

A Clerical Blunder.

"We are men, my liege.
"Ay, in the catalogue you go for men."
—SHAKESPEARE.

By PAULINE CARRINGTON BOUVE.

[Written for the Evening Post.]

It was a clear September night, and two young men, dressed in clerical garb, were walking across the Common. There was a general similarity in their appearance. Both were tall, both were blonde, both wore Vandike beards, and each had his hair cut and combed after the English fashion. But here the likeness ended. Upon close scrutiny, the two were as unlike in features and expression as they were in temperament and habit.

Amos Clarkson, the elder of the two men, had shrewd, clear gray eyes, thin lips, and somewhat the air of a man of fashion. He was musical, had an avowed taste for æstheticism, and had long since decided that the easiest road to the gratification of his refined tastes lay up the church aisle and ended at the matrimonial altar.

"It won't do, Bertram," he said sagely, with an air of superior wisdom that was trying to his companion. "Here you are, being discussed on all sides, I say. If the girl does not know better, you, surely, ought to be more discreet. Old Mrs. Appleton and the Lindons were speaking of your violent attentions to the strange goddess only last night, and I really could not say a word in defence."

"In defence of what?" inquired the new curate nervously, as he pulled his moustache.

"See here, Bertram, Miss Norval is agreeable and all that, but—"

"But what? I have only shown her the courtesies any man may pay any woman who is passably good looking and has wit enough to be amusing. There's no one in town yet, and I'm a stranger here. What's the harm?"

"You have been walking with her every day since you met her, and I am very sorry that I ever introduced you to her. She is absolutely penniless, and is earning her own living."

"Well, whose business is it if she is poor? That makes it perfectly safe. Everybody knows I could not afford to marry in that way. You talk as if I were entangled hopelessly, and about to take the matrimonial leap. Don't be uneasy about me."

"Of course, I know nothing of your intentions," replied the older man, "nor have I the right to ask you anything concerning your personal affairs. I only thought I ought to give you a word of advice."

"Thanks, you are very good. And as for my intentions, they are simple enough—I am bored, and I want to be amused. My intentions are to cultivate all the agreeable people I meet, and to go out with Miss Norval as much as I please."

"By all means," said the Rev. Amos Clarkson, "but you won't remain at St.—'s long, if you do. Miss Peck and Miss Elliott are shocked, and Miss Lee says no curate ever behaved so lightly before. I know what the road is, I tell you—I've travelled it," and Father Barrand's first assistant sighed. "It's the same thing with them all. Mullen was seen to wipe his eye-glasses on his cassock, and poor Perkins—rode about on a bicycle by his physician's advice, and they both had to resign. Father Barrand never makes any complaint, but the curates go. The dignity of the ecclesiastical profession is a ghastly burden to carry sometimes."

"I don't see the necessity of flaunting apostolic raiment in the face of every one I pass," said Mr. Bertram Terrence decisively. "I haven't taken the three vows, and I am not going into that sort of nonsense. A man in orders has a right to some innocent amusement and relaxation. In fact, it is a necessity."

"If you want the relaxation of a flirtation, my dear good fellow, go ahead, I say; but don't blame me when the tea-party is over."

"Look here, Clarkson, Miss Norval is the type of woman who is absolutely above that sort of thing. She is sincere."

"It is none of my affair now that I've warned you."

"I am glad to hear you say so. I am not the kind of fellow to ruin my prospects by a foolish marriage. I have not gone, and shall

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not go, too far. If the young lady has allowed herself to imagine my intentions meant anything further than pastime for both of us, I certainly have not myself to blame. Every woman ought to be sensible in such matters. If I ever have reason to suppose that she cares—"

"It will be too late. However, I have finished my part in the play. I've got an errand to do on the Hill, so I'll leave you here."

"Have a cigar to lighten your journey," replied his companion, as he held a lighted match in the hollow of his hand. "Cavallo—you remember Cavallo at Harvard?—sent me a box of these from Cuba; try one. No? Well, good-night."

As the younger man walked towards his lodgings an amazed expression sat upon his usually placid brow. Why could not people let him attend to his own affairs? He had been officiating as assistant curate at St.—'s ritualistic Episcopal Church for the past three months, and he had discovered that a curate's lot is not without its difficulties. To earn the approbation of good Father Barrand and the elderly female element, which was the dominant one in the church polity of this Catholic branch of the Anglican faith, was no easy matter. Strait and narrow was the path in which St.—'s curates must walk, and he who walked therein must watch his steps. To kiss the stole with graceful meekness, to bow with proper devoutness before each of the three altars, to intone clearly, to genuflect in good form, and hold one's thumbs with due solemnity, were strictly itemized in St.—'s supplementary decalogue, but there were various other points to be observed. The curates were on no account to enjoy the charms of feminine society. The ritualistic movement inherently tended towards the celibacy of the clergy, and encouragement of social relations between womankind and the incumbents of apostolic authority must be discountenanced. The Rev. Bertram Terrence pondered upon the situation of affairs as he wended his way homeward, and arrived at a definite conclusion. It would not do to lose his present curacy. He could not afford to marry a poor girl. He must—as delicately as possible, of course, but firmly—put an end to any false impression his evident admiration of the young lady might have made. He would be candid, but gentle, and the outside world should not know what an effort this self-control, this abnegation, had cost me.

Miss Norval was busy with some drawings for one of the magazines. Her auburn hair was pushed back from her low, broad forehead, and her violet eyes were full of grave contentment as her long, white fingers moved over the drawing-paper.

"How good everybody has been to me," she thought, as she glanced at a vase of fresh roses on the little table beside her. "How kind Mr. Terrence is! He is just as polite as if I lived on — Street instead of in a stuffy lodging-house on — Street. I suppose it's because I'm so utterly alone here and have no sort of protection. Whatever is the reason or motive, he is doing what is very like the thing St. James advocated. Well I am not very plain, and I dare say I don't bore him, or he would not come to see me so often. It is not Christian duty to take a girl out walking every day." The brows were drawn in a straight line as the young ladies reflections continued (and the illustration progressed slowly): "If he were not a priest, I might think—"

A loud ring of the door-bell interrupted Miss Norval's train of thought, and a moment later the young clergyman of whom she had been thinking entered the room.

He was pale and somewhat agitated, and she noticed that his hand was trembling.

"I am so glad you came in just at this moment," she said, pointing to a chair. "I was thinking of you."

How soft and bright her eyes looked as she spoke! It was a decidedly awkward ordeal. How was he going to be less attentive in the future?

"What were you thinking about me?" he inquired, as he sank down in a chair near the girl.

"I was thinking how good you were to me," she answered softly.

The Rev. Mr. Terrence felt an uncomfortable sensation. "You know I haven't any one to belong to me in all this great city; nobody whose duty it is to think of me; so I am very grateful to those who have been kind."

"Yes, of course," he murmured abstractly, twirling his moustache violently between his thumb and forefinger. The young woman looked up into her companion's face in some surprise. He was not quite natural this morning, she thought.

"Miss Norval," he said abruptly, "I wish to say something to you that may surprise you."

A flush spread over her face as her visitor paused. "I've had something I've been wanting to tell you," she interrupted.

"Ah," groaned Bertram Terrence in an agonized mental outburst; "she's going to tell me that she has learned to care for me! I must let her understand that it's impossible, utterly impossible!"

A DAUGHTER'S DANGER.

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"Who shall have first go?" asked the girl, with a soft little smile on her red lips. "Shall I begin?"

"No, no! I am not such a card—excuse me—you must not speak!" Wait until I've said what I came to say!"

The entreaty in his tone was unmistakable, and Gertrude Norval watched his face curiously.

"Miss Norval, I am afraid that—that you that is, that my attentions have seemed—seemed a little pronounced. I feel that my position as a clergyman, you know, renders it unwise to—to—to make myself remarked," he continued, in a vague, uncertain sort of way, glancing hopelessly at the pale face before him. If only she would say something, he thought, he could go on more coherently, but there was not the slightest movement from the figure leaning back in the red plush chair. Every detail of the room seemed photographed upon his brain as he sat staring out his explanation of his attitude.

"You see," he said desperately, "it isn't quite the thing. I was afraid you might—might think—I thought perhaps—if either one of us had any money it would be different." The young man paused and wiped his face with his handkerchief.

"Money would not make any difference—to me," said the girl, a pretty little smile hovering over her mouth.

How utterly unconscious she seemed of the situation! Had she no perception? Was it possible that she did not comprehend his meaning?

"The difficulty is," he went on, "that in my position as assistant at St.—'s, I have to be very careful of my conduct. I thought perhaps it was best to be candid."

"You were quite right," said Miss Norval softly.

"And so you will not misunderstand me and fancy me less your friend because I am forced to enjoy less of your society in the future?" The last words were spoken rapidly, and the voice of the speaker was hoarse from excitement. He was not altogether without manly instincts, and the ordeal had been painful. Certainly there could be no room for doubt, now, in the young lady's mind. He had thoroughly exonerated himself from all blame, and no one would ever dream how hard it had been to give up this sweet companionship. Yes, he, Bertram Terrence, had displayed a power of self-control not possessed by most men.

The girl looked at him steadily for a minute before she replied.

"Yes, Mr. Terrence, I quite appreciate the difficulty of your position. What a pity you did not think of this during the last three months," she continued.

"Yes," he replied sadly. "For your sake, I should have been clear. I trust that you have not—do not suffer—"

"There was a knock at the door."

"Excuse me," said the young lady, as she went forward to welcome the unexpected guest.

There was a glad little cry of joyful surprise, an exclamation of delight.

"Oh, Jack!"

"My darling!"

And the Rev. Bertram Terrence beheld Miss Norval clasped in the arms of a stalwart stranger, whose air of ownership was disagreeably apparent.

He got up out of the chair and mechanically walked out of the room, unnoticed by the two people, whose world was bounded by encircling arms.

Blindly he staggered down the stairs and out into the street, a sharp pain at his heart, a strange sense of sudden loss pervading his being. Three or four days later, when his friend Clarkson called upon him, he found the assistant curate seated beside a half-packed valise and holding a note in his hand.

He held out the sheet of tinted note paper towards his friend and adviser.

"Read it," he said.

Amos Clarkson took it from his hand and read:

"My Dear Mr. Terrence: I am so sorry you would not wait the other morning to hear my confidence, but I suppose you can guess what I had to tell you. It was just the old-fashioned secret. I am going to be married on the 24th of December, and I wanted to tell you about it."

"Jack (I mean Mr. John Reigrold) came in so suddenly the other day that I fear I was very rude. I had not heard that he had started from New York, and I was so happy and so surprised that I forgot everything but just ourselves. You'll forgive me, won't you? I thank you for all your kindness to me last summer, and so does Jack."

Very truly yours,

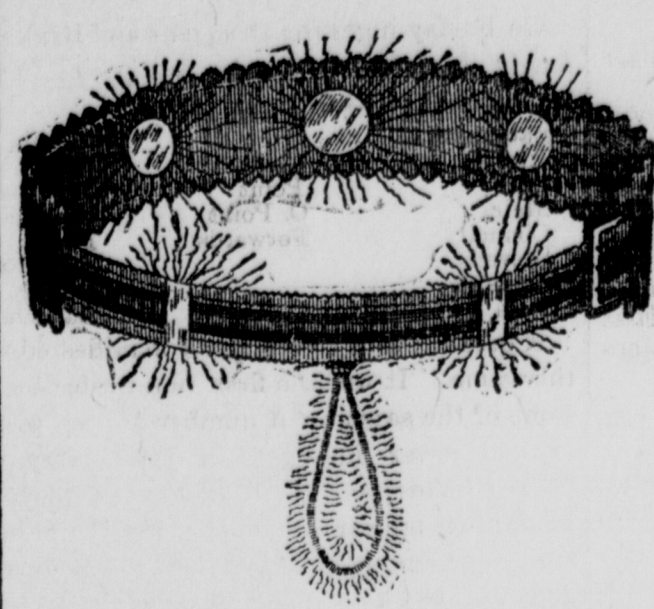
"Gertrude Norval."

"September 28, 1901."

"Well?" said the older man, questioningly.

"Nothing, only I've been a fool!"

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Late one evening a doctor received a note from a couple of fellow-practitioners, saying: "Pray, step across to the club. We are one short of a game of poker."

"Emily, dear," he then said to his wife, "I am called away again. It appears to be a very serious case, for there are two doctors already in attendance."

It is again announced that Mrs. Maybrick may be released. This will serve as a reminder that Mrs. Maybrick is still several releases ahead of Miss Stone.

Gentleman (to yokel): "Well, John, did you give the marquiss my note?"

Yokel: "Yes, sir; but its no use writing letters to him. He can't see to read them. He's blind—blind as a bat!"

Gentleman: "Blind?"

Yokel: "Yes, sir, blind. Twice he asked me where my hat was, and I had it on my head all the time."

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