

RING UP THE CURTAIN !

By U. P. A.

(Continued from p. 39.)

Each day fresh falls of snow occurred. The land remained in the grip of King Frost. Influenza continued to rage and to spread. We took our seats in a super-heated, westward-bound train.

It is a pity that Georgina is not in the Diplomatic Service. She has an insatiable thirst for knowledge, she invites confidence, and her knack of making friends with perfect strangers in a minimum of time and with a maximum of cordiality is, I am sure, much appreciated by all with whom she comes in contact.

Georgina does not believe in supporting the tedium of a grey existence. If you are bored, it is your own fault. Life is full of interest and novelty, provided you take the trouble to scratch below the surface.

A shabby little man buzzed like a bluebottle in the corridor, and made several ineffectual attempts to plant himself and his numerous packages in our coupé. He looked at me suspiciously, and at Georgina trustingly.

I glared.

Georgina smiled.

"Why does he not go away?" I said. "There is no room here."

"I think he rather likes me."

"You?"

"Yes. He is Yakub Schnellwützski, a Polish merchant in a large way of business. Thrilling!"

"How do you know that?"

"He told me all about it at the bookstall. He sells eggs—mountains of them."

I sniffed.

"Oh, you are quite wrong, as usual. Not just a few eggs for the suburban breakfast table, but thousands of eggs every day, for every conceivable purpose, in every quarter of the globe." Georgina became confidential; she whispered: "Guess where he is going now."

"How could I? Commercial Road, probably."

"Gracious—how clever! How did you know? Yes; and he is negotiating a contract for millions of eggs at 0.2168 of a penny per egg f.o.b. West India Dock. Tons of money in it, only—you must not tell anybody."

"Georgina—do you realize that you render yourself liable to fine and (or) imprisonment if you do not at once send this important information to the Food Council?"

"You mean the people who tell the Director-General to reduce your

pay because of the colossal fall in the cost of living? Then I shall go to jail—and gladly. Besides, Yakub says that, if I can do anything for him in Pindi or Lahore—he has already cornered Calcutta and Bombay—I shall have as many eggs as I like for 0.2168 of a penny each.” She added thoughtfully: “I wonder what the khansamah would think of that.”

I began to feel anxious. “Are Polish eggs fresh eggs?” I asked.

“I’m not quite clear on that point—not yet; but I shall know all about it before we reach Munich. Yakub has three or four dozen samples in his greatcoat pockets.”

“You can sample them in the corridor, not in here. I won’t have his eggs here—no—not even if he were Marshal Pilsudski himself.”

“Huh! Just like you. Fresh or otherwise—if only you would show more interest in eggs f.o.b. West India Dock, and less in the latest regulations about leggings and silly things of that kind, we might now be retiring in affluence, instead of spending our extreme old age in chasing phantom colonelcies—or whatever your next step isn’t going to be.”

I changed the subject; and eventually the man from Poland betook himself and his eggs elsewhere.

The way lay through the best type of scenery in this part of the world—forest-clad hills.

Twilight was approaching as we passed through Salzburg. The old town looked lovely under its snowy mantle, coloured by the last rays of the setting sun.

On arrival at Munich we put up at the Deutscher Hof, where we were as well looked after as circumstances would permit. It is a comfortable hotel, with an excellent cuisine and an attentive staff. But at that time Munich was suffering not only from snow, frost and influenza, but from Carnival too; and, of course, the hotels had to bear the brunt—to the great satisfaction of their proprietors and the discomfort of a proportion of their guests.

If you go to Munich at Carnival time you must live in fancy dress, consume an inordinate quantity of alcohol (without becoming intoxicated), dance till the milkman arrives and rise for “the five o’clock.” Otherwise you will be regarded as a freak: you will live a hand-to-mouth existence, and tire yourself out in trying to induce somnolent waiters to fetch a meal from the demoralized kitchen.

From 5 a.m. to 5 p.m. the caterers of Munich, and their staffs, lie flat on their backs, exhausted. From 5 p.m. to 5 a.m. they fly around, flurried and frenzied; and it needs a Bavarian-Mexican cow-puncher’s gun, or a Bavarian-Batavian cannibal’s club, to procure anything more substantial than a pint of Pilsener.

What a life!

Even “the five o’clock” was a struggle, for from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. the hotel was stormed and held by four or five hundred children, attended by

proud fathers, adoring mothers and troops of fond relations. They all danced, ate tons of creamy cakes and swallowed gallons of milk and chocolate. They chattered incessantly, but they did not laugh much, nor romp: they behaved decorously and, no doubt, enjoyed themselves in a well disciplined manner. The comparative absence of noise was astonishing but oh—the heat and the squash!

Worse still—a good deal worse—were the conditions from 7.30 p.m. onwards. If “the five o’clock” was a struggle, dinner was a dog fight, and supper a bear garden. Adult carnivalists invaded the hotel, ate prodigiously, drank enormously, danced indefatigably and had a good time generally, with that thoroughness and determination characteristic of the German people.

They got their money’s worth.

And oh—the stuffiness and crush!

One would not look at the Carnival through jaundiced eyes; but it is a form of entertainment which is all very well—now and again. It should be taken occasionally and in moderate doses. When it is administered in heroic dosage over a week, or more, none but a Teuton can stand up to it. It is not so much the concentration as the prolongation that wears you out.

The festival was initiated by a grand street procession, in which the heavy Westphalian horses, and the bands, carried off the honours. With certain striking exceptions, the dresses of the ordinary carnivalists were neither attractive nor original. Colour schemes were crude, especially by daylight; also, extreme modernism was too much to the fore, and too often coupled with sheer vulgarity. Epstein’s “Day” is bad enough in stone: imagine the ghastly thing in flesh and blood—ugh!

Mention must be made of Frau Fritz’s and Fräulein Gertrud’s legs. They were prominently displayed, and to a maximum extent, irrespective of circumference or shape. The result was seldom as happy as their proud owners believed: we were afforded ample opportunity of noting that, in Munich, there are a few good legs, some bad legs, and thousands of legs.

There is a good deal to be seen in Munich. The former Royal Palace is particularly fine. Do not “lunch in the famous old Hofbräuhaus at the Platzl, Munich’s best known beer ‘keller’” as the guidebook advises you to do—unless you are an Extreme Left proletarian.

We were engaged on our usual sketchy round of museums, galleries and churches, perhaps with less enthusiasm than usual—an end-of-the-session frame of mind—when, suddenly and unexpectedly, we discovered something superlative.

The Deutsches Museum.

In our experience quite unique, altogether admirable, and as nearly perfect as one has any right to expect in this very imperfect world.

We had been strongly advised to visit this institution, but this frightened us:—

SECTION A.—Mining, metallurgy, power-engines.

B.—Transport by land, road building, railway and tunnel construction, bridge building, ship building, aeronautics, aerostatics, meteorology.

C.—Mathematics, physics, chemistry.

D.—Buildings and building material, lighting, heating, gas and water supplies, electrotechnical appliances.

E.—Astronomy, textile and paper industries, printing, agriculture, brewing, distillation.

F.—Library, 100,000 volumes.

Bookstall, reading room and restaurant.

Entrance fee, 5d.

Dismal and dreary. Yes—it frightened us. You know : exophthalmos, retroflexion of the neck, tonic spasm of the lumbar musculature, flat foot and cerebral exhaustion. Museumitis.

However, the hall porter of the Deutscher Hof shamed us into going ; and, after that, we practically lived in the place.

It was founded by Dr. Oskar von Miller in 1903. Collection and arrangement, etc., of the exhibits were delayed by the war. An initial opening ceremony took place in 1921 and, in May, 1925, the completed museum was formally opened.

The main building is constructed of reinforced concrete, with a tower 200 feet high. The flooring covers an area of nine acres and, if you wish to see everything, you have to pace the galleries for a distance of nine miles. "If you are pressed for time, you should first view the sections you are most interested in, as otherwise the huge amount seen might possibly impair your receptive capacity."

Naïve, but true!

Bulk, acreage and distance are repellents.

In what respects, then, is this museum unique, admirable, nearly perfect?

To answer this question would need more leisure and ability than I possess, even if you had time and patience to read. Briefly—success is not dependent on the number and variety of the exhibits, but on the manner in which they are shown. That is the secret. Go to Munich and see for yourself : you will not be disappointed.

A truly great and intensely interesting show.

The Opera House is designed on severely simple lines. The curtains, paint work and furnishings are decidedly shabby and, in general elegance, the interior is not to be compared with the opera houses in Dresden, Vienna or Prague. The programmes were suffering from Carnival, and the artistes from influenza. However, in Munich we did come across a pleasing phenomenon which we had not encountered before, and have not met with since. This was a good tenor who was clean, young, slim and handsome, and who could act well. Of course, he was not the Opera's leading tenor ; but, perchance, he may be promoted some day, and before he develops a

blue-black chin, embonpoint and a stereotyped style: in fact, before he becomes eligible for a major's maximum pension. For that happy consummation we wish him good luck, although, under the circumstances, we are putting no money on his chances.

The Bat was our first piece. This is a popular comic opera by Johann Strauss. It is amusing and tuneful; but, when you hear an opera of this kind on the Continent, you are sure to compare it with its British prototypes—the operas of Sir Arthur Sullivan and Sir Edward German.

In making such a comparison you must consider the score alone: you cannot pass an adverse judgment on the libretto unless you have an intimate knowledge of German. But, libretto apart, there is no doubt that *The Bat*, and operas of its kind, are not in the same class as the Savoy fare, or *Merrie England*. Perhaps Donizetti's *Daughter of the Regiment* is an exception; but it is neither German nor Austrian.

However, with these opinions Fritz probably would not agree.

The Bartered Bride—another of Smetana's rural Bohemian compositions—was very good. It was well staged, the chorus was excellent, and the engaging young tenor once again charmed the ear and pleased the eye.

This opera makes no pretence at seriousness; but as it is based on the quaint customs of a simple-hearted, freedom-loving mountain race, it proceeds with a freshness and vigour which are absent from the "Bohemianism" of the towns, so often depicted in the more ambitious operas.

Smetana's work never reflects the tragedy of his life.

Charles Annesley's "The Standard Operaglass,"¹ introduces *The Magic Flute* thus:—

The Magic Flute is one of the most remarkable operas known on the stage. It is half fictitious, half allegorical. The text, done by the old stage-director, Schikaneder, was long mistaken for a fiction without any common sense; but Mozart saw deeper, else he would not have adapted his wonderful music to it. It is true that the tales of old Egypt are mixed up in a curious manner with modern freemasonry, but nobody, except a superficial observer, could fail to catch a deep moral sense in the naïve rhymes.

The paragraph is quoted in full, because it is typical of the literature which deals with the *The Magic Flute*. The more people write about it, the less do they—and their readers—make of it. All these so-called explanations are futile: they mean nothing at all, for the very good reason that, so far, the book of this delightful opera has remained a complete enigma. It is absolutely inexplicable; and "the tales of old Egypt," "modern freemasonry" and a "deep moral sense" are just three little red herrings drawn across the trail.

¹ German edition.

Ring up the Curtain!

What is the trail? On this, at least, everyone agrees: That the genius of Mozart negatives the possibility of his music being wedded to rubbish: there must be some meaning in the plot, some sense in the lines.

Firmly convinced of this truth, and profoundly dissatisfied with partisan explanations-at-any price—not one is even plausible—I took the trail. I admit that I took it with temerity and misgiving; but I worked hard, and I venture to think that, at last, I have solved the mystery of *The Magic Flute*.

Fiction and freemasonry? Egyptian and moral? Bah! It is none of these things.

It is a plain, straightforward tale told, like the "Pilgrim's Progress," in pure, easily understood allegory.

Here it is as I see it (not copyright.)

THE ORIGINAL.

VERSION U.P.A.

THE MAGIC FLUTE.

THE MAGIC MICROSCOPE.

Title.

Characters.

Prince Tamino.

Queen of Night.

Princess Pamina.

The High Priest Sarastro.

Papageno.

The Queen's Ladies.

Monostatos, the High Priest's servant.

Captain Tamino, M.C., R.A.M.C.

The Colonel's Lady.

Pam, the Colonel's daughter.

Micrococcus Sarastroysis.

Lieutenant Papageno, R.A.M.C., T.C.

Members of Q.A.I.M.N.S.

Coccus Sarastroysoid.

The lovely and utterly adorable Pam is stricken nigh unto death.

She is suffering from that terrible, because hitherto-incurable malady, Sarastroysis.

Pam's mamma, the Colonel's Lady, is beside herself with grief. She is distraught, demented, down and out.

Captain Tamino, M.C., R.A.M.C., is posted to the station from the Senior Officers' Course, Millbank. On the strength of a 60 per cent. pass, he at once applies for 30 days' leave.

The Colonel's Lady hears of the gallant Captain's arrival, sends for him, and implores him to save her darling Pam.

Capt. T.] "Delighted, I'm sure; but I have just put in for 30 days' leave."

The Col.'s Lady.] "If you cure my little daughter you shall have 61 days' leave. I swear it."

Captain Tamino makes a mental note of this, and returns to his quarters for the purpose of consulting his Collège notes on bacteriology. He finds that the professor has been rather vague on the subject of Sarastroysis.

Enter Lieutenant Papageno, R.A.M.C., T.C. He is in trouble. It appears that, although he has been in the station for six weeks, he has not yet called on the Nursing Sisters' Mess. It is also alleged that he ordered the ward-master to see to it that Private Doolittle received his dose of Mist. Alba, t.i.d., p.c. This, however, is mere idle gossip. Nevertheless, the Members, Q.A.I.M.N.S., have publicly announced their intention of having nothing to do with Lieut. Papageno. A resolution to that effect was entered in the minutes of the last Mess meeting.

Tamino prevails on Papageno to send to the Matron a written apology. The amende honorable is very well received and, at the usual Sunday afternoon tea-party, the Matron and Members Q.A.I.M.N.S. present Captain Tamino with a gold-mounted all-glass syringe : Lieutenant Papageno with an electric incubator : and both with a magic microscope.

Papageno is, of course, full of gratitude to Tamino, and expresses a desire to render him some signal service. Tamino asks Papageno if he knows anything about Sarastroysis. Papageno says that, when he was ship's doctor on the S.S. "Grosvenor," the Clyde to Brisbane, case whisky and foundry castings, the chief engineer—McCluskie by name—suffered from Sarastroysis. Papageno adds that the disease is due to a filter-passer. McCluskie was buried at sea, fifty nautical miles east of the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb.

Tamino begs Papageno to visit the Colonel's daughter as he (T.) is feeling indisposed.

Papageno discovers that Pam has been attacked by the giant Coccus Sarastroysoid—a sequela of the original infection, and the cause of death (secondary) in the McCluskie case.

He prepares a vaccine in the electric incubator, and cures Pam. However, in doing so, he accidentally infects himself and is put on the S.I. list. In his delirium he raves continually about the beauty and charm of the incomparable Pam.

Tamino makes a note of this. He goes to the incubator, removes the culture, examines it under the magic microscope and finds, firstly, that all the giant cocci have been electrocuted ; and secondly, that Micrococcus Sarastroysis remains in pure culture.

Tamino cannot be quite certain that the organism really is the elusive micrococcus.

Also, he wants his leave—61 days, if possible.

Also, Pam is a darling.

The brave captain visits the patient at long last.

Love at first sight. Mutual.

Captain Tamino then swears the Colonel's Lady to secrecy, and tells her of his grim, heroic plan. Failing to dissuade him from his awful purpose, the Colonel's Lady breaks the sad news to Pam, who is utterly overcome.

Meanwhile, Tamino returns to the lab., fills the gold-mounted all-glass syringe with Micrococci Sarastroysis in pure culture, and administers to himself an intra-peritoneal injection.

After a suitable incubation period, he develops an acute attack of the fell malady, and is marked "D.I."

Pam, on thinking over the affair, concludes that Tamino has attempted to commit *felo de se* in order to avoid marriage. She goes into a decline.

By this time Papageno has recovered. Using his electric incubator again, he prepares a vaccine from Tamino, and thereby rids Pam of her original infection. He then discovers that the decline is functional, and not organic. He therefore hypnotizes her in accordance with the recommendations of the B.M.A.'s Committee on Psycho-Analysis, and convinces her of the pure and self-sacrificing motive by which her lover, Tamino, was actuated.

Pam nurses her captain back to health and strength, with the usual result.

After they are married they proceed on their honeymoon. The Colonel's Lady is better than her word, for she procures for our hero not 61, but 90 days' leave ; and what is more, she induces the G.O.C. to sign a certificate sanctioning allowances in full.

Poor Papageno ! He loses a good friend and a promising acquaintance ; but he has his electric incubator ; and Tamino presents him with the gold-mounted all-glass syringe, and full possession of the magic microscope as he (T.) has no further use for these incumbrances. In them the lonely Papageno finds a measure of consolation.

It is of no use saying that the story of *The Magic Microscope* is far

too complicated for grand opera: The story of *The Magic Flute* is much more complicated.

“Two blacks do not make a white,” you say.

True; but at least *The Magic Microscope* provides an intelligible story, whereas *The Magic Flute* does not.

So much for the book: what of the score?

We all have our pet likes and dislikes. I am a prejudiced admirer of Mozart and, in consequence, lay myself open to attack from every side.

To begin with, there is the man's life—a romance of music, adorned by many wonderful works of genius, and extinguished at the early age of thirty-five.

Then the music itself—always charming and cheerful: always distinguished and, like most things of distinction, always honest and pure; and the good temper and humour of it—surely Mozart is the ideal guide, philosopher and friend in the realm of harmony.

Should you say: “I cannot abide grand opera,” I would ask: “Have you heard *Don Juan*?”

If you answer: “Yes,” then you will never like grand opera; but if your answer is “No,” then I beg you to attend a performance—a good performance—of this delightful piece as soon as you can. Do not abandon grand opera before taking my advice: ten to one that the lovable Mozart will captivate you with his *Don Juan*. Do not be discouraged on account of *Fidelio*, *Parsifal* or *Salome*: admittedly they present difficulties, at first. The only difficulty about *Don Juan* is his inability to accomplish a non-stop run. You feel desperately sorry when the curtain falls at the end of the last act.

The Magic Flute was Mozart's last opera. Although its music is beautiful, there is no doubt that, as a whole, it suffers from its alliance with its impossible libretto.

V.

Originally, we intended to stay for some time at Frankfort, where there is excellent opera. However, on our arrival there we found that all seats in the opera house were booked up for days ahead. We attempted bribery, but the box-office proved incorruptible. In this we may, in reality, have been lucky, for the cold was the most severe we had yet experienced, and a bitter nor'-easter blew fiercely and continuously throughout our short stay.

I shall never, never become an Arctic explorer.

Queer people who contemplate taking up Arctic exploration as a hobby would be well advised first to try out the idea in a hard Frankfort winter.

In default of opera, we went to the Hippodrome. It was only thirty yards from our hotel, so we were able to cover the distance before our noses and ears became frozen.

The programme was excellent, but quite different from British music-hall fare. Vocal and “patter” items were entirely absent. In fact, the

only words spoken were a few introductory remarks—first, in English, then in French, and finally in German—by the inimitable Grock and his partner. For the rest, the bill was filled by a silent company of acrobats, equilibrists, knock-about comedians, jugglers, conjurers, instrumentalists, dancers and so on; and very clever and entertaining they were.

Georgina became excited over a four-a-side cyclists' football (or was it polo?) match, England *v.* Germany. Result: a draw: three goals apiece. After that, an equilibrist, who was attempting to balance himself on a pyramid of champagne bottles, toppled over and came crashing down from a height of about fifty feet. He almost landed in Georgina's lap: almost; that is to say, he saved himself—and her—by clutching a hanging rope at the psychological moment. Georgina screamed. The equilibrist and the audience were delighted.

Grock was the "star." His turn occupied about forty minutes—a much longer spell than when he appears on the stage in this country. As usual, he was excruciatingly funny and hopelessly idiotic. A great artist.

Frankfort Hippodrome was a pleasant surprise, as similar shows at Brunswick and Vienna had proved to be disappointing. German vaudeville is good enough in a way, but it is not a patch on the British variety. And as for cabarets and "night dancings"—well, they are not unduly expensive and they are not wildly exhilarating; indeed, they are just about as dull as an Inveraray Sabbath.

The "Rheingold Express" conveyed us along the banks of the great frozen waterway to Cologne. There we stayed at the Eden Hotel, well-known to the old B.A.O.R. This hotel, like the rest of Cologne, was suffering from the after-effects of Carnival.

As in Munich, the programme at the opera house reflected Carnival and bowed to influenza. Thus, at the eleventh hour, *Orpheus in the Underworld* took the place of *Figaro*: an unwelcome change since, in the former, Offenbach is poor, whereas, in the latter, Mozart is at his best.

For one thing, at least, we are grateful to Cologne, viz., for our introduction to *The Lowlands*, a music-drama by Eugène d'Albert.

This opera is performed regularly in Germany, Czecho-Slovakia and Austria, but it is not well known to British audiences. The story is a tragic one; the orchestration and vocal score are fine; and the Cologne company did the piece justice. The portrayal of the principal rôle, "Marta," was particularly good.

The composer of *The Lowlands* was born in Glasgow, in 1864. His music is always melodious and written to fit the action and the place. Hence, frequent use is made of Spanish rhythms and measures. Nevertheless, the composition is essentially German in character, and to Dresden is due the discovery and encouragement of D'Albert's gifts.

Two ballets in Cologne provided interesting comparisons with the two which we saw in Vienna.

The action of *The Fairy Doll* takes place in a toyshop. The characters include the members of an English family who are, of course, mercilessly caricatured in accordance with Fritz's conception of John Bull. Both spectacle and music were charming, and the dancing was very good; but the ballet is not so brilliant, elaborate or "advanced" as its Viennese counterpart, Strauss' cream-cum-confectionery ballet.

Adeline Genée would have made a fascinating "Fairy Doll"; but then she belonged to Leicester Square, 1889, and not to the Opern Ring, 1929. Even the incomparable Pavlova might shy at the latter under certain conditions—the conditions described by Trilby as "The Altogether."

Bathyllus bore a marked general resemblance to *Joseph's Story*. It almost suggested a poor attempt at plagiarism. However, Bathyllus wore a hair shirt which had not yet shrunk to microscopic proportions; and his lady-love did not discard ninety per cent of her apparel—not publicly, at any rate—as did poor Potiphar's wife.

On the whole, *Bathyllus* was rather a crude affair; but it was neither ghastly in refinement, nor terrifying in sensuousness—and that cannot be said of *Joseph's Story* as told in Vienna.

Adolphe Adam's *Postilion of Longjumeau* ushered out our leave. This is a typical French light opera: a jolly piece in the same class as *The Bartered Bride*, *La Vie Parisienne* and similar productions.

Before boarding the train for The Hook it may be worth mentioning that Cologne Opera House is now under able, energetic and enterprising management, and is making a strong bid for eminence in the German musical world. Its efforts are attracting a good deal of attention and support and seem likely to be successful. As Cologne is so easy of access from England, this opera house should be a boon to British lovers of grand opera.

We left Carnival and influenza behind; but, on reaching home, we found every pipe frozen and had to sojourn temporarily in a hotel.

The hotel's central heating system was also frozen.

EPILOGUE.

There was a time when we held up German kultur to ridicule and contempt. We had to do it: it was demanded by the exigencies of the situation.

Unfortunately, the exigencies of the situation persisted too long: so long, that jazz bands and Hollywood films were enabled not only to spread their blight over our beloved land, but to become firmly rooted in the soil thereof. Being noxious weeds, they multiplied and flourished amazingly.

On the other hand, the Central Powers were walled off. They only suffered from the tail end of the invasion. To them, Wild West syncopations and "flickers" are still incidentals, not to be taken too seriously, and certainly not for a moment to be allowed to become dominants.

Looking back, it all seems very strange: a nightmare, in which our artistic intelligence and critical faculties were warped and debased.

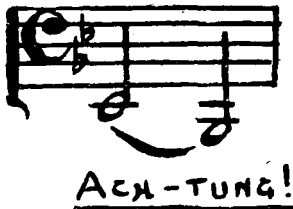
Looking forward, it behoves us to seek out the truth in these matters and, thereafter, to institute comparisons, thus:—Which is the more worthy of preference? Grand opera and all it signifies, or "The Talkies" and all they signify?

Nor do they draw the line at talking. No. Luridly, perfervidly, they beseech you to patronize the All-Singing Movietone, Fully Mechanized and in Natural Colours.

Well, well—

But, whatever they they may do, they cannot deprive us of our sense of humour. As Mr. Punch remarks: "There is much talk of naval disarmament; but what about nasal disarmament?"

The stage is dimmed. The great basso-profundo advances to the foot-lights. He wears a worried look. The orchestra plays the opening bars of the famous aria, "The Birth of Prohibition." The conductor raises his bâton: the basso-profundo opens his lips and begins:—



via the nose.

"What!" you exclaim—"via the nose? Impossible!"
It is, thank goodness.



JRAMC

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U. P. A.

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