

THE THREAD OF THE ARGUMENT.

An Unreported Fact.

BY PHILIP A. BEST.

"Agreement is like an arrow from a cross bow, which has equal force though shot by a child."

"More copy wanted!" said the "devil" as he bounded into the sanctum.

"What's the matter? The foreman must be in a hurry to get off to a wedding," laughingly remarked Lumsden, the proof-reader, as he wheeled around his chair in my direction.

"I guess the boys in the press room are impatient for the forms," I replied, after planting a conspicuous "O.K." at the head of the last "revise."

"Tell old Leadsplitter to run in that column and a half on 'Spanish Atrocities.' He will find it among that fresh batch of boiler plate," said the religious editor to our "devil," who was at that moment diving into waste-paper basket in quest of cancelled postage stamps.

That day, padding was in order, for news was mighty scarce. Nevertheless, a three column "scoop" of Harris' on "A Brunette's Queer Pranks" covered a multitude of stereotyped miscellanies.

But what of the composers? Was there no reason for their impatience on this particular day? Be sure there was. Printers are human. Everybody was anxious to get away early.

In a word, everyone was going to see the ball game. Some of our men were fast setters and, moreover, were usually the lucky ones, when the fat "takes" have in sight. As a consequence these latter could at times throw up one "em" quod to decide if they would work or not. If the little wick in the quod showed up, they would throw down their "stick" for that day, and hand over their "case" to some poor hungry "sub." But all "types" cannot act in this way. As they throw the letters into the boxes, they are reminded of the little mouths to be filled at home. No wonder, then, that they are glad at times to spend a couple of hours on the bleachers watching the home team "knock the visitors all over the field." You could not but be grudge them that little bit of innocent enjoyment.

The presses were now rattling below, and everybody was fastening the buttons of his shirt sleeves. The items to be attended to that evening had been written on the editor's pad and were now checked off. One thing, however, had almost escaped the hawk-eyed editor.

"Look here!" he said to me. "This affair cannot be overlooked. It does not amount to a row of pins, but the manager's wife's sister is a patron of the concern, and there will be a demand to pay if it is not written up."

The thing referred to was a musical and literary entertainment to be given late that afternoon at "Madame Pervert's Home for Indigent Children."

"I'll gladly attend to that," I said to the editor, although to tell the truth, I did not like it a bit. But likes and dislikes, like the perfumed essays of the sweet girl graduate, often find a grave in the editorial sanctum.

I was the last to leave the office. Before going, I searched for a programme of Madame Pervert's juvenile show. I could find none. However, I had the good fortune to discover the type of the programme lying on a galley, among the "dead" matter. Unluckily some careless "piv" had knocked the line into "pi." I quickly pulled a proof of what there was. "The end of it read: 'closing address by Rev. —'"

Then it stopped. There would be no trouble in finding out the clergyman's name.

Near the appointed time I was heading towards Mme. Pervert's Home. I entered from the rear. In the yard I accented a venerable-looking dame who was busy hanging out clothes on the line.

"Excuse me, madame, but are you connected with this institution?" I asked politely.

"Faith and I don't, sir. I am just a plain, decent woman tryin' to earn me livin', and it wouldn't be for the likes of them folks at the Home, I'd be workin', in fact, if I could find an other place," was the answer I received.

"Would I be too inquisitive if I enquired for the name of the visiting clergyman?" I asked further.

"Is it the preacher you mean? O murder! I never could remember. It's a thundering big Dutch name. Wait and I'll call the gardener. He knows more than how to plant cabbage."

The functionary referred to came to wards me.

"Sprechen sie deutsch?" I asked him.

He replied with a long drawn "Ya," and a smile of equal proportion. He was my man.

"What is the minister's name?" I enquired.

"Grosmaul, was the answer. I was satisfied. Moreover, I learned from this obliging gentleman from over the Rhine, that the lady bending over the laundry basket was Mrs. Bridget Houlihan. "She is Irish," I was told in a whisper. A rather unnecessary bit of information.

I had enough material collected now to spin out a good column and a half. I mostly depended though, on the programme. There would be plenty of room left to speak of "an ideal home," "well fed and rosy checked children," "immaculate pillow shams," "an air of tidiness," "perfect discipline," and all that. The annual report of the matron was full of such platitudes, and would help me out wonderfully.

In the meantime I attended the ball game and spent an enjoyable hour dodging the editor's sweeping eyes and the foul balls which came my way.

On the morrow our evening edition had an elaborate account of the "Great Event of the Season," at Madame Pervert's Home. Although I had not the pleasure of seeing or hearing any of the ladies who recited, or warbled, to the delight of Madame Pervert's juveniles, I managed to almost exhaust my list of adjectives in speaking of the "perfect, elegant and unapproachable" performance of this or that paragon of feminine loveliness. I wound up the report by saying that "the closing address given by Rev. Mr. Grosmaul was couched in words of fines diction. It was a masterpiece of graceful oratory, and the gifted speaker sat down amidst a storm of applause."

My German friend had failed to give the minister the usual polite prefix of "Mr." when speaking to me. It was a small matter, nevertheless, I was careful to supply it in print, but, alas! small things work great mischief.

The next morning I was at my desk bright and early, and when about to run my scissors into a fresh exchange, I looked up, and I beheld an object in black, standing at the sanctum door. It was a minister, if a white cravat and cadaverous countenance meant anything.

"Good morning!" I said, and my visitor promptly returned the matutinal compliment.

"I come on business of a serious nature," he commenced, and I sharpened my pencil expecting a roasting bit of news which would make "our esteemed contemporary" across the way green with envy.

"There is an error in your report of the entertainment at good Madame Pervert's yesterday," said the minister.

"You say—the reporter I mean says—that Rev. Mr. Grosmaul delivered the closing address. Splendid as far as it goes, but, my dear sir, it ought to have read Rev. Mrs. Grosmaul my wife, who, like her unworthy husband, is also a minister of the gospel. A correction must be made, or I shall feel it my duty to complain to your manager."

I felt ready to burst into laughter, but managed to conceal my pent-up feelings by making a rush at the office cart which was then making a tour of inspection among a lot of cuts to be used during the next Sunday school convention.

"Sit down, Mr. Grosmaul—your name I presume?" I then said.

"Listen to me for a moment, pray! I wrote the report you refer to. Now, if the manager finds this out I may be severely censured. I am sure you will let the matter drop."

"By no means, sir," he said. "I now changed my tactics."

"Mr. Grosmaul," I commenced, trying to be grave, "you yourself delivered a much talked of sermon some few weeks ago, did you not?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"Everything. That sermon was written right here in this office, and by one of our own reporters. Moreover, you got the credit of it, and a consequent increase of salary. Now, sir, if you open your mouth about this little mistake of mine, you may as well look around for some one to can deliver a farewell sermon which you can deliver to your congregation. Understand?"

He understood. Everything was forgiven and forgotten there and then. Moreover, I was heartily invited to spend a pleasant hour, or two, with the Rev. Mrs. and Mr. Grosmaul at Madame Pervert's on some future occasion. I accepted the invitation.

What I have said so far, is but introductory to the main argument, but it all belongs to the thread which led to my acquaintance with Mr. Grosmaul and his reverend consort. I have now to touch on matters to be spoken of only with respect and reverence, so I hope the grave reader will overlook what appears at first sight frivolous. Trifles appear to make up the whole, hence a reporter faithfully gathers up what seem to be insignificant details. That is his business. Hence no apologies.

The society of St. Vincent de Paul is one of the best in the Church. It does an immense amount of good, and does it unostentatiously. A novel thing struck me when I first became a member. At the end of the conference, a bag was passed around among the brethren, and each one dropped in his contribution. No one knew what the other gave. It may have been a crisp ten dollar bill or it may have been a copper penny. So you see there was no room for vanity or humiliation. And like their aims giving so wide what the deeds of the brethren of St. Vincent de Paul. There was no record of personal charity. The recording angel will attend to that; persons who needed it kept a list of persons who needed it. Many persons would starve rather than beg for help, and these the society went in search of. In many cases non-Catholics would also visit poor families and provide for them, and as a result we often heard of Catholic children being placed in proselytizing institutions. Such cases required great vigilance on the part of our members who would be pained, to see souls bartered for bread.

The duties of the members were manifold. They visited the poor, and the sick, fed the hungry, instructed the ignorant, buried the dead—in a word exercised all the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Since the majority of the members had to earn their own daily bread, it naturally followed that most of the work of the society was done in the evenings. On Sundays we went from house to house collecting the alms of our regular benefactors. One of

these, a lady, one Mrs. Liebreich (Peace to her ashes) was one of our most generous benefactors. She was head waitress in a wealthy family, and moreover a widow.

"Yes, am alone," she said one day. "I have no one to provide for now. God is good to me, and I do not think there is a better way of showing my gratitude than by helping the poor. I suppose you see much of the miserable side of life?"

I admitted that we did.

"I have had my cross to bear, 'tis true, but I know it will pass away, and the Blessed Virgin will obtain what I have asked of her. Beg the members of your society to pray for my intention," said Mrs. Liebreich.

This good woman had met with some painful loss or other. It gave her much anxiety. This no doubt it was the cross she sorely hinted.

We had an orphan child on our hands one day. It was to be baptized at once. Looking around for a godmother I thought of Mrs. Liebreich. She willingly acted as the child's sponsor. Two things attracted my attention during and after the christening ceremony. In the first place the godmother insisted in having the child enrolled in the Scapular of Mount Carmel, and secondly I noticed that she wiped away a tear or two from her eyes.

"My conduct may have appeared strange to you," said Mrs. Liebreich after the baptism, "I may as well tell you my own sad story. My poor husband left me with one child, a beautiful little boy, whom I had christened by the name of Louis. The Carmelite father who baptized the child likewise enrolled it in the holy Scapular, which the priest said would always protect the child from danger. The danger did come, and quicker than expected, and my darling child was taken from me. Those things in church to-day brought back everything to me. No one but a mother knows what it means to lose a child." By way of consoling her I said:

"My dear friend unite your suffering with the sorrow felt by our heavenly mother when she lost her Son in the temple. Remember, too, that your child is now among the angels praying for you."

"Oh! if I only knew that!" exclaimed Mrs. Liebreich.

I could not understand this remark coming from a woman full of faith. She saw my puzzled looks.

"It was this way," she explained. "We lived in that row of houses which were burnt down last winter. The confusion at the time was very great, and, moreover, it all happened at night. After all the excitement had subsided, I looked for my child, thinking he had been picked up by some charitable neighbor. I was mistaken, and my searching was all in vain. The child could not have died. If that was the case I would surely have heard of it. Be it as it may, a couple years have elapsed, and I have not come across a trace of my poor little boy. If Providence should give him back to me I should be so grateful, but alas! how could I recognize the child now? If he lives time has wiped away all signs of recognition. If I knew for certain that the boy was dead an awful load would be taken from my heart."

"If, as you say, Mrs. Liebreich," I remarked, you placed the child under the Blessed Virgin's protection, she will protect him. Of that I am certain. So, don't fret, but leave it all in the hands of the Mother of God."

It would have been a pleasure to help the poor woman. Any efforts on my part, though, seemed useless. Humanly speaking nothing could be done.

"Welcome! welcome! So glad to see you!" exclaimed the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Grosmaul, as they greeted me on the steps of Madame Pervert's Home.

"O Madame Pervert! allow me to have the great pleasure of introducing to you this gentleman—a right worthy representative of the press," exclaimed the enthusiastic clergyman.

I was the lion of the hour. Everything I saw I took good care to call "lovely," and now and then for a change, I declared all things "charming," "a feast to the eyes," and goodness knows what else.

After making the rounds of the institution, I was made to sit down to cake and tea—which, of course, I said was the best I ever had tasted. Then the children were brought in, and marched up on a temporary stage. A pretty little play commenced. Some of the children were dressed to personate little cherubs.

"Makes one feel as if he were among the angels," remarked Mr. Grosmaul to me.

"Yes, indeed!" would have been my proper answer, but I distractedly said "angels are in heaven, sir!"

The clergyman took my reply in wonderful good grace.

"That's a clever child there towards the centre," I remarked to Mr. Grosmaul.

"Yes, my boy, little Luther, I expect great things of him," he replied.

"Going to educate him for the ministry," said Mrs. Grosmaul.

After the entertainment the little fellow, who was the subject of our remarks, was brought towards us.

"He has been a naughty boy. He has been crying all the morning over nothing," said Madame Pervert. I volunteered no comment here, but thought to myself that children's tears are strong arguments at times. They do not cry over nothing, with all respect to Madame Pervert. In the meantime the two reverend Grosmauls were admiring an oleograph of Daniel in the lion's den.

"What is the boy's name?" I innocently asked Madame Pervert. I had forgotten that he was already pointed out to me as Luther.

"Wesley Knox," said Madame Pervert with hesitation.

A head of light flashed across my mind. Madame Pervert's hesitancy was the cause of it. It struck me there and then that no one was desirous to let the child's origin be made known. I felt like asking a thousand questions. However, I kept quiet and smothered my curiosity. The game had only commenced. I laughed heartily at what I know not.

"Yes, children cry over trifles," I then said.

"Look at this! Some Papist toy," said one of the nurses. "It was around the child's neck when it was brought here."

"Impossible!" What sense in having such things around its neck! I said with a show of surprise.

"I have had it take it along to add to your list of curios down at the office?"

"You are welcome to it," laughed Madame Pervert as she tossed me the little Scapular.

Little she thought that her own fate was in a way wound up in those slender Scapular strings. In fact, little did I myself guess that I had come into possession of so tangible a bit of circumstantial evidence which would lead to unexpected results. My sole object in getting hold of the Scapular was to save so sacred an object from profanation. As I pocketed it the child from whom it was taken looked wistfully at me.

"Too bad such a nice child should be here. Evidently it is of Catholic parentage," I thought. I argued rightly. Little I knew that I myself carried with me the instrument of rescuing an innocent child from spiritual peril and depriving some pulpit of a future occupant.

Neither Madame Pervert or her reverend guests had suspected any strangeness in my conduct. They were thoroughly pleased with my visit. With smiles and bows I was escorted to the door.

"Thanks for your kind visit, and we shall be grateful if you write us up," said Rev. Mr. Grosmaul.

"Depend upon that. I'll not forget to write up everything," I replied, and I do not think anyone detected an undertone of irony in my remarks.

"Come around and listen to me some day. We have a very cozy little house of worship," said Rev. Mrs. Grosmaul suavely.

"You are a worshipper at the Presbyterian chapel are you not," Madame Pervert said somewhat inaudibly, but her question was side-tracked by Mrs. Grosmaul who quickly followed up her first remarks by saying, "Oh, I suppose you newspaper men haven't much time to devote to religious services."

"Very true, madame. Still I manage to find time to go to an early Mass," I answered.

An earthquake wouldn't have had a more startling effect on those ladies than this word "Mass."

"I hurried down the steps. I turned back to doff my hat. As I looked everyone seemed glued to the spot. There was a look of horror on the faces of all. Misery of miseries! they had played into the hands of the enemy."

That evening I was sent by our society to look after a sad case. A poor woman was lying dangerously ill. Soon after my arrival at the house another of our members arrived with a good old Catholic woman who was to act as nurse. The latter treated me very coolly at first. Her answers to my questions were monosyllabic. Finally she burst out into what seemed a rebuke. She addressed my fellow brother, St. Vincent, but it was meant for me.

"Bad cess to them entirely," she said. "For the life of me I can't see what these paper folks do be doing around a decent woman's house. They must be hard up for things to print. And to morrow faith you'll see the same gentlemen bowing and scraping to the ministers."

I roared with laughter at this sally.

"Aren't you Mrs. Houlihan, and didn't I meet you before?" I asked.

I received an answer in the affirmative and then told her that I was indeed a newspaper man, and, moreover, had the honor of being a member of St. Vincent de Paul's society. My companion would bear witness to what I asserted.

Poor old soul! She was thrown into great confusion at this, but a little explanation set everything right.

"Well, Mrs. Houlihan, I am so glad to have met you again, and you will I am sure, help me very much in a little affair between me and Madame Pervert's Institution," I said.

"And do you want me to lose my job?" she asked.

"The society will attend to that part. Don't fear!" I said by way of a sedative.

Good luck had it that Mrs. Liebreich came to the house that moment in order to visit the sick woman. She soon came out into the small sitting-room where I was alone for the time. We fell into an interesting chat. I repeated all about my experience at the Home.

"Excuse my curiosity, but I should like very much to see that scapular," said Mrs. Liebreich.

"Certainly. Here it is," and I handed it to her. Her face was a study.

"That's it!" she exclaimed.

"I don't quite understand what you say," I said.

"Why!" she said "this is the identical scapular which I made for my dear little baby boy Ludwig. And he lives! Praise be to God! Oh, Mary is good!"

"Yes, he lives if you mean the child called Wesley Knox," I said.

No further argument was necessary to prove that Wesley Knox (or "Luther" according to Mr. Grosmaul) and Louis Liebreich were one and the same person.

"Look here, please!" went on Mrs. Liebreich. "There may be nothing to distinguish one scapular from another in ordinary cases. But here is an extraordinary case. There are no scapulars like this one which I made myself. I ought to recognize my own needle work. Do you see this letter?"

"M" worked in silk thread? Well, I worked that. Is there further need of proof or argument?"

"No," I said, "you have there the very thread of the argument."

It was a plain scapular. Simply two bits of brown wool attached by two slender cords. There were no pictures attached, as we see at times. As Mrs. Liebreich said, there was just that one letter worked in silk.

"But there is another thing to be proved, namely, that my darling boy wore the scapular when he was picked up. You know the parties who hold him could easily attest that the scapular was found on another child," said Mrs. Liebreich in a trembling voice.

"No fear of that," I said. "I have the testimony of Madame Pervert herself and a nurse. They said in my presence that your child and none other had worn the scapular. We need no more witnesses."

"Faith, and if you do I'm at your service," said Mrs. Houlihan.

"Thank you, ma'am," I said, turning to my quondam laundry friend, "and be sure Mrs. Liebreich that I'll have your boy restored to you in short order."

Early next morning, Madame Pervert received a curt note from our attorney informing her of the case, and notifying her to deliver up the child on a given day. Madame Pervert was evidently used to such formalities and did not mind it a bit. She would fight to the last ditch before she would relinquish her prey. I received a stinging letter from Mr. Grosmaul. He was answered in the same strain. I told him not to forget the etymology of his name, and also advised him to keep quiet for the sake of himself and revered spouse. I further reminded him of my promise to write up Madame Pervert's institution and that I might find it likewise convenient to add his unsavory name to the "scare" headline. Mr. Grosmaul therefore for prudent reasons retired behind the breast works.

The case came into court. Without retiring, the jury gave the child over to its mother, who, oblivious of the crowd covered little Louis with kisses.

Mrs. Houlihan was the star-witness. She created quite a scene by refusing to kiss the big book. She was only ready to testify when I produced a little pocket edition of the Duay Bible which I happened to have about me. Unfortunately for Mrs. Houlihan she lost her position at Madame Pervert's on account of her damaging testimony. In two days our society obtained a new situation for the good old lady.

"Glory be to God!" she said afterwards "It's an ill wind that blows no good. I'm better off now. My pay is bigger, and, besides I can go to Mass every morning and have lots of time to say my beads."

Louis Liebreich grew up to be a fine young man. He was a great consolation to his mother in her declining years. He became a valuable member of St. Vincent's, and I must say he was a very devoted client of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. He always wears the Scapular which Madame Pervert took from him. He says he owes everything to it, and "I'll be buried in it," he said to me when I last saw him.

I did not report this incident at the time of happening. Of what interest would it have been to readers of a secular journal. The editor might have questioned my sanity. So I passed over these notes jotted down at the time, expecting that a day would come when through some channel I could make it public for the honor of Our Blessed Lady. And the day has come.



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