

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers I*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86) The original is very badly faded.

The Romance of a Bible

B. was disgusted, and these were the reasons of his disgust. For years he had worked hard at his business, seeking no amusement or relaxation, other than that he derived from his books. He had come to look upon his books as his only friends, as they were his only extravagance. B.'s theory was, that although his taste for books was an extravagance, which perhaps his means did not justify, in the long run, they cost much less than friends, and what is more, he had something to show for his money and time. Do not suppose from this that B. was a cold-hearted wretch who had no human sympathy, for, on the contrary, his sympathy was of so broad a character, that it could not confine itself to individuals; it extended over the whole world and over all time. In his books he came into contact with a much larger circle of the best people, such as one, in the ordinary intercourse of life, meets but seldom. B.'s taste did not lead him to the purchase of expensive editions, *de luxe* or limited editions, editions limited by the amount the publisher thought he could extract from the credulous purchaser. On the contrary, B. haunted the auction rooms,, poured (*sic*) over catalogs of old books, and gleaned from the "any one of these books for 5 cents" stalls. He thought that the fact that the book had survived the ravages of time was, to some extent, an evidence of intrinsic worth. He had, however, a weakness for old vellum covered Bibles, Prayer-books, missals, and such treasures as delight the heart of the true bibliophile from their associations as well, if not more, than from their contents. When, as rarely happened, B.'s eye lighted upon one of these rare volumes, that had escaped the eagle eye of the wealthier book-collector, he haunted the place fingering the book over and over again, consumed with the desire of possessing it. He at times had great difficulty in resisting the temptation to slyly slip it into his great-coat pocket calling to mind illustrious examples were biblioklepts were looked upon as outside the ordinary laws of morality as regards stealing. B. was almost inclined to believe that a book belongs to him who could most appreciate it. However, he resisted these temptations; and contented himself with poring over the book desired, in the hope, generally a vain one, that the ordinary attendants at an auction would not discover its true value, and that it would be knocked down to him. At the time of the opening of my story, he had indulged in such a hope in regard to a Bible, one of the earliest copies of the English version, found in pretty vellum, somewhat soiled, however, which he had

seen among a number of books exposed to view preliminary to an auction sale. B. had carefully examined the Bible and discovered that it was a treasure, a book with a history apart from its intrinsic excellence. It had in its lifetime, as he well knew, passed through numerous scenes of historic renown, and had been owned, and possibly perused [].

There was some doubt on this point in B.'s mind, however, by men and women whose very names sent a thrill of sympathy through B.'s all-embracing breast. Fair hands had marked passages in it, and brave men had sworn good round oaths upon it; oaths by which perchance the destinies of nations might have been affected, whose history he well knew, they glistened with the light of discovery, and he felt that now was the opportunity of his life. How such a book could ever have come into the market, and have wandered so far away from home without recognition, was to him a marvel. This opportunity once allowed to slip him, he might never meet with again. The book he must own, by fair means or foul. He had hoped that he might get it at a ridiculously low figure. The soiled cover, which B. well knew how to clean until the vellum would shine like ivory, and the gold gleam as brightly as ever, he thought would drive away prospective purchasers who knew nothing of the book not indicated by its appearance. But, alas! he was disappointed. The coveted book was put up at the auction, and was about to become his for a paltry sum, when, to his dismay the head of his firm, a man who knew nothing of books other than those of his business kept by his book keeper, but who had by some strange chance, decided to visit this auction, offered to bid against the luckless book-collector. He knew nothing of the book, but he knew that B. did, and felt sure that if B. wanted it, it was worth having. B. became desperate and ran the bids up until he had bid far beyond his means, and until the astonished spectators thought the poor man must be crazy to bid so high for such an ordinary looking book. The head of the house, however, who was a man of great stubbornness as well as great wealth, was determined not to be outdone by his own junior, and finally had the book knocked down to him at a price which made all the speculators stare and the old man himself swear when he got a book and examined his purchase. At the conclusion of the auction B. who was dizzy and sick with disappointment hardly notice him as he bade him good bye and asked him to come round and dine with him the next Sunday and examine his purchases. The old man was not cruel but he had been put upon his mettle; after he had gained his point he was anxious to console B. over his defeat, and felt that B. would take pleasure in examining his library the regulation stock of well-bound books formed in every well-to-

do merchant's house, which he never read himself.

Without knowing what he was saying, B. accepted the invitation. When he got home he was very much surprised at his action in doing so, but it was too late to retreat now. B. knew what the dinner would be like. There would be the usual stupid conversation between his host and his host's daughter and himself at the table, after which they would all adjourn to the Library and cigars; the young girl, who was used to smoke, playing for them on the piano, while B. would look over the old books of engravings which the old man in his purchases had been as lucky as to pick up by accident. B. seldom had much to say to the young lady whom, in fact, he had noticed but little. He had heard that she was considered very pretty, quite accomplished, and of an excellent disposition. She was always very pleasant to him and seemed glad to see him. He had known her since she was a child of ten and he had been a young man of twenty; and although she had grown to be a woman by this time, B. had never noticed the change, and had always looked upon her as the little Pauline, and always called her so.

However stupid the prospect of dinner seemed to B. he felt that he was bound by his invitation, and so he promptly presented himself at the appointed time. The dinner passed off as usual; after the meal the party returned to the library. The old man was soon occupied with his cigar which always accompanied him to sleep after a heavy dinner. B. was left alone with Pauline and the books.

After some conversation, Pauline brought out his coveted Bible which she explained had been presented to her by her father as a birthday present, with the statement that he had been obliged to pay a high price for it. She was evidently disappointed with the gift, as, in its soiled condition, it did not seem a very precious book to the female mind. At this, and the statement that her father expected her to carry it on Sundays, B. was struck with horror. The idea of his precious volume being thumbed and worn by the miserable little wretches who constituted her Sunday School Class, filled him with dismay. He offered, however, to make it more beautiful in her eyes by cleaning it, feeling that the improved appearance might cause her to treat it with more tenderness, and promised to bring it back to her next Sunday. During the week the idea occurred to him that he ask the privilege of attending her to church, his purpose being to keep an eye, and perhaps a hand, on the Bible which he feared was not estimated at its true value by its present possessor.

Pauline gladly accepted his company on the next Sunday and on many Sundays thereafter. She had been much pleased with the improvement she supposed she had wrought in him, as shown by his increased attention to his spiritual welfare. Sunday after Sunday B. attended the fair Pauline to her devotions, happy in the privilege of carrying his beloved Bible, which became every day more and more dear. His attention began to be remarked, and his devotion misconstrued. The old gentleman began to think that the young man was developing a new trait of character. Things came to a climax one Sunday afternoon, when, after dinner which B. now regularly took with his senior on Sunday, – they were all together in the library. The old gentleman was taking his regular Sunday afternoon siesta, and Pauline and B. were discussing the unattainability of happiness. B. was carried away with his argument and insisted that people did not appreciate the things in life they possessed which might make others happy, although unappreciated by the owners. “Ah, my dear Pauline, you alone could make me happy. You have in your possession the means of happiness for me. Pauline looked embarrassed and then suddenly throwing yourself into his arms exclaiming “Then be happy, I am yours.” B. was thunderstruck; especially as at this inopportune moment the old man awakened; and seeing his daughter in the young man's arms, naturally at once gave his paternal blessing. He said to B. that he had always appreciated his worth, and as he had long seen that his daughter's happiness was bound up in him, he intimated that he was willing to overlook, and many other words to the same effect. B. saw no escape. His meaning had been entirely misconstrued. He mechanically submitted to the caresses of the happy Pauline, who was dating the beginning of her affection for him back to the day when he had shown his kind disposition by endeavoring to soothe her disappointed feelings at receiving that old Bible as a Birthday present. His kindness on that occasion, and his care and cleaning the old book had touched her heart. She declared that she should always value the book as the dearest of her possessions, since it had brought her her lover. She wound up that he must always keep it with the tenderest care.

This remark brought B. to his senses. The idea of at last becoming the possessor of the beloved book that had brought about all this confusion led him to consider, as calmly as he could, the situation. True, he had only wished for the book, but while he had thought of that, alone, he had gained the love of this beautiful girl.

For the first time he felt the pleasure that he had derived from her company,

while he had, as he supposed, been occupied with the Bible alone. The only way out of the confusion seemed to be to accept the situation, the Bible and the Wife.

Charles Theodore Greve

Budget

[Charles B] Wilby editor

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