

(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*, May 30, 1891 to February 6, 1892)

A Faithful Failure

One day last winter I picked up on the street a worn and soiled letter. It was addressed to "My dear friend", and was signed by a lady well known in Cincinnati society. It ran thus: My dear Friend,; I was sickened today by being told that you were in want of daily comforts. Can it possibly be true? After your long years of faithful work and unselfish service, does there remain nothing for you? You never come to see me anymore, but you know where to find me and you know what I am doing. You must not distress me by hiding away. I must know the facts, and every day and always there is a place for you at my house as my guest. I shall send for you. Do not put me to that necessity.

Ever Sincerely yours

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Knowing the writer of the letter, I was not long in learning to whom it was addressed, a gentleman equally well known and held in high esteem. Impelled by the interest which the letter excited I pursued the subject and was lead into a bit of social history which I am permitted to use, saving only that the identity of the persons must not be disclosed.

Far back in the past when the Hughes High School was still in Center Street, its classes were made up of a goodly number of young men and maidens who were more mature then the high school pupils of today; and under Barney V Knowlton they developed stronger characteristics and better scholarships. Attachments were common between congenial persons if the opposite sexes which in many cases resulted in happy marriages.

In one of the classes were a handsome pair, whom for this history, we shall call Arthur Courtright and Grace Bertrand. He was the son of a widow in plain circumstances; she the daughter of a wealthy merchant and the child of a luxurious and indulgent home. In their schoolwork, and in all the social adjuncts which grew out of school life these two were always paired. Like other similar friendships, it was so openly confessed and so conspicuous that it had ceased to excite notice or remark.

They held about the same average in their studies and passed the examinations passibus equis, for what either knew was, if necessary, promptly communicated to the other. After years of association passed in this way, their lives became interlocked so that neither seemed to contemplate any other destiny than a permanent union to end only at the grave. The next autumn after their high school course had ended they went to pursue further studies; she in a fashionable school in New York, he at one of the Universities; and it happened that they traveled the first part of their journey east-bound in the same train.

The girls father kindly read the morning paper apart, and allowed the young people uninterrupted tete-a-tete in a seat to themselves. They talked of their future with the enthusiasm of youth; and they made and exacted many promises; but just as they were about to separate where their routs diverged, Grace made a remark which was full of consequences.

It was that she would never leave her father's house until she entered another equally well provided for. Arthur was going to continue his studies, upon means which his mother with considerable self denial furnished him, and with no other thought than fitting himself for a profession in which he might earn success and position and wealth – for Grace's sake. Early in his life his feelings and his ambition were focalized on that one dream, and it seemed from every point of view to be a noble one. But as he worked along from month to month and from year to

year that unfortunate speech ever stuck in his memory, and became the subject of many a brooding and despondent hour. He knew that Grace had been reared in the life of luxury; that she lived in a home which cost many thousand each year to maintain; that she cared for no young man on earth but him; yet she was willing to remain at home until Arthur had alone his fortune, and then not until then, was she inclined to share his lot.

He took his degree in college not far from the head of his class; succeeded equally well in his professional studies, and made his start, full of courage and zeal. All this was pleasing to Grace Bertrand and won from her many a word of praise, and sometimes a fine handkerchief with Arthur's initials deftly embroidered in one corner. He stuck to his work; saw very little society; took few and short vacations; spent nothing for personal recreation; hoarded his earnings; and still looked forward to the time when he might have enough to tempt Grace to forsake the paternal roof; and yet all the time the impulse to ask her to take that final step was more and more opposed by a growing feeling that as his fortune increased her worthiness did not increase as well. At times he would seem to be convinced in his own mind that there was no true happiness behind his dream; that Grace would value him chiefly as a bread winner; and if need be perhaps only as a beast of burden; and he would become sick-at-heart. But soon again the unquenchable devotion of his manly nature would have its sway, and he would go on with his work and his waiting. He took counsel often with his good mother, but while she would make suggestions, she well knew that the least unhappiness lay in the path of the least interferences.

In a few years Courtright had a fortune of \$180000 in good securities; and having so good a start, he could look forward by the same economy and thrift, to its rapid increase; and he often strengthen himself by calculating the time when by his earnings, and interest and compound interest he would have \$10000.00 a year. About this time Mr. Bertrand suggested that

he could use more capital in his business to a great advantage, and Arthur let him have \$15000 of his \$18000. The old man paid a fair interest and so things went on without material change for several years; the young man quietly growing richer and living plainly with his mother, the Bertrand business and establishment always wearing outwardly the same aspect of prosperity.

From time to time on one pretext or another Mr. Bertrand got money from Arthur until it amounted to 45000; and by slow steps the old man got Arthur's name on the back of various notes. None of these ever went to protest; there was nothing to awaken apprehension; and as Arthur was known to have good credit, his name was often useful to the Bertrand house and it was never refused. In the meantime Mrs. Courtright reached the limit of human life and passed away, leaving her son what property she had.

After that event Arthur spent more time and more of his evenings at Mr. Bertrand's, and was more constantly in Grace's company, and occasionally he placed his name on the back of a note to take up an old one as he was told; and so matters went on for a time, when the smash came. The gradual contraction of the currency and falling prices wrought the same ruin in the Bertrand business which they did with many thousands of others. The wreck was complete. Bertrand was spared a little by the way of exemptions being the head of a family; but Arthur Courtright not only lost his last dollar but there still remained unsatisfied judgments against him when the last dollar went.

All he could do was to take cheap lodgings and stick to his work; but in time his energy flagged; his old patrons wandered to younger men; new ones never came; and after a while he found himself shelved and penniless. Mr. Bertrand did what he could until death laid him to rest; and Grace, sole survivor of the family, had to care for herself. After many experiments and as many failures, she fitted up a house with the relics of her former splendor and bid for boarders.

In this venture she succeeded, for she could manage a house; and at this she was working her way when she wrote the note which I found. She had heard that the friend of her life was starving, and she well knew how it came about. It is interesting to know how Courtright answered the letter. He is not past 60, has no near relatives, lives in obscurity on scanty earnings, and knows that when he dies his family will become extinct, for he is the last of his line. He has had a long and honorable career in his profession; never touched a bribe; never oppressed the poor. He declined public office more than once. He seemed to have no ambition other than to pursue the will-o-the-wisp which early absorbed his youthful fancy and which had led him a long chase to end in nothing.

His life had been unselfish and true. It is a seeming failure because it was too true and too unselfish. It stranded finally on the rack of selfishness in another; for it was Grace Bertrand who encouraged her father to get and use Courtright's name and credit to maintain the Bertrand splendor; and she solaced her conscience with the knowledge that her happiness was more important to Courtright than his own.

He was always welcome at the old house and would be a comfort at the new one. He was always supremely useful. How he replied to Grace's letter I cannot tell, but I know that he goes often to the boarding house not over two miles from the corner of 4th & Smith Streets. Grace is now a faded old maid but she does well by her patrons and charges them well for what they get. When he sickens of the cheap fare of the chophouses, Arthur very often enjoys an elegant square meal at Miss Bertrand's table and he always pays for it, and gives her all the oral and material [] support which lies in his power. Although in failing health, he still works and saves and has managed to compromise or settle about all the old judgments which stood against him. In the course of nature Grace is likely to survive him many a year, and if he be able to work only a little

while longer, he will be content to go to his rest, for he will die square with the world, and by his will he will leave to Grace Bertrand enough money to furnish her comfortable food and raiment and protection to the end of her days.

One day the court reports will announce such a will and it will need no explanation. There will be no one to contest it. It will expose the last act of a life of fidelity; and he who shall perform it shall then have gone under better condition of existence, faithfulness will meet with its just recognition and reward.

Theo Kemper

June 27, 1891