

STORIES  
POETRY

## The Inglenook

SKETCHES  
TRAVEL

## AUNT HANNAH AND THE CHURCH DEBT.

(By Mary B. Wingate.)

"Nothing succeeds like success!" Aunt Hannah having raised sixty dollars so quickly and apparently so easily for the poor children's outing, was overwhelmed with the congratulations she received, spiced, however, with an occasional reminder from the more sordid natures who seldom gave anything even to local charities, "that all that money went out of town and for their part they believed that 'charity began at home!' There was the church debt, why didn't she try to clear that off?" She said nothing but the sparkle in her eye assured those who knew her well that she was only dishing her time.

One day the pastor called at her cottage and after telling her what a hindrance the debt was to him in his work, asked if she could suggest a way by which it could be reduced and eventually cleared away. She agreed to think it over and talk with some of the leading members about it.

Not long after this the annual parish meeting took place. The subject was brought up and Aunt Hannah was called upon for some remarks.

She arose and looking around with an air of decision said: "Well, if I take hold of it 'twon't be no suppers, I can tell ye! I never did believe in a church's gittin' together an' eatin' themselves rich. Suppers are well 'nough for charity work but a church had ought to be honest an' pay its debts."

"Well, how can the thing be done?" some one asked.

"Let them go to work same's I did when father's long sickness left my home in to talk the matter over with me, and and didn't allers have butter for my bread, but I worked and saved and went 'thout till 'twas paid, then I kep' out of debt! Fust thing we must get the preacher's salary pledged, then I'll go to work."

After the salary was pledged she came in to talk the matter over with me, and began with characteristic energy: "Now, the fust thing ter do is ter git ahead of that intrist. Mr. Brown hol's that mortgage an' I'll see what he'll do about it. Then when the Ladies' Aid meets I'll see what they'll do. Then I'll start a subscription paper an' I think I'll head it with five dollars myself."

"Oh, Aunt Hannah!" I exclaimed, "don't do any such thing! You positively can't afford it!"

"Well, you see! I reckon it'll be quite a savin' of shoe leather and temper too, for I do git riled up over the meanness of some people in this place. If I give five dollars some of them skinflints can't decently write their names down for no less. I calculate to pay a tenth of all I git anyway an' the Lord allers helps me. Some of the folks that say 'charity begins ter home' is goin' to hear from me to their sorrier this time."

At the Ladies Aid the matter was talked over and the society voted to pay the money they were raising for a church carpet, on the debt. The carpet would cost eighty dollars or more and they had sixty dollars on hand. Aunt Hannah informed them that she had looked over the old carpet and was sure there was enough to carpet the platform and in front of the pulpit and the aisles. Then she suggested that they assume the care of the church for one year. In the summer time it would be an easy matter by getting one of the large boys to ring the bell. After the house was cleaned which was to take place next week, the sweeping, dusting

and care of the lamps she would be responsible for herself.

"Oh, Aunt Hannah, that'll be too much for you!" said the ladies in one breath.

"Oh, I won't have to do much of it. Them blessed girls of mine," looking around on some of the young ladies present, "will think it's a pleasure to help, won't you girls?"

"Yes, indeed, Aunt Hannah, you can count on us," said a chorus of eager young voices.

"I knew I could, an' with your help I think I can get 'nough men to agree to build the fires and shovel paths in the winter so'st we can git along 'thout a sexton an' that'll be fifty dollars more. 'A penny saved is as good as a penny earned' you know, an' now as we hain't got no baker, can't we earn something by home-cookin'?"

A brisk discussion followed and one lady agreed to bake six pots of beans along with her own every Saturday.

Another agreed to make cookies and another doughnuts and still another said she would have a dozen loaves of raised bread for sale every Saturday evening.

"An' now," said Aunt Hannah, "a good many of you ladies makes several kuds of rich cake. How many will agree to make only one kind, except when they expect company, and give the amount saved on this debt? All in favor raise their hands!" There was a good number of hands raised though some of the ladies said, "I know my men folks 'll find fault."

"Well, let them find fault with me if they want to! It'll be good for their souls and their stomachs too, I'm thinkin'! They'll give better if they find 'conomy is goin' to be practiced till this debt is paid, so don't give in to them the least bit—on no account—not once. I've ben to see Mr. Brown an' he'll give in the intrist that's due an' that'll be twenty dollars. My courage's risin' an' if you'll all take hold an' help as you've agreed, I think we'll burn that mortgage inside of three months."

As she sat down the ladies began to cheer and all went home feeling that the cloud that had hung over them so long would soon be cleared away.

Two weeks later, after Aunt Hannah had canvassed the town with her subscription paper, she came in to report.

"You see, I concluded to head the list with Mr. Brown's name for twenty dollars. First I struck Mr. Trask and he gave me his name for ten dollars. Then I tried Mr. Neal, the trader. He belongs to the church and is simply able, so I was bound to win 'specially as they are the 'charity begins ter home' kind. There was some customers an' a good lot of loafers present, so I seated myself comfortable like an showed him my paper. He was very purlike an' sez he, 'I am glad you're goin' to clear off that debt an' I'll give you three dollars towards it.'"

"Well, now," sez I, "I'm goin' to give five an' you're most as well off as I be. Pears to me I've heard you ask more for that black coat of you'n than I could git for my home." I heard some of the loafers laff an' everybody was listenin', an' I said: "Now you see a lot of us is agoin' to practice self-denial so's to give. Supposin' you smoke one cigar less a day for three or four months an' that'll amount to ten dollars. It'll be better for you—soul and body both." He grew red in the face for he knew folks was laffin' and give me a ten dollar bill, an' I left. Then I went into Smith's store. He wouldn't put down less'n Neal, so

I got ten dollars there. 'Twas easy gettin' Squire Pratt an' the others to sign ten dollars after that.

"Mr. Foss, the teacher, said 'twas a shame to the town to have a debt on the only church they had, an' give me seven dollars, an' Lem Jones said he'd give six dollars if he didn't never go to church. Then I wrote my name down for five dollars and got three five dollar subscriptions an' walked down to Dea. Stowe's. 'Twas a long walk an' I was tired enough. Mis' Stowe is a real good woman an' made me stay to supper. I looked around some and talked about the farm an' found they had a good stock an' was all out of debt. Then the Deacon come home an' begun to plead poverty and thought I'd better be two years about it' then 'twouldn't be so hard on poor folk like him. I told him I wa'n't poor an' I should be willin' to swap even for his place, an' if I could pay five dollars he could."

"Five dollars! Why Aunt Hannah! You won't have enough to carry you through, I'm dreadfully afeared!" "Well I'm not. I'll serve the Lord while I can, an' I can trust him to look after me later on," sez I.

"Now, pa," said Mrs. Stowe, "you put down five dollars an' I'll go 'thout somethin' an' help pay it." Poor woman! She has allers done without an' allers will. Others were more wil'in' to pay five dollars after seein' his name down for that amount. Then I got some one, two and three dollar subscriptions an' some of the women give fifty cents and three men said they'd give a load of wood apiece an' Mr. Trim said he'd haul me one for my pluck. I got all I could in cash an' the rest is nearly all good, so with what the Ladies' Aid will do an' a thank-offerin' when we meet to burn that mortgage, I think we've got about enough. It's about a month sense we begun an' I think in two months' time we'll have it all squared up."

"An' now what do you think! I got a letter from my nephew in the city an' he sent me five dollars an' asked me to come an' spend the winter to their house. That's just like the Lord! Now five dollars looked big to me an' I didn't know how I was goin' to raise it! but it's come an' I've paid it into the treasury with the rest."

The Ladies' Aid Society raised even more than was expected of them and the subscriptions were about all paid when the invitation was given for all hands to come to a parish meeting. After a statement of what remained due was made, a collection made up the deficiency. Then the ceremony of burning the mortgage was performed and all sang, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." The minister said he felt that he could preach better, and the choir said they could sing better; and Aunt Hannah said she thought "they could all pray better, feelin' that if they was poor sinners, they wa'n't mean ones."

The life of every man is a diary in which he means to write one story, and writes another; and his humblest hour is when he compares the volume as it is with what he vowed to make it.—J. M. Barrie.

Singleton—I want to ask you a question, old man.

Wedderly—Come on with it.

Singleton—Does a woman always mean what she says?

Wedderly—During courtship she doesn't, but after marriage you bet she does.