

A Matter of Dollars and Cents

BY GEORGE BARTON
IN BENZIGER'S MAGAZINE

Helen Gaskill's brown eyes blazed with hot indignation, and two red spots appeared on her dimpled cheeks as she angrily clutched a copy of the *Burlingham Banner* containing a malicious and bigoted attack upon the Catholic Church.

Burlingham was a typical city of about 75,000 population, progressive, wide-awake and full of opportunities for ambitious Americans. The people lived together in peace and harmony, regardless of their political and religious convictions. But recently a disturbing element had come into the community. Paid anti-Catholic agents had been engaged in working up a "movement," and this nasty article in the *Banner* was the beginning of the campaign for righteousness.

Her intellect—she had a college education—no less than her sense of right and justice, was offended as Helen Gaskill skimmed over the article. Even while she read the paper she picked out the weak points and the evident contradictions of the attack. She was filled with a consuming desire to answer the slanders, and she wondered how the editor had permitted such stuff to soil the pages of his paper. She was acquainted with Carson Stoneman, the editor and publisher of the *Banner*, just as she was with Francis Bassett, the controlling power of the *Clarion*, the rival newspaper. Instinctively she began to frame the wording of the protest she felt like making to Stoneman. She would make him understand that he had grievously and unnecessarily offended one-third of the people of Burlingham, and insulted the intelligence of most of the others.

Her only fear was the fear she would have in arousing interest on the part of her co-religionists. The Church had been attacked, misrepresented and calumniated, in one form or another for twenty centuries, and the puny efforts of one little newspaper in a small community might not be considered worthy of attention. But Helen was modern, practical and combative and had no desire to pursue the path of least resistance. Thirty thousand copies of the *Banner* were sold every day and it was just the same as though thirty thousand persons had entered that many homes and spread a poisonous lie—a lie that might affect the eternal destiny of many souls. Indeed, it was worse because it had the prestige which comes with the solemn whisper: "I read it in the paper."

Helen knew that Carson Stoneman was a non-Catholic but had never suspected him of being a bigot. As she sat there clutching the guilty copy of the *Banner*, her line of action became clear and distinct. That night she wrote a clear and convincing refutation of the slander, and in the morning called forth to the office of the editor of the *Banner*. Reading a copy of the current issue of the newspaper on the way down town, and finding in it a second slurring article on Catholicity only confirmed her in the wisdom of the course she had taken.

At sight of his unexpected visitor, Carson Stoneman rose from his leather-backed chair and courteously motioned her to be seated. "This is indeed a pleasure," he purred in his most professional manner, "I—"

"It's not a pleasure to me," interrupted his caller with startling directness, "but a disagreeable duty. I've come about the slanderous article you printed on the Catholic Church in yesterday's *Banner*. Here's an answer I want published,"

and as she spoke she tossed her manuscript on his desk.

Stoneman shrugged his shoulders and slowly resumed his seat. He picked up and read the letter and as he concluded, said:

"I suppose you've come for Father Skelly?"

Her brown eyes flashed fire and her white, even teeth gave an ominous elick.

"Father Skelly knows nothing of my coming. He's quite able to take care of himself. I've come because I regard your article as an insult to myself as it is to every member of the Catholic Church."

He smiled in a superior sort of way, and Helen noticed for the first time that he had thin lips, and that his eyes were shifty and evasive.

"But, my dear Miss Gaskill," he said soothingly, "there was absolutely nothing personal in the article. It simply attacked your Church as an institution, and you must surely concede that we have the right to do that."

"I concede nothing of the kind," was the spirited reply. "The laws of the State say that a publication which holds a citizen up to a ridicule and contempt of his fellow citizens is a libel and—"

"Oh, I say," he interrupted with an irritating laugh, "you don't mean to say you're going to sue us for libel?"

"I didn't say that. I do say your article must have the effect of injuring certain of your fellow citizens among those uninformed of the truth concerning the Catholic Church, and I claim the right to answer it. I am willing to be braver than you. Your article was anonymous. My name is signed to my reply."

He toyed with the pages on his desk for a few moments and then spoke slowly, as if measuring his words:

"I'm afraid I can't oblige you. Letters of this kind will stir up a controversy."

Helen had risen in her wrath. "I like that!" she cried, with blazing eyes. "It is you who have stirred up the controversy with your libel. You make a cowardly, underhand attack and then refuse us the right to defend ourselves!"

He was becoming uneasy under these hot reproaches. He adopted a conciliatory tone:

"Miss Gaskill," he said softly, "I admire the way in which you stand up for your religion. It does you credit. But you must not forget that some of us are very fond of the protestant religion."

Helen threw precaution to the winds.

"Protestantism isn't a religion—it's only denial of a religion. The name proclaims that. You've rejected Catholicity. Maybe that is your right. I don't question it. But I will not remain silent while you try to rob me of my faith. You attack it, I demand the right to defend it."

He shook his head sorrowfully. "I can't print your letter—to do so would stultify the *Banner*."

"Not to do so would be to proclaim yourself a coward," she insisted.

He shifted uneasily in his chair. "You use strong language. You're excited. I want to assure you that I haven't anything whatever against the Catholic Church. This—this is a matter of policy. You know this is a Protestant community—strongly so."

Helen became calmer. She even smiled.

"If by that you mean that the majority of the Protestants in this city endorse mean and false attacks on my Church, I take issue with you. I don't believe anything of the kind. Many of my friends are non-Catholics and I am sure that most of them are absolutely fair and honorable. That has been my experience."

He rose to indicate that the interview was at an end.

"Then you won't print my answer?"

"I am sorry to say that it is impossible."

"And you will continue this campaign of slander?"

He smiled.

"We shall adhere to our policy. It is not prejudice; it is a matter of dollars and cents."

Helen had a sudden feeling of nausea as she left the *Banner* office. This man had not even the courage of his convictions. Bigotry with him was a business. It was, as he so badly put it, simply a matter of dollars and cents. But as she neared her home a light began to dawn upon her understanding. In an unguarded moment of frankness he had told the truth. And, as she reflected upon the question, she began to see that most bigots and bigotted publications worked upon the Stoneman principle. It was a matter of business with them.

They preyed upon the credulous and the ignorant. It was an easy way of making money. But how was it possible to deal with such knaves? For an honest bigot, one might have respect. The Stoneman type only inspired disgust. To attack them, as her younger brother might have put it, was only to "plug her game along." The indignation of honest opponents was grist to their mill. Must she give up the effort to obtain justice? She sat at her writing table at home pondering over the problem. She idly turned the pages of the dictionary, and happening to look at the book, her attention was attracted by a word and its definition. It stared at her in this wise:

Boomerang, n. 1. Weapon used by native Australians; a stick of hard wood, so curved that when thrown forward it takes a whirling course upward till it stops, when it returns with a swoop and falls in the rear of the thrower. 2. Any scheme or plan which recoils upon the originator.

In that instant her resolution was conceived and prepared to be put in execution. Later she called it the new game of "The Bigot and the Boomerang." Two main thoughts were in her mind. The first was the oft-repeated assertion of the citizens of Burlingham that the town was only big enough for one first-class daily newspaper. The second was that Burlingham actually had two newspapers. The *Banner* was prosperous and enjoyed a large circulation. The *Clarion* had a small circulation and had difficulties in keeping its head above water. It was well edited, printed all of the news that was "fit to print," but somehow, it could not get out of the slough of despond. It was Helen's fortune to know the editor and publisher, Francis Bassett, and only recently he had confessed to her in a semi-humorous vein that if conditions did not improve his clean newspaper would go into bankruptcy. That very night she called at the office of the *Clarion* and told the story of her experience with the *Banner* to Francis Bassett.

"This is interesting, but it only confirms my opinions of Stoneman," he said, as he stroked his strong jaw; "but how can I help you, Miss Gaskill? You certainly do not want me to advertise the *Banner* by printing replies to its scurrilous attacks."

"Not at all," was the quick reply, "but I want to tell you a perfectly legitimate way in which you can increase the circulation of the *Clarion*."

He gave a loud, wholesome laugh. "If you can do that I will surely owe you a debt of gratitude. We have tried everything under the sun, but we don't seem to be able to get out of the rut. A newspaper

is a queer proposition. It is the hardest thing on earth to kill; it has more lives than a cat, but once it dries up it is next to impossible to rejuvenate it. I know that we are getting out a good paper, but we somehow do not seem able to get readers."

"Maybe," said Helen quietly, "you have neglected the obvious way."

"How?" he asked, a bit resentfully.

"By simply printing some news that will be sure to interest certain sections of the community."

"As for instance?"

"Well, I'll tell you. The interests of more than one-third of the people in Burlingham are absolutely neglected by both the *Banner* and the *Clarion*. I refer to Catholic news. Last Saturday the two papers in this city printed nine columns of church news. Not a single line of it referred to the manifold activities of the Catholic Church. Yet I know that more people went to the Catholic churches last Sunday than to all of the other churches combined."

Francis Bassett looked the surprise he felt.

"If you don't accept my word, go over the papers yourself, and you will find that I haven't exaggerated in the least."

"I'll do so," was the hearty response; "and I'll promise to remedy the neglect. In the meantime have your people send in any items of interest and I'll see that they are printed. You know, most of our religious matter is contributed. Your friends do not seem to send anything in."

"That's perfectly true," acknowledged the girl, "but I'm going to try and educate them to doing it in the future."

She was as good as her word. In the course of the next few weeks items concerning the activities of the Knights of Columbus, the Holy Name Society, and the St. Vincent de Paul Society began to appear in the *Clarion*. And at the same time the circulation of the *Clarion* slowly and almost perceptibly began to improve. Bassett was delighted. He met Helen Gaskill at intervals and thanked her for her interest in his newspaper.

"As a matter of news, you are entitled to one-third of the space given to church happenings. You haven't come up to that amount with your offerings. Keep up the good work."

"We're not going to insist upon the exact pound of flesh," she laughed. "We ask for no favors either. We only want that to which we are clearly entitled."

The climax appeared to be reached two months later, when the *Clarion* gave a column a day to the mission for non-Catholics conducted by the Paulist Fathers from New York. When some touchy reader objected to this, Bassett pointed out that only the week before the *Clarion* had given a column and a half daily to a revival conducted in the Methodist Church by one Gypsy Brown, an affair that was not attended by half the number of persons who had frequented the Paulist mission.

Already the circulation of the *Clarion* had climbed to the extent of three thousand readers, and by a curious chain of circumstances the *Banner* had lost precisely that number of subscribers. Stoneman realized that his circulation was slipping away, but he did not have brains enough to understand the cause. He kept up his abusive tirades on the Catholic Church, and the more ground he lost the more venomous became his attacks.

But Helen had only played one of her cards. Her campaign against mercenary bigotry had only commenced. The time was ripe for the second move. One of the important industries in Burlingham was the Gem Shoe factory, which was

SUITS DRY CLEANED
HAVE YOUR SUITS DRY CLEANED. We Dry-Clean Ladies' and Gents' Garments, sent per parcel post. First Class Workmanship.
HUMBOLDT TAILORING CO.

When looking for LAND
see me. I can sell you land at all prices and on the terms you want.
A. J. RIES, ST. GREGOR.

Pianos, Phonographs, Accordions, Harmonicas, Violins and other Musical Instruments
We are now prepared to fill all your wants in these lines. For **QUALITY CORRECTNESS** and **PRICE** our instruments cannot be excelled by any firm in Canada. With every Piano or Phonograph we give a **LASTING GUARANTEE**, none that is to be good only until the Instrument is once used, but we together with the manufacturers stay by our guarantee for years after. Another point you must bear in mind: you will not have to wait for months in case you need **ANY REPAIRS**, as you will have to with most other machines. We have **ALL REPAIRS CONSTANTLY ON HAND.**
2000 RECORDS to select from. Prices from 20 cts. up. Send for our Catalogues. We will gladly mail it to you.
We have a large stock of **Silverware, Cut Glas, Clocks, Stationery, Religious Books and Pictures, Statues, etc.**
M. I. MEYERS Jeweller and Optician HUMBOLDT

For Wedding Gifts and Rings
see
E. Thornberg
Watchmaker and Jeweller
Issuer of Marriage Licenses. Main St., HUMBOLDT, SASK.

CALL IN TO MY SHOWROOM
and look over the New
BRISCOE SPECIAL
the Car with the Half Million Dollar Motor.
The Price is within reach of everybody wanting an up-to-date Car.
I WILL GIVE YOU A DEMONSTRATION ANY TIME
Let me know your requirements and I can supply your wants in anything for the Farm. **FARMERS!** I have a **Portable Granary** on exhibit at my ware house in Humboldt. Double ply lumber and metal roof. Get my price before buying elsewhere.
E. D. LELACHEUR
THE HUMBOLDT MACHINE MAN
Main Street HUMBOLDT, SASK.

We Have A Full Line Of PAINT
House paint—Implement paint—Floor paint—Wall paint—Kalsomine—Floor Varnish—Linoleum Varnish—Floor Wax and all colours of Automobile Paint and Varnish in fact everything to brighten things up and make them look like new. Call and see, and get colour cards.
A full line of Drugs, Chemicals and Patent Medicines. Marlett's Gall Stone Cure always on hand, also Ad-ler-i-ka.
School Books and School Supplies in any Quantity.
Large Assortment of Gramophones & Records
Send us a trial order. Mail orders a speciality. Write us in your own language.
W. F. HARGARTEN
Pharmac. Chemist in Bruno, Sask.

You are safe in a threefold way, if you bring your prescription to us: 1) We use for the prescription exactly what the doctor prescribed, every article being of standard strength, fresh and pure; 2) We examine and reexamine the prescription, whereby every error as to drug or quantity is excluded; 3) We are satisfied with a reasonable profit and charge the lowest prices for the best quality. These are three reasons why you should buy from us.
G. R. WATSON, HUMBOLDT, SASK.
DRUGGIST *The Rexall Store* STATIONER

Advertise in the St. Peters Bote.