

PICTURES AND STORIES OF THE THEATRE

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TANGO-ING TO FORTUNE
The Story of Mr. & Mrs. Vernon Castle



TANGOING TO FORTUNE

The remarkable story
of the success of Mr.
and Mrs. Vernon Castle

By ADA PATTERSON

the reasons therefor, agrees with them. She is a philosopher at twenty, a laughing philosopher with a mind that shoots as straight at a subject as an expert marksman at a target.

She lay in a narrow white bed in a



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THOSE tire-some people who always seek the reason for everything, believe that Mrs. Vernon Castle's dancing conquest of Paris, New York and Chicago is a triumph of naturalness. And Mrs. Vernon Castle, who herself seems to be an investigator of things as they are and

square white room with the air and sunshine of a warm early winter afternoon pouring over her through a wide open window of a Harlem hospital when we met to talk about husbands, families, success, health, dancing and Rooseveltism. Seriously ill? Not at all. It was a Friday and she had lain there since Tuesday. On the following

Tuesday she was to dance at a fashionable tea in Chicago. But one more day of rest remained for her and she was enjoying it as a girl does her coming-out party.

She looked exuberantly happy and riotously well. There was a fine pink glow in her cheeks and her long, narrow, luminous eyes laughed with the joy of living and the vigor of healthy youth. She wasn't ill, but, being of a family of physicians,—her father, her uncle and an aunt represent the medical fraternity in the immediate domestic circle,—she had learned to husband her strength. The most addle-headed spend-thrift on earth, she believes, is he who wastes his strength.

She looked very chic in a pink and white negligée that was more than half lace, a dainty, diaphanous bit that said quite audibly "*Paris? Oui! Oui! Très Jolie!*" and her brown hair bound by a tight lace cap, adorned with a rosebud, also ejaculating "*Paris!*" But the face looking from this framework was not at all French, not anything, in fact, save American at its best. The straight, strong mouth betokened "character," which is our crisp way of saying "strength of character."

"Is this a florist shop?" I inquired as a nurse convoyed me into the room where tall roses and modest violets fought fragrantly for the favor of the smiling young creature whose bed they surrounded.

"It is a room that is full of reminders of friendship," she said, pushing "Wallops" forward for an introduction. "Wallops" was a tiny, shaggy brown terrier, generically forbidden to the hospital, but specifically smuggled in in Mr. Castle's greatcoat pocket that morning.

"I think they liked us in Paris because we were married and devoted to each other," she said, when I congratulated her on the success of herself and her husband in the French capital. "They're not used to that sort of thing over there. I suppose it appealed to their sense of romance. I have been told, too, that the simplicity of my dress appealed to them. It was a plain little white frock and I wore a little

Dutch bonnet. I chose that costume because it was becoming and didn't cost much. And it was clean. On the stage you may wear a frock that is a trifle soiled, but not in a cabaret. You are too close to your audience. And I think they liked our naturalness. We never exaggerated.

"I had danced ever since I could remember and my husband thought I could dance well. He had seen me dance at benefits. After we were married I joined him on tour with 'The Henpecks.' He was playing an eccentric comedian, the man who has a crazy barber who sets his hair on fire, you remember. They gave me the part of the girl who comes into the barber shop and wants her dog shaved. We wanted to introduce a dance, but Mr. Lew Fields didn't care about it. It has been gratifying that Paris and New York and Chicago have cared for our dancing. It showed us that even great men make mistakes in judgment."

Vernon Castle's wife smiled happily, without that sediment of resentment I have seen many times when like experiences were being recounted.

"We stayed with 'The Henpecks' until the middle of the following season and then we went to Paris to join a *révue*. The *révue* failed and we were anxious about funds. We didn't want anyone here to know that we had been with something that failed. We decided to try dancing in one of the *cafés*. We applied at the *Café de Paris* and the proprietor said we might try. He warned me not to go to any expense about costumes because he wasn't at all sure his patrons would like us. We weren't sure ourselves.

"We began with the one-step. Then we danced 'The Girl from Havana,' a little dance you have seen in 'The Sunshine Girl.' The intimation that they liked us came from a Russian, who sent us a hundred-dollar bill with the request that we dance that first dance again—the one-step. We were delighted. A hundred dollars looked big to us then. At the end of the evening the proprietor wanted to make a contract with us for a year. I told my husband to wait and think it over."



MRS. CASTLE WITH ONE OF
HER IMPORTED GRIFFONS,
"CASEY JONES"

"We came home after that and then danced for the season in 'The Sunshine Girl.' We danced at the Café Martin. Then we went back to Paris and filled engagements. Last week we came back on the *Imperator* and tomorrow we start for Chicago to dance at Rector's for

"From which I conclude you have a business head."

"So I'm told. Vernon has no business instinct. He does many things of which I don't approve. I don't like to say 'I told you so,' but I do remind him that I had made a suggestion along a different line."

She punctuated her remarks with a laugh and a long caressing stroke of Wallops' shaggy brown back.

"We decided after a week's reflection, and twice-a-day appearances at the Café de Paris, that we wouldn't sign a long contract, but that we would go on dancing for several months. We danced there for four months. We had three proofs of popularity. One was that, instead of the hundred and twenty-five dollars a week we together had earned in 'The Henpecks,' we were now earning two thousand a week. That was the most gratifying proof. The facts that everyone was doing what they called the 'Castle Walk,' and that the little lace caps from Rotterdam, which I always wear when I dance because they keep the hair in order, were being worn everywhere, were pleasant sops to our vanity.



Photograph by Hall, New York

THEY SPEND THEIR HOLIDAYS DANCING

three weeks. The first of the year we will be in a play Mr. Dillingham is producing. We don't know the name."

The nurse came in to ask if a basket of peaches had arrived. It hadn't but was expected. Mrs. Castle resumed:

"It all began with my being simply crazy about Bessie McCoy and by imitating her Yama Yama girl and other dances. She has retired now, and I suppose we won't see her again, but I shall always remember her as the most inspiring, original and individual of dancers. I Bessie McCoyed my family nearly mad, and, like all families, they thought I was a little better than the original."

She sent a happy, girlish smile speeding in the direction of New Rochelle. I hope it arrived there; 'twould have been a radiant visitor.

"My father in particular used to say to his friends who admired Miss McCoy, 'You ought to see my little girl; she's so much better than Bessie McCoy that you wouldn't make any comparison after you'd seen her.'"

She laughed, as if Dad were a foolish boy of fourteen.

"I appeared first at a benefit at New Rochelle when I was six years old. I have the little white tarleton dress I wore. It is packed away in the attic. After that I always appeared at the benefits, and always danced. Mr. Castle spent a summer at New Rochelle. I was quite excited when I found there was a real actor living near us. I had several friends who lived at the same boarding house as he and one of them finally introduced us while we were swimming in the Sound.

"We met often after that. My family didn't make the usual objections. My mother liked Vernon from the first. She couldn't help liking him. He is a sweet boy—not at all like an actor. He is simple and charmingly unaffected.

"We were married very quietly at home a year later. We went abroad at once. Mr. Castle took me to see at least eighteen English relatives who couldn't understand me because I spoke American. We came back and joined 'The Henpecks.' All that while, we hadn't danced a step together. My husband

always said I was a good dancer. He had seen me at benefits and he had watched me taking lessons from the teacher who gave me dancing lessons at New Rochelle. But he was interested in acting, and neither of us thought of dancing together until we joined 'The Henpecks;' and then Mr. Fields intervened. In Paris we thought there was no harm in trying. No one there knew us, and nobody would know if we failed."

There is no young couple in the United States for whom greater contrast exists between the then and now. A tall young man who walked with a curiously light step and gave the impression of being weightless had passed me on the stairs.

"It was Mr. Castle," said his wife. "He doesn't look as he does on the stage, does he? My friends used to pity me when he was made up so freakishly for 'The Henpecks.' The girls used to say, 'How could you ever marry such a dreadful looking man?' He was hurrying when you saw him, you say? I have no doubt he was giving a lesson."

She didn't tell me what is common knowledge in New York—that every minute is a dollar to Vernon Castle. Since Anthony Drexel engaged him to dance for his party dinner at the Ritz in Paris, the long, lithe young Englishman and his wife have been the fashion among millionaires. Society is Castle-mad, and the most welcome compliment that can be paid any pair whirling through a ballroom is to say: "You are like the Castles." The young man is engaged all day in giving lessons. Twenty dollars for a lesson of twenty minutes means a dollar a minute. There are sixty minutes in an hour, and if a young man be very energetic the working day can be prolonged into many minutes, and each day be the equivalent of an astonishing number of dollars.

That is the reason that on the tip of every tongue wagging with Broadway topics rolls, "The Castles are getting rich. Wonder what they are going to do with their money?" Mrs. Castle anticipated that question:

"I save my money," she explained with entire frankness. "My husband doesn't. When we travel we go with a retinue of servants,"—this deprecatingly, not boastfully,—"Vernon's man, my French maid, and the chauffeur. We keep a couple of cars. My husband insists on that."

The practical mind of the American girl follows far different directions than those of most dancers. Her half share of the two thousand a week is being saved for a comfortable



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she was born. No visions of dancing for "crowned heads" dazzle her clear eyes at twenty. What, think you, is the ambition of the girl whom they toast in Paris as "the bewitching Americanine?" To leave off dancing when she is twenty-five. To have a permanent home at New Rochelle. To have a good-sized family. For the good-sized family she falls below the Rooseveltian standard. Three is a good number—quite enough.

The slim, straight, lovely girl, who is indubitably the rage of Paris, wants to live in a simple home in a simple way. How rare an ambition, especially in America! She would have delighted the troubled heart

house at home, which is New Rochelle. She wants to live in the small town a half hour from New York, where



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MRS.
CASTLE
AND HER
PRIZE ENG-
LISH BULLDOG





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of the late David Graham Phillips, the prophet-novelist, who warned us that the country is going on the rocks because of the bad steering of its women.

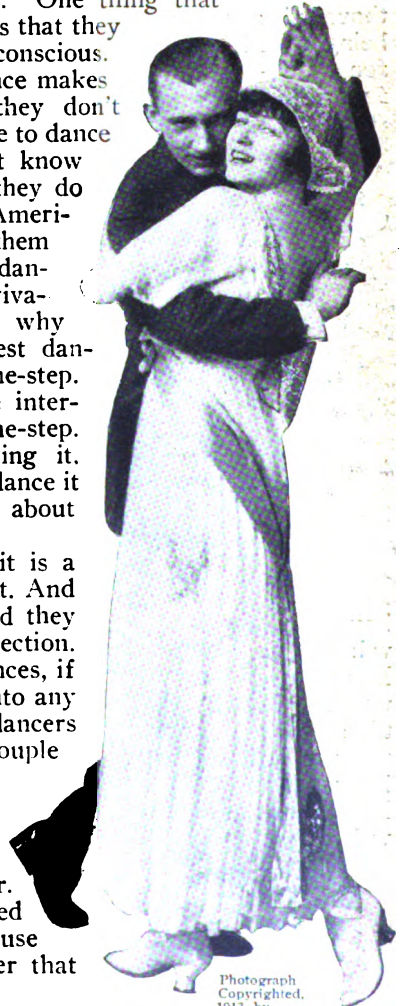
She sprang from good deep-rooted, fine-flowering American stock. Her father, Dr. H. T. Foote, of New Rochelle, is a successful practitioner. Liking out-of-door life and knowing its inestimable value, he practically brought up his little girl on his yacht, cruising about Long Island Sound. A dive from its deck for a morning swim was an indispensable part of her day. Brimming with the joy of life, she expressed it in dance. She danced as naturally as birds sing. 'Twas this naïveté, antipodal to her own exotic, artificial type, that charmed all Paris.

"Americans are excellent dancers," she said. "One thing that makes them so is that they are not self-conscious. When a new dance makes its appearance, they don't sit back and refuse to dance because they don't know it. They try, and they do something. The American spirit helps them to become good dancers. They are vivacious. That is why they are the best dancers of the one-step. The French are interested in the one-step. They are learning it, but they do not dance it

as well as Americans because they are slower about everything.

"They dance the tango beautifully because it is a slow dance and they can take their time about it. And there are a great many Argentines in Paris and they have introduced the dance and taught it to perfection. I think the tango is the most beautiful of all dances, if it is danced well. But it seldom is. If you go into any room full of dancers, whether there are twenty dancers or a hundred, you will only see about one couple dancing the tango well.

"The dancing of the present is beautiful if beautifully done. It is artistic if artistically done. It is moral if morally done. The immorality of any dance is in the thoughts of the dancer. I understand that the tango as it was first danced in South America was vulgar. But that was because it was vulgarly done. It was the turkey trotter that made the turkey trot vulgar.



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Moffett Studio, Chicago

"Anybody can do a 'rag.' I expect the interest in it will last for several years, for dancing is much better than many other things people do for amusement. It is more healthful than cards, for instance, and far better for one than eating, as many do, for mere amusement.

"But the pendulum is sure to swing back, and when it does it will be toward classical dancing. By that time I will be a contented matron, living in New Rochelle, and Vernon will be a real actor. Meanwhile, we'll earn money while enjoying ourselves. We both love dancing, so it never seems work to us."

"What dancers do you admire?"

"The Russians with Nijinsky, whom I saw in London, were wonderful. As I said, Bessie McCoy has always been, will always be, my idol."

"And what constitutes a dancer?"

"First of all, the dancing sense," she replied with readiness. "We can tell as soon as anyone moves about whether he or she can learn to dance. The dancing sense is not easily explained, but it is easily perceived. The man or woman with it has a sense of time and rhythm. He or she has the power of taking the measure of a room and adapting the movements to it. The non-dancer acts as if he doesn't know his way about a room. The dancer instinctively knows it."

"What of the physical equipment?"

"A girl shouldn't be either too short or too tall. Five feet four inches is a good height. I am five feet seven and three-quarters, so I am too tall. It is easier for the short person to dance well, because there isn't so much height to control, but if a tall person is graceful, the grace shows more. You know what I mean. It is the same about dressing. A dancer's weight should not be more than a jockey's hundred and two pounds. Mine is a hundred and sixteen, but I am very tall. They tell me I don't look so on the stage, but that is because my husband is so very tall. Five feet, four, and about one hundred pounds are a good preparation for a dancing career if one have the dancing sense. But there is no use of a girl trying to become a dancer if she isn't at least fairly good looking."

In Paris they give another name to Vernon Castle's wife when they pledge her in the sparkling waters of their own country. "To the pretty Puritan," say they with glasses raised.

That was easily comprehended, when we talked of the manner of life and the never dying incense to the tiny god in the flirtatious capital.

"They all knew we were married and happily married. Perhaps that is one reason why I wasn't annoyed by unwelcome attentions. When we had finished dancing and had gone to a table in the café, it was understood that the persons who joined us were our friends, and that no one else was welcome. That was soon understood. We acquired the reputation of being cold."

She laughed.

"Besides, what French count or Russian archduke wants to talk to a pretty woman who talks all the while of her husband?" That, it is evident, is Mrs. Castle's favorite theme. She will tell you that his name is Vernon Castle Blythe, that he dropped the surname, which is the same as that of the Barrymores, because, shorn of it, the remaining fraction of his name was better adapted to stage purposes. He is a brother-in-law of George Grossmith and the only actor who ever successfully played George Grossmith's parts in this country. Many were called, but her husband alone was chosen. In this country he was first seen in "The Girl Behind the Counter," and Mrs. Castle was deeply interested in him before she knew him because he was "an actor," and afterwards because he was so unlike one. Their ideas are one in dancing, and she will repeat his words: "The one-step is setting the dance pace now. It has the basis of the Frisco, the various trots, and, in fact, all the ragtime dances. The tango, being of Spanish-American origin, calls for the wild Argentine tang to the music, but that is negligible detail, like the wearing of the Spanish sash and hat. The tango goes to syncopation or ragtime, just as well as the other modern dances do. The maxixe is beautiful."

She will tell you that instead of being a bore to travel with a theatrical company, she has found it great fun. One

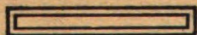
night stands were revelations and not unpleasant ones.

Mrs. Castle was married at seventeen and is heartily glad of it. "I had never been out of New York before, except to go to Europe," she said.

My final question: "Did Mr. Castle fall in love with your dancing?" brought the answer: "No,"—thoughtfully,— "not with my dancing." The fine head rose higher on its pillow and the young dancer's face was gravely happy: "I think he loved just me."

That Mr. Castle was not alone in this was demonstrated by the welcome given to the Castles when they appeared for a three weeks' dancing engagement at Rector's in Chicago early in the winter. On the first night of their appearance every performer of note who happened to be in Chicago joined the throng at Rector's. After the Castles had finished their first dance Raymond Hitchcock

walked over to say "Howdy-do." The moment the crowd noticed him they began yelling "Speech." He finally responded by singing "All Dressed Up and No Place to Go." The moment he finished some one yelled "Hopper," and DeWolf Hopper acknowledged the applause. The crowd, however, was so insistent on "Casey" that finally he gave it. Next came Chauncey Olcott, who sang "My Wild Irish Rose." Then Willie Howard of the Howard Brothers, who were playing in "The Passing Show," sang a couple of character parodies. Irene Franklin gave one of her songs with her husband, Bert Green, playing the piano accompaniment; Lelia McIntyre sang "Dr. Tinkle Tinker of Old Toy Town;" and Chauncey Olcott borrowed the orchestra leader's violin and took it to Fritz Kreisler, who responded by playing a short aria of his own composition.



A MAN IN A MILLION

"I WAS detained in a Western town for a night," said George Cohan, chatting one evening at the Lambs' Club, "and thought I would run in the only theatre the town afforded and see the show. It happened to be a play and it was certainly a very bad one. When the curtain fell on the first act, sounds of marked disapprobation were heard from all parts of the house. One man alone sat perfectly quiet and he happened to be sitting directly in front of me.

"At the close of the second act there was a perfect tornado of hisses. Still the man sat unmoved. Finally, I decided to find out his opinion of the play. I leaned over to him and said:

"'Pardon me, sir, but are you not disgusted with this miserable play?'

"'I am, indeed,' he replied heartily.

"'Then how is it,' I asked, 'that you don't signify your displeasure like the rest of us?'

"'Well, you see, it's this way with me,' he explained. 'I came in on a free ticket, and as I am getting something for nothing I do not think I am justified in expressing my disgust; but I'll tell you what I'll do: if this confounded play gets any worse I am going out to the box-office and buy a ticket, and then I can come back and hiss like the rest of you.'"