was in vain I assured him that I was one of Mortimer and Windsor's troupe, he did not believe a word of it.

We danced several dances together in succession. He interested me as a man has seldom interested me before, and he seemed to like my company very much.

What a contrast he was to the self-conscious officers at the hotel.

Then he told me he was dreadfully sorry the next dance was not ours. "I must see you again, though," he added. "May I have Nos. 18, 19 and 20? The dances we have had together have given me more pleasure than I have had for years and—and I was afraid I was going to be bored to death to-night. Balls are not in my line, now."

I promised him the waltzes he suggested, and to meet him beneath the palm at the far end of the room, and he left me to dance with a Turkish lady

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They All Love Pau

A CORRESPONDENT of the Associated Press tells the following incident of the daily life of General Pau, the commander of the French army in Alsace, who lost an arm during the Franco-Prussian War.

A dozen mud-spattered French infantrymen rested in a drizzling rain under some dripping trees. Suddenly the corporal stood erect and made a hasty salute. Through the fog and rain one of the three great leaders of the French army had appeared.

"Why do you not wear your cap?" asked General Pau.

"I have lost my cap, General."

"Where did you lose it?"

"When we were attacked in the woods this morning. A branch knocked it off, and I was too much in a hurry to go back and get it. It is gone."

"Take my cap."

The corporal hesitated. He feared that he would be punished for losing his cap.

"Take it, I tell you, and wear it," said the General.

And the humble corporal did as he was told, and became resplendent in the cap with the golden oak leaves. Since that day the corporal has marched along the country roads to the frontier, proud in the cap of General Pau.

"The General himself told me to wear it," he says to those who protest. "I obey the General's orders, and the cap stays on my head."

The General knows his soldiers, and the world may understand why the tired, bedraggled, and weary army goes on marching, and fighting, and dying for its commanders.

Laughed Off

THERE is a certain noted surgeon who had, some months ago, a very splendid crop of hair. Although the surgeon is not old, his hair is snow-white, and he is very proud of its beauty. He wore it parted in the middle and rather long, and it fluffed luxuriantly on either side of the parting. The impulse toward a change in hairdressing came to the surgeon in this manner:

He had operated upon a woman, and was bending over her as she began to come out of the ether. She opened her eyes for a moment, and then closed them again. Then with a long sigh and in a rapid voice she said, "What a beautiful white chrysanthemum!" The students present exploded, and now the surgeon wears his hair cut as close as a gentleman may.