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S. O. S.—R. S. V. P.

Vanity Fair's Prize Department of Deportment

Conducted by Charles Macomb Flandrau

Vanity Fair's readers send not only a bewildering number of answers to the problems in this department, —but they have of late greatly pleased the editors by submitting *problems* as well. While these problems have all been read with the liveliest interest, it is regrettable that so far, for one reason or another, none of them have been found exactly suited to our needs. Some of them are, for instance, of an intricacy—a complexity—that would have stumped even the master of ceremonies of a petty German court. (The habit of referring to a small German court as "petty" is one I acquired years ago and, as is the case with almost every other American writer, I have never been able to break myself of it.) Then, too, some of the problems submitted by our readers have been, in their setting and interest, startlingly local rather than general or universal.

From Salt Lake City, for example, an agitated lady outlined for us a most dramatic not to say tense situation and although Vanity Fair's five usually unruffled judges were thrilled by it to the contents of their inner tubes, they could not feel justified in presenting a problem the solution of which necessitated, if not an experience actually polygamous, at least a profound conversance (accent on the first syllable, please) with Mormon psychology.

Furthermore, it must be borne in mind by our readers that Vanity Fair cannot be transmitted to them by wireless. It is absolutely essential that the magazine should have ready access to the United States mails—a privilege that even with the recent elimination of that great and good man Anthony Comstock, we fear would be denied us if we printed some of the quaint problems which the judges have recently received.

It is, however, for none of these reasons that we are unable to make use of a problem submitted by that extraordinarily versatile and picturesque person, Mr. Aleister Crowley. "Mr. A., a well-known philanthropist, has just poisoned his wife in order to marry a Miss B.," writes Mr. Crowley. "On the way to the church he meets Mrs. C., the wife of an old friend whom he has

not seen for years. He realizes that it is Mrs. C. whom he loves and Miss B. Mrs. C. gives him her gladdest eye. . . . Problem: What should Mr. A. do"

Now, realizing that just this might happen to almost any well-known philanthropist, the editors felt that for the reading public the problem was pitched (as critics say of certain paintings) in somewhat too high a key. Just as that sainted creature, the late Lydia E Pinkham, used to tell us every morning at breakfast that "Woman can sympathize with woman," poets, no doubt, can sympathize with poets, and philanthropists with philanthropists. But would it, on our part, be quite fair to anyone to demand that our readers should assume, even temporarily, the point of view of either? On the one hand, we shrink from introducing "affinities" into the American home, and on the other, we feel that both poets and philanthropists should always be judges by a jury of their peers. Unfortunately it just happens that to the jury in charge of these contests, nature has withheld the gift of song, and harsh circumstance precludes "well-known" philanthropy.