

THE SEMI-WEEKLY TELEGRAPH, ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, APRIL 25, 1908



The EASTER WIDOWER BY PIERRE VEBER

No one ever knew how it happened that Paul Humblevault was always dressed in the latest fashion.

Maitre Jessmar, in whose legal office he exercised the functions of head clerk, even conceived some uneasiness about the matter.

Often he put the query to him—"Mr. Humblevault, might one ask you the address of your tailor?"

And the clerk would name a modest Polish tailor who repaired the breeches of the good people that colonize the neighborhood of Porte St. Denis.

At the end of several months, when Maitre Jessmar had decided that he was certainly not being robbed, when he had calculated that not a centime was missing from his strong box, he conceded that Paul Humblevault must be obtaining his resources by some more or less legitimate method.

Other companions, less romantic, insinuated that the head clerk had established himself in the good graces of an old lady, immensely rich, who loved this mysterious young man with an altogether platonic affection.

Now it happens that we are in position to unveil the truth. Here it is:— You know that Count de Perrault was the most accomplished gentleman of his period. From 1902 to '12 he was the model of all the elites; he dressed with a taste, a finesse, that were unique, and, needless to say, the newest fashion.

Now, Paul Humblevault, happening to pass Father Gustave's establishment, had remarked the "polls" won from Count de Perrault. These garments, of unique cut and style, fashioned from the richest sort of material, attracted his attention.

Lawyer Jessmar's clerk accepted the bargain. Every month he came to Father Gustave's shop and purchased the cast of clothes of Count Perrault. A brush with the wisp and a touch with the flatiron and they reassumed an air of absolute newness.

And, to sum up, he had his reward in his own circle he enjoyed the consideration that attaches itself to young people of good family who know how to dress. He even had considerable success among women.

Young Humblevault had only one ambition—to marry a rich girl—and

this he deemed quite possible. For rich girls appreciate all that is chic. Poor girls also appreciate it, but they do not figure in the calculations of young lawyers' clerks who wish to become lawyers in their turn.

Armed with these directions, the clerk that same evening made his appearance at the Cafe of the Two Sisters. In the rear room two men were playing billiards—a chauffeur and an old man, clean shaven and bald.

The smiling calm of Paul Humblevault's life was suddenly troubled. It seemed to him that he was growing fat! The Count's clothes were apparently getting to fit him too snugly.

Why of course you know it. His name is always in the papers. At least it used to be. But now, since the illness of the Countess, the Count doesn't go out any more.

He was losing flesh with astounding rapidity. From fortnight to fortnight his clothes shrank steadily. Undoubtedly some catastrophe was overturning the universe of the unknown, and Paul Humblevault fell into the deepest perplexity.

So the clerk called on Father Gustave and asked him for the name of the gentleman to whom the said clothes belonged.

"I do not know his name," said the dealer. "Everything that could give any clue as to the proprietor is always carefully removed from the clothes. The tailor's band on pantaloons and waistcoat and on the inner pocket of the coat, initials or name elsewhere—all these, you understand, have disappeared when the clothes are disposed of to me. I know only one thing, and that is that the valet who brings them to me is one Francis, and that every evening, from ten to eleven, he plays billiards at the Cafe of the Two Sisters, in Messina avenue."

Armed with these directions, the clerk that same evening made his appearance at the Cafe of the Two Sisters. In the rear room two men were playing billiards—a chauffeur and an old man, clean shaven and bald.

At about the same time Paul observed that the Count no longer had the same taste in dress. He who had once set the fashions seemed to renounce all interest in the matter. He wore his clothes for a longer time and did not exact so rigid a standard from his tailor.

Paul Humblevault once more went round to the little cafe in Messina avenue. He again found Francis there, who, like himself, was wearing mourning for Mme. de Perrault. He proposed a game of billiards, which he lost with the same adroitness as before.

Francis shook his head with an air of pity. "The Count will never again find a Countess de Perrault." "Was she so beautiful as all that?"

not to provoke any further confidences from Francis, who, on his part, had no hesitation in telling all that went on at his master's home.

The Count de Perrault had made a love match with one of his cousins, a very pretty girl, who, like him, had a taste for the elegancies of life. For several months the life of the young couple had been a series of parties, of social gayeties. Then, with the beginning of winter, the Countess had been seized with a lingering illness. Immediately the Count, renouncing the worldly life, had installed himself at the bedside of his wife. Little by little the beloved patient had wasted away and the Count had wasted away with her.

When Paul left his new friend he was fully acquainted with everything that concerned the Count and the Countess de Perrault. The old servant had hidden nothing from him, and he foresaw a denouement to which everything pointed. In fact, one month later, when he presented himself at Father Gustave's shop, the latter offered him a suit of black cloth. According to agreement Paul was forced to acquire it, and, as he was an economical lad, he knew it. Whereupon all the people he knew accosted him with an air of sympathy, saying:—

"My poor friend, I didn't know you were in mourning. I received no announcement from you. Whom have you lost?"

At about the same time Paul observed that the Count no longer had the same taste in dress. He who had once set the fashions seemed to renounce all interest in the matter. He wore his clothes for a longer time and did not exact so rigid a standard from his tailor.

Paul Humblevault once more went round to the little cafe in Messina avenue. He again found Francis there, who, like himself, was wearing mourning for Mme. de Perrault. He proposed a game of billiards, which he lost with the same adroitness as before.

Francis shook his head with an air of pity. "The Count will never again find a Countess de Perrault." "Was she so beautiful as all that?"

"Beautiful? She was more than beautiful! She was a stunner."

And when Paul inquired for the details that Francis summed up in the epithet of stunner he learned that Mme. de Perrault was, while living, a large young woman, neither too fat nor too slim, with a well turned figure and a face showing decision of very soft blue eyes.

"No, she was born a Raftot." By midnight the clerk had lost three hundred points, but he was marvellously well equipped with information about the late Countess. And he had arrived at a great decision—he was going to renounce the Count! It was necessary, indeed, to make him renounce before Easter; that is to say, before the end of ten months, so as to renew at a useful season his light weight clothes.

Next morning Paul hunted up at the office the list of clients—widows, old maids, divorced women. After severe examination he retained three names—Mme. de Franchel, Miss Decevant and Mme. Amusson. All three were tall, brunette, pretty and rich.

The widow of the Baron de Franchel, however, gave herself up exclusively to good works—there was no chance there. As to Miss Decevant, she was too intelligent, too much interested in questions of hygiene, in medicine; she was fond of sociology. There was no chance either with the one, the illusion she had formed about him, and it had taken him no less than ten years to give his wife a more realistic impression of the man.

Mme. Amusson, who had now been divorced for a year, was wearing herself to death. She was chic, she was fascinating. She dressed in black by way of defiance, because it is said not to be becoming to brunettes, and because she imagined herself to be disgusted with life. Paul decided that she should be, with the briefest possible delay, the Countess de Perrault.

And this is the stratagem that he imagined and that he had the audacity to put into execution. He wrote to Mme. Amusson:—"Madame, a gentleman suffers; you alone can rescue him from the black trouble that gnaws at his heart. He does not know that I am writing to you, but on Monday morning, between eleven and twelve, she will be at the Avenue du Blois. She will hold a New York Herald in her hand. Put, without affectation, a dark pink in your button-hole."

When they received these letters the two interested parties shrugged their shoulders. "What sort of idiot is it who is trying this hoax upon me?" Nevertheless the letters set their imagination working. "After all, how can one tell?" On Monday morning the Count and Mme. Amusson were in the Avenue du Blois. They did not, indeed, dare to carry the signs of recognition. That would have prevented them from denying that they had been caught by a trick. They promenade up and down the avenue several times, examining all the passers-by. Several times they met. The Count remarked Mme. Amusson who was of the type he preferred. Mme. Amusson asked herself if this gentleman, so black, so distinguished, had looked at her so steadfastly, might not be the man of sorrow. Matter is a serious one. "After all, how can one tell?" On Wednesday the Count wore in deal like a chrysanthemum, and Mme his buttonhole an enormous pink of the darkest hue, which looked a good Avonmore bore a copy of the Herald in each hand, so that it might the better be seen. She recognized the Count; the Count recognized her. He even dared to accost her. "Madame, are you the lady of whom the letter speaks?" "Sir," said she in wrath, "I do not understand any of this jesting."

she will be at the Avenue du Blois. She will hold a New York Herald in her hand. Put, without affectation, a dark pink in your button-hole."

When they received these letters the two interested parties shrugged their shoulders. "What sort of idiot is it who is trying this hoax upon me?" Nevertheless the letters set their imagination working. "After all, how can one tell?"

On Monday morning the Count and Mme. Amusson were in the Avenue du Blois. They did not, indeed, dare to carry the signs of recognition. That would have prevented them from denying that they had been caught by a trick. They promenade up and down the avenue several times, examining all the passers-by. Several times they met. The Count remarked Mme. Amusson who was of the type he preferred.

Mme. Amusson asked herself if this gentleman, so black, so distinguished, had looked at her so steadfastly, might not be the man of sorrow. Matter is a serious one. "After all, how can one tell?"

On Wednesday the Count wore in deal like a chrysanthemum, and Mme his buttonhole an enormous pink of the darkest hue, which looked a good Avonmore bore a copy of the Herald in each hand, so that it might the better be seen. She recognized the Count; the Count recognized her. He even dared to accost her. "Madame, are you the lady of whom the letter speaks?"

"Sir," said she in wrath, "I do not understand any of this jesting."

They never knew it. All the same, on this night of the contract Mlle. Blanche Vertout, daughter of Tapioca Vertout, was seized with a sudden passion for this elegant clerk who read so nicely, and immediately on her return home she demanded that her parents should at once obtain for her this distinguished young man, as a consequence of which the office of Maitre Jessmar passed a few months afterward into the hands of Maitre Humblevault. But that, as Rudyard Kipling says is another story.



BE READ THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT BEFORE A BRILLIANT ARSENAL

When Writing to Advertisers Please Mention The Telegraph