

## THE BEACHING OF THE LIFE-BOAT.

Mann'd by a crew of heroes, she  
Had boldly charged the storm-strung wave,  
And, battling through, had nobly caught  
The shipwreck'd from their threatened grave;  
And young and old, all hurrying down,  
Had watched her, in the early gray,  
With eager eyes and anxious hearts,  
Come struggling on her homeward way.

All through the night the storm had led,  
With angry shout and sullen roar,  
An army of impetuous seas  
Upon our iron-guarded shore:  
And now the tempest, fiercer grown,  
With all its strength, the boat assails,  
But English hearts are at her side,  
And courage over might prevails.

And as she wins her way to land,  
Cheeks pale that never blanch'd from fear,  
And many a hardy veteran turns  
Aside to hide an honest tear.  
Full soon a score of willing hands  
Prepare their need of help to reach;  
Now shoreward flies her lion—*Liz!*  
She runs in safety on the beach.

J. G. WATTS.

## THREE TIMES.

By the Author of "Lady Audley's Secret,"  
Etc.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE SECOND TIME.

THE Spindlecum people showed their appreciation of the British drama as represented by lion-taming by giving Herr Prusinowski a bumper. Whether it was the influence of the Cham of Tartary, or the Mikado, the Grand Duchess of Selzerwasserburg, or the local member, or the simple merits of the performance, is a moot question; but the Spindlecumians assembled in full force; and before the Herr had left the family tea-table to repair to the theatre, he received the pleasing intelligence that the crowd at the pit and gallery doors was half-way across the street.

"If we only go on like this for another year or so, Liz, I'll cut the profession," exclaimed Herr Prusinowski cheerily, "and start a theatrical public, somewhere on the Surrey side. It's a trying life is the wild-beast business."

"And a dangerous life too, William," said the little woman with a sigh.  
("The renowned Rudolph's name in private life was William.")

"Not much of that, old girl. I'm more than a match for Robinson by this time. There isn't a move he's up to that I'm not down upon; and he's the cunningest beast that ever picked a bone. You're going into the front to-night, eh, Liz?"

"O yes, I shall get a seat at the back of the boxes. Mrs. Prodder's going with me. She's took her ticket, and paid for it, you know, William, like a lady."

Mrs. Prodder was the Prusinowski's landlady, a ponderous matron of fifty, who had let lodgings to "theatricals" for the last twenty years.

"Ta-ta, Liz, then; I'm off."

"It's early, William. There's the *Miller and his Men*—that'll last an hour and a half, surely."

"I don't believe it'll play an hour. You ought to know what my benefit audiences are—all agog for the lions. I want to have a look at the beasts before we begin, and I'm always a little nervous on my ben. Good-bye."

This was a mere conjugal excuse. The theatre to a man bred at the side-scenes is his club. The Herr preferred smoking his pipe in the free-and-easy atmosphere of the dressing-room at the Queen's to the tamer delights of the domestic tea-table. He had very little anxiety about his beasts. Joe Purdy, his factotum, a keeper who had served his apprenticeship with the great Wombwell, had the custody of them.

The house was an excellent one. The boxes were not so well filled as on that memorable night at Manchester, which Herr Prusinowski had described to his friends; but the pit was a seething caldron of humanity, the gallery looked like a wall of eager faces piled one upon the other up to the iron roof. The *Miller and his Men* was performed almost in dumb show, or seemed so to be, though the leading tragedian retained on the establishment was roaring himself hoarse in the character of Grindoff, with a faint hope of snatching a stray leaf from the crown of wild olive which would be cast at the feet of the lion-tamer by and by.

Grindoff did not bate a syllable of his part or the minutest detail of his stage business; not a stamp of his russet boot, or a scowl of his heavily-inked eyebrows; but the rest of the company, less enthusiastic, scamped their work to the best of their abilities, and the drama was raced through in one hour ten minutes and seven seconds by the prompter's chronograph.

Then came a stirring overture—the "Bronze Horse"—during which the audience cracked nuts and became momentarily more excited; and then the act-drop rose to slow music of a soul-appalling character, and revealed Brown, Jones, and Robinson picturesquely grouped in the stock primeval forest.

There was a pause. The house applauded vociferously. There was something stirring in the notion that these three unfettered beasts might leap into the pit at any moment. It was quite a pleasant sensation—especially for the gallery. Brown, who was elderly and decrepit, yawned and stretched himself out as if for slumber, with the air of having been untimely disturbed from his after-dinner nap. Jones, who was of a lively temperament, whistled his tail, and snapped at an imaginary fly. Robinson stared full at the audience, as if he really did understand and appreciate their plaudits.

The music quickened, broke into a stirring march, and then, at a fortissimo chord from the full orchestra, the lion-tamer bounded on to the stage—a striking figure, broad-shouldered and muscular, in close-fitting flesh-coloured raiment, a scarlet girdle round his waist, and a leopard's skin over his shoulder.

There was a good strong Sheffield knife in his belt, but he had no appearance of being armed.

His reception was tremendous. He stood bowing and moving his lips in vague murmurs, with an air of being quite overcome by his feelings, for nearly five minutes before he could begin his performance. His eyes wandered all round the house with the gaze of calculation, they grew suddenly fixed, glaring at the stalls.

Now the stalls at the Queen's Theatre, Spindlecum, were a delusion and a snare. Spindlecum at its best was not an aristocratic town, and the Queen's was not the aristocratic theatre of Spindlecum. Except on a mayor's bespeak or under masonic patronage, the stalls were rarely tenanted. But there they were, two long rows of partitioned seats, covered with dusty red cloth.

To-night there were three people in all the length and breadth of them—two faded-looking elderly women in opera-cloaks at one end, and in the middle, in a position that commanded every inch of the stage, a middle-aged man, with a cadaverous face, prominent light-gray eyes, and lank reddish hair, carefully dressed in full evening costume.

He sat in an attitude of extreme attention, with his arms folded on the back of the seat in front of him—he was in the back row—and his eyes fixed upon the lion-tamer. For the moment the sight of him seemed to turn Rudolph Prusinowski to stone. It was the man he had been talking of that day.

The cold sweat broke out upon his forehead; but he stamped his foot savagely, angry with himself for this folly, muttered an oath, and began his business with the lions—standing upon their backs, riding round the stage upon all three at once, leading them through a kind of dance movement, described in the bills as a set of quadrilles, with garlands of paper roses, and otherwise disporting himself with them, the red-haired man in the stalls watching his every movement and every movement of the animals breathlessly, and never stirring by a hair's breadth from his attentive attitude, or turning his eyes away from the stage.

Then came the feature of the evening—a single combat between Herr Prusinowski and Robinson—who was described in the bills, by the way, as "Moloch, the royal brindled lion, presented to Herr Prusinowski by one of the native princes of the Punjab"—at the end of which the Herr dragged assunder the animal's jaws, and put his head into his red-hot-looking mouth.

To-night, in spite of that deadly terror which had come upon the Herr at the sight of that one detested spectator, everything went smoothly enough. Robinson, otherwise Moloch, kept his temper, suffered his jaws to be opened to their widest extent, and the tamer's head to repose upon his tongue as on a pillow for half a dozen seconds or so, and the curtain came down to vociferous applause; but when the *bénédiction* was called for, there was no response. The prompter found him leaning against one of the wings, white to the lips.

"Did you ever see a man tremble?" he asked, in a voice that shook so much as to be scarcely intelligible. "If you want to see one, look at me."

He was shaking in every limb, like a man stricken with ague.

"Why, what's the matter, cully?" asked the prompter, with more friendliness of tone than elegance of diction. "They're calling for you like mad. You'd better go on."

"I'm going, as soon as I can steady myself. I never neglect my business; but I've had a turn. I never thought I should come off the stage alive to-night."

"Why, the animals were quiet enough."

"Yes, as mild as lambs; but there's a man in front that's my evil genius. I never felt superstitious about anything else before—none of your ghosts or that kind of rot—but I've got my fancy about that man. He'd like to see me killed, and—he'll contrive to see it."

"Prusinowski," said the prompter. "I couldn't have believed it of you. I thought you was a man of sense."

But the prompter felt uncomfortable nevertheless. The human mind is especially open to uncomfortable sensations of this kind.

"Come, my boy," he exclaimed, "they're losing temper." This in allusion to the au-

dience, who were clamouring hoarsely for their favourite. "You'd better go on."

Prusinowski wiped his damp forehead, pulled himself together, as it were.

"All right," he said, and followed the prompter to the first entrance, and went through the narrow opening which that functionary made for him by pulling the heavy drop-scene a little on one side. He went on, made his accustomed mechanical bow, and crossed the stage, to disappear with renewed bowings on the opposite side. He was looking at the stalls all the time. The man was gone.

"Curse him!" muttered the lion-tamer. "If he'd given me time to change my clothes, I'd have been in front of the house in time to see him come out. I want to know who he is; I want to know what he means."

He dressed hurriedly, tearing off his close-fitting garb, and shuffling on the costume of every-day life anyhow, and then went back to the prompt entrance before the curtain had risen for the farce, and took another survey of the stalls, thinking it just possible that his evil genius had returned. But the man's place was empty. There were only the two dreary women, waiting meekly for one of the stalest inanest farces known to dramatic literature, and fanning themselves with their pocket handkerchiefs.

Herr Prusinowski went round to the public doors of the theatre, and hung about there, with a vague idea that the man might be lingering also. There was a large tavern just opposite the Queen's, where the audience were wont to refresh themselves—even the stalls and boxes—with brandy-and-soda. The Herr crossed the road by-and-by, went into the crowded bar, still looking for his man, and looking vainly.

While he was staring about him a friendly hand tapped him on the shoulder.

"It was well over eighty, my boy," said the voice of De la Zouche, upon whose youthful cheek still lingered some trace of the vermillion it had worn in the *Miller and his Men*, and whose upper lip was still stiff with the glue that had secured his horsehair moustache. "Nearer ninety, Tiddikins tells me, and he knows how to reckon up a house with any man in the profession. I wish you joy."

"Thank you, old fellow," replied the lion-tamer vaguely. "Yes, I think 's a good house."

"Think! There's no room for thinking. The perspiration was running down their faces in the pit all through the *Miller*. The house was like a furnace; and uncommonly thirsty that kind of thing makes a man. The pongelow you sent in was very acceptable. I thought Fitz Raymond would never have taken his head out of the pewter. He's awful coolly on his Grindoff—goes in a perisher, even when he can't hear himself speak for the noise in front. But I say, Prusi, how about the little supper you talked of?" This in an insinuating tone.

Prusinowski stared at him blankly for a moment, and then said carelessly:

"The supper—O, to be sure. I'd forgotten all about it. The noble countenance of De la Zouche fell, and his open brow was overshadowed by a sudden gloom. "But it's all right," continued the *bénédiction*. "It's ordered for twelve o'clock sharp. I ordered it on spec. I thought I should have a good house."

"Prusinowski, you are a gentleman!" exclaimed the actor. "You are one of Nature's nobility, sir, and daily contact with the brute creation has not degraded your lofty mind. At twelve sharp! I'll go home and put on a clean collar. I think you mentioned a goose?"

"Roast beef at the top, roast goose at the bottom," said the Herr absently.

"It is a bird which, on the supper-table, I appreciate above any of the feathered tribe," replied the walking gentleman. "Aur eau!"

He departed, wondering at the silence and gravity of a man who could draw an eighty-pound house.

Herr Prusinowski left the room and strolled listlessly along the street. It was not quite eleven. He had a clear hour before him, in which he could do what he pleased with himself. Under ordinary circumstances he might have gone home, to have a few words with his "little woman," and make some amendment in his toilet; but to-night he hardly cared to face his wife. She would see that something was wrong, and question him. The impression that man's appearance had made upon him was a subject he did not want to talk about, not even with her. He turned out of the busy thoroughfare in which the Queen's Theatre was situated presently into a broad, quiet, old-fashioned-looking street leading down to the quay—a street of broad square red-brick houses of the Georgian era, grim and respectable, with a shop only here and there, and then a superior class of shop. It was a very quiet street at this time of night. The summer moon was shining full upon the broad pavement and empty road, and there was just a glimpse of moonlit water at the end of the street where it opened on the quay.

There was only one shop open at this hour, a tobacco-shop at a corner. Prusinowski felt in his coat-pocket with a dim recollection of having allowed Mr. Fitz Raymond to empty

his tobacco-pouch that evening, and then strolled across the road towards the tobacco-shop. While he was in the act of crossing, a man came out of the shop and walked slowly away towards the quay. The lion-tamer recognized him at a glance and darted after him. It was the occupant of the stalls, a tall angular figure in the moonlight, with more or less the air of a gentleman.

It was an unjustifiable thing to do, of course; but Rudolph Prusinowski did not stop to consider the etiquette of the situation. He was resolved to accost this man. He would have done the same wherever he had met him.

"I beg your pardon," he said, at the stranger's shoulder, "I believe you were in front to-night in the stalls at the Queen's?"

The man turned and faced him. It was not a prepossessing countenance by any means, that long cadaverous visage, with the pale prominent eyes and lank sandy hair. The moonlight made it look more than usually cadaverous.

"Yes," he said, "I have been at the Queen's Theatre this evening. Dear me! you are the lion-tamer, I believe. This is really curious!"

He spoke in a formal deliberate way that was strangely irritating to Herr Prusinowski's nerves. These artists—even professors of the lowest arts—are apt to be sensitive.

"You have some kind of business with me, Herr Prusinowski?" the stranger said interrogatively, the lion-tamer standing for the moment staring at him like a newly-awakened sleep-walker, utterly lost and helpless.

"I—I wanted to ask you a question," he said abruptly, rousing himself with an effort. "This isn't the first time I've seen you. You took a private box at Manchester five years ago for my benefit."

"I did," replied the stranger. "I congratulate you on the possession of an excellent memory, Mr. Prusinowski. You had a narrow escape that night at Manchester, I imagine. One of your animals turned restive?"

"Yes," said the lion-tamer moodily, "that brute Robinson cut up rough. I lost my nerve, and he saw it. It was a narrow escape—a disappointment for you, wasn't it?"

"Excuse me, I hardly catch your meaning."

"You thought it was all over with me, didn't you? Come now, I want to know your motive for coming to see me that time—I want to know your motive for coming to see me to-night."

"Motive?" repeated the stranger. "I should suppose the motive must be sufficiently obvious. People generally attend that sort of entertainment in search of amusement."

"Other people perhaps—not you. I know what a man's face means, and I watched yours, as close—well, almost as close as you watched me. It wasn't the face of a man that came to be amused."

"You seem to have a peculiar way of looking at things, Mr. Prusinowski," replied the stranger, rubbing his bony close-shaven chin thoughtfully. "However, to be candid with you, I am somewhat interested in lion-taming. I am an idle man, you see. My means enable me to live pretty much as I please and where I please, and a man without occupation is in a manner compelled to create an interest for himself in things outside his own life. I am an amateur of wild-beast shows. There was a man called Green—you may have heard of him perhaps. I saw that man Green perform seventeen consecutive times. I was peculiarly interested in him."

"Yes," said Prusinowski. "I know all about Green. He was killed—killed by a tiger that he'd made a good deal of money out of."

"He was," answered the stranger; "I saw it."

Herr Prusinowski shuddered.

"I thought so," he said; "I thought as much. You've tasted blood."

"Upon my honour that is a very unpleasant way of putting it," replied the stranger. "I look at these things entirely from an artistic point of view. I have heard it asserted that men of your profession always do meet with some fatal accident sooner or later. Since you push me so closely, I am bound to admit that has formed one element of interest for me in this kind of performance. I can understand the delight of the Roman people, from the emperor down to the humblest freedman, in their gladiatorial shows. I have a somewhat classical turn of mind, perhaps, and am proud to acknowledge a taste which connects me with a classic age."

"I don't understand half that palaver," said Herr Prusinowski rudely; "but I trust in God I may never see your face again."

"Really, now! but why?"

"Because you are a cold-blooded scoundrel, and you would like to see me killed."

"My dear Mr. Prusinowski, that is a style of language which, if I were an ill-tempered man, I might resent. Happily I am not an ill-tempered man, so let it pass. You have no right to remark that I should like to see you killed by one of those brutes of yours. But if you are destined to meet your death in that manner, which it is to be hoped you are not, I freely admit that I should wish to be a spectator of the catastrophe. It would not make the smallest difference to you, and it would be highly interesting to me. Is this your way? No? In that case, good-night?"