Along The Way

The Merry Widow

By REV. DANIEL A. LORD, S.J.

I notice that they have revived The Merry Widow in New York—and with more than a mild measure of applause.

Draw up a chair and let's reminisce.

Remember way back when—in the exciting middle of the first decade of this century—The Merry Widow first happily smote our ears with its lovely music? We sang The Merry Widow Waltz as an accompaniment for everything. Tad (T. A. Donahue, the cartoonist), ran a series of pictures in which all the characters set their dialogue to the first bars of that waltz. A mother called her children to dinner by singing to the opening of the waltz:

"Dinner's ready,
"Fit for Teddy
"Roo-se-velt."

Merry Widow hats hit the streets and the eyes of male pedestrians—probably the largest hats ever worn on a feminine head. Topically, I wrote a verse about the chap who took his girl out in a canoe which capsized. Who cared? They rowed home in her Merry Widow hat.

Artistic soul that he was, Franz Lehar forgot a little thing like international copyright. So his music appeared in America under the impress of a half dozen publishers—and Lehar got only what, out of their generous hearts (that's what's known as heavy irony), the music publishers gave him. And the productions of his operetta in America were royalty-free. The Merry Widow should have made him rich. It made him merely sad and—for the future—copyright-careful.

The Merry Widow Waltz itself was danced by all of us. Those were the dear guileless days before dances were either geared to the cultus of St. Vitus or limited to the blooting paper floors allowed by the night club owners. And though the original waltz was danced by Danilo and his heroine slowly and languidly, we danced it by romping all over a dance floor. But then, in those ancient days, if you didn't wilt your collar and leave your partner in a state of physical collapse, you weren't a good dancer.

How little attention we paid to the way the Widow had grown rich! She had married a millionaire oil operator in a Balkan country called—I believe—Ruritania. (We loved those fake Balkan countries in those days; remember Zenda and Hentzau?). It never occurred to us in those peaceful years that in the year 1943, Hitler would be fighting tooth and nail to hold on to the oil of the Balkans, the last thing between him and defeat. The Widow had inherited these wells from her awfully dying husband. Oil in those days was subject for musical comedy—not for world wars.

But to me, The Merry Widow has a personal significance. Oh, yes; our leading soprano in old St. Catherine's in Chicago, sang "Villa" beautifully, and I borrowed "Women!" — still the hit of the show—for the closing of our parish musical comedy. But The Merry Widow always is me recalls Theresa. Theresa came to our washed dance dressed as the Merry Widow. She was deliciously blonde and the costume set her off to such perfection that the susceptible males at the party fairly swamped her. She was, both before and after unmasking, the hit of the party, no doubt of that. And I, callow Sophomore far from my ultimate Jesuit vocation, thought her simply gorgeous—and won permission to take her home. (On foot, in those simple days, and with a large crowd of others all gaily tramping through the snow in the smallish hours of the morning.)

Years later when I came back from the early days of my Jesuit training, I asked my Mother if she knew anything about Theresa's later destiny. Whom had she married of the many who that night paid tribute to our innocent and synthetic Merry Widow. My Mother smiled, and in her answer I glimpsed another aspect of the Call of Christ and the power of the Catholic Faith.

"Oh, Theresa," she answered, "has become a Little Sister of the Poor."

So today when I think of the Merry Widow I also think of the Little Sister who still serves the poor in some anonymous convent. Lovely note on which to end our reminiscences, isn't it?

Surprise For Teacher

The class had just begun Vergil, reports Frances Bittner, and the instructor read with feeling the classic opening line: "Arma Virumque Cano," she intoned. Then she turned to the little romantic girl in the front bench.

"How would you translate that?" she asked.

The girl's eyes grew misty. "I sigh for the arms of a man," she replied, and the class in Vergil almost ended at that point.

A Boy Died Last Night

A boy died last night. It doesn't make much difference now about his name. The important thing is that he died in poignant and awful loneliness, not somewhere on a waste of sand, but in a clearing silence, ten thousand miles from home.

"Missing in Action," read an obscure line in this morning's communique. That was all. Now he lies there, crumpled beside the twisted wreckage of his plane, rising high in the sun-lit heavens. The fine head and the shining face and the broad shoulders remain only in a picture that looks out upon a quiet living room on a shaded street an eternity away.

Last night, in those agonizing hours of unspeakable isolation, he went through a thousand deaths without the one thing that might have helped a little—the sound of a familiar voice, the pat of a friendly hand.

The pain was terrible enough. But there was that dreadful burden of thought in those endless last hours. Mom and Pop. The flowers blooming again there in the backyard. The good old rocker in the driveway. The last sweetheart kiss at the station. Those dances last summer. That half-finished letter in his blouse. All those plans for the future. Couldn't somebody find him, please?

Too much for you, all this? But it really happened last night, just like that. If people could only understand it, if they could just grind deep into their thinking of the stark, terrible reality of it, every petty, selfish interest would be swept away. They would sacrifice anything just to make themselves worthy of that thing needed, take away every last penny of profit, render uncertain every commonplace comfort, and easy security just to honor that boy.

He died last night, you see. There's no getting around that.—Louisville Courier-Journal.

Parents Must Act

Individuals and organizations will continue to inveigh against this danger in vain until the guardians of the nation's youth realize that every time their children sit down to peruse a comic book their own failure as parents is being exposed. — From "What's Wrong With the 'Comics'?" by Thomas F. Doyle in The Catholic World.

WE LEND OUR MONEY — THEY GIVE THEIR LIVES

Holy Childhood Association

Rev. John S. Randall
DIRECTOR

Hello, Boys and Girls.

Did you listen to our Mission Program last Sunday? How did you enjoy it? We are going to broadcast another Mission Hour this Sunday over WHBC at 9:45 A. M. This time it is a Pan-American story. Perhaps most of you are studying a great deal about Central and South America these days. If you would like to know a little of what the Missionaries are doing in these countries, tune in a fine story on Sunday, Oct. 10. I know it will be most interesting.

* * *

And now, I suppose everyone is anxious to hear about the good work that have come in during the past week.

The 4B Arrows here and this week seem to have outdone themselves this week. The pennies just keep pouring in from St. Andrew's School. I don't believe these boys and girls even get time to eat and sleep, they're so busy working for the missions. The Eighth Grade South have asked to ransom a Chinese baby to be baptized Rita Dolores. The Boys of the Fourth Grade have adopted a little American Indian. This baby is to be named Jude. Look what the Sixth Grade North just sent in. They sent in their dues amounting to $3.90 and then they asked for 2 babies. An Eskimo (Chinese and Japanese are their choices for naturalities. Very splendid mission work, boys and girls.

The Fifth Grade at Nazareth Hall have been doing some good work. They just ransomed a baby last week and now they want to adopt another Chinese baby. This time they would like the name of Peter Paul to be given to their Chinese baby. We will be sure your wishes are carried out, boys.

Well, boys and girls, I will be leaving you for this week. Please keep up the fine work and remember the priests and sisters in your prayers.

Junior Red Cross Hailed

A million army of American school boys and girls, more than seventeen million strong, labors valiantly for the American armed forces.

You will find them busy in school carpentry shops, machine shops, sewing rooms, packing rooms; collecting scrap; planning ways and means of raising money. Their work is nonetheless valuable because it is accomplished with flourish.

They are the American Junior Red Cross, organized under the auspices of President Woodrow Wilson in the last war. In that conflict they rendered a sizeable service of production. In the ensuing interval of peace they have been fulfilling one of their original reasons for existence — namely aiding needy children of foreign lands. In the present war, the Junior Red Cross has assumed a new importance in that it is continuing to carry out that obligation and, in addition, has taken on an enlarged job of production for our armed forces: creating and supplying an impressive variety of articles greatly in demand in Army and Navy hospitals and elsewhere.

Sixty-five percent of America's public, private and parochial schools have Junior Red Cross groups. All but five percent of the American Red Cross far-flung 3,787 chapters have them.

In the last fiscal year these energetic youngsters have produced and sent to the armed forces more than nine million articles of wearing apparel, comfort and recreation. These articles include such things as afghans, bed jackets, bedroom slippers; card table covers, cushion covers, lap robes, beside tables, canes, floor lamps, folding tables that may be easily placed on a patient's lap, and table lamps. The list goes on and on. It even includes such items as shoe shines for soldiers in Central and South America these days. If you would like to know a little of what the Missionaries are doing in these countries, tune in a fine story on Sunday, Oct. 10. I know it will be most interesting.

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gay little decorations, menu covers and cards which lighten the tedium of men on duty or in hospitals.

And every one of them ordered in advance, made according to specifications, and rigidly tested before being sent to the areas where they are needed.

GREAT GRACES

St. Paul said, "I chastise my body and bring it into subjection." You should not be discouraged because you cannot carry out such bodily austerity. Remember how great were the graces given the Little Flower of Jesus without her doing great bodily penance.