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ART. II.—CURIOSITIES OF CLERICAL EXPERIENCE.

IV.

THE man who has seen better days, and who, from whatever cause, has come down in the world, frequently becomes morbid, if not soured in his disposition. He retains the delicate susceptibilities of a gentleman, and, notwithstanding his reduced circumstances, he unconsciously exhibits in his conduct and conversation those little niceties which are so agreeable to every well-bred man. Once a gentleman, always a gentleman. Whatever such a man may be in the substance of his character, he very seldom loses that habit of mind which makes all the difference between vulgarity and refinement. When Marie Antoinette swept the floor of the dungeon where the low-bred radicalism of an upstart race of politicians had confined her, she betrayed the queen even when employed in such unaccustomed drudgery. No amount of wealth will ever make a gentleman except in name. No rank, however exalted, to which any person may be raised through the force of circumstances can ever impart that easy, well-bred air of courtesy which consists in a kind consideration for the feelings of others. A man may be poor, and yet have self-respect. He may be rich, and yet be deficient in it.

The Irish peasant of the olden time, before the rise of that revolutionary movement which has of late years swept over the country, possessed intuitively those qualities which enter so largely into the element of politeness. There are still to be found, in that island, old men who, in spite of all the disadvantages under which they labour from the perverted ingenuity of unprincipled demagogues, retain the habits of thought which inspired their early life. They are the gentlemen of Nature—a fact to which every stranger who has ever visited those shores has almost universally borne witness. The French peasant is also, in his way, polite; but it is a formal process. He will take off his hat to a lady if he should happen to pass her on a common stair, or in a narrow pathway. The Irish peasant, however, will put himself to personal inconvenience to oblige you; he will go out of his way to do you a service.

The true gentleman will not be influenced by the social position of the person to whom he extends an act of courtesy. He will stop in the street to help the poor apple-woman to pick up her scattered fruit, simply because she is a woman, and not because she is a beauty, or a wit, or possessed of a fortune. In a word, the man endowed with the gentlemanly temperament will, at all times and in every place, show attention to rich and poor alike, regardless of social distinctions.

Such men are, generally, of a sensitive and retiring disposition. They are always ready, in little things as well as in great things, to be attentive to the wants of others, just because it is their nature to do so. There are men, and women too, in high life whose vulgarity is manifest; and there are persons in humble life whose habit of politeness and obliging good-nature is equally manifest, and is exercised unconsciously just because it is a habit. Their very looks betray them. On their tongues is "the law of kindness." There is nothing artificial, nothing hollow-hearted in their manner. In all ranks of life such men and women are to be found. High and low, rich and poor, furnish examples of them. The following narrative presents a notable instance of one who, having been born in easy circumstances, and brought up amid all the surroundings of wealth, was, in middle life, reduced to very straitened circumstances, unhappily by his own misconduct.

One day, when visiting at a small house in a side-street in a London parish, the landlady informed me that there was a lodger upstairs who had recently taken a room "on the top floor back." She was sure "he was a gentleman, although he seemed to be very hard up." There was an air of quiet self-possession about him which convinced her that "he was not a butler out of place." Having ascertained the hour when he was likely to be at home, I called on him a few days afterwards. Having sent up my card, I waited in the hall to see if he cared to see me. In a few minutes he came down, and having satisfied himself that I was one of the parochial clergy, he invited me up to what he called "his den." When we were quite alone he thanked me for having visited him, presuming that he was indebted for the pleasure of seeing me to his landlady for making his name known to me.

What particularly struck me was his quiet self-possession, and the absence of anything like an apology for his asking me into the only room he possessed—partly a sitting-room, and partly a bedroom. His manner was easy and pleasant. We conversed on the general topics of the day, and after about fifteen minutes I took leave of him, expressing a hope that he would do me the favour of calling on me at his convenience. Next day I received the following note:

DEAR SIR,

Pray allow me to thank you for your obliging courtesy in visiting me yesterday. You were good enough to ask me to call upon you, and it would give me much pleasure to do so. But I hope you will pardon me for my frankness if I ask you to be kind enough to excuse me. The fact is, I came here hoping that I might be enabled to live in perfect retirement. Owing to the good-natured weakness of my landlady in mentioning my name, you did me the honour of calling, for which I am exceedingly obliged. But my circumstances having undergone a very great

change, it suits me, in my present condition, to lead the life of a recluse—unknowing and unknown. At the same time, I shall be always very glad to see you, if you will be so good as to call, whenever you may find a spare moment to look in upon me.

I am, dear sir,
Yours very faithfully,
JOHN D——.

A week elapsed before I again saw Mr. D——, and, in order to make sure of finding him at home, I wrote a short note to know if it would be quite convenient for him to see me if I were to call at a time appointed. Being assured of the fact, I paid him my second visit. On this occasion we became better acquainted with each other, and we succeeded to some extent in overcoming that natural estrangement which, from our cold and formal usages of society, has become a fixed habit in the ordinary intercourse between strangers. Finding that my new acquaintance possessed two pre-eminent traits of a well-bred man—never speaking of himself, and never asking questions—I confined my remarks, as before, to things in general. Whether fortunately or unfortunately, I never had the gift of introducing religion mechanically when placed in such circumstances, so far as to make a personal appeal to a man of such an exquisitely sensitive nature as that of Mr. D——. The religious influence which one man exercises upon another may be considered from two points of view. It may be considered as it is *the effect of an endeavour*, or as it is *the result of observation;* in other words, as it flows from what the one man *says*, or as it arises from what the other man *sees*. To make a direct and personal appeal to a man of gentlemanly susceptibilities in order to ascertain what may be his spiritual condition may have the effect of completely putting an end to all further interviews. A shy and reserved man might resent such a liberty. Besides, we are all to some extent transparent, easily seen through, and those whom we visit judge of us more by the unconscious influence of our whole man and manner than by any conventional talking about religion. The electricity of the human face and voice has a wonderful effect in the delineation of character. If "the fruits of the Spirit" be shed abroad in a man's heart, we may be sure they will mingle with his thoughts and feelings, and produce a far deeper and a more permanent impression upon the minds of those who hear him, than if he were to open fire upon them with some abrupt and personal questions, which, however well intended, may fall very far short of the desired mark. Consideration for the feelings of others is one of the first evidences of the faith which inspires a man's daily life. Where that is the moving power in a clergyman's dealings with his parishioners, there

will be no lack of opportunity for a direct attempt to stir up their minds "by way of remembrance."

With regard to my interviews with Mr. D——, I am perfectly satisfied that, had I begun by asking him, "Are you saved, sir?"—a question which well-meaning and piously-disposed persons sometimes put to comparative strangers—he would have politely declined to give any definite reply to such a query. I did not obtrude upon his individualism in such a personal way, and the consequence was that he gradually became more and more confiding, and in the end he gave me the history of the vicissitudes of his life, which was both interesting and instructive.

His income was exactly £80 a year—a miserable pittance for one who once had been in the possession of ample means. And yet, on that modest allowance, he lived like a gentleman, for he paid his way as he went along, and never got into debt. One day, when we were chatting together upon the difference between the popularity which money, or the want of it, gains for a man from the world, he suddenly stopped short, and said, with an evident allusion to his own experience: "When you pay away your last shilling, and don't know where you are going to get another till you work for it, you cannot help being a little bit anxious as regards the morrow."

"Surely you never have had to work for your living?"

"Indeed! is that your idea of my career in the past? I can tell you that many a long weary day, and often through many a sleepless night, I have worked with my pen to try to eke out a precarious subsistence in the undignified occupation of a penny-a-liner."

"For the newspapers, do you mean?"

"No; as a copying clerk. I used to 'devil' for a fellow who paid me a penny for every seventy-two words, for which he was paid three-ha'pence, and right glad I was to have the job to do."

"How, may I ask, if you will not think me rude in asking, do you now manage?"

"Ah! thereby hangs a tale; but it would take me too long to tell you all. If you care to hear it, I shall be glad to let you know some other time, only I fear to incur the risk of becoming a bore. Has it ever occurred to you to ask what rules the world? Kings? Emperors? the powers that be? Are those the sources of human energy? Nothing of the sort. The power that rules the world is what the author of the French play, known as 'Les Pauvres de Paris,' has expressed it, '*C'est le Biftek*,' in plain English—the beefsteak. That, sir, is the ruler of mankind. Individual effort to 'keep body and soul together' is the propelling power that keeps the world in

motion. Why, there are men in London alone whose efforts are so absorbed in the mere struggle for existence, that they have neither time nor thought for anything else. What is it to me who sways the destiny of the nation, if the dire necessity of earning my bread keeps me in a perpetual state of pre-occupation? The boatman who rowed the King across the river on the morning of the battle, ventured to express his earnest hopes for the success of his Majesty in the fight. The King's answer was not only a practical suggestion, but it conveyed, in playful irony, a piece of genuine philosophy. He said, 'Thank you—thank you, my man, but, success or no success, you shall be a ferry-man still.' Exactly so. Let kings and queens rule as they please, the great bulk of the people have to earn their daily bread in the best way they can. They have to be hewers of wood and drawers of water."

"But you are not working for your livelihood at the present?"

"No; I enjoy—shall I say?—an annuity purchased for me by a near relative, whose benevolent intentions were mainly directed to save the family prestige from scandal. It would never do to have me in the workhouse, while my rich relations were moving in the best society. Here, in an obscure lodging, I am out of their way, and can be no cause of offence to any of them. It was not without a pang that I was obliged to accept this arrangement, for I was incapacitated from work in consequence of having been afflicted with what is called 'Scrivener's paralysis.' My hand became disabled for further work, and there was nothing left for me but the pauper's last resource. But I must not weary you with my troubles. Everyone has his own, and I shrink from airing mine. Every stove should consume its own smoke; every man should keep his troubles to himself."

Having expressed a strong desire to know the whole story of his chequered life, he kindly consented, when next we met, to give me the principal outlines of it. They were a curious mixture of light and shade, smiles and tears, trials and triumphs.

The first false step he made was an improvident marriage. He committed the unpardonable offence, from a social point of view, of marrying below his station in life. A young and pretty milliner's daughter engaged his affection, and, in spite of every remonstrance from parents, relatives and friends, he resolved to have his own way—and he had it. He was just twenty-two years of age, and she in the bloom of sweet seventeen. She was "all his fancy painted her," and, by the artistic and judicious aid of dress, with all its mysterious fol-de-rols and fiz-gigs, she managed, according to his account, to make her personal attractions, which seem to have been considerable, too bewitching for the inexperience of

her young and ardent admirer. They were married quite privately, no one being present except her mother and two sisters on her side, and a college friend who acted as his best-man. His description of the wedding and all its details were curiously suggestive of the anomalous mixture of incongruities. He walked to the church, attended by his friend. She did the same, in company with her mother and sisters. After the ceremony, they retreated in the same order; his wife to her home with her mother, and he to his temporary lodgings taken for the occasion, so as to comply with the marriage law of residence. In the afternoon they met by appointment at the railway station, the starting-point for their wedding-trip to the Continent.

Everything went on smoothly for the first six or seven weeks, about which time differences of opinion arising from differences of taste began to set in.

Their first quarrel arose from a strongly expressed desire on the lady's part not to go back to England until she had seen more of the gay life of the French capital. He pleaded a return home, but to no purpose. His wife had a will of her own, and she was determined to exercise it. For peace' sake he gave in. But from time to time he noticed that sundry parcels were making their appearance, and that a corresponding demand was made upon his purse. Her acquired taste in the article of dress had ample scope in the metropolis of fashion. In fact, it was here that the young lady's trousseau was being elaborately prepared—an omission on her mother's part for which plausible excuses were not wanting. At length he found that he had to pay more than £150 for what should have been the bridal costume under more favourable auspices. He was devotedly attached to his wife, and though he demurred to her increasing love of finery which was being every day gradually augmented by indulgence, still he humoured her to the top of her bent, and paid "willingly, though with an unwilling mind,' for all the freaks of folly which this young aspirant after the newest fashions had so thoughtlessly forced upon him.

"Well," he said, as he was recounting this episode in his early married life, "I could have borne all this had my wife been only fairly disposed to be guided by my advice in her general conduct and deportment. At dinner I was terribly shocked by her utter want of manners. My good advice, when alone, was met by ill-tempered remarks, so that I was unable to be of any practical benefit to her in the matter of social etiquette. Gradually the period of disenchantment arrived. At the end of six months my daily life became almost insupportable in consequence of the extravagant habits

and the vulgar frivolity of my wife. Things were every day approaching a crisis which at length decided my course of action. I told her that I had been long enough abroad, and that if she would not return with me, I should go away without her."

"'As you like,' was her arrogant reply. 'I will not return to country life in England; but we can live in London.'"

Mr. D—— agreed to this proposal, and they left Paris the next day.

"The story of my subsequent life for five years," he continued, "may be briefly summed up in these words: My wife's tastes were so dissimilar to mine that we could not get along for hardly a single day without unpleasant scenes. One fine morning, to my surprise, she bolted from my house, taking with her our only child, a little daughter, of four years of age. My child I recovered, but her mother I have never seen since. The last I heard of her was that she had gone to Australia. She wrote me one letter, which speaks for itself:

"You will, I fear, be pained at my going away. But there was no other course open to me. I felt that we could not hit it off. We do not think alike on anything, and for your sake, as for my own, we are better apart. You were kind and indulgent to me, too much perhaps. Farewell—kiss Julia for her mother's sake, and try to think of me as favourably as you can."

"That was a lesson to me as to the egregious folly of a man marrying a woman whose social position is so inferior to his own. This ill-assorted alliance seriously marred my prospects, apart from having cut me off from my family. I had then about £1,200 a year, an ample income for myself and child. It was an allowance from my father, dependent solely on his good pleasure. To his eternal credit be it said, that though I nearly broke his heart by my wilful disobedience, he still continued his allowance by leaving me in the undisturbed enjoyment of my income till his death, an event which took place soon after. By his will he left everything he was possessed of to my mother for her life, with remainder to my two nieces, charging his property with £500 a year for me during life."

The sequel is soon told. Mr. D—— was induced to mortgage his annuity of £500, and with the capital thus realized he invested in railway stock. Gradually his investments, not by any means judiciously laid out, melted away a good portion of his ready money. His private expenses exceeded his regular income, and as he had recourse to his capital to supply any deficiency, he soon found himself in a position of hopeless entanglement in his pecuniary affairs.[1] The time at last came

[1] *Fortunately his daughter was carefully educated and cared for by a maiden aunt whose means were limited.*

when he parted literally with his last shilling—the fact to which he had so feelingly alluded in the quotation already given.

When narrating this portion of his life, he said: "I had now two courses before me, and so far as I could see, two only—the workhouse, or death. I would not beg, and I could not work. I knew no handicraft. I was unable to handle the pen of a ready writer. There was nothing left for me to choose except genteel starvation or the pauper's home—the first the more acceptable to me if only I could die without it being known. Did you ever," said Mr. D——, "know what it is to be hungry—*very* hungry—without as much as one penny in your pocket to buy bread with? Ah! that is an experience which, for a gentleman born in affluence, and brought up in luxury, is terrible. To pass by shops in every street with bread enough and to spare, and you perishing with hunger, because you cannot descend so low in the scale of degradation as to go in and beg for a morsel of food, that is something more depressing than I can describe. If I could only have died from natural causes, I felt that I could thank God for allowing me to depart in peace. The idea that I was doomed to live on in this world through summer after summer with its wealth of flowers, and winter after winter with its frosts and snows, while I was to be the inmate of a workhouse, drove me almost mad."

"But why did you not make known the actual facts of the case to your relatives, as the last plank after shipwreck. Surely there was a third course which you might have tried before you courted the approach of death, or resigned yourself to the workhouse?"

"They had all cast me off because of my improvident marriage; and there is something in a very sensitive nature that will not allow a man to knock under, or place himself in the position of being reminded that he is the fulfilment of the prophetic warnings of his indignant relatives. When a man is on his last legs, in despair, utterly smashed up, and not knowing what to do, or where to look for a generous hand or feeling heart, to be told that you brought it all upon yourself—that is the last ounce that breaks the camel's back. This is the style of thing: 'Well, you know, I told you from the first that ruin would overtake you; and you now see that I spoke the truth. You would take no advice, listen to no word of warning; you were determined to take your own course, and you see the end of it. You made your own bed, and with your own hands put the thorns into it. You can blame no one but yourself if you find it an uneasy couch.'

"That is cold comfort, is it not? How could I, then, apply to them? A waif and stray, I was illustrating, according to the sombre reproaches of my friends, the very principle

which was bound up with cause and effect, both in the natural and moral worlds. No doubt about it. My friends told me that it was good for me to be afflicted; a truth that my inner conscience could corroborate, and which no one knew better than myself."

"Finding myself cast adrift," continued Mr. D——, "I took up the advertisement-sheet of the *Times*. and carefully read up every case in which some one was wanted to do something or other. At last I hit upon one which required the services of a gentleman to read to a blind man two hours a day; references of character and position required: personal application only would be attended to. I called and saw the blind man; there was a female relative with him. She was one of those hard, angular type of women, tall, austere, and ungenial. She wore spectacles. She had a head-gear of faultless whiteness, the cap itself being kept in position by means of strings which met under the chin. Everything was correct, very much so. Her dress was the essence of neatness: colour, dark grey; texture, some sort of compromise between wool and goat's hair. She let me know that she was doing the faithfully severe task of choosing 'a gentleman' as companion for her nephew, as the blind man turned out to be. Evidently she looked upon me with suspicion, from the very fact that being, or supposed to be, a gentleman, I was ready to accept the subordinate position of reader to her nephew for the modest remuneration of five shillings a day, which was rendered more tempting from the fact that it was to be paid with undeviating punctuality on every occasion of my visit. This was done with an eye to business and economy. There would be no necessity to give me a week's notice if necessary. All that was required was an appointment from day to day. My antecedents were asked for, my present mode of life, my connections, and so forth. I replied with courteous caution; and I fancy that on one occasion the grim visage of the blind man's guardian slightly relaxed into an abortive smile. It was when I said, in reply to some home-thrusts as to whether I was married or single, and, if married, what family, when I said that I had been married, but was now living as a bachelor in private apartments, had one daughter provided for by an aunt, in whose care she had been for some years. Then it was that Minerva—for that was the soubriquet I gave the lady—exhibited just a shade of feeling, but in what direction it was impossible for me to say. All I know is that out of twenty-seven candidates I was selected."

"It would form an amusing narrative," continued Mr. D——, "if I were to tell you my literary experience with this blind man. I need only add that I retained this lucrative position

for two years and a half.[1] The lady's brother was a solicitor, and through his influence I was introduced to some of the law-scriveners who helped me to earn something by copying legal documents, as I have already mentioned to you. At last I was obliged to give up this source of earning my bread. A friend of the family who knew the facts wrote to my relatives, and put my case before them. The result was that they agreed to allow me eighty pounds a year, on which I strive hard, and only by very judicious management, to keep on my legs. These are the general outlines of my story—dark enough, you will say."

Mr. D—— had learned, by bitter experience, how one false step in early life sometimes renders it impossible for a man to regain his lost ground. There are few things which give a greater shock to family pride than a mésalliance in the way of marriage. The male portion of the family get over it easily enough after a time, though they never perhaps have the same cordiality for the offender as before. But the female side of the household rarely forgive. It is looked upon by them almost in the light of a crime. It is well known that a man will be received into the best society by "high-born ladies," and flattered—if he be worth flattery—though they know right well that their honoured guest is leading a life very far below the ordinary standard of propriety. But if the man marries beneath him, many are apt to regard his conduct as an outrage against good-breeding. True nobility, however, resides in the soul, and though, unquestionably, rank and position are very great advantages, it is a mistake to look down upon those not "born in the purple," as if the temperament of the true gentleman or gentlewoman were limited to the upper ten thousand. There is no monopoly in the matter of courtesy, and wherever it is real, no matter in what condition of life, the possessor of it, man or woman, will always make their kindly influence felt among all with whom they come into contact in the ordinary concerns of life.

In some respects, no doubt, Society is false and hollow; but in other respects it is the embodiment of the inherited good sense of our predecessors, who, by practical tests, have handed down to us the result of their matured experience.

The moral of Mr. D——'s failure in life suggests a useful warning. The young man of good family who marries a woman whose neglected education and vulgar surroundings unfit her for maintaining her proper position in society is very

[1] In reply to the question: "How came you to leave the blind man?" Mr. D—— said: "Because my opinion frequently differed from the lady guardian's. This divergence of interpretation evidently annoyed her, because she was not in the habit of being contradicted."

likely to entail a lifelong disappointment upon himself, while he runs the risk of imperilling the happiness of his wife. Whatever is not according to the fitness of things is seldom attended with happy results. There are unwritten laws in the social as well as in the natural world, whose operation is fixed and uniform. Whenever these laws are wantonly violated, we are made to feel, by bitter experience, that our sowing and our reaping are in relative proportions. No one can defiantly turn his back on the sacred sanctities of "home" and "father" without being made to realize, in bitterness of spirit, that our very delusions are often chosen by an over-ruling Providence to be our worst tormentors. "The stars in their courses" fight against those who wilfully disregard the loving counsel and the delegated authority of home-rule. Intolerance of control, and an imperious disdain of those whose faithfulness and devotion to our best interests entitle them to our respectful and loyal obedience, seldom go unpunished. Sooner or later they draw down upon the transgressor a penalty commensurate with the offence. The outer world may not see how the righteous reaction of retributive Providence recoils upon the sinner's head. Appearances are very deceptive: men are not what they seem. In the brilliant homes of splendour, as well as in the humblest hovels of the poor, there are individuals, in the former case, supremely miserable, and, in the latter, perfectly content. Conscience is the moral regulator of our lives until it has become entirely seared. Its accusing, or else excusing, verdict is heard in secret, and as such is known only to the individual himself. Memory is a faithful witness, and the best book-keeper on earth. Its records are written by a hand whose characters are indelible; and they supply to the reckless, the wayward, and the self-willed a sorrowful retrospect of wasted opportunities and blighted hopes. This, and no more, was the history and character of the subject of our sketch. He determined to follow his own way, and to carry out his own devices. Being "wise in his own conceits," he considered that he was the best judge of his own affairs. He wilfuly disobeyed his father; he married a worthless and vulgar, but a very attractive woman; and he squandered or muddled away his money until he was reduced to his last shilling, after which he had ample time for leisurely but unavailing regret.

G. W. WELDON.