

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

BARBARA'S DONATION.

By Elizabeth Van Nest.

If the young minister had been of a sanguine, easily satisfied temperament he might have accommodated himself to circumstances and drifted along as his predecessors had done. But James Morgan brought the enterprise of a modern theologian to the little hamlet, straggling down either side of a high hill, on a summit of which perched the church, like a snow temple.

As the church occupied the centre of the village, the young minister reasoned that it ought to be the centre of interest also. But, try as he would, he could not awaken the devotional spirit. His parishioners were niggardly in their offerings, the attendance was small and interest slight. His sermons were lost on the slow thinking worshippers; his musical departures were a failure.

But the Rev. Mr. Morgan did not despair. He had the square jaw that accompanies the aggressive nature. The elasticity of his hopes was phenomenal. He simply would not be discouraged. He had accepted the call in full knowledge of the drawbacks. The score of shabby houses classed under the name of Maywood represented only a tithe of the church membership. It was the prosperous farmers whose indifference he must change and conquer with his eloquence.

So James Morgan brought to Maywood a large stock of air castle material with which he beguiled his leisure. He would institute many reforms. The church should escape from an enveloping mortgage and, assuming a paying basis, make many missions glad from its plenty. It should be the mainspring, social and ecclesiastical, on which the village turned. He even proposed that the parsonage be let and the proceeds devoted to the county hospital, a proposal that met with unanimous approval, and the minister took up his residence under Widow Fleming's roof.

Until the end of the first quarter things moved smoothly. The new minister found work to do wherever he looked. And, being generous, he forgot to be cautious when need pulled at his purse strings. Hardly realizing it, he at length found his generosity must be governed by his means until he received his first quarter's salary. But at the end of the second quarter the first quarter's salary was still unpaid. With a board bill two weeks in delinquency the minister, blushing and stammering, informed his parishioners of their negligence.

While their profuse excuses satisfied him, he could not see his way clear to satisfy Mrs. Fleming. The fact that wheat was a failure would not recompense her for his board and lodging. Therefore the Rev. Mr. Morgan did the only thing possible from this point of view. He went to the city next day with a mysterious package. Shortly after the doctor drove three miles to borrow his microscope and was informed that he had disposed of it.

"I have so little time for experiments, you know," he explained, with heightened color. "I could use the money to better advantage."

From this emanated a rumor that at length reached Barbara Dean's ears. The new minister was so philanthropic he had given up his pet hobby to aid the poor.

A wee and timid question mark set itself upon her heart. Perhaps she had been hasty. There was none quite like him—so big, so firm, so brave. It was very singular that he had not asked again—he who in theory scorned defeat. Pretty Barbara did not know that the hope crushed by her laughing was the only inelastic one in his stock of dreams.

As the third quarter drew to a close without remuneration the minister mentioned the fact again, this time with fewer blushes and a graver air. His needs were urgent. Day after day he scanned his mail anxiously for the expected check, only to be disappointed. But, appreciating the hard times, other trips to the city with mysterious packages were made.

Returning from one of these visits one night, Mr. Morgan was surprised to see a motley collection of teams and vehicles around Widow Fleming's gate. Lights shone from every window of the cottage, including his study and bedroom. The minister was tired and in no mood to participate in a surprise party on his landlady. But knowing her limited space, it would be churlish to demand privacy. He must meet her guests, who had overflowed her apartments into his with ministerial welcome. Forcing the weariness from his face, he ran lightly up the steps and opened his study door.

Ranged around the wall was a solid row of chairs, from which smiling faces glowed upon him in welcome. Overturning the centre table and piled on the floor was a collection that at first seemed to be the stock of a grocery store. He singled out a sack of flour and various stone jugs with corn-cob stoppers as he picked his way to a small oasis of bare floor beyond. But, stumbling against one of the bulging packages, the paper burst and a stream of walnuts poured forth.

"Pardon me!" he gasped, trying to repair the damage on his knees. "Very awkward of me, I'm sure." The silence was contentious, and, flushed with contrition, the minister looked up straight into Barbara Dean's eyes. The light in them, tantalizing, amused, was his undoing. The walnuts slipped from his grasp and, striking another bag, liberated a peck of popcorn. He stood up guiltily.

"Please forgive me, Mrs. Fleming," he apologized. "I am sorry if my awkwardness has disclosed your gifts too soon."

"They're not Miss Fleming's," corrected Deacon Brown. "They're yours. We thought we'd give you a donation 'stead of money, times are so hard."

The Rev. Mr. Morgan unconsciously backed a step. "For me? But, deacon, I have no use for these—er—raw commodities. It is very kind of you—but—"

"Besides this, there's a side of meat and a firkin of butter outside," put in Mrs. Fleming proudly. "Now that you've seen them I'd better take the molasses out too. It's so warm in here," picking up two of the jugs.

"By all means," said the minister, wiping his forehead, and in the general conversation that ensued he found himself near Barbara Dean.

"I did not expect to see you," he said in a low voice.

"I am spending a few days with Cousin Beas," she answered. "Are you so devoted to Maywood that you have forgotten your old friends?"

"Only those who wished to forget me," significantly; then, with a despairing glance at the loaded table.

"What shall I do with it?" he asked. "A family of ten could not consume that perishable stuff before it spoils. Why did they bring so much?"

"The unwritten law of a donation party is that none may attend without bringing a present," she said composedly.

"Then what special donation must I thank you for," ironically—"the sack of flour?"

She laughed. His dismay was so comical. She did not know the desperate state of his finances. "I did not bring anything," she said. "I could not—to you."

Something in her voice lent sudden flexibility to his most inelastic hope. With her love to cheer him on he would yet make of Maywood his ideal

church.

"Come with me a moment," he said, leading her to the deserted window nearest the church. "I had bright dreams when I came here, Barbara," he went on. "I have learned to love the church and the people. If I go away now my work will be wasted. But I think I shall go when my year is up."

"Where?" she asked quickly.

"Anywhere—to any church that pays a salary," desperately. "That collection represents my work for nine months. It is not enough, Barbara. You said that no one may attend a donation party without a present. I am waiting for yours. If you want me to stay here you must do your part. The deacons and elders have looked after the needs of the material man. You must provide for his spiritual nature."

She played with the widow's best curtains nervously. "You said you would not ask me again," she reminded.

"I have not. You did well to say no," bitterly. "If my work is worth only butter and flour you are justified in forgetting me as quickly as possible. Maywood can keep its donation. I shall leave at once."

A change flashed across her pretty face. The mischief vanished, and in its place stole a tender blush. "Don't be hasty, James," she whispered, with a furtive glance over her shoulder. "Perhaps with my donation we can use the rest. When will the parsonage be empty?"

"I'll give the tenant notice tomorrow," he answered happily. Then, under cover of the widow's voluminous curtains, with the church looking on in solemn witness, he accepted her donation with a kiss.

ANTS HAVE COMBS.

No creature is more tidy than an ant, who cannot tolerate the presence of dirt on her body. These little creatures actually use a number of real toilet articles in keeping themselves clean. No less an authority than Dr. McCook says their toilet articles consist of coarse and fine toothed combs, hair brushes, sponges and even washes and soap. Their saliva is their liquid soap, and their soft tongues are their sponges. Their combs, however, are the genuine article, and differ from ours mainly in that they are fastened to their legs. The ants have no set time for their toilet operations, but stop and clean up whenever they get soiled.—St. Nicholas.

A DOG'S ATONEMENT.

A Chicagoan has a retriever, Jack, who has been trained to fetch slippers. Jack, one day, was bad, and they turned him out of the room. Ashamed and dejected, he went away. He knew that he pleased his master by fetching slippers. Therefore, to atone for his misconduct, he brought all the shoes and slippers he could find, and laid them in a heap before the door. When his master opened the door finally, there sat Jack, looking up wistfully and wagging his tail, while beside him lay some thirty shoes and slippers.

FAMOUS BRITISH OAK.

In the village of Polstead (Suffolk) stands a famous oak, which the rector has proved by researches to be 2,000 years old. It has a girth of thirty-six feet, and has always been known as the Gospel Oak, as under it the first Christian missionaries preached to the heathen Saxons thirteen centuries ago. Each year this is commemorated by a special service under the tree—London Evening Standard.