

## \* \* The Story Page \* \*

### Deacon Brown Soliloquizes.

BY THE PARSONESS.

Well, that does beat all! And is all that in the Bible? I declare I thought I knew the Book pretty well. Why, I've read it right through from cover to cover, a chapter every morning the year round, as many as a dozen times in these last forty years. To be sure, we had to do it pretty sly some of those mornings in harvest time, when the hay was in the field and the sky not over clear. But I've always made a point of insisting on the chapter, long or short, hard names, generations and all, and I did think nobody could catch me up on Scripture. But I must confess that young parson does get some of the queerest notions out of the Bible. How he did talk to us this morning! To think that the Lord wants us to run our business according to Scripture—that does beat me! And then that idea about putting business in our religion, too—that the business of a church should be run on business principles, I do declare!

And so he wants regular trustee meetings just as we have our town board meetings, and minutes and reports, and books kept up square to date just as we keep our own day books, and rules and regulations and by-laws and nobody knows what not, with annual meetings and church meetings and society meetings, and everything all planned out by rule. It does beat me? I guess he'll have us all a-going by clock-work before long, if he has his way!

Why, we can't even take up a collection as we used to—everybody putting in what they feel like, their dimes and quarters if they've had a good breakfast and everything's gone all right at home and the sermon happens to strike them; or their coppers if they feel blue or have the rheumatism or anything of that sort. No doing that way now, I can tell you! Here we are, all numbered like a flock of sheep, and every one given a little pack of envelopes with their numbers on it, and the dates of all the Sundays, and bound to say how much we'll put in every Sunday, whether we like it or not; the folks who thought they never could give anything hardly, giving quite considerable, because he got them to promise a little every week. And then if you don't pay regular, as the parson says is right and easiest, there it is down in the book in black and white, running up against you and you 'most ashamed to back out after you've once promised.

"System" and "systematic giving," the parson calls it all, and he says it's Bible doctrine, and all the rest. Give a tenth! Humph! Though that was for the old Jews; didn't know it meant us civilized folks, who are living now. Guess you'll have to let go some of them dividends you've got put away in a safe place, if you do all that young parson says is right, Deacon Brown.

But the queerest thing is about his salary! I do declare, if he doesn't want that regular, too, just as though he was a clerk in a store! And he says the "laborer is worthy of his hire," and he hasn't got anything to live on but his salary, and he has to pay his bills just like other folks, and doesn't believe in running in debt, which I suppose is all true. But there, the people do give him an awful sight of stuff, and seems to me he ought to get along. Why, I took him a bushel of apples last week myself, and my wife sent a jar of pickles, much as half a gallon, I guess!

We agreed to pay him a salary of \$700, and we thought that was pretty square. That's all we used to give old Parson Dobbs, and he seemed to manage all right during the twenty-six years he was here, and he never said anything about having it all paid in installments every month either. Being treasurer, I know pretty well about money matters, and the old parson he used to come to me every Monday morning and get the Sunday's collection, whatever it was, pennies and dimes and all, in a paper bag, and carry it home. Mighty convenient it seemed to me, because he could always make change. And then at the end of the year if it wasn't all paid, and he insisted on it (which he hardly ever did, good old soul!) why, we just had a donation and made it up, sometimes in money and sometimes in potatoes and such things. And if it run over two or three years, we just had all the bigger time collecting it.

But, my! this young man of ours, he did set right down on that sort of thing! The first Monday morning he never came after his paper bag of salary, and when I asked him about it, he said he would like it put to his account, once a month, in our new bank, which I had just started. I stared at him, I guess; and when he found out that wasn't our way of doing, what does he do but have a meeting of the trustees and get them to vote to pay him in that way. My, didn't I know it couldn't be done! But I didn't say anything. How could I, with him taking it for granted so!

And then came all those other new-fangled ideas. We had to go to work and pay a little note which Deacon Smith had had against the church for about fifteen years. How the parson did talk when he found it out! Said it

dishonored God's house, and it was our debt, each one, just as if we owed it ourselves. I never saw things in that way before. Why, half of them didn't know there was any debt. But he made it mighty clear, the parson did.

And then he wouldn't let us fix up the parsonage either (although the roof has been a leaking for two years) until we could pledge the money to do it with—which hasn't been yet, and probably won't be very soon, Deacon Brown, if you and the rest of you keep holding on to those dividends.

The young man did succeed pretty well at first with his fine new notions, for he has a taking way with him and lots of energy, and he sort of carried us right along with him. But I knew well enough it couldn't last, and it hasn't. Not that anybody has anything against the parson; no, it isn't that. Why, the youngsters fairly think the world of him, and he does make himself mighty agreeable to the old folks, too; and I don't know as even you, Deacon Brown, can answer his arguments about his way of doing things being right.

But the newness sort of wore off, I guess, and we were gradually falling back into the old ways, and some money had to be borrowed again, and even then the salary kept getting more and more behind; until I don't know as he has had more than enough to keep soul and body together lately. I declare, I haven't given much thought to it before, but I suppose it has been rather discouraging to the poor fellow—he hadn't had much experience in waiting for salaries before. And I suppose he's right about ministers having to have money to live on, same as doctors and farmers and everybody else. I was inclined to be a little put out at the way he talked this morning, but maybe after all it will do us good to be stirred up a little.

I suppose, too, there's a lot of truth in what he says about it's being pretty hard for a minister to go about his work cheerful like, comforting everybody and encouraging them, when he's all the time worried about how to provide for his family, and likely it isn't very easy to put his hand on to sermons when he doesn't know where the next meal is coming from, and can't even buy medicine for his sick child without running in debt on account of not being paid what's due him. And he doesn't want outsiders to know it's the church's fault, and it's sort of damaging to his self-respect to let them think it's his own fault that he gets so low that he can't even buy a postage stamp, and it's humiliating to have little bills standing against him at the stores for necessities, all because he's been counting on his regular promised salary and it doesn't come in.

And accordingly he's got to have it when it's due, and all expenses must (must, that's a pretty strong word, young parson) be met regular; if they have to be cut down so that he doesn't get but \$500 a year. And if that's all we can possibly raise when we give as the Lord has prospered us—Deacon Elizur, aren't you a little bit ashamed when you think of those dividends laid by?—why, he's willing to help along, and will manage to live on that much; but he's got to know what to depend on, and he wants the Lord's business done as faithfully as we do our own private business. Wouldn't have a private debt standing against you for fifteen years, would you, Deacon Brown? You wouldn't borrow money for yourself and not even know the day it came due, would you, Deacon Brown? You wouldn't want enemies pointing their fingers at you because you couldn't pay your bills, would you, Deacon Brown? Wouldn't have many dividends laid by for a rainy day, if you did your own business in that way, now would you, Deacon Brown?

Nonsense! what ideas this young parson is putting into your head Elizur Brown! But maybe it isn't nonsense. He says it's Bible. And he gets it all from those old texts you've read so often about giving "first-fruits" to the Lord, and "cheerful giving," and all things being done "decently and in order." Why, you've read them scores of times Deacon Brown. And if that young man, who hasn't been a deacon nigh on to thirty-five years, sees so much in them, maybe the next time you come to them in your reading you better stop and study and ponder them, Deacon Brown, even if you don't get through your chapter.

Well, well, well! Guess you better go and get the other deacons and trustees together, and attend to these things. It may be just possible that the parson knows what he's talking about. He's a right smart young man, Deacon Brown.—The Advance.

### \* \* Len's Other Side. \* \*

Len stood in the middle of the road one day last summer, his dirty fists clenched, his lips quivering, and his eyes flashing angrily.

"I wish I was big," he muttered. "I wish I was big, I'd whip the lot of 'em!"

Len was very much upset, and not without cause. It wasn't fair for Bob Alden, Charley Frask, and the other rich lads of Cliff View to poke fun at him, call him a poorhouse rat and the like. He was a poorhouse boy no longer; he lived with and worked for Farmer Gregory and did his best, and the cruel taunts of the thoughtless lads cut the orphan to the heart.

"I wonder how they would like it if they were in my place, and I was to call 'em all sorts of names?" he soliloquized. "It ain't fair—it's—it's—dirt mean!"

Two bitter tears gathered in those black eyes and rolled down the begrimed cheeks, to be brushed away on the ragged sleeve of Len's jacket. Then the boy picked up a stone, but realizing that his tormentors were out of throwing distance, he dropped it again.

"They're going down under the cliff to play and maybe to swim," he thought. "I've a good mind to follow them and see if I can't get square."

Len had been sent down to the pasture lot to see if the cows were safe. He leaped over the fence, assured himself that none of the cattle had strayed away, and returned to the road. Five minutes later found him on the top of Hummer's Cliff, overlooking the river and mill-pond beyond. The cliff, principally of limestone, was nearly thirty feet high, and at its base was a rough shore leading down into the stream, now somewhat shallow because of the long drought.

Looking over the edge of the cliff, Len saw that the boys who had twitted him were preparing to go bathing. They had retired to a little shelter built under the rocks, and now Bob Alden and Ray Strong came forth in their bathing costumes, calling to their companions to hurry up. Neither of the youths saw Len, who kept out of their sight purposely.

"Oh, if I could only hide their clothes," said Len to himself. Then the angry look came back to his sunburnt but handsome face. "I've a good mind to throw their clothes into the river or into the limestone quarry. It would serve 'em right!"

There were rough steps leading down to the base of the cliff, and Len began to descend these, bent upon doing some very serious mischief, when Ray strong's voice broke upon his ears in words causing him to come to a sudden halt.

"No, Bob, it isn't fair to call poor Len Barker names," Ray was saying. "I think he is a first-rate little chap, and Mr. Gregory told 'father he was a staver for work. I think we ought to be more considerate."

"Oh, don't preach to me, Ray," returned Bob Alden petulantly. "I didn't touch him. I threatened to strike him with my stick, but that was only in fun."

"I think you did worse than striking him with the stick. You called him a poorhouse rat, and that struck him to the heart—I could see it in his eye."

"Well he came from the poor house."

"So might you if you had been left poor and an orphan when you were a baby. If you were in his place how would you like to have it thrown up to you?"

Bob Alden colored and hesitated before replying.

"Come now, you wouldn't like it, would you?" persisted Ray.

"N—no, I guess not."

"Of course not—nobody would."

"If anybody called me a poorhouse rat I'd be apt to fight him," put in Charley Frask, who had just joined them.

"And yet you called Len that too, Charley. Len's not fighting, or trying to retaliate, speaks well, I think, for his forbearance—something he learned, I imagine at the very poorhouse we despise."

"I fancy he is too afraid to fight, or even to try," said Bob. "But, to tell the truth, I am ashamed I called him names, and I won't do it again."

"Neither will I," added Charley. "It was thoughtless and mean, and some day I'll try to make it up to Len. But come on, I'll beat you all in!"

A grand rush was made for the river by the five boys who composed the party. Soon all hands were disporting themselves in royal style in the cooling current beyond the rocks and about a hundred yards above where an old-fashioned lock-gate shut off the falls from the mill pond below. Len sat on the rough steps, his face flushed and his heart beating strangely. He had lost his interest in what he had proposed to do. Ray's words had touched his better nature, and he was more than willing to forgive and forget. Suddenly, a cry of alarm rang out from Bob Alden, who had swum nearly across the river. "Help! help! I've got a cramp! I can't—"

He could not finish, so great, evidently, was his pain. His right arm was thrown up appealingly, and then he sank from sight. His comrades were horrified, and for the moment were too bewildered to do aught for him. They Ray and Charley began to swim out toward the spot where he had last been seen. But this proved useless, for no Bob was in sight.

"Oh, Ray, what shall we do?" gasped terror-stricken