

# The Story.

## A MATTER OF BUSINESS.

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### CHAPTER—IV.

When the meetings were resumed on Sunday and Monday there was a noticeable absence of the leading members. They had talked over the matter continuously, and the conservative and evidently reasonable counsel of Mr. Lithgow, Deacon Park and others whom they influenced, turned the scale against Mr. Ray and his methods. They went to the pastor of course and argued the case. Pastor Foss, between two fires and afraid that the meetings would divide the church, was equally afraid to discontinue them for the same reason. He urged the brethren to stand by and give the matter further trial, but his plea was unsuccessful.

Nevertheless the report of the talk on Friday evening had crept abroad in the town, and the evident excitement into which it had thrown the membership contributed to bring in enough outsiders to fill the places made vacant by the church brethren. Mr. Ray had expected this. He had informed pastor Foss that the ground was now cleared, so that they might go ahead and try to win the unconverted by a different sort of preaching. This was attempted and there was a degree of success. But the antagonism of so many church members prevented any marked success and the meetings closed after two weeks more of steady effort on Mr. Ray's part. He declared before he went that it had been apparent to him from the first that no extensive revival would occur, as the church itself was not in a condition to take care of the fruits, and that his success and the success of the movement would not be seen in any immediate additions to the membership.

"Nevertheless," he said during his closing address, "I have a profound conviction that a large and mighty work has been wrought here that will affect the life of this church for years to come."

Mr. Ray went home, or to some other field, and the influential portion of the First Church settled down to the habit of speaking of the effort as an abortive one, and of Mr. Ray as a well-meaning man who evidently was not well calculated for the kind of work the church needed to have done.

"What do you think now of the revival, Theodore?" asked Mrs. Mack as they prepared for the morning service on the Sunday after Mr. Ray's departure.

"I think we have had one, dear. It may not appear just yet, but the church will feel it later. So will the town, or I have not reckoned aright the power of truth."

"It was good, plain preaching anyhow. It ought to do good," assented Mrs. Mack.

"And it will. It has done good already. I have never thought as much about this matter of business honesty before; but now my mind is set thinking that way I am finding out a good many things. For one thing, I am finding out why some of the young men in my class have not come into the church. There are the Ames boys, for example. They both work for Deacon Park in his store. I drew it out of them after Mr. Ray gave that Friday night talk. They confessed that their reason was not a very good one, but it amounted to the fact that they don't think Deacon Park does business

as a Christian man should. They told me some instances, too. I tell you, Mr. Ray hit the nail on the head. It seemed to me like a singular corroboration of my judgment in leaving the firm."

They went to church with this matter in their minds, and it was not entirely pleasing to them to hear a kind of apologetic sermon from Mr. Foss that seemed intended to take off the edge of the soreness in the hearts of certain of the brethren.

Mr. Mack, meanwhile, had made arrangements to go into business on his own account. He had three thousand dollars, and could raise a little more on some real estate. He knew that he was risking it in a doubtful enterprise in the face of the wealthy and powerful house of the Lithgows, who would be likely to regard him as an especially obnoxious rival. His first move after deciding on this step was to engage Paul Carroll, whose value he knew, as his head clerk—his only clerk, in fact, for the present, so modest were his beginnings.

When Mr. Mack's first unpretentious announcement appeared in the city papers, Mr. Lithgow, who had been watching for this movement and who knew that it was coming, went over in the most kindly fashion to greet his new rival in the business. He thought he saw the end of this enterprise. He was long-headed and business-wise, and had outlived a good many small enterprises in the years he had been in business.

"I have been looking for you to branch out, Brother Mack," he said cordially. "I came over to give you my congratulations and to wish you every success. Be assured that the house of Lithgow will stand ready to render you every possible encouragement and assistance. We are brethren of the same church, and ought to be ready to help one another. I hope you will be free to let me know if I can be of any service."

Mr. Mack received this overture with a proper expression of gratitude. He understood that he was not large enough to be regarded as a rival. He wondered how actual business competition would affect Lithgow's view of the mutual duty of church members in business.

Ben took a quick survey of the store without seeming to do so. With his experienced eye he saw that the stock had been chosen and arranged with the taste and judgment that he knew Mack possessed, and that it had, after all, no mean and scanty appearance. He also noticed Paul at the desk, whom he greeted with a studiously kind word, congratulating him on so soon finding congenial employment. Paul's presence here made him considerably uncomfortable, however. He reflected that it would be inevitable that the cloak incident would be talked over between Mr. Mack and his former clerk.

For two months there was but a small trade at the new store. It began to be said by the friends of Mr. Mack at the church and outside that it was a mistake for him to set up a business in the same town with the Lithgow house. It was also noted confidentially that Mr. Mack did not seem to have any such faculty for attractive advertising as his great rivals displayed. His announcements were of the most matter-of-fact kind, but noticeable for entire absence of all superlatives. Mr. Mack actually avoided saying that anything he had was the best or the cheapest in the city. The announcements, however, kept on repeating

the statement that every customer would be treated alike and was guaranteed a just and fair value for his money.

\* But one day in April Mr. Pendleton happened to want some gloves, and happened to think of them as he was passing Mr. Mack's store.

Mr. Pendleton was a large manufacturer of agricultural implements, a man of the world, though his wife belonged to the First Church, and he was very wealthy.

"I think I will try Mack," he said half aloud, and at once turned into the store. He remembered that Mr. Mack was a good and quiet fellow and trying to get on, and he had no objection to helping him to the extent of the profit on a pair of gloves.

He specified the kind he wanted.

"These are right. I always buy this make. They are better than our American gloves. How is it that they can make better gloves over there, Mr. Mack?"

"These are American," said Mr. Mack smiling.

"No—Paris. I know them well."

"They usually bear a Paris mark. I have taken off the mark from the box. You will find it inside the glove, though. I can't very well take that out, as it is printed. But they are made in New York. I have been in the factory frequently."

"Imitation, do you mean?"

"Just what I mean. But that doesn't go here. They are the same kind you will get anywhere in town under the Paris brand."

"But I don't want an imitation. I want the Paris article."

"I have some imported gloves—from Paris, too. But they are not so good as these and they cost a little more."

Mr. Pendleton looked at the gloves, and then at Mr. Mack, and then at the gloves again.

"But why don't you let the mark be? I should have felt altogether better if I had not found it out. Call them Paris gloves by all means, Mr. Mack." He laughed and laid down the price of the gloves.

"There are no false brands in this store," said Mr. Mack, quietly.

"It must be a sort of millennium place, then," said Mr. Pendleton, and went out still laughing.

The matter did not impress him greatly just then, and he was a man so constantly busy with his great manufactory that he did not think of this incident again for some days.

One morning at the breakfast table, however, he happened to hear his wife remark



that she was going to Lithgow's to make some purchases during the morning.

"Better go to Mack's. He has a millenium store," said Mr. Pendleton, a little jocosely. Then he narrated the incident of the gloves, and added,

"Mack is a good fellow, though he will starve to death trying to be honest. It is an ideal, but it won't work yet. World's too blame sharp for that. However, I learned a thing or two about gloves. I've laid my plans to play that thing off on Ben when I buy any more of his American-Paris gloves. Won't I lay him out, though? I'll just tell him where the things are made."

Mr. Pendleton went to his office, and later Mrs. Pendleton, on the hint she had received, took a notion that she would really go and try the new store and patronize Mr. Mack a little as a sort of Christian duty.

When she reached the little store she was a trifle surprised to find Paul Carroll behind the counter. In an instant his face reminded her of the cloak that she had bought of the Lithgow house and of the incident that happened there.

Mrs. Pendleton was a diplomatic and shrewd woman, and spent some time making small purchases before she opened the matter on her mind. At length, having mentally organized her proceeding, she said, with an aspect of unconcern and very pleasantly,

"I saw you last at Lithgow's, Mr. Carroll. Let me see—didn't you sell me a fur cloak there?"

"No, madam. We did not happen to have any that suited you."

"True, I remember. You made some error, I think. I wanted a whole skin and—let me see—I think you said the one I wanted was pieced. But Mr. Lithgow thought you had committed an error. I went back and bought the cloak. It was the whole skin, don't you know?"

Paul turned a little red, but made no answer to this. Mrs. Pendleton appeared not to notice his embarrassment. She was recalling the remarkable Friday night address of Mr. Ray. She had been one of the members who had felt kindly towards the evangelist.

"I hope," she said with seeming carelessness, "that the matter did not prove serious to you. I ask because I see you are out of the place. It was not long after that you got through there, I think?"

"Mr. Lithgow stated that he was obliged to reduce the force," said Paul. He would not mention to another his suspicion that had been well-nigh confirmed in his mind, that he had been discharged for refusing to misrepresent the cloak.

"There is so much that is false in business," said Mrs. Pendleton, "that I never know when I am getting cheated. How did you like Mr. Ray?"

The transition was natural enough in her train of thought, and Paul followed it instantly because he too was thinking of the things Mr. Ray had said.

"I was helped," he said simply. "I think he was right, too."

"About the business men, do you mean?"

"About business—yes."

"But my husband says no store could be run on his idea a great while. Its competitors would soon ruin it."

"Perhaps so. But it ought not to be so. It wouldn't, either, if Christians would think of it more, and refuse to trade with dishonest merchants."

"I have heard that Mr. Mack changes all his brands where they are not true. Does he, I wonder?"

"Beg pardon—but I fear he would not like me to talk of his affairs that way. But I am willing to say that there are no falsehoods tolerated or practiced in this business."

"Perhaps you still think that was a pieced cloak?" said Mrs. Pendleton, abruptly returning to her point.

"Yes, madam."

"But I have it at the house. I can show it to you if it would convince you."

"The one I showed you is almost certainly at Lithgow's still. I saw it there the day I left, and it was then time to put them back in the regular cloak department. The sale was over for the season, practically."

"And you think I bought a different one?"

"Yes, madam."

"The price was the same."

"You are a good customer there are you not?"

"I suppose so. I buy a good deal."

"If you got a whole skin cloak—perhaps you did—for the cut price, then the house lost money through my statement to you. But they saved more by pleasing you, of course."

"Oh! I see. But Mr. Lithgow did not say that the cloak I bought was the same one you showed me. That was what we call a 'trick of the trade' then, doubtless."

Paul was again silent. He had felt it his duty to state the facts in his own defense, but he would not pass any comment upon the transaction. He had never mentioned it to anybody except Mack.

Mrs. Pendleton went away and was thoughtful all the remainder of the day.

"I traded at Mack's to-day," she reported to Mr. Pendleton at the dinner hour. "I wonder if that kind of business ought not to be encouraged."

"Suit yourself, my love. Mack is a good fellow. If you find what you want and the price isn't too high, it is just as good as anywhere, I should say."

"But that isn't the whole of it, I think. If that young man is trying an experiment in honesty, I should suppose that people who like honesty better than they like tricks would feel a duty to help on the experiment."

"Church people especially. You folks over there at the First Church make a lot of prayers, and all that, but when it comes to trading with one of you, you have no objection to cheating the teeth out of a man's mouth. That is a kind of religion, I admit, that I don't take stock in. But if Mack has a better sort of religion to put up, I agree with you that the praying contingent ought to give him a lift. I think I will do a little trading there myself. That's merely to avoid getting imposed upon. Besides, his stock, though it is so small, is a fine one. Anybody can see that the first thing."

"Thank you, my dear. We'll try the thing and see."

Now Mrs. Pendleton was a woman who, when she started in to do a thing, could not rest with any half-way measures. She thought over and over what Mr. Ray had said, and then reflected on her husband's criticism of church members. She did not sympathize with it, but she was sad to be obliged to confess that it had truth in it and might be supported by instances.

But perhaps a better state of things was coming as a result of Mr. Ray's visit, and

perhaps she could help to hasten its coming.

The next day was the meeting of the Dorcas Society. It afforded her a good opportunity and she improved it. Mr. Mack's attitude about business falsehoods was carefully mentioned. Here and there his fine new stock of goods was commended. Suggestions as to the duty of the members to encourage this experiment in honesty were insinuated with all her woman's tact. Above all, it was made known to several people of wealth that day that Mrs. Pendleton, who was a leader and the richest woman in the church, was trading at the new store. This was the most effectual piece of business of all. There were some who might have heeded the suggestion as to the duty to encourage Mr. Mack, but there were far more who would think that they were not in the fashion unless they patronized whatever she patronized.

The result was that within three or four weeks the new store had begun a most prosperous and lucrative business.

Its new customers included people of ample means, who were not so often found at bargain counters as some, and who were able to appreciate the well-selected stock of Mr. Mack's goods.

It was inevitable that Mr. Lithgow, on the sharp lookout for what all his rivals in business might do, should soon learn of this accession to the custom of the new store.

*(To be continued.)*