

The Millennium at Coffinville

The priest at Holy Family was feeling that low in his mind...

He didn't get enough to eat. It is difficult to be sleek and well fed when you are poor and troubled...

Father Jones was a kindly, jovial soul; a man about sixty, with a pleasant face...

Through all his trials Father Jones' good nature was proverbial, and yet a physiognomist would have declared it a freak of nature.

consider, more pertinently than elegantly, a church row.

"I say he's a peach," declared Dan Casey, the storekeeper...

A group of young men, lounging about the village store, looked mildly interested at this novel idea...

"Well, let's give him things he does want," persisted Mr. Betts, and discussion waxed hot...

"I'll give him a six-shooter," began Jim Betts, when his words were met with derisive shouts...

"I'd just as lief use it on you," growled the blacksmith, significantly, and a little difficulty easily settled...

"I move we give him a vote of thanks," "A vote of nawthin!" cried Dan, now thoroughly aroused...

"He's a Jim-dandy," said Jim Betts, a bright and shining light in the Campbellite church...

"Holy Family!" sniffed Joe Smith, a drummer over from Springfield. "His family is good and holy, judging from some of his parishioners."

"You needn't talk," retorted Dan Casey. "You're a swell Episcopalian, but it strikes me that some of the people at your Holy Innocent's Church haven't enough holiness or innocence either, to hurt 'em."

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conscious of its existence. Now, however, he felt it throbbing painfully and urging him to a speech to which he scarcely felt himself equal.

"I tell you what I'll do, boys," he began, "I'll write to the Board to send him my box."

"Good for you, Parson," cried Dan, clapping him on the back with an uncomfortable friendliness which made the Rev. Ephraim Jones wince from the great hand-like hand.

"None of the men who applauded him so loudly had even an inkling of what the sacrifice meant."

The Rev. Ephraim Jones had been blessed under his vine and fig tree with a wife and eleven olive branches. There had been a baker's dozen, but two had succumbed to malaria, and he had tucked their little yellow faces away in the ground with mingled pain and relief.

Eleven children to feed and cloth, educate and generally equip for the hard tussle of life means care and anxiety untold. The Rev. Ephraim looked each winter for clothing for the rest of the season to the large and abundant missionary box sent out by the generous ladies of a rich Eastern church.

Had Mrs. Jones been at home, perhaps he would have stifled his generous impulse, for she was a wise little soul who kept her husband in excellent order, but the worthy woman was away for a two days' visit to a missionary meeting in Greene County, and Mr. Jones flourished alone like the proverbial green bay tree.

Nine little boys—ranging from fifteen to six—held high carnival at the parsonage, the two youngest children having gone with their mother; so, the cat being away, the mouse was playing with all his might.

The glow of the minister's enthusiasm never dimmed; indeed, his troublesome heart gave him no rest until he had written his letter. He meant to write to the "Board," that far-away refuge of troubled missionaries, but a notice of its pecuniary difficulties met his eye in the Church paper, so he decided to take the matter into his own hands and write directly to the church which had always supplied him.

"Dear Ladies of the Queen Street Church," he began, "I hope you will pardon the liberty I take in writing to you, but I am now wearing your clothes—and I have had so much kindness from you that I venture to ask a favor. Will you please not send me a box this year? It isn't that I don't want it, and my wife will want it worse, but I think it is needed elsewhere. There is a man here who is going to die unless he is looked after. I will try to tell you about him."

Then followed a stirring account of Father Jones' life and character, his good work in Coffinville, his two children. The Rev. Ephraim finished his astonishing epistle after this fashion: "He has given away everything he has; he has saved life to lose his own. Though not one in doctrine, he is a better man than I am, and I earnestly ask you to relieve his difficulties rather than give any thought to me. Hoping to hear from you, and that you will not think me ungrateful for all your kindness to me and mine, I am, your servant in Christ, Ephraim Jones."

"P. S.—Send the box to the Rev. Edward Jones, Coffinville, Mo. I did not mention that the one mentioned is a Catholic priest. He is not any relation of mine, for there are Jones' who are not."

"E. J."

This was the letter which fell like a bombshell into the midst of the Ladies' Home Missionary Society of the Queen Street M. E. Church, which edifice, in stone, exquisite with Gothic carvings, graced the largest street of an important Eastern city.

An anarchistic souvenir could not have more effectually excited the good ladies. All were talking at once—this was not an uncommon proceeding, and at the tops of their voices—but at last the president restored order.

"The simplicity of this letter goes to my heart," said Mrs. Leader, a tall, handsome woman. "The spirit of the man is perfectly beautiful. We cannot deprive him of his box."

"Of course not. It's half done, and all the children's clothes are ready. And we can't let that poor soul starve out there, if he is a Catholic," said Mrs. Bonham, the vice-president, a millionaire in her own right several times over. "Christmas is coming, and I suppose Catholics have as much right to celebrate Christmas as we have," said sweet little crippled Miss Gray.

"Christ died for the ungodly," said Mrs. Fitz-Simmons Blake, tentatively.

"I always thought it must be as hard for Catholics to starve as for the elect," said brisk little Miss Bland, a wicked twinkle in her great gray eyes. "But you wouldn't think it right to do anything for a Catholic priest, would you, Mrs. Leader?"

The president looked uncomfortable, then a bright thought came. "Not as a priest, of course; nor as coming from a church, but from individuals, as a token of our respect for a man who is fine and manly and virtuous. Will you head a subscription with one hundred dollars, ladies. Who will follow?"

Where Mrs. Leader proposed, all were glad enough to concur. Those who were her social equals so honestly loved her that they thought everything she did correct, and those who were below her in the social scale so wished to be associated with her, even in charities, that they gladly followed her example.

Tact will turn a windmill, and in a few moments the astonished secretary was empowered to send the box, a finer one than ever, to the Rev. Ephraim Jones, and a check for five hundred dollars to the Rev. Edward Jones.

"Make it plain how well we think of Mr. Jones' work as a missionary, Miss Tracey," said the president, "and show the other, in a tactful manner, that the gift is to a brave, good man."

"I will try to couch it properly, Mrs. Leader," said the secretary, and the meeting broke up, the ladies going on their way rejoicing, with a proud consciousness of virtue.

Christmas was at hand, the blessed season of kind thoughts and gentle deeds to warm the hearts of giver and receiver and prove as balm to the wounded Sacred Heart which gave itself for men, and giving—broke.

Christmas with its joys, its merriment, its sorrow, too, as memory gives a backward glance to those faces long gone, that once graced the Yule tide board with the bloom of their sweet radiance, Christmas—in happy home season of jollity and even in humble homes a time of blessing, since their self-denial often waits as handmaid upon giving, and "Who gives himself with this gift feeds three, Himself, his hungry neighbor and me."

In Coffinville the snow lay white upon the ground and the rough branches of the scrub oaks and sturdy hickory trees were powdered with its feathery flakes. It had been a bitterly cold winter and snow lay heavy upon many hearts.

Father Jones sat in his old arm chair beside the big box stove in which crackled the fire of hickory logs. It was his one luxury, this roaring fire, and it was his only because of the zeal of a devoted parishioner, who brought him a load from his wood lot whenever his watchful eye saw that the priest's woodpile was diminishing.

The father had changed terribly in the weeks following his illness. Pneumonia is not an easy foe to fight, but he had battled with it manfully, finding the convalescence almost harder to bear than the sickness itself. He needed tonics and delicacies, and soft, warm clothes, and none of which were to be obtained in Coffinville, or for miles around, ever had the wherewithal to obtain them been forthcoming. He felt ill, tired and discouraged. He leaned his head wearily on his hand, pondering how he could provide some Christmas treat for the poor of a parish where all priest and people alike were poor together. As he sat quietly, a stir was heard on the gallery which ran around the house, and a sound of voices. There was a knock at his study door, and Mrs. Hansey entered quietly.

"A box for you, father," she said, as two men carried in a huge wooden box and set it down with a flourish.

"That can't be for me," said Father Jones.

"Rev. Edward Jones, Coffinville, Christian County, Missouri. It's yours, all right," said Dan Casey, grinning broadly. "Merry Christmas to you, Father. Guess your friends didn't all forget you. Let me open it for you."

Father Jones looked on bewildered as the box was opened. Within it was warm clothing of every size and description; blankets, underwear and hose; all of

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