

AN ASSISTED PROVIDENCE.

(By Octave Thanet, in Scribner's Magazine.)

It was the Christmas turkeys that should be held responsible. Every year the Lossings give each head of a family in their employ, and each had helping to support his mother, a turkey at Christmas. As the business has grown, so has the number of turkeys, until it is now well up in the hundreds, and requires a special contract. Harry, one Christmas, some five years ago, bought the turkeys at so good a bargain that he felt the natural reaction in an impulse to extravagance. In the very flood-tide of the money-spending yearnings, he chanced to pass Deacon Hurst's stables and to see two Saint Bernard puppies, of elephantine size but of the tenderest age, gambolling on the sidewalk before the office. Deacon Hurst, I should explain, is no more a deacon than I am; he is a livery-stable keeper, very honest, a keen and solemn sportsman, and withal of a staid demeanor and a habitual garb of black. Now you know as well as I any reason for his nickname.

Deacon Hurst is fond of the dog as well as of that noble animal the horse (he has three copies of Black Beauty in his stable, which would do an incalculable amount of good if they were ever read!); and he usually has half a dozen dogs of his own, with pedigrees long enough for a poor gentleman in a New England village. He told Harry that the Saint Bernards were grandsons of Sir Bevidere, the "finest dog of his time in the world, sir," that they were perfectly marked and very large for their age (which Harry found it easy to believe of the young giants), and that they were "ridiculous, sir, at the finger of two hundred and fifty!" (which Harry did not believe so readily); and, after Harry had admired and studied the dogs for the space of half an hour, he dropped the price, in a kind of spasm of generosity, to two hundred dollars. Harry was tempted to close the bargain on the spot, hot-headed, but he decided to wait and prepare his mother for such a large addition to the stable.

The more he dwelt on the subject the more he longed to buy the dogs.

In fact, a time comes to every healthy man when he wants a dog, just as a time comes when he wants a wife; and Harry's dog was dead. By consequence, Harry was in a state of sensitive affection and desolation to which a promising new object makes the most moving appeal. The departed dog (Bruce by name) was a Saint Bernard; and Deacon Hurst found one of the puppies to have so much the expression of countenance of the late Bruce that he named him Bruce on the spot—a little before Harry joined the group. Harry did not at first recognize this resemblance, but he grew to see it; and, combined with the dog's affectionate disposition, it softened his heart. By the time he told his mother he was come to quoting Hurst's adjectives as his own.

"Beauties, mother," says Harry, with sparkling eyes; "the markings are perfect—couldn't be better; and their heads are shaped just right! You can't get such watch-dogs in the world! And, for their enormous strength, gentle as a lamb to women and children! And, mother, one of them looks like Bruce!"

"I suppose they would want to be house-dogs," says Mrs. Lossing, a little dubiously, but looking fondly at Harry's handsome face; "you know, somehow, all our dogs, no matter how properly they start in a kennel, end by being so hurt if we keep them there that they come into the house. And they are so large, it is like having a pet lion about."

"These dogs, mother, shall never put a paw in the house."

"Well, I hope just as I get fond of them they will not have the distemper and die!" said Mrs. Lossing, which speech Harry rightly took for the white flag of surrender.

That evening he went to find Hurst and clinch the bargain. As it happened, Hurst was away, driving an especially important political personage to an especially important political council. The day following was a Sunday; but by this time, Harry was so bent upon obtaining the dogs that he had it in mind to go to Hurst's house for them in the afternoon. When Harry wanted anything, from Saint Bernards to purity in politics, he wanted it with an irresistible impetus! If he did wrong, his error was linked to its own punishment. But this is anticipating, it not presuming; I prefer to leave Harry Lossing's experience to paint its own moral without pushing. The event that happened next was Harry's pulling out his check-book and beginning to write a check, remarking, with a slight drooping of his eyelids, "Best catch the deacon's generosity on the fly, or it may make a home run!"

Then he let the pen fall on the blotter, for he had remembered the day. After an instant's hesitation he took a couple of hundred-dollar bank-notes out of a drawer (I think they were gifts for his two sisters on Christmas-day, for he was a generous brother; and most likely there would be some small domestic joke about engravings to go with them); these he placed in the right-hand pocket of his waistcoat. In his left-hand waistcoat pocket were two five-dollar notes.

Harry was now arrayed for church. He was a figure to please any woman's eye,

thought his mother, as she walked beside him, and gloried silently in his six feet of health and muscle and dainty cleanliness. He was in a most amiable mood, what with the St. Bernards and the season. As they approached the cathedral close, Harry, not for the first time, admired the pure Gothic lines of the cathedral, and the soft blending of the grays in the stone with the brown network of Virginia creeper that still fluttered, a remnant of the crimson adornings of autumn. Beyond were the bare, square outlines of the old college, with a wooden cupola perched on the roof, like a little hat on a fat man, the dull-red tints of the professor's houses, and the withered lawns and bare trees. The turrets and balconies and arched windows of the boys' school displayed a red background for a troop of gray uniforms and blazing buttons; the boys were forming to march to church. Opposite the boys' school stood the modest square brick house that had served the first bishop of the diocese during laborious years. Now it was the dean's residence. Facing it, just as you approached the cathedral, the street curved into a half-circle on either side, and in the centre the granite soldier on his shaft looked over the city that would London or him—Harry saw the tall figure of the dean come out of his gate, the long black skirts of his cassock fluttering under the wind of his steps. Beside him skipped and ran, to keep step with him, a little man in ill-fitting black, of whose appearance, thus viewed from the rear, one could only observe stooping shoulders and iron gray hair that curled at the ends.

"That must be the poor missionary who built his church himself," Mrs. Lossing observed. "He is not much of a preacher, the dean said, but he is a great worker, and a good pastor."

"So much the better for his people, and the worse for us!" says Harry, cheerfully.

"Why?"

"Naturally. We shall get the poor sermon and they will get the poor pastoring!"

Then Harry caught sight of a woman's frock and a profile that he knew, and thought no more of the preacher, whoever he might be.

But he was in the chancel in plain view, after the procession of choir-boys had taken their seats. He was an elderly man with thin cheeks and a large nose. He had one of those orotund voices that occasionally roll out of little men, and he read the service with a misjudged effort to fill the building. The building happened to have peculiarly fine acoustic properties; and the unfortunate man roared like him of Bashan. There was nothing of the customary ecclesiastical dignity and monotony about his articulation; indeed it grew plain and plainer to Harry that he must have "come over" from some more emotional and unrepressed denomination. It seemed quite out of keeping with his homely manner and crumpled surplice that this particular reader should intone. Intone, nevertheless, he did, and as badly as mortal man could! It was not so much that his voice or his ear went wrong; he would have had a musical voice of the heavy sort, had he not bellowed; neither did his ear betray him; the trouble seemed to be that he could not decide when to begin; now he began too early, and again, with a startled air, he began too late, as if he had forgotten.

"I hope he will not preach," thought Harry, who was absorbed in a rapt contemplation of his sweetheart's back hair. He came back from a tender reverie (by way of a little detour into the furniture business and the establishment that a man of his income could afford) to the church and the preacher and his own sins, to find the strange clergyman in the pulpit, plainly frightened, and bawling more loudly than ever under the influence of fear. He preached a sermon of wearisome platitudes; making up for lack of thought by repetition, and shouting himself red in the face to express earnestness. "Fourth-class Methodist effort," thought the listener in the Lossing pew, stroking his fair moustache, "with Episcopal decorations! That man used to be a Methodist minister, and he was brought into the fold by a high-churchman. Poor fellow, the Methodist church polity has a place for such fellows as he; but he is a stray sheep with us. He doesn't half catch on to the motions; yet I'll warrant he is proud of that sermon, and his wife thinks it is one of the great efforts of the century." Here Harry took a short rest from the sermon, to contemplate the amazing moral phenomenon. How robust can be a wife's faith in a commonplace husband!

"Now, this man," said Harry, becoming interested in his own fancies, "this man never can have lived! He doesn't know what it is to suffer, he has only vegetated! Doubtless, in a prosaic way, he loves his wife and children; but can a fellow who talks like him have any delicate sympathies or any romance about him? He looks honest: I think he is a right good fellow and works like a soldier; but to be so stupid as he is ought to hurt!"

Harry felt a whimsical sympathy with the preacher. He wondered why he continually made gestures with the left arm never with his right.

"It gives a one-sided effect of his

eloquence," said he. But he thought that that he understood when an unguarded movement revealed a rent which had been a mended place in his surplice.

"Poor fellow," said Harry. Then he recalled how, as a boy, he had gone to a fancy-dress ball in Continental small clothes, so small that he had been strictly cautioned by his mother and sisters not to bow except with the greatest care, lest he rend his magnificence and reveal that it was too tight to allow an inch of underclothing. The stockings, in particular, had been short, and his sister had providently sewed them on to the knee-breeches, and to guard against accidents still further, had pinned as well as sewed them, the pins causing Harry much anguish.

"Poor fellow!" said Harry again, "I feel like giving him a lift; he is so prosy it isn't likely anyone else will feel moved to help."

Thus it came about that when the dean announced that the alms this day would be given to the parish of our friend who had just addressed us; and the plate pause before the Lossing pew, Harry slipped his hand into his waistcoat pocket after those two five-dollar notes.

I should explain that Harry, being a naturally left-handed boy who had laboriously taught himself the use of his right hand, and it is a family joke that he is like the inhabitants of Nineveh, who could not tell their right hand from their left. But Harry himself has always maintained that he can tell as well as the next man.

Out drifted the flock of choir-boys singing, "For thee, oh dear, dear country," and presently, following them, out drifted the congregation; among the crowd the girl that Harry loved, not so quickly that he had not time for a look and a smile (just tinged with rose), and because she was so sweet, so good, so altogether adorable, and because she had not only smiled but blushed, and, unobserved, he had touched the fur of her jacket, the young man walked on air.

He did not remember the Saint Bernards until after the early Sunday dinner, and after the afternoon cigar. He was sitting in the library, before some blazing logs, at peace with all the world. To him, thus, came his mother and announced that the dean and "that man who preached this morning, you know," were waiting in the other room.

"They seem excited," said she, "and talk about your munificence. What have you been doing?"

"Appear to make a great deal of fuss over ten dollars," said Harry, lightly, as he sauntered out of the door.

The dean greeted him with something almost like confusion in his cordiality; he introduced his companion, as the Rev. Mr. Gilling.

"Mr. Gilling could not feel easy until he had—"

"Made sure about there being no mistake," interrupted Mr. Gilling; "I—the sum was so great—"

A ghastly suspicion shot like a fever-flush over Harry's mind. Could it be possible? There were the two other bills; could he have given one of them? Given that howling derision a hundred dollars? The fear was too awful!

"It was really not enough for you to trouble yourself," he said; "I dare say you are thanking the wrong man." He felt he must say something.

To his surprise the dean colored, while the other clergyman answered, in all simplicity:

"No, sir, no, sir. I know very well. The only other bill, except dollars, on the plate, the dean here gave, and the warden remembers that you put in two notes—I—"

He grew quite pale—"I can't help thinking you may be intended to put in only one." His voice broke, he tried to control it. The sum is very large!" quavered he.

"I have given him both bills, \$200!" thought Harry. He sat down. He was accustomed to read men's faces, and plainly as ever he had read, he could read the signs of distress and conflict on the prosaic, dull features before him.

"I intended to put in two bills," said he. Gilling gave a little gasp—so little, only a quick ear could have caught it; but Harry's ear is quick. The clergyman twisted one leg around the other, a further sign of deliverance of mind.

"Well, sir, well Mr. Lossing," he remarked clearing his throat. "I cannot express to you properly the—the appreciation I have of your—your princely gift!" (Harry changed a groan into a cough and tried to smile.) "I would like to ask you, however, how you would like it to be divided. There are a number of worthy causes: the furnishing of the church, which is in charge of the Ladies' Aid Society; they are very hard workers, the ladies of our church. And there is the Altar Guild, which has the keeping of the altar in order. They are mostly young girls, and they used to wash my things—I mean the vestments" (blushing)—"but they—they were so young they were not careful, and my wife thought she had best wash the—vestments herself, but she allowed them to laundry the other—ah, things." There was the same discursiveness in his talk as in his sermon, Harry thought; and the same uneasy restlessness of manner. "Then, we give to various causes, and—and there is, also my own salary—"

"That is what it was intended for," said Harry, "I hope the \$200 will be of some

use to you, and then, indirectly it will help your church."

Harry surprised a queer glance from the dean's brown eyes; there was both humor and a something else that was solemn enough in it. The dean had believed there was a mistake.

"All of it! To me!" cried Gilling.

"All of it. To you," Harry replied, dryly. He was conscious of the dean's gaze on him.

"I had a sudden impulse," said he, "and I gave it; that is all."

The tears rose to the man's eyes; he tried to wink them away, then he tried to brush them away with a quick rub of his fingers, then he sprang up and walked to the window, his back to Harry. Directly he was facing the young man again, and speaking.

"You must excuse me, Mr. Lossing; since my sickness a little thing upsets me." "Mr. Gilling had diphtheria last spring," the dean struck in, "there was an epidemic of diphtheria in Martin's Junction; Mr. Gilling really saved the place; but his wife and he both contracted the disease, and his wife nearly died."

Harry remembered some story that he had heard at the time—his eyes began to light up as they do when he is moved.

"Why, you are the man that made them disinfect their houses," cried he, "and invented a little oven or something to steam mattresses and things. You are the man that nursed them and buried them when the undertaker died. You digged graves with your own hands—I say, I should like to shake hands with you!"

Gilling shook hands, submissively, but looking bewildered.

He cleared his throat. "Would you mind, Mr. Lossing, if I took up your time so far as to tell you what overcame me?"

"I should be glad—"

"You see, sir, my wife was the daughter of the Episcopal minister—I mean the rectory, at the town—well, it wasn't a town, it was three or four towns off in Shelby county where I had my circuit. You may be surprised, sir, to know that I was once a Methodist minister."

"Is it possible?" said Harry.

"Yes, sir. Her father—my wife's I mean—was about as high a churchman as he could be, and he married. He induced me to join our communion; and very soon after I was married. I hope Mr. Lossing you'll come and see us come time, and see my wife. She—our married?"

"I am not so fortunate."

"A good wife cometh from the Lord, sir, sure! I thought I appreciated mine, but I guess I didn't. She had two things she wanted, and one I did want myself, but the other I couldn't seem to bring my mind to it, no anyhow! We hadn't any children but one that died four years ago, a little baby. Ever since she died my wife has had a longing to have a stained-glass window, with the picture you know, of Christ blessing little children, put into our little church. In Memoriam, you know. Seems as if, now we've lost the baby, we think all the more of the church. Maybe she was a sort of idol to us. Yes, sir, that's one thing my wife fairly longed for. We've saved our money, what we could save; there are so many calls during the sickness, last winter the sick needed so many things, and it didn't seem right for us to neglect them just for our baby's window; and—the money went. The other thing was different. My wife has got it into her head that I have a fine voice. And she's higher church than I am; so she has always wanted me to intone. I told her I'd look like a fool intoning, and there's no mistake about it, I do! But she couldn't see it that way. It was 'most the only point wherein we differed, and last spring, when she was so sick, and I didn't know but I'd lose her, it was dreadful to me to think how I'd crossed her. So, Mr. Lossing, when she got well I promised her, for a thank offering, I'd intone. And I have ever since. My people know me so well, and we've been through so much together, that they didn't make any fuss—though they are not high—fact is, I'm not high myself. But they were kind and considerate and I got on pretty well at home; but when I came to rise up in that great edifice before that cultured and intellectual audience, so finely dressed, it did seem to me I could not do it! I was sorely tempted to break my promise. I was, for a fact." He drew a long breath. "I just had to pray for grace, or I never would have pulled through. I had the sermon my wife likes best with me; but I know it lacks it lacks—it isn't what you need! It was dreadfully scared and I felt miserable when I got up to preach it—and then to think that you were—but it is the Lord's doing and marvellous in our eyes! I don't know what Maggie will say when I tell her we can get the window. The best she hoped was I'd bring back enough so the church could pay me eighteen dollars they owe on my salary. And now—it's wonderful! Why, Mr. Lossing, I've been thinking so much and wanting so to get that window for her, that, hearing that the

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dean wanted some carpentering done! I thought maybe, as I'm a fair carpenter—that was my trade once, sir—I'd ask him to let me do the job. I was aware there is nothing in our rules—I mean our canons—to prevent me, and nobody need know I was the rector of Martin's Junction because I would come just in my overalls. There is a cheap place where I could lodge, and I could feed myself for almost nothing, living is so cheap. I was praying about that, too. Now, your noble generosity will enable me to donate what they owe on my salary, and get the window too!"

"Take my advice," said Harry, "donate nothing, say nothing about this gift; I will take care of the warden, and I can answer for the dean."

"Yes," said the dean, "on the whole, Gilling, you would better say nothing, I think; Mr. Lossing is more afraid of a reputation for generosity than the small-pox."

The older man looked at Harry with glistening eyes of admiration; with what Christian virtues of humility he was endowing that embarrassed young man, it is painful to imagine.

The dean's eyes twinkled above his handkerchief which hid his mouth, as he rose to make his farewells. He shook hands, warmly. God bless you, Harry," said he. Gilling, too, wrung Harry's hands; he was seeking some parting word of gratitude, but he could only choke out, "I hope you will get married some time, Mr. Lossing, then you'll understand."

"Well," said Harry, as the door closed, and he flung out his arms and his chest in a huge sigh, "I do believe it was better than the puppies!"

The Nation's Wards in Society.

There is one element in Washington society peculiar to its being at the seat of government. I refer to the number of accomplished women who are clerks in the various departments. Many of these clerks are the widows, sisters or daughters of departed statesmen, or of patriots who have done distinguished service for their country, men whose patriotism has spared them no time for money making, and who have died poor. The government very properly places these wards of the nation in positions where they can honorably support themselves. Their office hours of work once over, they are welcomed as an appreciated addition to the very best society. They are well received in drawing rooms, where Mrs. Malaprop would be coldly met were her purse as long as the Atlantic cable.

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After Oct. 17, Trains leave St. John, Standard Time, for Halifax and Campbellton, 7:00; for Halifax, 10:30; for Sussex, 10:40; for Point du Chene, Quebec and Montreal, 10:55.
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