

Proverb Proved
Hartzel Cope

Chapter I

MONSIEUR BLANQUARD was, and I hope still is, a glover in a street of Paris, of only secondary importance in the eyes of the fashionable. He was short, polite, stout, honest, industrious, irascible and slightly bald. Indeed a small coterie of his phrenological developments had assumed the appearance of a white billiard ball concealed with rather indifferent success amid his thin crop of sandy hair. Monsieur B. was also very active in his habits, as is often the case with impulsive people, and his movements in shop and workroom, partook of the character prefigured in the antique simile of a pea on a hot shovel.

Pierre Boutillier was man-of-all-work—his foreman, salesman, and occasional scolding target. In the latter capacity Pierre, however, acted but seldom, for he was a good fellow, with his heart, that “noble entrail,” in its right place, though the ugliest man out of Russia. If the old wives’ rule that men and women’s looks are developed contrary to the apparent promise of infancy, Pierre would have carried off the prize at any baby show contemporaneous with this earlier years though all the nations in the [world] (always excepting Russia) had contributed competitors. But though ugly, there was in Pierre’s eyes a kindling light that always shone for those who looked for it. He was Blanquard’s antidote—if the master snapped like a bonbon cracker, Pierre was as hardy as a pastille.

Beside Pierre there was Sophie—Mlle. Sophie—saleswoman, bookkeeper and cashier. She was a distant relative of the master. She had been taken into the house a year before, and developed that character for business which lies latent in so many women, and which we, sharp Yankees, are only beginning to find out. She also superintended the domestic affairs of Blanquard’s household, of which only Pierre and she were members.

About twelve o’clock, one day in June, ’55, I passed Monsieur Blanquard’s and it just occurred to me that I needed a pair of gloves, and that I had credit at Blanguard’s. Sophie was engaged with a tall whiskerando with Napoleonic moustaches, who seemed to be urging objections to every pair of gloves more for the sake of conversing with the fair Sophie than for any other reason. Pierre gave me my gloves, and said,

“Monsieur Cup (French for Cope) you will be glad to learn that my employer has raised my salary.”

“And very kind of him; I’m sure it was never better deserved.”

“You are too kind.” And his eyes lighted up at this appreciation of him.

“No, not at all. Now you must think of marrying in order to save your capital, you know.”

“Ah! That would be pleasant, but it is impossible.” He looks over at Sophie and the stranger, and I felt he was drawing unfavorable comparisons between his weak and fluffy goatee and the

stylish whiskers. The owner of the latter was flourishing his cane about, pointing out subjects on the shelves, behind the counter, &c. We withdrew our eyes in a moment after, and the next minute the stranger took his leave. Sophie went to her desk, made some entries, and returned to replace the goods. Blanquard came in from the workroom. I bid him and Pierre good morning, touched my hat to Sophie, and went away.

I came at eight in the evening. I had tore off the button of my glove, and would have Pierre or Mlle. Sophie put it on—it would be more neatly done by one of them than by the quivering fingers of a portress. Sophie was in, and was only too happy to be of the slightest service to monsieur. Monsieur felt flattered, and fell into a conversation with mademoiselle. Presently there came in an elderly woman, who beckoned Sophie on one side, and said—

“Will you not have the goodness to take charge of twenty francs that I have received today: I dare not let Paul see it, he would play it all away. I know of no place to put so safe and convenient as in your hands, mademoiselle, for you can let me have small portions of it when I want it.”

“Why you are in luck, Mother Trouette.”

“Ah! yes, you may say so. I have washed for the gentleman three months on credit, and thought I was about to lose all, when my gentleman comes yesterday and pays all in a [lump]. I bethink me of the bank for savings, but that requires forms and wastes time, says I. Bah! the best bank, says I, is Mlle Sophie. She is safe, and I can run in any moment and get what I want of my little deposit, and she will keep account for me.”

“Thank you for your good opinion. I will keep it with pleasure for you. Take a receipt.”

“Bah! Child; I know nothing of receipts. I am sure it will be all right in your hands.” She said good-night, and departed.

Sophie then finished my glove.

“Good-night, monsieur.”

“Au revoir, mademoiselle.”

Chapter II

MONSIEUR BLANQUARD and a gentleman with hair cropped within an inch of his life (an exasperating subject to fall in the way of a Camanche on the warpath by-the-bye) and of the complexion of the interior of a muffin. Blanquard was in a state of [excitement], the white billiard bald among his hair had turned to red. He was all shrugs and galvanic gesticulations. The scalplockless gentleman began:

“You have been robbed, Monsieur Blanquard?”

“Robbed! I have been plundered. Five hundred francs all in new bills of the Bank of France, laid aside for my rent, here, (pointing to a ledge over which the shelves containing the packages of his wares were placed) while I was gone for no longer than five minutes.”

“Imprudent. Who has access behind the counter?”

“My assistants only—Mlle Laurent, and Pierre.”

“Have they heard of the robbery?”

“No, I judged it best to inform the police of it first.”

“Very good indeed. Have they been out since it occurred?”

“No.”

“Have they room in the house?”

“Yes.”

“Can we examine them without their knowledge?”

“Certainly.”

“Then we will do so, if you please.”

Sophie was called in to attend the shop as usual, and the official gentleman and Mons. Blanquard walked upstairs. Pierre’s apartment was examined. The agent of the police skillfully unlocked the trunks with keys of his own. He examined the place minutely, looked on the inside of a plaster statuette of Napoleon, under a bit of carpet by Pierre’s bed, in the bed, in Pierre’s old boots, between the leaves of books, everywhere. Result, nothing.

Next came Sophie’s room, trunks first, not locked. Removal of articles of feminine wearing apparel, designations unknown; souvenirs of various kinds, pincushions, pen wipers etc, bottle of Extract pour le Mouchoir, novel by George Sand. Bad sign, contrary to Mons. Blanquard’s long cherished opinion that all novel reading and indeed most reading of any kind is a foe to virtue, though he said, he knew gentlemen, who had been accustomed to it from very early youth, who had apparently taken no harm from it. The police agent looks in the book, a twenty franc bill of the identical money so carefully laid by for his rent yesterday lying unblushingly there between the leaves!

Blanquard was hurt. He loved his theory about the mischief of literature, but was not prepared for so stunning and immediate a proof of it. He was sorry he had driven things so far. He might have made the search himself, recovered his money, set forth the magnitude of the crime to Sophie, and saved her from future errors without exposing her. The old gentleman was

exceedingly sorry. But he could not arrest the proceedings now, to compound a felony in France is not so easy a matter as nearer home. The agent held up the note to the light.

“There is an accomplice.”

“Indeed, how do you become aware of that?”

“No matter how, I cannot explain. I will make the arrest.” They descended to the shop. Pierre was just then about to return to the workroom. The police agent stepped lightly behind the counter, and said to Sophie—

“Mlle. will please to consider herself under arrest, and accompany me without noise.” The polished policeman!

But that was contrary to nature. So Sophie cried out loudly, “Arrest, monsieur? You are jesting. Why should I be arrested?” —She looked toward Blanquard as if to ask an explanation of the fun of the thing.

“Certainly, mademoiselle, you have a right to know why, you are charged with robbing your employer of five hundred francs yesterday. The proof is in my pocket.” Sophie was stupefied and sank helpless and weeping on a chair.

“What proofs does monsieur police agent speak of?” asked Pierre of Blanquard.

“One of the notes was found in her apartment and in a book,” added Blanquard solemnly as if that had enhanced the crime.

Pierre reached his hat from a peg, stepped out from behind the counter and in a quiet voice said:

“Monsieur the agent of the police and Monsieur Blanquard, I may as well confess at this moment that I took the money. That was crime sufficient, but I cannot suffer an innocent woman to go to prison for my offence.”

The agent gave a little laugh, and said:

“How came the money in mademoiselle’s room, and where is the remainder of it?”

”I gave her a portion as a present (and Pierre blushed) and the remainder I have sent to a friend in Austria, in a letter mailed this morning.”

“And just after I had raised his salary,” said the bewildered Blanquard.

Sophie did not understand all of this. She was confused. But she started up when Pierre mentioned the gift of money to her.

“That was not so. That—”

“Monsieur the agent will understand that she now feels bound to say anything that will screen me. You know whether to believe me or her. It is hardly possible that I would accuse myself of a crime out of jest.”

“My faith, it is not much of a joke, for you must go to prison with me. Mons. Blanquard you will be responsible for the safe keeping of mademoiselle until further news from the bureau of police; you detain her not as a criminal but as a witness.”

“Diable! Pierre I do not believe you,” said the poor Blanquard.

“I am extremely sorry my master, that I do not deserve your good opinion.” The rascal was becoming as fluent as a lawyer.

“Allons, Monsieur Pierre.” They walked off.

Chapter III

WHAT a remarkable likeness! Here we have in the room of the commissary of police a gentleman with whiskers, moustaches, cane and swagger, so much like the one that was talking a few days ago to Sophie, that we could swear he was the same man. —And we should not be committing perjury.

It is the same handsome fellow who excited Pierre’s envy, and made Mlle. Sophie’s heart flutter, for he was so like that character in the Mad. Sand’s novel, there he was.

A gentleman spoke to another. “Caught in the act.”

“Yes, with the notes on the end of his stick, thus,” and he reached out for the cane of Mons. Whiskers, who handed it to him with a bow, which was so politely acknowledged; the last speaker then thrust a minute sharp lance at the end of the cane through a piece of paper and held it up.

Our friend with the head so unsatisfactory to the Camanche, was there, and when he saw this, he stepped quickly up to his brother officer and enquired.

“How much?”

“Twenty thousand francs.”

“This then will send him to Algiers.”

“Certainly.”

“It is a pleasant country, but sàcre! no Opera, I believe; nevertheless I shall be glad of a change, I’m so tired of Paris,” said Mons. Whiskers.

“Before you go you can do me a little favor.”

“I shall be most happy to be useful to monsieur. How?”

“By simply stating whether you took five hundred francs at Mons. Blanquard the glover’s, the other day, and whether you paid any of that money to anyone.”

Mons. Whiskers mused. Would confession keep him any longer in a country where there was no opera?

“Consider, Monsieur, it will not lengthen your penalty in any considerable degree, the sum is so small. Confession will gain you favor before the Tribunal, and besides you will save an honest man from prison.”

“An honest man! Parbleu! let us encourage honesty by all means. Specimens should be preserved if only for the purposes of learned speculation. Well then, briefly—I did take the five hundred francs at Blanquard’s, and paid my laundress twenty or thirty francs, in that money.”

“Thank you Monsieur.” And our friend was off, but he overheard as he was going out.

‘That affair of Blanquard’s makes the seventh known offence, I think.’

“The eighth,” said Whiskers, correctly, with pardonable professional pride.

Chapter IV

I am nothing if not didactic, and I avail myself of this opportunity to bring in my little moral, and the justification of my title, here. The proverb is: “Handsome is as handsome does,” and I hope my story will show that a generous character can illumine the ugliest of faces, and a brave deed glorify any complexions though it were as muddy as the Mississippi. The truth of proverbs cannot be settled perhaps, as clearly as that of mathematics. But the one on which I lay my moral is as correct as the Multiplication table. For many of us love and are loved by one in whom there is neither bright complexion, lithe form, springy step, dewy lips, or aught else of the auctioneer catalogue of beauty—whose cherished image nevertheless, suggest no idea of physical deformity, but who seems to us symmetrical and glowing as the choicest of creation. Exit moral.

A handsome man stepped into Monsieur Blanquard’s little parlor that evening, in company with the police agent, who had leave of absence from the department for the day. It was Pierre, and how had he become a beauty? It was thus. Sophie had explained where the money came which had been found in her room. Thence it was inferred that the remainder of Pierre’s story was no better founded than that relative to making the present to her. His honesty had been unimpeached for years. He would not explain whether in Austria he had sent the money, it could only be because he could not. Plainly he took the crime upon himself, merely to save Sophie. Say it was sentimental—puerile—French—stuff—nonsense, the generosity of it is still there—and so Pierre

stepped into the parlor, a handsome man in Sophie's eyes, and those were of the principal importance to him.

"I knew that Mlle. was innocent, and thought that if she were allowed time, it would all appear," said Pierre simply, "and I do not wish to see her go to prison at all, for," (rather illogically) "that would have brought such a disgrace on the establishment."

"I knew that you were neither of you guilty from the beginning," said the police agent.

"How?"

"The marks on the notes—that triangular slit in them showed me that it was done by an adroit rogue, who had been the object of the attention of the department for a long time. He practiced with his cane, which had a little lance headed iron in the end that he would thrust into a package of bills lying behind a counter, and so lift them off.— Sometime a few would fall off, when a larger package than usual came to the end of his cane, and from those thus left marked, a theory of his manner of operating was established and he was at last successfully traced attempting a theft from a banking house.

"But why did you make the arrest?"

"To gain time and throw him off his guard. But why did you not explain about the laundress, Mademoiselle?"

"I was confused, and really Pierre so persisted that" (she blushed deeply) "he must pardon me, if at first, I took him at his word."

The evening ended. About three months thereafter, Sophie took Pierre at his word, again. She has apparently not regretted it. She resides now over the books of Blanquard & Boutillier, who manufacture excellent gloves (when you go to Paris I hope you will get some of them) and she thinks Pierre among the handsomest of men. My proverb's proved.

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