

The Conscience of Alderman McGinnis

Billy Hunter came back from the meeting at almost 12 o'clock, dead tired. His wife had the coffee hot for him, and brought him in a steaming cup without asking a question. Judith Hunter had been out at service before she married Billy, and she had learned a good many things besides cooking beer to a turn.

Billy sat with his legs out and his head sagging on his breast. It was a spring day, but Iowa springs have chilly nights following sunny days, and the warmth of the fire in the air-tight stove was grateful to him. To another observer it might seem a plain little parlour, and he might smile over the mingling of the gorgeous chromes that came with their garden seeds (neatly framed in brown paper), and two or three photographs of famous pictures. But to Billy the fresh paint and bright brass of the ribbon and lace tiles, the plush easy chair and the glistening cabinet organ, made it a dream of luxury. He had eight rooms in the house, if you include the lean-to, which was such a comfortable laundry and summer kitchen for Judith. It was a very good house, indeed, and the garden was so large that Judith kept a tiny poultry yard. In the summer it was beautiful to sit on their own piazza and be shaded by their own plants, and to look at the honeysuckle and geraniums and the green rows of onions and parsley. No landowner in town could be prouder than Billy had been yesterday of his little domain. Now his handsome brow wrinkled sullenly above his black eyes, and he gazed about him in a dreary stare, seeing and not seeing, like a man taking farewell. He sighed before he drank his coffee. His wife, still saying no word, smoothed the short curls which he had had matted on his forehead. He patted her hand. She was a tall woman, as tall as he, and of a fine, supple figure. Her eyes were very bright, and her skin very clear, and she had delicate, irregular features, which changed so prettily when she talked that no one ever found fault with their irregularity.

"It's you that I'm thinking about, Judith, you and the boys," said Hunter. He nodded his head towards the open door, through which one could see a cradle-rocker.

"Well, do, Billy," said Judith. "Come, now, you eat a piece of pie; it'll do you more good now than breakfast, and I'll get your pipe. Are they going to strike, then?"

"Well, as bad. They voted to send a committee to Hollister and ask him to submit their references to an arbitration committee or they'll strike Monday. Hollister won't listen to them. Not to anybody, I guess, and not to Robb and Luke Wigger, anyhow. He sent Luke off a week ago, and the other man is Johnny Mellin, who is as mild as skin milk and was put on to represent us. He'll sit there and get red in the face and say 'That's right, to whoever speaks last.'"

"Did you ever speak to them, Billy?"

"Did you say the things you were going to?"

Billy's face grew red.

"Yes, I did, and I wish I hadn't; I never made a speech before, but I felt so worked up about this I thought I could talk to the boys, just to give 'em plain sense how this here strike ain't got a show on God's earth of succeeding; but—well, I say you got up on my legs and I got scared; I was just as scared as I used to be when I'd play hooky when I was a kid and met Father Mahan, and he'd be saying, 'Is your mother sick, Billy Hunter, that you're out of school?' I could feel my voice wabbling under me, and all I could get out was some fool things about a strike that failed worse than can a strike, and then Robb he got up, so slick and with such a fine lot of words about organized labour and the great union behind us, and capital already on the run, and he worked 'em up about these new fellows (and they are a disgrace; they can't manage their blast now, and they may be killing somebody any day!) and he got the boys fighting mad, and he called me his cautious friend—like I was a coward! And then they all hollered. You see, he's got such a way with him, a little, smiling, white-toothed fellow, and a snazzy steel trap, and there ain't anything on earth we workmen like like a fellow who can talk."

"Can't he see himself it's crazy?"

"He sees we've got \$2,000 in the treasury, and how we've been cut down and cut down this winter, and he sees Hollister's got some big orders on now, and that's all he does see. If you tell him Hollister's obstinate's the devil, he jest laughs and says he's heard folks threaten to bite off their noses to spite their faces; but they don't do it, all the same, and Hollister can bluff him. I don't think Hollister's so bad as they make him out. But he's got the devil's own temper when you git his mad up. They'd have struck this very same night if it hadn't been for young Fitzmaurice."

"But he don't belong to the union," said Judith, who was now seated by her husband, hieing up with absorbing interest: "how'd he get in?"

"Well, we've had him for a lawyer, because he worked for nothing, and he was a poor boy that worked up, and he certainly has done well by us. Well, he came in, in time to see Robb write up the floor with me, and he made a speech; said he'd just got back to town this afternoon with Alderman McGinnis, and he wasn't prepared to speak, but he hoped they would give themselves time to see things clear. These things was necessary, to have a good

and a fighting chance to win, so he got them to appoint the committee, that was the best he could do. Fitz was a good man, but he can't stop the boys. They've got a head of steam on and they're bound to let her whiz. It's a kind of crazy fever. They're mad at me—boys I helped many a time. Now they're mad!"

His wife looked at him wistfully. "If they strike, will it be a long strike, Billy?"

"God knows! I want to see Harry Lossing, and says he: 'Don't let the hotheds fool you. Hollister's got his mad up—he's going to run his business or quit. He knows where he can get some new men, and if you strike he'll get them. You boys will maybe wait a week, a month, two months, and then you'll have to go back on his terms, or you won't have the chance to go back at all.'"

Judith clasped her hands together involuntarily. "But if you strike how will we pay for the house?"

"We can't pay for the house. Not unless—"

He hesitated, and she completed the word for him: "Not unless my brother could pay you back what you owe him." But he'll be out of a job, too."

"That's it. And we got to live, too. And if the stores trust us they'll have to be paid. Mr. Lossing he was awfully kind and said, 'You tell Judy not to worry, she shan't lose her house,' but we can't lay right down on him. I don't see how a man, jest to get himself talked about, jest to make a name for the newspapers, and have folks say what a big man he is—I don't see how he can be bringing other men to ruin that way. Josh felt awful 'bout it; he got up and said how he was situated, and how, after being sick so much and his family sick, he was jest gettin' on his feet, and this would knock him flat again. He most cried he felt so bad. But it didn't do no good. They're crazy!"

Judith found no word of cheer, but she did not ask him whether he could not keep at work whatever the others did. The workman's wife recognizes the workman's code of honour as well as he. "There's only one man," said Billy, "who can do anything; that's Alderman McGinnis."

"Oh, Billy, but you and you got some of the boys to vote against him!"

"I don't know; that's what Mr. Lossing said, and young Harry, and you living so long in their family, and they giving us such nice presents, of course I wanted to work like he asked, and I didn't think it was right sending so much money on the streets—though I got a good deal of it out to a street job myself, little as I ever thought it!" he added, with a groan.

"I wish I hadn't gone against him now, for I got to go to see him with Fitzmaurice and young Lossing tomorrow."

"Will he help you, do you think, Billy?"

"He ain't much hope. You see he's after an old of land or some kind of inspectorship, good pay and awful little work, and Timberly can git it for him, and Timberly's for the strike, and I bet he won't mad Timberly and the boys, too."

"But why is Mr. Timberly for striking?"

"Don't he know—?"

"He don't care, Judy. He's running for the Legislature, and he wants the labour vote, so he's making a big splash."

"How smart you are, Billy, about such things," said the wife, proudly.

But the unfeigned praise only brought a dark cloud to the man's brow. "I was forgetting another bad thing," said he. "Morris, the foreman, he's going to clean to his wife's folks—he's got a job there, and he told me to-day he recommended me to the boss, and he as much as said he'd speak about me to Hollister—"

"Oh, Billy, do you call that bad news? It would be fifteen dollars a month more—it would pay the payments on the house!"

"And do you think," said Billy, bitterly, "I got to think they'll be making a striker a foreman? No, they'll bring a stranger along, and put him over us!"

He got up; he began to walk the floor in strong agitation. "Then it ain't all that—my money; I've worked at the Hollister, man and boy, for almost fifteen years. Well I remember my poor mother fetching me to Moore, who was foreman then, and his promising me a job. I began at a dollar and fifty cents a week, and I was that proud—ch, Judy, I'll be lost without the shop! One day Hollister, the old man himself, went through and seen me at a casting. 'That's a good job you're making, Hunter,' says he. He remembers my name. He knows a good job, who's he? He's got a lot of good things about the old man, if he is pig-headed."

"I can't but think it'll come right," urged Judith. She comforted him, unreasonably, but just as efficiently as wives do comfort their husbands, whatever their class, I may say, whatever their intellect. Inevitably, under the spell of her pretended hopefulness and her real tenderness, his heart softened, and his sore vanity and soother. But in the morning before he fell asleep, perhaps it was later before the wife, who had seemed so peacefully slumbering, drifted beyond the reach of her own foreboding.

Alderman McGinnis was popularly supposed to hold the Eighth ward in the hollow of his hand. Rumour wagged her tongue, and shook her head, saying that the Alderman's paving contracts this year private avocation was that of

a contractor, she whispered how he led jockeying parties of Aldermen on visits to other cities at the expense of rival railroads, being to haul rival brickknacker's brick, and how they paid too freely of hospitality, both solid and liquid, furnished them in some way. She declared aloud, he was in every job" ever passed by the City Council. But the Eighth ward, after every explosion of vitriol on the part of his friends at large, remained and re-elected Alderman McGinnis.

It was in the latest unassuming assault that young Harry Lossing had looked home with the popular Alderman—and been defeated. Harry at this time had just been taken into business with his father; he was just beginning to feel the exhilarating pleasure of a new outlook on the world, and young and strong that they welcomed rather than flinched from burdens, and he was in the first phase of a young man's enthusiasm for municipal reform. He had spent days running about the town, marshalling the laudable and reluctant forces of the "decent citizens" against a certain paving contract of the Alderman's, and when the Alderman was set strong for him the contract, had defied him in his own ward.

Therefore, McGinnis had been elected by rather more than the usual majority, and that was how it came to pass that poor Billy Hunter all night was haunted by snatches of his own speeches against the ardor of the Eighth ward, and tortured his brain trying (in the clumsy fashion of a man rearing five orphan children with a cent from her husband, nor so much as a lump of coal from the poor overseer, and yet of no one in the ward were there recorded more acts of kindness, small and great. The widow's Sunday cap showed at the window. She was a large-featured, grey-haired woman, who smiled with her eyes oftener than with her lips, a woman that struck a cold chill, but it wouldn't be well for her to use that word in speaking of her in the Eighth ward. No less than three nosegays and a loose bunch of hothouse roses brightened the table before her. She beckoned with her hand, and Tommy led the way into the house, the door of which was opened by her daughter. The Alderman had gone on, the girl explained; he only stopped to bring her another some roses, but wouldn't she gentlemen stop in—her mother was wanting to speak with Mr. Lossing.

"I was wanting to ask you, knowing you knew Mr. Hollister; will they strike at the Hollister?" the widow asked, an eager tremor in her tones.

"I hope not, I don't know," answered Harry, whom Tommy in his young days had often brought to see the widow, who were looking for McGinnis. In hopes he can do something to stop it."

"That he can and that he will," declared the widow, earnestly; "he is a good man, Michael McGinnis. And the influence he has is wonderful. Though why shouldn't he have, when he's always helping somebody? But I heard yesterday the men were terribly hot, and he's quiet. I've been that distressed I can't quiet my mind at all!"

"But," said Harry, rather stupidly, "I thought your sons weren't in the Hollister?"

The widow looked surprised. "No, to be sure, sir; God be thanked! Did you think it was for myself I was scared? Oh, it ain't for me and mine. It's for all the sore hearts there'll be in this neighbourhood. Poor Mrs. Whinnys, she was crying over it this very morning. 'The boys'll be on the street from morning till night,' says she, 'and God knows what'll happen.' You've heard of her trouble? 'Twas the strike-made the fight. And Molly Aiken, the dressmaker, she was so worried she wouldn't work, and there's more misery than jest losing wages comes from a strike, and so I told the Alderman."

"I hope he agreed with you, Mrs. Hoffman," Billy spoke out of his anxiety, meeting her eye at that second.

"He says, 'Don't you fret, Mrs. Hoffman, it'll all come right in the wash.' It ain't for me and mine. And I'm hoping more now."

Billy's own hopes began to warm his heart again. He left the widow's comforted. But Harry Lossing frowned. Tommy's handsome Irish face was as impassive as a mask.

"They drove to many places after the Alderman. They heard of more than one saying how she wouldn't work. It was a joke, and then a shrewd bargain, and most often a trivial, good-natured kindness. But they did not find him. And presently Fitzmaurice, who had grown thoughtful, spoke testily:—

"I hope to the Lord that Mac ain't lying low, waiting for the cat to jump before he commits suicide. But it looks like it. If he is it's all up with heading off the strike."

"Maybe he's in Moseley's," suggested Billy; "he goes there sometimes, or maybe home."

"It isn't home. Did you see that boy striking to me at the last place we stopped? I sent him to Mac's, and he ain't got back. Mac hadn't been home, and he'd know he wouldn't be home for dinner. I don't like the way things look. But we can try Moseley's. No harm in trying, as the burglar said to the latch-key."

Moseley kept the corner grocery. He was sunning himself on his stove, smoking one of his own "elegant cigars," which he retailed at a nickel apiece.

"Mac?" he said. "Why, certainly, I see him half two hours ago; he was driving by with Captain Timberly."

"Much obliged," said Tommy. Harry's jaw dropped.

"Say, they're going to have a strike at Hollister's," the grocer continued,

and the two young men stood uncertain. "I hope not. Strike's a fearful bad thing for business; fearful! I got a lot of Hollister men on my nocks. They're going to pay, there ain't no better way than working people, but when you ain't got the money—where are you?"

"That's right," said Tommy; "good morning." He looked at Harry. Harry was driving very fast. "What's your next move?" said he.

"I'm going to Hollister himself," said Harry. McGinnis doesn't mean to risk his popularity, and he has no more conscience than a salmon sign. I'll drop you wherever you say, and Hunter and I will go to Hollister—I know he's at the office this morning—and we'll talk to him as two honest men to a third, and we may do something."

"I may not be an honest man," said Tommy, quietly; "but if you let me, I'll go with you. I can't help it if I didn't find Mac."

Harry gave his friend a gleam of his blue eyes, which missed fire, however, for Tommy was driving along the wide street lined on either side by one and two-story houses, many of them freshly painted, all with their little gardens. The windows in general were white, but curtains to one side. You could see that the families in the Eighth ward kept a parlour. There were few people on the streets. The plain church, with the gleaming red walls and white spire that bore aloft the symbol of sacrifice and peace, set forth a single peal of bells. Tommy, half unobscuredly, bent his head and crossed himself. He looked up and saw the grim walls of the great Hollister's home. Hollister meant to run his own business. The smallest of the doors opened, through which four men emerged in a huddle. One of them swung the door half open again for a parting speech. He was a portly man, still young, with black curls that sat in the sun. He wore a dazzling spring suit of gray flannel and a scarlet tie, and one large white handkerchief held gold-head cane.

"If there's a Mac himself!" exclaimed Tommy.

"And Robb and Johnny and Luke with him!" gasped Hunter.

The three men looked up and nodded. Johnny Mellin bestowed a furtive wink and smile on the astonished Hunter, who barely had noticed—; for Fitzmaurice had asked:—

"How about the strike?" And the Alderman had answered:—"Oh, the strike's off, I guess. Good morning, Mr. Lossing. While you're talking to Mr. Lossing, I want a word with Mr. Fitzmaurice and Mr. Hunter; I guess he and I will agree on this business, though we don't always. Hey, Mr. Hunter?"

Billy coloured and choked. But he was spared necessity for reply since the Alderman (towards whom he now cast a wistful glance) had expressed by the young Huesian had tread one foot on the hub of the wheel, and was explaining the morning events to Tommy Fitzmaurice with much relief.

"I heard something down town last night that made me open my eyes. The idea of their cooking up such a thing when my back was turned! Well, I didn't lose no time. I went straight to Hollister, and saw how he felt; he knew I would give him straight goods and treated me nice, and I got him to promise to see the committee, Robb and all"—he winked the eye furthest from Billy slowly at the young man on the front seat, and Tommy nodded gravely, to imply that he appreciated how far gratified vanity might work with a young labour leader—then I saw Wigger. He looks like a fellow included in the wink, and the elbow on the cushion laid moved a hand suggestively in the moulder's direction—

"I guess we all understand that Luke wants; he wants to be greased! And I guess, if the truth was known, he's pretty near the bottom of this trouble. Robb's ambitious and young, and wants to make a name for himself, and goes off at half-cock, but he's honest as the sun. He looks like a fellow who went into this hoping to git his job back—that Luke—or to git money if he couldn't; you got to bluff him, or you got to buy him. Hollister wouldn't buy him—so, seeing I know nothing or two about brother Wigger, I bluffed him. Never mind how! His only chance to git any kind of a job is from me, and every time I see him, I tell Robb, Johnny Mellin, and for you can put it Johnny told Robb and I, the real state of things, and I added a little, and we went to the office. The old man saw us. Whenever there was any hitch, I told 'em a story, and—well, before we went the old man had his cigars out, and I guess Robb knows it's better sometimes to settle a strike than to let her flicker."

"He's after a reputation as a peace-maker with honour now. But we got to handle this afternoon, all of us. Git our men together, and then Robb will give 'em stuff, and Hollister has promised a little bit, and we'll have the meeting and settle the strike fast! See?"

They were all there (for Billy was flattered deeply by the way the Alderman asked his opinion on subjects of which he knew a good deal) discussing how to see the most men, and do the most in the shortest time, when Harry Lossing rose sticking in his seat. "Look here, Lossing, you may say what you please, that Irishman has something more than boodle in him"—this was one of them—the way he managed those fellows, and by—the way he managed me was immense! And I'm hanged if I don't believe he was disinterested in the affair. He'll get knifed by Timberly for his meddling

(a true prediction), and I don't see that he stands to gain a thing except his consciousness that he's been decent!" With these words puzzling him, Harry went straight at the fence—

"I wasn't sure but you would feel, Mr. McGinnis, say he you would feel."

"You ever seen a big strike, young man?"

"Yes, I know what it is."

"Well, now, take it in. This is the way that I represent to the best of my humble ability. As long as I'm representing it, I go for what will help, and for—against what will hurt it. Every time, look at those fellows! They wouldn't win that strike. Hollister's hard some ways, and a deplorably aggravating, but he's honest, and he does a good many fair things. Strikers have got to have a howling grievance to win the public sympathy, and they ain't got it. They couldn't get sympathy or contributions, or pressure, or nothing! What would happen?"

A strike is the devil. It stirs up a blood anger. It allows us to lose the sense of those hard feelings, and the boys idling on the streets, and drinking, and the lights, and the women crying at home, and the storekeepers losing money, and the little bits of furniture going to the auction-room, and quarrels between friends—it's the very devil!"

"But Timberly?" Tommy said this.

"Timberly be hanged!" said the Alderman with deliberation.

"You haven't broken with Tim?" cried Tommy.

"I just have, then," said the Alderman, "between Mike McGinnis getting an office, no matter how good, and the Eighth ward going without meat for supper, and having to sell its cabinet organs and sewing machines, and losing the little house that ain't quite paid for—the office ain't it; that's all I got to say!"

"Good leader!" shouted Tommy, and he wrung the Alderman's hand. Billy, blushing violently, held out his own.

"You talk God's truth, Alderman," cried he, "and if you'll run for anything, from President down, I'll be honoured to work for you. And Mr. Lossing can't blame me."

He said something about being glad to work with McGinnis that day himself, and paid him a neat compliment with an ingenious flush on his own young cheeks. Then, in turn, he held out his hand.

"Oh, that's all right," said McGinnis, looking rather surprised. It was several years before he understood entirely all that simple gesture meant for young Lossing. "Well, I see Father Mahan down the street, and I must git him after the boys. See you later, gentlemen."

Billy's eyes followed him across the meadow. "He's a good man!" sighed Billy, from the depth of a grateful heart.

"I think myself the recording angel can afford to do considerable blotting for young Lossing on account of this day's work," said McGinnis, "as has a conscience, after all. And Tom, I've been thinking this morning. I begin to see why Mac is so popular. If we fellows would study some of the machine methods, without dropping any of our principles either, we mightn't find election such a blamed cold day."

Tommy did not return the expected smile.

"I've been thinking, too," said Thomas Fitzmaurice, "if it's right for him to sacrifice his own interests and risk his popularity for the good of the ward, why isn't it right to do as much and sacrifice the interests of the ward, too, if necessary, for the good of the whole town?"

(Harry Lossing's municipal good government.)

"That's reform!"

"Oh, Lord! I guess I'll have to go for it!" groaned Tommy.

And thus in one Sunday morning (Alderman Michael McGinnis lose a good office, avert a strike, and unconsciously plant the seed that was to convert the brightest of his machine politicians slowly but surely into a reformer—McFure's Magazine.

IS THE JEW DEGENERATING?

The degeneracy of the Jews as an athletic nation has attracted the attention of Sandow, "the strong man," who has been confiding his views on the subject to a representative of the Jewish Chronicle. Incidentally he gives us his opinion of the baneful effects of the conditions of city life on the human frame. "If you ask my candid opinion (and Sandow) what is the athletic position on the Jewish race in comparison with others of the world, I should answer regretfully that it is the lowest. The Jews require physical education more than any other nation. This is all the more remarkable when you come to remember that their ancestors were those splendid warriors of the Bible, and the comparison of the muscularity of the ancient Hebrews with the modern is none too flattering. The Jews are a very old race. The ancient Hebrews were brought up to the athletic and warlike exercise, but latter-day Jews have devoted their minds solely to business. It has been all head-work with them, and the tax on the brain without the culture of the body must produce injurious results."

Mrs. Celeste Coon, Syracuse, N. Y., writes: "I have seen a number of many kinds of food without producing a burning, excruciating pain in my stomach. I took Paroselle's Pills according to direction under the head of 'Dyspepsia and indigestion.' One box entirely cured me. I can now eat anything I choose, without distressing myself as I have." These Pills do not cause pain or griping, as it should be used when a cathartic is required.