

THE PARSON'S VOTE.

"I don't believe it; he'll not do it," old Judge Roy said, thumping his stick angrily against the ground.

"Parson's a fiery man," answered his companion, who was sly-looking, with a shifty glance. "I mind the time the Whigs voted away the Church lands how he preached at them, down into their very faces, for all they were his own party."

"That was one thing, this is another," said the Judge obstinately; "Vote against a man that has sat under him from a boy, that everybody speaks well of, and for a Catholic too!" and the Judge felt his churchism as well as his Toryism boil up at the thought. "That's what comes of clergymen meddling in politics."

"Come, come, Judge!" said a decent looking man who was crossing the square, and stopped at the last words, "A man's a right to his own opinions if he is a parson. It's my belief a man's born Whig or Tory like as a cabbage is a cabbage, and you can no more make a decent Tory out of a man that's born Whig than you can expect a cabbage to turn out cauliflower. It ain't in the nature of things."

The three men separated, the Judge stamping across to the court house, frowning, and shaking his head. For it was the universal opinion in Elderberry that Parson Jermyn had got himself into a hobble this time with his politics. An ardent Whig, he had insisted on voting with his party election after election, in spite of the scandal it caused in his Tory congregation, and time after time they had forgiven him, for the sake of the real affection they bore him. But this time matters had come to a crisis, and couldn't be winked at any longer, for wasn't the Tory candidate a member of his own congregation, one who had sat under him from a boy as Judge Roy had said, a man well to do, and of good standing in Elderberry, while to cap everything, the Whigs had brought forward on their side a Roman Catholic, a man of no birth whatever, "who didn't even know how to come into a room," as Mrs. Roy said plaintively. There was no doubt about the strong feeling in the congregation that their pastor had been indulged long enough, and that this time he must yield.

It was this very matter that Dr. Jermyn and his wife were discussing in their little parlour one day shortly before the election. The Rector, or Parson Jermyn, as he was commonly styled in Elderberry, was walking quickly up and down the room—his wont when excited—his hands behind his back. He was a tall fine-looking old man, with a resolute air that boded ill for concessions.

"But, John," Mrs. Jermyn said in her dubious, hesitating way, "suppose you didn't vote at all. You could just stay away you know, and not vote for anybody."

"Yes, that would be so like me, Mary," answered her husband sarcastically. "Hide like a rat in my hole because I was too much of a coward to face the consequences! No, I'd rather vote on the other side than do that."

"The man's such a good man in every way," pleaded Mrs. Jermyn; "You've not a thing against him but that he's a Tory."

"Oh Mary, Mary," retorted the Rector with a half comical, half angry expression, "that's the way with you women. So long as the man's not a liar or a thief, you can't see why it won't do as well to vote for him as anybody else. Besides the other, poor wretch, is a Catholic," and the Rector laughed as he recalled the solemnity with which an old lady of his congregation had said to him that it was "his duty as a Christian and a clergyman to keep down paganism." His didactic parishioner meant Papacy, but made a mistake.

Mary Jermyn sighed as her eyes wandered round the pleasant little parlour, and out through the open window, to the grassplot beneath.

"But John," she said soberly, "suppose they force you to resign."

The Rector stood quite still a second or two. Then he went over and sat down beside his wife, all his excitement gone.

"Mary," he said gently, laying his hand on hers, which was resting on the arm of her chair, "you've been a good wife to me all my days. What would you have me do? Vote against I what believe to be right for the sake of my own interest, and for fear of the consequences?"

Mary Jermyn was silent a moment, then with a half smile, half sigh, "Ah, John, John," she answered, "you've far too much fight in you for an old man and a parson." And Dr. Jermyn knew well enough which way her sympathy went.

Election time was an extraordinary period in Elderberry. Market-day, usually the most important in the week, shrank into insignificance beside it. Not only was it a kind of general festivity for unruly spirits, delighting in rioting, but of late years the parties had become evenly matched enough to make the contest an exceedingly hot one. The usual swaggering prophecies were made on both sides, but a very general hope and fear prevailed that the balance was going to dip in favour of the Whigs. The hustings stood not far from the market-house in a corner of the square, giving the place a look of unusualness, and creating a sort of anticipatory excitement in the inhabitants, especially in the children, who played round them and over them, and held mimic elections in imitation of their elders. The very returning officers, as well known to most of the townspeople as their own doorposts, had an unfamiliar air about them as they walked down the main street the morning the poll opened, newly clothed upon with the importance of the occasion.

At first the polling went quietly enough, but as the day wore on the square gradually filled with people. There were country folk from all the neighbourhood round, coming in three in a seat as the fashion was; French-Canadians from the nearest settlement, the quaint neat dress of the women lending picturesqueness to the scene; quite a sprinkling of Indians too, whose votes were of no value but whose political opinions were never-

theless strictly defined, for as "Old John," one of the chiefs, said, "White man lose, he cross, no whiskey; white man win, give John much whiskey." So the Indians were generally to be found on the winning side, and were rarely disappointed.

In the afternoon matters began to look more serious. One or two plumpers had occurred, a plumper being the lumping of an elector's votes in favour of one candidate, the constituency, a large one, returning three members; and plumpers always had a bad effect on the temper of the crowd. Women began to leave the square. There was much scuffling to get up close to the hustings, and remarks began to be enforced with occasional stones. Liquor too had circulated pretty freely. Votes worth one glass of brandy earlier in the day now brought three and four. Many of the little back-parlours of stores round the square were turned into impromptu grogshops, where the zealous on either side plied doubtful voters with whiskey and arguments, till they brought them to see matters in a proper light, after which they had generally required further support to the hustings. The Whig candidate, on trying to make himself heard, was greeted with a yell of "No Popery!" to which a low-minded Catholic in the crowd promptly responded, by planting a rotten egg full in the respectable Tory chest which sent it forth, bidding him take his rotten opinions home. About five o'clock, when the excitement was at its height, a whisper ran through the outskirts of the mob, "The Parson's coming! Parson Jermyn's coming!" Everybody knew about the Parson's dilemma; and everybody had wondered how he would get himself out of it. Some thought he would stick to his party; others declared, "Principles were all very well, but when it came to a man's bread and butter—," with an expressive hiatus.

Dr. Jermyn came up to the crowd with the long, swinging tread that seemed to belie his age, his head slightly thrown back, as was his wont when acting out a difficult resolution. The people parted for him readily enough. Some of the members of his congregation threw themselves in his road, with an anxious attempt at joking, "Well, Doctor, going to hold by your own this time, I hope!" But the Rector pushed by without answering, and when he stood right in front of the hustings, in his distinct, sonorous voice, coming out more distinctly than usual in the momentary hush, he gave in his vote for the Whig candidate. A loud cheer went up from the one party, and groans and hisses from the other, quickly suppressed however, for it was "the Parson" after all, and a parson everybody liked, in spite of his politics. But as he threaded his way back through the crowd again, it was wonderful how his Tory friends got out of his road, while friendly Catholics appeared on every side, anxious to fraternise and shake hands. On the outskirts he met Judge Roy. The two men had been cronies for the last forty years, ever since John Jermyn, a slim young Englishman, had come out and settled in the little Canadian town, having a pitched battle every election time, and then tacitly agreeing to bury politics for the sake of the friendship between them.

"Well, Judge," said the Rector, stopping from force of habit, but the old man glared at him with a half-angry, half-defiant look, as much as to say, "How dare you make me quarrel with you?" and passed him without speaking.

John Jermyn walked rather more soberly home. The tinge of excitement, which made anything in the shape of a contest pleasurable to him, had faded, and certain rather unpleasant consequences began to loom before him. Mary's quick ear even caught a suspicion of anxiety in the triumphant tone with which he said, as he seated himself opposite her at the tea-table, "Well, Mary, I voted with my party, and I think we're pretty sure of our man too."

Next Sunday morning the congregation of St. James' turned out to a man, but it was not to the little wooden church opposite the square that they wended their way. Down they flocked to the Kirk, to the embarrassment of the beadle, who could scarcely find them all seats, and not at all to the gratification of the worthy minister, who was treating his flock to an old sermon that day, a little trimmed over to pass for new. Precisely at his usual time Dr. Jermyn came out of his vestry and mounted the pulpit stairs. The unusual stillness had prepared him for something, but not for what actually met his gaze. The church was almost literally empty. Perhaps there were a dozen there altogether, perhaps not so many. A few women who wouldn't have thought "the Doctor" could do wrong if he preached Mormonism to them, some children and one or two men, the latter chiefly from other churches, brought thither by curiosity. The bare pews seemed to look reproachfully up at him, as if saying "How could you empty us so?" But those that were there that day said when they went home that never had the Rector preached a better sermon, and it would be a bad day for St. James' when it fell into the hands of Chum, as the lanky curate, Cholmondeley, was called with the brevity that sometimes passes current for wit. All that week Dr. Jermyn waited to hear from his congregation, but they made no sign. The injury was too deep. If the Tories had won the day all might perhaps have been forgiven; but to lose the election, and have their clergyman turn against them too, rankled in every Tory breast and could not be forgotten. If he met any of them on the street they either affected not to see him or treated him with formal politeness. He declared he saw Judge Roy dodging up a back lane to get out of his road.

Dr. Jermyn preached the second time to empty pews, and the following day sent in his resignation, which was accepted, and the curate appointed in his stead. Nothing now remained for him but to preach for the last time and yield up his position to another. There was no fear of his not having a congregation this time. Back the people flocked with a sensation of comfort at falling into their old places and routine once more, with an undercurrent of conviction too that the days of good preaching were over for St. James', for the curate was dry in his youth, "and a man doesn't