

The Van Bibber Baseball Club

by Richard Harding Davis

Young Van Bibber decided that he ought to take some people to the circus. He had long outgrown the age when the circus only pleased, but some of the men had said it was the thing to do just as it was the thing to go incognito to see Carmencita dance; and so he purchased a big box in the very centre of the lowest tier and wrote to Mrs. Dick Wassails that it was at her service and that she could fill it with whom she pleased. He added that he would expect them to take supper with him later.

He owed Mrs. Dick, as everybody called her, a great deal for many social favors, and he thought to make things even in this way; but Mrs. Dick was engaged for that evening, and said she was so sorry and begged to be excused. So young Van Bibber sent off a note to the Gramercys, with whom he wished to become more intimate, and whom he wished to put under an obligation. But they were just going abroad and were in the midst of preparations and they also begged to be excused.

It was getting very near the night now, and Van Bibber ran over in his mind the names of all of those people to whom he owed something or who might some day do something for him. He tried the Van Warps, because they owned a yacht, but they were going to a wedding; and he tried the Van Blunts, on account of their house at Lenox, and found that their great uncle had just died and that they were going to the funeral. Then he asked the men in the club, but the one who gave such good dinners thought it would be too much of a bore; and another, whose sister Van Bibber wanted to know better, said he was afraid he would catch cold, and others, all of whom had been civil to him in one way or another, began to make excuses. So young Van Bibber stood on the steps of the club and kicked viciously at the mat. He decided that his friends were a very poor lot. "One would think I was trying to borrow money from them," soliloquized Van Bibber.

"Where to?" asked the driver of the hansom.

"To the circus," said Van Bibber. It was a long ride, and he had time to make up his mind that he had been foolish in starting out; but as he was already more than half-way there he kept on. He had determined to see that circus himself in solitary state from that box, notwithstanding his irresponsible friends.

But at the entrance to the circus three small boys, in every way representatives of the coming "tough," waylaid him for ten cents to get into the side show—only ten cents, that was all they wanted. They did not aspire to such a pinnacle of happiness as the circus itself. But Young Van Bibber saw a way to use his box and to show his smart friends how somebody, at least, appreciated his invitations.

"Go get three more boys like you," he said; "dirty boys that haven't seen the circus, and I'll take you in."

The three youths looked at him uncertainly for a moment.

"Ah, he's kiddin' us," said one of them, doubtfully.

But there was such an innocent and embarrassed expression on young Van Bibber's face that they concluded he must mean it.

“Besides,” said one of them, “don’t you see he’s a priest? He wouldn’t tell no lies.”

Van Bibber for the first time became conscious of his white lawn tie and his long cape-cloak.

“Priests don’t go to circuses,” suggested one of the trio.

“Are you going to get those other boys or not?” asked Van Bibber, impatiently. It really seemed as if nobody was willing to go with him. But there was over a dozen boys about him by this time, and he picked out three of the smallest and raggedest. Then he shoved them all into the circus before him like so many chickens and saw, without caring, that the men by the door were laughing at him.

The boys raced about at first and yelled to each other to come see this animal, and to watch that one shaking the bars. Van Bibber wandered around after them. They seemed to be having a very good time, and he felt a queer sensation of satisfaction in some one else’s pleasure which was oddly pleasing. Then they flocked back to him again and informed him it was time to “get into the show part,” and so he led them, to the grave disgust of the attendants, to the principal box in the place.

“My eyes! but I wish de boys could see me now,” said one of them, pride and happiness beaming from every feature of his face. “I guess this is old man Barnum’s box, for sure.”

Van Bibber sat in the back of the box. He didn’t mind how the people around them smiled. He felt himself very far above them, and in a position to do as many eccentric things as he pleased. And he found himself enjoying the show and the friendly interest his guests took in him, and in their fear lest he couldn’t see everything, or that he might miss what the clowns said.

He stopped the man who sold peanuts and candies, and distributed them lavishly. It was cheaper by far than a Delmonico supper, and he enjoyed seeing the half-famished way in which the young rascals fell upon the supplies and stowed them away. They were really very noisy and wildly excited, but he didn’t care. He never remembered having given anybody so much extreme pleasure before in his life.

When it was all over and the big spectacular show that had held them breathless had ended, he fought his way out to the waiting hansom, very well pleased with the night’s experience. But before he got away his guests crowded around him at the door, and one of them, who, as they had privately informed him, was no less distinguished an individual than the captain of Open Lots Baseball Club, of which they were all members, thanked him very civilly and asked him his name. He gave the captain his card with grave politeness and shook hands with all of them with equal solemnity, and then drove down town and had a solitary supper. On the whole, he concluded that though he had made nothing by it, he had not wasted the box, and he went to bed satisfied.

And two days later he received in a very dirty envelope the following epistle:

DEAR SIR—At a meeting of the Open Lots Baseball Club it was voted, on account of your kindness, to change the name to the Courtland Van Bibber Baseball Club, which it is now, as a mark of our apreshun of your kindness.

Truly yours,
TERENCE FAHEY MCGLOIN,

Capt. C. Van. B. B. B. C.

“So,” said Van Bibber, as he put the letter carefully away, “It pays to go out into the highways, after all.”

Source:

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