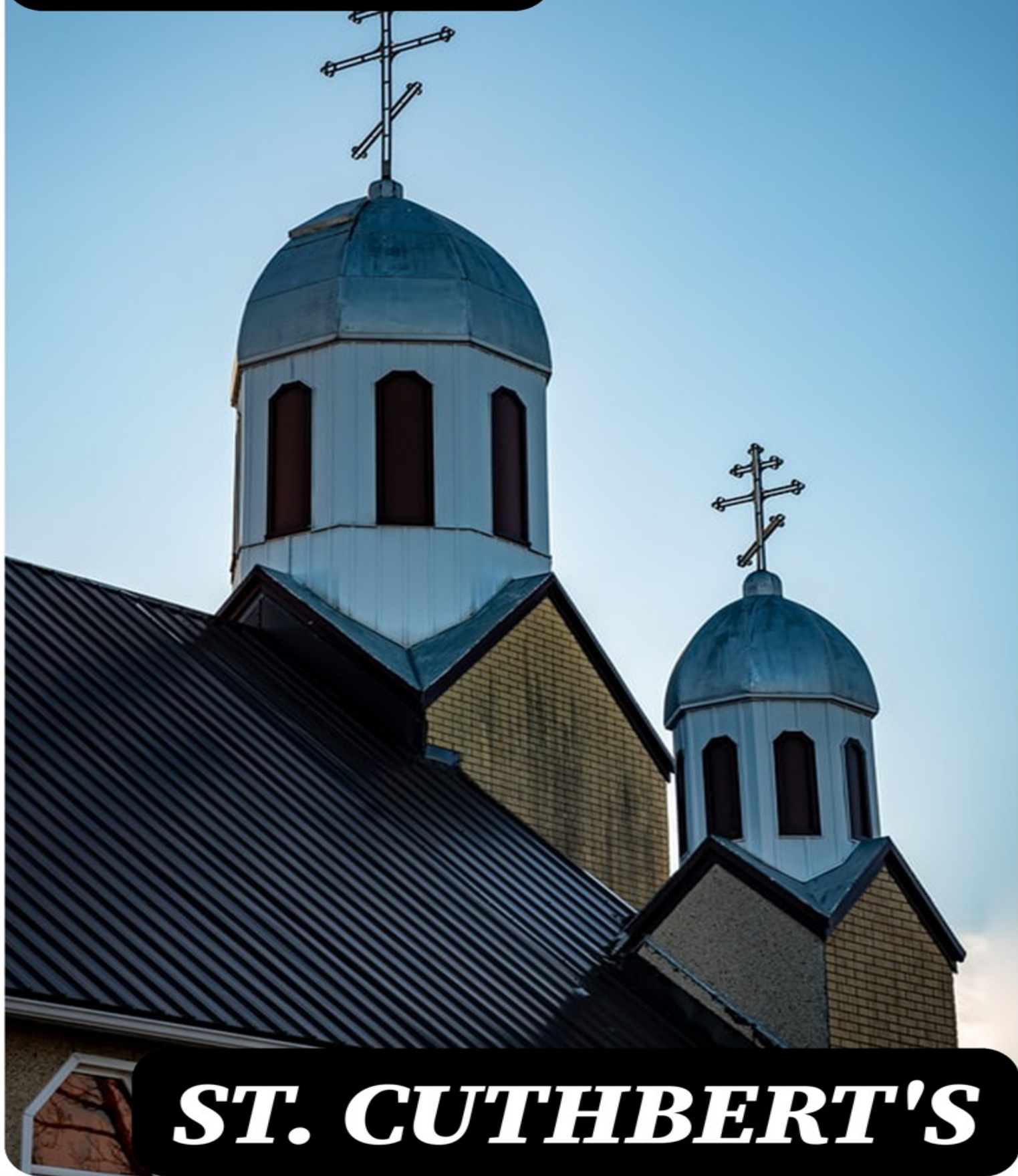


***ROBERT
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ST. CUTHBERT'S

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St. Cuthbert's

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I

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The TURN of The TIDE

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"If you don't get the call you needn't come back here," said my wife to me as I stood upon the door-sill, bag in hand, and my hard-bought ticket in my pocket.

"Well, dear one, I would be sure of it if they could only see the perquisite that goes along with me."

"You must be more serious, Tom, if you expect great calls; but come inside a minute till I say good-bye. When you brought me first to Canada we had half a dozen good-byes to every one farewell. Good-bye again, and if they don't call you they will deserve what they lose."

Thus spoke my wife, and thus was I despatched on the mission that was big with moment.

It was a wondrous hour that brought to us the invitation which I was now proceeding to accept. Not that we were unhappy because our salary was small; we had not lived by bread alone, and our souls were well content. But my wife had delirious visions, which she affirmed were sane and reasonable, of her husband's coming yet into his own, and indulged every now and then in savage and delicious little declarations of the great misfit, which misfit was in my being the minister of a little church which afforded a little salary and provoked a little fame.

Her other days had been spent in luxury and amid the refinement and the pleasures which money only can

provide. And when, our wedding day drawing near apace, I sent her my budget letter, bitterly revealing impecunious facts at which I had before but darkly hinted, and warning her of all the sacrifice which lay beyond, she replied with vehement repudiation of any fears, and in that hour made me rich.

"Cheese and kisses," wrote she, "are considered good fare in my South land for all who have other resources in their hearts." And I mentally averred that half of that would be enough for me.

And so we went ahead—oh, progressive step! And we were never poor again.

But there came a more heroic hour. It was hard, so hard to do, but the pressure rendered concealment quite impossible, for the note I had endorsed was handed in for suit. So I told her one twilight hour that our already limited income must be shared with an unromantic creditor. There was a little tightening of the lips, then of the arms, then of those mutual heart cords entangled in their eternal root.

We were boarding then, three rooms in a family hotel, and when I returned next day at evening I found everything—books, furniture, piano—all moved to a room upon the topmost story. I was directed thither by the smiling landlord, more enlightened than I, and I entered with furtive misgivings in my soul and with visions of that spacious Southern home before my rueful eyes.

But she was there, radiant and triumphant, still flushed with exercise of hand and heart, viewing proudly her proof of a new axiom that two or more bodies may occupy the same space at the selfsame time.

"I am so glad you didn't come before," she said. "I wanted to be all settled before you saw it. This is just as good as we had before, and only half the price. Isn't it cozy? And everything just fits. And we are away from all the noise. And look at that lovely view. And now we can pay off that horrid note. Aren't you glad?"

"But, Emmeline, my heart breaks to see you caged like this. It is noble of you, just like you, but I cannot forgive myself that I have brought you to this," said I, my voice trembling with pain and joy.

"Why, dear one, how can you speak like that? We have everything here, and each other too, and we shall be caged together."

I kissed that girlish face again and blessed the gift of heaven, murmuring only, in tones that could not be heard, "He setteth the solitary in families," and as we went down together I wondered if that sudden elevation had not brought us nearer heaven than we had been below.

It was largely owing to this lion-hearted courage that I now found myself swiftly borne towards the vacant pulpit which yawned in stately expectation of its weekly candidate.

The invitation "to conduct divine services in St. Cuthbert's, whose pulpit is now vacant," had come unsought from the kirk session of that distant temple.

St. Cuthbert's was the stately cathedral of all adjoining Presbyterianism. It was the pride and crown of a town which stood in prosperous contentment upon the verge of cityhood. Its history was great and honourable; its traditions warlike and evangelical; its people intelligent and intense. Its vast area was famed for its throng of acute and reflective

hearers, almost every man of whom was a sermon taster, while its officers were the acknowledged possessors of letters patent to the true ecclesiastical nobility. In my student days, medals and scholarships were never quoted among the trophies of our divinity men if it could be justly said of any one that he had preached twice before the hard heads of St. Cuthbert's. This triumph was recited with the same reverent air as when men used to say, "He preached before the Queen."

Some hundreds of miles must be traversed before I reached the place, but only some four-and-twenty hours before I reached the time, of my trial sermons. Therefore did I convert my car into a study and my unsteady knee into a desk, giving myself to the rehearsal of those discourses by which I was to stand or fall. Every weak hand thereof I laboured to strengthen, and every feeble knee I endeavoured to confirm. And what motley hours were those I spent on that fast-flying train! All my reflections tended to devotion, but yet my errand was throbbing with ambition.

Whereupon I fell into a strange and not unprofitable reverie, painfully striving to separate my thoughts, the sheep from the goats, and to reconcile them the one to the other. I knew well enough the human frame to be persuaded that ambition could not altogether be cast out from the spirit of a man, which led me to reflect upon its possible place and purpose if controlled by a master hand beyond the hand of time. I strove to discover my inmost motive, far behind all other aims, and consoled myself with the hope that God might make it the dominant and sovereign one, to

which all others might be unconscious ministers, even as all other lesser ones obey the driving wheel.

I somehow felt that the vision of that radiant face at home, for whom ambition sprung like a fountain, was in no wise inconsistent with the holiest work which awaited me on the morrow.

At thought of her, my ambition, earth-born though it was, seemed to be robed in white and to be unashamedly ministering unto God. And I was fain to believe at last that this very hope of a larger place was from Himself, and that He was the shepherd of the sheep and of the goats alike. Whereupon I fell upon my sermons afresh with a clearer conscience, which means a stronger mind, and swiftly prayed, even while I worked, that the Lord of the harvest would winnow my tumultuous thoughts, garnering the wheat unto Himself and burning the tares with unquenchable fire.

Onward rushed the hours, and onward rolled the train in its desperate struggle with them, till the setting sun, victorious over both, reminded me that I would be in New Jedboro before the dusk deepened into dark. Then restored I my sermon notes, reburnished and repaired, to the trusty keeping of my well-worn valise, settling myself for one of those delicious baths of thought to be truly enjoyed only on the farther side of toil.

I had but well begun to compose my mind and to forecast the probable experiences of the morrow, when a rich Scotch voice broke in upon me with the unmistakable inquiry, "And where micht ye be gaein?"

I responded with the name of New Jedboro, assuming the air of a man who was bent only upon a welcome visit to long-separated friends. But I had reckoned without my host. My interrogator was a Scot, with the Scot's incurable curiosity, always to be estimated by the indifference of his air. If his face be eloquent of profound unconcern, then may you know that a fever of inquisitiveness is burning at his heart.

My questioner seemed to scarcely listen for my answer, yet a tutored eye could tell that he was camping on my trail.

His next interrogation was launched with courteous composure: "Ye'll no' be the man wha's expectit in St. Cuthbert's ower the Sabbath?"

I now saw that this was no diluted Scotsman. Bred on Canadian soil, he was yet original and pure. He had struck the native Scottish note, the ecclesiastical. Like all his countrymen, he had a native taste for a minister. His instincts were towards the Kirk, and for all things akin to Psalm or Presbytery he intuitively took the scent. I have maintained to this day that he sniffed my sermons from afar, undeceived by the worldly flavour of my rusty bag.

I collected myself heroically, and replied that I was looking forward to the discharge of the high duty to which he had referred. Upon this admission he moved nearer, as a great lawyer stalks his quarry in the witness box. He eyed me solemnly for a moment, with the look of one taking aim, and then said slowly—

"I'm no' an elder in that kirk."

"Are you not?" said I, with as generous an intonation of surprise as conscience would permit.

"I'm no' an elder," he repeated. "But I gang till it," he added.

Then followed a pause, which I dared to break with the remark, "I am told it is a spacious edifice."

He merely glanced at me, as if to say that all irrelevant conversation was out of place, and then continued—

"And I'm no' the precentor; I'm no' the man, ye ken, that lifts the tune."

I nodded sympathetically, trying to convey my sense of the mistake the congregation had made in its choice of both elders and precentor.

"Ye wud say, to luik at me, that I'm no' an office-seeker, an' ye're richt. But I haud an office for a' that."

This time I smiled as if light had come to me, and as one who has been reassured in his belief in an overruling Providence.

"What office do you hold?" said I.

"Ye wudna guess in a twalmonth. I'm no' the treasurer, as ye're thinkin'—I'm the beadle."

I uttered a brief eulogy upon the honour and responsibility of that position, pointing out that the beadle had a dignity all his own, as well as the elders and other officers of the kirk.

He endorsed my views with swift complacent nods.

"That's what I aye think o' when I see the elders on the Sabbath mornin'," said he; "forbye, there's severals o' *them*, but wha ever heard tell o' mair than ae beadle? And what's mair, I had raither be a door-keeper in the Lord's hoose than dwall in tents o' sin. Them's Dauvit's words, and they aye come to me when I compare mysel' wi' the elders."

I hurriedly commended his reference to the Scriptures, at the same time avoiding any share in his rather significant classification, remarking on the other hand that elders had their place, and that authority was indispensable in all churches, and the very essence of the Presbyterian system.

He interrupted me, fearing he had been misunderstood.

"Mind ye," he declared fervently, "I'm no' settin' mysel' up even wi' the minister. I regard him as mair important than me—far mair important," he affirmed, with reckless humility, "but the elders, they are juist common fowk like mysel'. An' at times they are mair than common. Me an' the minister bear a deal frae the elders. He aye bids me to bear wi' them, an' I aye bid him no' to mind. I tell him whiles that we'd meet an' we'd greet whaur the elders cease frae troublin'—them's the poet's words."

We were now some two miles or so from the town and the church wherein he exercised his gifts and magnified his office; and my rugged friend, dismissing the elders for the time, reverted to the inquiry he had seen fit previously to ignore.

"Ye were askin' me aboot the kirk."

"Yes," said I in a chastened voice, "I asked you if it was not very large."

"Thae was no' yir exact words, but I ken yir meanin'. It's a gran' kirk, St. Cuthbert's, an' ye'll need to speak oot—no' to yell, ye ken, for I'm nigh deafened wi' the roarin' o' the candidates sin' oor kirk was preached vacant by the Presbytery. Dinna be ower lang; and be sure to read a' the psalm afore ye sit doon, and hae the sough o' Sinai in yir discoorse, specially at the mornin' diet; an' aye back up the

Scriptures wi' the catechism, an' hae a word or twa aboot the Covenanters, them as sealed their testimony wi' their bluid, ye ken. Ye'll tak' ma advice as kindly; it's mair than likely we'll never meet again gin the morrow's gone."

I thanked him for his counsel and reached for my bag, at the signal of escaping steam.

The car door had just closed behind me when I felt a hand upon my arm and heard a now familiar voice—

"An' dinna pray ower muckle for yir ain devoted folk at hame; an' dinna ask the King an' Head o' the Kirk to fetch till us a wise under-shepherd o' the flock."

With a word of additional acknowledgment I stepped on to the station platform, but my parley with a burly cabman was interrupted by the same voice whispering in my ear—

"Ye micht mind the elders in yir prayer; gin they were led mair into the licht it wad dae nae harm to onybody."

II

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A MAN With a SECRET

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There was no one about the station to welcome me and none to direct, but there were many to stare and wonder.

The moderator of the vacant kirk had provided me with the address of the house to which he said I should repair. I was in no wise mortified by this apparent lack of hospitality, for the aforesaid moderator had reminded me in his postscript that the folk of St. Cuthbert's were notoriously

Scotch, untrained to any degree of devotion at the beginning, but famous for the fervour of their loyalty at the close of their ministers' careers.

Whether or not I should have any career at all amongst them was the subject of my thoughts as I wended my way to "Inglewood," for such was the melodious title of the house which was to be my home during my sojourn in New Jedboro.

Beautiful for situation it proved to be, nestling among its sentinels of oak, upon the highest hill of seven which garrisoned the town. The signs of wealth and good taste were everywhere about, and my probationer's heart was beating fast when I pulled the polished silver knob whose patrician splendour had survived the invasion of all electrical upstarts.

I heard the answering bell far within, breaking again and again into its startled cry, and my soul answered it with peals of such humiliation as is known only to the man whose heart affords a home to that ill-matched pair, the discomfiture of the candidate and the pride of the Presbyterian.

The door was opened by the master of the house, Michael Blake, a man of forty-five or so, the wealthy senior of New Jedboro's greatest manufacturing firm.

I suppose he looked first at me, but my first sensation was of his keen eye swiftly falling on the shabby travelling-bag in my left hand, my right kept disengaged for any friendly overture which might await me.

Oh, the shame and the anguish of those swift glances towards one's travelling-bag! Can no kind genius devise a

scheme for their temporary concealment such as the modern book agent has brought to its perfection, full armed beneath the treacherous shelter of his cloak?

I broke the silence: "Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Blake?"

"Yes, that is my name," responded a rich, soulful voice, resonant with the finest Scottish flavour, "and what can I do for you, sir?"

Presuming that it would be hardly delicate for me to state the particular duty I was expecting him to discharge, I betook myself to the association of ideas, and replied—

"I am to preach in St. Cuthbert's to-morrow," hoping that this might suggest to him the information he had sought.

Swift and beautiful was the transformation. The soul of hospitality leaped from his face, stern and secretive though it was. His eye, which had seemed to hold my blushing bag at bay, turned now upon me with all the music of a great welcome in its glance. He looked at me with that frank abruptness which true cordiality creates, and when he took my hand in his my heart leaped to the warm shelter of its grasp.

"I have been looking for you; you are welcome here," he said, in the quietest of tones. He drew me gently within the massive door, and in that moment I knew that I was in the custody of love.

A grandfather's clock, proud and stately in its sense of venerable faithfulness, was gravely ticking off the moments with hospitality in its tone. A pleasant-faced lassie showed me to my room, reminding me that the evening meal awaited my descent.

My host justified my every impression. While we disposed of the plain but appetizing fare, whose crown was the speckled trout which his skill had lured from home, he submitted me to the kindest of cross-examinations concerning my past, my scholarship, my evangelical positions, my household, and much else that nestled among them all. Throughout, I felt the charm and the power of his gentleness, and under its secret influence I yielded up what many another would have sought in vain. Some natures there are which search you as the sun lays bare the flowers, making for itself a pathway to their inmost heart, every petal opening before its siege of love.

But reciprocity there was none. His lips seemed to stand like inexorable sentinels before his heart, in league with its great secret, the guardians of a past which no man had heard revealed. One or two tentative attempts to discover his antecedents were foiled by his charming taciturnity.

"I came from the old country many years ago," was the only information he vouchsafed me.

The evening was spent in conversation which never flamed but never flagged. My increasing opportunity for observation served but to confirm my conviction that I was confronted with a man who had one great and separate secret hidden within the impenetrable recesses of a contrite heart. He said little about St. Cuthbert's or the morrow, his most significant observation being to the effect that the serious-minded of the kirk were looking forward to my appearance with hopeful interest.

After he had bidden me good-night, he again sought me in my chamber, interrupting the devotions which I was

striving to conduct in oblivion of to-morrow and in the sombre light of the Judgment Day.

"Will you do me a kindness in the kirk to-morrow?" he said, with almost pathetic eagerness.

I responded fervently that nothing could be a greater kindness to myself than the sense of one bestowed on him.

"Very well, then, will you give us the Fifty-first Psalm to sing at the morning service—it always seems to me that it is the soul's staple food; and let us begin with the fifth verse—

"Behold, Thou in the inward parts
With truth delighted art.'

It falls like water on the thirsty heart. And perhaps, if your previous selection will permit, you would give us in the evening the paraphrase—

"Come let us to the Lord our God
With contrite hearts return.'

My mother first taught me that," he added, with the first quiver of the lip I yet had seen, "and I have learned it anew from God."

He then swiftly departed, little knowing that he had given me that night a pillow for both head and heart. I fell asleep, his great quotations and his earnest words flowing about my soul even as the ocean laves the shore.



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OUR MUTUAL TRIAL

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The Sabbath morning broke serene and fair. Thus also awoke my spirit, still invigorated by its contact with one I felt to be an honest and God-fearing man, whose ardour I knew was chastened by a long-waged conflict of the soul.

Our morning worship was led by Mr. Blake himself, who besought the Divine blessing upon the labours of him who was "for this day 'our servant for Jesus' sake."

We walked to the church together, mingling with the silent and reverent multitude pressing towards a common shrine.

As he left me at the vestry door, he said earnestly—

"Forget that you are a candidate of St. Cuthbert's, and remember that you are a minister of God."

The beadle recognized me with a confidential nod, inspected the pulpit robe which I had donned, and taking up the "Books," he led the way to the pulpit steps with an air which might have provoked the envy of the most solemn mace-bearer who ever served his king.

He opened the door, and then there appeared to my wondering view a sea of expectant faces, vast beyond my utmost dream. They were steeped in silence, a silence so intense that it left the impress on my mind of an ocean, majestic in its heaving grandeur; for the stiller you find the sea of human faces the more reasonably may you dread the trough of human waves.

The wonder of the reverent and the sneer of the scornful have alike been prompted by the preaching of a candidate. Something strange and incongruous seems to pertain to the

performance of a man whose acknowledged purpose is the dual one of winning alike the souls and the smiles of men. He seeks, as all preachers are supposed to do, the uplift of his hearers' souls, while his very appearance is a pledge of his desire to so commend himself as to be their favourite and their choice. Much hath been written, and more hath been said, of the humiliation to which he must submit who occupies a vacant pulpit as the applicant for a vacant kirk.

But, whatever ground there be for these reflections, I felt the force of none of them that radiant Sabbath morning in St. Cuthbert's. My Calvinism, which is regarded by those who know it not as dragonlike and altogether drastic, proved now my comfort and my stay, and within its vast pavilion I seemed to hide as in the covert of the Eternal. For there surged through heart and brain the stately thought that such experimental dealings between a minister and a people might be sublimated before reverent eyes, hallowed as a holy venture, and destined to play its part in the economy of God.

His claim seemed loftier far than any obligation between my heart and man, and so uplifted was I by the sense of a commission which even candidature could neither invalidate nor deform, that all sense of servility, all cringing thought of livelihood, all fear of faltering and all faltering of fear, seemed to flee away even as the blasphemy of darkness retreats before the sanctities of the morn. In very truth I forgot that I was a candidate of St. Cuthbert's and seemed but to remember that I was a minister of God.

Whether my sermon was good or ill I could not then have told; but I could well have told that a victorious secret is to

him who strives after earnestness of heart, unvexed by the clamour of his own rebellious and ambitious soul.

The congregation was vast and reverent as befitted the purpose of the hour; the most careless eye could mark the strong and reflective cast of those Scottish faces, whose native adamant was but little softened by their sojourn beneath Canadian skies. Reverence seemed to clothe these worshippers like a garment. They were as men who believed in God, whereby are men most fearsome and yet most glorious to look upon. It was the fearsomeness of such a face, garrisoned in God, which had beat back the haughty gaze of Mary when she met the eye of Knox, burning with a fire which no torch of time had kindled.

And when they sang their opening hymn, they seemed to stride upwards as mountaineers, for they lifted up their eyes as men who would cast them down again only before God Himself. From word to word they climbed, and from line to line, as though each word or line were some abutting crag of the very hill of God. Besides, the psalm they sung was this—

"I to the hills will lift mine eyes
From whence doth come mine aid."

Their intensity steadied my very soul. They seemed to look at me as if to say, "We are in earnest if you are; our kirk is vacant but our hearts are full," and the pulpit in which I stood, and in which many a hapless man had stood before, was hallowed by its solemn garrison of waiting souls, and redeemed of all taint of treason towards its sacred trust.

When I called them unto prayer, they answered as the forest answers when the wind brings it word from heaven,

save some venerable few who rose erect (as was their fathers' way), standing like sentinel oaks amid lesser trees, they also bending with an obeisance prompted from within. It seemed not hard to lead these earnest hearts in prayer—they seemed the rather to lead my soul as by a more familiar path; or, to state the truth more utterly, their devoutness seemed to bear me on, as the deep ocean bears itself and its every burden towards the shore.

This intensity of worship pervaded its every act. They joined in the reading of the Word as those who must both hear and see it for themselves, their books opening and closing in unison with the larger one which decked their pulpit like a crown.

Even when the collection was taken up they maintained their loftiness of poise. It had been often told me that Scotch folk contribute to an offering with the same heroism wherewith their ancestors opened their unshrinking veins, doling forth their money, like their blood, with a martyr's air. But although I remarked that some Scottish eyes followed their departing coins with glances of parental tenderness, there was yet a solemn stateliness about the operation which greatly won me, even those who dedicated the homeliest copper doing it unabashedly, as if to the Lord, and not unto men.

We closed with the penitential psalm which Mr. Blake had asked, and its great words seemed charged with the strong reality of men who believed in sin with the same old-fashioned earnestness as marked their faith in God, the two answering the one to the other as deep calleth unto deep, eternally harmonious as they are.

The congregation swayed slowly down the aisle, Scottishly cold and still, like the processional of the ice in the spring-time. They reminded me of noble bergs drifting through the Straits of Belle Isle. It was a Presbyterian flood, and every man a floe. But I suspected mightily that they were nevertheless the product of the spring, and somehow felt that they dwelt near the confines of the summer. The fire which warmed their hearts had touched my own, and in that very moment wherein they turned their backs upon me, I pursued them with surrendering tenderness, and coveted for my own the rugged faithfulness which hath now enriched these many golden years.

One or two turned to glance at me, but when their gaze met mine they despatched their eyes on some impartial quest, as if caressing their noble church or looking for some lingering friend.

The precentor, whose place was in a kind of songster's pulpit just below me, was wreathed in the complacent air of a man who has discharged a lofty duty and has done it well. He had borne himself throughout as the real master of the entire service, and as one who had ruled from an untitled throne. He cast me one or two swift glances, such as would become an engineer who had brought his train or a pilot who had brought his ship to the desired haven. I returned his overture with a look of humble gratitude, and he thereupon relaxed as one well content with what was his hard-earned due, but nothing more. I have well learned since then that by so much as one values one's peace, by that much must one reverence the precentor.

When I regained the vestry I found it peopled with six or seven elders (a great and sweltering population), but no word of favour or approval escaped a single Scottish lip. Their hour had not yet come; but I knew it not, and was proportionately cast down by what seemed to me a silent rhetoric of scorn. But it was the will of heaven to somewhat set aside what I unknowingly estimated to be the verdict of indifference. The beadle, as one with whom I had had a past, beckoned me without, whispering that a "wumman body," a stranger, desired to speak with me in an adjoining room.

Her story was short and sad; her request, the sobbing entreaty of a broken heart that I would pray for her darling and her prodigal, her first-born, wandering in that farthest of all countries which lies beyond the confines of a mother's ken. I answered her with a glance which owned the kinship of her tears, and pledged it with a hand which, thank God, has ever found its warmest welcome in the hand of woe. Then I went back to the vestry unafraid. "For what," thought I, "can these elders do either for me or against me, if I am really a priest unto God for one mother's son? This woman has evidently forgotten that I am a candidate of St. Cuthbert's, and has remembered only that I am a minister of God."

IV

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OUR MUTUAL VERDICT

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The evening service was like unto that of the morning, the only difference being that I saw this sturdy folk, mountain-like, in the light of the setting, instead of the rising sun. But still no word or hint revealed to me the favour or disfavour with which my efforts had been received by the people of St. Cuthbert's, save only that one man ventured to remark that I had brought him in mind of Thomas Chalmers.

I hurriedly exclaimed, "Is that so?" in a tone which all too plainly implored him to go on.

"Yes," said he. "When ye blawed yir nose, if ma een had been shut, I cud hae swore it was Chammers," whereupon the last state of me was worse than the first.

But I was a little comforted in overhearing one Scot say to another as they passed me on their homeward way, "He's no' to be expeckit to preach like yon man frae Hawick," to which the other replied, and I caught his closing words, "But there was a bit at the end that wasna bad."

This was but a thin gruel to satisfy one's wondering soul, but it was shortly thickened by the beadle. He was waiting for us at Mr. Blake's, wishing instruction about some task that fell within his duties, but he managed to have a word with me—

"I canna tell what waits ye, but, gin ye'd like to see through the manse, I'll tak' ye through the morn."

I thanked him, declining, but secretly blessed him and inwardly rejoiced.

At worship that night my gentle host read the story of the prodigal, and when we knelt to pray he repeated twice, "I

will arise and go unto my Father," and in the pause I felt that the wave of some besetting memory was beating on the shore; more and more was it borne in upon me that this man had a past, shared only by himself and God and some one else unknown.

The morning witnessed my departure from New Jedboro, and from the window of the train I watched its fast-retreating hills, so often trodden by me since with the swinging stride of joy, or clambered with the heavy step of care.

There is neither time nor space to set down in detail all that followed. Let it suffice to say that while they were musing the fire burned, and the good folk of St. Cuthbert's slowly and solemnly resolved to call me to their ancient church.

They were scandalized by a report, which spread with pestilential ease, that I had known my wife but three short weeks when I asked her to walk the long walk with me. This and other rumours provoked them to despatch a sage and ponderous officer to the distant scene of my labours, that he might investigate them on the spot. He came, he saw, he was conquered. My wife lassoed him at a throw. He went home in fetters, his eloquence alone unloosed. Long before the night on which they should meet to call, he had brandished his opinion as to the wisdom of my delirious haste.

"But did he mak' his choice so redeek'lus sudden?" he was asked.

"I dinna ken," he answered tropically, "and I dinna care. If he bided three weeks, he bided ower lang. I kent that fine