

JUST OR GENEROUS?

WHEN Hal Prescott left the Theological Seminary it was with the intention of devoting himself to mission work. Not foreign missions, nor domestic missions so-called; it was Hal's opinion that a whole section of the community had been sadly neglected by the Church, and to this section he meant to devote his life. The respectable working-class, he considered, just because they were respectable, were let severely alone; and for some reason or other—perhaps because of this neglect—there had arisen between them and the clergy a wall of separation.

Mr. Prescott had studied in the most progressive university in the country, where the New Political Economy was in the hands of one of its ablest representatives; he was brimful of theories, and had gained such practice as he might from Workingmen's Clubs, Trade Unions, open meetings of the Knights of Labor, etc. To say that "he knew it all" would be unjust; but Hal certainly believed that he knew quite a good deal.

His sister, who had inherited from a grandmother the quaint old English name of Lovely, was wont to look rather quizzical when Hal mounted his hobby and discoursed volubly upon the best methods of reaching the masses. Lovely frankly admitted to herself that the puzzle was too hard for her.

"But the only way to solve it is to go ahead and try, not minding how many mistakes one makes," said Lovely. "So if you want some one to keep house for you, Hal, I'm your chief assistant and ardent helper. It's my style of college settlement."

Lovely was a graduate of a co-education college, and a young person of very decided character, with a pretty piquant face, an abundance of golden hair and very charming dimples.

Such a pair of young people were not long in finding just such a parish as they wanted. There was a church in Berwynne which had once stood in a fashionable quarter, then had passed through the hands of Jews, Turks, Elamites and the dwellers beyond Mesopotamia, so to speak, before it was bought by the denomination to which Hal belonged, for a mission station. There was a rambling old parsonage adjoining, very solidly built of brown-painted brick, but with the woodwork, locks, windows, etc., greatly in need of repair; and of this domicile the young people found themselves in jubilant yet somewhat uncomfortable possession.

"It needs a great many repairs," said Lovely soberly. "However," dimpling saucily, "there couldn't be a better opportunity to employ Union labor; and by the time you are through with Union prices—"

"Of course," returned Hal, "under a system of imperfect distribution of wealth—"

But Lovely was gone to ascertain the address of a Union carpenter.

In consequence of which Mr. Aaron Field the next day rang at the parsonage door.

He was a personable young man of twenty-three; of good build, but slouching carriage; with a square honest brow, close-cut brown hair, clear gray eyes, sometimes dreamy, sometimes sullen, features a trifle rough-hewn, and a heavy brown moustache. Over his shoulder was a bag of tools, and in his pocket a blotted copy of verses of an incendiary character. Aaron was, in fact, poet-in-chief to the *Trumpet of Liberty*, the principal labor paper of Berwynne. Of course the editor could not pay for verses; but as poets are not organized, Aaron did not consider himself a "rat" or "scab," but was, in a small way, rather famous. For, in fact, his verses had in them the thrill of a true righteous anger against wrong and oppression, and, though the lines were often uneven and the rhymes off color, they rang with some degree of poetic melody.

Turning a corner on his way to the parsonage, he ran against the very editor in question.

"Hello!" said the editor.

"Hello yourself."

"Job on hand, or can you come?"

"Oh, don't say come," returned Field jocosely; "I'm a good little boy just out of Sunday School, and I won't be led into no wicked ways. I'm going to call on the new parson in the old parsonage, I am."

"Is that so? Why, you surprise me! Which parson is this? for there are shoals of them, worse luck! black-coated blood-suckers!"

"Henry Prescott, he calls himself; miserable, trifling, effeminate—"

"That's all so, only it don't apply right here," returned the editor. "I know Reverend Prescott, and he ain't a bad sort of fellow. Come down to paralyze—I mean evangelize—us heathen with what he calls a mission. He means well, very well, but of course he don't know much. Some snap to him though, and an awfully pretty sister."

"But what's behind it all?" asked Aaron bluntly. "Is he trying to lay up treasure in heaven at our expense, or just a blamed hypocrite?"

"Oh, of course, his business is to exploit our sins for his own benefit; but so far as he knows he means well," said the editor.

"You think he is sincere, then?"

"Well, I would if he subscribed to the *Trumpet of Liberty*," was the reply, as the editor went off laughing.

Lovely Prescott opened the door for Aaron Field. In her short-waisted, straight-skirted dress of creamy mull, her small drawn poke-bonnet, long white gloves and lace tucker, looped with a single Jacqueminot rose, she was like a heavenly vision to the young poet. He followed her into the house, partly conscious that a new door had been opened into his own life.

Hal Prescott shook his finger at his sister as she showed the new-comer into his study, where all was dust, confusion and books, and ordered her out of all the dirt. When she returned from her calls on up-town friends she found him as radiant over his treasure-trove of a workingman as a young medico with his first "case."

"Do you know that he is a poet?" said Hal. "Do you hear, Lovely? a poet!"

"What kind?" asked Lovely; and Hal was obliged to confess that he had not seen Mr. Field's verses.

"But at least he loves books, and when a man loves books you can always get hold of him," said Hal.

Mr. Field was a good deal about the house within the next few days, and showed himself not unwilling to be gotten hold of. In fact, he was more than ready to talk to Lovely, who, however amused, was too deeply in earnest to lose any opportunities of "doing good."

"Your brother seems like a clever sort of man, Miss Prescott," said Aaron one morning. He was mending the kitchen window shutter while Lovely washed the breakfast things, and he felt the situation decidedly cosy.

Lovely dimpled mischievously and bewitchingly. "I am glad you think so," she said. "I know my brother is very much in earnest, and that you could be of great use to him if you would."

"I guess I'm a better hand at a saw and plane than a Bible," said Aaron. "Whatever made him take to preaching, anyway? He's no Molly-coddle."

"So that's your idea of a parson," said Lovely. (Really she could not help it; it dimpled itself!) "He took to preaching because he likes to preach."

"Well, he ain't made it pay well," said Aaron bluntly; "though of course he'll strike for a fatter job when he gets the chance. Or is it—"

But Lovely had wheeled about, her eyes flashing so dangerously that the alternative, "laying up treasures in heaven," remained unsaid. In a moment the fire died out of the girl's eyes.

"You will know my brother better some day," she said quietly, and went on silently with her work.

Aaron was sorry, for he saw he had hurt her; and, as he hammered away, a faint light broke in upon his mind that perhaps parsons might be better fellows than he supposed.

"There's Bob," thought Aaron, meaning the editor; "money ain't his object. If Bob chose to sell his talents to a bloated oligarchy, he could get a fat salary to-morrow on any paper in Berwynne. Instead of that, he works at job printing, and edits a labor paper for the fun of it, which sometimes it pays and sometimes not. Why shouldn't a man who believes in God do as much for Him as Bob does for the cause of labor? By gracious! I'll go hear him preach next Sunday!"

How much the thought of Lovely had to with this resolve we will not inquire; let it suffice that he must have heard more of the sermon than an occasional allusion to "Ruth the Beautiful," for he urged his friend, the editor, to attend next Sunday, and confided to him that Prescott wasn't a bad fellow.

"And sometimes he says a thing or two," replied the editor. "Of course he don't know much, he can't be expected to. If I was you, Field, I'd coach him up a bit; for he's not afraid to say what he thinks."

"But do think he is sincere?" broke in a bystander. "Would he live up to it if he was a capitalist now?"

"Oh! who would!" said the editor. "The point is to make use of him while you can. Load him up, fire him off, then have him in the papers. Reforms go twice as fast if the pulpit starts 'em. If he'll only say what's right, I don't care a hang if he's sincere or not. Of course he's like the rest of 'em; the biggest salary is the Lord's will for 'em to accept; and a parson with a lot of

rich men to preach to must please his subscribers or they'll freeze him out. But this one ain't got that sort of a subscription list—”

“Nor he never will have, if he preaches your way,” said Aaron.

“Well, that's his lookout,” returned the editor.

It was one of Hal's methods of studying the workingman to ask him to tea, three or four at a time; and Mr. Field and the editor were very often among the guests. Lovely, indeed, had undertaken Mr. Field's education with a business-like thoroughness worthy of herself and her training. She criticised his verses, lent him books, started a Browning Club for his especial benefit, and in every way tried to implant ideas and ideals purer and loftier than those with which his life had furnished him. She found him so responsive that it occasionally occurred to her to doubt whether her system of training might be, after all, for his best and final good; but Lovely's theory was that what is right comes right, and if every step is in the right direction one can hardly come out wrong at the end. And it was surely right to aid in the development of such a nature as Aaron's. The little roughnesses of demeanor, faults of speech, and, more and more, any ungracefulness of bearing, dropped away from him day by day; as Lovely put it, the true gentleman within him was learning how to shine before men, so that they might see his good works.

Meanwhile the light of Lovely's own golden hair had attracted an admirer whose works were by no means always good.

Mr. Lyttelton Franklin, son and junior partner of the head of the great building firm of Franklin & Co., having seen her on the street and inquired her name, presented himself at church the next Sunday, and afterward introduced himself to Hal as one who had attended services in that building in his youth (which happened to be true), and felt drawn thereto by a strong local attachment, as well as by Mr. Prescott's fine sermons. As he backed up his words by a generous contribution to the pastor's salary, and another to general expenses, Hal, being only mortal, was inclined to believe him an acquisition; but Lovely had seen at a glance that his eyes were too close together, and, besides, assured her brother that Franklin & Co. were the foes of organized labor. Aaron Field supported this assertion, from personal experience as an employe of the firm.

“But this fellow has no more to do with that than you have,” returned the Revérend Henry. “He is a junior partner, to be sure; but, I say, Lovely, we'll ask him to tea, to meet Field; that's quite an ideal thing to do; bringing classes together, you know. The great thing is to make them understand each other.”

“If!” said Lovely. “Sometimes there are barriers. Fifty per cent. on an investment and a rise in wages will be as irreconcilable as ever, after a gallon of tea.”

“You and your epigrams!” retorted her brother. “Come, put your bonnet on, and we'll have a drive.”

“It's a toque,” said Lovely; “shall we take the editor's wife and her new baby along with us?”

The “tea” took place in due time; but the effect was rather to widen than close the breach between employer and workman.

“That chap's got his fish eyes on her,” Aaron said wrathfully to himself; “and if she wasn't clever enough to see through any six of his size, I'd cut his throat.”

Lyttelton Franklin, on his side, was equally quick to read the heart of Mr.

Field; and the first consequence of Hal's well-meant effort at the fusion of classes was a request from the astute Lyttelton to the head of the firm for the dismissal of "the best hand we've got."

"What's he done?" demanded old Ezra Franklin wrathfully. "Bring a charge against him, will you? Yes, I know he writes verses; and he'll turn you out a design for a bit of scroll-work or an arabesque in five minutes, that will save you hundreds of dollars. Straight as a string, too, and reliable as Old Time himself. Once for all, Litt, if you'll mind your own affairs, I'll look after the business. What's behind your new freak of going to church? I lay you've an axe to grind."

So Lyttelton was forced to consider other methods of crushing his rival. He was as much in love as was possible to a man of his character, which was weak, shifty and insincere, with passions which did not need to be very strong to hold him at their mercy. Dread of consequences—including a wrathful father—had kept him tolerably respectable up to the present time; he had been a church-member from boyhood, and would have been considered a more than eligible party by every church-going family of his acquaintance, yet it was really not a bad thing that, as Aaron Field put it, Lovely had sense enough to see through him.

As spring came on trouble began to bud and flower with the vegetation. The ceaseless, seething disunion between labor and capital, which underlies the lava crust upon which our modern civilization is erected, gave warning of its presence in growls and puffs of smoke, mutters of subterranean thunders, and flashes of volcanic fires, all of which were minimized by a careless, easy-going, reckless public, under the names of strikes, lockouts and boycotts. Neither press nor pulpit seemed awake to the situation, however, and the few prophets who ventured to utter their "Woe to Jerusalem!" were neatly described as "cranks." Least of all did the contending parties—the laborers and capitalists—realize the object of their contention; they disputed over eight or nine or ten hours for the working day, and a rise or cut in wages, as unreservedly as though they stood alone upon some sea-girt island, and could tug—pull, Dick; pull, devil—at the bond between them, unaware that for either to drag the other across the line would be to precipitate the civilized world into an ocean whereof the bottom has not yet been sounded.

Between the building firm of Franklin & Lyttelton and their "hands" the difficulty was a cut in wages, to which the men refused to submit; and its most immediate consequence was a refusal on their part to work at the lowest rates.

"I say, Litt," said Mr. Ezra Franklin to his son, "I always thought that parson of yours an awful humbug. The ring-leaders of this strike belong to his congregation; what sort of doctrine is it he gives 'em to make 'em so uppish? What's a parson for, if not to keep the lower classes in order? If he were to preach submission to authority and contempt of filthy lucre"—with a chuckle—"why—"

"They would leave the church in a body," said Lyttelton; "the time has gone by for that sort of thing, sir; it has been done several times too often, I am sorry to say."

"They tell me he means to preach about strikes next Sunday; and that won't do, Litt; we must spike that gun, do you hear?"

"I don't see why you should take the trouble, sir; not one man in a thousand cares a hang for what the pulpit says now-a-days."

"All your fancy, Litt; they care as much for the pulpit as ever when it says what they think themselves. That's what's the matter! When it speaks for us, it may not do much good; but if it takes sides against us, it can blow us to thunder every time. We must buy him off, Litt."

"Can't be done, sir; he's not that kind. Ah! stay, though! There is that day nursery for children he has been working so hard over—"

"The very thing!" said Ezra Franklin. "How many figures will set it on its legs?"

Of this Child's Hospital and Day Nursery Hal Prescott was one of the Directors; it was unfortunately (as some persons thought) a denominational institution, and the Directors were largely chosen from the clergy, though the infants were frequently unbaptized—and hence non-sectarian—when first taken in and cared for.

On the day that Mr. Franklin's munificent check was laid before the Board, Hal came home radiant.

"It's a special interposition of Providence, Lovely," he said; "I couldn't see how in the world that new wing was to be built, for you know we're not even out of debt for the present building—"

"Built?" said Lovely thoughtfully. She stood looking at him a moment without speaking, then suddenly whirled on her heel and disappeared into the kitchen.

"What's up now?" said Hal to himself. When his sister reappeared he began: "Of course, I know what you are thinking of, Lovely; but wouldn't it be over-scrupulous, even uncharitable, to refuse a man the opportunity of doing good, just because he's in trouble with his work people?"

"In trouble? oh, Hal!"

"Well, Lovely, of course I think him unfair and grasping; everybody knows that Ezra Franklin will squeeze a dollar until the eagle screams before he parts with it, but for that very reason one ought to let him be generous when he will."

"Or grind his axe when he will," said Lovely.

"Charity thinketh no evil," said Hal gently. "Need one impute motives, sister?"

"Is your next Sunday's sermon written yet, brother?"

"Not quite, why do you ask?"

"Because—well, never mind. You will say what you think under all circumstances, I know that; but—"

"You think with Walpole that every man has his price, and that—"

Hal could not finish the sentence.

"Not at all! Oh, how can you say such a thing! cried Lovely, with her arms around his neck. When I know you to be the truest, bravest, dearest—but, Hal, you know we have talked it over so often! My theory is that the points of view of clergy and workers are diametrically opposite; it isn't that you do not think alike, but that you do not see alike; and, as each party believes only in its own vision, neither can think the other sincere."

"Oh! I know they call us the capitalists' police," said Hal, "because we preach and minister to rich men as well as poor."

"Or to poor men almost as well as to the rich," said Lovely.

"Sister, do I—"

"Oh! not you, Hal; you have zeal in abundance, even if not always accord-

ing to knowledge. But some ministers, with their smooth faces, fine broadcloth and rich congregations—”

“ Sister, rich men have souls !”

“ Some of them,” said Lovely coolly ; “ there are others one can’t be sure of. But what I want from you is this : You cannot judge of or for the strikers—I mean judge impartially—unless you can see the matter from their point of view ; and this question of the gift to the day nursery just at this juncture will bring it out perhaps as clearly as anything else. So I ran over to the grocery just now and sent a telephone message to the office of the *Trumpet*. The editor will be here in a few minutes to tea, and will bring Mr. Field with him. Just mention the matter to them and see how they take it—that’s all I ask—for I know you will be fair and will try to understand. You can’t help being so ; ‘ it is your nature to,’ as Dr. Watts says.”

The editor glanced at Mr. Field when the amount of the check was mentioned. There was a queer look in his eye and a singular droop to one corner of his mouth. Mr. Field looked down at his plate, and said not a word.

“ Pretty good sum,” said Hal tentatively.

“ Oh, I guess he can afford it,” said the editor.

“ Why, I—yes ; it’s not so much to him, you know.”

“ Oh, no ! and it’s a quarter saved for me. I’ll put it in bank to buy me a last meal before I jump in the river with my pockets full of type-metal.”

“ I don’t understand.”

“ No ? Why I always put a quarter in the plate when I come to hear you preach ; but I doubt if the sermon will be worth a nickel this time,” said the editor humorously ; “ that check will knock the bottom out of it, you know.”

“ Ah ! thanks for your frankness. So you think it is intended to buy me off ? ”

“ And cheap at the price,” said the editor. “ See here ! this is how it works. He hires you to preach against the strike ; the strike fails ; he saves the amount in a month, on the account of the cut in wages, and then gets back every last cent in payment for the new wing you want to build. See ? ”

“ I see your way of looking at it,” said Hal calmly ; “ now try to see mine. Lyttelton Franklin is my parishioner just as much as Field there. Very well, then ; the question is simply one of conflicting business interests between two of my people—”

“ And, in order to judge of it impartially, you take a bribe from one of the parties,” said the editor.

Hal’s fair face flushed deeply, and Aaron Field interposed quickly :

“ Come now, Bob, bribe is a little too strong. You’ve got as much confidence in Mr. Prescott as I have.”

The editor laughed.

“ Would I waste my heavy ammunition on him if he was an ordinary person ? ” he said. “ No, Mr. Prescott, I believe you’re a gentleman. You ain’t quite sincere, for you don’t subscribe to the *Trumpet* ; and how can you expect to understand the working people unless you read their own organs ? But so far as you’ve caught on, you freeze to it ; and that’s why I’d like to see you catch on to a few more solid facts.”

“ Well, I’m open to conviction,” said Hal, “ and glad to be taught.”

“ Just so. Well, now, look at the church. Do I blame the church for licking the hand that holds her dinner ? No, sir, I’m a fair man ; I say it’s as hard for

a parson to go hungry as it is for me, and I couldn't put it much stronger, for I can eat! No, I don't blame the theological fellows for taking the money; no doubt they want it for their purposes as bad as I do for mine. But yet, when a strike, a pretty lively riot, and gifts for charitable objects come up in connection with the same name, even if they are separated by a year or so in point of time—why, if the clergy ever put two and two together—which they don't—it might make 'em feel kind of sad. See?"

"I see what you mean," said Hal, thoughtfully.

"Yes, sir," said the editor buoyantly; "you know I ain't a Christian, but I see that the church holds the key to the situation, if she'll only think so; but she's got to think quick, and don't you forget it. The parsons say they weren't educated for political economists, and that's so! but when they add that they can't take sides till they understand the situation, they talk confounded humbug. Don't they take sides every day, or money? which is worse."

Lovely had been sitting with her work, leaving the discussion to the men, but at this moment she looked up with a sparkle in her eyes, and her pretty lips parted by generous eagerness.

"There is one thing the clergy might understand," she said, "one reply they might make to a rich man who offers them money while he is fighting his working people."

"What is that?" asked her brother.

Lovely folded her hands one over the other, and looked him steadily in the face. Her own was very grave.

"'If thou art offering thy gift before the altar,'" she said, "'and there remberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.'"

"That's right! that's the talk!" cried the editor. "Is it Bible? sounds like it."

"It is in the Bible," said Lovely quietly. "Hal, I have tried very hard to understand this thing, and it seems to me that money is at the bottom of all the misunderstanding between clergy and workingmen; the difference between salary and wages. Among the workers, it is natural and laudable for a man to try to get on in life, to have his wages raised; it is unselfish and patriotic, for he works for his class in so doing. But a clergyman's ideal is self-sacrifice; if he wants a fat salary he doesn't dare say so; he is always supposed to work simply for the love of God and man. This the workingman does not believe in; in fact, he sees quite a number of examples to the contrary, I am sorry to say; so he calls the rich parsons hypocrites, and the poor ones, he thinks, would be richer if they could. They are bad workmen—"

"Clerical 'rats,'" said Hal with a melancholy smile. "Lovely, I believe you are right."

"She always is," said Aaron Field; whereat Lovely colored beautifully and dropped her eyes again on her work. Mr. Field had improved wonderfully during the time, now nearly two years, that Lovely had had him in charge; voice, manner and bearing had undergone a subtle change, which was not so much a reflection from those around him as a consequence of the development of mind and soul. Yet Hal, as he glanced from one to another, felt a shiver of repugnance. When the others had gone, he spoke to her about it.

"You remember, Lovely, I warned you some time ago about Field."

" Warned me? why?" amazedly.

" It is quite plain that he loves you."

" Well?" said Lovely, with composure.

" Do you mean to marry him?"

" I really haven't quite decided."

" Lovely!"

" Henry! Why shouldn't I marry him—that is, if I wanted to?"

" But how could you want to marry a man—"

" Who is good, intelligent—even very clever—maybe a genius—and remarkably handsome," said Lovely. " But mind, I am not in love with him."

" No, you are too cool about it," returned her brother; " if you were in love, you would either get angry or join in and call names."

" So you admit you are calling names! And don't you know us poor women thoroughly, you bright child?"

" I've had advantages," said Hal modestly; " and that is what makes me sure, little sister, that it won't do. Field is a capital fellow, no doubt of that; but at the best marriage is such a lottery, that to add to the risks is a very serious matter. And whether class distinctions are right or wrong, they exist and have got to be reckoned with; Field has his traditions, you have yours, tradition of etiquette, of—"

" Etiquette! hateful fraud!" said Lovely. " What does it mean but ' babel ;' and if good wine needs no bush, I am sure that good manners spring from a good heart, and need no etiquette. Hal, it's as arrant snobbery to value yourself on one's manners as on one's purse. Besides," smilingly roguishly, " Mr. Field is very ready to learn."

" Just so; but isn't it rather reversing the proper order of things to have him learn from you—that is, if you mean to marry him? It is the husband who should be the head of the house, not the wife; but you would always, on account of your superior birth and education, have such a predominance—"

" Oh! dear, dear," said Lovely despairingly. " When were you born—before the flood? I never heard such antiquated ideas in my life, from a modern person. Hal, the present theory is that two people ought not to marry unless each can learn from the other; and I've learned more from Aaron Field than ever I taught him. Besides, you don't know the man; apparently he's as mild-mannered as a saint; but I don't know any one who can better hold his own when he chooses. Why, it takes a really great man to be willing to learn from a woman; that's the sad result of such ideas as yours; and—in short, I don't care to discuss the matter." Whereupon she left the room, with a dignified bearing and some abruptness.

" Well, this is the higher education with a vengeance," said Hal, left *solas*. " Or, rather, it is the old story of '*Violette et Perlino*'; except that instead of blanched almonds and orange-flower water, Lovely uses Greek and Browning in the manufacture of a husband!"

It was a day or two afterward that a committee from the Board of Directors of the Child's Hospital and Day Nursery waited upon Ezra Franklin in his luxurious home. The committee consisted of Hal Prescott and a brother clergyman, a man of some sixty-odd years, with white hair, blue eyes and an expression of mild benevolence. Mr. Franklin rose from his chair as they entered, and came forward with outstretched hand and a bluff heartiness by no means feigned; but

there was not in the manner of his visitors the effusive gratitude to which he was accustomed on similar occasions. They shook hands with grave courtesy and seated themselves, unsmiling and formally, in a way to excite their host's very sincere curiosity. He leaned back in his chair, cushioned in Russia leather, and grimly left them to open the conversation.

"Mr.—ah—Franklin," said the elderly man, whose name was Lansdowne, "we had the pleasure of receiving from you the other day a very munificent—ah—that is, a check for a large sum of money, to be expended for the benefit—"

"Yes, yes," said old Ezra bluntly, for Mr. Lansdowne's slow speech grated on his nerves. "Check? yes; I sent it; now then, what's wrong with it? Cashier defaulted and gone to Canada? I hadn't heard of it. What's wrong?"

"To the best of my knowledge and belief the check is as good as gold," said Mr. Lansdowne slowly; "but—"

"But!" cried Mr. Franklin; "do you mean that you don't want the money?" laughing loudly at his own absurd suggestion.

"We do want the money," said Hal Prescott; "we have been hampered for several months for want of a much smaller sum. It would set us on our feet, and, humanely speaking, make us a power for good in this town; but—well, Mr. Lansdowne, you are spokesman, I believe."

"And if you don't mind talking a little faster, Mr. Swansdown, I shall be obliged to you," said old Ezra irritably; "I don't care to take root in this chair."

"Sir," said Mr. Lansdowne with a look of mild reproach, "it may be that my speech halted for fear of wounding you. I will speak more rapidly. Sir, the point is this: There is a strike in progress among your employes."

"And what business is that of yours?" growled old Ezra.

"Sir, it is directly my affair. I do not understand the rights of the case, that I freely admit; when I was a young man strikes were almost unheard of, and boycotts had not yet been invented. These new terms of 'labor time' and 'surplus value' I do not quite comprehend; and time to study the subject I have little; for, Mr. Franklin, my charge is a large one, my work is widespread and exhausting. But that a dispute exists between you and your workmen I can understand; and when I find some of those workmen who are members of my own congregation turning away from the Lord's Table because they are not in charity with you, then, sir, I consider that I am in duty bound to take action in the matter."

"Of course," said old Ezra. "Very proper of you, sir; very proper, indeed. I hope you will give them a rousing sermon on charity next Sabbath. The vindictive wretches! The strike did not keep me away from the Sacrament on Sunday, Mr. Swansdown!"

"I rejoice to hear it," said the old man gravely. "Yes, sir; I hope to speak to them of brotherly love, just as I have come to speak to you to-day of the same matter."

"To me?" with a frown.

"To you," was the reply. "And first, Mr. Franklin, we are charged to return to you this check, which our Master himself has bidden you not to offer at present, and which therefore we dare not accept."

"What on earth are you talking about?" said Ezra Franklin.

Then the old man fixed his blue eyes on the face of the other, and said impressively: "'If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there remem-

berest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

"Humph!" said old Ezra. "So that is your position is it?"

"That," said Hal Prescott, "is our position. We do not judge the matter in dispute—at least, as a class—though some of us may have a very strong opinion about it; but it was unanimously agreed by our Board of Directors, yesterday, that the dispute must be healed before we could accept the gift in the name of the Lord, who spoke those words."

"Humph! well, it's your loss," said old Ezra.

"I doubt that," returned Hal intrepidly. "Our loss or gain seems to me very intimately bound up with the success or failure of the strike, since every reduction in workmen's wages tends to increase not only the gross number of our patients—bad living and housing being a fruitful cause of disease among children—but especially the number of those who are unable to pay."

"Humph!" said the rich man again.

"In fact, resumed Hal, "I am not at all surprised at the workingman's horror and contempt of most charitable institutions, and his inveterate opinion that the money could be better applied. Look at those reformatorys for women which take work from the sweat-shops, and, by doing it at less than living rates, tend to lower the wages of the entire trade; so that while they save one woman, a hundred are brought to ruin because they cannot live—or even exist—honestly, on what they can earn."

"Women? yes;" said old Ezra. "I never made a bargain with a woman in my life but what I got left. That is why I should object to employing them; for there are women carpenters, you know; bricklayers, too, I believe; but I'm too soft-hearted. I agree with you entirely about women, Mr. Prescott."

"Your employes have wives, daughters, mothers and sisters, who will suffer—who must suffer—from this strike, whether it succeeds or fails," said Hal quietly. "Come, Mr. Franklin, you will submit your quarrel to arbitration? You will first be reconciled to your brother?"

"And then I'll put the gift in my pocket," growled Ezra.

"Done!" said Hal, holding out his hand.

For a moment old Ezra stared; then his open mouth resolved itself into a smile, he dropped his hand into that held out to him and shook it heartily.

"Done!" he said; then he tore the check across twice. "Arbitration it is, and that's what you pay for it."

"Is it cheap or dear?" asked Hal slyly.

"Humph! that depends on the arbitrators. Three, mind! one appointed by me, one by the strikers, the third chosen by the other two. Good-by; you're the kind of a parson I like; I shall come to hear you next Sunday. Oh! I say, is that pretty sister of yours going to marry my son?"

"Well, really, sir, I haven't asked her; but I must say that I see no sign of it."

"Eh? is that so? Well, I can't say I blame her. Litt is very poor property, sir, very; foundation defective and not enough mortar. But I'm sorry; if she's like her brother she might have made a man of him. Good-by, Mr. Swansdown; glad to have met you. That quotation of yours is very apropos, and it's a perfectly logical position for the church to assume. But how about the other side, Mr. Swansdown? How about the little nickels and quarters from those striking

communicants of yours? It is a poor rule that won't work both ways? or does Scripture specify the precise value of the gift, hey?" He bowed them laughingly out of the house, and closed the door before either could reply.

"He is right, however," said Mr. Lansdowne, as they walked away.

"As he will find," returned Hal, "if he keeps his word and comes to my church on Sunday. Brother Lansdowne, does it strike you that we of the clergy have less influence now than in former ages of the world?"

"To my mind we have more, Brother Prescott, if we go to work the right way to exercise it. Men's consciences are more awake than ever before; but so is their reason. The thing for the church to do is to find the position which she is logically justified in assuming, in regard to all these matters, and there she would find herself stronger than ever and both sides willing to admit her right to speak with authority."

"A clergy-league of all denominations, all over the country, to deal with strikes from the ground we took to-day, would be a grand thing," said Hal.

Of course Ezra Franklin kept his word the following Sunday. As soon as Hal entered the church he saw the shrewd, keen eyes and upright figure sitting beside the editor of the *Trumpet*, who, with a pre-Raphaelite serenity of countenance, sketched, on the fly-leaf of his hymnal, a lion and lamb lying down together; and then passed the book to his neighbor for the opening hymn. Ezra received it with unmoved countenance; but his gray eyes twinkled.

"My brethren," said the pastor presently, "your offerings will in a few moments be received, but first I have a request to make. All of you are familiar with that pest of modern civilization called the strike; some of you are now, on one side or the other, parties to the one now going on in this town. Now a great deal has been said of strikes, both for and against, but no one has ever denied that they are eminently unbrotherly. I am far from sure that the church would not be justified in assuming that parties to a strike are out of charity with one another, and therefore ought to abstain from the Lord's Supper until they become reconciled. That, indeed, is a fair secondary inference from the text I shall now read to you."

He then read the verses already quoted (Matt. v, 23, 24), and continued:

"But I shall not draw that inference to-day. I shall merely insist upon the plain meaning of the text. In the providence of God this strike has been submitted to arbitration; but I here and now authoritatively request that no one engaged in the strike, *on either side*, shall give to the altar until he has been reconciled to his brother. Value is nothing before Him whose are the cattle upon a thousand hills; and the gift of a penny may dishonor His sanctuary as effectually as the richest treasure we are able to imagine."

There was a decided sensation in the church; and some who had not heard of the offer and refusal of the rich man's gift looked incredulously to see whether the contributions of the Franklins, father and son, would indeed be rejected. But when the plate passed by those favorites of fortune as though it knew them not, the others looked at each other and smiled.

"Feel bad?" whispered the editor; but old Ezra merely turned upon him, without moving his head, one of his large gray eyes, and remained silent.

"For a parson, you're a very clever fellow," he said to Hal, after service. "Where did you learn it all?"

"Where?" replied the young man with a smile; "in the Book of God and the heart of humanity."

Old Ezra's eyes twinkled, as he looked after a couple who at that moment left the church together: Lovely Prescott and Aaron Field. "Humph!" said he, "I guess you did. Litt, my boy, I shall have to send you as a missionary to Turkey!"

[THE END.]