

The Days of the Year

By Newton Forbes

"Few and evil have been the days of the years of my pilgrimage."

THIS frank admission on the part of Amos Witherbee did not create a sensation at the class-meeting which followed the regular Sunday morning preaching at Clark's Corners. Familiarity may breed indifference, if not contempt, even in a class-meeting. The good people of Clark's Corners had heard Amos make this self-same confession at every class-meeting held in their little church during the previous ten years. It seemed good and pious—eminently the correct thing, in fact—for him to lay claim to a shocking depravity, especially as they had never heard a word from any other person

which would in the least substantiate the accusation. Had he been known to play cards, to attend the theatre, to drink liquor or to transgress the rules of the discipline in any way they would, no doubt, have bestirred themselves, and would have had him expelled as an ungodly man; but, as things were, his references to an evil pilgrimage were looked upon merely as a fine exhibition of humility.

Why, look at Miss Elvira Simpson! She was a gentle, old maid and everybody knew that she had never had even a flirtation. Yet she always talked in class-meeting about her wayward heart

and about fierce temptations which assailed her on every side! The evil pilgrimage, over which Amos almost seemed to gloat, was "of a piece" with Elvira's wayward heart.

Then, Amos had always contended that his pilgrimage days had been few. To those of his fellow class-members who might be suspiciously inclined this went to show, indisputably, that his whole confession was highly metaphorical, or, as some of those who sat in the seats of the scornful were wont to say a "sort of sanctimonious josh." Amos, while his face was of a deep pink and his figure straight and buoyant, was certainly no stripling. His bald dome and the fringe of snowy, white hair surrounding it proclaimed the days of the years of his pilgrimage as at least three hundred and sixty-five multiplied by sixty-five. Setting aside such fellows as Methuselah, Amos did not seem to have sufficient reason to complain as to scarcity of days.

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Amos was here interrupted by a loud "Amen" from Pastor Cragg who had a habit of interjecting this exclamation ("buttin' in with it," as some of the boys used to say) during the "testimonies" of his flock. Amos proceeded, keeping up his self-deprecatory vein, and finally sat down amidst a chorus of amens.

He was followed by Nelson Bowers, a big, solemn man with a long, red beard. Bowers didn't testify as to any depravity on his part. His past record seemed to be highly satisfactory to himself. In effect he declared that he had made admirable progress and he voiced his firm determination to "go on and on —"

Nelson always stopped just as he was declaring his intention to go on and on, and in this way he always left his hearers a little in doubt as to his proposed ultimate goal. But everybody knew that Nelson had a high opinion of his peroration, and that he distinctly desired that his testimony should be followed by the singing of a hymn with a refrain about "Marching on, on, on; marching on, on, on —"

Therefore Lem Briggs, who started the tunes, at once struck up and the rest joined in. Meanwhile Nelson sat with his head in his hands, evidently overcome with the tumult of his emotions.

It was in the reception of the testimonies of Amos and Nelson that one of the peculiarities of Clark's Corners was shown up vividly. Perhaps the same sort of thing exists in other congregations where a testimony is required from a member at certain intervals. Amos' confession of depravity was heard and disbelieved, and he remained a member in good standing. Nelson's loud affirmation of a militant and triumphant religious spirit was heard and, to a large extent, disbelieved; yet, he too was allowed to remain a member in good standing.

Amos had come to Clark's Corners ten years previous to the time of which we write, bringing with him his little grand-daughter, Amy. He had purchased fifty acres which he cultivated thriftily and seemed to be in quite independent circumstances. He had sent the little girl to school, always showering upon her all the wealth of his affection. While he lived for the girl, he had always been a good neighbor, honest and liberal in his dealings, a constant supporter of the church, and in every way a thoroughly useful and esteemed citizen.

Nelson Bowers, on the other hand, had a hard reputation as a grinder of the poor or of anyone who fell into his power. He was rich and he had made his money, like, probably, not a few other rural capitalists, partly by acts of tyranny and petty meanness. Hardly anyone gave him a good name, but many were kept quiet because they owed him money. But he gave a little more to the church than any of the other members, and it may have been partly for this reason that his class-meeting testimony was always followed by the rather vociferous singing of that hymn so admirably designed to encourage and inspire the doughty, Christian warrior.

A few more testimonies followed and then, with a closing hymn, the class-meeting was at an end. The members filed out to the broad platform, where, around the open door, the young folk and those of the older ones who had never achieved class-meeting status were congregated.

That platform had been the scene of many meetings as spirited and interesting as those which were held inside the church. Before the services began and after they were ended, groups had been accustomed to stand on that platform discussing many matters, hardly any of which had the remotest relation to the things of the soul. It was here that the latest tit-bits of gossip were retailed.

The platform, though serving as the threshold of the House of God, had been the scene of more than one wordy combat. So far, these encounters had been between women, and as yet no blows had been struck, but harsh recrimina-

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