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The Amateur Music Master

MR. BARDO, Non Mus. Doc. backed by B. D. Skritch, selfmade merchant, and Claude Carroll, Editor, undertakes to give Morekirk, Ont., the Musical Uplift. First of a serial of Amateur-Musico Sketches, based upon the experiences of one who had them, but not always playing the piece according to the exact score. Containing appreciations of character and musical satires which may excite a Mus. Doc. to ridicule

MR. ANTONY BARDO made himself obnoxious to his landlady two weeks after he arrived in Morekirk, Ont., to teach 57 boys how to get into High School. He leased a cabinet organ which had to be derricked up through the window and for two hours every evening he performed horrifying improvisations, using the full-organ swell most of the time, so that people naturally walked round a block rather than pass the house and the neighbours sighed for the police; and the organist of the Methodist church, just home from Lelpsic, said that Bardo's modulations were diabolical and his attempts at "close" harmony unspeakable.

Probably if this young man, age 20, with a First Class A certificate, had not been steered by fate against the deadly system of the Morekirk Central, if he had not come under the paralyzing hand of Principal Pontifex, who listened at class-room keyholes, he might never have played that horrible organ. But with 57 young blades each trained for seven years to get even with Pontifex by torturing emotional substitutes like Bardo, he had to have that organ or blow up with the unexpressed. So he played orgies of hatred against Pontifex, the tyrant who could poke his nose inside a class-room door and hypnotize 50 seething lads into the cataleptic stage. Bardo never could boss those boys. The more he worked on them the magic of living, as he felt it in the babbling aerialities of nature and what little art he had ever noticed, the more they abused him. He blamed Pontifex. He found out too late that the blunder was in two such different people working on the same thing at the same time. Pontifex had a system. Bardo had nothing but a musical instinct working on the business of education, with religion a close second to music.

Morekirk was a delightful old town among Scotch-Canadian hills, threaded by a trickling rivulet that was dammed up here and there for mills. He had never been a citizen of any such place and naturally felt himself in a new world. Being at the poet's age, he felt magic in all things; the same old folly that acts on some natures like alcohol and horses and stocks do on some others. Every morning until snow-time he was up at daybreak and out over the hills to meet the sun, sometimes with

By MAJOR B. FLAT

a book of Ruskin or Wordsworth or Carlyle; and from some suburban peak of those picturesque hills he felt it a great joy to stand and watch the sunrise, till it blazed on the windows of the Morekirk Central, when he broke into blank verse and damned the Morekirk Central up hill and down dale.

A young man with such a mental equipment never could have stayed out of the choir. Bardo sang a smug little bass part in the dingy loft that hung over the preacher's head in front of an asthmatic old organ. The first Sunday he creaked up the back stairs round the organ he got a sensation.

And of course it was a lady. Her name was Naida Dolsen, as Bardo well knew, because he had once written a letter telling her how divinely she had sung at a church service in the small city of Linden, up the line, but had afterwards torn it up. One of the reasons why he had put his best foot forward to get the Morekirk Central was that Morekirk was Naida's home town. She lived on the skirts of it, over the hills. Here she was bright and early, her good old father having driven her in the layback buggy to attend class-meeting before service, so that Naida had an hour on her hands of which Mr. Bardo became at least ten seconds as he went thumping-heartedly past the lady, knowing that she was looking at him. And from that until the collection plate period, Bardo endured a good sermon, etc., even though he expected to become a pillar of the Sunday School in the basement, because he waited for Naida to get up in the front row and sing, "He wipes the tear from every eye."

Satan himself could not have contrived a more effective contrast than Princ. Pontifex and Naida C. Dolsen. And Bardo was the poor devil through whom both sets of vibrations worked. He was born to become a sort of melting pot for the passions of a small community. Those who blamed him for being a fool about Naida didn't understand that the Morekirk Central, with Pontifex at the keyholes, was what drove him to it. The stage was all set. Mr. Bardo naively took the spotlight.

THE old Cardigan St. Methodist Church, with its bulwarks of stone and its busy basement, was another torture, because he liked it; the choir, the Sunday School, the prayer-meetings, the Epworth Leagues and the extra specials. It was there he met some of the characters that helped him to buck against Pontifex.

The S. S. Superintendent was one of these. B. D. Skritch was a self-made man who had come up out of great tribulation to be the chief merchant of Morekirk. He had butted up through bailiffs and bad debts, through prayer-meetings and sleepless nights to once-a-year booking passage to Europe, and transacting his settlements in marks and francs and

roubles and £. s. d. He had stores in other towns and a temple not made with hands eternal in the heavens. His knowledge of the world was extensive and his interest in Morekirk rather contemptuous, judging from the things he said about aldermen and City Hall in the newspapers. Skritch, like many other self-made men, lacked culture, and knew it. But he had a close intimacy with professors at the college on one of the Morekirk outskirts, and when Bardo hove into the Sunday School pining for an assignment, Skritch put him in charge of a class just ready for the girls' Bible Class, made him choragus of the School with power to wield a baton after the lesson, and before long made him welcome at his kindly and comfortable home—he was building a new one, however, to cost \$20,000.

SKRITCH had a friend in the editor of the Morekirk Call, a man who believed in something between single-tax and theosophy, with a little of both. Claude Carroll was a child-soul with a man's mind. He wore out several yards of carpet trying to show Skritch the new heaven upon earth. And at 11 p.m. he would take Bardo for a three-mile saunter over all the bridges in town, usually by moonlight. Among the three of them they agreed that Morekirk needed some sort of regeneration; of ideas or art or civic betterment—anything to stir the place up. The other two listened to Bardo anathematizing Pontifex.

"Well, I wish I had you, Mr. Skritch, for a chief, and you, Mr. Carroll, for an associate and—we could make that school a salvation for the community," he blurted.

"Why don't you start something in your paper?" asked Skritch.

Carroll shook his head.

"Too much politics, my friend. 'Why don't you start an ethics department in your store?'"

"I can't sell ethics," admitted Skritch. "I'm a business man."

"Then our friend Bardo must do something."

Carroll looked benign over his beard.

Talks like these stimulated Bardo. He wanted to show these men a way out. Maybe they were right. He was young; no business office limitations; a perfectly transparent soul seething with desire for the unexpressed and the beautiful, something to make Morekirk an uplift.

And when he came to himself after a seance with Carroll, at 1.30 a.m., each of them drunk with meta-

