

Sunday Reading.

The New Minister.

The new church at Tallman's Crossing was finished, and the parish felt it had a right to take pride in its work. Was it not the finest church building in the county and did it not stand, so to speak, on its own feet, free from a penny of debt? The committee, unhampered by any knowledge of architectural beauty, had given the village contractor full sway, and the result stood upon the green, cheerful in yellow and white paint, brave in 'ornamental' work lifting its little belfry with an air of conscious superiority, unabashed by notions of early English or later Gothic, and unsuspecting of any lack of beauty of design.

'Yes,' said Deacon Oliver, as he and Anson Taylor walked away from an inspection of the edifice, 'that's what I call a good job! Larson did well by us, and he's made a tasty thing of it. When we get our new minister we'll be well fixed, and we ought to have a great outpouring!'

Deacon Oliver was an active church member and an influential man in his sphere. His companion was a younger man, deliberate in his motions, with a far away look in his deep brown eyes. 'You couldn't call Ans Taylor lazy, but he hasn't got much sprawl,' was the village comment on him.

'So you're set on having a new minister?' he said, slowly, as they turned from the road into a path which led across the fields.

'There's no question about it,' returned the deacon. 'It was settled last Parish meeting. We want a minister that's up to the times. A church like that—pointing with a twist of his thumb—doesn't want fossils.'

Anson plucked a long stalk of dried grass. 'Mr. Nichols is a good man,' he remarked, as he chewed one end of the stem meditatively.

'Good man!' exclaimed the deacon; and there was unmistakable impatience in his voice. 'Of course he's a good man! To my mind, that's the least you can say about a parson. But our church needs something more than a good man; it's gone to sleep long enough under Mr. Nichols's goodness. I own I'd like to see a few sparks fly around Sunday mornings!'

The short cut across the fields led into the road near Anson Taylor's house. As the two men came along, Mrs. Taylor was standing near her spare-room window, while Miss Trickey, who was responsible for the styles in women's dress at the Crossing, was fitting a lining to her shoulders.

'There's Anson and Deacon Oliver,' remarked Mrs. Taylor. 'I guess you'll have to cut that out a mite under the arm-scyce. I shouldn't wonder if they'd been over the church. Anson hadn't seen how it looked since the new pulpit was got in.'

'Well, you've got an elegant building,' responded Miss Trickey, as audibly as a mouthful of pins would allow. 'I declare, I told Mrs. Dean—I made over her second best black last week—that it made me 'most sorry I was a Baptist. But what's born in the blood and bred in the bone can't be changed. How does your husband feel about the new minister they're talking about?'

Mrs. Taylor's bright, black eyes flashed. 'He feels just as I do!' she answered. 'It's for all the world like turning your own father out of doors because he's old! They say Mr. Nichols isn't up to the times but I say that when folks get 'way ahead of the Lord's good Gospel, they better haul up a bit and go slower.'

'Mr. Nichols's sermons are good enough for me to live by. As for his doings, and it's those that tell, well—if a man ever acted the Bible right out in his daily life, it's Mr. Nichols! He's baptized us and married us and buried us and looked out for us between, and I can't make it seem right, anyway I look at it, to turn him out now!'

Miss Trickey said nothing; she rarely committed herself. It was not business to lose good customers merely for the sake of having opinions of her own.

That evening Deacon Oliver, in his Sunday black, called on the minister. It was his errand to notify Mr. Nichols of the vote of the parish and to give him a chance to resign; and he set about it with a grim sense of satisfaction.

'You'd better send a letter,' advised his wife. 'It aint a pleasant thing to do by word of mouth.'

'No,' said the deacon. 'I ain't much of a hand with the pen and writing's liable to be read more ways than one. I can put it clearer if I talk.'

So he took his way under the clear autumn stars, to carry to the pastor the message that his people no longer cared for his ministrations.

White-haired Mr. Nichols greeted the

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deacon in his cordial way. The blaze from the old-fashioned fireplace cast a pleasant radiance over the room. Helen, the minister's only child and his comfort and stay since his wife's death, sat by the lamp sewing. On the rug before the fire rolled a tiny, golden-haired girl, the minister's orphan grandchild.

'I'm having a lazy time to-night. One has to be a little indulgent with these increasing years; but the grasshopper has not yet become a burden, thank the Lord!' said the old gentleman, with a smile.

Little Anna crept to her grandfather's chair and pulled herself up by his knee.

'Let Anna see g'asshopper, my g'an'pa!' she said, shaking the curls out of her eyes. Mr. Nichols lifted the little one to his lap.

'Here's a young lady who ought to have been in bed an hour ago, only her grandfather was weak enough to listen to her teasing! Well, Deacon Oliver, at last the church stands ready. It is, indeed, a fit temple, and I am proud of the people who raised it without the curse of debt to stand between it and its full service.'

Deacon Oliver gave an embarrassed little cough. Somehow it did not seem easy to get to the object of his visit. He almost wished he had taken his wife's advice and written a letter. After some desultory talk he made a desperate plunge.

'I called to-night,' he began, 'to—see you about a matter talked over at our last parish meeting. We feel that—er—you are getting along in years, as you just remarked, and we know you must feel your work getting arduous.'

Mr. Nichols gave a comfortable little laugh.

'Not yet, not yet, my friend! The good Lord grants me strength in abundance. But I thank my people for their solicitude.'

Deacon Oliver breathed a sigh and began again.

'It was voted to—er—well, to offer you a chance to rest from your labors!'

The deacon felt that this announcement was both Biblical and convincing in its form.

Mr. Nichols hesitated a moment before he answered. When he spoke there was a break in his voice and the suggestion of a fear in his eye.

'I cannot express to you,' he said in solemn tones, 'the deep sense of gratitude toward my people that fills my heart. Never was a pastor more lovingly cared for, I am sure, but in this instance I cannot accept their generosity. It is only five years since they sent me on that delightful mountain trip, and now, of all times, I should not consent to add to their expenses. No—no—I am well, and I must work while it is yet day. I have but few more years of my time at the most, my good friend, and must waste none of it. Bear this word to my people, Deacon Oliver, with my heartiest thanks.'

The deacon twisted uneasily in his chair. Was ever a man so obtuse? He was about to speak again, when his eye chanced to light upon Helen. That she understood the purport of the visit was told in her look of mingled pain and wounded pride, and by the quick tears which had sprung to her eyes.

The deacon rose abruptly.

'Guess I better be going along, Mr. Nichols,' he said, buttoning up his coat.

'A letter will be more businesslike,' he thought, as he made his way home. 'I'll write this very night, and there won't be any chance to mistake it, either!'

When Mr. Nichols came back from the door, Helen had caught little Anna in her arms and was carrying her to bed.

People are very good to me! The old man said, laying an affectionate hand on the young shoulder. 'The world is full of kindness, my dear!'

Helen did not meet her father's look. As she tucked Anna into her crib, the little one reached up and dragged a rosy, plump forefinger down her aunt's cheek.

'What for aunty c'y P?' she exclaimed, in childish wonder and sympathy.

The next afternoon Anson Taylor started on his way to parish meeting. As he was passing the parsonage, he heard a tap on the pane and saw a beckoning finger at the window. He stopped, and Helen Nichols came to the door. She held an envelope in her hand and her face showed signs of weeping.

'Mr. Taylor,' she said, 'I want to ask a great favor of you. Father is sick; he has a severe cold, the doctor says, and he is very feverish. This letter came this morning. I know what is in it, I feel sure. I have been told what the church want, but father doesn't dream of it, and it will kill him if this comes to him while he is sick. May I keep it a few days, until he is better?'

Anson Taylor might be slow of movement, but he was quick in kindness.

'Let me have the letter,' Miss Helen, 'h said. I will explain it to the parish. I'll like to say,' he added awkwardly, 'that I didn't vote for it! I thought I'd like to have you know.'

The parish meeting was held in the vestry of the old church. It was known that the subject of the new minister would be discussed that afternoon, and the small room was crowded.

After some preliminary business, the chairman spoke of the church's growing need of a more active pastor. 'As you all know, the parish has voted to give Mr. Nichols a chance to resign. Any suggestions in regard to this move, in case it is accepted, as of course it will be, are now in order.' There was a moment's pause, and then, to everyone's astonishment, Anson Taylor's long form unfolded itself; it was an unheard-of thing for him to 'speak in meeting.'

'I haven't any suggestions,' he began, in his moderate way, 'and I haven't got anything to say about the new minister. I just want to tell you a little story right here. It will be new to most of you. When I was a young man, a temptation came to me. I won't go into particulars; enough to say that a mortgage came due on the place my father left me, and I couldn't pay it. It wasn't a big sum,—it would seem mighty little now,—but the lack of those few hundred dollars meant the loss of my house and farm and—here Anson hesitated—'my happiness, for I was thinking of getting married.'

'This was a bad enough fix,' but worse came to me, in the shape of temptation, as I said. I had the care of some money, the small property of a distant cousin, and their was a whispering in my heart which said, 'Turn in some of that money and save your home and take your wife. You can make it up later, and no one will be the wiser.' At first I shook the thought off as if it was a snake, but that everlasting little whispering kept up and by and by it seemed like a straight and honest thing just to take the use of that money for a little while.'

Anson's voice shook now and then, and his throat was dry and husky. His little audience listened in surprise at the apparently irrelevant speech. Mrs. Taylor, who sat with a friend on the other side of the vestry grew very red, and finally covered her eyes with her hand.

'Well,' continued the speaker, 'at last I gave right in to that tempting voice, and then I began to argue with myself that I was doing the wisest thing, and I fairly persuaded myself that the money I was thinking of taking was a sort of special providence, sent to help me out of a hard place. The time was getting near, it was the very day before I was to pay the mortgage when I heard a man speak some words that cut me deep. They showed me just where I was standing, and—I went to that man and told him all that had been in my heart to do. He didn't scorn me but he helped me back to my self respect, and then he lent me the money to pay my mortgage.'

'He wasn't rich. I knew he went with out many things that winter for the want of those dollars. I was for selling all and paying him back, but he said, 'No. Marry and settle down in your own home. Neither you nor the young woman you love shall waste your young years in waiting. Begin your life together, content with little, but together, and with clear consciences to man and your Maker! That money has been paid back long ago, but I can never pay my debt of gratitude for my life's happiness and honesty. It was a man's sermon and a man's deed that saved me, and that man was Mr. Nichols, God bless him!'

There was absolute silence when Anson sat down. The only sound was a stifled sob, as Mrs. Taylor caught her breath. No one moved or spoke, until a hoarse voice from the rear of the vestry broke in on the hush.

'I've got a word to say, too!' spoke a rough looking man, with an almost defiant air. 'You all know me! Nothing kept me

from my crime, but Mr. Nichols got hold of me when I came out of jail, and he trusted me and made a man of me again. I'd work that hand off for the parson, and every one here knows it's been an honest hand for two years, and he's the one that made it a fit hand for an honest man to clasp!'

Again the silence; then a timid stirring in a distant corner, and a humble, shrinking little woman stood up. 'Last winter,' she faltered, 'my man was killed. Me and my babies was starving, and—Mr. Nichols—here she sat down sobbing; but she had no need to tell farther—not a soul in the room but knew the ending.'

There was a rustle of silken skirts and a subtle suggestion of violets in the air, as Mrs. Clyde, the richest member of the parish, arose. 'Haughty,' and 'exclusive' she was called, but there was no coldness now, in her beautiful face, and her clear voice trembled a little as she spoke.

'When my baby died,' she said 'I thought life held no more for me. Mr. Nichols came to me, and he made me feel that God is good. I think we all know what Mr. Nichols is in time of sorrow.'

The hush was broken now. There was no more silence; the little gathering was fairly carried out of itself. One after another arose and bore evidence of the pastor's help. Young Harry Thompson, home from college for a few days, who dropped into the meeting, 'just for fun,' told, with a manly break in his boyish voice, of wise and loving counsel. Mothers and fathers spoke of comfort in time of trouble with simple eloquence far more touching than the most polished oratory. There was hardly one in the vestry but had some experience of personal help to relate.

The spirit of testimony spread like a fire; the gift of tongues seemed to descend on the meeting, and the story bore always the same burden: I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me!'

At last the chairman arose and called the meeting to order. The tears were in his eyes. For a moment he could not command his voice.

'My friends,' he said, 'my friends, we have been saved from a great mistake this afternoon. We came here to talk of a new minister, and we find out what our old pastor is to us. What prosperity could we hope for with the sin of ingratitude on our heads? Let us install him anew in our hearts and in his church, and care for him as he has cared for us. I, for my part, am ashamed, and I pray he may never hear of the unkindness we were about to show him.'

Deacon Oliver reluctantly got upon his feet.

'Mr. Chairman,' he began in a halting sort of way, 'according to the instructions of the committee, I—er—I sent a letter to Mr. Nichols, this morning!'

Another hush fell upon the meeting, but this time it was the silence of consternation. Then, with his usual deliberation, Anson Taylor came forward and laid an envelope upon the desk, explaining it in a few words. It was the deacon's letter with the seal unbroken! Of course it was most improper for Young Thompson to cheer, then and in that place, but he did, and moreover, the cheer was taken up on all sides. Such a sound, certainly, never rose before within the walls of that room.

Then some one started the doxology, and even Deacon Oliver's harsh notes joined in the words sung from the depths of grateful hearts:

'Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow!'

"I Wear the Red."

A convict in the Elmira, New York, Reformatory lay dying. In spite of every inducement offered by the humane regulations of the place, he had remained in the lowest grade, among the uncaring and incorrigible.

Kind attentions were given him in his sickness, but he showed no appreciation of them. Faithful hospital service, religious ministrations, even the occasional gift of a flower from tender hearted visitors, elicited no sign of gratitude. To the last he continued unresponsive and taciturn, as if surrounded by enemies instead of friends.

Like many other men arrested for evil-doing, he had concealed his early history, and the name with which he had labelled himself gave no clue to his family connections. To the gentle questioning of a clergyman who had been specially requested to talk with him, he only replied, as he had replied to the chaplain:

'No one knows my name, and no one ever will know.'

If desire to protect a mother or any living kindred from the pain of his disgrace was the motive of his secrecy, it was his one sign of right feeling. He expressed

no contrition, asked for no sympathy. He would die where he had drifted—a shipwrecked soul.

His one miserable response answered every hopeful invitation, 'I wear the red! I wear the red! It was the burden of the man's last words: 'I belong to the red: I wear the red!'

In the Elmira Reformatory an honor system appeals to the inmates, and tests their self-respect. All new arrivals are encouraged to earn by good conduct their release from their first suit—a suit of red. If they respond to this encouragement, they are promoted to a suit of blue. If they win still higher praise, they are allowed to wear citizens' clothes.

The words of the dying convict meant that he was hopelessly stranded among the worst. He wore sin's conventional color; and it was a color that clung. It always clings.

But the despair of that unhappy young man could have found its antidote—where all the human race can find it—in humble appeal to Him Who said, 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.'

"Bread Upon the Waters."

The reward of a generous deed seldom comes more opportunely than it did in an instance reported by the Cleveland Leader. It appears that a prominent Cleveland named Cole, who had recently died, was forced to leave Cornell University at the close of his sophomore year, for lack of funds.

He went to New York, and began a canvass of mercantile houses and offices, in search of a position. Among many others, he visited the office of a produce merchant, who seemed greatly taken with his personality. The result of the interview was that the merchant said to Mr. Cole:

'Young man, go back and finish your college course, and I will foot the bill.'

Mr. Cole accepted the offer, completed his course with credit to himself and his strangely found friend, and at once entered upon a business career. It was not long before he prospered in a business venture, and found himself able to repay the sum advanced for his education. He went to New York, sought out the office of his friend, and stepping up to his desk, laid down seven hundred dollars.

'Mr. Cole,' said the old merchant, 'if it were not for this money my credit would have been dishonored today. Maturing obligations would have gone to protest. You have saved me!'

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His Position.

A meeting of a negro 'literary society' was in progress, and the business part of the programme was under consideration. Someone had proposed that the regular time of meeting be changed from Monday to Wednesday night, and the proposition provoked much discussion. Finally the president of the society was appealed to for his opinion, and he said, with much gravity:

'Well, membahs ob de s'ciety, pussionaly now, pussionaly, I don't car' which night de s'ciety meets, but fo' myself I prefers Monday.'