

CLIENT BY A CLIENT

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INTRODUCTION

Quevedo, that delightful Spanish romancer, recounts his "Visions," what he saw through his wonderful glasses, furnished by that great optician, Genius. By their aid he looked into his present, and into the future. The legal horizon of today, was beyond the power of his lenses, though Quevedo relates an experience of himself and the demon when they made one of their visits to hell.

"Without doubt," said the notaries, "we are the book merchants of manuscripts; we compose and publish our works, to which the public accord the same faith, as to things they have themselves seen; we are faithful public witnesses, the guarantees of contracts, promises, and obligations; the guardians of titles, rights, and privileges; our testimony is true, infallible; above suspicion, deceit, and fraud."

"Why," said the devil, are you come to hell? for if you fulfilled those duties, you are honest people, and I declare, not only useful, but necessary to the public; for between ourselves, there is so little public sincerity, that if one could not prove, by writings and witnesses, the price at which he bought or sold, he would often find himself cheated of his money."

"It is," said one of the notaries, "for some antitates or superfluous ciphers, that we are damned, judge you, if the matter is of such vital consequence; one is so often deceived by writings, and one figure is so easily substituted for another;—the pen, too, slips sometimes, and a nought is easily made!"

"You are right, in truth," said the devil, addressing himself to me, "they wrong these poor people, in sending them to us; they have committed trifling faults, while they do not punish the apothecaries, even, for putting up the recipes sent them. I have a great mind to send these unfortunate persons home again. Go; return, my friends; you have suffered great injustice."

With due humility, after such a recorder, let us relate our experience.

CLIENT

“CLIENT—, Client—, Client—,” came in slow, but distinct tones, from a prosperous looking man, on a rustic bench, in a public garden. Over, and over again came the repetition of these words. His gaze was fixed on a miniature water-fall, which flashed sunbeams into his eyes.

He was on one of those slat seats one soon learns are “hard wood.” If the resting place had been iron, he would have exclaimed with Saint Laurence, “You heathen seem to like the odor of my roasting flesh.”

External surroundings, he did not notice. The glaring sign, “These flowers are under the protection of the public,” stared at him. The hollyhocks, like clusters of tall candles, sprang upwards from a base of broad leaves for the bottom of their candelabra; some of the illuminants Nature had beautiful colored lights of bloom, springing from them, along their sides and tips. Some purple, some pink, some white. Their colors were pure and brilliant, not harsh like the electrician is so pleased to annoy the eye with when he tries to stimulate them with his tinted incandescent bulbs.

A great mass of phlox was close to hand, its spicy odors reached the lingerer on the seat. Before and around the sitter were clumps of blooming roses, whose sweet scent assailed his nostrils as the zephyrs wafted them to him.

The intent gazer had hooked his arms behind him through the slats of his seat, looking fixedly at the flashing sunlight from the cascade.

As Kipling writes in *Kim*, “A very few white people, but many Asiatics, can throw themselves into a mazedness as it were by repeating their own name over and over again to themselves, letting the mind go free upon speculation as to what is called personal identity. When one grows older, the power usually departs, but while it lasts it may descend upon a man at any moment.”

“Client? Client? Client? What is a client? The man muttered, rapt from all other thoughts, with his pupils contracted to pin-points.

Every circumstance and surrounding was most favorable for self-hypnotism. A sultry day, the scent hanging heavily from the nearby flowers, the steady light flashing from the water upon which the gaze was concentrated without visualizing it. The mind, absorbed by the one idea (what is a client?), repeated over and over.

People passed in loud conversation, children rushed past shouting, on squeaky toys, without disturbing the sitter. He remained thus for some duration, suddenly arousing as if from a deep sleep, he soliloquized.

"I have not been asleep, but what a strange vision (if so it may be called) I have had. My class-mates thought me worthy of honors they could confer. My later associates deemed me fit to sit on boards of different kinds, both business and otherwise. I was treated with deference by all.

"Chance, made me a client, and sent me to one who was reputed to be an eminent member of the bar. Another client of another lawyer told me his man's initials were D. L. and W., whose client said were his marked characteristics—which stood for 'Delay, Linger and Wait.' Other clients informed me the whole tribe of practitioners truly had the same failings.

"One fell by necessity into the unwritten rules of these chapels of the law. 'Come to chapel at the hour you are told. Drop every other engagement and remain seated in uninteresting anterooms. The chairs are calculated to put you in training for the torments of the lower regions. Become resigned to being told to come back after lunch tomorrow, next week, etc. Do not fret, if informed that your matter had not been reached by the court and had been postponed. Always be impressed when another lawyer, not your own, enters the latter's office. This arrival preserves a haughty manner towards the waiting throng of clients. His demeanor intimates that you are all a stupid crowd to have chosen D. L. and W. for a councilor. The intruder talks long and loud, ostensibly on business, but the most of the time is consumed upon what you consider matters far removed from the law.

"One becomes tired of gazing at the engravings of noted but long since dead jurists, for they could not have been considered, when alive, 'things of beauty and joys forever.' On the contrary, they remind you of inquisitors and portraits of distinguished malefactors, that should have paid the penalty for their crimes by hanging on gallows, not office walls, if their countenances are to be believed.

"How I have listened," said the dreamer, "to the tales of other

clients, who were awaiting an interview with the priest of the legal chapel (our lawyer).

"A self-assertive, positive man, held forth at length, to a timid, shrinking client on 'Principal.' 'I care not,' said he, 'for the small sum involved in my controversy, but for the principal I must maintain. I have secured several trials in the lower courts where judges and juries do not comprehend the principal I am striving for. Now I am trying to get a hearing before a higher court.'

"'It must have cost you some money,' replied the meek man. 'Is the amount involved considerable?'

"'No, the money is a trifle to me, and I would not feel it if I had to pay it. I think it originally was something between fifty and one hundred dollars. I have already spent six hundred dollars in litigation. But think, my dear sir, of the principal I am fighting for.'

"'It seems to me six hundred dollars is a large interest to pay for such a principal. But everyone to his liking,' answered the meek one.

"On the other side of me, a strenuous, assertive woman, was trying to hold the attention of a poor little widow to the tale of woe about the relator's husband, from whom she was seeking a divorce. According to the wife, her spouse had committed all the crimes in the conjugal calendar. She discoursed without stopping for forty-five minutes. The clerk saved the widow further infliction by telling her she could go, as the time for the interest on her mortgage of her home was extended.

"I thought of the observation of the Lama in *Kim*. 'The husbands of the talkative have a great reward hereafter.'

"The Courts claim our attention at times. In low tones, we discuss our surroundings—juries interest us, and we discouragingly note that about only two of their number show by their countenances any ray of intelligence. We infer, the other ten, will be guided in their verdicts by these two, if they agree with each other.

"I overheard a discussion between two of my fellow clients concerning the judge. 'He is called by the lawyers, "Judge Necessity," said one.' 'Is that his proper name?' demanded his hearer. 'Oh, no, but he is named that by the practitioners because he knows no law,' was the reply.

"'He reminds me of Buddha,' observed the first speaker, evidently a cultivated man, 'though the high desk behind which he sits conceals him below the waist, I imagine him sitting cross-legged as the Deity is represented. When he places the tips of his fingers together solemnly before him in sight of all, he approaches closely

the attitude of the idol. He maintains a severe immobile face. When he speaks, it is in measured tones that seem to issue mysteriously from the lips of this human effigy. His words are supposed to be oracular, like the augurs of old, and of great wisdom.'

"He may be sitting cross-legged, like a boss tailor, and gives forth as much wisdom, as he does to his employees,' replied an irreverent one.

"Did you notice how deferential and obsequious the tipstaves are to the judges—familiar with most of the lawyers—and positively overbearing to all others here?' observed another.

"That is easily understood,' said a voice. 'They are appointed by the judges through endorsements from the lawyers. Not being elected, the tipstaves care nothing for and look with contempt upon this assemblage of voters.'

"Silence,' came in thundering tones from the nearest tipstave, who glared at our party while they instantly became mum and shrank frightened into themselves.

"Phew, that was a hot shot that lawyer gave the other, but he got a good one back,' timidly whispered a client behind, adding, 'they are both as mad as fury and look as if they would like to kill each other.'

"Remember the poem, "The Devil's Thoughts"?' said his neighbor, quoting:

"He saw a lawyer killing a viper
On a dunghill hard by his own stable;
And the devil smiled: for it put him in mind
Of Cain and his brother Abel.'

"That stimulated wrath will be charged in their bills to their clients to the extent they can stand,' was uttered in bitter tones by another.

"Pshaw!' interjected a third, 'this is Common Pleas Court—beasts are gentle here compared to the way they roar in Quarter Sessions. That's the court for thrills; this is tame.'

"Did any of you gentlemen ever see the Court-in-Bank?' uttered a shrinking little man. 'I was told at my lawyer's office he was with this court. As I wished to see him very much, I went to all the banks and trust companies in town, but could not find any court in them.'

"The court you wanted means two or more judges sitting together without any jury and pretending to listen to the lawyers arguing over cases they have heard all about before,' remarked a frequent litigant. 'After the counsel are through jawing, they hand to

the clerk their briefs, which purport to be what they have just yelled at the judges. These printed prevarications the judges are supposed to read at some time (God knows when), and make up their minds about it, when they are not bothered by the noise made when they are supposed to have heard them.'

"Some fell to discussing what sort of men the plaintiff and defendant were in the case they were listening to.

"'You cannot correctly judge men by their faces and appearances,' commented one; continuing, said, 'I, like the rest of you, pass hours in my lawyer's anteroom. He has considerable criminal practice. Mild-mannered men I frequently learn are clients accused of homicide and manslaughter. One pleasing, well-mannered, good-looking woman, who seemed like a church worker, was accused of being a prominent adventuress and confidence operator. A particularly smooth, cultivated and interesting man, with a frank open countenance, was charged with robbing homes in which he had secured a position as butler. He was convicted at his trial. It was proved that he had been acting in many states in the Union without detection, but slipped up here.irate and fierce-looking men proved to be justly outraged good citizens that some sharper had fleeced.'

"'Keep away from the Orphan's Court as long as possible,' yawned one, 'sooner or later you will get there and you will find it dryer than the dust of Saharah. As far as I could determine, its judges were principally engaged in undoing what men had done before their death, as to the disposition of their money. One would be led to believe that most people who made wills were out of their minds when they did so. At least if not crazy, were weak-minded, because they did not leave what was expected to certain people. From their opponents contention, you will wonder that you have never heard of the deceased's wonderful intellect and brilliancy, prior to his demise. You will also find that the inheritance laws were enacted principally to provide fees and commissions for sundry and diverse persons whose usefulness to the inheritor the latter fails to grasp. The essential point here seems to be, to keep the beneficiaries out of their money as long as possible. To keep these despicable people (the heirs) from positively starving to death (which would inconvenience the attorneys) the latter are forced to do illegal things in a legal way. If perchance a trust company is the disburser, you had better pawn anything you can to get food and then go to the cheapest places to eat. In other words, it is a forced hunger strike without an apparent limit of time.'

“‘This court is dismissed until tomorrow morning at ten o’clock,’ sang out the tipstave.

“Like a moving picture, I was transplanted instantly to a tropical island floating in a vast sea of sand. I and my fellow clients were seated at a bounteous table in the midst of date palms and equatorial flora. Birds of brilliant plumage flitted about, sparkling fountains sprayed around us, cooling the gentle breeze that fanned the gathering; delicious viands, luscious fruits and inviting ices were before us. Strangest of all, quiet, smiling and willing attendants, vied with each other to serve us. The company gazed with amazement at the servitors who contrasted so strongly with the waiters of their previous existence. The haughty, overbearing ruffians who acted as if they were disguised Malay pirates, Bulgarian atrocities or bandits of other nations, were not there. No haughty painted jesebels, no supercilious beings, or gun-men from the tenderloin, grudgingly, hurled the guest’s food at them. These barbarians, metaphorically covering you automatic revolvers, in the guise of scowls to compel your surrender of half the amount of your check as a tip. Here nothing was expected or demanded.

“‘This must be heaven,’ exclaimed one, as he assimilated his surroundings.

“‘Yes, and there is Hell,’ voiced one, pointed to the encompassing desert. Some of my sanctimonious friends would be sure they were in the realms of bliss. Their fondest expectations are that they may be saved, and view some of their acquaintances enduring the torture of the damned,’ observed a client.

“‘Look out there.’

“‘That is a mirage,’ announced another. ‘Miles and miles away but seemingly close enough for us to recognize the caravans. See how weary and thirsty they seem, but are *hurrying* (strange to say) hither. Note those large solemn camels resting on sand dunes. The faces are the countenances of judges we have seen, the others, lower down, bear the physiognomies of our late masters, our lawyers.’

“A client interrupted with a verse by the poet Bigelow:

“‘Wal, it’s a marcy we’ve gut folks to tell us

The right an’ the wrongs o’ these maters I vow—

God sends country lawyers, and other wise fellows

To start the world’s team wen it gits in a slough;

For John P.

Robinson he

Sez the world ’ll go right, if he hollers out Gee.’

“The vision vanished, and I am a client.”