

A Matter of Dollars and Cents

BY GEORGE BARTON
IN BENZIGER'S MAGAZINE

CONCLUDED.

While these things were going on, Francis Bassett contrived to make a number of calls upon Helen Gaskill. Ostensibly it was to consult her about the progress of the campaign for increasing the circulation of the *Clarion*. As a matter of fact, he was showing a growing tenderness that caused Helen to become unaccountably shy.

"I'm a Protestant of the Protestants," he told her one evening, "but I would be false to myself if I did not tell you how much I admire your courage and boldness in this business. I know that you are inspired by your love of the faith, and I'm sure there must be something in a religion which is capable of inspiring such devotion."

"Yes," she added mischievously, "and of adding so materially to the circulation of the *Clarion*."

He became grave at that allusion. "Miss Gaskill," he said softly, "I wanted very much to make the *Clarion* the one big newspaper of Burlington, but I would feel that my work had been an utter failure if you thought I was prompted by merely mercenary motives—that I was in for dollars and cents."

"I never had such a thought," she retorted quickly. "I believe that you have been sincere, and I am sure you will give me credit for equal honesty—that I have made my fight against Stoneman according to the rules."

Two months more passed, and then Helen felt that it was time to play her final card. Department store advertising is a big factor in modern journalism. The largest establishment in Burlington was conducted with conspicuous success by Adam Hemingway. He had a page "ad" in the *Banner* every day in the week. It was the backbone of the advertising patronage of that newspaper. It meant not only revenue but circulation, because the "ad" attracted a certain number of women readers who looked upon it as real news—quite as important in its way as the other happenings of city life. Hemingway had never advertised in the *Clarion*. It was his rule to use only one paper, and although he felt that the *Banner* had lost much circulation, he imagined that it was still the leading paper in town. It was for Helen Gaskill to bring disillusionment.

One Monday morning Hemingway received letters from three of his charge customers instructing him to close their accounts. The next day four similar letters reached his store. Before the week ended twenty customers had quit in the same manner. This was too much for the shrewd business man. He started an investigation, and the reports he received opened his eyes. In almost every case he was told that his old customers would no longer read the bigoted *Banner*, and as that was the only newspaper in which his advertisement was printed they should have to quit dealing with him. He did not act immediately. He was the kind of man who wants to be sure that he is right and then proceeds to carry out his plans. He had no religion of his own and had only casually noticed the articles in the *Banner*. They had not affected him in the least in one way or the other. But now he realized that they had been highly objectionable to hundreds of his customers. That affected him very deeply. Next he made a quiet inquiry into the circulation of the *Banner*, and that convinced him that it was time to desert the sinking journalistic ship. Two weeks later his page "ad" appeared in the *Clarion* and disappeared from the columns of the *Banner*. Stone-

man called on him in a state of distress.

"I don't mind your advertising in the *Clarion*, but can't you give half of your business to the *Banner*—at least for the sake of old times?"

Hemingway fixed his cold, gray eyes on Carson Stoneman.

"You know very well that it is my fixed and unalterable policy to advertise in only one paper in Burlington, and that the paper with the larger circulation."

"But," pleaded the other, "you've been with us for so many years—I thought possibly as a matter of friendship..."

"Stoneman," interrupted the other harshly, "there's no sentiment about business. It's a matter of dollars and cents with me."

The editor and publisher of the *Banner* shivered as he listened to the very phrase he had employed in his talk with Helen Gaskill. It was as though Hemingway had doused him with a bucket of ice-cold water.

"Then—then there is nothing more to be said?"

"Nothing," exclaimed the other, with an abrupt gesture of dismissal. "You've made a bally fool of yourself, and I have a constitutional objection to doing business with fools."

This was the last straw that broke down the already overburdened back of the *Banner*. The expected happened. It lost more circulation and advertising, too. The gain of the Hemingway page "ad" placed the *Clarion* on the top wave of prosperity. All of the lesser advertisers hurried to follow the lead of Hemingway and to place their notices in the *Clarion*. Francis Bassett increased his rates, and the circulation of the *Clarion* increased to such an extent that he was compelled to put in new presses. It was a repetition of the old adage that "nothing succeeds like success."

No politician suddenly hurled from office feels any more lonely and friendless than the editor and publisher of an influential daily newspaper who has lost his power and importance. Carson Stoneman was a bad loser, and that did not help the declining fortunes of the *Banner*. He became surly and disagreeable, and even the handful of fanatics who had egged him on in his suicidal policy, now deserted him in his hour of need. A more courageous man would have made a better fight for life. The *Banner* continued, it is true, but it lacked gumption and no one cared what it said. Six months after the loss of the Hemingway "ad" the familiar official yellow poster on the front of the building announced that the *Banner* was in the hands of the sheriff. In two years it had passed from prosperity to bankruptcy, and it gave up the ghost without a struggle. It did not actually die—newspapers hardly ever do—and it was re-incarnated under a new title and became an evening appendage of the morning *Clarion*.

Early one morning Carson Stoneman left Burlington—unhonored, unmourned and unsung. The beckoning finger of Opportunity had called him to the editorship of a slimy weekly, whose chief writer had committed suicide. That same night Francis Bassett called at the home of Helen Gaskill. He was strangely quiet for a time and then he took her hand tenderly.

"Helen," he whispered, "you have been the best circulation manager and the wisest editorial advisor the *Clarion* has ever known. I—I want you to manage me—and the paper always."

She flushed and turned her face away.

"Don't you think," she murmured, "that you would be happy with some one of your own faith?"

"I am sure of it," he retorted, "that's why I want you."

She stared at him with wide open eyes.

He laughed jovially.

"Don't look so incredulous. Father Skelly has had me under instruction for three months, and I'm to be received into the Church to-morrow. You can thank Carson Stoneman. His attacks started me investigating and I've discovered the truth. That's all!"

The tears were glistening in her eyes, but there was a teasing smile on her lips.

"Then it's not a matter of dollars and cents with you?"

"Far from it," he cried heartily. "I want you for yourself alone, and some day in the future we'll sit down and collaborate in writing the story of 'The Bigot and the Boomerang!'"

Light In The Darkness.

Dennis Scott sat in the shadow of the wings awaiting his call. It was his last rehearsal, and to-morrow night he was to make his debut. He sat straight up, with his hands resting on the violin which lay across his knees, his lips slightly parted and his cheeks flushed with excitement. A woman with a deep contralto voice was singing on the stage, but he, instead of listening to her, was building castles in the air and dreaming dreams of future fame and glory. Then the voice on the stage grew fainter and softer, leaving the last sweet note still quivering in the air. Scott heard the deep breath from the little audience in the wings, thinking with pride that his applause would be still more enthusiastic.

It was his turn at length, and he slowly walked to the stage with his violin under his arm, and the flush still on his cheek and brow, for, after all, this little audience of artists were better critics than a whole houseful of fashionably-dressed people to whom he would play in a few hours.

Dennis Scott was of medium stature and slight, with fair hair, combed straight back from the high forehead. His eyes were dreamy and his mouth tender, his hands long and thin. His shoulders drooped slightly as he bent his head caressingly over his violin. Then the strains of music trembled over the shadowy, empty theatre, and the musician closed his eyes and swayed slightly as he lost himself in a land of music. After a while his eyes slowly opened, and in them there was a look of great wonder and—was it?—pain. His frame stiffened and he played on and on, regardless of time and auditors, only striving with all his power and might to put a soul, a heart into the wonderful playing—but in vain. At last his muscles relaxed, the hand holding the violin dropped to his side, and he stood, the flush gone from his face, cold and white as marble. Something hard clutched at his heart and then rose to his throat, and he staggered slightly as he crossed the stage. The congratulations of his fellow-musicians sounded far-off to him, and he knew that in them was missing the true ring of praise which they had given to the contralto. He was still staggering slightly as he went to his dressing-room. Light had dawned on him, and he knew that in his playing there was one thing lacking, and that thing was true genius.

As he picked up the violin to return it to its case, he hesitated a moment whether to break it into a thousand pieces—but no, after all, it had been his lifelong companion and friend, and he would never, never play it again. He had dreamed wonderful dreams. The last hour had seen them come to naught, and now he must go home and fight out the battle and

the terrible disappointment by himself.

He opened the stage door and walked slowly out into the street, still staggering with the weight of his new cross. He had been walking almost in a dream, but suddenly he realized that the streets were empty and that it was very dark even for late afternoon. The air was heavy and humid, but there was no rain; and soon crash after crash of thunder followed streak after streak of lightning. He hurried along; sometimes running, sometimes walking swiftly, and looking up and down the empty streets in vain hope of seeing a cab. Then he started for a stand a few doors distant, when suddenly a blazing, glaring bar of light crossed right in front of his eyes, it seemed, and then he felt as though burning torches had been thrust into them. A terrible deafening crash sounded in his ears, and it still seemed as though the awful fire was in his eyes. Afar off he heard a low, intense voice, full of terrible pain, say "God!" and he wondered vaguely if it were his own—then darkness.

Dennis Scott came to consciousness in his own room, and all around was intense darkness, although he heard voices in the room—lowered voices. He felt a peculiar sensation in his eyes, and he put his hand to them, only to feel a heavy bandage. He half sat up in bed. "Where am I, and what is the matter with my eyes?" he demanded of the unknown voices. Someone swiftly crossed the room and knelt by his bedside, gently pushing him back among the pillows. "Please be quiet for a while, Mr. Scott, and I will try to tell you everything," said a sweet voice, and he looked surprised, for he knew few women, and none who would come to him there.

"I am a Sister of Charity," the voice went on, checking his surprised exclamation, "and the doctors have asked me to tell you of—what has—happened. Mr. Scott, you were coming home from the theatre and you were struck by lightning. Do you remember anything?" He nodded grimly. "You may thank God that He has spared your life and—"

The voice faltered and almost broke, and then went on bravely: "Mr. Scott, do you think you can bear a great, a very, very great shock?"

Something like a prayer surged through Dennis Scott's soul, and he nodded again.

"Your life is spared, but you are"—her voice choked and blinding tears came to her eyes, but she clasped her crucifix tightly and her lips moved in prayer. It was so hard. "You are—blind for—life."

Again she pressed the crucifix to her lips and prayed for strength for him to bear it, and for her to keep from breaking down altogether and sobbing.

His knuckles grew white as he grasped the coverlet, and there were hard white lines around his mouth, but he managed to say: "Thank you Sister. You must not mind so much, and may I be alone for a while?"

She slowly left the room, looking back at him sadly as she went through the door. He was still in the same position, every nerve strained, until he heard the door close softly. Then he lay quite still and tried to realize the terrible truth. Never, never to see light again, to be helpless and dependent until his death. Ah, God! he wished that he could die now. It was too much, too much to bear. What had he done to deserve this terrible punishment? Then he tossed restlessly and moaned softly, and at last flung

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