

# A SUBSCRIPTION TO THE HEATHEN

*Callow Youth and Missionary Effort*

By MARGARET AND ARTHUR E. MCFARLANE

Illustrated by R. Johnston.

WASH had now turned seventeen; and, although he could not honestly say that Idelia Constable was the first, five minutes after he had got to speaking terms with her he realised from the depth of his nature that she would be the last.

That being so, Providence was benignly with him in the fact that she did not attend his church, the First Avenue Episcopal. To his years there was open only one regularly prescribed and codified outlet to one's passion, and that was in walking home from the evening service with the fair and tender object of it. And if Idelia had belonged to his own church, as had *someone else*—He thought of sister Het, of Wally, his "kid brother," and the two little girls, and he flushed again with a score of ignominious memories.

Idelia went to the New Brick Methodist, and Wash was almost immediately made to understand that she was joined to it by no such loose vicariousness of bond as that which still knit him to his own. That first Sunday evening, after half an hour of uneasy waiting in the New Brick vestibule, he did succeed in separating her from the cluster of girls of which she made a part in the outflowing congregation, and she allowed him to walk with her. But she explained to him with clearness that she had always felt that it wasn't right for a girl who was living according to the spirit to go home with any boy who hadn't been at church himself. Her other boy friends had always called for her at home, and she was sure her mother would be quite willing to have him do so, too.

He was psychically jarred by her mention of other boy friends. Yet not less fully did the same speech recognise him as their successor, and great happiness invaded him. To hear her, too, thus openly avow that she was living according to the spirit wrought within his own impressively. It was not merely by chance, then, that Idelia's face had made him think of "The Soul's Awakening." \* \* \* If he was no great things in that way himself, with awed solemnity he pledged himself to enter at once upon one unsparing effort to be worthy of her.

IN the meantime, next Sunday evening he would most certainly call at 44 Elm Crescent. He was so decided as to that, that he neglected to ask Idelia's permission. And, probably in consequence thereof, when he did call he found that he had come too late. Mrs. Constable, taking him in with humorous but not unkindly scrutiny, said that she was very sorry but Clarence Sweetnam of their church had been there before him.

He remembered that Clarence Sweetnam, though only by his schoolyard name of "Clara." He, too, had a face like that in "The Soul's Awakening," but it had never impressed Wash in the same way as did Idelia's. \* \* \* If you could land on that kind of Dough-bag even once and not risk putting him out of business *altogether*—!

He had learned some vital truths about girls, though, from Helma Young; and it was he who went with Idelia the Sunday following. By the end of another week the Dough-bag was little more than a memory of contemptuous conquest with him. \* \* \* And by now, if he still outwardly went on with the grind of the Academy, he really had his existence in an astral body of soft and blissful day-dreaming. During that third week there were nights when he did not get to sleep for hours; he did not want to. He was realising, too, always more and more, how hopelessly unworthy of Idelia he was. The feeling he had had for Helma he saw now had been merely a fancy, a kind of child's play and the delusion of the mind.

And that third Sunday evening at the New Brick, Idelia asked him if he would mind staying

with her to the after-meeting—the one the minister had spoken of in the announcements. Wash had heard something less of the announcements than he had of the sermon, but he said he would be very glad to stay. Let it be confessed, however, that he descended with her from the gallery to the body of the church with a good deal of nervousness; it would probably be one of those "experience meetings" he had heard about.

It was not "experiences" which were to be sought for. It was something which many worthy people find it even harder to give. That Sunday had begun one of the half-yearly terms in the New Brick; the Reverend George Johnston, from the Indian field was with them, and a grand call was to be made for new subscriptions to the foreign missions in general.

Wash took one of the cards from the hymn book rack in front of him, and while the grand call was being most eloquently delivered, he examined it. He had heard of the system, one of subscribing not in "lump" sums, but of engaging one's self to maintain a certain weekly average for the next six months. To every subscriber there was given a package of envelopes stamped with his particular number on the books, and whatever was put upon the collection plate in those envelopes was checked in to his account by the recording treasurer. If a subscriber fell behind one week he could make it up the next, and no one but the recording treasurer be any the wiser. But, for the enlightened satisfaction of all, at the end of the church half year a detailed report was published, and those who had subscribed for golden harps and paid for harmonicas were exposed as in a kind of lesser Judgment Day.

Wash had, however, always associated this subscribing business with the elders of the flock alone. He was now to find that in the New Brick things were otherwise. Collectors having been picked out to go up and down among those elders, the minister looked benevolently over their heads and asked "young brother Sweetnam if he would be so very good as to assist them and look after the requirements of those juniors who had so modestly retired to the pews in the rear."

It was "Clara" Sweetnam to whom he had addressed himself. With a befitting burden of gravity that youth arose, possessed himself of one of the baize-lined plates, and walked slowly but directly down to that rearmost pew into which Wash had ushered Idelia.

She had already procured her little silver pencil, and she made out her card for ten cents a Sunday. "The best we girls can do seems such a trifle," she murmured, smiling with a divine resignation upon both attendant youths. "Clara" smiled sadly back at her, finished filling out his own card, and dropped it on the plate. It was for twenty cents a Sunday. Wash beheld it, and also that the plate still tarried. "You skate!" he said in his heart. "I'll put a cannon firecracker into your tomato-can!" And he made out his card for half a dollar. \* \* \*

He could see the Dough-bag still gulping when he was four pews up from him. Idelia was giving his arm little ecstatic pressures of delight, and up and down his spine were running waves upon waves of fullest joy.

GOING home, too, Idelia said that what made her feel most proud of him was that she had thought at first that he was the kind of boy who wouldn't really care about the heathen at all. And even now mightn't he regret that he had been so perfectly lovely and generous?

Regret it? He felt that he had never got such value from money before, and never could again! When he was left alone, to go directly back to

his own abode was an impossibility. He walked down to the river, followed the dock-line, grey with trodden snow, and then on farther still, away around by Thompson's Mills. His secret thoughts, tumultuous within him, were of how easy it would be to marry and set up housekeeping in that weekly payment way. There had burst upon him the full inspiration of the instalment plan.

That part of it ends here.

## CHAPTER II.

IN this chapter the woe begins.

By next Sunday Idelia had got his envelopes for him—extremely neat and attractive squares of bond, about half the regular commercial size. Wash, too, was ready with his first half-dollar. On the twenty-eight of last December the pater had more than generously raised his allowance to five dollars, payable upon the twenty-eighth of every month to follow; out of that he would never really miss this fifty cents a week.

On the way to church Idelia pointed out to him that his number, 33, was exactly what their ages, added together, came to. It was minutes almost before he could find words with which to comment on this fact. And that night he sat in his attic den thinking long thoughts of unutterable sweetness. \* \* \* It was true, that to put in that first fifty cents he had had to stand off his quarterly dues, a dollar and twenty-five, to the Young Forest-Runners; but the Young Forest-Runners could always wait until the end of the month, and by then he would have another five.

Next Tuesday, in a Main Street window, he saw exactly the shade of four-in-hand he had been looking for ever since he had met Idelia. It cost him seventy-five, though. And when on Sunday he turned out the change pocket of his every-day vest, he had precisely forty-two cents left. He had just remembered, too, that half of his next five had been promised as his share of the deposit on the new pair-oar his camping crowd—he and Russ McGowan and Billy and Chant Harrison—had ordered for the coming summer up the river.

He was in arrears to the bowling alley, too, and had been clam enough to keep his library books out overtime.

But he could not stay away from Idelia. Before leaving home he slid two nickels into his envelope, and he listened tensely to the anthem as he laid that envelope on the plate. This time, when they were on their homeward way, Idelia said that he was showing himself so good about keeping up his subscription that she was going to tell him something. All the girls in her class had set out to get one of their boy friends to contribute. She had chosen him, and he had given twice as much as any of them—he not even belonging to their church, either! Wash glowed, temporarily, under the praise—though those nickels did not lie comfortably upon his inward pride. And he could not keep from a secret wish, too, that he had known before what those other boys were going to give.

The Sunday following—considering that next time he would be flush and could shove in a dollar or so at one go, probably—he put on no envelope at all. Idelia did not say anything, but he could feel that he had hurt her feelings, none-the-less. He was compelled, in justice, to tell himself, though, that she really had no great cause to complain. She had owned herself that he was whacking up twice what he'd had any need to. And, as a matter of fact, however angelically she had meant it, she couldn't very well have hit on any time in the whole year when he could less easily have spared that coin.

By next Sunday—that was the twenty-ninth of March—he had drawn his "V." But, in the meantime, to the bowling alley arrears, the Forest-Runner dues, and the deposit on the pair-oar, there had been added Wilkins & James' bill for the new band to his foot-power scroll-saw. They had soaked him unmercifully, too. By swallowing himself he had stalled off the payment on the "pair-oar," but he had had to cash in for the other things. He made it another case of nickels that Sunday.

As for the Sunday following, there was nothing for it, he would have to let Idelia go for once. In fact if he did not feel that Idelia was the kind of girl who brought out all that was good in a man, he would say that perhaps he had been giving almost too much of his time to her of late. \* \* \* It always pleased the mater and pater, too, to have him turn up now and again in the home pew. He met Idelia coming out of the library Friday afternoon, and, with a face that felt like a stove lid on ironing day, he explained this to her.

She said it was very good indeed of him to think about such things. And, just as they were parting, she showed that she could be thoughtful also: "Wouldn't he like her to put his envelope on for