

(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.

Budget – Hinkle editor
April 24, 1886

A Fugue In Brown and White

Mr. Editor:

My story is not pretty; it has no heroine; but such as it is, tis almost all true.

They were both men past middle life and ought to have known better. Brown weighed 280, and being self-made, was proud of the job. He had taken to religion late in life, and did it thoroughly in an expensive pew in a most fashionable church. Episcopal of course, for as Brown once said in his earlier and more vulgar days, he liked the chance "to jaw back"; and then too it was more fashionable than any other. Brown's rich bass voice could always be heard above all the others, leading the responses. He took great interest also in the kneeling and bending and rising part of the exercises. He had a fine figure, which he covered with well-fitting clothing, and an active participation in these observances gave him an added sense of being an important factor in the service.

As one of the usual privileges and appurtenances of wealth, Mr. Brown had a law-suit: a bitter lawsuit about a party wall. I believe the legal profession will agree with me that next to a patent case a party wall case can probably be made more profitable than any other sort of litigation.

In a patent case or a trade-mark case the litigants each are pressed on through all sorts of legal proceedings, motions, trials, appeals, and re-hearings by their natural pride in their own invention or device, which is moreover often the main-stay of their whole business. It is not a mere question of sending good money after bad as it generally is in most commercial litigation. So in a party wall case: the suitor's house may depend upon it, and it is a matter of necessity for which no expense can be spared, and the lawyers rejoice and the parties lose their temper and spend their money at the same time.

Now Mr. Brown's party wall case, at the time I mentioned, had gone through all the Courts, and had just been sent back for a new trial, because of some

incomprehensible error. It had commenced with an injunction, which the other party, a Mr. White had obtained without notice, restraining Brown from proceeding with some improvements which he had begun of his adjoining property, by forbidding him to disturb the dividing wall. On motion of Brown the injunction was dissolved, and suit was at once brought by him on the bond given by White. White carried it up and gained it in the upper court, and Brown then took it up higher, and so it had dragged along for over a year with auxiliary suits springing up every little while like suckers around a silver poplar tree, and the simile might be carried out further, don't you see, – sucker, lawyers, silver, etc. fill out to suit yourself.

White, the original plaintiff, was a very quiet man, very unlike Brown in many respects, and particularly in that he professed no religious belief, but he went to church regularly with his wife rather than see her go alone; and in addition perhaps selfishly exchanging for these two hours thus spent every week, a great many peaceful ones at home. Mrs. White was a devoted Episcopalian, and shortly after the party wall litigation had gained full headway, she had told Mr. White that their pew was too far back, and that she had arranged to take half of a pew in the main aisle nearer the chancel. The following Sunday the Whites occupied the new pew for the first time. At dinner White said as his face got red over the carving: “Did you notice, Mary, that old Brown, with whom I have had that lawsuit, sits right behind us in church? The old fool poked his head into the middle of my back pretty hard during every prayer this morning. I am afraid your selection of a seat is bad for his proper attention to his devotions but if he thinks he will get me to lean over and make room for him, he is mistaken.”

“How disagreeable” said Mrs. White; then, after a pause, “I always did think, Andrew, you might observe some of the forms in church, and at least incline your head during prayers; but you always sit up straighter than ever. Now, can't you make room for his head on the back of the pew, and save any appearance of difficulty? It would be more dignified, I think.” “Not a bit of it,” said her husband. “I've rented the seat, and it's all mine; and the space over it up to the ceiling, and he shan't have a bit of it. Besides, you know I never did believe in any sort of religious sham, and if I don't enter into the spirit of the prayer, I shan't pretend to do so.” To this his wife deigned no reply, and the subject was dropped. The following Sunday, as the Browns settled down to their dinner, Mr. Brown observed to his wife, “Did you see how that heathen White flaunts his atheism in the eyes of every one by sitting bolt upright during the whole prayer, litany, & collect? He actually

interferes with those who sit about him, and I'm going to see one of the wardens about his conduct. He ought to be put out of the church. Talk about an easement in a wall, I think I've an easement in the back of his pew and I mean to use it. I shall take the proper advice, and do something about it. Such people ought not to be permitted to rent pews in any church." But poor Brown apparently got no aid from the warden or elsewhere, for the next Sunday morning still found White's back as straight as a poker, and Brown balancing his portly form very uneasily on his knees, and vainly trying all sorts of positions for his devotions, in search of something like his former comfort and dignity.

The Sunday after, as Brown took his seat, there was something unusual in his appearance. His eyes flashed, with a look of determination, and his forelock of thin, black hair which was usually brushed carefully off his face, now seemed to be pasted down over his forehead, and glistened with a profuse addressing of pomatum which diffused an unwonted aroma about him. During the responses and prayers White sat as usual, but Brown balanced no more, but buried his forehead in the back of Brown's best black coat, often slowly moving his head from side to side. On his way out of church Brown walked behind White, and seemed to be much pleased with the result of a long look at his back.

As White was starting out for his usual walk with his wife that afternoon she passed behind him and then said: "Why Andrew, there's a large grease spot on your coat right in the middle of the back," and as White twisted himself to try to see it, she went up and put her face down to examine it, and then drew up exclaiming "Yes, it's grease, and it has that same barber smell that I noticed in church today; Didn't you notice it?" White peeled off his coat, and examined and smelt the spot. Sure enough, he had noticed the smell in church, and in a moment the cause of the spot was clear to him. He did not make any explanation to his wife but said only "very strange" and getting another coat took his walk without further remark on the subject.

The next morning he declined Mrs. White's offer to have the grease spot removed, saying he would attend with himself. On Saturday evening as he went home, White stopped at a drug store, and asked for a small box of cantheradal ointment, "strongest tincture". As he started for church with Mrs. White the following morning, –by the way it was Easter Sunday, – Mrs. White noticed that her husband wore his best coat, and, looking at the back of it said, "Andrew, you've made that spot worse than ever, why, what have

you been putting on it?” “Oh, it's a preparation I got at the Druggist's,” said White. It is particularly good for this kind of spot. I think it will remove it in a little while.” However, the spot looked so fresh and was so very apparent that Mrs. White wanted her husband to wear another coat; but he put on his light over coat saying that would hide it; – and to church they went.

Just before the confession, White took off his overcoat, and as Brown leaned forward, his forelock again redolent with pomade, he seemed to take satisfaction in the glimpse he'd got of White's back, but he buried his forehead into it, and gave himself up to that enumeration of his sins which he found in his prayer book. All through the Litany he rubbed his head into White's stiff back, and hard as he could. During the first lesson he felt an itching sensation on his forehead, and putting up his hand a dark greasy substance with a faint, but peculiar smell came off his forehead onto his fingers. Then the itching on his forehead gradually became a burning. He mopped and wiped it with his handkerchief; but though he got all the stuff off, whatever it was, the burning increased to such a degree that he could scarcely sit still. At the Collect, he did not rub against White, but leaned forward with his smarting head in his hands. As he walked down the aisle out of church, his wife said “Peter, what on earth is the matter with your forehead, it's as red as fire.” “It's the heat, I think,” groaned poor brown, but he clapped his hat on as soon as he could decently do so, and before he got home he is forehead was almost a running sore. After that day White had his seat-back undisturbed, but he and Brown never speak as they pass by. –

Charles B. Welby