

"First Be Reconciled."

TWO smiling middle-aged faces looked at each other across the library table. Mr. Clover was recounting to his wife the prospects of success which had opened in his business this fall.

"Yes, my dear," he said, "we must do something unusual by way of a thank-offering this year. What shall it be?"

"First, how much shall it be?" said Mrs. Clover.

"Well, say a thousand; we can spare it as well as not."

"I know what I'd like to do—have the church re-frescoed and some new carpets put in. That stained ceiling and that worn path up the centre aisle do distress me."

Everything in Mrs. Clover's house was fresh and shining. Her eyes were spoiled at home for shabby things abroad.

"Well, I'd like to beautify the church," said Mr. Clover. "I'll speak to some of the committee after prayer-meeting, and tell them what we propose."

"Will they let us?"

"Let us? Well, I guess so."

"And let us have some choice about colors and carpet, I hope?"

"Oh, you'll see; you'll have it all your own way."

Mrs. Clover looked beaming. In fact, two very happy people went to prayer-meeting that night.

"Nice folks," said Ebenezer Grist, the sexton, as he saw them pass up the aisle; "but sometimes there's a little of the 'strut and crow' about 'em, too!"

Indeed, at that very minute good Mr. Clover was meditating a little speech in the meeting, which perhaps might have had the "crow" echo in it only too audible to captious ears.

But that speech was never made, for he had not been five minutes in the meeting before there came into his mind some words out of the New Testament which seemed to pull his heart right down from its place of jubilation and stuck it full of thorns. A shadow fell over his ruddy face, and his wife, who did not in the least understand it, immediately reflected it in her own.

The words which had this unhappy effect were:

"Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

And there, across the aisle, nearer the door but still within reach of every uneasy side-glance, sat a brother who had something against Mr. Clover. It was only poor old Deacon Simon. His face was thin and his hands shook; his hair was white; his clothes were shabby. He had been made deacon because of his burning zeal; but the

severity of his spirit had not made him popular in the church. He was often at odds with his brethren. Poor Deacon Simon! who often stood testifying for old ways of righteousness, and whose sensitive spirit was so rasped by the indifference with which his testimony was received.

Only the previous month he had objected to a Children's "October Sunday," when there should be autumn leaves and kindred "frivolities" brought into the church. Then Brother Clover, who looked so good-natured but had a choleric temper of his own upon occasions, had fired up and spoken hasty words to the deacon, words as rude as a blow. They had been received in silence; they had never been apologized for; there had been little intercourse between the men ever since.

"I won't apologize," said Mr. Clover, now to himself. "I told him the truth, and nothing less would have stopped his talk and served our turn."

"If thy brother hath aught against thee"—hummed the unwelcome words in his ear.

"He was going to spoil a good thing. We couldn't stir hand or foot in this church if somebody hadn't put down his domineering spirit; I'm glad I did it."

"If thy brother hath aught against thee," repeated the echo.

"He'd no business to lay it up against me. He ought to thank me for telling him the downright truth."

"Leave there thy gift before the altar"—repeated memory again.

"Was I going to allow a good thing to be blocked by an old curmudgeon like him!"

"First be reconciled with thy brother"—reiterated the inexorable verse.

"That cannot be—might as well try to be reconciled with an old bear! There's no use wasting words with him."

"Then—then come and offer thy gift."

"Pshaw! pshaw! what a fool I am! I have not heard a word Doctor Parsons has been saying. Now, who's going to offer prayer? Dear me! if it isn't Simon."

There were a few of the customary greetings between the Clovers and their neighbors when the meeting was over. Without waiting to see any member of the business committee, Mr. Clover hurried headlong out of the church. His wife lost no time in asking for an explanation.

"Oh, I'm all upset; I'm such a fool."

"What is it?"

He knew that in the end he would have to tell her, and besides it was really a relief for him to do so. She asked some close questions.

"Tell me just what you said," she demanded.

"Well, he said we were just teaching the children to make play out of worship. That made me mad, and I said, 'Deacon Simon, if you'd been there when they brought the children