

# THE MORAL ADVENTURESS.

BY JAMES L. FORD.

A WOMAN WITH HIGH AMBITIONS FOR A "CAREER," A PASSION FOR A "SWEET HOME LIFE,"  
AND REMARKABLE SKILL IN GETTING SOMETHING FOR NOTHING.

I CALL her the Moral Adventuress for want of a better term, although she is not vicious enough to pass muster as a real adventuress, nor high minded enough to deserve the qualifying adjective. She is not essentially wicked, according to the common acceptation of the word, but in certain respects she is far more dangerous than the woman who smokes cigarettes and locks within her own bosom those twin secrets, the true color of her past and of her hair. She is a true adventuress, however, in that her whole life is a constant attempt to get something for nothing.

The Moral Adventuress usually wishes to "be something," and her efforts along the line of this important and significant verb are invariably seconded by the group of well meaning and credulous persons whom she gathers about herself as a sort of staff. Every one of these believes in her implicitly, and is tireless and noisy in proclaiming this belief from the housetops, in talking to influential men and women about her, and in seeking to interest them in her behalf.

Sometimes the Moral Adventuress wishes to "be something" on the stage. This is an ambition that is certain to bring out the full strength of her support and stir the different members of her staff to words and deeds that literally border on frenzy. I have noticed that when she makes this move she generally contrives to enlist in her service an important coadjutor in the person of some writer whose open mouthed belief in everything that is absurd and impossible has won for him a place as critic on some chronicle of current thought and event. This writer, usually an impressionable young man who takes himself and his critical labors very seriously—and who is therefore an easy prey to the wiles of the flatterer—always believes that the Moral Adventuress has a great future before her; that she is that "coming actress" for whom the American public has been waiting ever since long before the first band of Millerites climbed the hill to behold the coming of the Messiah.

It is true that this belief always rests upon the most slender foundation, for the real Moral Adventuress never possesses a particle of true dramatic fire. If she did, she would not follow her calling of moral adventure,

but would secure an engagement in a good company, draw a good salary, eat late suppers with a relish, compile a scrap book of notices favorable to herself from the pens of critics whose good opinion is worth having, and enjoy to the full the pleasures of an artistic career—perhaps even the crowning one of deriving a steady revenue from the sale of her photographs.

I have known scores of young women of the Moral Adventuress type who hungered after histrionic honors, and I do not think I am doing a single one of them the least injustice when I say that they were all totally unfit to take even the most trivial part in a decent dramatic representation. More than that, each and every one of them endeavored to achieve success in a very difficult calling by methods that were illegitimate and positively contemptible.

There are various ways in which the Moral Adventuress seeks to launch herself upon a histrionic career. She usually begins by giving a reading in the drawingroom of some excellent woman who is in full sympathy with her ambition, and who perhaps thinks that it would be pleasant to have her own face illumined with a little of the glory of the new *Juliet*. This reading is invariably a tremendous success, for I will defy any one, even the silly stage struck girl, to read "Curfew Shall Not Ring Tonight" or "Grandma Danced a Minuet" so badly that a roomful of gawping admirers will not be convinced that they are listening to a second Mrs. Siddons.

The gifted young critic who believes in the Moral Adventuress is one of the guests on the occasion of her parlor debut, and if he were only wise enough to appreciate the difference between reading and mouthing, and courageous enough to try to stop the spread of crime, she might be knocked out in her very first round with dramatic art by a good right hander of ridicule. But as a matter of fact, even in those rare instances when he happens to be competent to judge, he does not dare to look the matter squarely in the face and tell the whole humiliating truth in cold black type about the young woman who is trying to foist herself upon a long suffering public. On the contrary, he either boldly announces the discovery of a new Neilson or else writes

a few commonplaces about the "delightful reception at Mrs. Greengoose's house," and makes a few flattering allusions to the talented young lady whose many charming friends in society "hope"—that is the salve to his conscience—that she will one day make a name for herself in the profession she has chosen.

Having made her début in the Greengoose drawingroom, the Moral Adventureess next endeavors to secure a position on the stage. She receives all the aid that her entire staff of followers can give her. The young critical writer is assiduous in her behalf, and does not disdain to call upon theatrical managers of his acquaintance and ask them to place her before the public. The excellent Mrs. Greengoose, and the other excellent women who know absolutely nothing about the stage but believe implicitly in the Moral Adventureess, rush breathlessly to and fro, championing her cause with fervor.

The Moral Adventureess herself is "studying," diligently and earnestly, while awaiting the engagement that is to show New York what acting really is. I have often wondered what the word "study" means when used in connection with young women of the type I am trying to describe. I know of one Moral Adventureess who has been "studying" for the past ten years, during which time she has had at least seven unimportant engagements; but the faith of her friends is as strong as it was a decade ago. Certainly I never heard of one of these women who studied so hard that she could not accept every invitation that came her way, so it may be that the curriculum of the stage struck maiden includes bonnets, gowns, tea, terrapin, and contemporaneous men and manners.

At this stage of her career the Moral Adventureess is willing to play any part as far down in the scale as *Juliet*, and only wishes a chance to make a beginning. She would like a place at the head of some stock company in New York, but realizes that that is out of the question during the present season at least, as every manager has his favorite leading lady whose interest he is seeking to advance. She has written to two or three of these managers offering to star under their management, but has received no replies, probably because of the sinister influence exerted by these leading ladies. The season moves along, and although the coalition of managers and leading ladies is strong enough to prevent her from obtaining the engagement that she covets, nevertheless she has the satisfaction of feeling that she is now a figure of growing importance in the various social and so called artistic gatherings where she carries on her course of study. In these assemblies she is pointed out as the very interesting young girl who reads so beautifully—"I do hope some-

body will ask her to recite before she goes"—and is actually going on the stage to be an actress.

Thus her following among the credulous and those who love to be on speaking terms with fame and success, or at least within hailing distance of them, grows day by day, while laudatory paragraphs glisten from time to time in those misleading columns of print that purport to chronicle the happenings of society and the stage.

At last, through the personal influence of the young writer of critical reviews, the Moral Adventureess secures the long looked for opportunity. It is not precisely the one she had hoped for, for the part is but a small one, but it is with a company which is to open in New York, and at last her native gifts, ripened by her arduous course of study, are to find expression in the portrayal of one of the minor rôles in a new comedy.

As the time draws near for this important moment, the tea tables of the town literally throb with excitement, and the leaders of the claue bestir themselves with renewed vigor in well meant efforts to make the professional début of the Moral Adventureess an occasion of far reaching importance. It is at about this stage of the game that the benevolent middle aged woman of ample girth comes wheezing to the desk of the dramatic critic whose office boy does not know his business, and recites the following monologue:

"I suppose you make it a practice to speak well of the deserving in your column? Yes? Well, then, I want to have you write a pleasant little paragraph about a noble young girl who is making such a brave struggle for a place in the world. She's going to make her first appearance in New York next Monday night, and I think people are going to be astonished when they see what wonderful talents she possesses. Perhaps some day I will give you the material for an article showing how the managers of this town are banded together to crush out a young woman who wants to live a sweet home life and is such a genius that not one of them dare give her a part. Why, sir, this little girl went to four different managers in this city and offered herself as a leading lady, and not one of them would even listen to her. What do you think of that? And it is all because she wants to live a sweet home life and knows a great many very charming people. I am going to give a little tea for her myself tomorrow afternoon, and I should be so pleased to have you come and meet her. I think it is time that some encouragement was given to noble young American girls instead of giving all the praise to these dreadful foreigners like that Sarah Bernhardt and Heaven knows who else beside!"

If the dramatic editor knows his business

one quarter as well as his office boy—who does not know his at all—he will keep away from that tea. Probably experience has already taught him that if he be rash enough to write or even speak a complimentary word in regard to the débutante, he will be looked upon as having committed himself irrevocably to her support; therefore, if he be wise, he will get rid of the woman with the monologue as pleasantly and easily as possible, and if he be true to his calling, and sincere in his desire to help a young girl who is so bent upon living a sweet home life that she must join a profession that is followed exclusively by nomads, he will study her performance carefully and then tell the truth about her with brutal frankness. Of course, the members of the clique will not hesitate to declare that he was bribed by some jealous star or manager to crush the budding genius, but he may console himself by cherishing in his own heart the knowledge that he has done an honorable and commendable thing in trying to keep at least one hopeless amateur off the stage.

At this point the reader may inquire why I assume that the Moral Adventuress is a hopeless amateur. I answer that no true artist would seek success on the stage by such illegitimate means as she employs, and that the mere fact that she believes that dramatic success means newspaper puffery, nothing more and nothing less, is proof positive that she is not only trying to enter the profession by the wrong door, but is also bending her steps toward a sham, not a real, goal.

Of all the silly illusions that are cherished by persons like the Moral Adventuress and those who compose her clientele, none is more ridiculous, and consequently more certain to take root in feeble brains, than the unreasoning belief that to have a newspaper or newspapers declare one an artist is the same as being an artist; and there is not a Moral Adventuress in the land that cannot be detected by this flaw in her intelligence.

On the night of her début her friends are certain to crowd the theater and testify their admiration by loud applause whenever she reads a line. In fact, her presence in the cast, although disturbing perhaps from an artistic point of view, has a distinct pecuniary value, which is precisely the reason why the manager engaged her. She will remain with the company till it leaves New York, and then perhaps drop quietly out and return to the city to resume her course of "study" and to sponge on her friends—for the Moral Adventuress, as a rule, will absorb everything, from tearful sympathy to a sealskin sack, as her rightful due.

Moreover, the Moral Adventuress has a distinct distaste for the hard, dull work which every true artist must face bravely and without complaint. Her health, never

strong enough to permit her to do anything she did not wish to do, will not permit her to undergo the rigors of hard work and travel in inclement weather. Besides, it is almost impossible to work and sponge at the same time. All successful spongers do nothing else; for sponging, when it becomes a fine art, is, if I may employ the familiar metaphor of the old fashioned romantic novel, a jealous mistress who will brook no rival.

I have known hundreds of chronic spongers of the type that I describe, and I never knew one of them to have any regular employment. Nor will any one of them do anything that does not promise some reward in the way of publicity. The successful feminine sponge first asks for sympathy; having obtained that, there is nothing she will not demand or accept. She will ask the newspaper writer to use his own personal influence and the columns of his employer's paper, to the jeopardy of his own position, to further her interests; and she will accept free board, clothes, and even spending money from those well meaning women who are always ready to take a deep interest in a thoroughly meretricious career.

A Moral Adventuress who plays her cards well may succeed in stretching her dramatic efforts over a considerable space of time, and in securing small engagements now and then, if for no other purpose than to keep alive her friends' interest in her as an actress. She can do all this without possessing a particle of dramatic talent; and if she have only moderate skill in the art of working on the sympathies of her friends, they will believe in her at the end of ten years of what she calls a "professional career" varied by frequent periods of rest and "study," just as firmly as they did on the night of her début. They will believe that she is "persecuted" by a powerful syndicate composed of rival actresses, soulless managers, and wealthy and aged Lotharios who have pursued her in vain. In short, there is no limit to the credulity of excellent and well meaning women when once they fall into the clutches of a Moral Adventuress who would rather live a sweet home life than work.

Having exhausted the stage as a means of self advertisement, the next step in the career of the Moral Adventuress is the publication of a book, which is invariably one with what is called a "purpose," and which usually takes the form of a leaden footed satire on existing social conditions, or of a glorification in tricky English of something that is false or immoral. The book does not enjoy a large sale, chiefly because of the activity of the band of conspirators already mentioned, and partly because the persons who go to make up the literary and artistic tea table set seldom read books and never buy them. They only talk about them. Everybody



hears of the new work, however, and a few society reporters refer to its author as the "gifted and versatile young actress who has now turned from the stage to literature," and so the new venture may be safely regarded as having achieved its object, which is to rekindle the fires of sympathy.

After the tumult attending the publication

of the book has subsided, we may expect to see its author enter upon the downward grade of her career. She may be fortunate enough to get married, but failing in this, there will be nothing left for her to do except to crochet beautifully and give a series of Ibsen matinées.

And after the Ibsen matinées, silence.

## The Temptation of Ten Per Cent.

BY WALTER L. HAWLEY.

THE LONG SERIES OF FRAUDULENT SCHEMES OFFERING IMPOSSIBLE PROFITS TO THE INVESTOR WHO DESIRES TO GET RICH QUICKLY, AND THE SECRET OF THEIR MARVELOUS SUCCESS.

MORTUARY statistics may fluctuate, but the birth rate of fools remains unchanged, and the swindler who offers something for nothing today will find plenty of victims eager to chase golden rainbows if the percentage of prospective profit is large enough. The police record of the operations of certain financial syndicates that flourished recently in New York City shows that the work of separating inexperienced and credulous persons from their money has been reduced to an exact science, in which skilfully adjusted percentage has superseded the crude methods of the confidence man and the pick-pocket.

To sell a man a gold brick, a worthless check, or a package of green paper may still be possible in isolated cases, but such frauds are too slow and uncertain to engage the attention of shrewd men who would get rich quickly. Men who speculate nowadays upon human avarice and credulity expect prompt returns. To get money they have only to ask for it and offer ten per cent a week in interest, making the offer in heavy black type marked "confidential." Students of human nature cannot explain it, but there is some secret, mysterious, and seductive influence about a letter from a stranger that is marked "confidential," if the subject matter is an appeal to the honor or the avarice of the recipient. An offer of ten per cent a week in interest upon an investment of any sum from a dollar upward is far more alluring to a man who believes himself honest than a proposition to sell counterfeit money that cannot be detected. Thousands of men who would indignantly spurn the latter will hesitate, investigate, and invest in the former.

The popular impression that large fortunes are made quickly by speculation on the New York Stock Exchange has made it possible for clever swindlers to collect money from a confiding public at a rate that makes the South Sea Bubble, the Freedman's Bank, and

other ancient frauds sink into comparative insignificance. Timid and hesitating indeed is the speculator who, offering a return of ten per cent a week upon all money intrusted to him for investment, fails to collect a million dollars within a year. Those who swindle on a large scale have less to fear from the law than a petty thief. Public opinion is tolerant of a Napoleon of fraud, especially when his victims are not entirely innocent, but risked their money knowingly for a chance at impossible returns. No really successful swindler by the game of percentage has yet been convicted in the courts, and there are learned lawyers who say that a conviction in such cases may be impossible. Courts and juries, apparently, have little sympathy for the willing victims of a fraud perpetrated as a game of chance.

The modern financial syndicates offering impossible profits upon investments are the natural outgrowth of a petty form of speculative swindle known as "bucket shops." The owners of bucket shops made money slowly because they did not guarantee any return upon capital invested with them, and promised no fixed rate of interest. This form of swindle, it may be explained, is very crude and old fashioned. A "bucket shop" is an alleged broker's office for trading in stocks where fictitious quotations are posted, though securities are never actually bought or sold. The customer is not, as a rule, permitted to buy or sell on margin a particular stock according to his own judgment. He must invest his money blindly, trusting everything to the judgment of the broker. That form of trading makes it easy for the owner of the shop to furnish each customer an account of the loss of his money in trades that were never made. The cash invested by customers represents the income of the broker, less his operating expenses. Some small fortunes have been made in this way by brokers who encouraged good customers with an occasional