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Southernizing Jimmie

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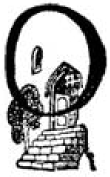LIO in one” was the way Jimmy McClellan’s scene plots read during his first year on the big time. He was a novice in the vaudeville game; but he had ability, and, what is more, he had faith in his ability. As vaudeville-house managers invariably stated in their weekly reports to the booking offices, Jimmy was a “hard worker,” and his material was always new.

Jimmy got by in No. 2 position, and finally worked his way down on the bills.

A house press-agent in Terre Haute billed him in the Sunday newspaper “flash” as the “Komedy King.” Analytical readers would have noticed that about every third Sunday a “Komedy King” was about to ascend his throne at the Lyric,

But Jimmy forthwith annexed the title for his very own, and added it to his billing. Later he looked up a live agent, got booked solid over the big time at a fifty-dollar raise in salary, and at the end of the season bought himself a showy special drop.

Fate and Flossie Van Hutton and Captain Irwin were all kind to Jimmy on the day that he opened at the Castle in New York.

Flossie, the best-dressed woman on the vaudeville stage, just didn’t seem to get over. Her costume-trunks had not arrived from Indianapolis, and she was just an ordinary, two-a-day little comedienne in street clothes. Captain Irwin’s act didn’t appear the first day, following some trouble with the union stage-hands about setting up the tank. All this is what Fate had arranged. Jimmy did the rest.

Just to show that he had “pep” to spare, he opened by cart-wheeling across the stage.

Then, placing his compactly shod foot against the lower part of the proscenium arch, he caromed almost to center stage. He woke up the audience—and “got a hand.” And then Jimmy got right down to it.

He worked harder than ever.

He got off *ad-lib* remarks that brought back the chuckles. He proved a “riot” with the audience, and smelted the lead out of the heart of a sorely tried manager, who had him held over for another week.

Jimmy was nothing if not aggressive.

He made friends with the press-agent. He called on the vaudeville critics. He photographed the house “front” the second week, and got out three-color cards representing a three-sheet, showing himself head-lined above half a score of the nation’s premier entertainers.

And, of course, it wasn’t long before Jimmy woke up as a permanent head-liner.

Spats and canary-colored gloves and a stick came next. Jimmy found that they made an

impression on managers when he visited them after the Monday matinees.

And he never failed to visit them. Unknown to them, he influenced their reports. If they drank, he bought them drinks. If they didn't, he discussed show business with them.

He put his press-book at the disposal of the press men, and made personal trips to the newspaper offices. He meant to retain his hold on head-line honors, and he did retain it.

In fact, he strengthened his grip.

Jimmy ate, drank, and slept vaudeville—and he "knocked" about everything else. He detested what he sarcastically called "the drahma." Civil-War plays aroused his particular ire.

"This Southern stuff is all bunk," said Jimmy to his friend, Joe Aladden, who had waited at Jimmy's dressing-room door to drag him to the last act of "The Warringtons of Kentucky," a cleverly written play, with its hero a young Union officer and its heroine a lisping Southern damsel.

"I tell you, Joe, the war's been over for half a century. Don't tell me about no ramblin' Southern mansions, with jasmine or magnolias twinin' about the doorway. I've played Atlanta an' Birmingham an' Louisville, an' I tell you they're real towns, same as up here. An' don't talk to me about no Southern beauties. When I was hidin' away up in the tanks once I split a week in Watertown, an', believe me, them North-country dames have got it all over these simperin', old-maidish, press-agented Southern beauties. Don't argue with me, Joe. I know."

Wadsor Tolliver, of the Four Real Dixie Boys, might have passed a more pleasant week at the Grand if he hadn't met Jimmy Monday afternoon, and mentioned that his folks were slave-owners before the war.

Jimmy forthwith proceeded to make a monkey out of the said Wadsor Tolliver, of the Four Real Dixie Boys.

"Sure, I know," he said, grinning at Charlie Shaw, the property man. "You never did no work 'cept order the niggahs round the plantation. Always had a colored 'uncle' mixin' juleps for you. I read a story like that once. Old stuff, son."

And the impoverished Southern scion never lounged around the stage-manager's office after that.

And then came the alchemy of love. Cordelia Settle struck the big time. She was right from the heart of Kentucky, and her looks, bearing, manners, speech, and general ensemble were sufficient justification for anything that had ever been written about Southern beauties.

Jimmy watched her from the wings, down in "one" on Monday afternoon, and fairly ate her up with his eyes. Every sway of her lissom body, every rustle of her gown, every word of her songs, was a revelation to him.

"She's got class," grudgingly admitted Flora La Rue of the La Rue Sisters.

"Got it?" returned Jimmy in a scandalized tone. "Why, woman, that gal *is* class!"

"G'wan, take another; it's comin' to you," advised Jimmy, as Miss Settle took a fourth legitimate bow and smilingly closed. "Take it, girly; you're stoppin' the show."

"I'm sure I never met you, sir," said Cordelia, eying him very frigidly and beckoning her maid to follow her to her dressing-room.

Jimmy afterward remembered that she never even used the word "fresh." She had just glided over toward her dressing-room, as if the incident had been closed forever—or, in fact, as if it had never happened.

Jimmy was floored.

He had brazened out his act when college boys, following a big football game, had taken possession of the theater and fairly spoiled the show for others. He had made sarcastic remarks to "fresh guys" in the first few rows.

He had announced things from the stage when discouraging remarks such as "Is that so?" and "Who told ye?" as well as various queer

noises had come from the gallery. He had got off old jokes when he knew they were dead. He had opened and closed shows when nearly everybody was either talking in or walking out of the theater.

And he had never lost his nerve or the opportunity for a come-back to man, woman, or child. But this time he was floored. He colored through his grease-paint, and said nothing.

The La Rue Sisters, whose names were not La Rue and who were not sisters, "kidded" him, but he replied nary a word. If a sand-bag had fallen on him from the fly-gallery he could not have been silenced more effectively.

The McClellan pep was absent from the show that day. Cordelia Settle had ran away with the honors, just as Jimmy himself had done three years before, at the Castle.

Cordelia Settle got No. 1 dressing-room at Leed's Boston Theater the following week, and Jimmy was poked up-stairs. She was featured in the daily advertisements, but Jimmy never fought.

He saw her name interpolated into such old press stories as "Actress Runs Mint-Farm in Florida," "Southern Beauty Mixes Her Own Juleps," and similar stuff, when his own press-book was just bursting with good feature dope.

He had actually been in a famous wreck on a railroad noted for its wrecks less than two weeks previous. He was a brother of a famous featherweight, which would have drawn at least a column from a sporting editor.

He owned fourteen pairs of spats—all of which could have been worked into a story. But he said nothing. What he did do was to carefully wash off his make-up, after the Monday matinee, and with determined mien make his way to the manager's office.

"I'd like to meet Miss Settle," he announced, after the preliminary greetings had been exchanged.

Joe Marx, the manager, grinned. "You troupers get me," he sighed. "Trying to make the single woman, and gettin' some one from the front of the house to make it good. You sure are funny."

Jimmy didn't see the humor of it. "She's different," he explained. "I'd just like to have you give me a regular knockdown. She wouldn't stand for no informal stuff. She's from the South, you know."

The treasurer grinned. "Them Southerners are great on formality. One o' the Four Dixie Boys knocked a fellow down just for askin' him if his people were slave-owners before the war."

But Jimmy hadn't heard the last of the information. He was following Joe Marx through the darkened auditorium, *en route* to backstage regions.

Miss Settle, trimly attired for the street, was just banging her door shut as Jimmy and his cicerone came down the narrow little hallway. She smiled pleasantly at Marx, whom she had met that morning. Jimmy stood back in anticipation. It was the first time he had ever stood back in anything.

He mumbled an old formula as Marx introduced him, and even thought he must look awkward, standing stiffly in the little hallway, with his hat in his hand.

Miss Settle graciously opened her dressing-room door, and then followed a pleasant little chat, with Miss Settle girlishly dangling her satin-shod feet from a high costume trunk.

Jimmy was seated opposite, where he was anxiously aware that the strong tungstens which framed the make-up mirror would mercilessly seek out the sparse spot near the crown of his red head. Marx draped himself against the wall.

Miss Settle was of a species new to Jimmy.

Judging from her conversation she had never been a "riot" in Pittsburgh; she had not stopped the show in Cleveland, nor had she been pestered by reporters in Detroit. She spoke with dignity, and featured herself but little.

"Are you traveling alone?" inquired Jimmy.

"Yes," replied Cordelia sweetly. No boast

that she could take care of herself. No expression of fear—just a matter-of-fact affirmative.

"May I have the honor of taking you to dinner?" asked Jimmy, rather mechanically. "You and I and Mr. Marx could make up a nice little party."

"I shall be delighted," answered Miss Settle.

And over the repast the dates ahead were compared and found to be synonymous for the following four weeks.

It has been said that opposites attract each other. At any rate, such was the case with James Thomas McClellan, formerly of Third Avenue, and Miss Cordelia Settle, formerly of Kentucky.

Jimmy had wanted to go into vaudeville and found it a pretty tough job to get there—but he had done it. Now he wanted Cordelia Settle, and—but we shall see.

As for Cordelia, she found much that was novel about Jimmy.

His slang was quaint. There was something direct and clean-cut about him. She felt that he had that wonderful quality—nerve.

And Cordelia was of a strain of women who admired a brave man more than anything else on earth. That he might not be her social equal she had reason to believe. But a season on the big time had broadened her views.

The writers of humorous columns in theatrical papers found a mine of material in the announcement one morning that James McClellan and Cordelia Settle were to play the leads in a dramatic sketch which was to be tried out in a New Jersey city.

Jimmy McClellan in a dramatic sketch—it was a joke.

But strange things happen. The sketch "got over." It had come from the clever pen of vaudeville's greatest sketch writer, and within a few weeks was one of the strong spots of the bills on which it appeared. Before the end of the season it was a top-liner.

So when some time later it was announced that Brittingham, the producer, was recruiting a cast for a new play, and that "James McClellan and Cordelia Settle (in private life Mrs. McClellan) will have prominent roles, it is understood," the newspaper wits made but little comment.

True, Joe Madden, of Madden & Sykes, bemoaned the fact that Jimmy had "flopped to the legit," and could find only one explanation for it.

"It gets me," he said to Sally Shapiro, singing comedienne. "It must ha' been the Jane, all right."

"Whaddaye mean Jane?" asked the sprightly little Sally. "You let Jimmy hear you call her a Jane. He'd have Sarah Heartburn waiting on her. She's some queen."

It was several months later when Sally and Joe Madden found their names on the same stage-manager's list in St. Louis.

Madden & Sykes closed their act with speed and dash, and got one solitary curtain call.

"Go out an' fight 'em, Sally," advised Joe in the wings. "This town is the coldest I've ever played."

Sally went out and fought them—and was defeated. Joe met her in the stage-manager's office with a "Can you beat it?" expression.

"Yes, some town this," smiled Sally, a trifle ruefully. "St. Louis and Utica, New York. There's two towns for you. It's a death-watch, I tell you. They come in to see the show die."

"A bunch o' hicks," agreed Joe. "They all sit on their hands. There's one great scout in this town that I know, though," he continued. "A guy that really put me in the show business. Frank Carter's his name, an' he runs the big house over here. Some big new show on. We've got time to see him an' catch the last act over there. Are ye on?"

"I'll do anything once," said Sally.

Carter was glad to see Joe and his clever little companion. In fact, he was feeling unusually good. He had packed them in to see

"The Final Appeal," until the firemen had stopped him.

"They're eating it up," he said to Joe. "We were sold out by seven o'clock. If this was in the old days we'd have them standing four deep in the back of the house, and the S. R. O. sign 'u'd be fluttering in the breeze. Well, we did pretty close to three thousand to-night, and we don't want the earth. Let's get this last act."

Joe snatched a program, and he and Sally followed the manager down into the owner's box.

The final act was on. The setting was an old colonial mansion, and the backings showed a profusion of bright flowers and shrubbery. The time was evidently 1865, for an orderly tripped across the stage and spoke the line:

"Peace has been declared, gentlemen. Let us rebuild our beloved Southland, now billowed with the graves of our Southern heroes. Heaven grant that—"

Joe failed to hear the final words of the orderly. He was gazing with a rather puzzled expression at a young man in center stage wearing Confederate gray and the bars of a captain on his shoulder-straps.

The young captain walked erectly-down left, and bowed his head.

"We've lost, suh," he said to an old, white-mustached general. "Yet not with dishonor, suh. May I make bold, suh, to ask the hand of yo' daughter. Virginia, in marriage?"

"Take her, my lad," answered the general. "No bluer blood runs in all the Southland than runs in her veins. A thoroughbred, suh."

The blue-blooded Virginia raised her head and rushed into the outstretched arms of the young captain.

"We have not lost in love, my dear," he comforted. "I have won a treasure sweet as the magnolias of my beloved State." He said more, but Joe did not hear him.

He was fluttering the leaves of his program. He spoiled the scene with a gasp, and lay almost exhausted as the curtain fell to a fusillade of applause.

"Sally, Sally!" bellowed Joe. "Look! Do ye get it? That young Southern girl was Cordelia Settle, an' the captain was Jimmy. Good night an' good luck!"

"Can ye beat it?" asked Sally.