

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

THE DEACON'S TENTH.

By Mary S. Chapman.

Ye see, the elder had preached a most powerful sermon on Christian givin' in which he took what I called purty strong ground. Among other things, he said we'd ought to do as much for our religion as the old Jews did for theirs, an' while it was all right to lay up for a rainy day, an' to get ahead if ye honestly could, we should set apart at least one-tenth of our income as the Lord's money.

"Now, I think the elder went a leetle too far," says I to my wife, Huldy, as we was a drivin' home from meetin'. "Givin' is well enough, but I get a'most tired a hearin' these ministers forever a dinkin' about it."

"Waal, Lyman," says Huldy, "why don't you try givin' a tenth—try it for one year anyhow."

"My!" says I, "as if I didn't give mor'n that now; it's two shillin' an' fifty cents, every time I turn around, to say nothin' o' the contributions to big objects. If I get home with a dollar in my pocket I think I'm a lucky fellow."

"Then I'm sure," says Huldy, with that queer little smile o' hers that she sometimes has, "it'll be a real savin' to ye to go into systematically a givin' yer tenth."

Now I hadn't any idee of doin' it, an' keepin' a reckonin' of what I contribute—in fact, I thought that verse about lettin' yer right hand know what yer left was a doin' was rather again it, but somehow Huldy has a cool way o' takin' things for granted, an' though the mildest of all women, she generally manages to carry her p'int.

Next mornin' I see her a makin' a book out o' some sheets o' paper, an' rulin' 'em off, and stichin' on to 'em a pasteboard kiver an' on the outside she writ in big letters that was as plain to read as printin', "The Lord's Money." This she handed to me an' said nothin'.

That very week I got pay for my wheat; it was an uncommon good crop; it come to six hundred dollars. I was a settin' by the fire a countin' it up with some satisfaction, when Huldy jest stuck under my nose that book, "The Lord's Money."

"What's that for, Huldy?" says I.

"Why, for the tenth," says she.

"Bless my soul!" says I, a wriggin' an' twistin', "that would be sixty dollars; I can't stan' that."

She didn't say anything, but set a watchin' me, an' I knew it warn't no use a dodgin' her, so I took six ten-dollar bills, all crisp an' new, an' laid 'em in a pile.

"Yis, yis," says I, a tryin' to screw my face into a smile, an' to act as if I'd been a calkerlatin' all the way through to give 'em.

Ye see there was an awful sight o' old Adam in me. I jest set there a bredgind' that money. I most wished the wheat hadn't come to so much. Then I happened to remember what the elder had said in his sermon—that it would be a mighty hard wrench on us at first to give a tenth—that when the fingers had got crooked up a graspin' this world's goods 'twas hard to get 'em straightened out, but that when we'd become used to this way o' givin', we'd enjoy it an' be blessed in it as much as in prayin' an' readin' the Scriptures. A thinkin' on that sermon I made up my mind I'd double my subscription for the elder's service, an' that would just take the sixty dollars.

As I harvested my crops an' sold 'em, I was astonished to see how the Lord's pile grew, an' I had to think it over midlin' sharp to know where to invest it so 'twould do most good, an' I was gettin' over the wrench a little until my interest became due. The year before old Uncle

Nat had died, an' most unexpectedly had left me five thousand dollars: If the legacy had dropped down from the skies I couldn't have been more surprised. Now I had three hundred a comin' in from it, and it most killed me to take thirty on't an' put it aside for the Lord. I couldn't help whinin'.

"Now, Huldy," says I, "don't ye believe the old Jews deducted their taxes after they laid by their tenth?"

"I dunno," says she; "we might read up Leviticus an' Numbers and Deuteronomy an' see."

"Bless my soul, Huldy," says I, "I'd rather pay the whole thirty dollars than wade through all them dull books. An' then," says I, thinking hard, "accordin' to what these agents that come around beggin', say, I s'pose it would be a good pecuniary speckleration to give to the Lord. They tell about throwin' out crackers, an' comin' back leaves, an' show how them is blessed in their basket an' in their store that bestow their goods on the poor. Anyhow, I've made up my mind to try it."

"Now, Lyman Tubbs, don't ye go into this tenth business with no such worldly motives. If ye do ye'll be worse than Annas and Sapphira, who was struck dead at once. Not but that the Lord has said, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee, and prove me now herewith,' but if ye undertake to drive a sharp bargain with Him, ye'll find out that He'll get ahead of ye every time. No, He's given us all we have, an' I'm thinkin' He'll ask us some mighty close questions about the way we've used it."

Huldy didn't very often preach, but when she did her sermons were what I call p'inted.

Times passed on, an' I got used to givin' my tenth. I didn't squirm over it as I did; in fact, I got kinder raised, an' to feelin' liberal. I didn't sell so much as a turkey without puttin' aside tithes of it.

It happened in the summer that my wife's cousin Silas an' his family came to see us, an' I was a braggin' about givin' my tenth, an' I supposed he'd never heard o' sech a thing; but Silas says, saye he, "I've done it ever since I was converted. I airn two dollars a day, an' every Saturday night I jest lay aside one dollar and twenty cents an' I pray over it; it's sacred; it's the Lord's money."

"Don't ye take yer livin' out o' it first?" "Yer what?" says Silas, amazed. "It's jest so much I airn, an' the ability to airn it comes from the Lord, an' I joyfully give back to him the little part."

"But," says I, "ain't that kinder resky? Ye might be took sick or yer work give out; I should be a little fearsome."

"These are the promises," says Silas;

"My God shall supply all our needs,"

an' "Lo, I am with you." They are all yer an' amen."

Waal, if I didn't feel small after that. I had simply given a tenth of all I'd sold and grumbled over it at that, an' there were all those broad acres that had fed us, an' those big trees in the woods that had kept us warm—blessin's upon blessin's that I hadn't counted, an' here was Silas with nothin' but his hands, an' yet so willin' hearted an' doing so much. When I carried him an' his folks back to the city I jest filled my wagon box full o' things, an' felt as if I was givin' directly to the Lord.

One day the elder an' his family was over to our house, an' we was a-talkin'. His son Fred was a playin' with my Thomas—they was awful good friends—an' says the elder, "If I had as much money as you have, Deacon Tubbs, I'd send Thomas to school, an' ask the Lord to make a minister o' him."

"Bless my soul!" thought I, "that's the last thing I want him to be." Ye see I had other things for my boy, but I said nothin'.

My next neighbor, old Mr. Hodges, had a son who went to the city and studied law, and got to be a judge, an' comes home in his big carriage once in a while to visit the old folks, his wife an' children dressed to his, an' seein' them I had a natural hankern' for Thomas to turn out like that. I was a-sayin' this to Huldy when the elder's folks was gone.

"Now, Lyman Tubbs," says she, a-lookin' at me with them great, earnest eyes o' hers, "would you really like to have our Thomas jest like old Mr. Hodges's son—a-breakin' the Sabbath, he an' his boys, a-shootin' ducks, an' a drinkin', an' a playin' cards? Be you a deacon an' a member of the church an' not feel as if 'twas bigger business to persuade men to forsake their sins an' to love the Lord Jesus Christ?"

Ever since Silas was here my mind has been dreadfully took up with somethin' he was a-tellin' me. He said some good Christian men had hired rooms in the worst part o' the city, and made them bright an' attractive, an' was a singin' hymns an' a preachin' to the folks, all without money, an' without price, an' some sech work as this is what I'd been a wishin' my boy could do, an' jest then Thomas came in an' stood beside his mother. He had the same hair as hers an' the same brown eyes, an' somethin' told me that if he took to preachin', he'd be one of the convincin' sort, for I must say that nobody's words ever took hold of an old sinner like me as Huldy's does.

Well, my tenth money grew; half the time I didn't know what to do with it. I was over to the elder's one day an' he was a tellin' me of a school near by which he thought would be a good place to send our Thomas—he'd noticed how crazy the boy was for books an' learnin', an' the minister said he'd a cousin a livin' jest out o' the village that would take a good care o' Thomas, an' board him, an' he'd be under good Christian influence.

"What do you say, Huldy?" says I, as soon as I'd got home.

"I'd like him to go," says she, "an' for the elder's boy to go with him."

Sure enough he should, an' that would be a use for the rest o' my tenth, an' Thomas an' Fred was awful good friends; they was like David an' Jonathan, an' what do you think, there was a revival that, jest like a big wave, struck that school, an' in fact the whole community, an' both the boys was converted, an' you can't think how I felt, so glad about it, an' kinder streaked, too, for I knew it warn't none o' my doin'; I'd been sech a poor, good-for-nothin' Christian all my life, it was enough to set my Thomas again' the Lord.

We got the good news on Saturday mornin' an' in the afternoon was the covenant meetin'. It was jest about a year from the time that Huldy handed me the "Lord's Money" book. I remember how I got up in the meetin' then an' talked, not because I'd anything to say, but bein' deacon, I felt as if I ought to, an' told the brethren I hadn't made no progress, an' all that—jest what I commonly said. How could I talk that way now when I'd had a year o' sech uncommon blessin', an' with Huldy beside me a cryin' for joy because our Thomas had been converted. No, I couldn't keep from breakin' down, an' thankin' the Lord for His goodness to me an' mine, an' I knew that givin' my tenth, though it had come so bredgindin'ly, had been a help to me. I warn't sech a small, washish critter as I was afore.

The next year I was man enough to divide my tenth with Huldy, an' sech good times as we had investin' it. Now, Huldy was great on what we call the "Inasmuch charities"—"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one o' the least o' these," etc. She was always a findin' some bed-ridden old woman to help, or crippled child, or some other case o' need, while I couldn't hardly sleep o' nights a thinkin' o' the great