

## A Revolution in a Country Church.

From the Familiar Chronicles of Araminta Brambley, member of the Spruce Hollow Church.

By Ward Fisher.

I declare our preacher gave me a start once when he was preachin' away like time. He said that some churches, meannin' meetin'-houses, were so old that they are filled with the "anshent air of anticiketty." Now I know our church isn't as old as anticiketty, for my son Daniel—who is dead and gone now, poor fellow, married the sextant's third daughter the year the logs were got out for the underpinnin'. And didn't I scald my hand with the lard when I was a-cookin' doughnuts for the ramin'. See, there is the scar yet plain as day.

Well, I sot there a-thinkin' the preacher forgot to read over the sermint before he came to church. You know his sermints are hair-looms—that is, I mean to say that his uncle, who brought him up, bought them at the auction of old Parson Brown. Anyway, I have hearn tell that that is the way our minister got his call to preach. Oh, yes, they are a fair kind of sermint, although I must say I don't fancy them myself, for I never did like old Parson Brown anyway.

But to keep to my subject: "Perhaps," says I, "he doesn't mean the church is as old an anticiketty, but that the air is." And that is the gospel truth, for the air in our meetin'-house was shut in alter the deddication, and has never had a chance to get out. I remember tendin' district meetin' once, and hearn one of the preachers say how much good it did him to preach in a church where the religious atmosphere was strong. As our preacher was holdin' protracted meetin' at the Mill Church, I invited the stranger minister to preach for us, as our meetin'-house had the strongest religious atmosphere in the county, and I know the poor man would enjoy it.

Did I ever tell you of the minister who preached for us last summer? Soon as he came in he sniffed, and made for a window to raise it. He tugged and tugged, and got red in the face and said something spiteful like, but of course he couldn't raise it, for they were all glued in with paint. You remember the year the house was painted fourteen coats if there was one. It was the year the paint factory burned down. All the members paid their subscriptions in paint that year.

I was mortified last summer. You see we have taken some pride in the religious atmosphere of our church, for the very breaths that were breathed at the deddication were still there, though I must say I didn't like the way Preacher Jackson breathed through his nose. Well, my niece's daughter's young man came down to visit her. You know she came home to get her trousseau ready for her weddin'. He sings in the quire in Boston, and is said to be a fashionable young man. I gave them an invite to tea, and then we went to church. You know where our pew is—the second one at the side of the singers. I got it there on purpose to watch the quire. Sometimes they act real scandalous. It used to make me mad to see the airs of that stuck-up Bemis girl—she that now is the wife of the school-master at the Corner. And what a sly one that Lil Jones was. She and her fellow, Dave Robinson's boy, used to hold hands all through the sermint—that is when they weren't passin' conversation lozengers.

But to go on with my mortification. I led the way down the east side. I had on that black alpaca skirt John got me the year we sold the back meadow, and the grey silk waist with the jet trimmings that Susie made me. When I am dressed up there isn't any stylisher lookin' women—if I do say it myself.

Well, just as we got half way down to our pew, and as the minister was comin' up the pulpit steps, my niece's daughter's young man give an awful sneeze, and said right out loud: "Blazes, what a smell!" The people snickered out loud. I was fairly scandalized. The minister glared at us, and prayed dreadful loud for those who use profane language. He needn't try to make himself out a saint, for I know better. Why, I was at his house last summer, and—well, no matter. I know the way of husbands for I haven't married forty years without findin' out some things.

Howsumever, my niece's daughter's young man said it was the air that caused him to sneeze. And then he told me about mikerobes until I was unable to sleep a-thinkin' of the danger of our meetin'-house. Come to think of it, it must have been those dreadful wigglin' critters that makes some of our members act like sixty.

Well, we had our annual meetin' next week, and Deacon Rhines was objectin' to everything worse than usual. You know what a trial his father—dead now this thirty years—was to the minister. But to continue. I see that everyone was a-gettin' mad, for we were plannin' to entertain the Association the next summer, and wanted to re-set the meetin'-house and get a new organ, instead of the old melodeon that was wheezy thirty years ago. The deacon was a-wavin' his hands, and shoutin' out his one plaggd argument—"What was good enough for our fathers is good enough for us." Well, indeed! I know the deacon was right smart in branchin' out after his father died. The old house his father lived in wasn't good enough for him. No, nor the wagon, nor the horses, nor nothin'.

I stood it as long as I could, and then I riz, and told them about the air in our meetin'-house, and soon, I know what's the matter with you. It's miker-

and pintin' my finger at him, I said fierce like: "Deacon, I know what's the matter with you. It's mikerobes. You've caught the objectin' mikerobes from your father's air."

The deacon flopped down, and Hez Smith laffed out. I turned to him and said: "You needn't laff, Hez Smith. You are worse than the deacon in meanness. And who did you catch it from, if it wasn't from your wife's mother who paid her subscription to the minister by givin' him a lawn mower, when he had no lawn and then a-borrowin' it till it was all worn out, a-mowin' her own lawn. This church is a-goin' to get its mikerobes out of her sistem, and I am a-goin' to begin with the meetin'-house tomorrow morning."

"Now," I said, "I'm a-goin' to speak my mind, even if you turn me out of the church. Here's our meetin'-house. It hasn't had a real cleanin' for twelve years. Every time our minister pounds the pulpit he is nearly choked to death by the dust and it sets the quire a-sneezin'. And then the seats! The deacon says what was good enough for our fathers is good enough for us. Well, all I've got to say about it is that when our fathers sat on those seats they didn't squeak and topple over—that is, the seats I mean—like as when that big summer boarder smashed through last summer."

"The deacon says our meetin'-house is good enough. Yes, lots of people think anything is good enough for the Lord. We give him in a mean, grudin' way, as though everything we give to the Lord is as thrown away. And we never have time to do anything for Him. We can't come to meetin' because we can't spare the time. We can't even get out to church Sunday mornin' because we have to take the Lord's day to go trapesin' round the country huntin' for hired men a suckin' pigs."

"And," I says, startin' like, "look at the way we use our minister. Nearly two hundred dollars behind on the salary. We call him here to preach the gospel, and then begrudge him his salary. Didn't I go round with the paper last year—I know what was said. He gets more than anybody, does he—and all he has to do is to drive round the country! That's what Jim Peck said, and I know that Jim Peck wouldn't take less than forty-five dollars a month for himself and horse to work at the mill. And that is more than our minister gets, and he has to keep a horse and family more respectable, than we ever think of expectin' from Jim Peck. Needn't look mad, Jim Peck."

"Now," I says, turnin' to the corner where the deacon sits, "why didn't our minister tend his sister's funerals last month—here the minister who was gettin' fidgety, raises his hand to stop me, but I went on like a race-horse—because he didn't have money enough to get a railroad ticket. And why didn't his wife go to convention with him last fall? because she used her only spare skirt to make a suit for the boy, expectin' we would pay some we owed on the salary, so she could get a new dress. And we talk about our minister's wife not a-dressin' more stylisher, and not invitin' us to tea at the parsonage,—when I know they don't have much for themselves. I've been a cantankerous old woman, but I've been a-seenin' things. We have nice homes where we meet each other, and then go to sit with the Lord in a stiffin' meetin'-house. We say we love Him, and yet when the collectors go 'round for missions we ridicule His last words on earth, as with pierced hand he told us to give His gospel to the world. Brothers, not only is the world perishin' for the gospel, but our own kin right here in Spruce Hollow is a-judgin' the dear Lord by us and as they look at our meanness of soul they see no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. "Brothers," I says, in a appealin' way, "we must change our ways. Let us show that we love the Lord by a-doin' His blessed will, and a-livin' together in love."

Then I sat down feelin' as weak as a cat. After a little the minister rose, and in trembly tones prayed for the Lord to make Himself known to us, and that the joy of His salvation would warm our hearts together for His service. And he was a-prayin' for our kin when he broke down a-sobbin'. And I was a-cryin' myself, and didn't see poor old crippled Brother Jones get down on his knees as he prayed the Lord we might work together to save the boys who were a-goin' wrong. It was a meltin' time, as we remembered his own wild sons—yes, and our own, too.

Old Sister Smith, in a shaky voice, started "Bless be the tie that binds," and before she got to the second verse, everyone was a-singin' quiet and subdued-like. We haven't sung that piece, for a long time, for it seemed sarcastic-like, because we weren't tied very close together. Only old Deacon Rhines sat as stiff and glum as a post.

Well, the meetin' went on nice after that, and a committee was appointed to see what could be done to re-set and clean the meetin'-house, and I was on the committee.

At eight o'clock next mornin' I goes to the meetin'-house, and lo, and behold, there was Hez. Smith, and Deacon Brown, and Joe Barlow, who is the clerk, a-measurin' and a-markin'.

"Well, Sister Brambley," he says, "We talked it over after meetin' last night and said if you'd take a paper 'round for the money we owe the minister—the men would look after the seeatin' and repairin' in time for the Association."

"Thank the Lord," I said, "those wigglin' mikerobes are a-coming out of the sistem. I'll go 'round," I says, "soon as I give the meetin' house a good cleanin' and airin'." And I got Hez to pry up all the windows to give the mikerobes a better chance to get out.

And then who should walk in but Deacon Rhine's wife. But somehow I wasn't surprised, as I supposed I ought to be.

"I've come to help clean the meetin'-house," says she. "I made up my mind last night while I was a-lyin' in bed that I must do something to save my religion from turnin' sour like the deacon's. After breakfast I got ready and told the deacon where I was goin', and that he would have to get his own dinner."

"What did the deacon say?" says I.

"All he said was 'Hub,' and went to the barn."

Well, we no sooner got to work when more of the women came, till over a dozen were a-workin' away. And such a-sweepin' and a-dustin' and a-scrubbin' as that meetin'-house got! Late in the afternoon we went home tired but happy, for we had a real good time together. We've been a-hidin' our hearts from each other long enough, and now I hope we will be able to rejoice with each other, and a-mourn with each other a-seein' we have begun to know each other better.

Next mornin' I starts out a-collectin' what we owe the minister. I began collectin' from myself first. Then I goes to Deacon Rhines. He is our senior deacon, and I believes in a-begginin' right. I hated like pisen to go, and perhaps get a-jawin'. But I'm not one to neglect the hard things. ...

Mrs. Rhines was in the kitchen a-mixin' bread. Soon as I went in she goes to the old chiney teapot where she keeps her egg money, and takes out a two dollar bill and give me, a-sayin: "The deacon is on the barn floor. Hope you won't have any trouble, Sister Brambley."

I goes out to the barn and finds the deacon fixin' harness. He looked kinder surprised to see me, but said nothin' and kept a-workin'. I says: "Deacon, I'm 'round collectin' what we owe the minister, and I've come to you, because you are the leadin' officer." He stopped work, never a-lookin' at me, and put his hand in his inside vest pocket, and took out his wallet, and opened it, and handed me two bills, sayin', without a-lookin' at me. "One is for the minister and the other is for the seats." And then he went on workin'.

Well, you could have knocked me down with a feather. I went all prepared to labor with him, and a-show him his duty, and here he gives two dollars without any argument particularly after the way I spoke at the business meetin'.

"There," I says to myself, as I went on my way. "That's fourteen dollars already," and I went to put his bills in my purse, when my eyes fairly jumped out as I saw they were twenty-dollar bills. I felt all a-takin' back—kind of dismayed like, and then I got joyful, and shouted. "They are a-comin' out of his sistem"—meannin' the mikerobes, of course.

Well, I called on all our members, and only one man refused and he was so deaf, or made out he was, I couldn't make him understand. My purse was so bulgin' I had to tie em up in my neckerchief. I tell you I was so happy I didn't feel tired.

I came home by way of the ministers. He was a-washin' his wagon, and I called him in, and told him I had been round collectin', and wanted him to count the money and keep it on his salary—except one of the twenties of Deacon Rhines'. You know when I mentioned about the seats to the men, they said never mind about them now, they would look after the seats.

Well, when I emptied my purse the minister's eyes jumped, for there was the deacon's twenty and some fives, and ones and twos. But when I emptied my neckerchief the minister's wife just cried and laughed, and the minister and I were so trembly and excited we were a-countin' it in all kinds of ways. We just sat down for a little till we got calm, and then we managed to count right, and sure as you are alive there were two hundred and fourteen dollars, a-leavin', thirty dollars more than we owed. Well, I told him to keep it in advance as we had kept him behind long enough.

To make a long story short, our people all seemed different. Everybody was kind of friendly to everybody. On Sunday the meetin'-house was well filled, and looked nice and bright. The windows were clean and lowered a little from the top, and there were some bokays on the pulpit. The service went real good. The singin' sounded as though there was music in it.

We had a fine sermint, and the minister seemed to have lots of freedom in the preachin'. No wonder! I've hearn tell that ministers preach a good deal better when they have a twenty dollar bill in their pocket.

Surprisin' how friendly everybody was. There was handshakin' and smiles and invitations and the minister just as happy as he was the first Sunday he was with us. I saw Deacon Rhines and Hez Smith very confidential together, and when they parted I heard Hez say: "You are right, deacon, its about time we all turned over a new leaf. Anyway, we'll have things lookin' different before Association meets."

It is all peace now. The mikerobes are about all gone. The deacon and I are real good friends.

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