

## BLUE MONDAY.

"RURAL COUPLES AT THE ALTAR."—A recent "Blue Monday" article under this title refreshes my memory of another marriage ceremony where another minister was somewhat embarrassed and several wrong couples came near being married. About six o'clock one evening a young man came to the parsonage asking the minister to marry a couple about a mile out in the country, and stating that they wished to be one in time to take the 7.30 train. I warned him that there was scarcely time, but said that if he would hasten back and make all ready, I would be at their service at the earliest possible moment. Quickly harnessing my horse, in a very few minutes I was there. But before entering the house I was met by the father of the bride, who remarked: "See here, Parson, you need not be in a hurry; they can't take that train, and we propose to have a wedding supper." Though not acquainted with the family, I knew the marriage to be a proper one; but, reminding the father that I had not seen the young couple, I asked that I might be taken to their room before they would come in for the ceremony. "Yes, yes, Parson, I will see to that." With this I passed into the parlor, where I found the guests already gathered. As best I could, I tried to keep the conversation in cheerful channels; but, despite my efforts, by and by the wheels of time began to drag very heavily. And no wonder, for a full hour had passed and yet not the least sign of my being invited out, or of the appearance of either bride or groom. At length I went out and spoke to a member of the household, hoping to bring some satisfactory response. "Be sure that I am taken to see the young couple before they come in." "Oh, yes, they will be ready very soon," was the reply. I returned to the parlor not a little cheered with the assurance that at least the bridegroom had not run away, or the bride backed out of her bargain. Catching inspiration from my look of relief, the guests again began free and lively conversation, but which soon again sank down to something like frightened or sullen silence, as almost the length of another hour had dragged its slow sixty minutes along. I made up my mind something must be done. Going out, I asked plainly the meaning of the delay. "Oh, it is all right, Parson," said the old father again. "The groom has gone to neighbor R.'s to get their girl, who we wanted to have come." Then a picture presented itself to my mind. It was of a late-invited guest dressing her hair and decking herself in suitable wedding array, while the bridegroom himself sat awaiting her finished readiness. But even this was a real relief, for it bore the assurance that given time enough the wedding would most surely come off. Again I remarked to the father that I must certainly see the young couple before they would come in, and once more returned to enliven the guests in the parlor.

Imagine my surprise when, in the midst of our conversation, suddenly there appeared a vision of silks and ribbons and flounces and white neckties to the extent of six gayly dressed women and men, taking their places in the middle of the floor. Though I had never seen the couple to be married, fortunately I knew their names. I said to myself, "I can make a beginning, and I guess I will find out which couple to marry." After a prayer of invocation, and finding it still impossible from their positions to detect who were bride and groom, in a somewhat indefinite attitude I began to address the usual words, "In token of your careful consideration of the obligations of marriage, and of your free, deliberate, and lawful choice of each other, etc., etc. You will now please join your right hands," at the same time watching most carefully to see which couple would respond, that, without seeming surprise, I might address them more pointedly. But think of my astonishment and dismay! There greeted my eyes such a vision of hands—"hands to the right of me, hands to the left of me," not quite four hundred; but, as moved by one common impulse, all three couples reached out and joined their right hands. In dismay, but determined not to be in defeat, nor to have the guests detect my perplexity, I looked down at the hands, and instantly noticed that one of the women had on long white kid gloves. I said to myself, "Now I am safe; the hand that holds this is the groom's." With something like assurance, addressing the couple, I said: "Do you, Henry B., take this woman whose hand you now clasp to be your wedded wife; and do you promise in the presence, etc., etc. Do you?" And there was a great calm! After a moment—the longest moment I ever knew—a woman near me in low voice said, "Mr. H., you are addressing the wrong couple." At the very same instant a deep voice at my left said impressively, "I do." Turning slightly toward the new-found bride, I put the usual question to her, and receiving her "I do," pronounced them husband and wife!

Seeing there was no use trying to pass the whole matter off as if nothing unusual had happened, and in order to save myself, after the first few moments of congratulations to bride and groom, I formally invited the other couples who had shown such willingness for the matrimonial bonds to step forward and I would make them equally as happy. This turned the tables upon them, and never have I witnessed more fun at others' expense.

That six o'clock wedding occurred at a quarter before nine. I may further explain the difficulty of distinguishing, by saying that the parties were all of the colored persuasion, and that to my bewildered eyes, at that time of night, they all looked alike.

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