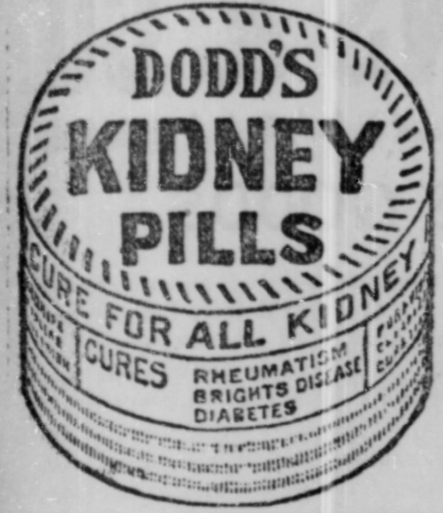


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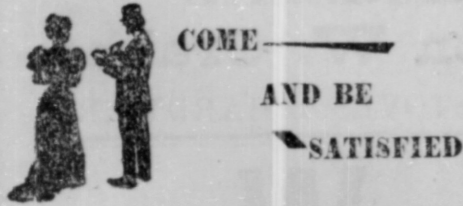
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A CLERICAL ERROR

By FRANCOIS LYNDE.

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By way of prologue let me say that I have never been quite able to understand why my colleagues in this far western diocese call me "the padre," coupling the innuendo with an intimation that I should have been a priest of the older faith rather than a poor clergyman of our own. In my own looking glass—and which of us is ever vouchsafed a peep into that of another?—I find nothing to justify the inference. The quicksilver images the figure of a middle aged person, whose sedentary habit has sickled a face never ruddy, whose vigils with the student's lamp have begun to accentuate the stoop in a rather ungainly pair of shoulders, whose attire is not and has never been, I trust, more than decently ecclesiastical in cut and ensemble.

None the less, sincerity compels the admission that in traveling I am not infrequently taken for a Romish priest, and that even here in my own little parish of Carbonero the coal miners call me Father Penburton. It was this absurd misconception, heightened, possibly, by the fact that I was reading a small black bound book which may have been mistaken for a breviary, that led to my entanglement in a romantic affair on the railway—an entanglement which has since cost me many disquieting moments. Not that I hold myself in any way accountable or blameworthy, be it understood, but merely because it has given my clerical associates a fresh occasion for other of their ill-chosen and meaningless gibes.

The beginning of it was in this wise. I had been on a visit to the bishop and had boarded the train to return to my parish. Having taken a seat in the Pullman, I was reading the small black bound book—which, I beg to protest, was not a breviary—when two young persons entered the car and established themselves in the section next to my own. At their incoming I fancied they were the inevitable newly married couple whose presence seems nowadays to be a necessary complement to the passenger list of any public conveyance. The young man was a clerk of some sort, one would say, and his face was vaguely familiar. It was clean cut, smooth shaven and of the alert type which marks the younger men of business in this progress ridden region. The young woman was petite and distinctively handsome. Her face was a most agreeable study in youthful beauty and her flashing brown eyes, alight with repressed excitement, had a look in them which carried me swiftly back to my—but pardon me, this is not the story of my own youthful follies.

I perceived at once that the two were laboring under some stress of emotion which I took to be very natural embarrassment, and as they sat facing me I thought to relieve them in some measure by taking the opposite seat with my back toward them. I desire to emphasize this point because one of my colleagues is uncharitable enough to insinuate that the change was made in order that their conversation might be the better overheard, a charge which I wish to repel with proper scorn. That their talk was overheard is a matter of no moment. Every right minded person will agree with me that motives and not incidents are the cosmic principles underlying any code of ethics.

"Great Jehosh! You say he did come home to dinner, after all?"



When a man gets down flat on his back, so that he has to be carried about like a baby, he finally realizes that he is a sick man. Very frequently he has been a sick man for years, but has recklessly refused to recognize nature's warnings. Severe illness is something that does not strike a man like a flash of lightning. It creeps upon him by degrees, and at every step warns him with a new danger signal.

When a man feels "out of sorts" or "knocked out," or whatever he may call it, he is a sick man. It is time to take warning. Headaches, drowsiness, loss of sleep at night, loss of appetite, nervousness, bad taste in the mouth in the morning, and frightful dreams—all these are warnings of encroaching illness. Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery creates appetite, cures dyspepsia, stimulates the liver, purifies the blood, quickens the circulation and tones the nerves. It makes rich, red, tissue-building blood. It builds firm flesh, but does not make corpulent people more corpulent. Unlike cod liver oil, it does not make flabby flesh. On the contrary, it tears down and excretes the unhealthy tissues that constitute corpulence, and replaces them with the firm, muscular tissues of good health. It cures 98 per cent. of all cases of consumption. All bronchial, throat and kindred ailments, as lingering coughs, spitting of blood and weak lungs are cured by it. Thousands have testified to its merits. At all medicine stores.

It is a dealer's business to give you what you ask for; not to tell you what you want.

Dr. Pierce's Pleasant Pellets cure constipation. Constipation is the cause of many diseases. Cure the cause and you cure the disease. One "Pellet" is a gentle laxative, and two a mild cathartic. Druggists sell them, and nothing is "just as good."

The speaker was the young man, and there was a very emphatic note of uneasiness in his voice.

"Yes, he did," answered the young woman. "And that isn't all. I'm almost sure he suspected something."

"You are? Why? What makes you think so?"

"The way he acted. He was as short as pie crust all through dinner, and when I left the table he asked if you had called; said he had seen you in the carriage driving down Alameda street."

The young man groaned quite audibly. "Of course he did! That idiotic driver turned out for a furniture van just as we were meeting him and drove up to the very curb. I made myself as small as I could, but he couldn't help seeing me. What did you tell him?"

"I said: 'Why, poppa—Mr. Roderick! After you've forbidden him the house?'"

The young man chuckled as if the sinful equivocation were appreciative rather than a thing to be sorrowfully deprecated.

"Good! What did he say to that?"

"He was angry—as he always is when your name is mentioned. He said you were unscrupulous enough to do anything. Then he asked me if I could be ready to start for Aunt Josephine's tomorrow."

"And you told him you could?"

"I did just that, but I didn't tell him I would. Oh, why doesn't the train start?"

I heard the click of the young man's watch case.

"Chiefly because it isn't time. We have five minutes yet."

"Oh!" The exclamation was almost a sob. "If he catches the 1 o'clock car down town, he can overtake us here, can't he?"

The watch case clicked again.

"He might, but it's unlikely. The car is due at the corner just at our leaving time, and he would have a block to walk—or run. But I was thinking of something else. If he has his wits with him we shan't be safe till we pass the yard limits."

"The yard limits? I don't understand."

"We have to stop to register at the limits. If he just misses us here, he can take a carriage, run the legs off the horses and intercept us at the yard station. It can be done. I've done it myself more than once with a belated passenger."

"Oh, horrors! Alan, if you let me be taken back now, I'll never speak to you again as long as I live!"

"You needn't threaten me. It won't be my fault if we're captured. I'm not any more anxious to meet your father just now than you are," asserted the young man, earnestly.

Then silence supervened, and I had leisure to construct the accusation. It was a wedding party, indeed, but a priori—an elopement, in short. This sweet faced young woman with the reminding eyes was taking her future in her hand to give it over into the keeping of a young man whose consent to such a proceeding was his sufficient condemnation. I pictured to myself the distress of the father, whose wishes had been so unfilially disregarded. He was doubtless a kind and indulgent parent—are not all modern parents culpably so?—and his objections to the alert young man were probably well rooted in good judgment and common sense.

The name, Roderick, and the word about belated passengers, bridged the gap in my memory, and I was able to place the intending bridegroom. He was a young man employed by the railway company in some capacity—I know not what—in the booking office. He it was who had procured for me my clergyman's permit for half rates. At that time I had thought him a very pleasant young fellow, but it must be admitted that circumstances alter cases, and in the light of the present episode my point of view coincided immediately with that of the aggrieved father. It was not my affair, to be sure, but my sympathies were so strongly enlisted on the side of parental authority that I could with difficulty hold my peace. Indeed, it was borne in upon me so forcibly that I ought to expostulate with the young rashlings that I was about to do so when the train moved out and carried them, so to speak, suddenly across their Rubicon.

Having thus lost the opportunity for hopeful interference, I confess that I awaited the turn of events with no inconsiderable degree of curiosity.

Would the injured father have his wits with him, as the young man so irreverently phrased it, and drive post-haste to intercept the train at the registering station?

The day was warm and the car windows were open. When the shriek of the airbrakes was uplifted and the speed began to slacken, I looked out and up the road leading down from the city. Far away among the last scattering houses of the suburb a carriage drawn by fast galloping horses came in sight. At the same moment I heard the young man say:

"This sun is fearfully hot, don't you think so, Eleanor? Let me close your window."

The bang of the sash and the whir of the shade followed quickly, and I divined his intention. He, too, had seen the carriage.

Presently the train came to a stand with the forward end of the Pullman immediately opposite the platform of the small registering station. From my window I saw the conductor come out

and raise his hand to give the signal for departure. In the very act he espied the carriage with the galloping horses and desisted. He was evidently going to wait for the vehicle to come up.

For the next few moments the suspense was well nigh electrical. The crucial anxiety of the two young people seemed to communicate itself in some mysterious manner to the other occupants of the car, and we all sat breathless under the weight of a silence which was surcharged with suppressed excitement. When the drumming of the horses' hoofs became faintly audible, the young man could endure it no longer. With a hasty "Excuse me a moment" to his companion he left his seat, and I craned my neck from the window in time to see him join the conductor on the platform.

"What are you waiting for, Graffo?" he demanded, with the air of one who is made bold by the occasion.

The conductor jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the chaise.

(To be Continued)

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