

UNMASKING DARRO.

BY EWAN MACPHERSON.

When Buxton, the English correspondent, called that evening on Miss Blanche Kershaw, for the fifth time in four days, he found Darro sitting with her.

The two men were introduced, and almost the first thing Buxton said was, "I suppose you spell your name like the Derreus at home—the dauntless Derreus," they're called in my county—D-e-r-r-e-u."

It was dark, and the three were gathered on the porch of the Kershaw residence, where no artificial light served to reveal the breadth of the smile with which Miss Kershaw greeted this remark. Darro was a rather undersized man, with eyeglasses, extensive college antecedents and decided literary tastes, so far as his conversation might indicate.

"Certainly do not," he said in his habitual weary drawl. "Life is too short. I spell my name just as it is pronounced—D-a-r-r-o—and I am far from dauntless."

"By Jove, how odd!" said Buxton. "I was rather in hopes you might turn out to be a cousin of the Derreus of Derreuly Manor. I was born in that neighborhood myself; name's pronounced exactly like yours. And there's an old rhyme dating from goodness knows when:

"Brand nor halbert, lance nor arrow,
Checkesh charge of dauntless Derreu."

"When I'm quite sure I can't be of kin," Darro persisted. "I'm afraid of everything, from Mausers to mice."

The hostess laughed.

"At least you ought to be ashamed to make such a confession to a Britisher, Mr. Darro. Think of our national reputation."

"I do. I think it brutal. Physical courage, if it ever was a desirable quality, lost all its recommendations centuries ago."

"By Jove!" Buxton exclaimed. "You must pardon me if I seem a little unprepared for all this. You know I was a correspondent with your army at Santiago."

"That was where you met our forceful friend Wickley," said Darro.

"To whom I owe the delightful privilege of Miss Kershaw's acquaintance."

"You have every reason to be grateful to Wickley; but, for all that, I consider him an American of an objectionable type."

All of this Miss Kershaw seemed to be enjoying in a quiet way. Then they talked of other things till Darro left them.

"That's a most interesting double enigma," said Buxton, "an American and a Darro, you know."

"I hope you'll stay with us until you find a solution of him. Mr. Darro's ambition to be thought timid is notorious here."

"Isn't it a very singular ambition?"

"Very. That may be the solution of the enigma."

A pause, and then Buxton mustered up courage to ask, "Miss Kershaw, you couldn't—ah—feel interested in a man like that?"

"I don't know. Brave men are so common with us, and, you know, I rather like exotics."

Buxton hardly enjoyed the suspicion that this girl found him interesting as a rarity and that she valued the timid Darro proportionately higher as he was the rarer. Then, again, he felt chilled at the thought that she could possibly entertain a degenerate taste for cowards.

Buxton's sojourn in the place was uncertain. A wire from his chief in London might any day send him on to San Francisco or back to New York, so he made up his mind to ask Wickley about it that very night.

This was easy enough, for they occupied rooms in the same hotel, but hard on Wickley, who had just fallen asleep when the Englishman's knock caused him to dream that the place was on fire. The interview was unsatisfactory to both parties, Buxton only obtaining the assurance that Darro was a crank, with a forcible recommendation to go for further information either to the man himself or the father of all lies, while Wickley fell asleep again with the vague idea that the correspondent was preparing an article on "The American Coward."

So it came about that Darro, on his way to his uncle's law office, was hailed by Wickley.

"Say, Darro, you want to let up on that timidity poppycock of yours. All very well to give home folks that old song, but don't try it on an English newspaper correspondent."

"I suppose you mean Buxton. Has he already told you of our conversation last night?"

"Told me! He may have told it to all the English newspapers by this time. He woke me up at midnight to ask me if it were true."

For a moment Darro looked pale enough for his favorite part.

"Did he tell you where we met?"

"I suppose it was at Blanche Kershaw's. He seems smitten in that quarter, and I knew he was going there last night."

Darro managed to recover his meek pose. "You know, Wickley, I don't think much of physical courage."

"All right, then. I only hope Buxton will mention your name in his story. We don't want the whole city to get that sort of reputation."

Darro was disturbed. His uncle noticed it when he entered the office and demanded the cause.

"There's an Englishman here!"

Before he could finish the door of the outer office opened, and Buxton, fresh and cheerful, entered. Darro was with him in a moment, showing a most abnormal eagerness for the meeting.

"Oh, here you are!" said Buxton. "You'll pardon my coming here during business hours, won't you? I've got to start for California this evening—wire from London just reached me—but before I go I want you to tell me (we English newspaper men like to be accurate and full) where you were during the Spanish war."

"I was in the law school of a western university when the war began," said Darro.

"Michigan, eh? Thanks. Enlisted in the Michigan volunteers under the name of Dobbs. Remember the day you sneaked out from under cover and brought in that wounded boy when the sharpshooters were swarming in the mango trees?"

Judge Mason was by this time an attentive listener to the conversation. The office boy also listened and gaped.

"My name is Darro, Mr. Buxton," said the pattern of peacefulness, struggling with himself.

"But it used to be Dobbs in 1898, just for a few weeks. It will make an awfully pretty story for my paper. Odd I didn't begin to think of the resemblance until!"

"You're not going to put my name in the paper?"

"Story won't be any good without it. 'Brand nor halbert'!"

Before the Englishman could repeat any more of the ancient rhyme Darro had him by the throat. It might have ended in strangulation had not the other interfered.

"Oh, the whole thing is clear now beyond the shadow of a doubt," said Buxton when he was saying goodbye to Blanche Kershaw that afternoon. "First I began to think of the likeness last night lying awake. When I saw him this morning, it was palpable. Then when he flew at my throat—doesn't weigh as much as I by thirty pounds—why, that settled it."

"For you, I dare say," said Blanche. "For me there was nothing to settle." "You never believed all that talk of his?"

"Of course not. Still I, all of us, ought to be very grateful to you for unmasking him."

"And what do I get?" the Englishman asked.

"My sincere thanks. Sorry I have nothing better to offer."

"The exposed impostor gets the higher reward? Is that justice?"

"I don't know. Bon voyage!"

Something About Faith Cures

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"What shall I do, what shall I do?" he moaned.

"You might commit suicide heroically," she suggested coldly.

"But that would be murder," he exclaimed horrified.

"I think not," she said assuringly. "Any jury in the country would call it justifiable homicide without leaving the box."—Exchange.

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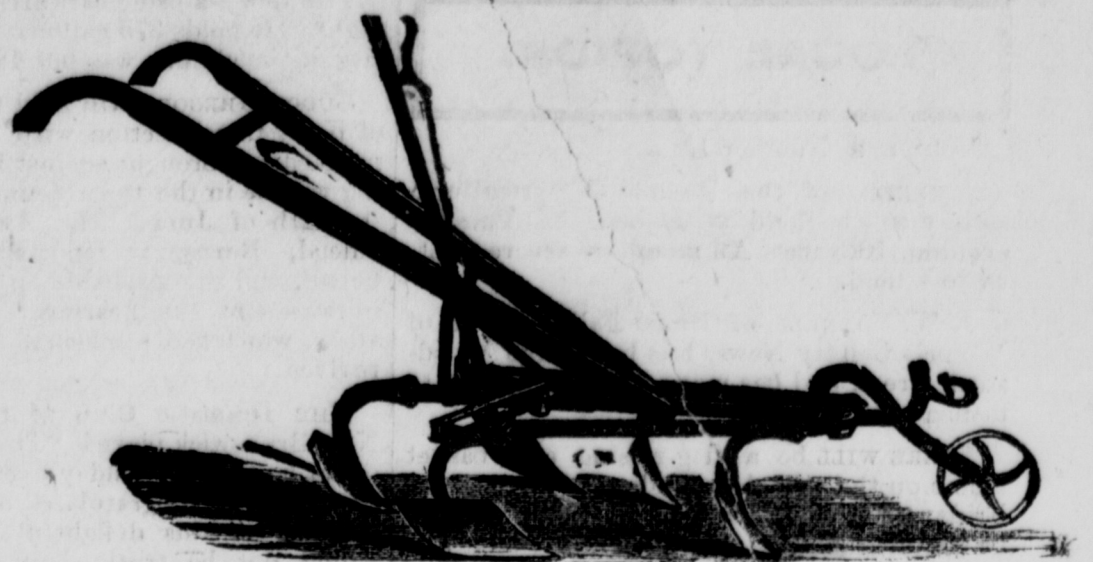
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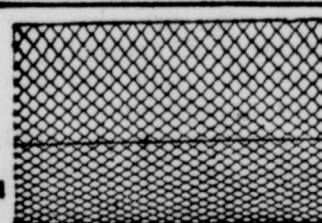
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