

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

FIXING UP THE CHURCH.

By James William Jackson.

With the letter was a check for two hundred and fifty dollars, sufficiently explained in the words, "A thank-offering which you are to use for such good purpose as you may select."

The minister was glad his grateful parishioners had returned safely from the sea. He decided to use the contribution as the basis for a church repair fund, and a half hour later he was pleading with Miss Lois Felner for a donation.

"The organ needs overhauling," he reminded her. "The mice have made it a playground. The church roof leaks and the sidewalk should be re-laid. The carpet is worn out and the building needs a coat of paint."

Warming up to his subject Lawton leaned over in his chair and touched his finger tips with rhythmical emphasis on each detail until Miss Felner's hands lifted protestingly.

"I'm poor this year," she declared. "There's that Peter Brent owes me a hundred dollars back rent. But as soon as he pays me something—"

Unsuccessful in getting anything more encouraging Lawton was soon wending his way toward the office of a board member. His route lay through a street of shabby houses, one of which stood in the middle of a stable yard. Every second or third pale was gone from a tottering fence and a stunted rose bush fought stolidly for continued existence as it looked out over an empty flower bed with clam shell border. An old sleigh with one runner and a wheel-less, frazzled buggy top littering the yard made cozy corners for the pecking chickens.

Lawton recognized the home of Peter Brent, who picked up a living for himself and his granddaughter with the help of an old horse and a ramshackle wagon.

A few blocks more brought the minister to an office building, where the general owner of a Van Dyke beard welcomed him. Lawton brought his finger tips into play again.

"Starting a fund, Houston," he commenced, "to eject the mice from the organ pipes, mend church roof, new sidewalk, carpet, paint, storm windows, plaster in study, steeple painting, drain, fresco patching, leaders rusted, grate in heater—I have two hundred and fifty for a start. Will you give another hundred?"

Lawton had by no means exhausted the possibilities of the repair list, but he was a trifle out of breath and saw, moreover, that Lawyer Houston was losing the real point as he stared with open-mouthed admiration at the minister's memory. So Lawton merely repeated, "Will you?"

Houston shook his head slowly and—in the presence of such a mind for details—reverently.

"No," he replied, regretfully; "no; I can't. I'll tell you what, though, I'm a lawyer, you know. I'll serve a correct legal notice on the mice in the organ to vacate. Then you get Plumber Matthews to attend to whatever is in his line; and so on. See?"

"But seriously," he continued; "can't afford it. Now, if I had won that patent suit for Peter Brent I wouldn't mind turning over the fee. But"—the lawyer turned up his palms—"it was money wasted. Feels it too, poor fellow. He has found a specialist who can help his grand daughter—for money."

Lawton nodded as he sighed and got up to leave. He was new to the town but he had heard a little about Brent's grand daughter.

The office of John Morris, M.D., was his next objective point. A little, wiry man expressed pleasure at seeing the minister. The old list was fired at him:

"—Coal bin, additional register in the body of the church, three broken panes of glass in the cellar and several slats out of the louvre windows in the steeple. Now, my dear doctor," Lawton begged in a brisk tone; "don't tell me you are too poor because Peter Brent or somebody else owes you money."

"Brent does owe me money for a fact," the doctor protested, with a gasp at the long list of specifications. "He's been sick off and on all winter. Unless he pays me something I couldn't afford—"

"I understand," the minister sighed again and went forth once more.

It was time for lunch. As Lawton took the short cut home through Brent's street he espied a child on the crumbling stoop of the old house. She sat with her hands in her lap, one little fist resting in the palm of the other hand, her tiny feet not quite reaching to the step below.

Lawton paused at sight of the sweet faced child, rocking back and forth with her head stiffly upraised.

"Poor blind bit," Lawton pityingly murmured, noting how she failed to sway her face from side to side after the usual restless fashion of children who can see.

He turned in impulsively between the gateless fence posts, hailing the girl with a kindly word as he crunched through the soap-box walk. She returned his greeting with a gentle smile and shifted a trifle in the direction of his voice. Lawton sat down and put a hand on hers.

"All alone, little one?" he asked, to make talk.

She nodded. "I'm watching for granddaddy," she explained brightly. "He's out delivering a load of wood; and he's going to buy me a blind book when he gets the money."

"Granddaddy is good to you, isn't he?" Lawton observed, scanning the child's face and marking the evidences of character in the regular and pretty features.

"Oh, yes," she agreed, enthusiastically. "And he is saving up to take me to a great doctor in the city, so I can see. Twenty dollars, maybe. Granddaddy says it will cost more than a horse and wagon. How much does a horse and wagon cost?" she asked wistfully. "Do you know, mister?"

"Well," guardedly ventured the minister, "it costs as much as twenty dollars at least."

"Granddaddy would sell the horse and wagon he has now," the child explained; "only he did sell it already. He got sick working over in the swamp and he had to sell it to buy groceries, because he couldn't work. The grocer won't trust us any more," she conceded, with cheerful indifference to the pity of it.

Lawton nodded, forgetting that the child could not see. Then he fell to meditating until a horse and wagon came in sight around the corner. A peculiar halloo turned the face of the girl quickly in granddaddy's direction. With an inner sight she saw her beloved coming; and a radiant smile lighted her features.

A bent old man drove slowly into the yard and clambered laboriously from his seat to take the child in his arms, greeting her by name as he lowered his gray head to kiss her.

"Mary and I have been visiting while we waited for you," Lawton explained. "If you are not too busy I'd like to talk with you a little now."

The old man's eyes, later on, shone brilliantly, as he signified his readiness to go to the ends of the earth if so he might restore sight to the little one.

"Well," Lawton observed quietly, "I have two hundred and fifty dollars, given me for just such a purpose. We'll see what the specialist can do."

Mr. Lawton mused while he ate his lunch that day. "The old church will

have to hold itself up as best it can," he decided. "The Lord will never be ashamed to come into it, thank goodness."

Dr. Morris met him at Brent's after lunch, by appointment. Mary had been given to understand somewhat. She threw her arms about the minister's neck. "I know you are beautiful," she declared, as she played the touch of her sensitive fingers over his smooth-shaven face. "I'll come to church and look at you when I can see."

Encouraging reports were forwarded from the city hospital during the weeks that followed. These sufficed to comfort Peter Brent in his loneliness, especially as Lawton had taken care that the old man should have work to occupy the waiting time.

Meanwhile the deflected finials of the church continued to deflect, the plaster fell bodily from the study wall; and an occasional mouse in the organ pipes came in on the anthem a shade late or a tone off.

But it was a gala day when the little one arrived home. Lawton was not at the station to see the glances of Peter Brent, to hear the sob of joy as the grey head bent to kiss the still bandaged eyes; but he came to the house later and was privileged to receive the affectionate greetings of the young lady in a darkened room.

And a Sunday or two later he had the pastoral satisfaction of seeing both Mary and her grandfather in a pew near the door. No other incumbent had ever seen Peter Brent in church.

The congregation knew all about it, apparently. Many stopped to greet the shy Mary, to watch curiously when the minister shook hands, first with Peter and then with the child.

"And did you like the church?" he asked.

"It is beautiful," she reverently declared. "I love it—and you." She reached up her arms to him.

"She thinks the church is beautiful," the minister repeated, after the two had gone, and while he was on his way up the aisle to answer a summons. "We'll just have to shut our eyes to the leaky roof, paint, drain, fresco, leaders, grate, plaster—"

His foot caught in a rent of the carpet. In the task of saving himself from a fall he forgot the remainder of the lawyer.

Lawyer Houston and Dr. Morris were waiting for him. The doctor, as treasurer, had just been counting the offertory.

"Ahem!" he began, eloquently. "I took the liberty to present this matter of the repair fund to the congregation, Mr. Lawton. I explained the situation thoroughly, and pleaded for a special donation at this service. We have here nine hundred dollars in cash and the returned check of the specialist. Eleven hundred and fifty! One-third is for Mary Brent, and the balance for the fund. That will repair some, won't it?"

The minister folded his arms and frowned at his officious lieutenants. But they knew the scowl was intended to hide his gratification.—Sel.

MAKING THE BEST OF LIFE.

Whether the things we do, be little things or great things, every act, if it be our best, is bringing us more nearly in harmony with God's plans, the pattern by which he would have us live and work. Giving a cup of cold water to a little child, if that be the most and the best one can do, is genuine service, as truly so as was leading the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage.

Rolling away the stone was a small part of the great work to be done, but it was all that human hands could do, and the Master recognized it and blessed it. Whether it be our lot to do little sometimes and great things sometimes, or little things all the time, it is ours to do the best we can, with every passing day, and leave the rest with God.