

# The Bishop and Decorum.

By LILIAN QUILLER COUCH.

'I thought they were always black,' said Sybil Challoner, pausing between her spoonfuls of vanilla ice to look down upon the Bishop, who paused between his spoonfuls of vanilla ice to converse with Miss Delf.

'Nonsense,' I protested. 'How about Bishop Q. and Pears' soap?'

Sybil grew contemplative. 'It must be a change for him,' she remarked slowly, resting her eyes upon Miss Delf's somewhat sparse coiffure, 'after all those woolly-headed blackamors.'

'We have some palms about, at any rate,' I said cheerfully. 'They ought to make him feel at home.'

'Palms! Those things!' Sybil's scorn was very complete. 'When he's been accustomed to—banyan groves, and—and baobab forests, and—'

'Dear me!—(patriotic fire, I presume, flared in me)—I'll be bound he'd have bartered his banyans and his baobabs, too, any day of the week for a vanilla ice out there. Look!' And as we watched the Bishop chase his last morsel up the slant of his little glass plate, and allow himself to be over-persuaded in the matter of a second little mound—of strawberry flavour, this time—Sybil was, so to speak, calcined.

It was prize-giving day at Miss Delf's, and the Bishop of some warm, polysyllabic spot had come to talk at us from the platform in the big school-room, and then take books from a table and hand them, one by one, to the girls who advanced in single file, as a relief party. It was a gracious sight, as I was well able to judge, not being required, myself, to join in the procession.

After the great ceremony was over, the company had adjourned to the palm-decked library for—as Mary Tenterden's brother somewhat coarsely expressed it—'drinks all round'; and I had secured Sybil Challoner and two vanilla ices, and had retreated to the little gallery at the end of the library to enjoy myself.

It was truly a great day in the school. Most of the girls had people up; some had prizes; many had new frocks. Letitia Ford had top marks and a new tooth ('wisdom,' I think she called it); I had my hair up; and we each found our own particular form of commemoration most absorbing.

When the Bishop—still at his moorings beside Miss Delf—was almost through with his second ice, he lifted up his eyes to view the architecture—or the ventilation—of the library, and Miss Delf, lifting her eyes also, viewed the gallery, and me. By an almost imperceptible wave of her hand she told me several things; viz., to leave the gallery, to come into her presence, that she disapproved of me, that the disapproval was to some extent modified by reason of the occasion, and that, at any rate, I'd better make haste.

I turned to obey. 'How's my hair, Sybil?' I besought her.

'It isn't—down,' she replied, dubiously.

'Then I suppose it's up?'

'I suppose it is.'

I pressed my hairpins and ran.

At the foot of the first flight of stairs I met Miss Narrowway, and she spoke.

'I really think, Miss Pomeroy, that on such an occasion as the present you might curb your unladylike and hoydenish behaviour.' I had overshot her, so to speak, in my rush, but I stopped. 'At your age,' she continued, 'it should be your aim to teach decorum, not defiance.'

I retraced the steps I had overshot. 'It shall,' I assured her. Then I went decorously upon my way.

Miss Narrowway did not look entirely relieved.

Letitia Ford once loftily informed me that anyone who wished might be a saint. I remember thinking it an irrelevant remark at the time; but Letitia rather prides herself upon what we call 'double intenders,' so I let it pass, perspicacity not being my strong point, and took her word for it. I failed now to see why, at my particular age, the teaching of de-

corum should be my peculiar ambition; but if saltness were within the reach of everyone, I supposed a proficiency in decorum would not be more difficult of attainment. These things seem to be chiefly a matter of self-confidence.

In the library I found Miss Delf's disapproval still more modified. A circle of parents was engaging two-thirds of her attention, while the greater part of the remaining third was being churned to anxiety, for the parents had to some extent cut the Bishop from his moorings, and he was drifting.

Miss Delf's eyes were harassed, but her lips smiled on me.

'Dr. Goofalo,' she said, turning to the Bishop through the parents, 'pray allow Miss Pomeroy to show you that specimen which we were discussing, Patricia,' turning to me (and thereby I knew myself to be forgiven, temporarily), 'will you show Dr. Goofalo

versation at the same moment. The Bishop stopped. Instinctively I did the thing which seemed to be required of me. I sat down. Instinctively, I presume, he did the same. At a little distance I could see Letitia, standing beside Mary Tenterden's brother, and watching me nervously.

'Think,' I said, earnestly, and I leaned forward and clasped my hands in my enthusiasm. 'Think of the charm, the intense interest of instructing a mind absolutely fresh and untrained—'

'H'm,' coughed the Bishop. He, of course, knew all about it.

—the pleasure of instilling the first rules of decorum into a mind free and—receptive!' I knew I had caught a sufficiency of Miss Narrowway's style to carry me through with safety if circumstances remained normal.

'Yes—h'm—yes,' he agreed, with some hesitation. 'There would be pleasure, as you say, provided the minds were—ah—were receptive.'

'Think, for instance,' I continued, with a wave of my hand indicative of freedom (Letitia saw it, and I knew how she would be feeling), 'of a class in your own—your own diocese—(I hoped that was correct)—a class of un moulded minds gathered beneath the shade of the banyan grove—'

'H'm—the banyan—' (he became

strict sense of the word would mean, in your opinion—'

I plunged then.

'Everything that is proper,' I declared.

'A great mission; a great mission, undoubtedly.'

'Great?' I sighed; 'there is so little scope for such greatness in this small, trammelled land.'

The Bishop paused.

'Zargasesi,' he remarked reflectively, 'is large, and certainly untrammelled.'

'Ah!' I sighed again.

'There might certainly be found a deep interest,' he admitted, 'in the innocent freedom of the heathen. One sometimes regrets—here a calm smile played over his features—the narrow prejudices one sees displayed even by some in authority.'

If Miss Narrowway could only have heard that.

'And you go back to freedom!' I smiled back most audaciously considering his high dignity.

'The pleasures of this freedom, my dear young lady, are not altogether unmixed. Zargasesi has drawbacks—several drawbacks, I feel it my duty to tell you. For instance, excessive sunshine, a limited water supply, extremely—h'm—unconventional society, and so forth. But, on the other hand, it occurs to me that with decent quarters at a friendly station, with



ACROSS THE LAWN I SAW MISS DELF, SHE WAS COMING TOWARDS US.

the new blue orchid in the small greenhouse?'

'The Bishop and I bowed to one another, and I felt the moral support of my hairpins as we turned and walked down the room.'

'You will pardon me, I trust,' he began, with ponderous lightness, 'if my observation is at fault, but I do not recall your face as one—h'm—as one—'

'It is not,' I sighed, 'my part to take prizes.'

He grew more pastoral.

'Ah! You—h'm—you—teach—?'

I bowed my head. 'Decorum.' I admitted softly.

The Bishop decided that I was worth a second glance, and gave it.

'Dear me! Dear me! Decorum! How excellent. How truly excellent! I feared that in the rush of modern thought and the stream of new teachings, the older, gentler graces must, perforce, die, or, at least, be neglected.'

'On the contrary' I affirmed, 'my appointment is still young—is, in fact, an innovation.'

'Re-action,' he murmured, 're-action, undoubtedly; the backflow of the tide. Do you—ah—find your pupils—ah—?'

'Not altogether,' I admitted.

'They do not follow you with ease?'

'Not in what may be strictly termed "decorum."'

'It is frequently the case,' he sighed; 'the civilised mind must needs undergo the process of unlearning before it is ready to receive the teaching we so strongly desire to instil. Whereas the fresh, the—ah—the fallow mind—'

'Ah!' I exclaimed, 'that's the best job—' I mean, that is what I prefer; the regular fallow ones.'

'Eh?'

'To—to teach,' I explained.

We were strolling across the lawn by this time, and had reached a garden seat and this point in our con-

pleasantly explanatory) 'the banyan is, I believe, a native growth of India.'

'That was Sybil's fault; how was I to know?'

'—or the baobab forest,' I continued unabashed.

'H'm, yes. It is possible the baobabs might be utilised with safety.'

'—or—anything shudy,' I declared.

'Exactly, exactly,' he agreed; 'shade would be essential.'

'To decorum,' I added.

'To decorum,' he echoed.

Then he paused. I imagine the Bishop was following out a train of thought.

'Decorum,' he said at length, 'in the

the consciousness of a mission to fulfil, and a heart full of enthusiasm for the real work before you, you might lead a useful, cheerful life of honest duty with a very fair amount of comfort.'

'That was sudden. It is one thing to draw houses with chalk upon a blackboard; it is another thing to find yourself expected to go and live in them. I sat upright with the shock.'

'A most enviable life,' I assented. Across the lawn I saw Miss Delf; she was coming towards us. It seemed worth while to temporise.

'The natives,' he continued, 'are kindly disposed, in most cases, and prove tolerant listeners. Their ap-